

Leonard Cockayne's many fields of achievement: an introduction

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This series of talks was given on 4th November 2013: the 75th anniversary of the official opening of the Leonard Cockayne Memorial Garden in the Christchurch Botanic Gardens. On this day in 1938, Professor Dr Carl Skottsberg, Director of the botanic garden in Gothenburg, Sweden, stood in the newly inaugurated Memorial Garden and delivered his address in honour of Dr Leonard Cockayne to assembled staff, scientists and public figures. This was a doubly momentous occasion because 1938 also marked the halfway point in the life of the Christchurch Botanic Gardens. It was 150 years since their founding with the planting of the Albert Edward oak in 1863.

Leonard Cockayne arrived in Christchurch in 1885. During the best part of the following 50 years, much of which he spent living at properties in or near Christchurch when not on field expeditions, Leonard Cockayne exerted his considerable influence on our study and appreciation of the natural world. These themes were very much aligned with those of the fledgling Canterbury Museum (opened to the public in 1867) and of Canterbury College of the University of New Zealand (established 1873). Their neighbour, the Christchurch Botanic Gardens (then the Domain), were in the process of developing the first indigenous and exotic botanical collections.

One of my favourite photographs of Leonard Cockayne shows him alone, alert and seriously engaged in surveying the tussockland of the Canterbury College Mountain Biological Station at Cass in 1915 (Figure 1, page 4). He was heroic not just in his observation of the natural world but also in conveying the meaning and application of his study to other scientists, government agencies, landowners, gardeners, and the public at large. His publication record, which continued after his death in 1934 through the efforts of his co-workers, spans the years 1891 to 1935, with articles appearing at a rate of seven each year (Thomson 1982).

The words of Professor Skottsberg's oration are preserved in print (Anon. 1938) and the occasion fittingly remembered in the sharp black and white photograph taken on that windy and cool November day in 1938 (Figure 2, page 5).

As reported in Te Ara [<http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/3c25/cockayne-leonard>], Andrew Thomson declared Leonard Cockayne to be "New Zealand's greatest botanist and a founder of modern science in New Zealand..." As we

shall learn today, while Cockayne might have laid the foundation, the subjects of his study continue to excite and engross the public, land managers and scientists to the present day.



Figure 1. Leonard Cockayne surveying the natural world at Cass Field Station around 1915. Image: Andrew D Thomson photographic collection, Christchurch Botanic Gardens, originally from a collection of photographs presented to Leonard Cockayne by Charles Foweraker, Christmas 1915, supplied to AD Thomson by Dr Brownsey, National Museum 1979.

But let's go back briefly to the beginning. He was born at Norton Lees, near Sheffield, England in 1855 (Laing 1936). Here we find the young Leonard Cockayne in his lonely appreciation of nature, observing birds, fish and flowers in the wood near his home. Leaving England and his family behind in 1876 – possibly taking with him some of the character expressed in his brothers' drapery business motto of *Attention, Assiduity, and Punctuality* (Godley 1979) – he embarked on a teaching career in Australia and later in New Zealand (1880-1884). He came into a small independent income in 1884 on the death of his father, William Cockayne Senior. He bought a small mixed farm of 15 acres, Dilcoosha, at Styx, Christchurch the following year and devoted himself to things other than school teaching. He was then already 30 and had not published a single paper. Leonard Cockayne published his first small communication on the newly-introduced “humble bees” in 1891, a second paper appearing seven years later (Thomson 1982). Who would have guessed that at the age of 42 his scientific career was about to take off?



Photo: Green and Hahn

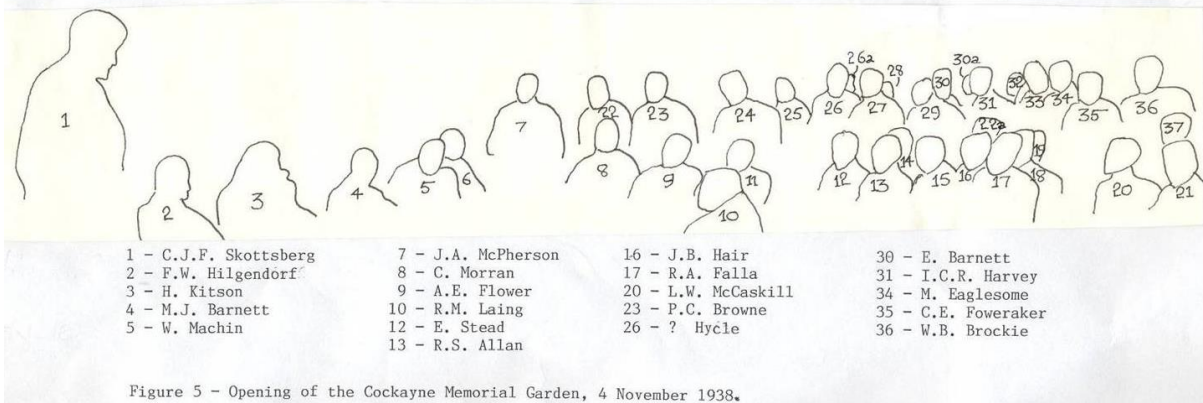


Figure 5 - Opening of the Cockayne Memorial Garden, 4 November 1938.

Figure 2. Professor Skottsberg speaking at the opening of the Cockayne Memorial Garden, 4 November 1938. Image Andrew D Thomson photographic collection, Christchurch Botanic Gardens, a copy of that gifted by Mrs CE Foweraker to Diane Thomson for Andrew Thomson.

Taking a person's long professional life and teasing it apart is a challenging task, especially in the case of Leonard Cockayne who was active in so many complementary fields. One of the most detailed and visually memorable attempts at this task is contained in the inaugural Royal Society of New Zealand Leonard Cockayne Memorial Lecture delivered by Dr Lucy Moore in 1965 and published in 1967. Here we see the first and only attempt to chart graphically Cockayne's life work, his strands of endeavour, the honours he was awarded, and a summary of his portfolio of research outputs and contributions to society and to his profession (Moore 1967) (Figure 3, page 7).

We should note Cockayne's many honours, activities, and publications. He published papers in top international journals. He wrote for and was published in local newspapers, and he wrote books and reports for you and me, for the Government, for farmers and foresters, for gardeners and lovers of nature.

It is fitting that Lucy Moore was the first Leonard Cockayne Memorial Lecturer. He appreciated able and attentive students, including Lucy Moore, whom he fostered and encouraged. He was a "Lover of Nature" who gave himself wholeheartedly to the first-hand study of plants in the field. Cockayne with

others “extolled the value of establishing a field station at Cass” where students were able to join the great scientist and staff members of the University College in the delight of studying New Zealand’s botany.

References

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1855 - **LEONARD COCKAYNE** - 1934

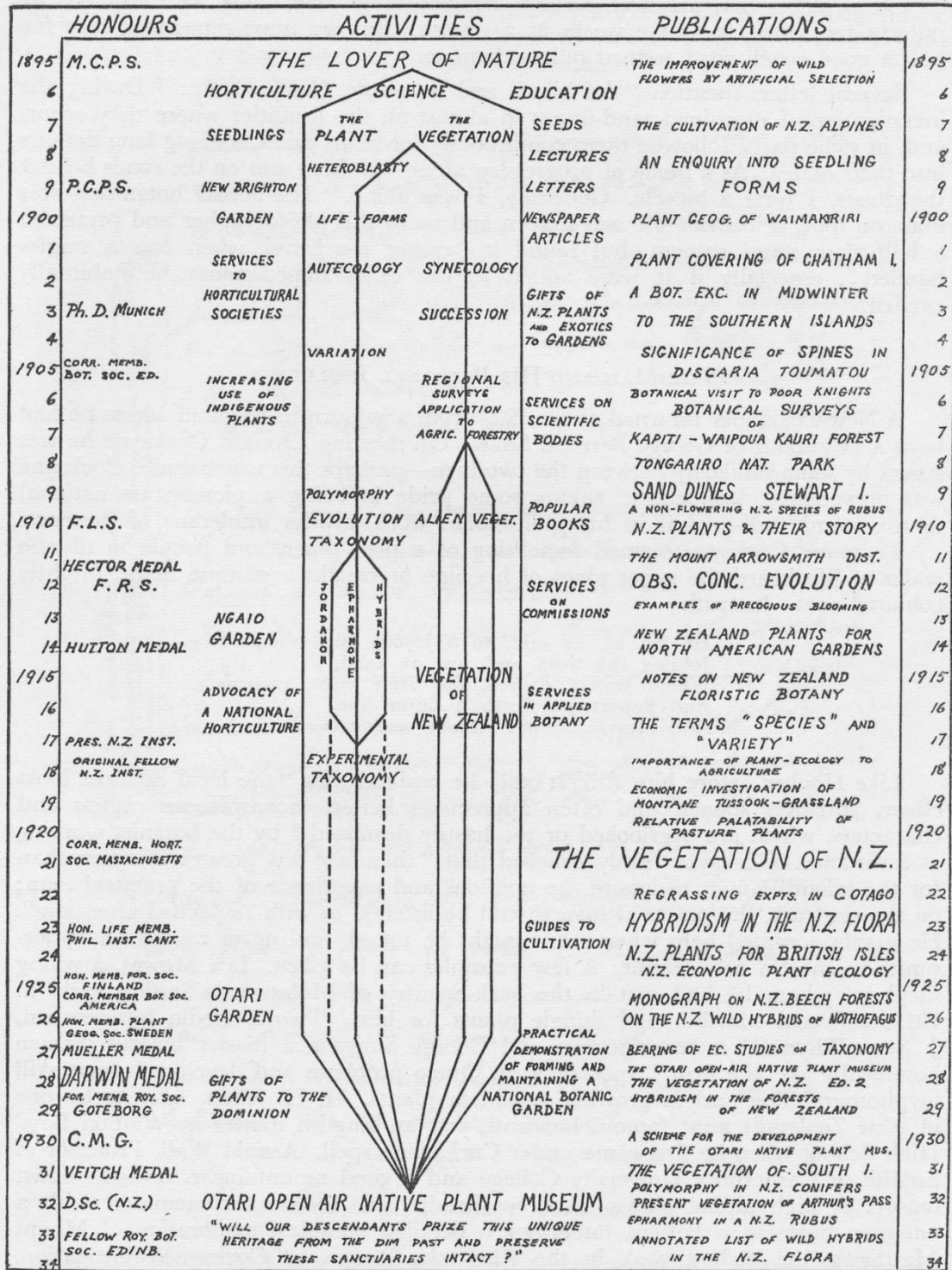


Chart prepared by Dr H. H. Allan for a lecture on Leonard Cockayne delivered in Christchurch about 1934. Copied from the original by R. A. Burns.

Figure 3. A chart prepared by Dr H.H. Allan for a lecture on Leonard Cockayne delivered in Christchurch about 1934. Copied from an original by R. A. Burns. Image from Moore (1967). The Royal Society of New Zealand is acknowledged.