



Bason botanic gardens trust

autumn 2019 newsletter

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BLANCHE AND STANLEY BASON REMEMBERED

On Friday the first of March, Kaye Neale and Ngaire Adams and a couple of their friends went for a walk around the Bason Botanic Gardens. Nothing unusual there perhaps, except they had not done so since the 1960s when Stanley and Blanche Bason were living and farming there. They are the great nieces of Blanche Bason, who they would visit and sit with on the seat in the succulent garden, while they chatted about the plants they all loved so much (see image) and, no doubt, other things that concerned young ten and thirteen year old ladies of the day.

In those days the Homestead Garden was well established and planted with young shelter. It would be a while before the many young trees, struggling to deal with strong westerly winds, would develop into the great shelter they now provide for Whanganui's beautiful botanic park. The Conservatories were not yet built, the Lake not yet formed.

It was with great pleasure that Phil Thomsen and I strolled the grounds with Kaye and Ngaire as they saw, for the first time, what Stanley and Blanche Bason's dream had developed into. They marvelled at the trees, the open spaces, the barbecues, the fern house, conservatories and more. They loved the way the Japanese Tea House enhanced the view of the Lake and were intrigued by the green and red Azolla fern and the meandering pathways that the ducks created through it.

And what impressed just as much as the gardens and plants? Ngaire and Kaye absolutely loved the sculptures, artistic barbecues, frisbee course and the general modern, family friendly feel.

These two ladies and their friends were mightily impressed, and their nostalgic visit reinforced for me the value of this great asset, nurtured by both Council and independent donation, that serves the families and people of Wanganui and the many visitors to our city.



If you have not discovered what is still known as "The Bason Reserve" or not been lately, then why not take the family for a picnic? It's a great place to relax and enjoy a quiet garden sanctuary.

- Terry Dowdeswell



HOMESTEAD GARDEN ENTRANCE

Over the years, the Bason Botanic Gardens Trust Board has commissioned a number of features, in partnership with the Whanganui District Council. Usually, the degree that visitors react to them varies – most like them, but some can be critical of aspects. However, there is one feature of which I have never heard a word of criticism – the entrance to the Homestead Garden. This is surprising to me, as it is far from traditional for what one might expect in a garden that developed its basic themes well over 50 years ago.

How did this unusual structure come about? Ian Hamilton, elected as Chair in 2012, initiated a planning process whereby several proposed assets were selected for priority treatment (eg the Villa Rustica sculpture at the bottom of the Millennium Hill). The one that was Ian's particular brainchild was the entrance to the Homestead Garden. At this stage, the high paling fence around the western side of the Garden was continuous, to keep out the prevailing westerly winds, with the entrance tucked into the side. Ian felt that this was far from inviting, and visitors often felt that they were approaching a private area of the Gardens. The Board commissioned The Isthmus Group, a landscape architectural firm, to develop the concept and manage the project. The selected option was for a sculptural arch with a contemporary asymmetrical flavour, and made of corten steel. This product has the advantage that it needs little maintenance – if left uncoated, it develops a distinctive surface rust that doesn't migrate through the steel, and that maintains its integrity.

Two additional aspects were introduced. Wendy Bainbridge, Board member and Team Leader Parks for WDC, suggested glass art be incorporated into the sculpture, to reflect that aspect of Whanganui's artistic community. Lisa Walsh, a glass artist in Waverley who trained at UCOL's glass school, was selected to create the artwork. Lisa chose images that reflect the plants and flowers that feature in the garden. These are encased in plate glass for protection, and are installed in steel structures that resemble old-fashioned pickets, reflecting the traditional heritage of the Homestead Garden. The second addition was to include a quote from Stanley Bason in the arch itself. Stanley was a poetic and often melancholic person, and the poignant quote reflects this: "Through the trouble of this world there still runs a thin stream of serenity for those who seek it".



Subsequently in 2014, local firm Wells and Wadsworth were commissioned to do the work, with BPL as project supervisors. The project was fully funded from bequests, particularly from the Pat Holmes estate. The work was completed during 2014 to critical acclaim. Sadly, Chairman Ian Hamilton, who had initiated the project and taken particular interest in it, passed away suddenly in early 2015. His family took his body to the Gardens prior to the funeral, so he could spend some time with his personal "baby". It was great that it was completed before his death.

Originally it was intended to add shelter plantings on the north-western side, since there was concern that the arch would funnel wind into the garden. However with the increased shelter provided by the mature plantings, particularly the Phoenix palms along the path, this hasn't been found to be necessary. This means that the arch is visible to people driving towards the Picnic Flat, and helps to draw people into the Homestead Garden. I feel that the project has been a complete success. The arch is a dramatic feature that draws people along the palm-fringed path, and has "Wow!" factor. When one gets closer, the Stanley Bason quote and glass art intrigue visitors. So it works at several different levels. Weddings often take place in the Homestead Garden; I notice that photographers often use the arch to frame their pictures of the Happy Couple! I invite you to make the most of one of the golden autumn days to visit the Gardens and spend some contemplative time with this remarkable sculptural feature.

Phil Thompson

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

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:
alan.f.donald@gmail.com

Membership: Individual \$20; Family \$30; Corporate \$100; Life \$500
Internet banking 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.

Payment may also be mail by snail mail to -
The Treasurer, Bason Botanic Gardens Trust, PO Box 778, Wanganui

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"MILL HILL" RECOLLECTIONS

Sometime around the mid-1990s, and for several years in a row, I suggested the removal of the deer on the hillside. No one was quite sure why they were there and I pushed for their removal because we were a garden and not a zoo. Also deer were being farmed extensively and easy to view elsewhere.

After a brief period of inertia, I think it was Suzanne Vickers who suggested it could be our millennium project. I came up with a plan for a totally informal, Mediterranean-type planting, but with a very formal structure through the middle.

Bruce or Vonnie Cave recommended a local earth-moving contractor whom I met one afternoon. We pegged out the path which transverses the hillside two or three times and also the site of the flight of steps was marked out for some earth work preparation. Some of it was a bit tricky because there were existing trees that we didn't want to lose.

I wish I could remember his name! He did a great job! And the bill came to \$2000. I think the deer went to Peat Park and what happened to the fences I don't know, but we were now left with a very large hillside of grass – but with a brilliant access track.

So, for the next 20-odd years, we did major planting there each year. The succulent area in the Homestead Garden spread on to the corner near the cork oaks. Vonnie grew and planted echiums near there. The *Echium wildpretii* plants were indeed a wonder.

In those days, we had a curator, Don Stephenson. Don was not keen on the steps so it didn't happen. When the steps did come, this century, it gave real structure to our Mediterranean-themed hillside. The addition of the view point building and the Stuart Welch "Round and Around" sculpture at the top, along with the paths and seating at the bottom, achieved wonders too.

One planting I remember was the actual millennium celebration planting. By then the hillside was actually starting to resemble a deliberate landscape statement. On planting day, we had three *Brachychiton rupestris* (Queensland bottle trees) for the "celebrities" to plant. Mayor Chas Poynter planted one. I can't remember the other two. All three trees are growing well, although one needs liberating from a *Pinus patula* branch.

So the pattern is set for our (now affectionately called) "Mill Hill".

Long live Mill Hill!

- Clive Higgie



SHAKESPEARE IN THE PARK

We are delighted to announce that "The Merchant of Venice" is scheduled to be performed at the Bason Botanic Gardens next February/March (dates to be finalised). This is going to be another exciting production directed by Karen Craig and one that may well reflect on changes in our society today. We are already working on the weather. "The Tempest" came a little close for comfort last time!

The Bason Botanic Gardens are becoming known as a place to hold events. As well as weddings, birthday parties and work "dos" there has also been an awesome fundraising event "Biking the Bason" created by Trevor Francis and Jason Sturzakerback and hosted by Downers Whanganui (see our Facebook page for a video <https://www.facebook.com/basonbotanicgardens/>). If you would like to hold an event at the gardens please contact wdc@whanganui.govt.nz or wdc@wanganui.govt.nz

"CITY GIVEN £25,000 FARM"

Almost concurrently with my contact with Kaye and Ngaire I met up with Richard Green, a friend of a friend. The subject of the Bason Botanic Gardens came up and Richard told me that it was he who reported on the donation of the farm to the city 53 years ago. He thought he may have the original clipping. Well, it turns out that although he didn't have the article, he did have the scanned image that appeared in the article, of Stanley pointing out the farm boundaries to him as a young reporter for the Wanganui Herald.

Enquiring at the Heritage Library, Jill Kosmala, who it turns out knows Richard from their school days, helped me find the original article in the Herald and we were able to send him a copy to go with the image displayed here.

Terry Dowdeswell
Chair



KIA ORA

We are pleased to welcome Megan James as Fulton Hogan's Bason Botanic Gardens new Team Leader. Megan has recently relocated to Kai Iwi with her family where they are building a new home.

Megan began her Horticultural career in Nelson and then moved on to complete her apprenticeship and work at Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney, where she obtained Level 4 in both Horticulture Arboriculture.



Megan says, "I have worked at Parliament House, the Art gallery and other high profile gardens. I ended my time there in the newly made Rose Garden until I decided it was time to return to New Zealand. I have come from my own business in Palmerston North where I worked at Greenhaugh gardens which is a National Trust garden, newly appointed 6 stars."

Megan says she is looking forward to working in the gardens with her team to maintain and improve this special area.

The Bason Botanic Gardens Trust Board take pleasure in welcoming Megan to our little spot of paradise and look forward to watching the gardens flourish under her stewardship.



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c/- PO Box 778, Wanganui

