Chapter Twelve

TO KEEP OR NOT TO KEEP, IS THAT THE QUESTION?

Floock has recently drawn attention to the need for the conservation in New Zealand of historic gardens. To exemplify their importance he cited the recent devastation of the Mungavin Estate at Porirua by a motorway extension, a garden which was laid out by A W Buxton Limited in 1916. While certain shrubs were saved they represent only a trifle compared to the loss of the historic landscape and the loss of the social environment of some of the people of that time. Floock argues that we are the caretakers of this heritage for succeeding generations and it is not just another conservation fad.

Binney is also an ardent conservationist of gardens and has written that unlike historic buildings
"gardens not only need constant attention but are, self evidently, going through continuous cycles of growth, maturity and decay. The problems of upkeep have been exacerbated throughout most of this century by inflation, rising wages and taxation, with the result that almost everywhere gardens have been reduced or simplified, shrubs have replaced annuals, borders and beds have been grassed over."

So Binney wrote in 1979 of the need for garden conservation in Britain in a passage which highlighted the decay and neglect of the traditional walled garden, the alpine garden, the gardens of the Surrey school, particularly those of Jekyll and Lutyens, and the gardens of substantial town and suburban houses. Now that more attention is being paid, around the world, to gardens which are not so formal or grand as those which have been preserved in Europe for a long time, according to Bourke we need to develop a coherent philosophy for the process of preservation. Since the Venice Charter of 1964 there has been a code of conduct/practice for the restoration of historic monuments and sites. Historic garden conservation requires no less and possibly more difficult decisions than the conservation of a building, ruin, or historic town. Fundamental questions arise as to what is a historic garden and where its boundaries lie. While there have been promising developments in garden conservation since 1979 in Great Britain, in the United States of America and in Australia, in New Zealand little has happened. While the Historic Places Act 1980 does not specifically mention gardens, that does not mean that they do not qualify as 'historic places'. An 'historic place' is defined in the act as:
"...a place (including a site, building, or natural object) which is historic by reason of an association with the past and which demonstrates or provides evidence of any cultural, traditional, aesthetic or other value of the past..."

In Adams' words gardens '..can be and do these things' and on this basis the Historic Places Trust has extended its activities to include the identification and recording of historic gardens. At present only one region is subject to this work, the Wairarapa. The Trust has also been concerned with historic gardens in conjunction with the historic buildings which it maintains. However, for some of its sites questions arise as to which garden should be restored or maintained - the original or some later layout, or some combination of the gardens of different periods. However, attitudes may be changing. In late 1988 the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust organised a workshop on Garden History which specifically focussed on the conservation and management of historic landscapes. The workshop was organized with the assistance of the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture, the Historic Places Trust and the British Council. The aim of the workshop was 'To discover the philosophy behind the conservation of historic landscapes and gardens and its practical application in planning and management.'

An historic garden has been defined as
"an architectural and floral composition which is of interest to the public from both an historical and an artistic point of view."

Tom Wright uses the definition of the UK Garden History Society, which has also been used in a national survey of historic gardens in Britain. Gardens, parks,
Table 12.1 Classification of Buxton gardens for conservation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Original house</th>
<th>New house</th>
<th>Unrelated</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private rural</td>
<td>Greenhill, Waeranui, Lake Hawea Station, Scott's, Pukerau, Achray, Rotherham, Dixon's, Eyreton</td>
<td>Panikau, Eskvale, Lanadale, Longburn</td>
<td>Brooklyn, Greendale, Allen’s, Carterton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Institution</td>
<td>Hato Paora College, Kimbolton</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private urban</td>
<td>Lesmahagow, Benhar, Parkdale, Chch, Rotorua, Chch</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public urban</td>
<td>Glenelg Health Camp</td>
<td>Purnell Further Education Centre, Masterton, Antonio Hall (Kincaid’s), Riccarton</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Homewood, Karori</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Riverlaw, Chch.</td>
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designed landscapes, designed grounds and places of recreation are of historic interest when:

"a) they illustrate some aspects of the history of such places or of the history of gardening or horticulture. In this respect they may provide examples of the work of a particular designer, or have features of a particular period or of a particular style.
b) they have significant historic associations with perhaps a particular person or event.
c) they have a group value of buildings, and the group value is of historic interest or when they provide the setting for a building of historic interest." 380

In England, under the National Heritage Act 1983, a statutory definition of gardens and other lands of historic interest has been established. The Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England, set up under the Act, has the authority to prepare a 'Register of gardens and other lands of historic interest' and uses a grading system, equivalent to that for buildings of architectural or historical interest, which has three grades I, II*, and II.

Grade I: Parks and gardens which by reason of their historic layout, features and architectural ornaments considered together make them of exceptional interest.

Grade II*: Parks and gardens which by reason of their historic layout, features and architectural ornaments considered together make them if not of exceptional interest nevertheless of good quality.

Grade II: Parks and gardens which by reason of their historic layout, features and architectural ornaments considered together make them of special interest.

These gradings are intended to reflect the importance of a park or garden compared to that for English parks or gardens as a whole. Entries on the register give no right of public access. Landowners may make their own arrangements to permit access. The preparation of the register is one of the duties of the newly appointed Gardens Inspector of the Commission. The main purpose of the register is that it serves as notification to
Fig 12.1 A view of the pergola at Greenhill, Hawkes Bay, as it was in August, 1986.

Fig 12.2 The view of the house at Greenhill from the top steps of the pergola in August, 1986.
all landowners, local authorities and government agencies that a park or garden is of historic interest. 381

In New Zealand, at present, there is no statutory provision for the listing of gardens of historic interest although some informal listings are being prepared. 382 As a first step in garden conservation the listing of such gardens would be useful to encourage their voluntary conservation by their current owners. Sales has argued that listing results in official bodies avoiding valuable gardens. It may draw to their owners’ attention, in his opinion, that they possess something valuable, which other people think worth preserving. Also it may give their owners something of which to be proud in itself. 383

Do gardens designed by Alfred William Buxton himself, or by one of his companies, meet these definitions or their New Zealand equivalents? If they do, as Flook clearly believes, we have New Zealand gardens which merit conservation. 384 However, we are left with a number of difficult questions. In particular, should all Buxton gardens be identified and restored/conserved or would it be more advisable and economical to conserve just a selection of the best examples of each type, and, if so, which gardens are they? 385

To facilitate the identification of valuable Buxton gardens a matrix has been prepared contrasting key characteristics of Buxton gardens. Along the ‘x’ axis is described the nature of the house to which the garden relates. It is divided into two categories, those gardens surrounding the house for which they were originally planned and those for which the original house has disappeared (often because of fire). The latter category is subdivided into two further categories, those where the new residence has been designed specifically with the garden in mind and those where the residence seems to have been sited and designed regardless of its surroundings. Bubitz has highlighted the problems of buildings changing:

"Removal, alteration or deterioration of buildings will change the focus of views and often alter the whole character of a garden." 386

The ‘y’ axis is divided into urban and rural landscapes and further subdivided into private and public (institutional) landscapes where public is referring to the ownership of the site and thus the financial control of any conservation work undertaken whether by a public authority or a private body corporate.
Fig 12.4 The drive approaching the mature garden at Eskvale with the new house framed in the gateway.

Fig 12.5 A closer view of the new house at Eskvale, showing the original steps and parts of two of the horizontal elms which dominate the approach to the house.
Fig 12.6 Part of the garden at Lanadale, Longburn, showing the remains of the cascade, the ponds and one of the many bridges.

Fig 12.7 Part of the remains of the fernery at Lanadale.
The most common category are the private rural landscapes. In the light of urban expansionary pressures and increased rates burdens this is hardly surprising. Only those sites which have been taken over by very wealthy individuals or for institutional purposes are able to survive those pressures. The current state of the gardens varies substantially. Greenhill, for example, still exhibits the damage caused by the Napier earthquake of 1930, although attempts are being made to renew what is left (Fig 12.1 and 2). A short distance away Waeteranui is relatively well preserved but at a smaller scale which makes the financial burdens much less severe (Fig 12.3). Another large site is that at Achray, Rotherham, where the present garden is much smaller than that landscaped by Buxtons, but the outline of earlier developments can still be clearly seen. Of the rural gardens with new houses the most outstanding is that at Panikau, which has been well maintained by the Murphys. Eskvale at Ranfurly in the Maniototo is also a superb example of the integration of a modern house design with an established garden and of all Buxton’s gardens most deserves preservation (Fig 12.4 and 12.5). Lanadale, Longburn, the Tanner’s residence, has the most extensive ponding system and the best example of a fernery which have survived (Fig 12.6 and 12.7) and with Achray and Hato Paora College will be among the oldest Buxton gardens surviving except for Rotorua in Christchurch. Another feature of surviving old gardens is the dominance of the mature trees. Lake Hawea Station has superb trees in a beautiful setting in a popular holiday area (Fig 12.8).

Other rural gardens, where the gardens have not been matched by suitable new houses, when the former houses have burnt down, include Parera, the Allen’s residence at Carterton (Fig 12.9), and Ridgens at Brooklyn, Greendale. Both gardens have interesting pergolas which now stand alone from the residences which they were once designed to suit. That at Greendale is one of the few Buxton gardens to have specific historical interest, as it was the first in which Sidney Holland addressed a major public meeting before he became Prime Minister, but its ponds have dried up and its bridge now spans a dry depression (Fig 12.10).

Of the private urban residences that at Parkdale, Heaton Street, Christchurch, would be the most noteworthy, but it can only be seen from the interruptions made by gates in high boundary walls. Rotorua in Rossall Street, Christchurch, not that far away from Parkdale at the corner of Rossall and Heaton Streets is more visible but probably more changed.
Fig 12.9 The pergola at Keith Allen's property, Parera (Te Pua), Carterton. (G Densen, May 1989)

Fig 12.10 The garden at Brooklyn, Greendale, after the replacement of the original house. Notice the pergola in the background and the bridge to nowhere in the foreground.
Fig 12.11 Antonio Hall (formerly Kincaid's) in Riccarton Road, Christchurch. Notice the pond hidden by the weeping elm to the right of the picture and the proximity of modern building in the background.

Fig 12.12 Mona Vale from the River Avon.
Opposite: Two views of Purnell Education Centre, Essex Street, Masterton, formerly the home of R R Burling as it was in 1986. The running water adds stature to the Centre which lies back from the street. Again the weeping elm features in this Buxton landscape.

This page: Leenahagow, Benhar, as in 1986. Above is shown the front view of the house, below the inside of the pergola.
Fig 12.17 The back of the wall supporting the pergola at Lesmahagow. Notice that it remains quite vertical in spite of the sinkage in the unattached floor of the pergola.

Fig 12.18 The different brick facings used in the garden construction at Lesmahagow, Benhar.
Many urban properties have now been subdivided but in Christchurch there are still four examples of extensive Buxton landscapes but now all are in institutional ownership. George Bowron's former residence, Raroa, is now Glenelg Health Camp. The Kincaid residence in Riccarton Road is now Antonio Hall (Fig 12.11), a former Roman Catholic Seminary, and Riverlaw next to the Heathcote River belongs to the Christian Healing Trust. Mona Vale, formerly Tracy Gough's home, now belongs to the City of Christchurch and has become a public recreational area with the house being used for reception purposes (Fig 12.12). In each case there may be the opportunity to recreate something of the former Buxton garden if funds and the will to do so are available. All have a major advantage over more remote rural properties. If restored, they may be sufficiently close to the urban market to provide a regular flow of visitors. Other institutional gardens include the Purnell Education Centre in Masterton, which was formerly the residence of R R Burling (Fig 12.13 and 12.14), and Homewood at Karori, the official residence of British High Commissioners. Whether each could maintain a sufficient number of visitors to be economically viable is a moot point, but if they were part of a recognised circuit of gardens of merit their prospects might be improved.

One garden has already been featured in a Historic Places Trust publication, Lesmahagow, at Benhar near Balclutha. This garden is considered to be of interest because it and the house are all constructed of bricks made in McSkimming's brickworks in the village. The whole village is of interest because it is a fine example of a single enterprise village. Lesmahagow was the residence of the former brickmaster who was probably owner of most of what he surveyed. When the garden was landscaped in the 1930s terraces, retaining walls and pergola were all constructed out of the local brick and still survive today (Fig 12.15-18). The planting is in a rather derelict state but certainly not beyond recall.

The extensive photographs given in this chapter show the state of some of the best examples of Buxton gardens that the author was able to visit. There may be many more, and even better examples of his work, but the author was unable to see and photograph them. Limited time and financial resources precluded visiting other sites that had been identified. While conducting the study I became aware of the standing of Alfred Buxton in communities where I had not expected him to be known. His standing has made me think about some form of permanent memorial to his inspired efforts and those of his staff. What memorial could be better than the preservation of some of the finest examples of his work. I have already outlined some of what I believe are the best examples of his landscape operations. I have also outlined some of the problems of garden conservation in a country in which European history is so short that the conservation of historic phenomena such as gardens has not grasped the public imagination in the same way as conservation of the natural environment. Fortunately, the government seems to be aware of some of the limitations of present historic places legislation and 1990 and the sequelcentenary seem to be stimulating awareness of the national heritage.

Completion of the present review of the law may well be critical. However, it may not be enough in an era in which 'user pays' and 'Rogernomics' rule supreme. While rich individuals will continue to conserve some of the best examples of Alfred Buxton's work, a more commercial approach to garden conservation, as outlined by Bublitz 16 may well be appropriate. To a degree this is already taking place. Certain farms, such as Lake Hawea Station, act as hosts to groups of visiting tourists, and feed their bodies and souls with food and a very pleasant rural setting. Could this way of tapping the tourist dollar be developed into a comprehensive, New Zealand wide, garden circuit, which might include examples of the best New Zealand gardens such as those by Alfred Buxton? Such a development will not be easy until public consciousness is awoken. Then there will still be the problem of the limited size of New Zealand's own internal market and the remoteness of many of the gardens. It is hard to visualize a garden circuit with the likes of Hidcote, Sissinghurst, Scotney Castle and Sheffield Park, to name but a few, as the international drawcards. But such a development would be an alternative source of revenue and employment to those in the ailing rural economy, where there appear to be few alternatives to sheep for diversification. It would help conserve an important part of New Zealand's garden heritage.

**Colour Plates**

On the following two pages are two colour plates of Buxton landscape plans. The first is that prepared for Achray, Rotherham, for Alec Macfarlane by Edgar Taylor. It is one of the water coloured variety of plan designed to sell the landscaping job. It should be compared with Fig 5.15 which is a copy of the 'working' plan drawn on linen. Both are the property of Mr and Mrs J N Boag, the present owners. The second is that prepared for A Anderson at Southbridge by Trevor Buxton of which there are also two forms. Note Buxton's seal of satisfaction on the latter. This is the property of Mrs E Anderson, Southbridge.