Chapter Four

NURSERYMAN AND LANDSCAPE GARDENER

For Canterbury the period from 1896-1914 was, in economic terms, one of development under the impetus of steadily rising prices. Profits rose resulting in wealthy farmers and employers. Wages rose less quickly being held down by the Arbitration Court. In real terms wages actually declined in relation to profits. These two trends were exhibited, in Scotter's words, in 'a vulgar display of riches' on the one hand and on the other in attempts to improve the conditions of the poor. 119 As the farmers and employers were Alfred William Buxton's chief clients St Albans Nurseries thrived with their clientele. So much so that about 1901 the growth in the business outranstipped the site in St Albans and a new site for a larger nursery with scope for further expansion was acquired in St Martins. The only information on the business prior to 1900 comes from the first catalogue. It is clear from the introductions to the different sections that the nursery was still building up its stock levels. Some 250 varieties of roses were grown, mostly Dwarf tea, Noisette and Hybrid Perpetual varieties. A number of varieties of deciduous and evergreen trees was grown and a 'magnificent collection' of young ornamental conifers. Stocks of hedging plants, ornamental flaxes and grasses, climbing plants, herbaceous plants, bulbs and tubers, were also held. Japanese plums were the only fruit trees recommended from the nurseries' stock, other fruit trees having to be obtained from other nurseriesmen. Plentyful supplies of berryfruit plants were held and also culinary herbs, asparagus and rhubarb.

The backcover of the catalogue provides an early picture of Alfred William Buxton, standing in the nursery with some of his staff and shows the St Albans coach passing along Springfield Road in the background (Fig 3.4). The choice of site on the coach route along Springfield Road would have facilitated customers visiting the nurseries and, as the large notice advertised, would have helped to draw them to the attention of the general public. The most intriguing question raised by the first catalogue of St Albans Nurseries is why did Thomas G Abbott, the eldest son of Buxton's former 'Master', choose to work for a young man whom he must have had a considerable part in training. The subsequent catalogue (1900-1) suggests Abbott must have joined Buxton in 1895 or 1896:

"About five years ago Mr Buxton availed himself of the services of Mr T Abbott, who for over 30 years was connected with the well-known Exeter Nurseries."

Family tradition, reported by Challenger, suggests Thomas G Abbott was still working at Exeter Nurseries in the last year of his father's life (1895) and so is likely to have moved to Buxton's business either just before or just after his father's death, but certainly before his mother sold Exeter Nurseries in April 1897. Thomas Abbott's sole legatee was Mrs Eliza Abbott, who inherited all his worldly goods. Mrs Abbott and her daughter Annie Elisabeth were Plymouth Brethren and there is a suggestion of strong religious differences within the family. They may have led to Thomas G Abbott being disinherited. His father left less than £4000 but a quarter of that would have been sufficient to carry on the business. 120 However, we find Thomas G Abbott working for Buxton in either 1895 or 1896. His role was:

"....the careful selection, propagation, and general supervision of Roses and all other Nursery stock...."

and he was described as:

"....an expert Rosarian, propagator and salesman, also specialist in fruits and conifers, in fact, well known in all departments for more than thirty years...."

which, if accurate, means that he started working for his father at about ten years of age. 121 At the time of commencing work for Buxton Abbott would have been about 40 years old, nearly twice the age of his youthful employer, then aged 23. Why did he not establish himself on his own? Perhaps, as already suggested, he had no capital as a result of a family wrangle. However, Buxton had started out on a similar basis only a couple of years earlier. Perhaps he had no desire to, or an objection to borrowing money or taking a commercial risk. We know little of how Thomas Abbott (senior) ran his business but Thomas (junior) may never have been allowed to make any more than
the most minor business decisions and thus have lacked the experience necessary to establish his own business. On the other hand Abbott may have decided to join Buxton for very positive reasons, perceiving in him a natural entrepreneur with a flair for business organisation and development. It seems likely that whatever Abbott’s reasons Buxton could only benefit from Abbott’s experience and reputation. If Buxton had worked at Abbott’s for only the five years of his apprenticeship his skills in certain key areas were still likely to be lacking. Propagation skills, which would be vital in establishing and operating a new nursery, would have come into this category. Abbott had been the chief propagator of the most respected nurseryman of the previous era. Abbott may also have had key customer contacts from his days at Exeter Nurseries which he was able to bring across to Buxtons as well. Thus both parties had something to gain from the move and the unpleasant alternative may have been to join the unemployed, who in 1895 had not diminished significantly from the peak of the previous year.

![Image of Thomas G Abbott](Fig 4.2 Thomas G Abbott (S C Challenger)).

In employing Thomas G Abbott, Alfred William Buxton was beginning a strategy which certainly lasted him through until 1926 and may have been important even after that. The strategy was to employ the best people available to work in his business. Other appointments upon Abbott’s death at the age of 53 in 1907 tend to confirm this idea, but are discussed later. The other aspect of Buxton’s business to be highlighted by the first catalogue was landscape gardening. It was claimed to be a speciality of the business and involved two types of work. On the one hand Buxton advertised for the laying out of gardens and grounds, and on the other he provided a gardening service for keeping gardens in order. Estimates could be provided for both services, and for the former plans and specifications were prepared upon request. As the testimonials indicate (Fig.3.6) such services appear to have stimulated a ready demand. By 1902 some thirty persons were employed in this work and over forty gardens and grounds were ‘in hand’. The *Cyclopaedia of New Zealand* describes this landscape work thus:

"Many of the most beautiful and picturesque gardens in Christchurch and throughout the country have been laid out with the greatest taste by Mr Buxton..." [122]

The earliest town garden landscaped was for his relative Joseph Shirley Buxton, who had built a new house at the corner of Office and Boundary Roads in 1896. [123] The grounds of the house, known as ‘Rotorua’, extended over an acre and included a fountain and two lily ponds. These were later drained when Rossall Street (Boundary Road) was widened. [124]

The rapid growth in interest in landscaping among the country fraternity may have been stimulated by Buxtons taking a stand at the 1898 Agricultural and Pastoral Society’s November Show. One of the earliest known Buxton designed gardens in the rural part of the province was that at Leslie Hills, landscaped for Duncan Rutherford about 1900. Buxton’s design work there has been described by Thelma Strongman:

"...The garden was essentially a large rectangular lawn in front of the homestead. A carriage drive led from the far corner to reach the house in gentle curves sweeping around two sides of the lawn. The garden was enclosed by closely planted conifers such as cedars, Douglas firs and various pines, and kowhai, wattles, quinces and a mulberry formed some of the rest of the planting. On the outside sweep of the drive were shrub borders and informal flower beds, with many daffodils planted on the outer curve of the bend. Buxton used horses and scoops to smooth the natural terrace on which the homestead stood. He then sculpted the edges of the ridge to give a uniform shape to the lower lawn which was used for croquet and tennis. The higher terrace was occupied by flower beds, an *araucaria*, a trachycarpus palm and cabbage trees. At the top of the drive was a rose garden and a wooden framed pergola led from the new garden to the old. One of the focal points of the garden was an elegant formal flight of steps joining the upper and lower lawns."
Flowerbeds lined the walk from the top of the steps to the homestead."  

No other descriptions exist for gardens known to have been laid out before the nurseries were moved to St Martins, and no others can be dated definitely before that time.

Operating a nursery business in St Albans was not without its problems. The swamp like nature of the district and the lack of proper drainage and roads were of major concern to local residents. They were also of concern to Alfred Buxton because they had the potential to leave his nursery waterlogged in periods of heavy rainfall. CONSEQUENTIAL plant losses could result and access for business traffic and customers might be impeded. Problems appear to have come to a head at the end of 1898 after the Borough Council recommended that "the open drain on the end of Springfield Road be filled in and the channel gone on with as soon as possible".  Just over a year later, in May 1900, a deputation of Springfield Road residents, including Alfred William Buxton, his neighbour C Rides (also a horticulturist) and several others, interviewed the Council respecting the drainage of their properties. They stated that the Council’s action in raising the side channel had left no outlet for surface or stormwater and asked that something should be done to relieve the problem. The Council responded by deputing its Works Committee to visit the locality and report back on the best means of draining the area. However, subsequent to the meeting little action appears to have occurred.

When the Council became due for re-election in April 1901 Alfred William Buxton was among the twelve candidates nominated for the twelve vacant seats. As there was no election his popularity in the Borough was not put to the test and he was elected unopposed with the other candidates. To stand for elected office in New Zealand local government was not a novelty in the Buxton family. Joseph Shirley Buxton had served on the first Sydenham Borough Council and also on the Heathcote and Spreydon Road Boards. But the motive in Alfred William’s case seems to have been largely concerned with getting some action on issues of
concern to Springfield Road residents. When the Council first met he was elected to the Sanitary and Lighting Committee. The exact status of this Committee is unclear because an ad hoc 'strong' committee was appointed later in the same meeting to consider the installation of an electric lighting plant in the Borough. Apparently the Sanitary and Lighting Committee was not 'strong' enough for such a major decision. However, at the end of May it reported to the Council recommending the erection of new lamps in Springfield Road and Madras Street. At the same meeting Alfred Buxton moved, seconded by Charles Carter, the proprietor of the Springfield Road and St Albans Coaches, that the Works Committee note the state of repair of Springfield Road and arrange for it to be put in a fit state of repair. The meetings in June and July were largely concerned with considering the financial estimates for the year and striking the rates. Springfield Road was back on the agenda at the August meeting when Charles Rides, Buxton's neighbour, complained again about the problem of drainage. In September a further complaint was received from Charles Chaplin about the drainage in Springfield Road. At last the Council decided to put Springfield Road in order as early as possible. In October 1901 the Works Committee reported, recommending the laying of a 6 inch pipe drain from St Albans Creek along Springfield Road to Buxton's section. The report was adopted. The following year Councillor Buxton was also involved in moves to widen Springfield Road. After the initial successes on the council in 1901, as far as the minutes indicate, he was never as prominent as some of the 'stronger' councillors were.

As amalgamation with Christchurch City Council approached in April 1903 Buxton attended far fewer meetings, whether because of the development work needed on his new nursery at St Martins or because he felt the remaining period of existence of the St Albans Council was inconsequential. When the St Albans Borough Council disappeared Alfred William Buxton's public life in local government came to an end. A brief public career with limited objectives ended with their achievement.

The growth in the business must have fully utilised the site of St Albans Nursery quite early in the new century, for by 1902 a new site was being developed in Wilson's Road, St Martins. Initially the new nursery was known as Premier Nursery. Later its name was changed to Opawa Nursery. It was situated on nearly nine acres of land to the east of the Heathcote River and to the north and south of what is now known as Buxton Terrace. While the land was not purchased from its previous owner, A A Adley, until July 1903, the new nursery must have been established before that date for an entry to appear in the Cyclopaedia of New Zealand Some previous unregistered lease must be suggested to explain this occupancy prior to purchase. Challenger found this to be the normal process in the nursery industry at this period. Also it helps to explain how a sale price of £1000 was financed by a mortgage from the vendor for £1300. If Alfred Buxton had prior occupation of the site and developed it immediately by planting out stock plants, nursery stock, roses, bulbs and his other crops, the value of the land would have increased instantly beyond the agreed sale price of £1000. It would have been one way of raising capital and giving the lender very good security as first mortgagee, with the conveyance of land and mortgage deed not being signed until the plants were in the ground. It may also have allowed for the development of glasshouses and packing sheds on the site. When the Buxtons themselves moved to St Martins is unknown but certainly by July 1903.

A number of reasons may be suggested for the selection of the St Martins site. In terms of soils the area consisted of Kaiapoi fine sandy loam and Tai Tapu heavy silt loam. It would thus have had a reasonable water retention capacity to the point of poor drainage. Climatically, the area around the foot of the Port Hills has been regarded as relatively 'early' in terms of seasonality. Being next to the river should also have been an advantage, with a ready supply of water for the plants' needs. In terms of location the site was further from the city centre than St Albans Nursery. A tram could be taken to Sydenham, getting off at Tennyson Street and walking a quarter of a mile to the nursery, or coaches went from the Square to Wilson's Bridge, and later to the nursery gates, several times a day. The more affluent could use their own transport as is shown in an early photograph of Opawa Nursery (c.1905) (Fig 4.4). One other feature may have drawn Alfred Buxton to the site. Closeby, at the foot of the Port Hills, lay the Farnley Brickworks, formerly owned by John Austin who had married Mary Buxton, one of John Buxton's daughters. One advantage of the proximity of the nursery to the brickworks would have been the availability of different forms of pots and pottery. They were heavy, bulky and brittle goods to transport but essential to any nursery producing stove plants in the days before plastic pots and planter bags.

The new nursery site had a two storey Victorian house, an 'early genteeel home of the pioneers' as one observer has described it, into which the Buxtons moved (Fig 4.5). Essential nursery buildings had to be constructed. By the time of the appearance of the 1905-6 Catalogue
a packing shed, water tower and glasshouses are clearly apparent in the cover photograph (Fig 4.4). As the official introduction to the nursery said:

“No expense has been spared to make each of our departments thoroughly efficient.”  

One of the houses became specially reserved for the production of palms (Fig 4.11) which were sold at any size between six inches and six feet, or which could be hired out for decorative purposes. The production of such stove plants necessitated a heating system and boiler house. The chimney of the boiler house can be seen just to the left of the water tower (Fig 4.4). Another feature of the nursery which shows clearly in this early photograph (Fig 4.4 and 4.8) is the avenue

Fig 4.4 Opawa Nursery from Buxton’s Descriptive Catalogue 1907-8. (Alexander Turnbull Library, Ephemera Collection)

Fig 4.5 The Buxton’s family home at Opawa nursery (Mrs M Kirkwood)
running from the iron gates to the glasshouses. Another observer has recalled this avenue when her family moved to the south end of Gamblins Road in 1919, by when it would have achieved some maturity: "A long very beautiful avenue of trees and shrubs ran from St Martins Road to this centre" (the glasshouses - author's parenthesis). Establishing the new nursery must have been an expensive business. Besides the mortgage raised from the vendor of the property other funds were obtained from the sale of half of the St Albans property for £165 but the residuum was still mortgaged for about £350. However, more funds were needed to achieve the standards of excellence desired. To obtain the required injection of capital a private company, A W Buxton Limited, was formed with John Avis Pannett on 19th September 1904. The principal objectives of the new venture were to take over Opawa Nursery, including all the assets and liabilities of the proprietor, as a going concern, and to carry on in New Zealand the business of landscape gardening, nursery gardening, and asphalting. It is, perhaps, significant that landscape gardening should be listed before nursery gardening in the list of objects since it so clearly reflects the interests of the principal shareholder. The nursery was a means to facilitate the first love of its principal, landscape gardening. The share capital of the new company was ten thousand pounds made up of ten thousand one pound shares. The shares were divided between the two shareholders on a two to one basis with Alfred William Buxton receiving 6666 shares and John Avis Pannett 3334.

![Image of John Avis Pannett (1850-1937) (Cyclopaedia of New Zealand).](Image)

Pannett was a prominent farmer, living at that time at 'Riverlawn', Greenpark. The Pannets were also nonconformists, being strong supporters of the Baptist Church at Lincoln. In his younger days he had been a successful ploughing match champion. Then he had taken to buying, developing and selling farms. At one time he was reputed to own and farm 4,500 acres and lease a further 28,000 acres which carried some 20,000 sheep. In addition, he grew large quantities of garden peas for Carters, the seedsmen of London. He was also heavily involved in local affairs as well and was one of the first shareholders of the New Zealand Farmers Cooperative Association. He served for some twenty years as a director and several as chairman. He was also for a time a director of Booth, Macdonald and Co., and the Automatic Franking Machine Company. In agricultural affairs he was similarly prominent as a Southdown sheep stud owner, as a leading figure in the Farmers Union of which he was Provincial President in 1905, and as a member of the Canterbury and Timaru A and P Societies. Clearly he was a man with substantial business connections who could be of benefit to Buxton's expanding business. We may speculate that the two came into contact through Pannett's wife Jane, who was a great lover of flowers and trees and who may have been a client of the nursery or had garden improvements carried out at Riverlawn by Buxtons. The investment in the company, from Pannett's point of view would not have been particularly large since he was reputed to have spent £7000 alone on the only successful attempt to drain Lake Ellesmere into the sea. Not only did Pannett become owner of one third of the company, he also injected further funds by way of a mortgage.

It is difficult to judge how closely Pannett was involved in the running of the business. He may have been a sleeping partner but two points suggest he took a more active role. First, when in 1914 Alfred Buxton and two of his principal employees, William Edginton and A H Shrubsall, joined the Association of New Zealand Nurserymen, a Pannett is also listed, although the initials given may be wrong. Secondly, at the 1915 Conference of the Association, in the group photograph published in the New Zealand Farmer (Fig 6.xx), Pannett appears along with Alfred Buxton, although the latter's name is omitted from the caption and the former's initials are again presented incorrectly. In any event his involvement in the company must have added a note of substance to the rapidly growing business and opened many doors in the farming and business communities.

The business was expanded still further in early 1905 with the acquisition of the seed and florist business of Mr T Turner of 159 Colombo Street, Christchurch. Acquisition of this shop gave a city centre outlet to complement the suburban nursery. At the time of
Fig 4.7 A W. Buxton's staff as shown in their Descriptive Catalogue for 1905/6. (Alexander Turnbull Library)

Fig 4.8 A view of the avenue leading from the road to the nursery buildings, from Buxton's catalogue for 1912 (Thelma Strongman).
acquisition the firm determination was expressed to maintain the high standard of reliability for seeds on which Mr Turner's reputation was based. Seeds would continue to be carefully selected and thoroughly tested before sale so that customer confidence would be maintained. Also a pot plant and florist business would be operated so that every want in those areas could be supplied. 139

The rapid expansion of the business necessitated taking on more staff. When a staff photograph was taken for the 1905/6 catalogue the all male staff numbered fifty (Fig 4.7). That all should be men was unsurprising in that era. Horticulture, and in particular nursery work, was regarded as a male occupation, unlike today when it is seen as suitable for and sought by both sexes. During the winter freezing workers were employed in lifting and planting operations in their off-season, and it was common to see forty men with spades working down a row (Fig 4.9). Later a smaller number were employed and then the operations were carried out by horse and plough. With the turn of the century came changes to the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1894 which were to change the context of employment in the nursery industry. Under the original Act horticultural workers were unable to benefit from the procedures provided. In 1900 the range of workers covered by the Act was extended from employment of an 'industrial' character to:

"...any person of any age, of either sex, employed by any employer to do any skilled or unskilled manual or clerical work for hire or reward." 140

Eighty five additional trade unions were registered in the months following the amendment, including the Canterbury Gardeners Union, no. 300. 141 In 1902 the Union had 45 members, far more than the minimum of 7 required by the Act for a union to be registered, but hardly enough to have any strength in the industry when one of the largest employers had at least fifty staff alone. With careful attention to the procedures of the Act and sufficient funds for a skilled and articulate advocate a union, no matter how big, could compel a group of employers to appear in an official dispute and be subject to an award of the Arbitration Court. Under the Act there was no need to build a large and loyal membership, to accumulate a large strike fund or to confront employers from a position of strength. The union's principal goal was to improve the standard of living of its members which, it was claimed, had deteriorated over the previous twenty years. This was to be achieved through an award granting increased wages, limited hours, holidays with pay, and a limit on the number of apprentices to be employed at no more than one for every three gardeners employed. An improvement in living standards was perceived as encouraging a better class of men to enter the trade. 142
The Gardeners’ dispute was heard before Mr Justice Cooper in the Arbitration Court when it sat in Christchurch in May 1903. Seven employers were cited by the union: W Jones, Abbott’s successor at Exeter Nursery, A W Buxton, the Christchurch Nursery Company, J Joyce, Nairn and Son, Kerr and Barnett, and Ross and Leighton. The employers’ case was led by Messrs Jones and Nairn. Alfred Buxton is not reported as giving any evidence in the proceedings but at least two of his staff appeared on behalf of the Union, J A Campbell and W Smith. James Campbell was two years younger than Alfred Buxton and a native of Victoria, Australia. He had arrived in New Zealand at the age of 23 and became a landscape gardener and horticulturist. How long he had worked for Buxton at the time of the award hearings is uncertain, but the friendship formed with his employer was to last lifelong. William Smith had joined Buxtons soon after the nursery opened at St Martins. He became a foreman specialising in rose production later. It appears from the later friendships and job progress of Campbell and Smith that nothing was held against them for appearing for the union against the employers. Little of their evidence was reported in the newspapers save that Campbell believed that a man should serve five years to become competent as a gardener or nurseryman. The tenor of the proceedings was generally amicable and the parties agreed that much could be settled by mutual agreement. The Judge was left to rule on the contentious issues. Although the employees had argued for a forty four hour week, they conceded a forty eight hour week in return for an agreement from the employers to work longer hours Monday to Friday and have a half holiday on Saturday in the summer months. Robert Nairn, who was the only employer to have joined the Canterbury Employers’ Association in 1903, had argued for this in his evidence, stressing that every moment of time was valuable in the winter months, and thus a half holiday could not be spared then. The chief point of contention was over wages which none of the nurserymen appearing believed they could afford to pay. There were nurseries in every little town of Canterbury competing with those of Christchurch, which alone had been cited. When the Judge settled the award a weekly wage of £2:5:0d was set for competent nurserymen and practical gardeners and a rate of £2 for nursery and gardener’s labourers. Hourly equivalents were 1/- and 10.5d, compared to a carpenter’s rate of 1/3d per hour.

In 1904, 1905 and 1906 the Gardeners’ Union applied to the Court to have the coverage of the award extended to a wider range of employers. It also applied in 1906 for improvements in pay and conditions.

Fig 4.10 The fountain at Opawa Nurseries (Canterbury Times, Canterbury Public Library)

Fig 4.11 A portion of one of the palm houses from Buxton’s 1912 catalogue (Thaddeus Strongman).

Though initial attempts were unsuccessful, because of a poor understanding of the procedures on the part of the Union, forty seven employers were successfully cited
in the 1906 Gardeners' Award. While a large part of
the hearings in 1906, before Mr Justice Chapman,
concerned the parties to be added to the award, the
claim for improved conditions was warmly debated.
The employers were better organised than in 1903 and
had J A Frostick, a boot manufacturer and former
President of the Canterbury Employers' Association,
appearing as their advocate. Alfred Buxton did appear
on this occasion, both asking questions on behalf of
the employers and being called as a witness on behalf of
the Union. The Union renewed its claim for a forty
four hour week. It also claimed a minimum wage of
£2:7:6 for nurserymen and practical gardeners and
£2:2:6 for labourers. Where board and lodging were
provided the Union asked that the maximum deduction
should not be greater than 10 shillings, and where a
cottage was provided the maximum rent should not
exceed 10 shillings. William Smith, when called to
support the Union's case, said that competency should
be assessed on the basis of whether a man kept his job
rather than how long he had held his employer.
Eight shillings a day was very poor pay for an
experienced nursery gardener, and he did not consider
them to be fair wages. Another Buxton employee, W C
Hyde, who had considerable experience as a jobbing
gardener, thought that a man employed at gardening
should be paid gardeners' wages. The fact that he was
kept at his work would prove that he was capable. He
believed that a wage of 1s 1½d per hour broken time
was not too much for a labourer. A married man had to
live very economically to make ends meet on that. The
wage of the day was 1s per hour, the wage of an
ordinary labourer. In reply to Mr Frostick, Hyde said
that one of the reasons for asking for increased wages
was the higher cost of living and rents, but he
recognised that employers could not buy food etc
cheaper than the workman.

Alfred Buxton, when called by the Union
representative, stated that he had been paying 6, 7, and
8 shillings per day before the award. Since the award
he had paid 8 shillings and his business had not
decreased but increased. However, he attributed the
increase to putting more capital into the business by
making it into a company. In Buxton's opinion
jobbing gardening did not pay. The difficulty was that
there were not enough gardeners in Christchurch who
could be sent out to do jobbing work. There were
plenty of gardeners' labourers. He paid 8s 6d and 9
shillings a day to some men. In reply to W Jones,
appearing for the employers, he said he was not aware
of any fresh nurseries starting since the award, but
three had failed. In the remainder of their evidence
the employers stressed how competitive was the market
situation in which they were operating. They had to
compete with others in full time jobs in other
occupations; with overseas competitors from Australia,
Japan, Europe and San Francisco; and with former
employees recently established on their own account or
with part time producers. They also had to compete
with nurserymen in other parts of New Zealand where
lower wages were paid. Consequently the Judge
concluded that increasing the wages or reducing the
hours would not be fair to the employers and the
conditions in the award were not changed. The only
changes of significance were those to the award's
coverage which was amended to include nurserymen
and employers of several gardeners, such as A W
Bickerton of the renowned Wainoni Gardens, from
Cheviot in the north to Timaru in the south. The
employers of private gardeners, fruit growers and
market gardeners were excluded from the award. The
chagrin of the Union at this decision is
understandable when one considers that A W Buxton
was offering something of an employment service for
gardeners in his 1904/5 catalogue, and the ones
recruited from the ranks of his own staff were
previously guaranteed the minimum rates laid down
by the award.

"Ladies or gentlemen requiring gardeners

A W Buxton Ltd have always most respectable men
in their employ, and also on the Register, waiting
for situations of all classes, and would be pleased to
send full particulars."

"All gardeners seeking Re-engagements etc.

Should send us a correct and full statement,
particularly that bearing on experience and success
in the profession, last or previous employers, to
ascertain character, etc. together with photographs,
to enable our customers to decide whom they wish
to engage, thus saving useless expense and
disappointment."

Mr Justice Chapman concluded that the attempt to
obtain coverage for the private gardeners was quite
impractical as well as uncalled-for. Only a small
proportion of such gardeners were members of the
Union. Many were grooms or general menservants
as well, and there was no evidence of discontent among
this class.

By the time the 1906 Gardeners Award was being
heard (August 1906) there was another major focus of
attention in Christchurch - preparations for the
International Exhibition. The New Zealand
International Exhibition of 1906-1907 was organized at
the instigation of the Premier, R J Seddon, who
n.b. The later expansion of the Board of Directors about 1918.

Fig 4.12 A W Buxton Limited’s organisation chart in as far as it has been able to be reconstructed.

determined on Hagley Park, Christchurch, as the ideal location. The Exhibition, which was on a much larger scale than previous exhibitions, necessitated the erection of buildings which extended from the Armagh Street entrance of the Park nearly to Carlton Bridge. To oversee the landscaping of the site an Exhibition ‘Horticultural and Landscape Gardening Committee’ was constituted. The chairman was Dr Levinge, the Medical Superintendent of Sunnyside Hospital. The membership consisted of some members of the landed gentry, often with well known horticultural interests such as R Heaton-Rhodes (MHR), and H P Murray-Aynsley; some from the professions such as H J Beswick, a solicitor and former Mayor of Christchurch, H Cotterill, another solicitor, and Dr Russell of Christchurch Hospital; another political representative who was also a member of the Domains Board, H Ell;

and several members of the trade: Robert Nairn, W Lawrence, J Armstrong, W Jones, J G Davies, and A W Buxton. To be associated with the Committee would undoubtedly have been a mark of approval from the Canterbury establishment for Alfred Buxton (Fig 4.13). However, his involvement in the laying out of the grounds was to be indirect rather than direct, through a former employee.149

The site was landscaped to a general scheme laid out by T Pearson, the Tourist Department’s Landscape Gardener for Rotorua. James Campbell was recruited from Buxtons to lay down the sportsgrounds and manage the gardening staff. William Jones of Exeter Nurseries was responsible for the planting. Bedding plants were purchased by tender and only about one
third of the tenders went to nurserymen, the remainder of the contracts going to other private individuals for whom plant raising was only a part time activity. 150 Buxton's direct input to the Exhibition was a horticultural exhibit for which a gold medal was received. Besides displaying a selection of the wares of A W Buxton Limited, the display also included a model landscaped garden, designed to scale, and intended to give prospective clients an impression of what their gardens could look like. The level of detail and care taken is demonstrated in the elaborate fencing surrounding the property, which followed the pattern for a brand of fencing for which Buxtons were the agents, and which surrounds many of their gardens of the period. 151 The whole display was presented in a rustic framework typical of many of the landscapes laid out over this Edwardian period of his work and perhaps recalling the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement in Victorian Britain. The effect of the Exhibition on Buxton's sales is difficult to gauge, but the Exhibition itself was extremely successful. Some two million people were registered as attending the Exhibition between 1st November 1906 - 15th April 1907, at a time when the population of the colony was less than one million. 152

In the continued expansion of the business in the mid Edwardian period several key appointments were made. Figure 4.12 reconstructs the internal organisation of the company, giving the key members of staff where known and their dates of employment. In an industry in which obtaining key staff was regularly a problem, Alfred Buxton appears to have done very well at both recruiting and retaining skilled staff. To some degree retaining skilled staff may be attributed to the above award rates which were paid, but also to the satisfaction of working for one of the most progressive businesses in the industry with an employer with a keen desire for excellence. Many of those who did move on either opened their own nurseries or other businesses, or developed successful careers in other fields. 153 However, it should be noted that the key staff of the business: the nursery manager, William Edginton; the shop manager, A H Shrubsall; the draughtsman and landscape manager, Edgar Taylor; and the company accountant and secretary, Sidney Smith, all worked for Buxtons for the best part of twenty years helping to develop the largest nursery and landscaping business in the country. Of those four only William Edginton left before the imminent collapse of the business in 1926.

Edgar Taylor was also pursued by Buxton for sometime before he agreed to work for him. Taylor's father, Ambrose Taylor had been Curator of the Christchurch Botanic Gardens 1889-1907. 154 Edgar was born in Britain in 1886, but was only three when his parents emigrated to New Zealand. His father's career and training was exceptional for a Victorian gardener. He had begun under his own father who was Head Gardener to the Duke of Bedford at Woburn Abbey. Then for two years he had worked at Chatsworth House, nominally under the control of Sir Joseph Paxton. 157 From Chatsworth he had moved to Kew Gardens for two years study before becoming Terrace and Pleasure Gardener for the Earl of Harewood at Harewood House in Yorkshire. He remained at Harewood House for four years of which the last two were as Head Gardener. Then from 1863-1883 he was Superintendent of Woods and Gardens for Baron Lionel de Rothschild at Tring Park, Hertfordshire, in close proximity to other Rothschild properties at Mentmore and Waddesdon. After the Baron's death he practised on his own account for six years, landscape gardening and otherwise advising, before applying and obtaining the position as Curator. The young Edgar Taylor grew up in the Botanic Gardens and was employed there from an early age under the direction and tutelage of his father.
Fig 4.13 The Horticultural and Landscape Gardening Committee of the New Zealand International Exhibition inspecting the site. Alfred Buxton is seen kneeling in front of the group on the left. (Canterbury Public Library)

Fig 4.14 A W Buxton Ltd sold their own mixture of grass seed. From the 1912 catalogue (Thelma Strongman).
Fig 4.15 Selwyn Farm, Ellesmere, which exhibited the fancy fencing for which Buxton's held the agency. (I Andrew)

Fig 4.16 The fencing is still exhibited today at Mr A Button's residence at Lincoln. It was once owned by a family called Crump who had the place landscaped by Buxtons. (D Hollander)
Under his father he gained a good knowledge of the cultivation of plants, shrubs and trees, and of general estate work. In particular, he was also trained in drawing and mensuration, which was to prove useful in his future role as Buxton’s draughtsman. After his father retired he continued for a time under the next Curator and then worked for some months in the Forestry Department at Hamner under Mr. Cram. Buxton tried to recruit him before the move to Hamner but was resisted, only succeeding when Taylor returned to the Botanic Gardens which were then under the Curatorship of James Young. From Buxton’s point of view Taylor would have been an extremely useful addition to his range of skilled staff. His general horticultural knowledge would have been above average and his draughting skills, acquired from his father, would have been very useful to the landscaping side of the business. 158 Previously Buxton had had to rely for draughting plans on Charlie Hyde who oversaw the jobs gardening and ran the Seed Shop. Hyde appears to have set up on his own as a seedsmen about 1906. Later, about 1913, he became an orchard instructor in the Department of Agriculture, based in Wanganui. 159

After Edgar Taylor joined A W Buxton Limited he worked for a time on the Landscape staff gaining experience in various contracts before being appointed Draughtsman in 1908 in Buxton’s drawing office. Taylor continued his education after joining Buxtons, studying Architecture at the School of Art under George Hart by means of evening classes. He was a very successful student obtaining the School’s Architectural Scholarship in December 1912 and the New Zealand Institute of Architect’s (Canterbury Branch) prize for the student gaining the highest marks in the Architectural Examinations. He also obtained a first class pass in Architectural Drawing. The following February, in an exhibition of work at the School of Art, his effort was described as follows:

“...Mr E Taylor breaks fresh ground in his combined design for a suburban villa, together with a detailed plan of the garden and grounds...” 160

The Canterbury Society of Arts later awarded him a Diploma for Garden Design.

6. Collaboration with Mr Buxton in designing and wholly carrying out the construction of a model landscape garden, etc., to scale
7. At certain periods the supervision of large contracts in both South and North Islands
8. Assisting in Nursery and Seed Store at times of stress.

In these activities he gave every satisfaction to his employer, for the reference continues

"...His draughting produced excellent plans with detail drawings etc., to illustrate the special features.

His work in the Landscape Department as a whole gave every satisfaction, thoroughness being the keynote throughout...

...We also desire to state that we have always found Mr Taylor a thoroughly honest and upright man of gentlemanly conduct, and we can highly recommend him to anyone who may desire to secure his services..." 161

While Edgar Taylor filled the role of draughtsman of plans vacated by Charlie Hyde, A H Shrubsall replaced the latter as manager of the town shop and jobbing gardening service. Shrubsall began to work for Buxtons in November 1906. Previous to coming to New Zealand he had worked for three years for the Department of Agriculture in Ireland. During that time he had been involved at a practical level in horticultural lecturing and organizing work. In his development as a horticulturist he claimed that the greatest help he had received had been the technical instruction in horticulture he had received from the Essex County School of Horticulture, which was the best of its kind in Britain. In New Zealand he maintained a close interest in the ‘trade’, becoming a member of the Association of New Zealand Nurserymen at the same time as Alfred Buxton in 1914. In 1916 and 1917 he read papers on education in horticulture to the Association’s national conferences which were influential in initiating the New Zealand Institute of Horticulture. In the first publication of that New Zealand Institute in the foreword, Shrubsall’s papers and his article ‘Horticulture and Homes’ are given credit towards the initiation of the Institute. 162

In his work over the period to 1922 Taylor had a wide range of responsibilities which were described in some detail in the reference he was given on leaving the Company’s employment in 1926. As Draughtsman his work included:

"1. All plan draughting
2. Detailling of landscape planting lists
3. Making surveys
4. Assisting in drawing up specifications
5. Mensuration of the proposed work

The fourth key member of the management team was the Company Secretary and Accountant, Sidney G Smith. Smith too joined the company in 1906 and continued to work for it throughout Alfred Buxton’s period of control and after. Besides general office and accounting duties Smith was responsible for most of
This Indenture

made the twelfth
day of November
in the year of our Lord One thousand nine hundred and sixty.

Witnesseth that:

William Emma Ivory (hereinafter called Apprentice), hath as well of his own free and voluntary will as by and with the consent of his Parent Guardian, John Ivory (hereinafter called Master), to learn his art and with him after the manner of an Apprentice to serve from the eleventh day of November 1906 for and during and unto the full term of five Years from thence next ensuing, and fully to be completed and ended, during which said term the Apprentice his Master shall and will faithfully serve, keep his lawful commands everywhere and at all times obediently; he shall do no damage to his said Master nor to any of others, but to his power shall forthwith give notice to his Master of the same; he shall not waste the goods of his Master nor lend them unlawfully to any person; and he shall not and will not during his said apprenticeship absent himself from the service of his Master at any time without leave from him his Master first had and obtained, but in all things as a faithful Apprentice shall and will behave himself to his Master and those in his authority during the said term as an Apprentice aforesaid, and as the nature of the said business shall require. And the said Master, Arthur Whitton, Limited, in consideration thereof, doth for himself, his executors and administrators, covenant, promise, and agree to teach and instruct the said Apprentice in the Art andWW

Signed and delivered by all the parties hereto in the presence of

Witnesses,

[Signature]

[Signature]
the Company's official correspondence and legal documents which did not require the signature of the Managing Director. Thus we find him as the signatory to personal references, apprenticeship indentures and landscaping contract documents. While later contract documents may have been typed some have survived in Smith's clear, bold hand. In addition to his duties for the Company he also provided secretarial services for twenty years to the local branch of the Association of New Zealand Nurserymen, was Minutes Secretary for some of their national conferences, and also for the New Zealand Institute of Horticulture. 

Beneath the managerial level of the Company was a second tier of long serving employees whose names have recurred from time to time during the research on which this book is based, but who would be almost unidentifiable from any official sources. Their names have come to notice because of kindnesses done, or because their descendants recollected their working for Buxtons with what can only be described as a degree of pride. Sometimes it is impossible to name other workers whose memory left favourable impressions of Opawa Nursery, but their beneficiaries' testimony lives on:

"The rejects and compost was tipped down the bank to (the) River where there was no road. We children fossicked there for treasures such as cyclamen corms and bulbs of many kinds.
I do not remember meeting Mr Buxton himself but his men were very kind to children whose interest was genuine, and showed us how to pot plants..."

Ray and Merle Buxton also recall the nursery staff as a 'very nice happy family' although they recognise that the section heads were always under more pressure to produce results. One of the key jobs was that of propagation. Propagation secrets were often closely guarded in the days before rooting hormones, electrically heated benching and fungicides became readily available. Thus the propagators were key men in the business. Reference has already been made to William Smith's part in the hearings before the Arbitration Court in 1903 and 1906. Smith became the foreman under William Edginton and was head propagator. He was a big solid man and a qualified nurseryman, but he believed that his education was inadequate for running a business. To get around he rode a 'penny farthing' bicycle. Smith's grand daughter, Lucy, recollected visiting him at the nursery:

"...I can remember my taking lunch to the nursery, when my grandparents lived in Wilsons Rd Opawa. It was only a short walk and I had to pass a brick kiln where jugs etc. were made and baked in a kiln...I remember and can now still recall acres of roses which my Grandad budded, grafted and knew the names of all. He'd tell me a different botanical one each time, and I earned many a 3 penny piece when he got home from his long days work and I had recalled its name..."

When Ray Buxton was 7 or 8 years old rabbits were proving a problem in the nursery. One day he attempted to shoot one with a shotgun. The shot missed and he ended up on his back. William Smith took him in hand and taught him how to shoot rabbits. At the time he seemed to Ray Buxton to be a very old man.

Other propagators included Joe Williams, Dale Williamson, Tom Tabor, Fred Russell and another by the name of Revell. Another long serving member of staff in the nursery part of the business was Charlie Dann. He was employed from 19th March 1906 until 3rd April 1920. Charlie Dann had responded to an advertisement for a 'carter' because he could drive. However, Alfred Buxton saw through his lack of knowledge of carting when he had problems harnessing the pony trap. Bill Smith showed him how to put the harness on and he got the job at the age of eighteen. For three years he was involved in carting. Initially he drove a light baker's van, followed by a one horse tipping dray for shifting manure. After three years he went to work in the glasshouses, where he was employed for some nine years. Then Bill Edginton shifted him to the packing shed where he prepared trees for packing, wrapping and casing them. At another time he also had three months working in the shop. Dann left the Company's employment for a better position on an orchard in the Heathcote Valley. Buxtons gave him a reference which described him as trustworthy, reliable and a good worker who would do his best to give satisfaction.

Another employee to begin in 1906 was George Bent who worked for the Company until the nursery shifted to Belfast. Bent was trained at his grandfather's nursery at Forest Gate, Epping, England. When he first joined Buxtons he worked in the nursery, then he went on to landscaping and general nursery work around Christchurch. He rose to be manager of the town landscaping and gardening branch. His work was based at the shop in Colombo Street. While Bent usually only worked in Christchurch, when Buxtons laid out the greens for the Allenton Bowls Club in 1923, he supervised the work there. The team assembled in those early years of the century were to be the backbone of Buxton's business for nearly twenty years. Most can be followed through the records of the Association of New Zealand Nurserymen and the New Zealand Institute of Horticulture, and many will be referred to frequently in this biography of their principal.
TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

We have pleasure in stating that Mr. Charles Hamilton Dann was employed by us in our Nurseries from 19th March 1906 until 3rd April 1920. He was mainly employed in our Glass House Department but had some experience in outside work. We always found him trustworthy and reliable and a good worker and he can be relied upon to do his best to give satisfaction. He left us to take up a better position and we wish him every success.

A.W. BUXTON LTD.

Secretary

Fig 4.18 The reference given by A.W. Buxton Ltd to Charlie Dann (Arthur Ivory).
Fig 4.19 The Buxton children playing croquet with a friend in the garden at St Martins. Merle is the tallest girl in the light coloured dress. Trevor is on the left and Ray on the right. (Mrs M Kirkwood)

Fig 4.20 The opening of the Opawa Bowling season in November 1908. Bowling was Alfred Buxton’s principal recreation. (Weekly Press, Canterbury Public Library)