

AN INVITATION TO (THE) DANCE

Dances evolve from people's expression in and of their physical place. A dance represents a cultural expression of a people and their place. Perhaps a cultural expression of the nature of a place.

A dance has a strong and clear theme, a rhythm, a style, an idea, a language. This is its signature. This language involves distinct components. The components may be represented differently by different performers, but all retaining the distinctive flavour of the particular style of that dance. Diverse expression within

Different dances develop from different peoples, times and places. Each dance has its distinct character. Distinct components. Whilst different dances usually share some common components, each has a combination and emphasis that allows it to be distinct. Not a potpourri of steps and rhythms from different dances merely thrown together, but each with a distinct character. An idea. A flavour.

Just as distinct dances layer up in the cultural expressions of a place, so to with expressions of place through vegetation. Plantings too have traditionally been an important cultural expression of the distinctiveness of place.

The expression of place through vegetation involves layers of nature as well as layers of culture. In many places, distinctiveness of place through use of vegetation has been retained through the restrictions of climate or tradition. Here in Canterbury, whilst the utilitarian plantings may involve clear language, style and idea, the climate and cultures of have enabled a confused plethora of amenity plantings to develop.

To encourage discussion and perhaps development of some clarity in visions for plantings, I provide a brief snippet of some of the contributing layers, that together contribute to our planting heritage. There has been a strong interest in horticulture and arboriculture from many of the peoples of the lands of Canterbury.

GONDWANALAND

Early Europeans recognised this was a peculiarly unique country. NZ was home of a prolific array of ancient forms of life.

Part of the vast supercontinent of Gondwana with carried ancient ferns podocarps and araucarian pines (cf. Kauri). Flowering plants evolved and spread but NZ had drifted away from Australiawere blocked by the Tasman. But a number of species made it via our links with South America and Antarctica - Southern Beech was one, also members of magnolia, protea and fuchsia families. Some in our forests today.

Triassic forests in New Zealand included the cycads, ginkgos and conifers that evolved, these forests were deciduous, and tree ferns were abundant. Benmore example.

The flowering plants then evolved and became dominant. It is from a magnolia-like ancestor that all our flowering plants evolved. Dominant in cretaceous along with two conifer groups, podocarps and aruacarians. Tree ferns elsewhere dominant.

But 140 million years ago, during Mesozoic, a vast landmass.
80 to 65 million years ago the ocean spread, Tasman Sea formed.

Tree ferns are of archaic varieties that came to the south-west Pacific more than 190 million years ago.

For at least 80 million years a flora has evolved in New Zealand separate from the rest of the world.

As a result we have a very separate, distinct and special flora, responsive to this place, the geology, the soils, the climate, and the fauna that belongs here.

The temperate lands of Canterbury has a very good representation of this flora. The beech forests, the totara-matai forests. The kowhai woodlands. The shrublands, grasslands, wetlands and dunelands. Main divide to plains. The limestone country. The volcanic country. The range of lakes, from the many in the high country (particularly of the Waitaki, the Rakaia, the Waimakariri, and the Hurunui systems) to the few at the coast, particularly Te Waihora, Ellesmere and Wainoni in the south. There is a flora for each of these lands.

The Waitaha who arrived here perhaps a thousand years ago brought with them plants that were important to them. Other iwi have brought other plants that had been cultivated in their tropical Pacific homelands, and moved plants here from other parts of Aotearoa. Some of the plants introduced have naturalised e.g. karaka, which has naturalised in the Lyttelton area, and taupata, *Coprosma repens*, which has become a significant coastal shrub in northern Canterbury. Other plants introduced, such as the food plants taro and kumara were cultivated, and survive only under protective management. With tropical origins, the flora generally was not particularly adaptable to establishment in this temperate land. The early introductions have not naturalised, not invaded and made this their home. Medicinal plants?

Tangata whenua also named the plants native to Aotearoa with which they had an affinity, particularly the plants seen as directly useful. The names were often the same or very similar to the name of a plant with similar use properties to one at home. Thus the kava plant of the Pacific has its relation in the kawakawa plant here. Kahikatea? Many local native plants became used for culinary, medicinal, fibre or decorative purposes.

With the arrival of European explorers there was an excitement and fascination with the native flora of this land. With the arrival of European settlers, there was the introduction of a large range of plants that had been cultivated in their temperate homelands, including food plants as well as amenity plants. Whilst the expanses of evergreen woody vegetation were seen as an impediment to production, there was also an early aesthetic fascination with the new flora, as shown in early garden development. Plant material was taken to Europe, not just for botanical analysis, but for horticultural trial. A new dance was developed, with the floral showy newcomers partnering the handsome, solid natives.

Alas, many of the newcomers took to this land too well. Hundreds have become problem plants. Planted for decoration, timber production or shelter, many of the species moved out from the gardens, the shelter-rows, woodlots and hedges, and spread around the countryside. Most are controlled by the browsing animals that had been introduced with them - the sheep and cattle, so that they only "let loose" in areas out of reach of stock, or unpalatable to them. Thus we now have naturalised hundreds

of types of trees, shrubs, vines and herbs, even ferns, that compete vigorously to push out our native flora.

Of the trees, the sycamore, ash, alder, wattle, pine, cherry, cherry plum,
of the shrubs, the briar rose, barberry, holly, buddlia, broom, gorse, elderberry,
himalayan honeysuckle (*Leycesteria*), etc.
of the vines, the convolvulus, ivy, honeysuckle, jasmine, potato vine, flame creeper,
passionvine, *Clematis vitalba*,
of the herbs, agapanthus,
grasses, *Nasella*,
ferns, male fern,
on dry lands, wet lands, even in water - flag iris, etc.

But these are the species that have the capacity to invade - with seed carried by wind, birds, waterways, or attached to woolly socks or a fleece. At the same time there are many species that have not demonstrated that capacity - the magnolias, etc. Well-mannered trees. They either stay where they are put, or have seedlings that only establish very close by. For example, species with heavy seed that drops and is not dispersed, such as oaks and walnuts.

Using species that will not spread beyond a lot or management unit, there is no threat from such exotic species.

TOWARD PRINCIPLES

Time to recognise the ecological aesthetic.

Not say don't mix. Need a continuum, from expression of the natural layers, either as pure natural of that place, or as varying degrees of interpreted natural as an ecological design. Expressions of various cultural layers.

International duty to our indigenous, particularly our endemic, not just to species, but to their expression in the land. Also a duty to our cultures.

Respect all, celebrate all.

Develop new cultural layer that is a response to our natural layers, and new retain cultural heritage as long as ecologically responsible - i.e. non-invasive species.

Finding the balance. The dance appropriate to each site. The components that express a layer of nature or a layer of culture, combined in a language, a layout, a dance, that expresses clear ideas. Choose the rhythm, the dance - a samba, a foxtrot or whatever.

Suggest talks and a series of feature articles. Jacqui. Colin. Thelma. Kevin Garnett. One on each layer.