Chapter Five
LANDSCAPING

To get landscape work Alfred Buxton needed to advertise. We have already noted the initial advertisement in the first catalogue produced for St Albans Nursery. Subsequent catalogues for 1905-6, 1907-8, 1909 and 1912 all reproduce a section headed "Our Landscape Department". This section took six full pages in the 1909 catalogue, out of 112 pages, including two full page photographs and three smaller ones. The tenor of the section was persuasive stressing the need to use a landscape gardener to make the best use of the site - to give variety yet retaining harmony of form and colour. The subject was described as a fine art: first, the finished picture was to be conceived, then reduced to paper as a well thought out plan, and lastly the scheme was to be implemented by skilled hands under expert management. Stress was also placed on Buxton's ongoing work as a source of examples of the firm's capability and the expertise and ability of the staff, together with a sense of correct judgement and good taste. The nub of the argument was summarised in a boxed paragraph at the end of the section:

"Get rid of that mistaken notion that anything will do for the Garden. The Outdoor Department deserves the thought and knowledge of the skilled Landscape Architect just as much as the Indoor Apartment that of the Builder's Architect. We have the knowledge and experience, and are able to make the best use of the Natural features of your Grounds."

Another point stressed at the beginning of the catalogue was the need for landscape clients to consult Buxtons before building because the possibilities of so many houses were spoiled by the house being in the wrong position.

Besides the Descriptive Catalogue the firm also advertised through its presence at the Agricultural and Pastoral Society's Show at Addington in 1905 and at the International Exhibition in 1906-7. These events, and accumulated awareness of the Company's activities, apparently led to an increasing demand for the expert knowledge and experience of the staff, and was shown by an increased demand for landscape plans in 1906 and 1907. Farmers were the biggest clients for trees and shrubs. Nurserymen grew them and wanted to sell them. Since farmers did not have the means of transport to get to town easily, having only horse and gig, Alfred Buxton's philosophy was that the best way to acquire the farmers' business was to visit the farm and explain why shelter and windbreaks were necessary. Also how the grounds could be landscaped to best effect. Merle Kirkwood used to accompany her father on these visits which she has described:

"He was very good company from a farmer's point of view. He was like a breath of fresh air. He came in with news from the outside to the farmer and he was always greeted with open arms by the farmer's wife.....because she heard all the news of the town and when I was a little girl he would take me with him.....and they would make a terrific fuss of us and turn on a terrific meal and just listen to my father open mouthed, more or less, as he was telling all the little bits of interest. But he was very good like that, a very good talker." 170

The clients tended to be the farmers who had larger farms and more money to spend. Often their houses were not particularly well located for landscaping with results that Ray Buxton recalls:

".....He (A W B) would design a garden and.....they'd finish up by having their house in a different place, because a lot of houses were wrongly positioned for a start, almost impossible to make a good (job design?) because there was no room for shelter, or something like that, you know.....poorly positioned, so they'd start all over again, and build a new house as well as a new garden, not that that meant anything to my father, not that he would make anything out of that.....He would design the whole thing except the house." 171

By 1910 Buxton's access to the countryside had improved after he had acquired his first motor vehicles, the most useful of which was a second hand one cylinder Cadillac. Another, an Oldsmobile, was unreliable and could not cope with the rough country roads and rivers as the Cadillac could.

Of the out of town landscaping team only two names stand out beside that of Edgar Taylor, those of John Frank Ridder and a Mr Painter. Painter was not a trained man but was described by Edgar Taylor as the
best man he knew who could use a rake. Painter worked on landscaping projects in both South and North Islands. John Frank Ridder joined Buxtons in the early 1900s. One of his first jobs was driving a horse and spring cart around Christchurch with a big Ransome handmower for mowing. The horse and cart were also used for tools, plants, trees and equipment for the gardens. When he was twenty years old Alfred Buxton appointed him foreman Landscape Gardener. He worked for the Company in both North and South Islands and was involved in many of Buxton’s major projects, including that at Parorangi, near Fielding, for Ernest Short, and several sites in the Kaikoura area. Closer to Christchurch he was also involved in landscaping Bassett’s at Hornby, ‘Knock Lynn’ on the old Tai Tapu road for Halls, ‘Ahuriri’ for R Morten and other properties at Dunsandel, Doyleston and Southbridge. Besides supervision of staff Ridder was also responsible for some site survey work. After he left Buxtons Ridder worked under Jack Humm at Nairn’s Nursery on Lincoln Road.

Little conclusive has been discovered on the landscaping operations of the Company between the landscaping of Leslie Hills and the Christchurch International Exhibition. Thus the landscaping activities known commence at approximately the same time as Edgar Taylor began to work for the Company. Table 5.1 shows the properties known to have been landscaped between 1906-1912 when operations in the North Island began and the phase of work described in the next chapter begins. The properties landscaped which are described in Table 5.1 are only a sample of Buxton’s work at this time but they do represent the principal types of property on which he worked with his team, with the exception of the small town garden. Table 5.1 also shows that the range of work had extended by 1912 from farm gardens and suburban estates to more significant projects such as the work done on the School for the Deaf at Sumner and the plans for Caroline Bay. The former was described officially at the time:

“The Contract for the laying out of the grounds at the School was completed in the spring of the year. The work has been designed and carried out with great taste, abundant use being made of the natural features of the grounds. The beneficial effects of a beautiful environment are already noticeable and the facilities which will in future be available for nature study cannot fail to have marked results in developing habits of observation among the pupils and in forming their characters.” 172

The plans prepared and implemented by Buxtons included grounds and orchards for the “use, pleasure, and
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Owner and locality</th>
<th>Type</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>Mrs A J White, Rock House, Sumner.</td>
<td>Weekend home</td>
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<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>Mr T Kincaid, Upper Riccarton.</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
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<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>Miss Crosby, Sockburn.</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>Mr A Chamberlain, Thongsleigh, Ellesmere. Farm</td>
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<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>Mr W Cunningham, Westburn, Brookside.</td>
<td>Farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>The School for the Deaf, Sumner.</td>
<td>Institution</td>
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<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>Mr J Boag, Middlerigg, Brookside.</td>
<td>Farm</td>
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<td>1908</td>
<td>Mr C Murray, Wharanui, Marlborough.</td>
<td>Farm</td>
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<td>1909</td>
<td>Mr R M D Morten, Ahuriri, Tai Tapu.</td>
<td>Farm</td>
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<tr>
<td>1910c</td>
<td>Mr J Macfarlane, Achraray, Rotherham.</td>
<td>Farm</td>
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<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>Mr A Martin, The Grange, Otaio.</td>
<td>Seaside</td>
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<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>Caroline Bay Association</td>
<td>Farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912c</td>
<td>Mr I Andrews, Selwyn Farm, Ellesmere.</td>
<td>Farm</td>
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The education of the inmates. Little is also known about Buxton’s work for the Caroline Bay Association in 1911 save that Edgar Taylor was responsible for the drawings and plans prepared. The newspapers of the time reported the impact of the proposed developments:

"Mr Buxton, landscape gardener of Christchurch, who was engaged by the Caroline Bay Association, to prepare a comprehensive scheme for improvements to the Bay, to guide them in their future operations, has done his job very thoroughly. He has painted a series of large pictures of Caroline Bay perfected according to an expert landscape gardener's ideas. In detail these plans will doubtless require a great deal of thought before they can be put into execution, but his scheme has some broad merits which are obvious at a glance. It is not destructive, it fits in with all the work already done, it is not injuriously conducive to artificiality, it provides more trees and shade, it avoids obstructing views, and it declares no enmity with sand. The cliffs at the south end and only at the south end are to be removed to provide clay for a strip of reclamation, bounded by a kerb, along the outside of the present promenade, which will not trench materially upon the sand. The lawns are to be slightly widened, artifically laid out, and provided with seats at intervals, and rockeries are to be built against the cliffs. The cliff path to the piazza will be adorned with trellis work and creepers, affording new facilities of shade. The north end will be made a neat games area, and we are glad to see that shade trees are suggested for the new north-end promenade. The scheme cannot be carried out in a few months; that was not intended. The Borough Council will, of course, be the final arbiter on the main works it comprises, but the Association and the Council should both benefit by having a comprehensive scheme before them by which they can direct, with divergences if necessary, their work for the improvement of the Bay in future."

The preponderance of farm gardens in Table 5.1 may be merely a reflection of which gardens have survived best the ravages of time. Town sites of any size have often been subdivided both because their value has increased, attracting a heavier rates burden, and because the costs of maintenance for all but the most affluent have become insupportable. The garden of Rock House, Sumner, originally laid out for Mrs A J White in 1906, has recently suffered this fate although the house has been restored to something of its former glory. The present owners have run a high fence across the street face of the house and sold off the front garden for further building. Their reasoning illustrates the problem facing large town gardens:

"We got the parks and recreation department down to see if the garden could be salvaged, but it was too far gone. It would have needed relanscaping and besides, there's the maintenance and the rates....It was the house we were really interested in,...we like the seclusion of a back section and it is not as if we have lost any view."

In its heyday in the 1930s the garden was described in glowing terms as part of an advertisement for tourist flats, which the house had become:

"Over an acre of beautiful rock studded grounds are enchanted with the choicest of native shrubs and flowers, while a large grass area is admirably laid out in tennis and croquet lawns."

Kincaid's, the other property landscaped by Buxtons, circa 1906, was a big two storey brick house with an Oamaru stone relief, set in three acres of grounds on the south side of Riccarton Road, approaching Church Corner. It was the earliest landscaping job Edgar Taylor could recollect Buxtons doing. In later years he
Fig 5.2 T Kincaid's residence in Upper Riccarton showing the second set of landscape operations in the 1930s. The first set, of the early part of the century, are shown in the mature plantings. (Mrs E Buxton)

Fig 5.3 Also at Kincaid's during the 1930 landscape operations. (Mrs E Buxton)
Fig 5.4 The preparation of part of the Lily ponds during the 1930s at Kincaid’s (Mrs E Buxton)

Fig 5.5 The finished landscape contract with the ponds filled, a bridge and cascade. Note the maturing Araucaria on the right of the picture, probably from the earlier landscaping (Mrs E Buxton)
described it as quite an attractive place to work. The only clues available on the early layout of the grounds comes from photographs taken in the 1930s when Buxton obtained a further contract to create an extensive system of ponds, bridges and a cascade. The photographs (Fig.5.2-5) show an area of lawn to the east of the house, with prominent elms, one horizontal and the other weeping. To the front of the house there was a half grown Araucaria imbricata. A Chinese fan palm, Chamaerops fortunei, can also be seen in the background, as well as several flowering cherries. The plan prepared for Miss Crosby's residence at Sockburn was never implemented. The site was to the west of Church Corner, not far from Kincaid's, and the job may well have resulted from Buxton's work at Kincaid's. The plan was prepared by Edgar Taylor and is the earliest of his plans to survive. The remainder of the schemes listed in Table 5.1 are farm gardens. Several are close to Christchurch, in particular the cluster in what is now Selwyn County, and three further afield at Otaio in South Canterbury, at Wharanui between Clarence and Ward on the Kaikoura Coast and at Rotherham in North Canterbury. Thus by 1912 Alfred Buxton was carrying out landscaping operations from north of Kaikoura to the Waitaki River.

The information available on these gardens is fragmentary. Plans have survived for 'Westburn' landscaped for Mr W Cunningham in 1908, 'The Grange', Otaio, landscaped for Mr Andrew Martin in 1911 and 'Achray', Rotherham, landscaped for Mr A Macfarlane. Contemporary photographs of varying quality and usefulness have survived for each of the
farm gardens listed, but only for ‘Wharanui’ laid out for Mr C Murray in 1908, do any more details survive. For ‘Wharanui’, besides a sequence of photographs taken at varying dates, there is also a set of contract documents and invoices still extant for the original landscaping operations. The gardens covered some four and a half acres and included terracing, a rustic summer house, a water race and ponds, besides the orchard and other plantings. The total contract price quoted was £500 of which £100 was for plants. The final invoice was for £584-13-5, with the extra costs coming from freight and extra goods supplied outside the original contract. In the sequence of photographs (Fig 5.8-13) the evolution of house and gardens from their original state can be seen. The house was initially extended at ground level about the time the gardens were laid out. Subsequently an upper storey was added to the design of architect William Hawker. The coastal location of the property and the sweeping drive and lake are shown from the air in Fig 5.11. Subsequently a tennis court was constructed across the section of the drive leading to the farm yard, where the horses would have been kept in the years before motor cars became widely used. A new garage can be seen on the left of the drive directly below the round bed next to the house. Among the features which appear in the surviving photographs are extensive rustic work, and the use of local rock in the gateway, the bridge parapets, the walling around the ponds and the front entrance.
Fig 5.8 The original house at Wharanui in completely undeveloped surroundings (P Murray)

Fig 5.9 The enlarged house at Wharanui with partially developed grounds (P Murray)
Fig 5.10 Part of the original landscape developments at Wharanui before the further enlargement of the house. (P Murray)

Fig 5.11 The enlarged homestead at Wharanui, now two stories, the farm buildings and surrounding country. (P Murray)
Fig 5.12 The rustic summerhouse at Wharanui. (P Murray)

Fig 5.13 An aerial view of Wharanui, showing the ponds from Buxtons' landscaping and a subsequent tennis court developed over the drive to the farm buildings. (P Murray)
The most elaborate plan, which has survived, was prepared for the only North Canterbury station known to have been landscaped at this time, Achray, at Rotherham. The plan was prepared for Alex Macfarlane, who had the estate from 1892 until 1913, when he died and the estate was subdivided. The exact date of the plan is not certain but it is numbered as No.10 and was signed by Edgar Taylor. The plan exhibits the characteristic serpentine curves of the 'picturesque' landscape style of John Claudius Loudon. This style was, however, about seventy years out of date in 1913. Either the client had requested this type of planting or the style had taken seventy years to cross the world. The latter appears unlikely when Edgar Taylor was attending the School of Art and would have been aware of the more recent trends associated with the 'Arts and Crafts' movement. Also undated is the plan for G H Ridgen at Greendale on the Canterbury plains, but this plan is atypical in that it is the only isometric projection to have survived from this period. It was also prepared by Edgar Taylor and appears to exhibit more of the 'Arts and Crafts' influence. At this period a number of features dominated the typical farm garden. Besides a drive, lawn and pleasure garden other features included a vegetable garden, a drying green, an orchard, and stables or later a garage. Sometimes additional features were added according to the exigencies or opportunities of the site. These features include a summer house at Wharanui, a gazebo at Westburn, and ponds at Achray and Wharanui.

Planting is more difficult to evaluate without the original documents. Fortunately the planting at Wharanui has been analysed by Anderson.\(^{179}\) Anderson has divided the planting into seven groups of trees; two groups of edging/hedge plants; two other groups of hardy shrubs; water lilies and rockery plants; and four groups of smaller plants. The most common type of trees were New Zealand natives. There were 289 in the original planting plan of which 115 were cabbage trees (Cordylinae australis), 64 Phormium cultivars, 50 Matipo (Myrsine australis) and 36 Hebe species. There were also 12 Pittosporum, two Clithium punicum and one each of Hokia, Leptospermum 'Chapmanii', and Olearia and Sophora. Plantation trees included 200 Pinus insignis (now known as P. radiata) but there was also another category of conifers including several Chamaecyparis, Abies, Cedrus, Juniperus, Libocedrus, Picea, Thuja, Thujaopsis, and Taxus. Forest trees were distinguished if they were deciduous and included Larix species (Larch), 18 Betula pendula (Silver Birch), 5 Fraxinus excelsior (Ash), 5 Tilia x europaea (English Lime), 2 Ulmus species (Elm), 2 Quercus coccinea (Scarlet oak) and one each of Alnus, Fagus sylvatica 'Purpurea' and 'Cuprea' (Purple and Copper Beech), Chestnut, Catalpa, Platanus and Sequoia species. Autumn colour was to be provided by 2 Acer species, 2 Pyrus japonica\(^{180}\) and one Rhus cotinus (now Cotinus coggyria). Foliage of colour and variety were provided by ornamental grasses, bamboo, pampas, rats tail grass, and toi toi. Ornament was also provided by 4 Chamaeops humilis (the European fan palm), 4 weeping trees and 3 Yucca. The orchard was to be planted with 100 fruit trees of various species, black and red currants, gooseberries, figs, hazelnuts and walnuts. Hedges were to be provided by 900 Laurels (probably Prunus laurocerasus) and 300 Berberis vulgaris. There were also 6000 Buxus sempervirens 'Suffruticosa' (dwarf box edging) for margins. In addition colour was to be given by 100 roses and a mixture of hardy perennials, biennials, annuals and bulbs.\(^{181}\)
Fig 5.14 The house of Andrew Martin at Otaio landscaped according to Edgar Taylor’s plan of 1911. (D and P Draffen)
Fig 5.15 The landscape plan drawn for Acrey, Rotherham, by Edgar Taylor (J N Boag)