



# Bason botanic gardens trust

winter 2015 newsletter

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## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Terry Dowdswell

Con te partiré. Time to Say Goodbye. One of Ian's beloved musical pieces that was played at his funeral. The song has enormous strength and passion and oh, how so very appropriate for a man who brought both of those qualities, in abundance, to the way he spent his life, to whatever he did. He had the ability to inspire. He was a true leader and a great Chairman of the Board. We miss him. Dearly.

As Chairman of our Board his passions were superbly directed to ensuring that the Bason Botanic Gardens flourished, became an icon of our city and an essential part of its future. Ian realised that in order to survive the Bason Botanic Gardens, like so many botanic gardens around the world, must demonstrate its value and show a return to the city that maintains it.

The additions and improvements championed by Ian and funded by very generous benefactors, have done much to achieve this. The new Homestead Gardens entrance, covered barbecues and the wonderfully situated Japanese Tea House will attract and delight more visitors, both local and international. The recently commissioned "Villa Rustica" sculpture, shortly to be erected at the foot of the Millennium Hill Steps, will continue to enhance the visitor experience.

But Ian's vision and drive were not restricted to capital works. He was keen to attract visitors for recreation, education and enjoyment. He wanted to attract visitors from all walks of life, not just plant enthusiasts, not just gardeners, not just families for barbecues, but everyone. These gardens need to be used. Need to be seen. Need to be enjoyed.

I intend to see that the next phase of Ian's vision, the people phase, is achieved. How? The spring newsletter will expand on this but for now let's just say that there is no better setting for a Gala Day and that 2016 marks a very special Shakespearian anniversary.

My thanks go to all Board members. You have a great range of skills. You give much time and effort. You are a great team to work with and your support is invaluable.

Thanks also to everyone, volunteers, council and contractors who work to make the Bason Botanic Gardens such a magical place.

And thanks to all those who use the gardens. Come, bring your family, relations and friends. Bring everyone you can. Show the gardens off!!!



## OBITUARY – IAN HAMILTON

Phil Thomsen

In early 2011, Ian Hamilton was approached by the Board, with a view to him becoming a Board member and eventually Chairman. Work commitments to the Ministry of Education prevented Ian from committing to a full involvement at an early stage, however he took an active interest from the start. Ian was elected as Chairman on 16 August 2012, and held this position up to his recent death.

The list of projects and activities commenced or completed in the short time since then are a testament to Ian's energy and vision. One of his earliest drives was to push for



a new Strategic Plan to be written, to provide guidance to the Board for the future, and also to help to attract funding. In 2012, the Strategic Plan including a timeline for implementation was driven by Ian. This Plan was presented to the full Council on 21 August, and unanimously endorsed, with the Board under Ian's guidance being thanked for its good work.

When a storm destroyed much of the lakefront ten years ago, the Board took it as an opportunity to redevelop that area, and Ian inherited the direction for this. This was a significant project involving remodelling the lakeside, building a walkway beside the weir,

and creating a series of terraces. On 15<sup>th</sup> March 2014, Ian presided over the opening of this project, which was the culmination of a large bequest from Belle and Christian Alexander.

More recently, it was agreed that the then Outdoor Forum area had become an eyesore and was no longer being used; this led to the development of the idea of developing two covered barbecues for the site. A plan was commissioned for a curved roof structure; this has subsequently also been built and is now completed. Ian presided over this project at all stages.



Ian's wife Carole plants a Totara in Ian's memory.

In October 2011, Ian started enthusiastically promoting the idea of a sculpture at the bottom of the Millennium Hill. Ian's vision was for a sculpture that would be large, abstract and dramatic – enough to grab the eye of someone in a vehicle driving down the Hill. A process was initiated for inviting proposals from national and international artists. At an event at the iSite on 19<sup>th</sup> February this year, Ian unveiled the maquettes (models) for the three finalists to an assembly of dignitaries. Subsequently the proposal from Paul Johnson and Gail Mason was selected by the judges for the competition.



*Ian's granddaughters planting Totara.*

eastern end of the Lake, and the Board assisted financially with the removal of the Tea House from Wanganui East and its establishment at the Gardens. It is greatly to be regretted that Ian's sudden death prevented him from presiding over the opening of Tea House in April, and overseeing the landscaping of the site that is still to be implemented.

Ian was also very interested in improving communications regarding the Gardens to the public, regularly organising promotional articles through the Chronicle, Midweek and Rivercity Press. He actively participated in working bees, planting areas of the Millennium Hill. He kept an eye on the Gardens during his regular visits: during one outing in 2012 he spotted boy racers tearing up the lawns; Ian reported this, resulting in a car being confiscated and restoration being ordered.

On 18<sup>th</sup> September 2014, Ian was informed that it was likely that the Japanese Friendship Centre in Wanganui would close, and the associated Tea House need to be removed. Ian had been involved with the Centre for many years, including sister-city visits to Nagaizumi, and was enthusiastic about the idea that the Tea House be relocated to the Gardens. An iconic site was identified on a peninsula at the

During late 2014, it became clear that there is a threat that the cost-cutting measures needed for Council could impact negatively on the maintenance budget at the Gardens. Ian was very staunch in ensuring that the budgetary allocation wasn't diminished, and took any possible opportunity to communicate this to long-suffering Councillors. It became very obvious that Council



*Bason Board members at the memorial tree planting.*

expenditure would need to be closely linked to clear benefits to the citizens of Wanganui and visitors to town. Subsequently, Ian felt that the Board needed to become more involved in encouraging major events at the Gardens. The first of these was being initiated when Ian passed away.

Ian's name will always be most closely remembered in relation to one final major project at the Gardens (Gosh! So many in such a short time, Ian!). When Ian first attended a Gardens site visit in May 2011, he suggested that the entrance to the Homestead Garden was inconspicuous and uninviting; he commented that some visitors didn't even realise the Garden was there. Ian felt that the existing wooden shelter structure at the entrance was past its "use-by date", since wind was no longer such an issue, and that it could be replaced with something more inviting and in keeping with the theme of the Garden. In the event, a dramatic modern entranceway was developed, incorporating glass art from local award-winning glass artist Lisa Walsh. It is fortunate that Ian saw this through to completion before he died, as more than any other, this is the project that carried his vision and personal stamp. The Hamilton family is commissioning a memorial seat for Ian that will be within sight of this feature. We suggest that when sitting quietly here, Friends might like to consider Ian's contribution to the Gardens.

I could say more about Ian's leadership, humour and drive: however I have left this to our current Chairman, Terry Dowdeswell.



*The Hamilton and Board members with the Tea House a fitting backdrop.*

**BOOKINGS:** Direct all Botanic Gardens venue/BBQ bookings to the Customer Service Desk Wanganui District Council, phone 349 001.

**MEMBERSHIP:**

Become a **Friend of the Bason**, or gift a subscription, and support Stanley Bason's dream.

Send your name, postal and email address to BBGT Treasurer.  
Membership: Individual \$20; Family \$30; Corporate \$100; Life \$500

Internet banking is also available. The bank details are:

**Account Name:** Bason Botanic Gardens Trust Account  
**Account Number:** 03-0791-0463019-00

Use your name as a reference and also please state whether this is a donation or membership subscription.

Notification of payment can also be emailed to the Treasurer if you wish, at [terry@delphinium.co.nz](mailto:terry@delphinium.co.nz)

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## INSPIRING SPEAKER FOR THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The guest speaker at the Bason Gardens Annual General Meeting will be renowned landscaper Kerei Thompson. Kerei is in the business of creating constantly evolving masterpieces, by keeping gardens at some of New Zealand's most exclusive locations well manicured for discerning clients. His company, Bark, tends the grounds of Government House (both Wellington and Auckland) the grounds of Parliament, Vogel House, and Auckland's Ayrilies garden, which was featured on BBC's Gardens of the World. Bark Ltd has been awarded more than ten Landscape Awards from his peers including Gold for both Wellington and Auckland Government Houses; the judge commenting "these grounds are an outstanding benchmark of garden management in the fullest sense ... embracing the long term custody of the garden ... Bark holds to a high environmental ethic."

Bark won two gold awards at the 2012 Landscaping New Zealand Distinction Awards in the large project management category for its work on the grounds of prestigious Auckland apartment complex The Pines and at Government House, a contract it has held for about 17 years since not long after Thompson started the company. "Gardening has become quite simplified over the years. People think of gardening as mowing the lawns and weeding. What we do is more garden management. Gardens are expected to look good today, but also look good in 20 years," Thompson said, explaining that Bark's approach to planting had to be long term and the position of each shrub was well thought out.

Today the company employs 47 people nationwide, with about a third of its work in the capital, a third in Auckland and the remainder split between Christchurch and Hawke's Bay. More than half of its work is in public properties and the rest is caring for the gardens of private individuals.

"People have gardens for two reasons. For a property like Government House, a lot of it is around the appearance as you enter a property - that's probably a shared reason for all of our clients, but also

some of them are really passionate about the gardens they have created. We need to make sure we always share that passion without forgetting it's not our vision but the clients' that we need to bring to the garden."

Kerei is a Fellow of the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture. He is also the Chair of the New Zealand Gardens Trust, which recognises Bason Gardens is a Garden of Significance. His address will cover the aims and criteria of the NZGT, plus a wider range of interesting and amusing stories and anecdotes that Kerei has accumulated over the years. Kerei is an entertaining and thought-provoking speaker; this promises to be a great one-off chance to hear a speaker of his calibre. Kerei's presentation to Friends and the public will take place at 7.30 pm on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> August at the Davis Lecture Theatre, straight after the Annual General Meeting at 7.00 pm. Put it in your diary now; you won't want to miss out!



## OBITUARY – RAE WILLIAMSON

Phil Thomsen

Rae Williamson passed away in late May after a long illness. She was an active Board member for a period during the 1990s. She was elected Chair in October 1999, a position she retained until March 2004.

Key achievements during Rae's tenure as Chair include a tunnel house being constructed in 2000, mainly to house the non-flowering orchids. Plans and funding for a new Visitors Centre were a major commitment; however the Board was unable to secure sufficient funds and the project had to be reluctantly dropped. The Millennium Hill Lookout now stands on the place where it was planned. An audit of the Gardens in 2002, under the oversight of Rae, resulted in 3162 trees being identified. The road of the top flat from the entrance to the top of the Millennium Hill was sealed in early 2002, making a major difference to the visitor experience.

However the biggest achievement over this period would have to be the development of the Millennium Hill, which had been a neglected part of the Gardens. Rae presided over the dedication on 28 May 2000 with the Mayor and dignitaries, and much of the planting and early maintenance was carried out by Board members and volunteers. The area is now a lush paradise of Mediterranean-themed plants. Several Board members who were on the Board during Rae's tenure remember her with fondness and respect.

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM of Bason Botanic Gardens will take place at the Davis Lecture Theatre, Watt St. at 7.00 pm on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> August, 2015.

The AGM will be followed at 7.30 by a presentation by Kerei Thompson on the New Zealand Gardens Trust, plus anecdotes from his landscaping career (see the article in this Newsletter).

If you wish to nominate someone for the Board, a nomination form can be obtained from Phil Thomsen (Secretary), and must be returned at least seven days before the AGM. The person nominated must sign their consent, as must the proposer and seconder. All these people must be current financial members.

## JAPANESE TEA HOUSE

Phil Thomsen

The Wanganui District Council has had a strong relationship with its sister city of Nagaizumi in Japan for many years. In particular, the Japanese tea house has been a feature of Wanganui East for decades, hosting groups with a traditional tea ceremony. However, in 2014 the Nagaizumi Town Council decided to close the centre. Mayor Endo said it was uneconomic to run the Friendship Centre, and that changes in technology meant that finding out about Japan is much easier than it was 30 years ago when the Centre opened. The Bason Botanic Gardens Trust agreed to finance the relocation of the tea house to the Gardens. It was therefore lifted from the Centre and stored at Britton House Movers site in Tayforth as a first step.

Meanwhile, the site was prepared. First, the location for the tea house was cleared of some of the large poplar trees. Kaumatua John Maihi blessed the site on 31<sup>st</sup> March, and digging for the piles started on the same day. The tea house was placed onto its foundations on 7<sup>th</sup> April at 2pm. Pruning work was done on the trees by Marc Higgin and Andrew McDonald 17<sup>th</sup> April, and last minute tidying up was carried out by WDC contractors and staff.

An official opening was carried out on Tuesday, 22<sup>nd</sup> April by mayor Hideo Endo. Mr Endo arrived in Wanganui on the previous day, and cut the tea house ribbon with Wanganui mayor Annette Main at a



*The official party at the opening ceremony.  
photos: Beverley Sinclair*

ceremony attended by members of the Wanganui Japanese community, Iwi representatives, Wanganui district councillors, Rutherford Junior High School students, and Bason Botanic Gardens Board members. Ms Main said that the placement of the tea house at the Gardens, overlooking the Lake, was the perfect place and would further establish the Gardens as a major attraction for people from inside and outside the district. "This is a more high profile place for the tea house, and I believe more people will come to visit this beautiful building". She also thanked the Board for financing the cost of moving the tea house from its old home. The tea house is expected to be operational in September and Ms Main said she hopes it will be well-visited by local Japanese and visitors to Wanganui.

Mr Endo said the tea house built in 1991 is symbolic of the friendship between the sister cities and he is pleased that it

has been moved to a "wonderful place surrounded by nature". The acting Chairman of the Gardens Trust Board, Terry Dowdeswell, said he wished to commend the Council for the "excellent job they have done in such a short time" in relocating the building. "Today is a celebration of the tea house which has found its true home here,

surrounded by peace, tranquillity and everything that should be associated with a tea house. We will use this tea house and care for it."

A plan has been drawn up for traditionally styled gardens surrounding the tea house by Board member Kelly-Jean Kerr, who was the Young Horticulturist of the Year in 2013 and is currently landscape architect at Springvale Garden Centre. The plan was submitted to the Nagaizumi Town Council for approval. The plan features rocks, bamboo, flowering cherries and ornamental pines. It is hoped that the tea house will be available for tea ceremonies in the spring.



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