

THE LADY NORWOOD ROSE GARDEN

Walter Cook - Historian of the Botanic Garden

For many people the Lady Norwood Rose Garden and Begonia House are their first contact with the Wellington Botanic Garden. With their horticultural displays, restaurant, and accessibility they have always been a hit with tourists and the local public. Even during the 1960s and 1970s when the Botanic Garden as a whole was not heavily used, people still flocked to the Rose Garden and Begonia House, especially on Sunday afternoons.



The plan for this complex of gardens was most likely the work of the Director, Edward Hutt. It was certainly the largest addition to the Botanic Garden established during his directorship (1947-1965).

The scheme was expressive of a forceful new director, and a community moving to reclaim its open spaces, many of which had been appropriated by the military during the Second World War. It was also expressive of an affluent post-war Parks Department, which, compared to the 1920s and 1930s, had money to burn. In 1965, at the end of Hutt's reign, Wellington had the best funded parks department in the country.

On becoming director in 1947, Hutt wasted no time in reorganising the department and getting new projects up and running. That year the new plant nursery at Berhampore was



built. This operated as a factory ultimately pumping out millions of bedding plants for use in the Botanic Garden and throughout the city. Until 1956, it was also where trees and shrubs were grown on.

At the Botanic Garden, Hutt extended seasonal features such as spring tulip displays which at their most extensive consumed between 70 and 100 thousand bulbs. Throughout the 1950s he tidied up the Main Garden by installing stone walls, and establishing

the present Camellia and Peace gardens.

After Berhampore Nursery, a rose garden and conservatory were his next big horticultural project, and in July 1948 the plan for these was published in *The Dominion*.

ROSES IN THE BOTANIC GARDEN

Roses do not seem to have been a feature of the Botanic Garden of the Board in the way that camellias and rhododendrons were. What James Hector did establish in the 1870s was a teaching garden on the site of the present Sound Shell Lawn. The layout of this garden, with its formal rectangular beds, was to become the basic structure of the first rose garden in the Botanic Garden. The teaching Garden remained unchanged after the City Council took over the Botanic Garden in 1891, and remained unchanged until well into the 1900s. Photographs of the cleared, newly planted Main Garden dating from ca 1906, show that it was still intact at that date. Other photographs dating from ca 1906 to ca 1910 show that at its southern end, some of the rectangular beds had been modified, and were used for displays of seasonal annuals.

The transformation to a rose garden was gradual, with rectangular beds being divided by new paths and much of the original planting including cabbage trees being retained. That roses were a feature of the garden by 1912 is recorded in a report to the Town Clerk from Superintendent Glen stating that the "Enclosed Garden" had been broken into and that roses and other flowers had been cut and strewn about. By 1917 the garden had become "The Rosary," though many of Hector's original plants still remained. The last of Hector's cabbage trees and rhododendrons were finally removed in 1928, at which time the area was a fully fledged rose garden. The beds were edged with clipped box, and were underplanted with flowering annuals such as pansies and violas, a practice introduced in Britain in the late 19th century, by the horticultural writer, William Robinson.

The old rose garden remained until the Lady Norwood Rose Garden was completed in 1953. I don't know when it was finally grassed over, but it was still alive and well in 1951.

THE SITE OF THE LADY NORWOOD ROSE GARDEN AND BEGONIA HOUSE.

The site occupied by the Lady Norwood Rose Garden and Begonia House is the result of the most drastic landscape modification ever inflicted on the Botanic Garden. Originally a valley extended from the bush at the back of the Dell, through the site of Anderson Park and Bowen Street, and included Sydney Street. On the western side the Herb Garden ridge was higher, and ran above the site of Anderson Park, connecting with the ridge in Thorndon on the eastern side of Tinakori Road.



Part of this land had belonged to the Wesleyan Church, but had been transferred to the Botanic Garden in 1872. The rest was cemetery reserve, unused, and planted by the Botanic Garden board. In the late 1870s the valley was crossed by a high embankment that carried Glenbervie Road, the predecessor of Bowen Street. By the late 1890s and early 1900s, this area along with the Botanic Garden, was being surrounded by new suburban developments. Kelburn to the south,

Northland to the West, and infill housing on the town acres along Tinakori Road increased the western residential population enormously. This boom in local population, combined with the development of organised sports, made the long projected Thorndon recreation ground politically achievable. The valley was chosen as the site for what became Anderson Park, one of a flush of sports grounds constructed in Wellington between 1905 and 1910. The others were the completion of Kelburn Park, Duppa Street (now Wakefield Park), and Kilbirnie Park.

Building Anderson Park began in 1906 and was completed in 1910. Its construction involved the demolition of part of the western ridge, which was used to fill the valley. The money available for this project did not allow for filling that part of the valley on Botanic Garden land. This remained a gully, used as a rubbish dump by the Botanic Garden until the great depression of the early 1930s.

Unemployment resulting from the depression brought a "work for the dole" response from the Forbs/Coats government. This resulted in a number of work relief schemes, the most important of which was scheme five. Under this scheme the Government supplied the money, and local bodies the jobs and tools.

Wellington benefited hugely from work done by cheap, subsidised labour. Sports fields multiplied, new roads were built and old ones widened, and much of the Town Belt was planted. One of these work relief schemes was the Anderson park extension. Between 1931 and 1934 much of the remaining western ridge was demolished and thrown into the gully, providing a site, first for a sports field, then from 1942 a military transit camp, and finally the Lady Norwood Rose Garden and Begonia House.

THE CIVIC ROSE GARDEN PROJECT

The Parks Department's files on the rose garden, the Council minutes, and the Parks and Reserves Committee's minutes from late 1945 to 1948, contain no information, or hint, of discussions about, or lobbying for, a rose garden and begonia house. The Parks Department file on the rose garden begins after the proposal had been accepted, and the plan published in the Dominion on the 15th of July 1948. Nor is it clear who came up with the idea for a rose garden and begonia house, and who designed the layout.

According to Hutt's successor, Ian Galloway, this was likely to have been Hutt himself, and all the evidence that I have found so far, seems to support this conclusion. Hutt had trained in England and Scotland in the commercial nursery firms of Henry Cannell and Son, Swanley, Kent, and Dobbie and Co of Edinburgh. Personal documents, now in the Council archives, include information that while in Edinburgh, he took a course in landscape and garden design. With these documents there is also a plan for the layout of gardens around Lower Hutt's Civic Centre, drawn up by Hutt when he was Director of Parks and Reserves in that city, before taking the Wellington job. These demonstrate that he was quite capable of designing a layout like the proposed rose garden and begonia house.

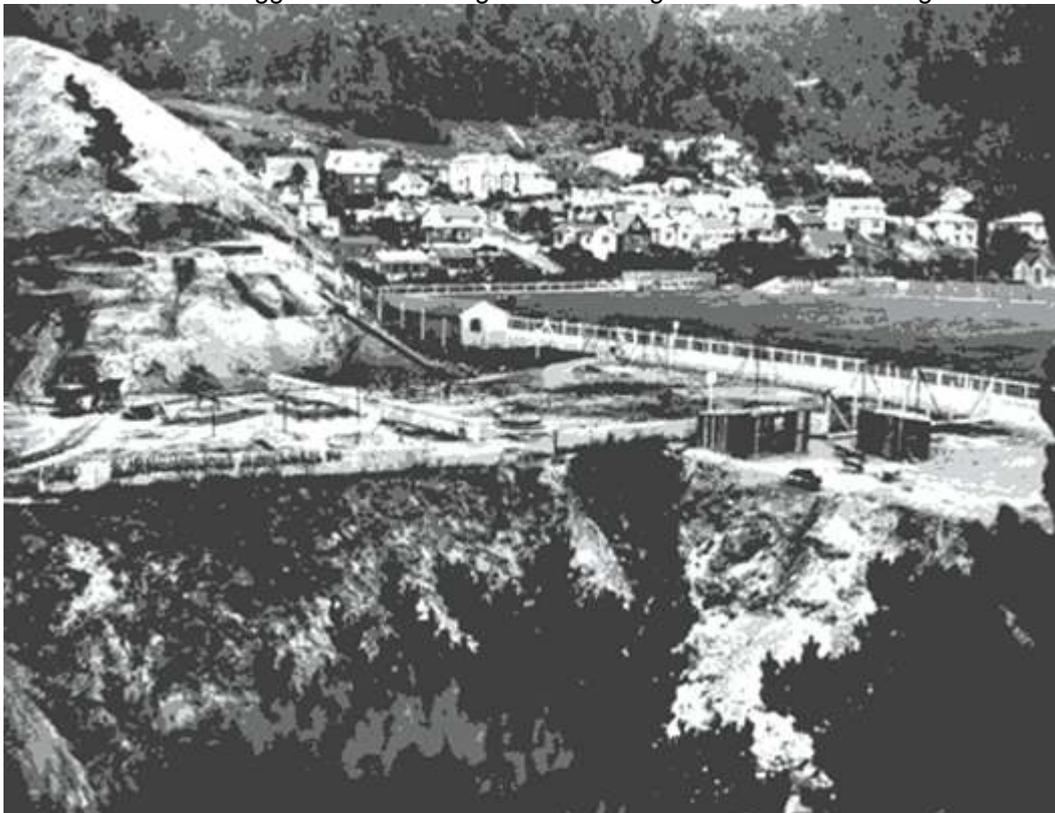
Other records in the Council archives also imply that Hutt was the probable author of the plan. He began his directorship in February 1947. That month he produced a report detailing a plan for the reorganisation of the department. It begins with comments on the organization of the Director's office. It has no adequate filing system. Nor is there evidence "of any landscape plans for the development of parks and reserves." Those plans that were preserved referred only to the engineering side of development. As a result of this, one of his recommendations was that any future development of parks and reserves should involve the preparation of detailed plans for their layout, and that these plans should be the responsibility of the Director. To date I have not had the time to look into the records to see whether there are collections of plans dating from 1947 on. The existence of such plans may reveal or add weight, to the contention that Hutt himself designed the layouts, as he seemed to recommend in his report. Another record that suggests he did, or oversaw their preparation, comes from a recommendation he made to Council in 1957. Hutt wanted to employ a landscape architect because the planning and design of parks and reserves was now the responsibility of the Director of Parks. Previously such work was done by the Engineers Department. Because the Parks and Reserves Department had grown over the previous ten years, the Director's role had become more of a political and administrative job than before. This request had no outcome, and the department was not to get its first landscape architect until the late 1960s. From all this it seems to me probable that in 1948 Hutt was the person who conceived, and probably drew up the concept of the layout of the rose garden and begonia house, which he then handed over to a surveyor and draughtsman.



It took two years from 1946, to remove the military buildings on Anderson Park and the site of the future rose garden and begonia house. This involved negotiations with the Government around whose responsibility it was to meet the costs and do the work of restoring reserves taken by the military during the war. In some cases a trade-off was reached by which the Council agreed to do the work, and in return was allowed to keep the buildings. This seems to have been what happened in the case of Anderson Park and its extension. Timber was in short supply, and timber from the military buildings was used for housing, particularly for foremen and custodians of parks and reserves. Acute labour shortages during the late 1940s and into the 1950s meant that free or low rental housing with a job encouraged staff retention.

The removal of concrete foundation slabs from Anderson Park and the extension began in November 1947, which probably means that the area was not finally cleared until well into 1948. Another factor of the post war cleanup and

refurbishment of reserves was the amount of money available for the task. At its meeting of 1 July 1946, Council proposed two loans that were subsequently approved in October. One of 96,000 pounds was for the improvement of city reserves generally. The other of 16,400 pounds was specifically to restore the playing fields at Anderson Park. This suggests, that as yet there was no idea, other than returning the grounds to their pre-war uses. There is no suggestion of a rose garden or a begonia house at this stage.



Anderson Park Gully in the process of being filled, the site of the Rose Garden 1931
*From *The Botanical Garden* by Shepherd and Cook*

Money for improvements to Wellington's reserves kept coming in the late 1940s. In 1949 a loan of 180,000 pounds was authorised for 1950. Again there is no mention of money specifically for the rose garden project that had already been approved. Thus, the cost of the project may have been seen as part of the post-war refurbishment, and was embedded in these loans. One area that I have not had time to hunt out in relation to this are documents relating to establishing the scope of council estimates in the late 1940s.

The first reference to a rose garden and begonia house comes from the Reserves Committee's minutes for the 5th of July 1948. At this meeting "the Director submitted a plan for the development of Anderson Park and the northern portion of the Botanic Garden to provide for two hockey grounds, or one rugby ground at Anderson Park, and for a children's play area, a rose garden, a winter garden, begonia house, and fernery." The plan as submitted was approved and later endorsed at the Council meeting on the 14th of July 1948, the day before it was published in the Dominion. It would appear that any discussion about the project, or directive to Hutt from his committee to come up with a plan, took place outside meetings, and off the record.

Judging from the rose garden file, in July 1948 Hutt was already thinking about the planting the new rose garden. He intended to use species as well as horticultural rose varieties. To this end on the 16th of July 1948 he wrote to the directors of Kew and Edinburgh botanic gardens asking for seeds of rose species. Edinburgh sent seed, and Kew promised to do so the following season. I have found no documentation indicating that plants resulted from this, or that species roses ever became part of the original rose garden plantings. On the other hand the file contains sheaves of letters and lists to and from New Zealand nurserymen relating to the purchase of rose varieties. The building of the rose garden did not get underway until 1951, and was still at a rudimentary stage in March that year when a photograph of the area was published in the Evening Post on the 10th of that month. The caption with the photograph reported that Anderson Park would finally be ready for rugby League games during the coming winter season.

Judging from the orders for roses in 1951, planting must have begun in 1952. This continued in 1953, with the added urgency that the garden be completed in time for the royal tour that year. In planning the rose garden, Hutt was supported by the Wellington Rose Society. In 1949 the Society held a rose festival that raised 147 pounds, 15 shillings and 2 pence for the garden, and gave the department 100 rose bushes.

LADY NORWOOD AND THE NORWOOD FAMILY

At this point I want to establish the connection of Lady Norwood and the Norwood family with the new rose garden and begonia house. Hutt's predecessor, J G Mackenzie, made several attempts before the war to build a winter garden. When he failed in his bid for this in 1939, Lady Norwood donated 200 pounds to improve the old begonia house that doubled as the main propagating house located at the Botanic Garden nursery. In 1949 she donated a further 300 pounds towards the begonia house projected in Hutt's plan. This seems to be the beginning of the financial support given by the family that ultimately enabled the completion of the project, and allowed for the landscaping of the surroundings. In 1950 the City Council decided that the new rose garden would be named after Lady Norwood, and in 1955 she offered to donate a fountain. This was installed and was operational by November 1956. Lady Norwood's fountain was replaced by the present one in 1977, donated by her children.



COMPLETING THE PROJECT

Sometime during the first decade of the Lady Norwood Rose Garden's existence, there was a great disaster. A gardener accidentally sprayed the roses with 24D, a hormone herbicide, mistaking it for liquid DDT, and killed all but two beds of roses. All the bushes were removed, and that season the garden was planted with annuals until a new batch of roses could be installed. Needless to say I have found no documentation relating to this event, but it was still one of the horror stories related by staff when I began my apprenticeship at the Botanic Garden in the early 1960s.

Hutt's original project for a rose garden and begonia house was completed in 1960 and 1961. The begonia house was built in 1960, stimulated by a donation of 20,000 pounds from Sir Charles Norwood, and it opened on the 22nd of December that year. In 1961 the pergola, the zig zag and brick walls up to the present Herb Garden were built. All in all, even in a climate of post-war affluence, it had taken Hutt 14 years to see his project through.



The surroundings of the Lady Norwood Rose Garden and Begonia House were given their final form on the eastern side in the early 1970s. In May 1970 the children of Sir Charles and Lady Norwood gave 50,000 dollars towards this project. Between September 1970 and May 1971, the cut banks on the eastern side were hidden by tons of soil, and the waterfall, summer house, pond, and brick walls were built. This work was supervised by Richard Nanson. As part of the project, access from the Weather Office was upgraded, and the pohutukawas along Salamanca Road were thinned and repositioned back from the road.

The begonia house was completed when the lily house was built in the early 1990s, a project supported by Sir Walter Norwood.

From 1969, and through the 1970s, the rose garden was floodlit during the summer, and this was combined with musical and dramatic events. This use in summer was extended especially during the Summer City festivals that were inaugurated in the summer of 1978/1979. These events benefited from the Government funded PEP schemes that subsidised artists, actors, and designers. Spectacular events were staged in the Dell and Rose Garden, and elsewhere in the city.

Today the Lady Norwood Rose Garden and Begonia house remain the most visited part of the Botanic Garden. They and the surroundings stand as a fitting memorial to Sir Charles and lady Norwood and their family who have for over fifty years supported the Botanic Garden, and this area in particular. I also think that in some way this part of the garden should also be publicly associated with Edward Hutt.

THE FORMAL ROSE GARDEN

Displaying roses in a formal setting did not originate in New Zealand, and I think that it is of some interest to know where it came from, and why Hutt may have chosen it. It could be argued that a more informal layout might have better suited the site and its surroundings. I have always felt that a formal garden of this size in the Wellington topography is something of a wonder - a triumph of mind over matter; of culture over nature.

To understand the origins of formal gardens as they existed in the first half of the 20th century, and specifically formal rose gardens, I'm going to start with 19th century England. By the early 19th century there was a reaction against the classical landscape gardens of the 18th century. In these gardens, great houses, framed by trees, sat in vast lawns that swept up to their walls. This reaction, often associated with Humphrey Repton, argued that the garden should be an extension of the house, a place to use, and like the house, a product of artifice and the quirks of the human imagination, rather than a proposed improvement on Nature. By the 1830s and 1840s this had developed into a full blown revival of renaissance styled formal gardens, their elaborate parterres full of the new half hardy seasonal annuals.



To translate such styles from the gardens of the very rich to the lesser estates of the new middle classes writers like John Claudius Loudon produced encyclopaedic publications which included plans that would suit a wide range of pockets. The practice in the formal garden was to have the house raised on a terrace overlooking the garden, which was also surrounded by raised walks. This enabled the design to be seen as a whole as well as entered for closer inspection. Though roses were displayed in formal settings before the 1880s, the short flowering period of old roses meant that such formal gardens were established outside the main axis of the garden, where they could be ignored while they were out of season.

This sort of formal gardening was the cause of another reaction in the late 19th century, associated with the names of William Robinson and Gertrude Jekyll. Robinson proposed a move away from formally planted gaudy displays of annuals to a garden composed of native British plants and hardy exotics. Jekyll took his ideas and advocated a garden of formal and informal elements, including carefully colour-coordinated plantings of herbaceous borders, allegedly derived from the cottage gardens of England. There was much of the national ideal of "England's green and pleasant land" in this movement. It went with the revival of arts and crafts, building houses based on 17th and 18th century originals, urban middle classes colonising decaying villages on the commuter networks, collecting and recording traditional folk songs and dances, and a sense of nostalgia for an old lost England.

This sense of nostalgia for things old and "native" informed the revival of formal gardens during the 1890s and 1900s. This revival was based on surviving 17th century gardens that were originally inspired by French and Dutch formal gardens. But by the late 19th century such survivals were read as being native and British in contrast to the formal gardens of the 1830s and 40s. These had been exotic imitations of past foreign styles. This development was not entirely separate from the Robinson/Jekyll type of garden, but is notable for the use of topiary, either in clipped hedges forming a series of rooms, or as in the 17th century gardens, quirky fanciful sculptural forms. Ironically, one of the greatest of these new formal gardens was constructed not in England, but in New Delhi, India. Sir Edwin Lutyens, planner and one of the architects of the new imperial capital, designed for his Viceroy's House (now Rashtrapati Bhavan), a large formal garden which synthesised English and Moghul ideas. It includes a large circular formal garden for flowers.

The importance of this development for rose gardens was that it happened at the time rose breeders were producing perpetual flowering hybrid tea roses. By 1900 these varieties were widely used, and because of their long flowering period, the rose garden moved into the main axis of the garden. The architects and designers of this new type of formal garden also used the pillared pergola, and often the formal rose garden was partially, or completely surrounded by such a structure.



One of the well known practitioners of this sort of formal garden was Thomas Mawson whose book "The Art and Craft of Garden Making" went through five editions between 1902 and 1926. Copies of Mawson's book are held in the Wellington public Library and the National Library in Wellington. In it are illustrated spectacular layouts for formal rose gardens, both for public parks as well as private clients. The pergolas surrounding the Lady Norwood Rose Garden are simplified versions of pergolas illustrated in Mawson's book, with their elaborate beam-work in an arts and crafts/Japanese style.

David Tannock in his "Manual of Gardening in New Zealand" published in the late 1920s, refers to the popularity of pergolas, rose gardens, and rockeries. Christchurch based landscape gardener Alfred Buxton spread them around the station homesteads of New

Zealand between 1900 and 1930.

Though not all formal rose gardens were circular, judging from Mawsen's plans, circular designs, or designs with strong circular elements were common. Tannock illustrates a circular design lifted from James Young's book on rose growing in New Zealand published in 1921.

Edward Hutt had grown up and trained as a gardener when this approach to garden design was contemporary, and widely admired as "the English Garden." To me it is no surprise that his rose garden was a late version of this received manner for displaying roses. His public would also have recognised his intention. The revival of formal gardens and the herbaceous border had had an impact on the suburban garden in the 1920s and 1930s, here as in Britain.

Though the scale of the Lady Norwood Rose Garden gives it an openness more in the spirit of the earlier renaissance revival formal gardens, this is appropriate for a garden, the function of which is public. And on this scale the pergola defines the boundaries rather than encloses the space.