

# Lammert (Max) Visch

1929 – 2014

Miles Giller



Max was born in Doornspijk, the Netherlands in 1929. As a young boy he embarked on his lifelong passion for nature, and taught himself (and where possible his siblings) the scientific names of many local plants. Through reading books and magazines, he apparently came to believe that New Zealand must be the most beautiful place in the world. Following his school years Max studied tree culture for three years at Boskoop, and after a subsequent stint in the Dutch army he came to New Zealand in 1953. Max first worked near Milton, after which he moved to Dunedin where he worked as an arborist. Following this Max moved to Christchurch to work first in the Ministry of Works Nursery, and then in the Botanic Gardens as a gardener. Owing to a bad back he began studies at the University of Canterbury studying botany and later geology, and gaining a Bachelor of Science in 1961. Fortunately, one of Max's early

Christchurch neighbours (Mrs Cranfield) was a Canterbury Botanical Society member, and first introduced Max to the Society. About that time Max began compiling his extensive collection of lichens, liverworts and mosses. Soon after, he purchased a property on Hoon Hay Road, which became his home for the rest of his life. Max attended Teacher's College and gained a Master of Science in 1964, after which he took a teaching position at Ashburton High School. On a trip back to the Netherlands Max met Riet, and they married in 1966. On returning to New Zealand Max took up a position at the Christchurch Girls High School science department, teaching biology and general science until his retirement in 1989. Former pupils describe Max as a natural communicator. Max passed away on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

Max was a keen tramper and continued botanising and adding to his large collection of cryptogams. One lichen specimen collected by Max in mountain beech forest near Cass in about 1960 was eventually described as a new species - *Pannaria vischii* (Dodge 1970). Max's specimen (the type) is now

held at the Farlow Herbarium (Harvard University), and most of his other lichen specimens are currently being processed for incorporation into the Allan Herbarium. Max continued his involvement with the Canterbury Botanical Society and soon gained a reputation for his knowledge of the flora, especially lichens. He served on the committee of the Canterbury Botanical Society from 1990 to 1996 and helped to lead various field trips including outings to Orton Bradley Park in 1994 and 1996, the Raincliff spring camp in 1997, and Prices Valley in 2004. He frequently led guided tours of his beloved Christchurch Botanic Gardens, where he was never short of interesting facts, figures and stories about a range of plants. Max also gave talks to the Botanical Society, again often describing the notable trees of Christchurch and the Botanic Gardens. Max's most recent talk was titled "Foreign invader trees and their contribution to the Garden City", presented in September 2009.

Max wrote a number of articles for the Society's journal, the topics reflecting his very broad botanical knowledge. Titles included Liverworts (Journal Issue No. 6, 1973), *Tortula papillosa* (Journal Issue No. 9, 1976), Lowry Peaks bryophytes (Journal Issue No. 12, 1978), Bryology of the Ahuriri Reserve (Journal Issue No. 13, 1979), A key to the coprosmas of the Christchurch Port Hills (Journal Issue No. 16, 1982), and *Robinia*, honeylocust and pagoda tree (Journal Issue No. 38, 2004). A hand-written and illustrated key to the small-leaved shrubs of Prices Valley (based on an earlier key by Marie Bulmer) has proven to be a valuable aid for those trying to identify the various divaricating plants of Prices Valley and nearby forest and scrub remnants. Max received the Senior Bledisloe Trophy from the Canterbury Botanical Society in 2000.

Max did not confine his botanical interest to the Canterbury Botanical Society. He was also an active member of the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society, Christchurch Tramping Club, the International Dendrology Society, and Friends of the Christchurch Botanic Gardens. Max helped to produce accurate plant records for the Christchurch Botanic Gardens, Mona Vale, Victoria Park, Orton Bradley Park and several other botanical collections. In 2000 he was awarded honorary Membership of the New Zealand Order of Merit (MNZM) for services to horticulture.

Whenever asked a question about something botanical, Max could be relied on to provide a measured and thoughtful answer, always in an unassuming and obliging manner. Given his breadth of knowledge he certainly never seemed to be lost for an informed reply, often weaving in an interesting anecdote or perhaps some humour. As often as not, one would receive a letter in the mail several days later, containing some notes, a photocopy of an article or a page from a book, and perhaps a pressed specimen. While the Society has lost a knowledgeable member, we are fortunate that Max shared so much of his knowledge and enthusiasm with us.

## Reference

Dodge CW 1970. Lichenological notes on the flora of the Antarctic continent and the Subantarctic Islands IX - XI. *Nova Hedwigia* 19: 439 – 502.