

The Magazine of the Friends of Pukekura Park

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Summer in the Park

Photo Derek Hughes

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Thoughts from a new member of the FOPP Gardening group

Marion Sephton

About a year ago I became one of FOPP volunteer gardeners – principally helping in The Gables garden. It had taken a while to persuade me to take part, as I felt ill-qualified to join an elite sounding band of keen gardeners. After retirement I had not even managed to tame my own garden!

However it sounded as if this was an opportunity to learn as well as contribute to basic digging and weeding tasks. Provided I could identify the weeds of course. Armed with some hand tools, including an old bucket, I joined the others for my first session. Available members meet promptly at 9am on Thursday each week, weather permitting, at The Gables. The number in recent months has varied between 2 and 6, working until 11am. That is only 4-12 volunteer hours per week and not enough to care properly for the beautiful Gables gardens. The others are a friendly bunch, led by Adrienne Tatham who has special knowledge of the whole Park, but particularly of the gardens at The Gables.

On my first morning we were instructed to tidy up in Brooklands Zoo. We spent several Thursdays in the zoo while the roof of The Gables was re-shingled. The meerkats watched closely, stretching up from their burrows, standing on their hind legs. They looked as if they were shaking their heads at us working in the sun. It was tough going to edge the paths, dig and weed the beds but we felt a huge sense of achievement afterwards. The team wears high-visibility vests to be identifiable, although not all the vests are marked on the back as “volunteer”. On one occasion a group undertaking Community Service was also working in the zoo wearing the same orange vests. It may not have been obvious who was who and one of the young men politely asked to help me with digging.

Once The Gables roof was fixed the FOPP gardeners moved back into the garden, generally trying to keep it tidy. The Council gardeners treat us all with a lot of respect and are so very grateful for any help. Currently parts of The Gables garden are being cleared and redeveloped. New plantings are planned with the removal of some of the overcrowded shrubs. I have learned that weeds can be anything that is growing in the wrong place. We have taken up a lot of day lilies and aged dahlias. Much as I love forget-me-nots and violets these too have to go, in addition to the

ubiquitous convolvulus and wandering willy. I need a much bigger weed bucket.

The recent introduction of a short drinks break (we bring our own flasks) has been a welcome time to exchange opinions and update plans. Most weeks, Ross a slim black cat with a collar inspects our work and either struts off or supervises from a spot in the sun. Birds fly in from the main Park and flowering shrubs are often full of bees. It is pleasant rooting around



Pauline, Adrienne and Mary.

Contributions should be sent to
Friends of Pukekura Park, P.O. Box 484, New Plymouth 4340.
Magazine content editor: Adrienne Tatham. Photographic editor & designer: Derek Hughes
email: project@pukekura.org.nz web: www.pukekura.org.nz

in the garden with new friends; learning how to care for hellebores, irises and other plants from more learned colleagues. The group could do with more hands and I strongly encourage others to come along with or without specialist gardening knowledge.

The Border at the Gables

Adrienne Tatham

With some plants becoming thugs and taking over the large border at The Gables, the decision has been made to remove many plants which have grown beyond their use by date.

To this end Sheryl Clyma and Rose Hogwood met with current Friends gardeners in early March to discuss just what we needed to do to bring the border up to date. So plots were hatched over a delicious coffee and tea morning complete with fresh scones and jam.

For a while the border will appear to be wrecked as we remove such things as *Acanthus* and the *Hemerocallis* which have endeavoured to take over all other plants. Plenty of weeds have infiltrated the roots of existing plants so this is a chance to get the garden cleaned up.

The Friends' gardeners who work in this area are delighted to be included in the design and have compiled a dossier of likely plants of an old fashioned nature. Tried and true, they should be hardy and thrive. We are responsible for much of the upkeep and can't wait to have some fine days to get going. Meantime it is a work in progress. An exciting time.

We have always space for more volunteers for the two hours on Thursday mornings. Being volunteers, there are always engagements which preclude attendance every week, but the work becomes an outing where we share our knowledge and expertise and make friends over a hot drink at the end of our time there. We feel honoured to help in the Park in this way.



Photo by Alison Pitman

Colin, George, Pauline and Marion.

Dragons in the Park

Tony Burrell

Don't worry these dragons will not hurt you. They are plants from the Ericaceae family of the genus *Dracophyllum*. The name *Dracophyllum* means dragon-leaves and comes from the resemblance of the leaves to those of the dragon-tree (*Dracaena draco*). That dragon tree is no relation and is currently placed in the asparagus family. There is a large specimen of *Dracaena draco* in the Traffic islands garden at the western end of Jellyman Walk.

Back to *Dracophyllums* - there are about 60 species altogether with about 40 of these native to New Zealand (including Chatham, Auckland and Campbell Islands) with the remaining ones found in New Caledonia, Lord Howe Island and Australia. With the large number of species in New Zealand it had been thought that New Zealand was the headquarters and they radiated out from here but recent DNA research indicates that about 2.2 million years ago seed from possibly one species was blown over from Australia. This was a time when the mountains were pushing upwards so there were new cool open habitats unsuited to forests where few local species could grow. The immigrant *Dracophyllum* could adapt well to these new habitats with its cold tolerance and ability to handle poorer soil types. Just over a million years ago the NZ *Dracophyllums* split into two groups. One line has the large leaf species and the other line, containing the majority of species, is commonly called the small leaf group. This small leafed group had a large species radiation mainly in the mountains. The size and shape of these resulting species is very diverse ranging from small cushion plants of 1 centimetre height to trees greater than 12 metres in height. Although the physical appearance is very diverse there is almost no genetic diversity between the species with the result they will all readily hybridise. Australia by contrast has few remaining species but far greater diversity. It is thought that as the Australian climate dried out many species would not have survived. Most of the overseas survivors are now located high up in the moist cooler mountain tops.

One feature mainly in the large leafed species is the red to bronze flush in the leaves at certain times of the year. This is due to anthocyanins which protect the tissues from frost damage. Heat and sunlight break them down so the leaves generally return to green over the summer period.

Another feature of *Dracophyllums* is that they produce alkaloids which are deterrents to browsing and fungal attack. A side effect is the leaf litter does not break down and results in a dense carpet of dried out leaves that deter competing vegetation. Walking through these is likened to stepping on a bed of potato chips.

Maori sometimes used the stiff leaves of the large leaf species to form decorative strips for attaching to the woven base of cloaks. Sometimes the strips had a more practical purpose - to channel rain away.

Two of the NZ species were called turpentine bush by the early settlers due to ease of burning when green. The burning is due to the high amount of wax in the leaves and not turpentine. The way the wax is laid down causes the leaves on many of the *Dracophyllum* species to gleam.

In general *Dracophyllum* like damp cloud forest. This preference means most species will not grow well in our suburban gardens or parks. They are difficult to propagate and are only occasionally available from specialist growers.

The rock star of the group would be *Dracophyllum traversii* (mountain Nei Nei) This species has long candelabra-like branches with tufts of broad recurved leaves which taper to a fine point. A large erect flower head is produced from the centre of the tufts. Given time it will grow to 12 metres. Its natural range is from the central North Island north on the semi open top of peaks and mountain ranges. It is also found in the South Island western mountain ranges. This species has exceptional presence and has been likened to a Doctor Seuss tree. It has been listed in the book "100 Best Native Plants for New Zealand Gardens" but unfortunately is out of its comfort zone in our Taranaki gardens. Pukeiti does have more of a cloud forest environment and they have a number of juvenile *D. traversii* growing. Their plants would already be decades old but for a species which can live for 500-600 years plus they have a lot of growing ahead.

Dracophyllums in the Park

Dracophyllum latifolium (Nei Nei):

This species is closely related to *D. traversii*. It has a very similar appearance but everything is on a smaller scale. It will grow down to sea level and its natural range extends from the Far North down to North Taranaki open forest.

There are two old plants growing in Fernery House 1. Information passed down indicated they were part of the early Fernery plantings. Ian Hutchinson has reviewed very early photos and they do not show up so he believes they were likely planted circa 1936-1940. This still places them at over 80 years old. Their diet has been regular watering but no fertilizer.

The New Zealand Plant section in the Fernery Annex area has three potted seedlings. The history of these is unknown but possibly they are some of the very occasional seedlings from the plants in House 1.

There are two *Dracophyllum latifolium* planted outdoors. These were obtained from Duncan and Davies in July 1963. They are now both becoming grand specimens. One is planted in the Poet's Bridge garden and the other is on the Scanlan Walk bank near the waterfall. Seedlings are extremely rare but there are two small ones growing near the Scanlan Walk tree. See if you can find them? They are not where you would normally expect to see them.

***Dracophyllum strictum* (Totorowhiti):**

This species is a member of the small leaf group. *Strictum* in Latin means upright stiff. It grows down to sea level and its range is across the central areas of the North Island. It is found in North Taranaki generally in the sedimentary hill country on damp banks. It is a small branching shrub which it is said grows to 3 metres but an old tree on the side of Moki Road is well over 3 metres. This species has distinctive glaucescent (blue/green) foliage. It can produce flowers over a 6 month period. It can grow reasonably fast if there is competition around. I have one that has grown more than 1 metre in 3 years.

Five *D. strictums* were planted in October 1984 on the lower racecourse walk cutting near the Teahouse. Although only two of the originals now remain this appears to be an ideal location and *D. strictum* have naturalised here with dozens of seedlings growing below them on the steep sides of the cutting. *Dracophyllums* have mastered the ability to survive in what would appear to us, and no doubt most of its plant competitors, as inhospitable locations.

D. strictum could be a useful addition to our suburban gardens. Not in the flower garden out the front, but the problem areas many places have around the sides or back of the property (semi-shaded and a little damp with poor soil profiles). These problem places where other plants struggle is the ideal home for *D. strictum*. An important growing requirement of *Dracophyllums* is the root area must be kept cool and moist.

Three *D. strictums* were planted on the Horton Walk bank in June 1990. These were obtained from Mt Messenger. Only one now survives.

There are two *D. strictums* in House 2 of the Fernery. One is above your head as you enter from House 1 and the other is on the right side plantings just before the Annex.

It is not too hard to see *D. strictum* growing in the wild in North Taranaki as they favour roadside banks. On Moki Road, Kiwi Road, Forgotten Highway and many others, even SH3. If you are travelling north you can see them growing on the sides of the Mt Messenger tunnel entrance.

***Dracophyllum sinclairii* (Inanga)**

Named after the British surgeon, botanist and Colonial Secretary, Andrew Sinclair (1794-1861).

This is a member of the small leaf group and is found in open forest in the upper half of the North Island. It is a shrub to small tree growing to 6 metres. It has thin and twisted leaves and groups of white or red flowers are borne on short side branches. It is adaptable enough to grow in gardens.

Five were planted on August 2014 in an area directly above the Fernery beside the path that leads up to Horton Walk. Two have survived. The plants were obtained from the Oratia Native Plant Nursery.

Other *Dracophyllums* that would grow in Pukekura Park

***Dracophyllum arboreum* (Tarahinau)**

Is a Chatham Island species which can grow to over 12 metres in height. It is from the small leafed *Dracophyllum* group and is sometimes called the Chatham Island grass tree. Grows mainly on the Island's peaty soils and appears to grow well in mainland New Zealand. There is a good specimen growing at Hollard Gardens.

***Dracophyllum longifolium* (Inanga) turpentine shrub**

Grows from sea level to sub-alpine areas from the middle of the North Island down as far south as Campbell Island. It is commonly called a grass tree as it has long grass type leaves. It is slow growing but is long lived to at least 220 years. Its form is more of an erect shrub but can grow into a small tree up to 12 metres.

A variation *Dracophyllum longifolium* var. *filifolium* grows on Mt Taranaki. In places on the mountain it is quite dominant.

***Dracophyllum filifolium* (needle-leaf grass tree)**

Grows from the southern half of the North Island south to Stewart Island. It is found on Mt Taranaki and forms a small shrub up to 4 metres tall. It has distinctive long needle like leaves.



References:

New Zealand Native Trees - John Dawson and Rob Lucas
Dragons in the Mist article – David Glenny and Dr Steve Wagstaff
Local History input - Ian Hutchinson and Ken Davey

Juvenile *Dracophyllum traversii*. Notice the gleam
In 1998 a *D. traversii* was planted out in the park but it did not survive.



Dracophyllum strictum on the Lower Racecourse Walk.

Kermit

Dave Hunger

Farming on the slopes of Mt. Taranaki with an annual rainfall of almost 3 metres, pugging is an ever constant threat. Although a covered yard has helped greatly in recent years, some days you only have to leave the cows on a break for 20 minutes too long and you have done damage that lasts for months.

Rolling pugged paddocks is one of those jobs that are hard to get right. If you try to roll too soon while the soil is still wet you do more damage than you fix, and if you leave it until the ground is dry the roller bounces across the lumps but doesn't squash them down flat. The window of opportunity when conditions are perfect – dry on top but still moist and malleable underneath, is often only a few days and always clashes with more important jobs on the farm. In a perfect world, rolling pugged paddocks would be done in summer when the weather is pleasant and there is cricket to listen to while you drive. But this isn't a perfect world...or is it?

Pukekura Park is generally regarded as the jewel in New Plymouth's crown. Donated to the city in 1876, it has been developed from swamp and scrub into an internationally recognised Park complete with bridges, lakes, walking tracks and a Christmas lighting display that draws visitors from all over. All this, just five minutes' walk from the CBD. Oh yes, Pukekura Park is also famous for its cricket ground. Surrounded on three sides by high grass covered terraces, it is a favourite with players and spectators alike. The short boundaries are a batsmen's delight, while spectators know that they all have a chance of taking a catch and enjoying 5 minutes of fame in the local newspaper. There have even been sixes that have made it to the lake! The cricket ground is such a perfect spot that it is jealously guarded. No other sports are allowed on the sacred wicket.



In 1951 the New Plymouth District Council purchased a roller for the park wicket. Imported from England, the brand new Greens Roller had an impressive pedigree. Thomas Green & Son of Leeds had been building rollers

and selling them all over the world since 1874, when rollers were steam powered and used mainly on roads. This 4 tonne roller in Kermit green, was powered by a 16hp 2 cylinder Lister diesel engine and was built for grass. The roller is #DXG 536, and is hand cranked where the rear PTO would be on conventional tractors. Because you are effectively cranking the back of the motor, the crank handle turns the opposite way to how we are used to doing when starting tractors from the front. There is a very necessary decompression handle above the crank handle. While it is possible to crank the engine and operate the decompression on one's own, starting is much easier with two people!

The roller has 3 gears and a clutch lever that you pull back or push forward depending on whether you wish to go forward or reverse. i.e. 3 forward and 3 reverse gears. The foot brake is fairly ineffective but the hand brake is tightened with a big wheel and works a treat. You do need to allow a bit of time to get it wound on though, as there is no such thing as emergency braking! It's all about planning ahead. Steering is accomplished with a wheel not unlike a traction engine's and is quite "light" due to there being 15 revolutions from lock to lock.

For 50 years the Roller was only used to prepare that solitary wicket in Pukekura Park and was always housed when not in use. At one stage there was a minor scandal when the roller was "discovered" in a small hidden shed at the Park yet it wasn't on the council's register. Apparently the groundsman had been hiding it for fear the bureaucrats would get rid of his old roller.

A decade or so ago the Lister developed a couple of oil leaks which you will appreciate are not welcomed on a cricket pitch. It was sent to a local engineering firm, McCurdys, who fitted new seals and gaskets. They were still readily available from England! A few years later the New Plymouth District Council decided to give the Greens Roller a real birthday. Again it went to McCurdys Engineering where it was stripped right down, the seat recovered, a broken tooth on the RH bull gear repaired and was completely repainted. A considerable amount of money was spent on it at this stage. Within a couple of years the council decided to spend some really serious money (430k) upgrading the Pukekura Park Cricket facilities in the hope of attracting international matches. New practise nets were installed after enormous public debate and agonising over the cost, and a new roller was slipped, unnoticed, into that budget.



The owner of the engineering firm that had serviced the old Green Roller is a man who appreciates quality vehicles. He ended up incurring the wrath of his wife by buying the roller because he had an attachment to it. He certainly didn't have a use for it. It sat in his workshop until he on sold it recently to a farmer with a pugged paddock – and a machinery museum.

Boats in Pukekura Park

Adrienne Tatham

Robert Clinton Hughes was a keen swimmer who envisaged a swimming and boating lake could be formed by damming the stream which ran through a gully infested with gorse, tutu and other weeds. A lawyer, he and his friends approached the Taranaki Provincial Council in 1876 and persuaded them to purchase this area of 12 hectares of wasteland for a recreational reserve, with the intention of providing a water sports venue and botanical garden on the site which is now known as Pukekura Park. From the early days of the lake being formed by building the earth dam in 1878, it was always the intention that this body of water would be used for boating and swimming. Two years later the dam was built and boats took their place on the lake. Boating was a popular pastime of the day and today, an often asked question is “where are the boats?” as visitors who grew up in the area revisit old haunts. They have fond memories of adventures with the boats.

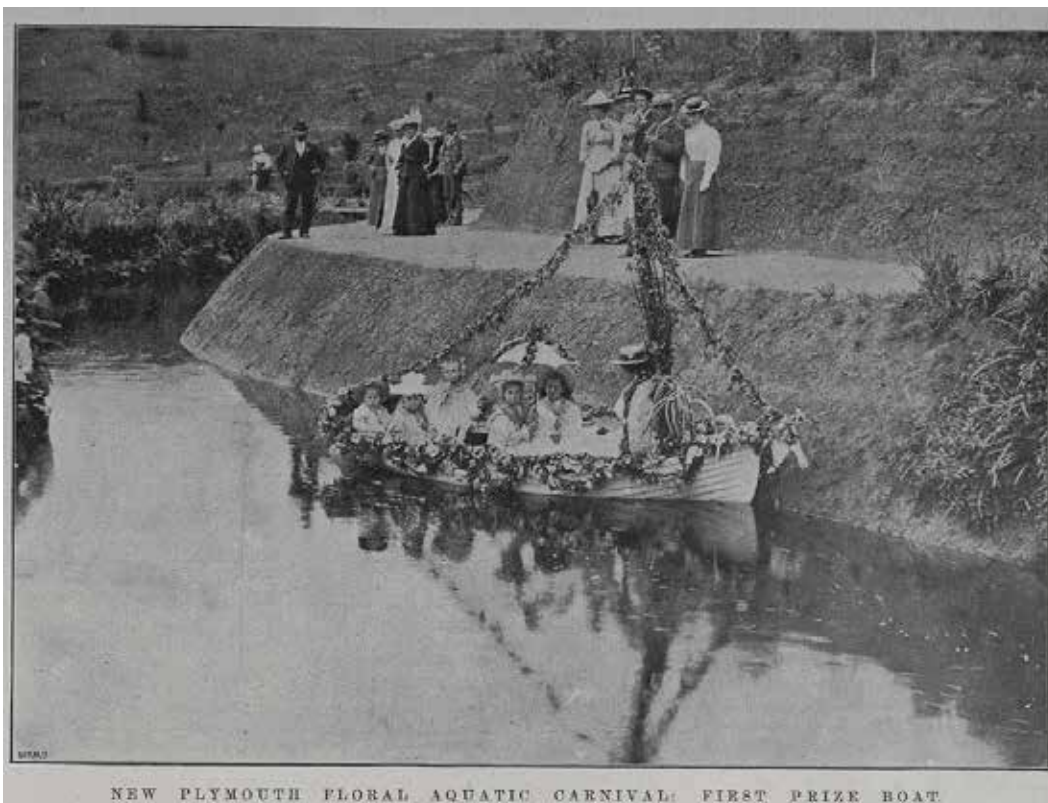
There was controversy over some aspects and later that year the Recreation Ground Board passed an extraordinary resolution forbidding the owners of boats to row on the ornamental water on Sundays. At an “after” meeting that resolution was modified and permission given to use the water for boating purposes until noon on Sundays. The *New Plymouth Wesleyan Chronicle* appears not to approve of this, because “it is fully taken advantage of by numbers of young men and boys, who spend the Sabbath forenoon at the pastime,” and then goes on to say, “We would ask the Committee whether they think it honest on their part to first secure the cooperation of all classes of the community, including prominent church members to suffer this shameless desecration of the sacred day.” Then proclaiming “We can hardly see the distinction between walking in the garden, and rowing on the water, but perhaps the *Chronicle* would wish the grounds closed on the only day in the week the greater portion of the community have time and inclination to visit them.” The Taranaki Herald in March 1885 reported that “the big boat that is kept on the Recreation Ground lake broke loose last Wednesday and drifted against one of the statues, the presentation of Professor Forlong. The figure was toppled over from its stand into the water. It was recovered on Sunday by some bathers, but, unfortunately, when it was being hauled ashore it broke in half at the waist. The material of which the statues are made – plaster of Paris – does not stand the exposure well: it is showing out in black spots, and has become very brittle.” In another Herald report of 5 April 1890 “The children have a great treat in store for them on Monday next at the Recreation Grounds Sports. The Committee have been to some expense in bringing the lifeboat of the *Hawea* – kindly lent by Mr. F. P. Corkill – from the breakwater and placing her on the “Rec” pond, where she will ply for hire under the charge of two members of the late Lighter Company, who have generously given their services for the day. So parents need have no fear in trusting their children under the care of two such experienced boatmen as Messrs Joseph and Stockman – The charge will be very small, so we hope to see the venture well patronised.” By November of that year another newspaper report stated that “Mr. Corkill is going to considerable expense in having the lifeboat on the “Rec” lake done up, in order to give the children a treat on sports day, 10th November. A small charge will be made for the round trip, to go towards defraying expenses in laying out the sports ground. Messrs Josephs and Stockman have been working for the last three weeks in the Recreation Grounds, repairing and generally overhauling the *Hawea* lifeboat, to be in readiness for the great crush of “small fry” that we anticipate will be in the grounds on the Prince of Wales’ birthday.” This boat appears in a photograph taken in 1908 of the Waitara School Picnic.

In November 1892 the Board decided to charge an annual license fee of 5s for each boat on the lake, conditionally that the license might be withdrawn if it was found that the banks were injured, and also that the boats be not used after 8am on Sunday. The custodian was instructed to charge 2s 6d per hour for the large and 1s for the small boat to anyone requiring them, and that steps be at once taken in conjunction with the Athletic Club to provide cover for the two boats. The annual receipts of the Board for this year showed a gain of 12s 6d for fishing and boating licences. Shortly after this the Board were offered a Maori canoe called *Huirangi* at a reasonable price. They stated that “as the canoe is a valuable relic of old Taranaki, there is every reason to believe that the Board will secure it for use on the lake.” The Board reviewed the fees in April 1895 and required the use of the boat to be charged from 10s – 30s to be used to keep it in repair and on no occasion was the boat to be used unless a responsible man was put in charge. It appears that at this time there was only one boat on the lake.

In September 1893 the Board met and decided to ask Mr G. Brown to prepare a plan for a small bridge and boatshed at the upper end of the lake, the estimates of which were 20 pounds for the boathouse and 40 pounds for the bridge. The Board report of 2 May 1894 spoke of plans for the erection of a new bridge and boatshed at

a cost of over 100 pounds. The following year a “substantial and commodious boat house has been built, at a cost of about 30 pounds. This was much needed, as a valuable boat, kindly lent by Mr Corkill, had been for years, for want of protection, exposed to all weathers, and for months together might be found lying submerged in the lake.” About this time or a few years later, a newspaper report shows a movement from being a playground to become a botanical park. It says that swimming and canoeing on the lake were a favourite attraction. One account apparently tells of Newton King and C.W.Govett competing in a tub race, with of course each tub filling and sinking. Then it talks of regular fireworks displays being held to provide income, and the way that that had to be discontinued because of the many ways patrons could access the park without paying. Floral fetes were held each year for a time and orchestral concerts were common. It was in this way that the Board raised money for maintenance and development of the park. In 1909 only 19 shillings was gained from revenue from the boat licence fees and in 1916 the revenue was 2 pounds, 2 shillings and 6 pence.

Several times the bridge and the boathouse appear to have been replaced, and estimates given by the chairman Mr D.F.C. Saxton to a meeting in 1951 were two thousand pounds for each of these. There was a bequest from the late Leah Graham which paid for this rebuild. Mr and Mrs Graham had owned the Criterion Hotel. The existing boatshed was constructed sometime during the 1950's. A Ladies' Committee arranged a fete to be held in the Recreation Grounds on Thursday November 9, 1899. The advertisement included a Grand Procession of Decorated Boats at 2pm, Boat Races for Girls and Boys, Model Yacht Sailing, Punch and Judy Show, Aunt Sally, Tug of War and other games, Character Reading, Prize for Best Decorated Boat and Crew, Prize for Best Model Yacht and a Cricket Match – Hawera v New Plymouth. Town and City Bands were to play during the afternoon and the Excursion Train would be delayed until 5.30pm. Admission charge was 1 Shilling and there was a Liberal Concession to families. The Auckland Weekly News contributed an article on 24 November 1899 of this Aquatic carnival – First prize boat, second prize gondola and third prize boat.



In 1901 the Board thanked Mr H.W.Roberts for his moderate charges for repairing and refitting the large boat. A report from 1908 states that “During the past fortnight the water in the large lake has been rising slowly and has covered the bed of the extension sufficiently to enable the whole length to be roved over by the honourable secretary, Mr Tribe, who thus earns the distinction of being the first circumnavigator.” The following week the Board were asked “to allow the lifeboat to make trips on the lake for the pleasure of country visitors who would

be in town for the events of Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Threepenny voyages would doubtless prove a great attraction,” it said. Thomas Horton in his diary of 8 January 1932 stated that it was a “glorious day, wonderful crowds, fernery and boats well patronised.” Thomas received 3d boat tickets numbered No 1 – 5000 and 6d boat tickets numbered No 1 – 6000, and fretted about having a secure place in which to hold the tickets. He also said in 1935 that the boat receipts for the year were 60 pounds.

In 1934 Nukuhakari Station which was owned by Newton King and his family ceased surfing out the wool because Te Marama Road was opened, and trucks could now take over the cartage. The two surf boats became redundant and were donated, *Kingfisher* to the New Plymouth Harbours' Board and the second boat to the park. At about that time the boats on the lake at Brooklands could possibly have joined the fleet as Brooklands Estate was donated to the Council and became part of Pukekura Park.

Over the whole period of boating on the lake some of the staff have overseen their operations and have been responsible for the upkeep of the boats. Mostly the boats have been available on most weekends and special occasions. George Fuller described them as "A fleet of very aged, wooden clinker-built rowing boats available for hire during most weekends and holidays. It is possible to disappear from view into the far reaches of the southern end of the Main Lake – creating a lifelong memory for many users." During Alan Jellyman's time as curator there were 12 clinker built wooden boats in the fleet and they were repaired by staff member Eric Powell who used copper nails and worked in the back shed behind the old office. Two groundsmen, Ron Trass and Ivan Jordan supervised the boats during their weekends. Alex Dent was a gardener who helped with the boats on Sundays, and a retired man Val Carroll supervised during weekends for a long time. Steven Doy was mentioned as was Michael Paulin. Some of these men made their own oars out of tanekaha timber. The oars wore out where they moved within the rowlocks so had to be replaced from time to time. Eric Powell shaped the oars and put blades on them. During the 1940's High School boys supervised the boats, among these was Ian Launder.

Sometimes, Ken Davey said, the boatshed was broken into and the boats taken out for joyrides, nothing changes. In answer to an advertisement asking for boats for use in the park a dinghy was donated by Ruth and Ron Luxton during the winter of 1984. The boat was a clinker built craft built in 1953 which had been used for trout fishing by the family near Rotorua for many years. Mr Luxton reckoned that more than 1000 trout had been caught out of the boat. The couple stated that they were glad to think young people would get pleasure out of the dinghy.

A drowning occurred in the park lake in January 1985, when a 16 year old man drowned as he apparently swam between 11 boats the large party from Otara had hired for an hour. He apparently got into difficulties when he unsuccessfully tried to climb back into his own boat. The party was a particularly happy, lively one of varying ages up to about 50 years old and the youth would have been the youngest member. It was difficult for the park's boating attendant who could not swim but watched helplessly as the incident unfolded. He however gave good advice from the bank as others tried to locate the body which lay within a couple of metres of where he indicated. The lake depth varied from 1 metre at the southern end of the lake to at least 4.5 metres nearer the kiosk and the New Plymouth Underwater Club found his body about 50 metres from the Tea House and 12 metres from the eastern shore.

Many generations of local children have been aware of the boats and the ability to obtain free rides by tying the painters to form a queue and rowing them to and from the steps where they stayed during the daytime. Each boat was numbered, with the number painted onto it and there was a gong, so the supervisor rang the number of each boat as the half hour hireage time was up. At four thirty in the afternoon local children would arrive to take the boats back to the shed to be locked up for the night. It was always a help to the boatman and built a good rapport with the children. They honed their rowing skills, played pranks and had fun, at no cost. This pleasant memory remains in the minds of folk of a certain age. I know for I was one of them.

Currently there are 10 boats plying the lake, three of them wooden and the rest are five year old moulded fibreglass boats. The largest of the three remaining wooden boats was collected from the Mangamahoe Power Station 15 years ago by Chris Connolly who donated it to the park and named it *Lady Jane* after his wife. Upon its arrival at the park it was thoroughly cleaned and painted.

These days the boats are a great drawcard for visitors to the Festival of Lights where they are lit up and ply the lake for hours. Lifejackets however, are worn now. Otherwise the boats are available for hire through the Tea House and are often about during holiday periods.

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Otter Introductions

**Jolene West
Keeper**

On the 5th of March Takumi (male Asian small clawed otter) arrived at Brooklands Zoo. He spent 30 days prior at Auckland zoo where he completed his quarantine period as Takumi came from Mogo Zoo in NSW, Australia. When Takumi arrived at Brooklands he was put into an enclosure off display to the public. We let him settle in on his own for the night. The next morning we brought Jemima (female Asian small clawed otter) over to the same enclosure as Takumi but in different areas so they could only see each other from a distance. We changed their bedding materials over, giving Jemima some of Takumi's straw and Takumi some of Jemima's straw. We did this because otters communicate a lot with smell and after a day or so when there was no negative behaviour seen between both otters we gave them access to each other through mesh, where they could touch each other's paws. Once we were happy with their interactions we let them in together for short periods of time building it up longer and longer always having keepers watching. Otter introductions can be very complex and can go wrong very quickly if not done right.

A lot of chasing observed to start with, they did do a bit of interlocking and rolling in the water, keepers did distract them at times by rustling leaves or clapping hands. Both otters never received any injuries during introductions. Once we were happy with their progress we left them together overnight.

On the 21st of March we moved the otters to their main enclosure on display. Both otters explored their enclosure together. Takumi was very active in and out of the pond, climbing every tree in the enclosure so it was lucky that the keepers trimmed the trees away from the perimeter fence just to make sure that he could not escape or he could not be reached by a member of the public.

Both otters are getting on really well, which is awesome to see as otters are very social animals and in the wild live in family groups. If you are ever up at the zoo, go over to the otter enclosure and say hello to Jemima and Takumi.

