

# Bason botanic gardens trust

autumn 2018 newsletter

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Shakespeare in the park returned to Bason Botanic Gardens in February with a superb production of *The Tempest*, directed by Karen Craig. More than 800 people enjoyed the brilliant weather and atmosphere at Whanganui's premier outdoor space.





## VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

Late February once again saw a fantastic Shakespeare production at the Bason Botanic Gardens. Two years ago it was Macbeth, and no-one died. This time we tried our luck with "The Tempest" and although a tropical storm paid a fleeting visit in the preceding days the weather was fine, warm and calm for the event. Add a recently completed walkway to the Japanese Tea House and gardens kept in peak condition by the wonderful Fulton Hogan staff and the stage was truly set for some great entertainment in beautiful surroundings.

Karen Craig directed and produced the play and Kathy Cunningham, as executive producer, made sure that everything worked as it should, when it should. Many, many thanks to all who worked so hard to make the play such a resounding success.

With the successes of Macbeth and The Great Bason Fair two years ago, and The Tempest this year, the Bason Botanic Gardens have demonstrated what a fantastic venue they are for the performing arts and family entertainment generally. It is the board's intention to build on this success and host more events for the benefit of both residents and visitors to our city.

But we are not doing this just for the entertainment. We have a cunning plan!

Botanic gardens the world over are expanding their roles in the community. By providing a variety of plants and spaces they are in a position to educate (both passively and actively) an ever-increasing population - a population that tends to be more and more removed from such things as gardens, and plants. Plants are special, very special. They have had seminal connection with our development as a species, a people and in our everyday lives. As a botanic garden I believe we have a duty to preserve and foster that connection.

Terry Dowdeswell  
Chair



## THE TEMPEST

By Phil Thomsen

In autumn of 2015, director Karen Craig approached the Bason Gardens Trust Board with a proposal to produce a production of Macbeth. The play was duly produced in February of 2016 to critical acclaim and good audience sizes. As part of the event, the Great Bason Fair also featured in the same month; again adjudged a success.

From late 2015, after another approach from Karen, discussions took place regarding a new production. It was decided not to include the Fair this time, since it was logistically too demanding for the limited resources and volunteers available. However, it is hoped to revive the concept in the future. Karen Craig again took on the role of director; however, on this occasion the role of executive producer was contracted out to Empire PR, rather than carried out directly by the Bason Board. The Board underwrote the costs and provided general support, including volunteer assistance during the productions.

Karen's choice of play this time was The Tempest. It played, again to good-sized audiences, on February 22-24. After rain in the early morning of February 22, Bason Gardens Board chair Terry Dowdeswell, who had been consulting various meteorological oracles, held his nerve and didn't postpone the production. Fortunately, his predictions were justified and, again, the weather gods smiled on the production.

The set for the play was designed and built by Dave Craig, with assistance from a band of willing volunteers. It was material draped over a framework of bamboo, which had been provided by Board member Clive Higgie of Paloma Gardens. Underpinning this framework was a foundation of metal standards, kindly donated by PGG Wrightson. I should mention at this point other significant donors: Fulton Hogan and Downer. Behind the set was the mature treescape of the Gardens; what a great backdrop for a glorious production.

The lead role of Prospero was played by Dwight Ballard, who gave the part a suitably august authority. As a counterpoint to Prospero, Chris McKenzie gave an earthy and yet sympathetic presentation of Caliban.

**BOOKINGS:** Direct all Botanic Gardens venue/BBQ bookings to the Customer Service Desk  
Whanganui District Council, phone 349 0001.

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Sisters Samantha and Kathryn Atkinson-Fleming played Prospero's daughter Miranda and the sprite Ariel; the latter having plenty of scope for mischievous pranks and misdirections. All the cast performed well; however, two other standouts were Phil Hudson as the drunken steward Stephano and Mel Hawkins as the fool Trinculo.

The evening productions were a rare opportunity for people to visit the Gardens after dark; attendance was at least 200 for each viewing. The Board, as the principal for the production, carried out an audience survey of the play. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive. The comments of two respondents sums it up: "Very professional and can hear every word. Good set! Enjoyed music and dancing – it enhanced an excellent performance. Very mature performance from younger actors. A great feat of organisation. Costumes excellent. Do it again next year." And: "Great, great venue – awesome to have outdoor theatre – must make it a yearly event. Fantastic!"

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A word from Karen Craig, director of The Tempest: My heartfelt thanks to the Board for allowing me to again produce for them. They couldn't have been more helpful and supportive.

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## **COUNCIL COMMENT**

By Wendy Bainbridge

Brrrrrr the winter switch has certainly been turned on across the country, and after such a long hot summer it is difficult to adjust.

Oh well, at least the cold takes care of the insect pests.

The winter annuals have been planted now, so we have some colourful displays to look forward to. Once again there will be tulips lining the pathway that leads up to the conservatories.

Keep an eye out for some new daffodils this spring. We have purchased 400 new bulbs. Dianna Loader, who is a member of the Bason Botanic Gardens Trust, shows daffodils and was keen to see more planted along the Spring Walk.

We are hopeful of a good display of cymbidiums this year as we had a number of plants gifted by Ken Elms and flower spikes are already forming.

Now that we only heat the Larsen House conservatory, it gets more difficult to provide colourful displays so we have been trying to focus on plants that will do okay in cooler conditions. One plant that seems to grow in our conditions are the *sarocochilus* orchids. We have been building up a collection of these dainty orchids for display, and have recently purchased 10 more.

If you have been for a drive around the Bason recently, you may have noticed that there has recently been some work done to seal the remaining section of road.

Other maintenance work has included chemical washing of the brick work around the conservatories, the barbeques and the wooden decking on the weir bridge.

We are also about to start putting some matting down on the landings between the steps on the Millenium Hill. The matting allows for grass to grow up through it. Hopefully, this will provide a better surface for people walking the steps, particularly during the winter months.

Chris Maquire has been the foreman for Fulton Hogan at Bason since 2013. He is leaving in May to live in Ireland and be closer to family, now that he and his partner have a young family of their own.

For those of you who have had dealings with Chris from time to time, I am sure you will wish him well for the future.

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## **CORK OAKS AT THE BASON BOTANIC GARDENS**

By Clive Higgle

Possibly the most iconic planting and the trees most commented on at the Bason are the cork oaks on Millennium Hill, by the hairpin corner.

This group of *Quercus suber* was planted by Kevin Luff when he was working for the Council back, I think, in the early- to mid-nineties. I remember seeing Kevin plant the trees. I was wandering around with Paula Loader, who was then Council's horticultural officer. At that time, the hillside was still grazed by deer, with just the cork oak corner outside the fence.

Yes, this is the tree that cork comes from. It is native to the Mediterranean countries of southern Europe. Portugal especially has large plantations for cork harvesting, for which the demand is much reduced with many countries no longer using corks. There still is quite a major industry for cork tiles and many European wine bottles. To harvest cork, the tree's bark is peeled off, to such an extent that I'm amazed that the tree can keep growing – which it does.

There's a big old cork oak at Aird, near Fordell. This was planted by James McGregor about a hundred years ago. During the second world war, Max McGregor "harvested" some cork to make duck decoys. You can still see the different texture of the bark resulting from that harvesting, probably 75 years ago. I think the first harvest (or two) doesn't have the quality of latter harvests and would be used for industrial reconstituted material.

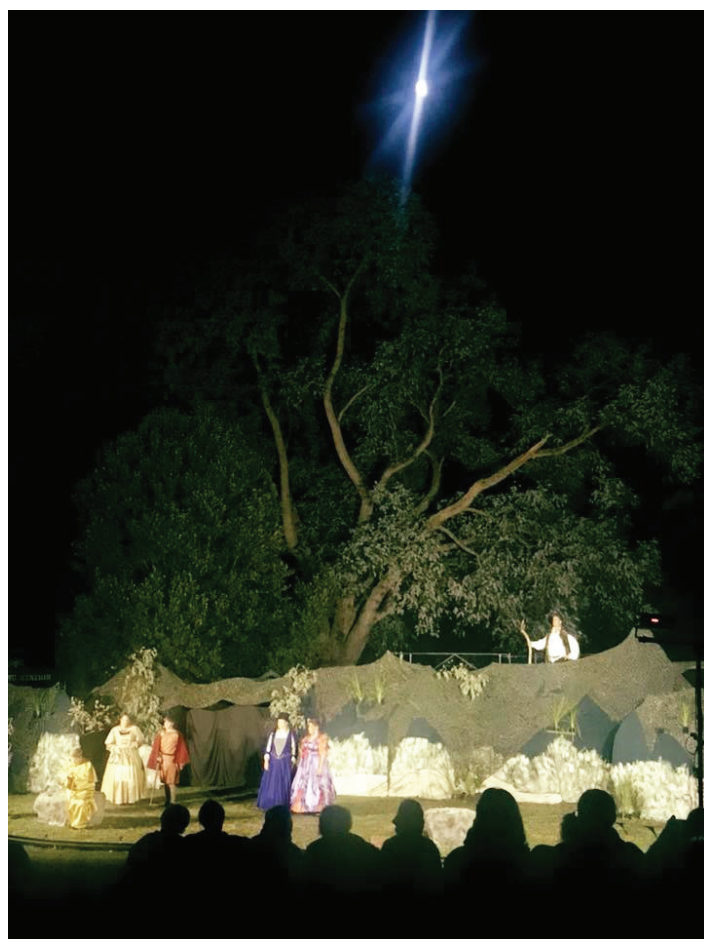
So, *Quercus suber* is a long-lived, evergreen oak. It can handle an extremely dry, Mediterranean climate. Our Bason specimens are happily growing many times more quickly than in their homeland.

They are incredibly beautiful and uncommon in New Zealand. Our Bason trees were gifted to the Council by an Auckland man who grew them from acorns that he collected from a tree near his work. He gifted many trees to councils all round the North Island.

Perhaps the largest cork oak specimen in New Zealand, and possibly the world, is growing in the Te Awamutu cemetery. Well worth a visit.

There's a good little book called "Cork oaks and cork; a New Zealand perspective" by Ross Macarthur.

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*Thank you to everyone who supported the superb production of "The Tempest".*

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