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CENTRE FIELD: A CASE FOR VISUALISING THE FABRIC OF THE NEW ZEALAND HISTORIC GARDEN

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This presentation is based on two presentations, one given to an ICOMOS meeting in Tauranga in November 2010 and the other at the June conference of the New Zealand Archaeological Association held at Havelock North. Both presentations are in response to criticisms of garden conservation made by Sarah Beresford (2010: 14-19) in the Winter issue of *Heritage New Zealand*.

The article asked its readers ‘what defines a heritage garden?’ and ‘how authentically should it be maintained?’ Those half dozen owners and managers who were asked these questions gave a range of answers. They were unsatisfactory. The primary question asked should have been at what age does a garden acquire heritage status and the associated values? What indeed is a ‘value’? Does a value have a physical expression? Gordon Collier states at the end of the story that “most gardens don’t survive a generation” but what of those that have survived many generations and those that are documented in drawings from the 19th century and remain as archaeological sites full of physical garden elements? Their loss is potentially as important to garden historians as those new garden types and styles created over a generation to be sold and demolished at will. Values come and go but the footprint of a garden survives.

The New Zealand historic garden has to be placed at the centre of the debate about the management issues that the *Heritage New Zealand* article raised. As a solution to the problems of the invisibility of the fabric of historic garden, and the misunderstanding of what garden fabric is, I propose the publication of the list of physical garden/landscape elements that follows. This list should be regarded as preliminary and additions are encouraged.

By making these garden elements visible through publication and discussion across a number of disciplines, publication may strengthen the evolving discipline of garden history in New Zealand. I consider garden history a distinct

sub-discipline of other contemporary evolving heritage disciplines such as archaeology, arboriculture and horticulture.

I propose that the New Zealand Archaeological Association supports the inclusion of a new historic garden ‘type’ and supporting list of categories be published in Archaeological Site Recording in New Zealand (Walton 1999). This would be added to any future review of the guide.

Contemporary arboriculture and horticulture and to some extent archaeology impose values that are proving destructive to the historic garden’s integrity. Evidence of this conflict is gathered from the many heritage garden projects my business Endangered Gardens has worked on over the past decade with my anxiety confirmed by some of those opinions expressed in the Heritage New Zealand story.

Why is an understanding of gardens important for the three disciplines listed above? Plants are the dominant element and expressed as the living ornamental (exotic) or functional (line/form/colour) and modernist representations of art history, architectural history, historic cultural landscapes, cultural geography and environmental history. Historic live plants collections contain scientific genetic resources for agriculture, ethno-botany, horticulture and forestry.

Several attempts to classify garden elements have been published by Walter Cook (1987) for the Alexander Turnbull Library tentative Garden History Indexing Project and Dr. Rupert Tipples (1989) at the same time attempted to describe the typology of gardens in his book about the mainly garden designer Alfred Buxton. These attempts and other published reports written by Dorothy Cameron-Gavin (1993) never got far. They never spoke to other disciplines and were probably oblivious to them or were careful to manoeuvre around them. In Australia, an important classification of garden elements was published 20 years ago, Juliet Ramsay’s *Parks, Gardens and Special Trees. A Classification and Assessment Method for the Register of the National Estate*.

A rigorous heritage assessment of the garden is also missing from many New Zealand archaeological reports I have read, such as boundaries, fences, hedges, ditch and banks, orchards, groves, arbours, bush gardens...

To return to the Beresford story. Beresford (2010: 19) quoted the owner of the Otago Peninsula’s Larnach Castle, stating that “Larnach was not a gardener...” to seemingly justify not conserving any of the garden elements he oversaw the construction of, such as an amazing rustic arbour that stood in the grounds until the early 1980s. Larnach would have sought expert garden design advice from nurseryman and landscape gardeners such as George Matthews (Anon 1898), who was reported as the local 19th century expert landscape designer. Larnach also obtained money through the Forest Tree Encouragement Planting scheme – under this scheme, money and lands were given for up

to 250 acres of land planted with approved forestry trees. Plans of this work, showing what had been planted where, were produced at the owner's expense. While forest historians have noted that trees were planted around homesteads (including Larnach's Castle), the detailed landscape plans that the government received from claimants have not been published. Later 20th century owners of Larnach's Castle grounds employed locally trained and expert garden designers, such as local graduate landscape architect I. V. Thornicroft to design the grounds. Thornicroft would go on to pioneer teaching landscape architecture at a university level in Tasmania according to Hurburgh (1986).

What does a historic garden contain that might be of interest to archaeologists? The garden is usually enclosed by diverse types of shelter in the form of live hedges, fences and walls constructed to hold out grazing animals. Boundaries appear to be something that arborists and other land managers appear unaware of. Witness the clearance of the internal and external boundaries across the new Monte Cecelia Premier Park in Hillsborough, Auckland. Because the practice of garden history places value on the maintenance of all the physical elements that make the place, including live or material boundaries, the garden history discipline argues for the retention of the maximum quantity of physical elements. If the boundaries are made of old living plants one will sometimes find that these plants shelter previous boundary technologies and may have slowed the ageing process of those physical elements comprised of timber or metal. This was first discovered while walking through the older streets – Renall and Essex Street – of Masterton several years ago. Ancient totara posts, still upright, were hidden in the live hedges of *Olearia* spp. and *Prunus lauruscus* etc. The relationship between plants and below ground archaeological sites is complex, though, as trees produce roots that can be a threat to the stratigraphy of a site (Walton 1999).

The removal of all living or non-living boundary material with no consideration of the heritage value of these features is bad practice. If boundary systems are considered redundant they should at least be photographed and measured before being destroyed. Herbarium specimens should also be collected from any vegetation planned for removal. A contemporary practice is the grinding out of all tree stumps by a machine, with the mulch then spread across the site. This practice has the potential to spread the native ground disease armalaria from the infected timber fibre. The historic tree placement patterns are also destroyed when stumps are removed. Some stumps are not only an important record of tree planting patterns but are historic objects in their own right, as observed in the 1980s in the grounds of Government House,

Auckland, in the 1980s, with several large pine trunks planted with climbing plants. The stump rotted away and was later removed

Part of the solution to what to me appears to be a denial that New Zealand gardens have historic elements is to provide archaeologists with more information to enable them to record historic gardens in detail, including modernist urban garden landscapes. Highly significant garden history fabric from the 20th century is probably being lost faster than that of the 19th century. There is a problem, too, with the 100 year cutoff date used by the Historic Places Act 1993 to define archaeological sites.

To advance the understanding of perhaps a new field in Aotearoa New Zealand where the garden is valued as a ‘centre field’ – where the practice of garden history is both applied and theoretical – will require some detailed descriptions of the categories of what comprises the garden archaeologically, tree stumps included. I would encourage you to support the inclusion of a ‘category’ listed, described and published in the contemporary management inventories of New Zealand horticulture and archaeology, such as Archaeological Site Recording in New Zealand.

Those gardens that have and are being lost through being poorly described are potentially as important to garden historians as those new garden types/styles created over a generation to be sold and demolished at will. Values come and go but the physical footprint of a garden survives!

What follows is a preliminary list of physical garden and landscape elements.

Circulation

- Walks, paths, carriage drives – bounded by raised curbs (stone, brick), dish drains (brick), and road ways (timber, cobble, asphalt).

Spatial pattern and structure

- Kitchen gardens – squared (Tanner (1980), Morris (2008)) or oblong square (Cobbett (1820)).
- Systematic gardens – botanic gardens, acclimatisation gardens, experimental gardens.
- Nursery grounds – hot beds (e.g. Auckland Domain), medicinal gardens/herb gardens.
- Historic plantations – Henry Matthews’s plantation planting layout plans (see the Appendix to the Journal of the House of Representatives, C series 1900s).
- Flower garden e.g. Albert Park ‘parterre’ (with stone mulch; Salmond

Reed Architects et al. (1997)).

- Market gardens, including Chinese and Māori – fields, irrigation, dwellings and infrastructure.
- Terraces (Italianate style) – earth and concrete.
- Steps – concrete, basalt, turf/earth.

Garden objects

- Arbor – single live tree(s) i.e. *Macrocarpa Cupressus macrocarpa* (sometimes confused with pergolas).
- Pergola, bridges, bush houses, fernery (NB: many 19th century bush houses/ferneries contained Māori carvings on the doorway).
- Pākehā in-ground and above ground food storage systems, often modelled on Māori knowledge (Berridge 1910).
- Glasshouses – summer houses, conservatories, vinery.
- Garden urns, statuary, fountains, natural rustic features (such as logs and/or timber).
- Terracotta edging tiles, bricks, bottles, timber, concrete posts.
- Tree and plant labels – associated with experimental and systematic gardens
- Rockeries, rock gardens.
- Military and prison gardens using stone ornamentation as detailed by Verran (2010).
- Railway gardens.
- Rustic tree stumps – ex-arbor/pergola (e.g. Old Government House, Auckland).
- 19th and early 20th century children’s play equipment.
- Concrete planters.
- Dovecotes.

Boundaries

- Manuka fences.
- Ditch and turf bank with live hedges, posts and rails.
- Hedges – various species e.g. *Rosa* sp., hawthorn.
- Balustrades – timber or stone.
- Concrete modernist low wall structures (e.g. Hayes Paddock, Mt Eden) – prefabricated/cast.

Trees

- Commemorative single or mass plantings, sacred groves,

- arboretum.
- Shelter trees.
- Tree guard enclosures.

Water

- Lakelets e.g. T.E. Pearson's designed lakelets, Auckland, Rotorua, Christchurch and Queenstown (Figure).
- Ponds – for fish breeding, water races, dams.
- Ponds – Japanese style and modern functional biomorphic form.

Scenery - spatial

- View shafts – e.g. at The Elms Garden, looking towards Mount Maunganui.

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