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Mr Karl Rossiter  
Friends of the Bowl of Brooklands  
New Plymouth.

Dear Karl,

**Re: Eric Hanbury, A B Scanlan (ABS) and J W Goodwin (JWG) choosing the Brooklands Lake area for the 'Entertainment Venue' site.**

I read with interest (Midweek, Jan. 9) the item on the above topic and without wishing to detract in the slightest from the level of praise attributable to Eric Hanbury in pioneering the establishment of the Bowl after his appointment as Public Relations Officer in 1956, it should not be forgotten that there was another key player on the scene who had not only also proven himself to be a master of organising public entertainment on a grand scale but who happened to be in a critical position of authority. He also happened to be a person of exceeding modesty and self-effacement which helps to explain why his name is sometimes overlooked in credits.

J W Goodwin had been appointed Superintendent of Pukekura Park and Brooklands in 1949 with the stipulated mandate of 'devising means of bringing visitors back into the Park' after the travails of World War Two had resulted in a decline in standards.

By 1956 JWG had already been instrumental in founding the Parks and Reserves Dept and appointed to its leadership, played an important role in the founding, surveying and landscaping of the Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust (spending practically every Saturday there as Honorary Curator), planned meticulously for the 1954 Queen's visit to the Park involving thousands of children being in attendance and organised monster public displays of fireworks on the Sportsground, so he would have been in sympathy with Eric's aspirations.

During 1956 JWG would have been busy planning a forthcoming study/leave visit to the United Kingdom and the United States in the following year to attend a meeting of the International Institute of Parks Administration. Ideas gleaned during this journey were to have major consequences for public entertainment in the Park following his return but that is another story.

A B Scanlan in his 1976 Centennial booklet covering the history of the Park reveals that proposals to provide an entertainment venue in the Park had surfaced in 1954 but not surprisingly had met with opposition, not least because the suggested site was in the Bandstand area and would have necessitated its removal.

Written records of subsequent developments are vague but my recollection of events as disclosed by JWG himself are that he had researched the Brooklands Lake area and was

satisfied that it offered the greatest potential. Remembering that JWG departed overseas in 1957, if we refer back to ABS's writings we find '..... and in 1957 *New Plymouth's Public*

*Relations Officer, Mr Eric Hanbury was taken by the writer of this history to view the Brooklands Valley as a possible site for a sound shell and open-air theatre. At once Mr Hanbury saw the possibilities of the area. ....'*

It is my understanding that JWG made sure before his departure that ABS was fully acquainted with his conclusions on the favourable possibilities offering at the Brooklands site by visiting it with him and/or including details in the routine reports he would have been tabling to the still governing (post-1929) Pukekura Park Committee of which ABS was a long-standing member.

Exact details may never be known but for historical records it is safe to conclude that JWG and ABS were in agreement that the Brooklands Lake site was the most favourable option available and when in JWG's absence in 1957 ABS escorted Eric Hanbury there to view it Eric's imagination took wings and the rest is history.

### **The obstructive copper beech.**

Apart from the need for major reformation of the lake edges and construction of buildings etc. which were to become a formidable undertaking for Eric's followers there existed a very large obstruction in the centre of what was to become the seating area. Growing there was a large and flourishing specimen of copper beech! JWG was to become internationally respected for his expertise in the horticultural discipline, notably relating to trees and to the administration of parks and what transpired provides a measure of his foresight and capabilities.

Before he left for overseas he gave Tom Wagstaff his foreman instructions on how to prepare the already large tree not for felling but for removal to a new site during the dormancy of winter. By any standards this must have been a very formidable undertaking with the available equipment but his planning was always thorough and the exercise was a success.

Few who now sit in the amphitheatre and in quiet moments relax to enjoy the spectacle of the surrounding trees would realise that the impressive copper beech they will admire on their right at the bottom of the entrance drive was, only fifty years ago growing perhaps where they are sitting. There are no records of its size in 1957 but in 1973 it was 13.4m both in height and canopy spread and 91.4 cm in diameter 30cm from ground level. In 2001 dimensions had increased to 19.25m in height, 21.1m in canopy spread and 1.35m in trunk diameter.

### **'Festival of the Pines' origin and perpetuation.**

At the outset the skyline behind and to the right of the stage as seen by the audience was dominated by an outstanding dome-shaped stand of *Pinus radiata* planted near the boundary shared with the Racecourse. This unique feature became the symbol chosen to advertise the early summertime programmes.

JWG was notable for being able to anticipate the needs of the community several generations ahead and in this case, aware that the pines had been planted by the Racecourse administrators not for ornamentation but for the ultimate value of their timber, foresaw the prospect of them being felled not too long into the future. He took action to safeguard the integrity of the 'Festival of the Pines' title in longevity by planting a comprehensive pinetum of species not only representing botanically many diverse growth habits but also many countries of origin.

To ensure that there was no possibility of his intention being overlooked, the planting was made as close as practical to the amphitheatre on and over the ridge following the right hand side of the entry drive down to the Bowl. Numerous dwarf species were removed relatively recently when this boundary was cleared and shifted further back to provide more viewing area but larger species have thrived and are now skyline pines in their own right.

As JWG anticipated, the original stand was felled several years ago and a second generation in the same site is now beginning to lay its claim to that skyline. The presence of this and the pinetum mean that the integrity of the title 'Festival of the Pines' is safeguarded if there should be a desire to perpetuate that historic and appropriate term into the future.

### **The Scanlan Lookout.**

By coincidence, the same pine plantation at the Racecourse/Brooklands boundary visible from the Bowl ticket box and amphitheatre is the site of the Scanlan Lookout.

ABS was a highly respected Rotarian with a tremendous love for and knowledge of the mountain and Egmont National Park in addition to Pukekura Park. After his death fellow Rotarians felt that it would be appropriate to commemorate his deep dedication with a lookout into which strands of both famous parks could be woven. Ultimately this location proved to be the most suitable and they put their energies and expertise behind the proposal.

This site, accessed by vehicle via Mason Drive has proven to be very appropriate. It is within the Brooklands/Pukekura complex so dear to him yet commands also a superb and unique panorama of the entire Kaitake, Pouakai, Mt Taranaki (Egmont) skyline. These features were enhanced by raising the viewing platform with boulders and surrounding it with native plants specifically associated with the mountain. It is very easily accessed on foot from the Bowl area by taking a short but rather steep track which branches up from the vehicle route serving the rear of the Bowl stage.

In the context of this document it should be recorded that the lookout also provides a clear vista through the trees giving a sighting of the Bowl ticket box and part of the amphitheatre and links once again the memory of ABS with the Bowl. This adds a great enhancement and provides the lookout with not only a greater sense of height but the sighting of a well-known reference point across the valley which will help viewers to relate to their surroundings. In view of this and in recognition of ABS's input into acceptance of the imminently suitable choice of the Brooklands Lake site all those years ago it seems important to me that efforts should be taken now and continue into the future to maintain the openness of this critical vista. It is disappointing to note that the commemorative plaque is missing.

Recording this need for periodic maintenance in a sense seems to close a circle in my friendship with ABS because I am deeply grateful for the fact that on an occasion early in my curatorship he asked me if I was aware that we were 'losing' the famous view of the mountain as seen from the Tea House. He obviously anticipated my expression of puzzlement because he placed in front of me a photograph of the scene taken several years before from which it was very obvious that the growth of certain foreground trees had over the course of time progressively obscured more of the mountain.

The obstructing trees were a stand of oaks located near the south end of the Main Lake close to where the Hughes Walk joins Brooklands Rd. I accepted the challenge which in timing preceded the availability of light chainsaws so took a double-extension ladder and bow-saw and in a very physically demanding exercise 'topped' by hand all the offending oaks. The outcome was spectacularly successful and gave ABS great satisfaction. It also gave me and the team confidence to undertake an extensive programme of remedial work on the canopies of a great many of the Park's major trees which continued until my retirement, greatly aided by the introduction of small chainsaws.

As a footnote I am sure that ABS would agree that the time has come for the oaks to be trimmed again!

**The final salute.**

Possibly it is now too late to carry out the work that would be required by the timing of the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations but it has occurred to me that perhaps it would be appropriate to illuminate at least one of the stands of pines for the occasion. It could introduce a moment of high drama if this element was kept secret and at a point in the proceedings when historical reference reached the point where the early decision was made to call the programmes 'The Festival of the Pines,' a switch was thrown and spectacularly, the pines came aglow.

This would encapsulate a very simple but fitting tribute to all those who had toiled so selflessly over the early 'Festival of the Pines' years but most poignantly it would give touching recognition to the above three visionaries who cooperatively took the steps to make sure it could all happen in such magnificent surroundings.

George Fuller.  
Curator, 1965-90.