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Birth, Death, and Marriage in the Garden: Canterbury Colonial Women Gardeners, 1850-1914

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Abstract

This thesis presents a study of the role of gardens in the life stages of colonial women of Canterbury. Using the framework of the expected life-cycle of middle- and upper-class Victorian women (birth, marriage, death), this thesis analyses how women's garden-making, and interactions with gardens, cast new light on various aspects of colonial gender discourse and gender relations.

The study demonstrates that gardens of colonial women were sites of social cohesion in settler communities. Colonial women used the garden for family or communal events, such as wedding celebrations, and community games and sports that helped bind together rural society. Women were also capable of using the garden as a site of resistance to, or rejection of, the prevailing gender norms. The ambiguity of the garden space, both public and private, connected to the house but separate from the house, enabled women to use it as a site for pushing the boundaries of what was considered socially acceptable behaviour in colonial society

Women gardeners also made considerable contributions to environmental transformation in New Zealand's South Island. This thesis argues that this has been overlooked or minimalised in environmental historiography in New Zealand. It also argues that previous historical arguments that women gardeners were motivated primarily by imperial ideologies and the desire for social display, ignores the very real role played by environmental hazards and health issues in the creation of colonial gardens.

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Introduction

Worldwide, garden history is a fast-growing field of historical enquiry. However, among New Zealand historians it has rarely received the serious scholarly attention it deserves. In *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, for example, environmental historian Paul Star discusses the transformation of the New Zealand environment yet makes no mention of the role of private gardens and garden plants in this process.¹ He mentions that “the process of environmental change in New Zealand is most clearly seen in transformation of the countryside” and yet does not analyse the impact of rural gardens as part of this transformation.² However, the importance of gardens in the colonising process can be demonstrated in many ways, not least in the fact that during both Māori and colonial settlement gardens provided sources of food essential to the survival and development of functioning societies. Gardens also provided sources of pleasure, centres of social relations and knowledge exchange while, later, they served as places of negotiation between British and indigenous identities.³

The focus of this study is the gardens of European settler women of Canterbury during the colonial period, 1850–1914. This period covers the official beginning of the Canterbury settlement as a Wakefield colony, with the arrival, in 1850, of the ‘First Four Ships’, and then follows the development of gardens in the province right up until the technological, social and emotional watershed of the First World War. During this time, gardens were vital entities for settler men and women. This thesis argues that they provided material sustenance, offered solace and comfort in times of stress, contributed to the celebrations of significant milestones in women’s lives, and made possible the process of colonisation. It also argues that women’s experiences of the garden differed from men’s, thanks to gendered expectations about the appropriate behaviour and activities for women in such places. It shows, too, that women could circumvent these boundaries and that the garden could be a place of negotiation about expectations of gendered behaviours and class.

¹ Paul Star, ‘Humans and the Environment in New Zealand c. 1800–2000’ in *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, ed. by Giselle Byrnes (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 2009) 47–70.

² *ibid.*, p. 60.

³ Helen Leach, *1000 Years of Gardening in New Zealand* (Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed, 1984), p. 98.

This thesis uses the framework of the expected life-cycle of middle- and upper-class Victorian women (birth, marriage, death) as a way to view these women—stages with which they themselves would be familiar. It examines women’s daily life in colonial society in the context of women’s interactions with their gardens. There is a strong academic precedent for using the lifecycle structure as a method of analysing women’s lives. Noted feminist historians Patricia Crawford and Sara Mendelson described “the cycles of early modern women’s lives from childhood through adulthood” in their 1998 book, *Women in Early Modern England 1550–1720*.⁴ The benefits of this approach are that it shows “the way in which class and gender expectations, rites of passage and larger historical alterations affected how women viewed themselves and the disruptive changes around them”.⁵ Health historian Catharine Coleborne has also used a similar structure in her 1992 Masters thesis, “Female Illness and Life Stages in Early Modern England”.⁶ When applied to a nineteenth century colony such as New Zealand, this structure serves as a methodology highlighting both the specifically female experiences of colonial life, such as pregnancy and childbirth, and women’s emotional and social reactions to these aspects of their life cycle. This approach concentrates on, as Crawford notes, “how women viewed themselves” and as such is appropriate to a study mainly based on primary sources.⁷ The period covered in the works by Crawford and Coleborne was a time of great upheaval and rapid social and economic changes. Women in colonial times were also living in a world of “disruptive changes,” with the most obvious being their transplantation into a new environment, landscape, and society.⁸ In addition, the life cycle of women remained essentially the same as that of their predecessors several centuries before: notwithstanding the emerging ideal of the ‘New Woman’ in the late-nineteenth century, women were still expected to bear and rear children as they had done in the early modern period.

Yet, using the lens of the life cycle to look at the ways in which familiar rites of passage, such as marriage and childbirth, were adapted in response to changing colonial circumstances, is to shed new light on the influence that gender roles, gender stereotypes, ideals of health, race, class and the ideologies of imperialism had on colonial women’s daily lives. It shows, not least, that the garden could serve a multitude of purposes, in reinforcing or in questioning the

⁴ Sarah Covington, Review of ‘Women in Early Modern England 1550–1720’ by Patricia Crawford, and Sara Mendelson, in *Renaissance Quarterly*, 53.2 (2000), p. 603.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Catharine Coleborne, ‘Female Illness and Life Stages in Early Modern England’ (unpublished master’s thesis, University of Melbourne, 1992).

⁷ Covington, p. 603.

⁸ *ibid.*

traditional role of women as bearers of children and keepers of the household. In addition, it presented a site over which issues of class could be negotiated, as well as being a site of family life, and gender interactions. Thus analysis of gardens can present new angles from which to approach themes of family, gender, class, childhood and aging in colonial society.

Approach and Methodology

This thesis focuses on the women of the Canterbury settlement for several reasons. First, there are great advantages to studying the women and gardens of one particular, recognised region. The province of Canterbury developed a distinct identity based on attributes of Anglicanism, Englishness, and elitism.⁹ These aspects of Canterbury were always more mythical than real. For example, historian John Cookson has shown that as early as 1881 Anglican settlers only made up 50 per cent of the church-going citizens of Christchurch.¹⁰ As well as being a self-consciously Anglican settlement, Canterbury was also a distinct political unit under the provincial system of government until 1877. Cookson has even suggested that “in the nineteenth century Canterbury had led the rest of the country in its development,” with tremendous emphasis being placed on its pioneering achievements resulting from the, again largely mythical, “better type of migrant,”¹¹ and its contribution to education and culture in the new colony.¹² Economically, as historian Jim McAloon has pointed out “the open grasslands of the East Coast” of the South Island is where “settler capitalism first entrenched itself”.¹³ Canterbury also possesses a distinct environment, with extremes of weather, climate and terrain that make it a challenging place in which to make a garden. This enables the garden historian to examine the variety of approaches that colonial women took to gardening, in conditions very often different from the ones they knew in Britain. That colonists persevered in their garden-making speaks volumes about the practical and psychological importance of gardens in daily life, and the importance of gardens in colonial identity-making. Secondly, Canterbury was the home of some of the wealthiest farms, estates and sheep stations in early colonial New Zealand, so examining the gardens of these successful families tells us much about the aspirations of elite early rural settlers. Third, these elite colonists have left behind a treasure trove of diaries,

⁹ John Cookson, ‘Pilgrim’s Progress: Image, identity and Myth in Christchurch’ in *Southern Capital Christchurch* ed. by John Cookson and Graeme Dunstall (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2000), pp. 13–40.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 18.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 14.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 23.

¹³ Jim McAloon, *The New Zealand Economy, 1792–1914* in *The New Oxford History of New Zealand* ed. by Giselle Byrnes (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 217.

descriptions, sketches and photographs, not just of their garden-making, but so too those of other classes. Fourth, Canterbury, through its main settlement of Christchurch, has always been linked with gardens and garden-making and it is important to understand the historical reasons for this development. The origins of garden-making in Christchurch, and Christchurch's image as the Garden City, were examined by Matt Morris in his 2006 thesis, 'A History of Christchurch Home Gardening From Colonisation to the Queen's Visit', which focused on the way in which Cantabrians used gardens as sites of status, display and moral worth.¹⁴ There are, however, many more aspects to the development of colonial gardening in Christchurch than were analysed in the Morris thesis.

This thesis argues that garden-making played a significant role in the colonisation of New Zealand, and that the multiple and complex responses of women to their gardens illuminates forgotten or ignored aspects of the female experience in colonial Canterbury. As it is based on primary sources, this thesis concentrates mainly on those women from the middle- and upper-classes who had the time, money, education and leisure both to make gardens and to write about them. The focus on those who left primary sources behind them does mean that working-class women, and their gardens, are less in evidence. While this is a disadvantage, it does leave room for a more comprehensive study in the future. Such a study, concentrated on working-class women alone, could yield valuable insights. It would, for example, be particularly beneficial to see whether the middle-class models of garden design privileged in the literature, had any major impact outside of their own class grouping. Where sufficient primary sources exist, every attempt has been made in this thesis to include working-class women.

A thematic approach provides a valuable opportunity to contrast and compare the lives, and gardens, of Canterbury women from various backgrounds, including the significance of religion and other cultural forms in shaping garden-making. Examining the impact of marriage, birth and death on these women through the medium of the garden, has allowed their individual voices to be heard. The use of primary sources prioritises women's own views of their role in settler society. This places them at the centre of the colonising process, not the periphery, to which they are still too often relegated, particularly in popular history. In a recent NZ On Air history documentary series, "Making New Zealand",¹⁵ the entire first minute of film in

¹⁴ Matt Morris, 'A History of Christchurch Home Gardening from Colonisation to the Queen's Visit: Gardening Culture in a Particular Society and Environment' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Canterbury, 2006).

¹⁵ 'Making New Zealand' Television Series, (New Zealand on Air: Top Shelf Productions for Prime, 2014), <<http://www.nzonair.govt.nz/television/showcase/making-new-zealand/>>.

Episode 3,¹⁶ for instance, consists of montage footage of New Zealanders transforming the land and developing resources. In all this footage there is just one woman shown, and she is portrayed switching off a domestic lamp. The accompanying voice-over claims that New Zealand was built by “skill” and “sheer bloody-mindedness”—characteristics, the footage suggests, of male New Zealanders alone.

This thesis also overturns many assumptions promulgated by both popular and academic historians: that middle- and upper-class women were, for example, merely “expensive drones”¹⁷ the “Sloane Rangers of Erewhon”¹⁸ and only reluctantly “energetic business women” because “the ideal lady knew nothing about such things”.¹⁹ This thesis demonstrates that the women of Canterbury transformed the landscape through their gardens and created their own narratives of place.

The definition of a garden used in this thesis is a broad one and is based on that provided by the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture. Gardens are defined as sites that are created

through human intervention to conform to our human concepts and values. In order that nature as it is does not have its way we weed them of invasive plants and rid them of other pests that we have introduced. They have now, more in common with the parterre than with their original pre-human autonomy²⁰

In this thesis, settler gardens constitute pleasure grounds, also orchards, paddocks, shelterbelt plantations, stands of native bush and the incorporation of views and natural features from the wider landscape. These are mostly managed landscapes. In some parts of Canterbury, for example, pleasure and kitchen gardens needed shelterbelt plantations simply to survive, and that need to protect their gardens led the settlers to plant, and protect, the sheltering trees.

Historians James Beattie and Katie Holmes have characterised New Zealand as being “the poor cousin of Australia” in terms of garden history.²¹ A great deal of popular work on garden history, they note, is poorly contextualised, either “in relation to other works in the field of

¹⁶ *ibid.*, Season 1, Episode 3, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dbJ3peT8LqE>>.

¹⁷ Stevan Eldred-Grigg, ‘The Landed Gentry of Lowlands Ashburton County, 1890–1896’ (unpublished master’s thesis, University of Canterbury, 1974), p. 98.

¹⁸ James Belich, *Making Peoples: A History of the New Zealanders: From Polynesian Settlement to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Auckland: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1996), p. 405.

¹⁹ Eldred-Grigg, p. 115.

²⁰ Walter Cook, Review of ‘A History of the Garden in New Zealand’, ed. by Matthew Bradbury, in *New Zealand Garden Journal: Journal of the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture*, 1.3 (1996), p. 30.

²¹ James Beattie, and Katie Holmes, ‘Reflections on the History of Australasian Gardens and Landscapes’, *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes: An International Quarterly*, 31.2 (2011), p. 78.

garden history or within wider historical processes”.²² Garden writers are “relatively thick on the ground”²³ but certainly some popular New Zealand books on this topic are “poorly referenced”²⁴ such as Bee Dawson’s *A History of Gardening in New Zealand*. In her book, Dawson describes the “dramatic breakthrough” celebrated by antipodean plant collectors when “Nathaniel Bagshaw Ward” successfully sent plants in glass cases from London to Sydney.²⁵ There was great jubilation apparently experienced when the plants arrived safely but lack of references to this piece of text mean we do not know by whom or even where the jubilation occurred. In London? Sydney? Both?

Other New Zealand gardening books seemingly contain no references at all, as with Keith Stewart’s *Rosa Antipodes*. The situation is beginning to change, however, and there have been several impressive academic contributions to the field, including Matthew Bradbury’s edited collection *A History of the New Zealand Garden*, Katherine Raine’s ‘Domesticating the Land,’ in *Fragments*, and Thelma Strongman, Rupert Tipples and Matt Morris who have analysed gardens, and garden makers, in the context of Canterbury. Beattie and Holmes themselves, have also produced a great deal of research on the development of gardens in Australasia, their links with environmental and social change, and the importance of plant and design exchanges among colonies in the British Empire and in East Asia. All of these works have provided useful background for this thesis; however it is most closely modelled upon Raine and Strongman, both of whom combined academically rigorous analysis of gardens with an awareness of the social and cultural constructs behind them. They also emphasised the personal and emotional ties that women had with their gardens.

It is perhaps unsurprising that historians studying gardens have struggled with how to define the parameters of their topic. Garden historian John Dixon Hunt has written of the difficulties of even defining garden history as a separate field, when it has been claimed by studies as varied as “geography, botanical history, sociology, anthropology and cultural history”.²⁶ Its “interdisciplinarity of approach” has the disadvantage of treating garden history as part of a

²² *ibid.*, p. 79.

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ Bee Dawson, *A History of Gardening in New Zealand*, (Auckland: Random House, 2010), p. 126.

²⁶ John Dixon Hunt, ‘Approaches (New and Old) to Garden History’, in *Perspectives on Garden Histories*, ed. by Michel Conan, 21 (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1999), p. 78.

greater whole rather than as an individual field of historical study in its own right.²⁷ It also leads to those attempting to write garden history having to attain

a familiarity with a wide range of materials and methodologies. Historians, too, will need to take a wide trawl through materials with no obvious connections to gardening. This is partly because the materials and documents that will sustain garden history are not always the obvious ones (legal documents for instance) and partly because in order to understand why gardens occupy such a privileged place in human discourse we need to understand all aspects of existence that might explain the garden's emergence, design and use²⁸

This is almost a blueprint for the creation of this thesis. There is no one methodology in use here, simply because in order to gather and analyse a large volume of material on the topic of gardening it was necessary, as Hunt suggests, to do an extremely wide trawl of the evidence. The key historical tool used is discourse analysis. T. van Dijk, former Chair of Discourse Studies at the University of Amsterdam, has defined critical discourse analysis as “a type of ... research that primarily studies the way social power, abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk”.²⁹ This technique has been used to analyse numerous collections of letters and diaries, as well as published memoirs of settler women, that exist in New Zealand museums and libraries. These have been obvious sources of information. Through critical analysis of these texts, conclusions can be drawn about women's relationship to, and their strategies of coping with, what seems to be an overwhelmingly male-dominated society. The ways in which women accepted, or resisted, the prominent gender discourses of their time in the context of their gardens, can be clearly seen in many of the primary sources.

The thesis also makes significant use of the National Library's digitized newspaper collection *Papers Past* for alternative primary evidence, such as advertisements, letters to the editor, court cases and magistrates' reports. The searching process within this digital library was based upon use of key search terms, such as 'women', 'flowers', and 'funerals'. Searching on already known names was also a rewarding technique. Local histories were valuable sources of information and perhaps deserve more prominence in academic historiography. Despite being written, in the main, by amateur historians, they often preserve pieces of local history or lore

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 89.

²⁹ Teun A. van Dijk, 'Critical Discourse Analysis', in *Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, ed. by D. Tannen, D. Schiffrin, and H. Hamilton (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 352.

that would otherwise be lost to researchers. Likewise, the many small museums and historical societies in the province of Canterbury, such as the Cheviot Museum and the Geraldine Historical Society, have a plethora of resources and records, many of which remain under-utilised or indeed, undiscovered. Various photographic archives have been most useful, including the Acland Photographs in the Macmillan Brown Library at the University of Canterbury and the online creative commons collection ‘Keteselwyn’ produced by the Selwyn District Library. Photographic records are often examples of how the colonists would like to have been seen for posterity, and thus are notable indicators of settlers’ aspirations, their transformation of the colonial landscape, and women’s continual negotiation of their status in society. Visits to some of the gardens from the period still in existence have been valuable in obtaining a sense of the design and ambience of settlers’ gardens. Other sources from the period that provided useful insights have included such varied pieces of evidence as children’s books, hymn lyrics, natural history texts, parliamentary acts, and floral and landscape art; all of which help to contextualise the culture of the garden in colonial discourse.

Historiographical Contributions

As Hunt stated, it is important to understand ‘all aspects’ of the reason for a garden’s existence. In the context of middle- and upper-class women of colonial Canterbury, this involves examining the environmental, social, and religious contexts shaping their creation of, and actions in, the garden.

Garden history has often been criticised for not engaging adequately with environmental history, and in some New Zealand garden history in general there is certainly a lack of acknowledgment of the external environmental factors at play in the making of gardens. For example, even in Katherine Raine’s particularly well researched piece ‘Domesticating the Land’, she describes how Jane Deans of Christchurch “civilised her bush and made it garden-like by bounding it with a protective belt of Scottish firs, poplars, willow, and elms”.³⁰ This description puts more emphasis on the ‘civilising’ ideology behind her actions when in fact the keywords here are ‘protective belt’, as the continued existence of the native forest depended upon it no longer being exposed to damaging environmental factors, such as the drying nor’west wind and continual dust that swept the Canterbury plains in the early colonial period.

³⁰ Katherine Raine, ‘Domesticating the Land: Colonial Women’s Gardening’, in *Fragments: New Zealand Social and Cultural History*, ed. by Bronwyn Dalley and Bronwyn Labrum (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2000), p. 83.

This thesis seeks to redress this imbalance in recent garden history by taking into account the major environmental factors at play in colonial Canterbury and placing them in their proper context in relation to women's garden-making. Indeed, it is impossible to fully analyse colonial gardens without examining the wider environmental factors—such as wind, rain, sun, soil and access to water—that were the essential elements women had to contend with when they wished to start a garden. In Canterbury, one of those factors—the nor'west wind—is only now beginning to be analysed by historians such as Katie Pickles, despite the fact that it had, and continues to have, such an enormous influence on the Canterbury landscape and arguably shaped “the collective personality of Canterbury and Cantabrians”.³¹

The limitations and disadvantages of what became Canterbury's environment following its purchase from Ngai Tahu, continually challenged attempts to recreate a British landscape, and hastened the need for settlers to culturally adapt to using both native flora, and flora from other parts of the Empire and beyond. This thesis examines the complexities of cultural transfer both within, and outside colonial New Zealand. Peter Holland's recent work on the transformations of the South Island landscape by colonial settlers has explored several elements of this process of adaptation, most notably with regards to the unique climates of Canterbury and Otago. Similarly, there have recently been new works on the “eco-cultural exchanges” involving New Zealand colonists and Chinese migrants with other parts of the world, such as that by James Beattie.³² These studies have outlined the ways in which varieties of exotic flora were quickly and keenly adapted by settlers, and other groups such as the Chinese, who recognised them as being well-suited to New Zealand's environmental conditions.

This thesis suggests that historians have either underplayed or totally overlooked the contribution of women to environmental transformation in colonial Canterbury. This neglect is surprising as historians have acknowledged the centrality of garden-making to colonisation. Eric Pawson and Tom Brooking have stated that “improvement was the ideology of colonisation: it applied to both lands and peoples, and one of its most potent symbols was the garden”.³³ In the introduction of an earlier book Pawson and Brooking describe New Zealand

³¹ Katie Pickles *Post-Colonial Environments in Making a New Land: Environmental Histories of New Zealand* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2013), p. 265.

³² James Beattie, ‘Eco-cultural Networks in Southern China and Colonial New Zealand, 1860s–1910s’ in *Eco-Cultural Networks and The British Empire: New Views on Environmental History*, ed. by James Beattie, Edward Melillo, and Emily O’Gorman, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), pp. 151–179 .

³³ Eric Pawson, and Tom Brooking, eds, *Making a New land: Environmental Histories of New Zealand* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2013), p. 20.

as a “garden colony”.³⁴ It is interesting to see therefore that women, who were important garden-makers in settler society, are still relatively neglected in mainstream environmental histories. The evidence presented in this thesis demonstrates that women had a significant and lasting environmental impact in Canterbury through their participation in tree-planting, garden-making, farm management and gorse production. Furthermore, this thesis argues for the need for a stronger emphasis in New Zealand historiography on the social contribution of women and gardens to New Zealand’s colonisation. Socially, gardens played a cohesive role in colonial settlements and were integral to the improvement ideology of colonisation. They were places of community and personal interaction, and, as this thesis demonstrates, they were significant components of the major events in a settler’s lifetime. From childbirth, to weddings, to funerals and through all the social occasions common in rural communities such as dances and picnics, gardens often functioned as the centre of a social network. Gardens, too, became the way in which colonial women could negotiate a position of power in their family or community, and establish models of taste and gentility to define their place in this new land.

As a physical space that was both private and public, gardens also gave women a field for action outside the domestic confines of the house. However, at the same time, the very openness of the space to both the public and the elements, could transform what should have been a safe haven into a place of uncertainty, and even danger. There was a contradiction between the ideal image of the garden as an idyllic Eden, and the reality experienced by many settler women. The thesis has also analysed the consequences when gardens failed to be places of cohesion and instead became points of conflict. There was often tension between the different roles ascribed to women in contemporary gender discourse. In light of this, some women chose the culturally complex site of the garden to perform actions of assertion or rejection. Analysis of the role of the garden in women’s lives is therefore vital in establishing the way in which ideals of gender were both constructed and resisted in colonial New Zealand.

This thesis also analyses the role of gardens in colonial childhood. New Zealand children were known throughout the Empire for having significant opportunities to play and move in the great outdoors, thanks to a temperate climate and, unlike Australia, the lack of any predatory or venomous creatures in the landscape. The paucity of transport infrastructure in the colonial period helped to give girls in particular a greater mobility, as children often had to travel on

³⁴ Eric Pawson, and Tom Brooking, eds, *Environmental Histories of New Zealand* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 4.

horses or ponies, without adult supervision, to neighbouring homes or the local school. Sifting through the primary evidence, it can be seen that this freedom led to greater flexibility and fluidity in gender roles than might be expected. The ambiguity of the garden space—public or private, outdoors or indoors, a place of work or a place of pleasure—meant that girls, as well as women, used it as a site in which to negotiate or resist the gendered ideals of their time.

Although the women in this thesis came from varied cultural backgrounds, one element that the majority of them shared was a deeply held Christian belief. To read the words of these women is to become aware of the great strength and comfort they gained from their religion, and the way in which it enabled them to cope with situations of extreme loss and trauma, including the death of their children. Despite recent work by John Stenhouse,³⁵ James Beattie,³⁶ and Caroline Daley,³⁷ arguing for a re-appraisal of the impact of religion on settler culture and particularly its effect on settler women, there is still little positive acknowledgement in mainstream academic history of this vital part of women's lives. Similarly, analysis of the influence of religion has been lacking in recent environmental history, with the exception of a study by Beattie and Stenhouse. Yet Canterbury (as well as Christchurch, its main town) was intended to be a Church of England settlement, centred on an Anglican cathedral and college. Although the reality was never that exclusive—there was a strong, vocal minority of Scots Presbyterians, for instance, right from the earliest days of the settlement—the ideals still permeated the early years of Canterbury's settlement. The first Anglican settlers were referred to as 'pilgrims' and their task, as they saw it, was to plant civilisation and tame the wilderness.³⁸ Consequentially, the gardens of settler women were permeated with biblical ideas, philosophies and imagery. The most famous garden of all—Eden—was used symbolically in settler society to provide examples of everything from the innocence of childhood to the rules of wifely conduct. In a more practical sense, the products of the gardens themselves were often used for religious purposes, whether in decorating churches for weddings, or gifts of fruit and vegetables for harvest festivals. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that there was such a strong link between

³⁵ James Beattie and John Stenhouse 'God and the Natural World in Nineteenth Century New Zealand' in *Christianity, Modernity and Culture*, ed. by John Stenhouse (Hindmarsh: ATF Press, 2005), pp. 180–203.

³⁶ James Beattie, 'Science, Religion and Drought: Rainmaking Experiments and Prayers in North Otago 1889–1911', in James Beattie, Emily O'Gorman, and Matthew Henry, eds, *Climate, Science and Colonization: Histories from Australia and New Zealand* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 137–155.

³⁷ Caroline Daley, *Girls and Women, Men and Boys: Gender in Taradale 1886–1930* (Auckland: Auckland University Press 1999), pp. 96–103.

³⁸ Cookson, p. 14.

gardens and religious beliefs. Gardens are, after all, about birth, growth, reproduction and inevitable decay.

These religious ideals were only part of the reason that women were so strongly identified with the garden, floral imagery and language. In nineteenth century Britain, gardening for women was also “intimately linked” with “morality and femininity”.³⁹ Constructions of femininity, particularly for ‘genteel’ women, intersected with gardens in a specific way. Ideally, women were seen to be connected with the beauty and delicacy of the flower garden rather than the practicality of the orchard or vegetable garden, despite the fact that in reality they often managed all three. In 1890, a public lecture given in Christchurch summarised these ideals by asking the question “What would the world be without flowers and without women? Life would lose all its brightness, for these are the chief ornaments of the earth, and are essential to the comfort of existence”.⁴⁰ As fellow ‘ornaments’ of the earth, women were considered to have an innate love of nature both as nurturers, and as lovers and producers of beauty. According to colonial ideology, women settlers would use these natural talents and instincts to “extend the primary colonising work of their menfolk” and “create havens of loveliness as befitted superior female endeavour”.⁴¹ Gardening was also considered a morally uplifting activity whether “as an antidote to superficial accomplishments” and the blandishments of society such as dancing and flirting, or because it was “a path to piety and health”.⁴² To be in the garden was to admire the gifts of beauty that God had granted to mankind and middle-class women were encouraged to think of the garden as a space for religious meditation on the wonder of creation.

Piety was seen to encourage mental well-being, but the garden also became a space for gentle physical exercise, and experiencing fresh air and beautiful scents which could be used to dispel any lingering signs of ill health. In a pre-antibiotic world of high child mortality rates, and easily spread diseases such as typhoid, scarlet fever and tuberculosis, spending time in the garden became one of the few ways in which women could manage their own health and try to protect that of their families. This became particularly true of women in colonial Canterbury, who not only had these old world illnesses to cope with, but also had to battle against the sometimes harsh environment around them. In line with Beattie’s think piece ‘Geographies of

³⁹Dianne Harris, ‘Cultivating Power: The Language of Feminism in Women’s Garden Literature, 1870–1920’, *Landscape Journal*, 13 (1994) <doi:10.3336/lj.13.2.113>, p. 115.

⁴⁰ ‘Mr Vincent Pyke on Flowers’, *The Press*, 21 February 1890, p. 2.

⁴¹ Dianne Lawrence, *Genteel Women: Empire and Domestic Material Culture, 1840–1910* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 140.

⁴² Ann B. Shteir, *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science: Flora’s Daughters and Botany in England 1760–1860* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 35.

Settlement' this thesis argues that health concerns played a greater part in women's approaches to garden-making than the more commonly suggested motivating factor of imperialist ideology.

This study of the gardens of settler women thus not only reveals aspects of the gender constructions that they were forced to function with, and under, but also elements of their practical experience in pioneer life which are often overlooked. Further, because gardens were sites of spatial and hierarchical ambiguity, some colonial women were able to use this fact to resist, reject and often renegotiate the mores of their society.

Synopsis

Chapter 1 examines the role of the garden in courtship, marriage ceremonies and the lives of women who remained unmarried. Although settlers inherited their cultural ideals of courtship and marriage from Britain, this chapter shows that circumstances in the colony encouraged significant cultural transfer, particularly from among other parts of the Empire. Settlers also learned to adapt the native flora and environment to fit in with older cultural traditions, or to create new traditions for a new society. Chapter 2 looks at early married life, women's economic and romantic partnerships in the garden, and their contribution to the environmental transformation and social cohesion of the colony.

The role of the garden in childbirth and motherhood is examined in Chapter 3. Colonial childhood was noted for its informal, outdoor style, and this thesis analyses the reasons why mothers established, or were encouraged to establish, this approach to childcare. Changing ideas on racial health, urban decay, and the increasing opportunities for women towards the end of the nineteenth century all had considerable influence on the ideals of motherhood promulgated by both the state and popular culture. These ideals often centred on the garden and the natural environment.

Chapter 4 examines the culturally complex meanings invested in the garden by analysing the role of flowers, plants, and gardens in settler mourning and funeral customs. It also investigates the impact that environmental dangers, and dealing with illness and old age, had on the lives of women in the garden. Gardens, it shows, played a significant part in settler attempts to improve their environment and to contribute to their own health by removing what they saw as sources of disease and 'miasma'. Finally, by analysing the way in which some women were closely identified with their gardens in their obituaries, this chapter demonstrates the continuing

importance of the garden in the creation of feminine ideals and shaping the narrative of women's lives.

The role played by gardens in the important events of women's lives could vary, from being an elaborate stage backdrop for wedding rituals, places of welcome for new brides, the first time outside for newborn babies and their mothers after confinement, or a place of burial and remembrance. These emotional and social occasions fixed the garden space firmly into the narrative histories of settlers' lives, and confirmed the growing identification of colonial women with their new land.

Chapter 1:

Courtship and Weddings

This chapter examines the role that gardens played in courtship and wedding rituals for colonial women throughout the period, 1850–1914. This period was one of changing ideals of courtship and marriage, and these ideals both reflected, and impacted upon, women’s interactions with their gardens. The cultural ideology of the time linked courting with gardens in several ways; these included its strong religious connections with the Garden of Eden, and the identification of women with the innocence and beauty of the garden. Gardens also played an important role in the lives of women who did not marry, particularly those who were excluded from wedlock by ill health or disabilities.

This time period can be roughly split into two sections. The first, from 1850–1890, reflects a time when gardens were in many cases still being established. Colonial houses were small and crowded, so alternatives were needed if the middle- and upper-class tradition of courtship was to thrive in the colonies. Even when more spacious homes were built for the middle- and upper-classes later in the period, they were still often filled with family members and servants. This “lack of privacy within the house” gave great importance to gardens; it resulted in “the young people of the homesteads, and the domestic staff” having to arrange “their love lives in the garden walks”.⁴³ Because courtship was such an integral part of the process of colonial marriage for middle-class women, colonial parents often incorporated elements into their gardens that looked forward to the courting days of future generations. The designs of larger gardens were often chosen to facilitate both the courting process, and maximise opportunities for people to socialise, with activities such as croquet, and walks in the shrubbery.

Working-class women were not excluded from the site of the garden for courting, and those who worked on some of the larger rural estates often had regular social contacts with eligible young working men, and were allowed access to the garden. The greater familiarity between employers and staff in the New Zealand context, as well the inadequate supply of able servants in the colony, meant that the class system had to be much more flexible than in Britain.

⁴³ Thelma Strongman, *The Gardens of Canterbury: A History* (Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed, 1984), p. 38.

Marriages between estate workers were often encouraged, as reliable hard workers were too valuable to lose.

Gardens in this period also became important for those women who remained single. Religious ideas of fitness for marriage and childbirth, meant some women with chronic illnesses or disabilities were destined from a young age not to marry. For these women, the garden became a place where they could be useful, keep themselves healthy and indulge any frustrated nurturing tendencies that they were expected to feel.

From 1850 to the late 1880s, the weddings of Canterbury women also reflected a cultural preoccupation with the garden and its traditional English flora, for their homemade bouquets and decorations. When these traditional flowers were not available, improvisation with anything that could be found was common. There were also gradual shifts in attitudes towards New Zealand native plants thanks, to the popularity of the British fern-collecting craze and the increasing awareness of the availability and uniqueness of indigenous flora. This can be seen in descriptions of colonial wedding ceremonies, as New Zealand native plants became increasingly popular choices for bouquets and decorations.

The second section covers the time period 1890–1914. As with the previous time period this not a strict demarcation point and some elements overlap. However, this period of development in colonial society brought several significant changes to both the ideology behind courtship and weddings, and the way in which they functioned. From the 1890s—as Section Two shows—ideals of courtship were increasingly influenced by new theories of health, fitness and racial strength, with such ideas demonstrated by the use of gardens as spaces for sports, and outdoor activities. Social occasions often consisted of games and sports, such as lawn tennis and croquet, involving both sexes, rather than being segregated along gender lines as was formerly often the case. The gardens of homesteads played a vital role in these social activities, and the new types of garden buildings and structures fashionable in this period, such as summer houses, provided increased private opportunities for socialising.

In addition to middle- and upper-class women, private estate gardens gave domestic servants continued opportunities for socialising and courting in the garden. So long as they adhered to middle-class standards of morality, their courtships usually had the blessing of their employers. However, other aspects of working-class interactions in gardens were viewed with concern by middle-class women. For example, throughout the period, urban working-class women used the emerging phenomenon of public parks and gardens to establish romantic and sexual

relationships, but the public aspect of these courtships was viewed negatively by offended middle-class sensibilities.

Floral wedding customs also reflected changes in colonial society. From the 1890s, these changes included: increased access to the newly fashionable Japanese flora and other international plant species; new technology such as telegrams and telephones; and the rise of floristry as an occupation. The temperate New Zealand climate, and lack of a state church, meant that colonial weddings also developed an informal feel, best exemplified by the popularity of the garden wedding. Weddings and receptions in the garden allowed people to control the way in which their family was represented for posterity, particularly through the medium of photographs and newspaper descriptions.

Section 1: 1850s-1890

Physical Space, Social Activities and Garden Design, 1850s-1890

The problem of private space was an obvious issue for the first generation of Canterbury immigrants. The archetypal first dwelling for most people, whether wealthy or not, was a two-roomed cottage, consisting of a living room and bedroom; although after the first year some people were able to add a small back kitchen and second bedroom.⁴⁴ Ellen Harper, for example, grew up in a “good, roomy vicarage” in Berkshire, which was described as having “extensive gardens and ... fine stables”.⁴⁵ But when the family emigrated from Britain to Christchurch in 1856—when her father was appointed Bishop of the city—their cottage was so small that “when visitors came to see my father, some of us had to go to the neighbours to make room”. On her sister Mary’s wedding day, “Mary’s room downstairs was so small that she stood on her bed to be dressed”.⁴⁶

Whilst some families might graduate quickly from a tiny temporary shelter to a more spacious homestead, for other families “the first rough shelter might last for years”.⁴⁷ In the early 1860s,

⁴⁴ Jeanine Graham, ‘The Pioneers (1840–1872)’, in *The Oxford Illustrated History of New Zealand*, ed. by Keith Sinclair (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 60.

⁴⁵ Colin Brown, Marie Peters, and Jane Teal, ed., *Shaping a Colonial Church: Bishop Harper and the Anglican diocese of Christchurch*, (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2006), p. 37.

⁴⁶ A. E. Woodhouse, ed., *Tales of Pioneer Women: Collected by the Women’s Institutes of New Zealand*, (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs Limited, 1940), p. 242.

⁴⁷ Graham, p. 60.

Rose Hall described the social consequences of the small size of the houses. “Though our own little domicile is far above the average of Christchurch dwellings, we have only one sitting room and that is as full of furniture as it can well hold. So that there is no space for general receptions and one, two three to dinner is a doubtful pleasure”.⁴⁸ Figure 1.1 shows a surviving example of the small colonial huts, typical of the first years of settlement in Canterbury. The picture captures the cramped nature of dwellings of the like described by Hall. For colonists living in these circumstances, the only opportunities for private conversations during courtship would have been outside the house, in the garden.



*Figure 1.1: The original one-roomed sod hut at Longbeach Estate, Ashburton
(Courtesy of Bill and Penny Thomas).*

However, in the earliest decades of settlement there were few well-established gardens, while the lack of a pleasure garden as an appropriate location for courting was widely lamented. In late 1856, Ellen Harper was being courted by Charles Tripp in the raw landscape of the new settlement of Christchurch. In her reminiscences, she commented on “how well I remember our walks together, where the domain is now—then only flax and rough tussocks—not very private for lovers”.⁴⁹ It was a world away from the circumstances in which she, as a bishop’s daughter, would expect to be courted if she were in Britain.

It was the next generation of young people, from the 1880s onwards, who would benefit from the now maturing gardens thoughtfully laid out by their parents around the homesteads. The

⁴⁸ *Letters to Grace: Writing Home from Colonial New Zealand*, ed. by Jean Garner and Kate Foster (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2011), p. 59.

⁴⁹ Sarah Ell, ed., *Lives of Pioneer Women in New Zealand* (Auckland: The Bush Press, 1993), p. 54.

very design of the gardens could be used to promote relationships. Anthropologist Helen Leach has noted the way in which “in the pleasure garden all main walks ... allow two persons to walk in comfort alongside of one another”.⁵⁰ An example of such a path at Orari Gorge Station, was named ‘lover’s walk’ by Ellen’s father, Bishop Harper of Canterbury, thus placing the establishment’s seal of approval on the idea of courting couples in the garden.⁵¹ At Coldstream Estate, one of the young girls who lived in the estate cottages in the 1880s, remembered flowers “filling what was then known as ‘the lovers’ walk’ with their sweet scent as she walked there with her young man”.⁵²



Figure 1.2: The estate house built to replace to original sod hut at Longbeach Estate, Ashburton (Courtesy of Bill and Penny Thomas).

Increasingly spacious and elaborate houses and gardens became more common towards the end of the nineteenth century, as shown Figure 1.2, which depicts the estate house built to replace to original sod hut at Longbeach Estate, Ashburton. The layout of walks in these more formal gardens often followed a winding or ‘serpentine’ pattern, seen as traditional, but in reality the fairly recent invention of eighteenth century landscape designers.⁵³ Walking a serpentine path,

⁵⁰ Helen Leach, ‘The European House and Garden in New Zealand: A Case for Parallel Development’, in *At Home in New Zealand*, ed. by Barbara Brookes (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2000), pp. 73–88.

⁵¹ Strongman, p. 76.

⁵² E. J. Studholme, *Coldstream: The Story of a Sheep Station on the Canterbury Plains 1854–1934* (Upper Hutt: Wright and Carman Ltd, 1985), p. 75.

⁵³ Strongman, p. 13.

such as the one shown in Figure 1.3, gave lovers many opportunities to duck out of sight from any group or chaperone that might be following or escorting them. Attempts were also made to make these walks as peaceful, and as beautiful, as possible by making use of garden features such as the gentle sound of trickling or running water, and highly scented shrubs that might be brushed by a wide crinoline skirt. At Parnassus Station, probably in the 1860s although the source unfortunately does not give a date, the “shrub-lined lover’s walk” was located next to the “water race” thereby creating a romantic atmosphere and, more practically, solving any irrigation problems the garden might have in hot weather.⁵⁴ The aroma of “laurel ... weeping eucalyptus and verbena” was used at Mt Peel Station to enhance the scenery of the walk.⁵⁵ The garden at Orari Gorge Station was re-designed after a flood in 1868, and relied on the beauty of native ferns to create “a beautiful undergrowth of leafy evergreens”.⁵⁶ Raine suggests that the “average Victorian garden was a sanctuary from the world, a private retreat”. This was the garden’s main attraction for courting couples.⁵⁷



*Figure 1.3: Serpentine path at Mt Peel Station house
(Courtesy of the Macmillan Brown Library).⁵⁸*

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 123–124.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 87.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 76.

⁵⁷ Katherine Raine, and John P. Adam, ‘1860s–1900: Victorian Gardens’, in *A History of the Garden in New Zealand*, ed. by Matthew Bradbury (Auckland: Viking, 1995), pp. 86–112.

⁵⁸ MB 44, Acland Family papers, Reference code 234, ‘The homestead at Mt Peel Station from the garden’, Unknown photographer, Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury

From the 1850s until the late 1880s, gardens also provided gentle forms of leisure activities, both for young people getting to know each other, and husbands and wives enjoying social visits to, and from, friends and neighbours. The most popular activities were companionate walks and the game of croquet. Both were activities that could be performed by women, despite being hampered by the unwieldy bulk and weight of petticoats and crinoline. They were also sedate forms of exercise for women who were frequently pregnant or recovering from a confinement.

In the early days of settlement, croquet lawns such as the one shown at Peel Forest Estate (Figure 1.4) were ubiquitous at wealthy homesteads. Croquet was a game that allowed plenty of time for social interaction, and for this reason it was popular with young people as well as married couples. The difficulties women experienced in playing even leisurely games such as croquet whilst wearing large hoop skirts, could be a source for humour. At Orari in 1859—not to be confused with Orari Gorge owned by the Tripps—W.K. MacDonald and his family laid out their pleasure grounds to include a croquet lawn. When their friends Mr and Mrs Luxmore came to visit from Timaru, “Mr Luxmore used to amuse everybody by jokingly accusing his wife of cheating. He claimed she secreted the croquet balls under the wide skirts of her crinoline”.⁵⁹ Emily and John Acland at Mt Peel Station had numerous games with visitors, and in 1868 even re-scheduled meal times so they would all have enough light by which to play.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Strongman, p. 55.

⁶⁰ J. B. A. Acland Diaries, Entry for 27 April 1868.



Figure 1.4: Croquet lawn were ubiquitous at stately homes, such as this one at Peel Forest Estate (Courtesy of Macmillan Brown Library).⁶¹

For unmarried girls, the croquet lawn was synonymous with socialising and the opportunities to interact with young people their own age. Teenager Adie M. Hall, wrote in 1868 of her delight at visiting her Aunt Rose, and discovering that she possessed a lawn for croquet for, “I have not had a game of croquet for such a long time, we have no ground”.⁶² Later, Adie got to know a neighbour who also enjoyed the game and wrote, “I am going this afternoon to play croquet at Mrs Stevens. I generally go on Tuesdays and Fridays, they have little croquet meetings on those days”. Unfortunately, Adie does not mention whether this group of young people were all females or whether the croquet game afforded opportunities to interact with the opposite sex. Adie might have been disappointed to know that, from the 1890s, croquet was to go out of fashion and to be replaced by the more physical sports of a new era. The change was made obvious in places such as the expanding suburbs of Christchurch where, by Edwardian times, in the few older properties to escape subdivision, “croquet lawns had become, more

⁶¹ MB 44, Acland Family papers, Reference code 152, ‘Peel Forest Estate, formerly home of the Dennistoun family’, Unknown photographer, Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury.

⁶² Garner, p. 167.

fashionably, tennis courts”.⁶³ Possibly Adie’s disappointment might have been alleviated somewhat by the knowledge that these new sports and games would begin to give young people opportunities to meet in mixed company that were unknown to the previous generation.

Working-Class Women and Courting in the Garden, 1850s-1890

As Thelma Strongman points out, gardens and outdoor landscapes were not just an essential component of upper- and middle-class courtship.⁶⁴ Colonial domestic servants openly availed themselves of the opportunity to use homestead gardens to further their relationships. This would have been unthinkable on wealthy estates in Britain, where James Belich suggests “changes in genteel architecture and manners ... reflect an increasing distance from servants and labourers. In extreme cases, servants were supposed to face the wall when a proper person passed”.⁶⁵

Two factors worked to mitigate this incredibly rigid class structure in the colonies. First was the difficulty in obtaining, and then keeping, reliable servants. Courtship between homestead or estate workers was often encouraged, for keeping reliable staff together as a working couple was preferable to them marrying off the property and moving away.⁶⁶ This is amply evidenced in Canterbury. In the 1860s, Frances Caverhill of Hawkswood Station in North Canterbury wrote that “Maggie [the maid] took the children for a walk (James Dowd with her of course)”.⁶⁷ Caverhill’s use of the phrase ‘of course’ demonstrates her accepting attitude towards the right of her servants to have their own private life. Maggie would later marry James Dowd who was the estate carpenter.⁶⁸ The social opportunities that many employers allowed their staff also resulted in young people forming relationships. On Christmas Day 1876 at Hawkswood, the Caverhills gave their “maids and station hands” an “outing of their own”. Frances Caverhill wrote in her diary “Sarah and Louisa and Tom McDowell, Grey, Andrew and Newsome went for a picnic to the first bush. We lent them the buggy and horses”.⁶⁹ The aforementioned Thomas McDowell was in charge of the station hands and would marry the maid Louisa by the next year.⁷⁰

⁶³ Strongman, p. 142.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 38.

⁶⁵ James Belich, *Making Peoples: A History of the New Zealanders From Polynesian Settlement to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Auckland: Allen Lane, 1996), p. 294.

⁶⁶ Charlotte MacDonald, *A Woman of Good Character*, p. 112–113.

⁶⁷ W. J. Gardner, *The Amuri: A County History* (Christchurch: The Amuri County Council, 1983), p.184.

⁶⁸ MacDonald, p. 112–113.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 184.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 183.

Socialising and entertainment for female and male workers was also prioritised at Longbeach estate.⁷¹ John Grigg was an enthusiastic proponent of the idea that a socially and culturally active workforce was an economic benefit. Figure 1.5 shows the Longbeach orchestra which was entirely made up of workers from the estate, demonstrating that Grigg put his ideas into practice. The Longbeach orchestra provided music for the frequent socials, dances and concerts held for the workers, which were also often attended by the family.



Figure 1.5: Orchestra of staff at Longbeach—part of the social and cultural opportunities available for colonial servants of both sexes (Courtesy of Bill and Penny Thomas).

Louisa Hendry, who was a maid at Blue Cliffs Station, recalled that “the men from the station were allowed to come down to the kitchen on two evenings a week to see us girls”.⁷² On one occasion in the 1870s, she and some other maids and station hands were asked to make up the numbers at a formal dance. Presumably it was just before Christmas for “one of the men hung a piece of mistletoe from the ceiling and it was fun trying to dodge it”.⁷³ In 1910, Airini Rhodes, the daughter of the family at Blue Cliffs, thought that it was ironic when, a local farmer told her mother “I’ve noticed that if a girl stays at Blue Cliffs for a year, she never leaves except to get married”. The farmer concerned had “been personally responsible for the departure of a little kitchen maid of whom we were very fond”.⁷⁴

⁷¹ E. J. Studholme, p. 129.

⁷² A. E. Woodhouse, *Blue Cliffs: The Biography of a South Canterbury Sheep Station 1856–1970*, (Wellington: A. H. & A.W. Reed, 1982), p. 68.

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ Woodhouse, p. 115.

The other mitigating factor in ensuring a more flexible class system was that, according to historian Charlotte MacDonald, “there was a good deal of common life and much less distance between servants and mistresses” in colonial society. “Young women in service worked alongside the lady of the house rather than to a distant set of commands or in a physically separate space”.⁷⁵ Unlike the majority of wealthy women in Britain, the women of the Canterbury homesteads knew the reality of how exhausting a servant’s life could be. In times when domestic servants were scarce, the lady of the house often had to take on the servants’ duties. In 1899, Charles Tripp wrote that “even ladies ... are always... at work, for instance female servants are sometimes difficult to obtain and when you are out of a servant the lady of the house has often to turn Cook. I know Mrs Tripp has had to cook for three months at a time. When the Lady Tancred was stopping here, I have often seen her in our pantry of a morning washing up”.⁷⁶

Mrs Rutherford of Leslie Hills Station was described by the daughter of her cook as “very fair in all her dealings, and if she was without a maid ... Mrs Rutherford would do the maid’s share until another one was obtained”.⁷⁷ Frances Caverhill took her maids along with her on family holidays to what would later become the tourist resort of Hanmer Springs. Once there “the men ... fixed a ladder for the ladies to climb down into the water. Mrs Caverhill thought it ‘clean looking’ but was too nervous to move, but Elsie and Marian, the maids, thoroughly enjoyed themselves”.⁷⁸ Despite being labelled by some historians as a “Southern Gentry,” it is difficult to see many similarities in the attitudes towards servants, among the wealthy farmers of Canterbury and the landed elite of Britain.⁷⁹ Holidays, swimming with the servants, or performing the maid’s duties, was unlikely to have been an accepted part of life for a lady of the English gentry. As Charlotte Macdonald has suggested “colonial servants were more truly ‘helps’ than maids of a subservient and separate class”.⁸⁰

The result of these often-close working relationships between employers and employees in colonial New Zealand was the blurring of traditionally rigid boundaries of class during courting. In contrast to Britain, where servants ‘walking out together’ was forbidden in many

⁷⁵ MacDonald, p. 119.

⁷⁶ Jim McAloon, *No Idle Rich: The Wealthy in Canterbury and Otago 1840–1914*, (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2002), p. 77.

⁷⁷ Gardner, p. 165.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 224.

⁷⁹ Stevan Eldred-Grigg, *A Southern Gentry: New Zealanders who Inherited the Earth* (Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed, 1980), p. 25.

⁸⁰ MacDonald, p. 119.

households, in New Zealand, if a relationship between two staff developed it was usually accepted, as long as the lovers concerned kept to middle-class and genteel standards of behaviour. If they failed to do so, disapproval was quick to follow, and they risked at best a severe reprimand and, at worst, complete dismissal.

There is an (unfortunately) unlabelled and uncatalogued piece of paper in a file at the Geraldine Historic Society that tells the story of Alice Whittaker, maid to Ellen Tripp at Orari Gorge Station. Whittaker was walking out with Tom Bateman, a station hand. The incident probably happened in the late 1870s or 1880s, as Ellen Tripp was entering middle-age. The paper relates how

Mrs Tripp, a very managing lady ... went for a walk in the cool of the evening, only to find one of her maids and one of her station hands embracing in the shrubbery by the front gate. She promptly marched the young couple to her husband in his study and demanded that they be dealt with severely. In the subsequent lecture the young man asked, 'Mr Tripp, didn't you ever embrace Mrs Tripp before you married her?'⁸¹

Whether the unnamed couple in this anecdote was Alice and Tom or not, there are several interesting elements about this story that shed light on colonial attitudes towards courtship. Most noticeably, the responsibility for dealing with anything that approached a sexual transgression by staff was obviously the remit of the husband, not the wife, in order to keep up middle-class standards of propriety. Secondly, the two young servants were themselves adhering, in their own way, to those same standards, as the young man's reply suggests that both ultimately expected the relationship to end in a respectable marriage. If this, granted unverifiable, vignette does apply to Alice and Tom, then the response from Charles Tripp was quite telling. Far from being dismissed, Alice and Tom went on to marry, and they continued their employment at Orari Gorge, with Tom being promoted to head orchardist.⁸² Did the young man's apparently innocent question strike a slightly guilty chord with Charles Tripp? Or was it simply that they were reliable servants who were too valuable to the working of the station to lose? Maybe it was both.

⁸¹ File: Geraldine Historical Society, Miscellaneous Texts including photocopy of Mary Herbert Tripp's memoir of her mother. Paper labelled p. 100.

⁸² *ibid.*

Certainly local memories of life at Orari Gorge referred to the fact that “a kiss was often stolen over the milk-bucket when the cowman gardener presented the daily ration to the maid in the kitchen. Romances ran high and many a young girl met her Romeo on the station”.⁸³ Presumably Ellen Tripp did not know that embraces in the shrubbery were just the tip of the iceberg. Nor was it just the formal grounds at Orari that attracted courting couples. Ellen’s descendent Barbara Harper has described how “there were walks, particularly by the younger element, to the bush above Station Creek—through shadowed arcades formed by the branches of tall totaras ... festooned on the outskirts, in summer, with flame-coloured mistletoe”.⁸⁴

Single Women, the Garden, and Fitness for Marriage, 1850s-1890

Not everyone had the ability to partake of courtship rituals and social activities. Some women suffered from health problems that, by the standards of the time, made them ineligible for the marriage market. They often made the choice, or were persuaded by family or friends, not to marry at all. The Victorian belief in women as the helpmeet for their husbands, and the religious emphasis on marriage for the procreation of healthy children, meant that illness or disabilities ruled them out as potential partners. It was accepted, even when these girls were quite young, that they would not marry, and many families carefully planned for their future by ensuring that they would have lives that kept them busy and fulfilled.

These preparations were frequently centred on the garden. It was, in some ways, to become a focus for the innate need to nurture that was considered a natural part of the female psyche. The garden would provide a living, growing substitute for the frustrated maternal feelings these girls were expected to experience. It was also considered important that these women remain as active, healthy and useful as possible, both for their own sakes and for that of the family that would be expected to support them. This was more particularly an issue for settlers of the mid-to late-Victorian period as the opportunities for an unmarried woman to earn her way in the world were few. The gradual opening up of job options for women leading up to the First World War did modify the situation, although if a young woman had an obviously debilitating illness she would still find her opportunities circumscribed.

Eliza Robinson of Cheviot’s daughter, Elizabeth, “had developed epilepsy” in the mid-1860s when she was seventeen, and “suffered the occasional fit of unconsciousness”.⁸⁵ This meant

⁸³ Barbara Harper *The Kettle on the Fuchsia* (Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed, 1967), p. 79.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p. 116.

⁸⁵ Margaret Wigley, ‘Ready Money’ *The Life of William Robinson of Hill River, South Australia and Cheviot Hills, North Canterbury* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2006), p. 237.

that Elizabeth, despite being clever, attractive, and outgoing, would no longer be eligible for matrimony. The Robinsons had already created a lavish landscaped garden around their home, but once Elizabeth's condition was diagnosed, alterations were made to the garden to take into account her future status as the daughter who would remain unmarried. Her father "devised a circuit for a buggy track in the plantation at Cheviot, and provided a smart little carriage for Lizzie to drive. A family photograph recalls the obvious pleasure she took in this".⁸⁶ Elizabeth had not only been a girl who loved the outdoors but a talented horsewoman as well. The creation of the buggy track in the garden meant that Elizabeth would still be able to enjoy her favourite leisure activities well into the future.

Similarly, the Elworthy family of South Canterbury had a daughter Edith in 1869, who was born lame and for "much of her life she wore a specially made boot and was regarded as a 'cripple'".⁸⁷ Inevitably, she became "the daughter who remained unmarried".⁸⁸ Her life's role, instead, was to be "a companion to her widowed mother". Luckily, Edith's mother Sarah was both cultured and independent. As well as encouraging her daughter to travel overseas (Edith climbed Mt Vesuvius in 1901), Sarah was a keen gardener and shared her enthusiasm with her daughter.⁸⁹ Edith kept herself busy both by tending the garden and by supervising her young nieces and nephews playing outdoors. Many of the family photographs that still exist of Edith "show her in the garden with her pets".⁹⁰

The garden was also central to the life of another young woman who seemed destined to remain single, although this time not for health reasons. Annie Moore was the daughter of George Moore who designed "the most elegant and fashionable Victorian garden in Canterbury" at Glenmark, near Waipara.⁹¹ An immensely wealthy man, it was rumoured that after she came to live with him in 1866, he "actively discouraged young men from his daughter's company, assuming that they would be after his daughter's inheritance".⁹² The grandeur of the garden itself was taken as confirmation of this, with local gossip suggesting "that the many pets and birds kept on the estate were suitable company for her, and that the extensive conservatories and garden walks were added compensation".⁹³ The house and garden continued to be

⁸⁶ *ibid.* p. 292.

⁸⁷ Elworthy, p. 151.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p. 156.

⁹⁰ Elworthy, p. 168.

⁹¹ Strongman, p. 108.

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ *ibid.*

developed right through the 1870s–1880s until in 1891 the house was destroyed by fire and he and his daughter moved to Christchurch.

While it seems to be true that Annie Moore was discouraged from marrying—when she did finally marry it was done in secret—her father’s creation of the garden merely as compensation for her seems less likely. Annie Moore already evinced a great love for gardening and animals, which was to be carried on in her own right after her father’s death with her purchase of the Christchurch estate Karewa, eventually re-named Mona Vale. She took an interest in natural history and made generous bequests to the Christchurch Botanic Gardens.⁹⁴ Despite gaining a reputation for eccentricity, she already had practical experience in land management, since she had “effectively managed” her father’s estate “for the last ten years of his life” and done it so well that after his death she became one of the wealthiest heiresses in the country.⁹⁵

Before the 1890s, Victorian ideals of marriageability were strongly influenced by theological concepts. These dictated that women should enter wedlock to be their husband’s helpmeet, and to procreate healthy offspring following the biblical injunction to ‘be fruitful and multiply’. Due to ill-health or disabilities, some women were unable to fulfil these expectations and stayed unmarried. Other women were restrained from marriage by overly-protective families. For women who were forced, or chose, to stay single throughout the period, the garden remained a welcome place of potential physical freedom and intellectual interest, as well as a place to expend any frustrated nurturing tendencies that society believed they would inevitably feel. After the 1890s, the increasing levels of concern throughout the Empire about racial health and the changing position of women in society, merely re-emphasised the importance of physical and mental fitness in the process of finding a spouse, and meant some women continued to remain single just because they did not fit the ideal.

Gardens became important locations for courting, and social activities linked with courtship, in the early- to mid-colonial period. The often cramped and crowded nature of colonial housing encouraged the tendency of courting couples to spend time together in the garden. The design of the gardens reflected this, and many garden elements such as serpentine paths and tree-shaded avenues made it easier for couples to spend private time together. Gardens were also sites of social activities, such as croquet games or picnics, which provided settlers with

⁹⁴ ‘Domains Board’, *The Press*, 2 March 1910, p. 3.

⁹⁵ Jim McAloon, *No Idle Rich: The Wealthy in Canterbury and Otago 1840–1914* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2002), p. 88.

opportunities to interact with each other in a relaxed, informal atmosphere. This was not just a factor in middle-class courtship rituals. On the larger farms and homesteads in rural Canterbury, the right of the domestic staff to perform their own courtship rituals in the garden was respected as long as they conformed to middle-class standards of propriety. Gardens continued to play this role in courtship right through until 1914, and by that time of course, many colonial gardens had reached full maturity. This fact, and the increasing popularity of garden structures such as summerhouses and tennis courts, meant couples in the later colonial period had even greater opportunities to socialise together than the lovers of the previous generation. Gardens also played a central role in the prospects of women who decided, or were persuaded, to remain single. They were intended as places where unmarried women could retain or improve their health, be kept busy and entertained, and fulfil their innate need to nurture. Just as gardens became sites of multiple purposes for those women who performed courtship rituals, so too did they reflect a multiplicity of meanings for those who concluded the courtship by accepting the offer of marriage.

Colonial Weddings

Historian Alison Clarke has described the development of holidays in New Zealand from the mid-to-late nineteenth century as a “sometimes uneasy blend of cherished traditions from elsewhere and customs developed from the local environment”.⁹⁶ This description could also apply to the practice of wedding rituals in New Zealand. Clarke’s reminder that the “settlers brought with them a variety of regional and religious cultures rather than a simple overarching British culture”, is also applicable when examining colonial marriage customs.⁹⁷ Gardens and flowers were central to many of the traditions linked with weddings in colonial society. The customs, both regional and national, brought out from Britain by the settlers dominated weddings.

Despite the fact that many parts of the wedding ceremony, such as the choice of hymn, remained popular right through the colonial period and even beyond, when it came to flowers for display, and the decoration of the wedding venue, there were obvious changes over the period 1850–1914. Wedding rituals slowly evolved over colonial times to take into account new international fashions, new technology and a growing sense of national identification.

⁹⁶ Alison Clarke, *Holiday Seasons: Christmas, New Year and Easter in Nineteenth Century New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2007), p. 2.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 1.

Cultural Continuities

The religious elements of the wedding ceremony were strongly entwined with the presence, both real and symbolic, of gardens, flowers, and floral motifs. A key example of a religious ritual within colonial weddings that had links with the garden—or more specifically that first Garden of Eden as described in the Book of Genesis—was the music played at the ceremony. The story of Adam and Eve permeated Victorian ideals of marriage. In James Kellogg’s book on women’s health, which was an important contribution to nineteenth century discourse on the ‘true’ nature of women, he describes marriage as “an institution of divine ordination, having its origin in Eden, the birthplace of the race”.⁹⁸ The most popular hymn therefore, to be played, or sung, as the bride walked up the aisle, seems to have been “The Voice that breathed o’er Eden”.

This specific hymn is named so often in newspaper descriptions of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century marriage ceremonies that it could be termed *de rigueur*. In fact this particular hymn became so ubiquitous in Britain, as well as New Zealand, that it was still popular as late as the 1930s. By that time English writer and humourist P.G Wodehouse was able to use it in his books both to symbolise matrimony and the reluctance of his dapper heroes to be forced into a situation in which the dreaded tune might be played.⁹⁹

The popularity of this piece of music demonstrates the strength of connections made by Victorian women between a far distant religious past and their everyday lives in the present. The first verse makes this connection clear:

*The voice that breathed o’er Eden
That earliest wedding day
That primal wedding blessing
It hath not passed away*

and the fourth verse directly links the bride standing at the altar with the original bride in the Garden of Eden.

*Be present loving father
To give away this bride*

⁹⁸ James Kellogg, *Ladies Guide in Health and Disease* (London: International Tract Society Ltd, 1895), p. 333.

⁹⁹ P. G. Wodehouse, *Uneasy Money* (Maryland: Arc Manor, 2008), p. 72.

*As thou gav'st Eve to Adam
Out of his own pierced side*¹⁰⁰

It is a reminder of the religious and cultural continuity that settlers brought with them from Britain to the new colony.

A further cultural continuity reflected the consistent popularity of the monarchy with the majority of colonial settlers. When brides from colonial Canterbury walked down the aisle, their veiled heads were adorned by a circlet of orange blossoms. In Europe, orange blossom had a long tradition of being linked with women's garlands and chaplets. Cultural historian Jack Goody has traced the appearance of orange blossom for this purpose as far back as the sixteenth century,¹⁰¹ but its appeal for settler women was its connection with a far more recent history.

Queen Victoria had eschewed the more traditional church flowers of roses and lilies, to wear orange blossom on her wedding day in 1840, as did her daughters in later years.¹⁰² Orange blossom therefore, not only had the glamour of royal association, but was linked with Victoria, one of the most happily married and fertile monarchs in British history, and this might unconsciously have added to its popularity. The flower became such a representative part of a bride's apparel that many newspaper reports on society weddings used the phrase "and of course" before describing the orange blossom circling the veil. This continued to be a popular tradition right up until the First World War but after that it went out of fashion. It is likely that post-war, its associations with the imperial past, and what was increasingly seen as the 'stodginess' of Victorian times made it unattractive to 'modern' brides.

Women, and Wedding Flora, 1850s-1890

Sandra Coney has suggested that "for women, weddings are the last, great female ritual, an opportunity to be unashamedly centre-stage".¹⁰³ In colonial weddings, this was true not only for the bride, but for the women of the bride's family and community, who were the primary agents in the staging of the ritual. It was traditional for local women to band together in creating elaborate and meaningful floral decorations for the church, and sometimes the reception. Thus

¹⁰⁰ Biggs, Rev. Louis, ed., *Hymns Ancient and Modern: For Use in Services of the Church*, (London: Novello and Co., 1867), p. 257.

¹⁰¹ Jack Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 167.

¹⁰² Extract from Queen Victoria's Journal, 10 February 10 1840
<<http://www.royal.gov.uk/TheRoyalCollectionandothercollections/TheRoyalArchives/QueenVictoriaeducationproject/TheweddingofQueenVictoriaandPrinceAlbert1840.aspx>>.

¹⁰³ Sandra Coney, *I Do*, p. 12.

women could participate *en masse* in an activity that positively reflected their gentility and creativity. It was also a rare occasion to be on public display without the social criticism that would normally be attached to ‘respectable’ women who, in a phrase of the time, ‘put themselves forward’. Weddings were considered a rite of passage central to the “creation of a new family unit,” and represented “faith in the future as well as ... conservatism and tradition”.¹⁰⁴ In colonial societies in particular, this was vitally important, both socially and psychologically. For these reasons local women seem to have relished helping with the artistic and floral decoration of weddings.

It was common for the main organisers of the wedding to be the unmarried friends of the bride. Their act of creating a decorative spectacle for her had about it elements of a farewell ritual—she was leaving their ranks and stepping into a new role, something both they and their society acknowledged. It was an opportunity to demonstrate friendship and solidarity as well as the chance to indulge in the excitement of creating a socially sanctioned artistic display.

The first and most obvious floral element of display was, of course, the bridal bouquet. Whilst almost all settlers, no matter what their religious beliefs, shared the tradition of flowers and garden foliage as an integral part of the wedding rituals, the specific ways in which these elements were used could vary depending upon availability and changing social attitudes. For the first generation of Canterbury brides, the bouquet was homemade and generally consisted of whatever flowers happened to be in bloom no matter how unusual. On Ellen Harper’s wedding day in 1856, a neighbour, “old Mrs Westenra made us pretty little bouquets of white primroses, these and a bunch of gorse being the only flowers we had”.¹⁰⁵

The English flowers originally used in bridal decorations reflected the composition of settler gardens. The early colonial period c.1850–1890, saw the dominance of kitchen gardens for subsistence, and while Canterbury nursery catalogues might be full of many different varieties of fruit trees, the choice of decorative flowers available was far less wide-ranging.¹⁰⁶ Most settler gardens contained rose bushes, lilies, and geraniums as well as the popular spring plants of narcissus and primroses. Not surprisingly, these are the ‘English’ flowers most often mentioned in the surviving descriptions of wedding bouquets and church decorations. At one

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁵ Ell, p. 55.

¹⁰⁶ Strongman, p. 35.

wedding, at Merivale, Christchurch in 1889, the altar was covered “with handsome bouquets of primroses. It might be called a ‘Primrose Wedding’ so many of those flowers were used”.¹⁰⁷

In this period, flowers used in for wedding ceremonies were most often in the traditional colours of white, yellow or red, and improvisation was common. The colours used in bouquets were highly symbolic. White was representative of purity and chastity and yellow was a colour sacred to Hymen, god of marriage in Roman times.¹⁰⁸ As more gardens became established, brides were able to have a greater choice for their bouquets than Ellen Harper did, although white and yellow seem to have remained popular colours. Roses and lilies were also favourites, as they symbolised love and maidenhood respectively. As with bouquets, church decorations also reflected what was available at the time, in both settler’s gardens and surrounding native bush, but unlike bouquets they remained a mostly home-made phenomena throughout the entire period. The use of foliage was particularly fashionable, and reflected the craze for ferns and greenery in floral arrangements that was prominent in the 1850s and 1860s in Britain.

Fern collecting had begun in Britain as a hobby for the wealthy, for successful cultivation depended upon the existence of temperature controlled glasshouses. In New Zealand, ferns took on a different cultural status. They were ubiquitous, and easily accessible to everybody. The kind of collection that Baron Egerton created in 1859 at Tatton Park in Cheshire, England as a symbol of wealth and exoticism could be identical to the backyard of any settler, no matter how poor, who happened to live near the New Zealand bush.¹⁰⁹ It is yet another example of the intricacies of cultural transfer and how some plants took on wholly different cultural meanings in the colonial setting.

Eventually, in Britain, the exclusivity of fern collecting was gradually eroded, with the introduction of cheap Wardian cases that anyone could use to grow different varieties of ferns.¹¹⁰ The result was the waning of the British craze for ferns.¹¹¹ In New Zealand, however, the use of fern foliage remained popular right throughout the era, at first because of its accessibility, and then later as a symbol of a growing, national identification with, and appreciation of, all that was unique about our native plants, animals and landscape. As part of their continuing negotiation with colonial identity, settler women drew on elements of their

¹⁰⁷ ‘Wedding at Merivale’, The Press, 2 October 1889, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ Coney, *I Do*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁹ Mary Blacker, *Flora Domestica* (London: the National Trust, 2000), p. 152.

¹¹⁰ Strongman, p. 16.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

environment, as well as the cultural norms of their European past, to create hybrid forms of material culture suitable for their new lives as New Zealanders. Floral decorations for weddings were one of the earliest examples of this. Frances Tripp's 1882 wedding saw her walking up the aisle between an "avenue of tree ferns and cabbage trees" and her new husband Arthur later wrote of how there were no flowers out at the time so "the village decorated the Church with greens and paper roses".¹¹²

Flowers and gardens provided settlers with reassuring cultural and religious continuities with their old lives back home and were considered essential elements in colonial weddings. Whether it was through choices of hymns or the traditional European symbolism of flowers, New Zealand weddings reflected the British origins of most nineteenth century settlers. However, colonial weddings also provide evidence of the way in which settlers began to incorporate New Zealand flora into their traditional customs. In the very early days of settlement, the lack of established gardens meant that settlers had to make do with all types of improvised floral decorations including gorse and tree ferns. Their gradual acceptance of New Zealand indigenous plants was thus partly due to convenience, but also because British plant-collecting crazes, such as the popularity of fern collecting in the 1850s–1860s, had sparked an interest in exotic and unique foliage from across the Empire. The use of New Zealand plants in wedding ceremonies became symbolic of the evolving customs that would see British settlers gradually create new identities as New Zealanders.

¹¹² David Reynolds, and Louise Donnithorne, *Two Raincliffe Pioneers* (Christchurch: Microfilm Digital Print Ltd, 2006), p. 17.

Section 2: 1890s-1914

Gardens continued to play a significant part in courtship rituals for colonial women throughout this period but the use of the garden often mirrored changing social ideals and opportunities. Rural working-class women continued to be able to access the garden if they conformed to middle-class standards of behaviour. However there was increasing disapproval of the attempts by women from the urban working-class to use public gardens for courting, and growing worries about urban depravity made their presence in public spaces problematic. In contrast, gardens continued to be seen as appropriate spaces for middle-class women to indulge in courting rituals, because of traditional religious and philosophical associations of women with the beauty, innocence and fertility of the garden.

This period also saw courtship in the garden becoming increasingly centred around ideas of racial fitness and health. Physical activity and sports were now acceptable pastimes for young ladies, and gave them greater opportunities to interact with eligible, fit young men. The design of gardens evolved to keep up with these social changes, with elements such as tennis courts and rowing lakes becoming popular. For those women who married, the style of wedding ceremonies also changed slowly over time reflecting wider social transformations. While many parts of the wedding ceremony, such as the choice of hymn, remained popular right through the colonial period and even beyond, when it came to flowers for display, and the decoration of the wedding venue, there were obvious changes which reflected the popularity of new international fashions, new technology and a growing sense of national identification. This resulted in weddings becoming more lavish spectacles than they were in the early colonial period. This later period also saw the rise of weddings and receptions in the garden, a site that enabled families to have more control over the way in which they represented themselves, both to larger society, and to posterity.

Working-Class Women and Courting in the Garden, 1890s-1914

In the 1890s, the garden at Holmslee Estate, near Rakaia in North Canterbury, was “bounded by a laurel hedge and two walks were laid out within it. The walks were called ‘lover’s lane’ by the family and it was there that the maids of the family entertained their gentlemen callers”.¹¹³ The fact that suitors for the servants were labelled as ‘gentlemen’ indicates the standards of behaviour expected of them in return for using the garden as a place for courting.

¹¹³ Strongman, p. 113.

Throughout the period, the unpredictability of young lovers, however, meant that middle-class standards were sometimes breached and the response from garden owners could vary from amused indulgence to outright anger.

Domestic servants who did not adhere to suitable standards of behaviour and respect risked losing not only the privilege of access to the garden, but also their jobs. The *Waimate Daily Advertiser* of November 1900 ran an article about one such incident.

The owner of a ... handsome family residence ... situated in nicely planted grounds is very angry ... He was away from home with his family ... and on his return, found his garden very much trampled upon and the place in a general mess. He stormed furiously without discovering the cause of the disorder, but next day his wife elicited from the domestic servant the fact that her young man, who is also the family butcher, had brought along his father and mother and brothers and sisters, as well as a photo fiend, and that they had been photographed in a group on the afternoon. There is a vacancy for a new girl in that house just now¹¹⁴

The language used in this report is fascinating for the attitudes it reflects. The description of the photographer as a 'photo fiend' is obviously included to heighten the tone of disapproval. The final sentence which announces the maid's dismissal with humour and a hint of a triumphant crow, shows very clearly where the writer's sympathies lie.

This story is worth looking at more closely as an example of the complexity of class and cultural relations in the garden. The unnamed maid had obviously gone to a great deal of effort to set up the event. Her motivation, from what little information we are given, seems to have been the urge to create a pictorial record of herself and her future in-laws in an elegant, genteel setting. Was the photograph to be sent 'Home' to relatives to show how well they were all doing in the colonies? Was there even a hint here of pretence, that those who viewed the photograph might think the house and garden was in fact theirs? Given that the group seems to have gone to a great deal of trouble to be photographed in such 'nicely planted grounds', would they really then have caused so much damage, thus spoiling the very impression they were obviously hoping to convey? And was it not so much any minor damage they might have

¹¹⁴ 'Clippings', *Waimate Daily Advertiser*, 20 November 1900, p. 3.

caused but the social offence of their actions in transgressing class boundaries that was the real cause of the owner's anger and indignation?

Conversely, should our sympathies be with the owner? The maid was already courting with the young man and therefore presumably planning to leave service soon to set up her own home. Did she feel she had nothing to lose? Did she have a grievance against the family and decide to act upon it in the garden? Maybe a great deal of damage was done. The size of the group is not mentioned, perhaps the 'family butcher' had a large set of relatives who were quite capable of causing a "general mess". From this distance in time, the truth is unknowable but this case does highlight the concept of "the domesticated landscape as an arena for practical, political and symbolic action" in which "women were both trained within traditional structures and asserted themselves against those constraints".¹¹⁵ The colonial garden reflected a society in which class and gender roles and stereotypes were constantly being re-negotiated. Even the plants contained therein had meanings that changed in their colonial settings. A letter in a Christchurch newspaper talks about camellia shrubs and how "to an English eye it seems strange to see this flower, so highly prized at home and adorning the home or breast of the more favoured of Fortune's daughters, here carelessly stuck in the hat or button-hole of some street lad".¹¹⁶

Life on the large estates in this later period still afforded many working-class women with social opportunities to mix with the opposite sex, thus ensuring that although they were placed in a rural environment there was no need for them to be lacking in entertainment. At Coldstream Estate, around 1910, the manager Henry Rogers created a tennis court near his cottage and the "men on the station played regularly; they asked girls from the district to join them on Saturday afternoons".¹¹⁷ Rogers' daughter, Mary Shaw, remembered Coldstream providing "work for both men and women. It provided entertainment in its dances, cricket matches and its garden parties".¹¹⁸ The other local landowners often joined in the entertainments and Mary Shaw fondly remembered Jack Grigg from Longbeach and Jack Acland from Mt Peel as "bright hard-cases—lovely people".¹¹⁹ There is little evidence here of cap doffing servility, or any indication that the landowners concerned expected it. In fact, as with Mary Shaw, many reminiscences by

¹¹⁵ Judith W. Page, and Elise Smith, *Women, Literature and the Domesticated Landscape: England's Disciples of Flora, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 4–5.

¹¹⁶ Helen Solomons, *Lost Christchurch: Remembering Our Lost Heritage*, <<http://lostchristchurch.org.nz/christchurch-dull-and-as-flat-as-a-kitchen-table-1880s>>.

¹¹⁷ E. J. Studholme, p. 129.

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*

working-class women show a great deal of respect and affection for their employers. However while courtship and entertainment in the garden continued to be a normal part of the year's round for those in domestic service on the large estates, the acceptance of working-class women in urban areas who turned to public gardens for their courtships, was far less straightforward.

Public gardens were naturally places of courtship but were also spaces of great ambiguity. A letter to Christchurch's *Press* in 1884 highlights the complexity of the ways in which public spaces were used. The letter-writer discusses the paths of Hagley Park and how popular they were "in summertime ... for ladies and lovers".¹²⁰ These courting couples were "very fond of this pleasant promenade" and obviously, if not all middle-class, were at least, according to the writer, following appropriately middle-class standards of behaviour.¹²¹ There were other modes of behaviour that were less easy to slot into the framework of middle-class mores. The letter writer went on to indignantly describe what he called scenes of "profligacy and indecency".¹²² These included the sides of the footpath being used as a "disrobing room for drunken men and women".¹²³ Once these couples had perpetrated their "gross wickedness," they would then use the park to "sleep off the effect of their debauches".¹²⁴ These "disgusting scenes" were apparently a "daily" occurrence and meant that the writer was reluctant "to walk along these paths with a lady", presumably in case she accidentally witnessed this "great evil".¹²⁵

The policing of public parks for this kind of behaviour was a constant problem over the colonial period. Fifteen years after that letter to the *Press*, more comments were made in the newspapers about the "larrikin element" whose activities had become such a nuisance that "women and girls are warned that it is not safe for them to go unaccompanied into the park".¹²⁶ It is hard to interpret the coded language of Victorian culture. Were these 'larrikins' actually molesting or propositioning women in the park, or was it just a case of inappropriate language or bored youths lounging around? Little had changed by the new century. In 1907, public opinion claimed that the Botanic Gardens were "infested with a number of undesirable characters both male and female ... making it almost impossible for ladies and children to pass that way".¹²⁷

¹²⁰ 'The Paths in Hagley Park', Letters to the Editor, The Press, 10 March 1884, p. 3.

¹²¹ *ibid.*

¹²² *ibid.*

¹²³ *ibid.*

¹²⁴ *ibid.*

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²⁶ 'Larrikin Element', The Press, 21 April, p. 4.

¹²⁷ 'The Domain', The Press, 14 March 1907, p. 10.

Later, in 1912 there were still comments on the south section of Hagley Park which was likewise “the rendezvous of undesirable characters, and is unsafe for women and children”.¹²⁸

Public parks and gardens had long traditions in British culture as sites of immorality and licence.¹²⁹ The reputations of Vauxhall, Ranelagh and Cremorne Gardens in London eventually became so bad that they were satirised in literature (William Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* is a classic example) and eventually forced to close.¹³⁰ Public gardens in Canterbury were forced to defend their reputations by claiming that they would be managed in a “strict and unimpeachable manner” with no toleration of immorality.¹³¹

It is likely that public spaces like this did become convenient places for prostitutes to ply their trade. Certainly Caroline Daley’s study of the Auckland Domain demonstrates that there was always a “tension between physicality and sexuality” in “the ongoing, fraught relationship between women and men’s use of leisure space and resources”.¹³² The use of public gardens for sexual liaisons also clashed with many of the ideological reasons for the gardens’ existence. James Beattie’s study of colonial artist Alfred Sharpe analyses the aesthetic ideals behind the creation of public gardens.¹³³ Morally they were designed to have a “regenerative effect on individuals worn down by the artificiality of city life”.¹³⁴ Cities were sites of moral decay which public gardens could alleviate by providing “places in which to exercise, to enjoy nature and to restore health”.¹³⁵ Sharpe encouraged city planners to place “a little natural woodland in the secluded portions of the grounds for the artist and the lover of nature to feast their eyes on”.¹³⁶ The hegemonic moral absolute of the picturesque was obviously resisted by working-class couples who used the gardens for sexual activities, and yet it is possible that they were attracted to the parks for exactly the same reasons as those who came to admire them aesthetically—they were beautiful, peaceful, often secluded spaces.

While the true reasons for some women choosing the gardens for ‘amorous’ encounters will probably never be known, it is also possible that the ‘disgusting’ scenes that so infuriated the

¹²⁸ ‘The Christchurch Domain’, *The Press*, 9 March 1912, p. 5.

¹²⁹ Strongman, p. 129.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*

¹³¹ *ibid.*

¹³² Caroline Daley, ‘A Gendered Domain: Leisure in Auckland, 1890–1940’, in *The Gendered Kiwi*, ed. by Caroline Daley and Deborah Montgomerie (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1999), pp. 87–113.

¹³³ James Beattie, ‘Alfred Sharpe, Ruskin and Australasian Nature’, *The Journal of New Zealand Art History*, 27 (2006) 38–56.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 50.

¹³⁵ *ibid.*

¹³⁶ *ibid.*

Press letter writers, were merely signs that not everyone accepted, or conducted their relationships according to, the unwritten laws of middle-class morality. As Erik Olssen has demonstrated, certain regions of Britain did not even have the custom of engagements or church weddings.¹³⁷ Particularly in Scotland, Wales and northern England, the intention of couples to marry was considered enough and cohabitation without any formal ceremony was common.¹³⁸ Sandra Coney states that in 1913 more than one-third of brides were pregnant on their wedding day.¹³⁹ While some women might have the view that courtship consisted of romantic walks and discussing the future with their intended, other women saw the engagement, or intention to enter the commitment of a relationship, as a signal that sexual relations could begin. Given the lack of space in working-class homes and gardens of the colonial period, it would be unsurprising if some couples used the private spaces of public gardens to further their relationships.

Middle-Class Women and Courting, 1890s-1914

If the position of the working-classes in the garden setting could be contradictory, the situation for middle-class women was far less ambiguous. The garden was widely seen as an appropriate place for women to perform courting rituals and to receive the proposal that would end the courtship and move them towards the next (and expected) stage of their lives. The suitability of gardens for courting was reinforced by religious beliefs and elements of popular culture including literature. A recent analysis of nineteenth century literature by Lynn Voskuil, amply demonstrates the connections between Victorian texts and horticulture.¹⁴⁰ Gardens in Victorian religious beliefs represented “emotional well-being and moral rectitude”.¹⁴¹ Nineteenth century horticultural writer Shirley Hubbard saw the garden as the “meeting place” of heaven and earth, “for there God talked with Adam, and there the Saviour wept in agony for all”.¹⁴² Dianne Lawrence’s work on gentility and British colonial women shows that in Victorian times

women’s association with gardens was deemed to be ‘natural’, a logical extension of the nurturing role ordained by their very sex. The garden

¹³⁷ Erik Olssen, ‘Families and the Gendering of European New Zealand in the Colonial Period, 1840–80’, in *The Gendered Kiwi*, ed. by Caroline Daley and Deborah Montgomerie (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1999), 36–62.

¹³⁸ *ibid.*

¹³⁹ Coney, *I Do*, p. 8.

¹⁴⁰ Lynn Voskuil, ‘The Victorian Novel and Horticulture’, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Victorian Novel*, ed. by Lisa Rodensky, 23 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 549–568.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 555.

¹⁴² *ibid.*, p. 551.

supposedly reinforced her image as a pure and lovely being, and in turn the garden was enhanced by the innate beauty of her soul¹⁴³

The garden thus represented both her role as a future mother (that, and becoming her husband's willing helpmeet, being her primary purpose as a wife) and her current virtue as a chaste maiden.

The link between courting in the garden and biblical imagery was so widely accepted that a humorous article in the Christchurch *Press* of December 1896 was able to portray Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden as the equivalent of a young, wealthy runholder courting an innocent young gentlewoman.¹⁴⁴ This article gives such an excellent summary of contemporary courtship mores that it is worth quoting at some length. According to the text, Adam's reaction to the newly created Eve is one of passion, which he controls by contenting "himself for the time with his duties as host, and proposed a walk in the garden ... No doubt it was a pleasant sight, the young Squire showing his best and only girl round the estate". This was all part of Adam's attempt to show off his eligibility and the fact that he had "no vices, belonged to no club, didn't smoke, had no mortgages on his property, and no poor relations". In fact "nobody could deny he belonged to the very first family".

The satire on middle- and upper-class Victorian marriage continues, with Eve being put in a position of great responsibility "to a young and inexperienced woman (she had no mother or any other natural adviser). Perhaps, after all, Adam might turn out to be the younger brother and not the heir!" But no, "... he was the catch of the season, the possessor of the largest estate the world had ever seen [and] it was all freehold, unencumbered by ... mortgage". From Adam's point of view, the situation is splendidly uncomplicated; "when he obtained Eve's consent he had not that awful interview with Papa to dread, no settlements, no lawyer's delays ... and the serpent had not yet begun to practice as the family solicitor".

Following marriage, Eve's lack of any worthwhile tasks to do leaves her so leisured and bored that she is susceptible to the blandishments of the snake. After all, "even washing day, that *bête noire* to small housekeepers, had no terrors for Eve" in her "fig-leaf combinations". They now began "the life of settlers in earnest, as hard as the case of any other couple of assisted emigrants". True, they did not do much "in the settling line except settling themselves down to

¹⁴³ Dianne Lawrence, *Genteel Women: Empire and Domestic Material Culture, 1840–1910* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 138.

¹⁴⁴ 'Tale of the Early Settlers', *The Press*, 29 December 1896, p. 2.

matrimony, but that of itself is an important factor in colonisation”. Despite its comic tone, this article emphasises the continuing relevance and importance of religious belief and indeed stories, to the way in which settlers viewed both their roles and their society. It demonstrates, also, the strong connection in Victorian culture between garden imagery and contemporary ideals of marriage.

The Victorian novel also popularised the concept of a proposal in the garden and varied, and widely read, works of literature such as *Jane Eyre*, *Barchester Towers*, and *North and South* by Elizabeth Gaskell, contained key examples of this as an accepted literary trope. Even the ambivalently romantic ending to *Great Expectations*, by Charles Dickens, takes place in a garden. Victorian magazines for girls and women also made this a standard plot device in their short stories. The *Young Ladies’ Reader* of 1881 contains a proposal scene that begins: “The moon shone brightly on a couple who were standing at the gate of this rustic garden”.¹⁴⁵ A similar short story in an 1895 issue of *Woman’s Life* magazine tells of how “Cora Smith ... ran down the garden path towards the stile where [her] lover was waiting for his lady-love as she had many a night waited for him”.¹⁴⁶ The most famous poet of the Victorian era, Alfred Lord Tennyson, wrote a poem on the subject, published in 1855, and the popular refrain “Come into the garden, Maud” became widely quoted.¹⁴⁷ Tennyson was a favourite with colonial readers as seen by the frequency with which his books of poetry were listed as gifts for newly-weds in local papers. The ideological link between women and the loveliness, abundance, and fertility of the garden was not accidental. What was acceptable in literature and religion transferred easily into the reality of colonial society. Some parents went to elaborate lengths to ensure their daughters received their proposal in the correct setting.

Bob Rhodes found his neighbours, the Rutherford’s, beautifully designed garden and grounds at Opawa a god-send, when Miss Jessie Bidwill of Pihautea in the North Island came to stay with them in 1889. A descendent has described their rather rapid courtship

while Jessie was at Opawa there was a fall of snow. John Rutherford suggested that Bob [who was also visiting] should take ... [Jessie] for a walk down the drive to show her the snow-covered country. They came back engaged.

¹⁴⁵ Margaret Beetham, and Kay Boardman, eds, *Victorian Magazines: An Anthology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 73.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 94.

¹⁴⁷ John Dixon Hunt, “Come into the garden Maud”: Garden Art as a Privileged Mode of Commemoration and Identity” in *Places of Commemoration: Search for Identity and Landscape Design* ed. by Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn (Washington D.C: Dumbarton oaks, 2001), p. 1.

Rutherford thought this an enormous joke and took full credit for the subsequent marriage¹⁴⁸

If a suitable partner did appear it was expected that, as in the case of John Rutherford, family and friends would do all they could to expedite the process of courtship by providing the couple with private time, and spaces, in which a proposal could take place. Nor was it just parents or older friends and relatives who were actively involved in creating opportunities for courting. In 1894, Ethel Elworthy tried to make a match between her brother Arthur, and her friend Ruth Studholme. Her tactics included arranging a picnic on the Studholme Estate at which “a number of us drove up to the bush ... had great fun”. She also smugly congratulated herself on her efforts when her brother, the next day, ended up “driving Ruth in our buggy. I arranged it all very nicely”. She was most disappointed when a year later she was at college overseas and received a letter “with the astounding news that R.S. is engaged [to someone else] ... Double-faced little devil”.¹⁴⁹

Even the arrangement of trees in the garden reflected the desire of some colonial women to create the perfect romantic atmosphere for their daughters. At Kaiwara Run, also in the 1890s, there were “weeping elms on three corners of the large lawn” that “were planted by Mrs Macfarlane for her daughters; she envisaged that each would receive a proposal of marriage under her own tree”.¹⁵⁰ It would be easy to see such gestures as mirroring unrealistic ideals of gender and class. What if her daughters were not able, or did not want to get married? Not many families, after all, owned enough land to plant even one weeping elm let alone three. However this is to look at the situation through the distorting lens of our own times. Katie Holmes, Susan K. Martin and Kylie Mirmohamadi describe making gardens as “an imaginative act, by which landscapes are overlaid with meanings”.¹⁵¹ In this case, for Mrs Macfarlane, planting those trees for her daughters served the same psychological purpose as other gardens Holmes *et al.* have analysed. It was “an act of faith, a gesture towards the future” and proof that both she and her daughters would be there “to witness the fruit of their labours” and hand over the land to the next generation.¹⁵² As such, the elms were more than just a pretty backdrop,

¹⁴⁸ Woodhouse, p. 52.

¹⁴⁹ David Elworthy and Ros Henry *Edward's Legacy: The Elworthy's of South Canterbury* (Christchurch: Henry Elworthy Ltd, 2011), pp. 215–216.

¹⁵⁰ Strongman, p. 126.

¹⁵¹ Katie Holmes, Susan K. Martin, and Kylie Mirmohamadi, *Reading the Garden: the Settlement of Australia* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2008), p. 4.

¹⁵² *ibid.*, p. 9.

rather they had their own role to play in the colonising of a particular piece of land and its placement into the narrative history of one family.



Figure 1.6: Still just wide enough for two—the path leading away from the house of Sir John Hall, Hororata, Canterbury, 1907 (Courtesy of Kete Selwyn).¹⁵³

Courtship, Women and National Fitness, 1890s-1914

By the late-nineteenth century, and into Edwardian times, the sense of privacy in the garden was even more developed. Not only had the plantings around Victorian homesteads grown to maturity, but changing uses of, and fashions in, gardens resulted in even more features enabling

¹⁵³ 'Path leading to Sir John Hall's house', Kete Selwyn, (Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 New Zealand License) <<http://keteselwyn.peoplesnetworknz.info/site/images/show/347-path-leading-to-sir-john-halls-house>>.

people to be alone together. Garden buildings such as tea-houses, arbours or summer-houses became an integral part of middle- and upper- class leisure pursuits. The newly fashionable, mixed sport of tennis, for example, meant that summer-houses were often placed near the courts “so that players can occasionally resort to its cool shade in the intervals of the game”.¹⁵⁴ The increasing popularity of the idea of ‘garden rooms’, where the interior of the garden was broken up “with shrubberies and herbaceous borders, so that it is impossible to see the whole place at once” also resulted in the creation of more private spaces.¹⁵⁵ These garden rooms were often linked by “passageways and arches,” all amidst plantings that had “grown to maturity, endowing the landscape with a luxuriance for which the first settlers could only yearn”.¹⁵⁶ One aspect that had continued on from the earlier Victorian gardens was the intimacy of the pathways which, as shown in Figure 1.6 of Sir John Hall’s Edwardian residence at Hororata, were still designed in order that two people could walk together comfortably. Lack of privacy and opportunities for quiet time together was no longer the issue it had been for most young people a generation earlier.

The future certainly widened possibilities for these later generations. By the middle of the 1880s, *The Lancet*, a prestigious medical journal, was advocating moderate exercise [for women] as forming “the co-efficient of healthy scholastic training and healthy motherhood”.¹⁵⁷ From the 1890s these ideas were being reinforced in popular culture by best-selling health manuals of the time, such as James Kellogg’s 1895 text *Ladies’ Guide to Health*, shown here in Figure 1.7.¹⁵⁸ The result of this was that men and women who were physically outgoing were considered the better catches in the marriage market. The mid-nineteenth century emphasis on women’s physical frailty was superseded by the idea that fresh air and gentle exercise had “a rejuvenating effect on women and by making them healthier would improve their child-bearing capacity”.¹⁵⁹ This was considered vital for their future role as mothers of the empire.

¹⁵⁴ Leach, in Brookes, p. 77.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 78.

¹⁵⁶ Katherine Raine, ‘Early Twentieth Century Gardens, 1900–1920’, in Matthew Bradbury, ed., *A History of the Garden in New Zealand* (Auckland: Viking Penguin, 1995), p. 117.

¹⁵⁷ Kathleen E. McCrone, *Sport and the Physical Emancipation of Women 1870–1914* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 199.

¹⁵⁸ Kellogg, Plate 11, between pp. 244–245.

¹⁵⁹ McCrone, pp. 195–196.



Figure 1.7: Moderate exercise was the sign of a healthy young woman, according to James Kellogg's 1895 manual *Ladies' Guide to Health*.

These new developments in leisure and social behaviour meant that from the 1890s to the beginning of the First World War, there was a marked increase in the opportunities for young people to socialise together, as outdoor leisure and sporting pursuits became a more common factor in the social round. Thus, from this period gardens were designed not just to reflect social status but the family's ability to enjoy social and recreational activities.

While there is no denying that these fashionable activities could be instrumental in introducing young people to suitable prospective partners, contrary to the theory put forward by Stevan Eldred-Grigg,¹⁶⁰ this was not their only, or even their primary purpose. The 1890s onwards were times of widespread anxiety, both in Britain and parts of the empire, over the supposed

¹⁶⁰ Stevan Eldred-Grigg, *A Southern Gentry: New Zealanders who inherited the earth* (Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed, 1980).

degeneration of the Anglo-Saxon race due to increasing urbanisation, which was seen as a process that encouraged materialism and effeminacy. The rise of Germany as a world power, and the emergence of other countries, such as Japan and the United States, onto the world stage threatened Britain's sense of military and cultural supremacy.

The changing status and opportunities for women also challenged contemporary notions of masculinity. New fashions for women, such as the disappearance of the crinoline, and the invention of more practical clothes for the popular leisure pursuits of bathing and cycling, also encouraged an interest in active lifestyles. The result was a growing emphasis on physical exercise and fresh air as conducive to "racial health". Jock Phillips has argued that the "colonies ... promoted an open-air lifestyle" that was seen as essential for keeping the "race rural and pure".¹⁶¹

Women in many Canterbury homesteads were quick to heed that call. Stevan Eldred-Grigg gave the example of one Canterbury social figure who was described by a fellow society hostess in 1888, as having "everything that can make a house attractive—sport of various kinds, tennis, a splendid table and pretty girls".¹⁶² Tennis was seen as particularly conducive to courtship and socializing, because it could be played in the form of mixed-doubles. Therefore most tennis parties were based on the involvement of both sexes, as can be seen in Figure 1.8. A newspaper gossip column of 1892 speaks to the social dimension of such gatherings. It contains a description of a Christchurch tennis party held by Mrs Bowen "in their pretty, sheltered garden ... what a delightful form of entertainment tennis parties are; one feels at liberty to roam and lounge about at one's own sweet will, and to talk only to those one likes".¹⁶³

Tennis was just one of the many forms of social interaction available to young middle- and upper-class people. The daughters of the Elworthy family for example, lived a life of considerable activity. At any particular time, they could be seen "riding or driving the carriage ... walking, playing croquet and golf, collecting fossils, going on picnics in the bush ... hunting and even shooting".¹⁶⁴ All these pursuits gave them ample time and opportunities to

¹⁶¹ Jock Phillips, *A Man's Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male: A History* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 98.

¹⁶² Stevan Eldred-Grigg, 'Whatever Happened to the Gentry? The Large Landowners of Ashburton County 1890–1896', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 11 (1977), p. 10.

¹⁶³ 'A Christchurch Lady's Letter', *The Press*, 26 November 1892, p. 4.

¹⁶⁴ Elworthy, and Henry, p. 213.

interact with eligible suitors or, as in the case of their friend Ruth Studholme, to flirt safely in company with a young man she had no intention of marrying.



*Figure 1.8: Mixed tennis party at Longbeach early 1900s
(Courtesy of Bill and Penny Thomas).*

Fashion, Changing Society and Wedding Flora, 1890s-1914

For those women who did marry, the style of wedding ceremonies changed slowly throughout the period 1890–1914, reflecting wider social transformations. Many parts of the wedding ceremony, such as the choice of hymn, remained popular right through the colonial period and even beyond. However, when it came to flowers for display, and the decoration of the wedding venue, there were obvious changes which reflected the popularity of new international fashions, new technology and a growing sense of national identification. This resulted in weddings becoming more lavish spectacles than they had been in the early colonial period. The elaborate nature of these ceremonies was not without its critics and the clergy and journalists frequently commented on the excesses of the ‘modern’ wedding. This later period also saw the rise of weddings and receptions in the garden, a site that enabled families to have more control over the way in which they represented themselves, both to larger society, and to posterity.

Through the period 1890–1914 the role of flowers and gardens in weddings gradually changed, through improved transport and communications infrastructure, the influence of overseas fashions that were easier to access, combined with a greater appreciation for the uniqueness of New Zealand’s indigenous flora. From about 1890 onward, the inclusion of native plants and

wild flowers had become increasingly popular as part of the wedding ceremony, even as the older, English-style flowers fell out of favour due to the influence of international fashion trends. As a classic example of this new sense of patriotism and burgeoning ‘kiwi’ identity, the wedding of Gertrude Bowen at Riccarton in 1889 must take the cake. According to the newspaper report “the church itself was beautifully decorated with clematis” and the bride “carried a lovely bouquet of wild, white clematis bordered with silvery fern fronds of the silver tree fern (quite a national bouquet)”.¹⁶⁵

At Minnie D’Oyly’s wedding in Papanui, Christchurch in April 1893 the church was “tastefully decorated with Marguerites, evergreens, flax and toi toi grass”.¹⁶⁶ Flax and toi-toi (*austroderia*) were also the decorations of choice at Jessie Babington’s wedding in 1895.¹⁶⁷ The church chancel at the Ashburton wedding of Gertrude Steward in 1897, was a “perfect bower of flowers and foliage, cabbage [tree foliage] and toi-toi being used freely with excellent effect”.¹⁶⁸ Indigenous decoration of another sort was present at the 1904 wedding of Janet Shury who wore “a greenstone heart pendant”.¹⁶⁹ This almost certainly reflects the increasing popularity of Maori design and art and its absorption into the currently fashionable art nouveau ideals. When Kathleen Julius married in Akaroa in 1914, she was carrying “the most beautiful bouquet, composed chiefly of native white clematis”.¹⁷⁰ Quite apart from demonstrating a sense of growing identity as New Zealanders, rather than just colonists, the appeal of New Zealand native plants to settlers was also based on their often structural good looks and forms which made them useful components in flower arrangements.

Homemade bouquets such as Ellen Tripp’s had been standard up until the 1890s, but in the years after that “more and more aspects of the wedding were professionalised”, including the making of the bouquet.¹⁷¹ Towards the end of the century, fashion rather than symbolism began shape the culture of wedding flowers, and bouquets based on exotic new flowers such as dahlias, chrysanthemums, and cherry blossoms became the flora of choice for more status-conscious brides.

¹⁶⁵ ‘Wedding at Riccarton’, *The Star*, 23 October 1889, p. 4.

¹⁶⁶ ‘Marriage at Papanui’, *The Press*, 6 April 1893, p. 6.

¹⁶⁷ ‘Wedding at Opawa’, *The Press*, 10 April 1895, p. 6.

¹⁶⁸ ‘Wedding: Curtis-Steward’, *Ashburton Guardian*, 8 January 1897, p. 3.

¹⁶⁹ ‘Orange blossoms: Dawson-Shury’, *Ashburton Guardian*, 1 June 1904, p. 2.

¹⁷⁰ ‘Wedding: Armstrong-Julius’, *Akaroa Mail and Banks Peninsula Advertiser*, 9 October 1914, p. 2.

¹⁷¹ Coney, *IDO*, p. 9.

Regional or national differences amongst British settlers could also be accommodated in these new, more flexible, church floral traditions. Emily Robinson of Cheviot Hills Station married Patrick Campbell in 1890 and at this ceremony it was Scottish traditions that were prominent. Not only were the bridesmaids dressed in “sashes” with the “broad tartans of Clan Campbell and “Glengarry bonnets with eagle’s feathers” but it was “sprays of heather” that were thrown over the couple for good luck “as they passed down the aisle”.¹⁷² The flora of a church wedding had become a statement of cultural identity and of how people wished to present themselves, both to their own community, and for posterity.

For this reason, the white wedding emerged as a display of social-standing and economic status, as proved by the increasingly elaborate descriptions of weddings in the social pages of the newspapers. The bouquets for brides and bridesmaids in this era were usually made by professional florists, and reflect this new, socially aware, more ostentatious approach. In 1895, Nellie White married John Fraser in Timaru. According to the newspaper report of the wedding “she carried a lovely shower bouquet of white roses and hyacinths”. Her bridesmaids “carried white wands tipped by white posies tied with white ribbons with long streamers”. The bridesmaids’ bouquets became part of the wedding ritual. When “the newly wedded pair came out from the vestry the wands were raised, forming an arch for them to pass under”.¹⁷³ The term ‘shower bouquet’ came from the long, trailing nature of the flower arrangement which could sometimes spill down as low as the hem of the bride’s dress. Equally elaborate was the 1904 wedding of Janet Shury in Ashburton at which it was particularly noted that the bride had “a handsome shower bouquet of uncommon and beautiful lilies, with hand painted streamers”.¹⁷⁴

This reflected a shift in late-nineteenth century New Zealand from religious ritual towards “a modern consumer culture” that Alison Clarke also noted in her study of religious holidays such as Christmas.¹⁷⁵ This reflected contemporary international trends in Europe and the United States. Domestic changes in the colony by late-Victorian and Edwardian times, also influenced this process. Settler gardens were now well-established, and new technological developments such as faster transport on ships and railways, communication devices such as telegraphs and telephones and the growth of the floristry trade meant that learning about, and obtaining new

¹⁷² ‘Wedding at St Michael’s’, *The Press*, 30 July 1890, p. 6.

¹⁷³ ‘Fashionable Wedding’, *The Press*, 14 February 1895, p. 2.

¹⁷⁴ ‘Orange blossoms: Dawson-Shury’, *Ashburton Guardian*, 1 June 1904, p. 2.

¹⁷⁵ Clarke, *Holiday Seasons*, p. 71.

plants, seeds and bulbs had become easier than ever. Wedding flora of this era shows a corresponding leap in lavishness and variety and became increasingly representative of social as well as religious symbolism.

This is demonstrated through a colonial tradition that has not survived into modern times—that of the guests carrying bouquets, as well as the bridal party. Guests' bouquets were often highly symbolic, using colours or recognised flower meanings to compliment the new couple. At the wedding of Beatrice Palmer in 1890 “many of the guests wore and carried bouquets of spring flowers, reminding us of the near approach of spring”.¹⁷⁶ Spring, as a time of new beginnings in nature, seems to have been a popular time for weddings in colonial Canterbury. At the wedding of two members of Christchurch high society in 1893, one of the guests, a Miss Lean, was described by a journalist as carrying “a bouquet of lilies-of-the-valley and forget-me-nots” which reflected both her feelings for her friend who was getting married and presumably her wishes for the newly-wed couple.¹⁷⁷

Changes in fashion influenced the choices of floral decoration as well as bouquets. Church decorations could be a deliberate statement of gentility and taste, with the use of expensive and rare plants such as orchids. However, because of their more personal nature as a tribute from friends, floral decorations were, more often than not, composed of flowers that were full of personal symbolism shared between the women themselves. When Beatrice Walton was married in Papanui, Christchurch 1890, her female friends had decorated the church with “very pretty evergreens, hollyberries, and beautiful variegated leaves ... [and] on the altar stood bouquets of white Christmas roses” to symbolise the fact that it was a winter wedding.¹⁷⁸ Estelle Allan's wedding in 1897 was distinguished by the “special bouquets and floral devices of large daisies that had been tastefully and appropriately arranged by girlfriends of the bride”.¹⁷⁹ The choice of flowers referred to the nickname her friends had given her—Daisy. In another example, the 1901 wedding of Miss O. Hitchcock in Oxford “was tastefully decorated with white flowers and ferns ... and suspended from a lamp immediately over the heads of the bride and bridegroom was a bunch of fuchsia blossoms ... which appear to have some mysterious meaning, but if any of the young ladies are asked to give the true solution of the mystery, they

¹⁷⁶ ‘Wedding at St Michael's’, *The Press*, 6 August 1890, p. 6.

¹⁷⁷ ‘Fashionable Wedding’, *The Press*, 18 October 1893, p. 6.

¹⁷⁸ ‘Wedding at Papanui Church’, *The Press*, 27 August 1890, p. 6.

¹⁷⁹ ‘A Daisy Wedding’, *The Press*, 15 January 1897, p. 2.

simply smile and pass on”.¹⁸⁰ It is a reminder of the close-knit, private ties could exist between women in settler communities.



Figure 1.9: Massed floral decorations, such as those shown here, were common in late-nineteenth century wedding ceremonies (Courtesy of NZETC, Victoria University of Wellington).¹⁸¹

The fashion for floral decoration at weddings— such as those shown in Figure 1.9—also crossed over into religious cultures that had no tradition of floral ornamentation in religious ritual. Jack Goody, in *The Culture of Flowers*, states that “flowers and plants are not generally used in ceremonies at the synagogue”.¹⁸² Colonial Jewish brides seem to have been blissfully unaware of their faith’s strictures against flowers. Alternatively they may have deliberately overridden them. Mabel Louisson married Max Cohn in 1905 at the Christchurch Synagogue, which was “decorated with evergreens and arum lilies”.¹⁸³ The reception at the Art Gallery was equally “charmingly decorated”.¹⁸⁴ Five years later, a Miss Ehtenfried was married to Mabel’s brother. She carried a “handsome bouquet” up the aisle and had her wedding breakfast tables “tastefully decorated with white flowers”.¹⁸⁵ This is a clear indication of the ability of settler women to adapt to changing cultural circumstances.

¹⁸⁰ ‘Wedding at Tataraimaka’, *Oxford Observer*, 25 May 1901, p. 3.

¹⁸¹ ‘Interior of St. Michael’s Church’, NZETC, Victoria University of Wellington (Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 New Zealand Licence) <<http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/Cyc03Cycl-fig-Cyc03Cycl0191a.html>>.

¹⁸² Goody, p. 46.

¹⁸³ ‘A Fashionable Wedding’, *The Press*, 7 September 1905, p. 9.

¹⁸⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ ‘Fashionable Wedding’, *The Press*, 5 January 1910, p. 7.

The most popular form of wedding decoration in Christian church ceremonies, judging by the numerous times it is mentioned in newspaper descriptions, was the floral marriage bell. According to Coney, “the flower decorated marriage bell” was “a traditional wedding decoration which could be placed in the church or at the reception. If its petals fell on the bride, this was meant to bring good luck”.¹⁸⁶ Marriage bells seem to have been regional, rather than national phenomena back in England and this is reflected in a newspaper report on a wedding in Timaru in 1895. The writer, who was obviously from a part of England which did not have tradition, referred to the bell that hung in the church as “an innovation” in decoration.¹⁸⁷ Contrary to what that particular journalist believed, the marriage bell was an old tradition in England. It possibly has links with the old church custom of displaying ‘virgin crants’—also called ‘Maidens’ Garlands’—which were bell or crown-shaped floral decorations that were hung in churches in memory of young people who had died unmarried.¹⁸⁸ If the marriage bell does have similar cultural origins to the crants then it is a very old tradition. Some churches in England, such as one in Abbots Ann in Hampshire, have examples of crants that are over 250 years old.¹⁸⁹

Another British tradition that might have cultural connections with the colonial ritual of hanging up marriage bells, is the Garland Day ceremony, still celebrated up to the present day at Castleton in Derbyshire. Here in the shades of an old fertility rite, a chosen man rides through the town on horseback. His face and upper body are covered with an immense bell of flowers, and he is accompanied by a ‘May Queen’.¹⁹⁰ The exact origins of marriage bells would repay further study, but they were very much a reflection of an older religious past that still influenced colonial society.

In colonial Canterbury the floral marriage bell remained a homemade creation long after elaborate florists’ creations became popular for bridal bouquets. As with regular church decorations, the marriage bells were designed and made by female friends of the bride. A description from an Akaroa wedding in 1902, makes it clear that with this particular cultural ritual, the personal touch was still preferred: “St Andrew’s Church ... was charmingly decorated for the occasion by Misses Coop, Joblin and Williams, assisted by friends, the most

¹⁸⁶ Coney, *I Do*, p. 37.

¹⁸⁷ ‘Fashionable Wedding’, *The Press*, 14 February 1895, p. 2.

¹⁸⁸ John Timpson, *Timpson’s England* (Norwich: Jarrold Colour Productions, 1987), p. 192.

¹⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p. 193.

¹⁹⁰ Roy Christian, *Old English Customs*, 2nd edn (Trowbridge: David and Charles Ltd, 1972), pp. 44–45.

noteworthy feature of their artistic work being a large bell of white flowers, suspended from a point directly over the altar rails”.¹⁹¹

International Influences and Flora, 1890s-1914

The greatest innovation in floral wedding traditions from the 1890s, and hugely influential in Canterbury, was the influx of new flowers and shrubs, not to mention artistic ideals, from the emerging world power of Japan. The process of cultural transfer of plants from Japan was complex and multi-directional. James Beattie, Jason M. Heinzen and John P. Adams have demonstrated how, in colonial New Zealand, the image of Japan became that of a flower-loving society of considerable cultural sophistication.¹⁹² As a non-Western society that was rapidly industrialising and modernising from the 1860s onwards, the Japanese were also held up as a model for those ‘races’ who were under European rule.¹⁹³ The contacts between Japan and New Zealand gardeners were many, but as Beattie *et al.* point out, Christchurch in particular became a “major export destination”. By the end of the Edwardian era “at least sixty-two Japanese species were commonly obtainable” in Christchurch nurseries.¹⁹⁴

Japanese flowers became popular for wedding decorations from the 1890s. This was particularly true of the chrysanthemum, which is often mentioned in descriptions of bouquets and garlands. Its popularity was probably due to its novelty value, its availability in many different colours, and its suitability as a cut flower. It also had considerable romantic appeal as the symbol of the Japanese royal family who were often idealised in the Western press. The Emperor and Empress were figures of fascination and intrigue and anything associated with them had a corresponding air of glamour. The Empress was often described in deliberately poetic language as in this example from the Christchurch *Star*

Her figure is slender and youthful, her carriage graceful ... her gown is of violet, the imperial colour, brocaded with chrysanthemums, the royal flower.

It is the empress, in her garden, among her flowers. Everyone bows¹⁹⁵

According to British press articles that were reprinted in New Zealand newspapers, Japan “is the one really fascinating land still left to us” where there is as much sophisticated “art as the

¹⁹¹ ‘Wedding at Little River’, Akaroa and Banks Peninsula Daily Advertiser, 14 January 1902, p. 2.

¹⁹² James Beattie, Jasper M. Heinzen, and John P. Adam, ‘Japanese gardens and plants in New Zealand, 1850–1950: Transculturation and Transmission’, *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes: An International Quarterly*, 28 (2008), p. 221.

¹⁹³ *ibid.*, p. 230.

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 222.

¹⁹⁵ ‘Ladies Column’, The Star, 14 May 1904, p. 3.

Italy of the Renaissance”.¹⁹⁶ One of the most obvious heights of civilisation which the Japanese had reached, was that of the “cultivation of flowers” which was “carried to ... perfection”.¹⁹⁷ The possession of Japanese flowers and shrubs therefore linked Canterbury colonists with a worldwide network of plant distribution and artistic culture. They were high status plants that reflected a family’s wealth and cultural sophistication.

The fashion for Japanese flowers permeated all the main religious denominations in Canterbury and was prevalent from the 1890s onwards. Amy Rhodes was married in 1893 and the church in Merivale, Christchurch, was decorated with marguerites and Japanese lilies.¹⁹⁸ In Timaru three years later, Mary Kerr was married at an altar “covered with white chrysanthemum blooms” and farewelled with her new husband through a shower of “white chrysanthemum petals”.¹⁹⁹ These were all Anglican weddings but the Japanese influence was not confined to the Church of England. In 1911 Gertrude Waring was married in the Roman Catholic Church in Temuka, and her wedding table was “beautifully decorated with cherry blossoms”.²⁰⁰

The cultural meanings of plants did not always travel as well as the plants themselves and the use of Japanese flowers demonstrates some of the complications of cultural transfer. In Japan, chrysanthemums were a symbol of the royal family, but the white varieties popular for weddings in New Zealand, were actually linked to funerals and death in Japanese culture.²⁰¹ Similarly in Chinese society, white was representative of ghosts, death and mourning.²⁰² It is probable most colonists were unaware of this connection, and for those who were the overwhelming cultural imperatives of British white wedding traditions seem to have overridden any superstitious reluctance they might have to use flowers with such symbolism. It could be argued that this was appropriate enough in New Zealand, amongst people of British descent, but when colonial wedding ceremonies actually took place in these Asian cultures, the local communities must have been bewildered at the foreign preference for funeral colours on a wedding day.

¹⁹⁶ ‘The Fascination of Japan’, *The Star*, 1 July 1883, p. 2.

¹⁹⁷ ‘Japanese Flower Festivals’, *The Star*, 27 July 1901, p. 2.

¹⁹⁸ ‘Fashionable Wedding’, *The Press*, 2 February 1893, p. 5.

¹⁹⁹ ‘Marriage of Mr J.H. Smith and Miss Kerr’, *Timaru Herald*, 6 May 1896, p. 3.

²⁰⁰ ‘Weddings’, *Timaru Herald*, 23 September 1911, p. 1.

²⁰¹ Roger J. Davies, and Osamu Ikeno, eds, *The Japanese Mind: Understanding Contemporary Japanese Culture* (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 2002), p. 206.

²⁰² ‘Chinese customs, superstitions and traditions’, The Economic and Commercial Counsellor’s Office of the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the United States of America, 29 Nov, 2004, <<http://us2.mofcom.gov.cn/article/aboutchina/custom/200411/20041100004548.shtml>>.

In 1909, Maisie Deans, only granddaughter of Jane Deans of Riccarton Bush, Christchurch, married her fiancé who was a civil servant in Hong Kong. Her family's Presbyterian faith did not hinder her from having a lavish and highly decorative ceremony. The wedding had many elements that the European guests obviously found exotic and suitably 'oriental'.²⁰³ She was taken to the church in a sedan chair carried by "four stalwart coolies" clad in "white and scarlet uniforms".²⁰⁴ To a local audience these colours would symbolise death and joy, an unlikely, and probably unlucky, combination. The bride herself was dressed in "an exquisite gown of white satin charmeuse" and carried a bouquet that symbolised her old home (New Zealand fern) and her new home in the Far East (white tropical flowers).²⁰⁵ As Jack Goody has pointed out, in Chinese culture bouquets and wreaths tended to be only for shrines or coffins, so even the Western bridal tradition of holding a bouquet could convey an ambivalent message.²⁰⁶ As the whole wedding procession travelled along "the busy Queen's road" in Hong Kong, the sight must have been confusing to the local population who would have seen it as looking more like a funeral cortege than a bridal party.²⁰⁷

Maisie Deans was not the only Canterbury woman to be married in another part of the Empire. In 1913, Miss A.E. Campbell, a former schoolteacher from Timaru, arrived in Mlange mission station in Nyassaland (present-day Malawi) to be married to a white farmer. Her steamer could not dock so she landed "in the big basket running on a rope ... to the shore".²⁰⁸ Three days later she walked up the aisle to the sound of a choir made up of her husband's black workers, who sang the hymn *The Voice that Breathed o'er Eden*. The *Timaru Herald* reported that:

This is the first European wedding celebrated in the church, which was specially decorated for the occasion with tropical flowers and maidenhair ferns. The usual wedding feast followed the ceremony, for a wedding in Central Africa is much the same as a wedding in Timaru²⁰⁹

Only for white colonists one presumes. The statement demonstrates both an ignorance of African cultural customs and a touching faith in the transferability of British traditions that was prevalent throughout the empire. However moving to a new country meant negotiating a new

²⁰³ 'New Zealand Wedding in Hong Kong', *The Press*, 10 July 1909, p. 6.

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *ibid.*

²⁰⁶ Goody, p. 375.

²⁰⁷ 'New Zealand Wedding in Hong Kong', *The Press*, 10 July 1909, p. 6.

²⁰⁸ 'An African Wedding', *Timaru Herald*, 19 April 1913, p. 3.

²⁰⁹ *ibid.*

environment. After all brides from Timaru were unlikely to be carried to their new home in a sedan by “four stalwart natives” or be unable to leave the verandah “after dark, because wild beasts may be prowling around” (at least we hope so!).²¹⁰ After the wedding Miss Campbell’s experience demonstrated the centrality of gardens and familiar flowers to women settlers in an alien environment, as it was her first topic of conversation with the reporter.

... any flowers that grow well here [New Zealand] flourish there. The roses are magnificent, and she is successfully raising plants from New Zealand seed. Leading up to her house are long avenues of rubber trees, which meet overhead, affording the shade that is so necessary there²¹¹

The cultural transfer was not just one way. Here New Zealand plants were brought to Africa so that a colonial bride could feel more at home. There was also another aspect to the transference of New Zealand flora. Africa was strongly linked in colonial environmental ideas with disease, humidity, languorousness and even madness.²¹² New Zealand’s colonial image was seen as far healthier, and its flora and environment far more suited to the European constitution.²¹³ Planting New Zealand plants could be seen as Miss Campbell’s attempt to protect her health and the health, of her new husband, from the enervating effects of Africa’s climate.

While it is not mentioned in the newspaper item, it was presumably the other settler women of the Mlange district that decorated the church for this particular wedding. They would have already been through the process of trying to accommodate the new culture and landscape into the European mindset. It is tempting to wonder whether they too brought plants from other parts of the empire to help with the process of acclimatisation. Whether this was the case or not, their floral contributions to the wedding were an important community-building exercise and would have been intended as a gesture of welcome.

Critiques of Floral Traditions

It did not go unnoticed in wider society that fashion seemed to be trumping religious tradition. From the 1880s there was much social and religious criticism of the new trend of ostentation

²¹⁰ *ibid.*

²¹¹ *ibid.*

²¹² Will Jackson, *Madness and Marginality: The Lives of Kenya’s White Insane*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 24.

²¹³ James Beattie, ‘Colonial Geographies of Settlement: Vegetation, Towns, Disease and Well-being in Aotearoa/New Zealand, 1830s-1930s’, *Environment and History*, 14.4 (November, 2008) 583–610.

in bridal finery. A newspaper report on the subject was printed in the *Christchurch Press* in 1898. By this time the simplicity of early colonial marriages was definitely a thing of the past for middle- and upper-class families. Despite the fact that the report was obviously written for a London audience, the editor must have supposed that it would strike a chord with the New Zealand audience too. The article compares the “glaring discomfort and finery” of a modern society wedding with the uncomplicated nature of the old traditions and the writer is scathing about the artificiality of the new fashions.

And thank goodness, we who are in society have got rid of all that childish sentimental nonsense about one’s native village and a country church decorated by loving hands with flowers from the old garden²¹⁴

The increasing ostentation of weddings was obviously a current topic of discussion and another article entitled *Wedding Expenses* gave examples as to why. “These decorations are becoming so lavish that society is naturally beginning to rebel”.²¹⁵ It describes a London Society wedding at which the cost of one floral decoration alone was £1000.²¹⁶ While colonial weddings were unlikely to have reached such heights of extravagance, as in Britain the “large increase of cost is only too apparent”.²¹⁷ The article claims that for colonial families “marrying a daughter involves as much outlay as would suffice for the household expenditure of the young people for at least half a year”.²¹⁸

The Canterbury clergy were equally worried about the loss of old traditions and the imposition of these new, elaborate customs. In 1908, the Anglican Archdeacon Averill, preached at St. Michael’s in Christchurch against the way in which “great religious rites” were sinking “into mere social functions”.²¹⁹ Weddings had become “disfigured” by a “love of show and parade” in these days of “telephones and florists”.²²⁰ It was time, he declared, to “strike a blow at the presiding god at weddings—fashion”.²²¹ As he somewhat plaintively stated of these new-style ceremonies, “I sometimes wonder where God comes in”.²²²

²¹⁴ ‘Social Tyrannies of Today’, *The Press*, 6 October 1898, p. 2.

²¹⁵ ‘Wedding Expenses’, *New Zealand Herald*, 14 September 1898, p. 3.

²¹⁶ *ibid.*

²¹⁷ *ibid.*

²¹⁸ *ibid.*

²¹⁹ ‘A Rebuke from the Pulpit’, *The Press*, 22 October 1908, p. 3.

²²⁰ *ibid.*

²²¹ *ibid.*

²²² *ibid.*

Farewelling the Bridal Couple with Flowers, 1890-1914

The farewelling of newlyweds also depended upon flowers, although by the turn of the twentieth century, the floral tradition of showering the couples with petals was competing with the increasingly fashionable rice and confetti. The older custom of using rose petals had many advantages, not least in that it was suitable as a metaphor (the rose as a symbol of love) and for its practicality (there were very few settler gardens, no matter how small, that did not have at least one rose bush). When Beatrice Walton married Charles Cockburn-Hood at St Paul's Church in Christchurch in 1890, their flower girls "little Miss Matson and Miss Thomas strewed flowers in their path" as they left the church.²²³ Also in 1890, at the wedding of Beatrice Palmer "several children scattered flowers outside the church porch".²²⁴ On both these occasions the flowers mentioned were roses.

In the next few years the traditional rose petals began to be combined with newly popular objects such as rice, at society weddings, or were displaced entirely by fashionably exotic flowers. The girlfriends of Gertrude Reeves of Christchurch for example "pelted her with white chrysanthemums even to the church gate".²²⁵ A newspaper report of 1893, describes the wedding of Emily Rhodes to Reginald Hunter-Blair and how they took their "departure amid ... showers of good wishes, rice and rose leaves".²²⁶ Another Rhodes sister, Amy, had also married in 1893, and perhaps regretted the demise of the rose petal tradition as she drove away "amidst the usual showers of rice, *shoes* and good wishes".²²⁷

Despite the fact that throwing rice became fashionable, some people stayed with the old floral tradition for a very practical reason—being used as a target for hundreds of hard grains of rice could be decidedly uncomfortable. At Ethel Elworthy's wedding in South Canterbury in 1900, "bright coloured and harmless confetti" was used "in place of the cruelly stinging showers of rice".²²⁸ The *Akaroa Mail and Banks Peninsula Advertiser* of November 1909 reported on a local wedding where

the guests waited outside the church to greet the young couple in the orthodox style. Fortunately for them the missiles chosen were mostly rose leaves and

²²³ 'Wedding at Papanui Church', *The Press*, 27 August 1890, p. 6.

²²⁴ 'Wedding at St. Michaels's', *The Press*, 6 August 1890, p. 6.

²²⁵ 'Wedding at Opawa', *The Press*, 16 May 1890, p. 6.

²²⁶ 'Fashionable Wedding', *The Press*, 18 October 1893, p. 6.

²²⁷ 'Fashionable Wedding at Merivale', *The Press*, 2 February 1893, p. 5.

²²⁸ 'Wedding', *Timaru Herald*, 15 February 1900, p. 3.

there was very little rice about. As the bride and groom walked down the pathway ... they were literally deluged with rose leaves²²⁹

Presumably, if the items chosen to 'deluge' the couple had been rice grains, the word 'missiles' might have become appropriate.

Just a few years later, another floral farewelling tradition also had to be modified to fit the rapidly changing society of the early-twentieth century. Amy Rhodes had been driven away in a carriage, but when Edith Julius of Akaroa was married in 1914, she and her new husband "left shortly after three o'clock on a motorcycle with side car ... tin cans and a horse shoe made of flowers were tied to the back of the cycle, but they were soon cut off".²³⁰ A floral horse shoe attached to the back of a carriage might be charming but attached to a motorcycle, near the wheel and exhaust, it was simply dangerous. Modern transport would spell the end of large floral horseshoes as a common attachment to the wedding vehicle.

Garden Weddings, 1890-1914

If many of the floral traditions of Victorian weddings such as floral horseshoes, and guest bouquets did not survive, a tradition that not only survived, but also thrived with increasing popularity, is that of the garden wedding or reception. Unlike in Britain, the lack of an established state church in New Zealand meant that where people were married became less important than who was entitled to perform the ceremony. This flexibility, and the temperate New Zealand climate, meant that the garden was widely adopted as an appropriate physical and psychological space for a wedding.

Garden wedding ceremonies had the obvious disadvantage of being vulnerable to the vagaries of the weather. When the weather behaved itself garden weddings seem to have been greatly enjoyed. The wedding of Emma Lambie in 1894 is a case in point. If the newspaper report is to be believed, "the day was perfect, not a cloud in the sky" which is lucky because the ceremony "took place on the lawn" with the Rev. W. Grant, of Leeston presiding.²³¹ The advantage of garden wedding ceremonies was that the family had total control of the ceremonial space and how they wished to represent it. As shown in Figure 1.10, at the 1902 wedding of Fanny Rogers to George Gudsell, several generations of their families posed in the

²²⁹ 'Wedding', Akaroa Mail and Banks Peninsula Advertiser, 5 November 1909, p. 2.

²³⁰ 'Wedding', Akaroa Mail and Banks Peninsula Advertiser, 22 May 1914, p. 3.

²³¹ 'Weddings', The Press, 6 April 1894, p. 6.

garden for a photograph. The resulting picture portrays them as the epitome of colonial success, prosperity, hard work and fecundity.



Figure 1.10: The family presented for posterity in the garden, at the wedding of George Gudsell to Fanny Rogers, Selwyn District, 1902 (Courtesy of Kete Selwyn).²³²

The garden wedding of Beatrice Bowker to T. Wright, in 1908, received a highly detailed review in the *Timaru Herald*, partly due to the novelty of such an occasion. It was held on the “flower-bordered lawn in front of the residence”.²³³ Carpets had been laid down from the door to the lawn and the rest of the description demonstrates the amount of organisation needed to stage such an event.

Down the rich green oval there was marked out with daisies and rose leaves a 4-foot pathway, the bride and bridegroom walking between the floral lines. In the centre of the lawn, alongside a wide-spreading weeping ash, there was erected a dais with steps, and here under cover of a large Japanese umbrella, the nuptial knot was tied. An organ and piano were completely embowered beneath the drooping ash²³⁴

Once the formal ceremony was over the legal niceties still had to be attended to so

The newly-wedded pair had to walk further down the lawn, still between lines of strewn flowers, to a little rustic tea kiosk, at the entrance to which hung a huge floral bell and here they signed the marriage register²³⁵

It was still a novel enough occasion for the *Timaru Herald* to describe the arrangements as “somewhat off the beaten track” but the paper also conceded that this “open-air gathering”

²³² ‘Wedding of George Gudsell to Fanny Rogers, 1902’, Selwyn Library, (Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 New Zealand License)
<http://keteselwyn.peoplesnetworknz.info/family_history/images/show/431-wedding-of-george-gudsell-to-fanny-rogers-1902>.

²³³ ‘A Pretty Wedding’, *Timaru Herald*, 30 December 1908, p. 2.

²³⁴ *ibid.*

²³⁵ *ibid.*

made “an exceedingly pretty picture”.²³⁶ The inclusion of Japanese elements, such as the umbrella and tea house, made this an exceedingly fashionable wedding as well as an unusual one.

The garden wedding might still be a novelty in the early-twentieth century but the garden reception party was already a widely accepted tradition, particularly amongst families with large, elegant gardens. The Japanese elements that were so fashionable also appeared in one particular wedding reception of 1887, when a Miss Hamilton of Christchurch married F. Robinson of Napier. The bride and bridegroom stood “in the pretty garden” to receive their guests.²³⁷ The newspaper description continues:

In all sorts of nooks were comfortable chairs and little tables, suggestive of rest, champagne and wedding cake; and under the shade of a large Japanese umbrella reposed the cake itself.²³⁸

The couple left for their honeymoon—“at four o’clock, surrounded by sunshine and flowers”.²³⁹ In 1893, at the small settlement of Cust, north of Christchurch, a wedding reception was held at the “residence of Mrs Garland where a sumptuous breakfast was provided in a large marquee erected on the lawn”.²⁴⁰ In the same year, another small town, Darfield, celebrated a wedding reception in exactly the same manner where “a large marquee had been erected among the trees, and here the wedding breakfast was held”.²⁴¹

The socially prominent Emily Rhodes of Elmwood in Christchurch also had a garden party for her wedding in 1893 but it was a decidedly more ostentatious affair. In the obligatory marquee there “was a splendid display of flowers for the decoration of the table” including “a magnificent display of 1250 blooms of lilies-of-the-valley”.²⁴² This was less a display of nature and more one of wealth and status. Just as with exotic flora from the Far East, the availability of mass decorations such as these spoke of those with the time, money, staff and hothouse technology to devote to the cultivation of sometimes rare and valuable plants for their beauty alone. Alternatively, magnificent floral displays were a sign of a family with the economic ability to order the very best of fashionable floristry. Emily Rhodes’ sister Amy had also

²³⁶ *ibid.*

²³⁷ ‘A Summer Wedding’, *The Star*, 14 November 1887, p. 3.

²³⁸ *ibid.*

²³⁹ *ibid.*

²⁴⁰ ‘Wedding’, *The Oxford Observer*, 22 April 1893, p. 3.

²⁴¹ ‘Wedding’, *Ashburton Guardian*, 21 April 1893, p. 2.

²⁴² ‘Fashionable Wedding’, *The Press*, 18 October 1893, p. 6.

married earlier that same year and she, too, had a post-wedding “entertainment taking the form of a garden party” which was presumably equally lavish.²⁴³

The garden party reception did not necessarily reflect just the British background of the colonists. It could contain elements of other cultures important to the family and their history. Inclusion of exotic components such as Beatrice Bowker’s Japanese umbrella sometimes mirrored fashionable tastes, but they could also be directly related to the family’s cultural representation of themselves. In 1895, Jessie Babington of Opawa, Christchurch was married in the presence of many guests, including her father Colonel Babington “late of the Bengal Army”.²⁴⁴ Their Indian background obviously meant a great deal to the family, so much so that when the bride and groom received their guests at the garden party they “stood on a rich Indian rug on the lawn”.²⁴⁵ The example of Miss Babington is a pertinent reminder that Canterbury colonists had connections all over the empire, not just with Britain. A garden reception could lend itself to many versions of social and cultural presentation and this probably accounts for some of its popularity with settlers who came from similarly varied backgrounds.

Garden wedding-receptions were not always so deliberately grand. In 1898, Selina Williams of Waimate, married J. L. Harwood, who was leader of the Waimate Brass Band. Later that day “the festivities continued in a large marquee in Mr Williams’ garden. The Waimate Brass Band was present and contributed much to the evening’s enjoyment”.²⁴⁶ This presumably noisy and jolly reception was certainly far more common than the elaborate high society ‘do’ exemplified by the Rhodes sisters’ society garden parties.

Even that representative of the establishment, a local vicar, was happy to have the more relaxed option of a garden reception. Ethel Julius, daughter of Rev. A. H. Julius of Akaroa, was married in 1909, by no less than the clergyman who disliked frippery—Archdeacon Averill. Not surprisingly then, this wedding, though obviously that of a financially well-off family, was unusually modest. The bride’s veil had been “worked by herself and looked exceedingly dainty”.²⁴⁷ The reception party relied less on lavish displays and more on the natural beauty of a well-tended garden. The *Akaroa Mail and Banks Peninsula Advertiser* stated that the

Vicarage grounds looked exceedingly pretty ... the sun was bright, and there

²⁴³ ‘Fashionable Wedding’, *The Press*, 2 February 1893, p. 5.

²⁴⁴ ‘Wedding at Opawa’, *The Press*, 10 April 1895, p. 6.

²⁴⁵ *ibid.*

²⁴⁶ ‘Local News’, *Waimate Daily Advertiser*, 19 November 1898, p. 4.

²⁴⁷ ‘Wedding’ *Akaroa Mail and Banks Peninsula Advertiser*, 5 November 1909, p. 2.

was practically no wind at all. In front of the house is a large rose garden with some fine roses out in it... an adjournment was made to the lawn, where afternoon tea and wine were dispensed to the guests²⁴⁸

Presumably the Archdeacon registered his approval.

From the 1880s onwards, the garden wedding-reception also reflected the cultural preoccupations with active games, sport and physical fitness. Many wedding reception organisers took advantage of the outdoor setting to arrange games and sports as part of the entertainment. When Miss Fitton of Akaroa married Mr Joyce in November 1889, towards the end of the reception “a party had a game of cricket in Mrs Shadbolt’s paddock”.²⁴⁹ At Oxford in 1891, Miss E. Powell was married to Mr Richard Fenwick. After the ceremony “games were indulged in in an adjoining paddock ... our local artist Mr De Loree photographed the wedding party as they sat on the green sward”.²⁵⁰ By 1896, the craze for tennis courts was well under way for middle- and upper-class gardeners, and when Mary Jollie married Major Robert Storey in Akaroa that year, the new venue came in handy for the wedding reception. The *Akaroa Mail and Banks Peninsula Advertiser* reported that “during the afternoon Mrs Jollie gave a tennis party, at which numerous friends of the family were present”.²⁵¹ The 1904 wedding of a Miss Palliser of Timaru to Mr S. Smith concluded with “evening festivities” in which “outdoor games were carried on with spirit, and the fernery, hothouses and vinehouse were centres of attraction”.²⁵²

Sometimes these physical activities could be impromptu events, but more often than not they were a fully-planned component of the celebrations. As with garden weddings, the use of sports as part of the entertainment also reflects the more relaxed attitude towards special occasions that existed in colonial society. The milder climate might also have had much to do with the popularity of games and activities at weddings. Certainly the elaborate, formal weddings and parties were not always the most popular option no matter how impressive a spectacle they provided.

Despite the expense, not to mention the clerical disapproval, the final end of the lavish Victorian wedding with its floral decorations, wreaths, bells, shower bouquets and wands, was

²⁴⁸ *ibid.*

²⁴⁹ ‘Happy, Happy, Happy Pair’, *Akaroa Mail and Banks Peninsula Advertiser*, 5 November 1889, p. 5.

²⁵⁰ ‘Marriage’, *Oxford Observer*, 27 June 1891, p. 3.

²⁵¹ ‘Fashionable Marriage’, *Akaroa Mail and Banks Peninsula Advertiser*, 18 February 1896, p. 2.

²⁵² ‘Wedding’, *Timaru Herald*, 2 January 1904, p. 1.

not to come until the beginning of the First World War. In the sombre times ahead the ostentation seemed in very bad taste. Even at the beginning of the war, sheer practicality dictated that simple weddings were better, as young men were often ‘called up’ with little notice, and ceremonies had to be arranged quickly, before their departure. In September 1914, Lt. Commander Denistoun married Beatrix Pyne in Timaru. “As originally planned,” the *Timaru Herald* explained, “the marriage was not to take place for some time but owing to the fact that the bridegroom is about to leave for the war, it was hurriedly arranged for today”.²⁵³ The bride’s girlfriends still had time to decorate the church with white flowers, but only with the help of “Sister Alice, one of the deaconesses” who at least ensured the “altar was a mass of arum lilies”.²⁵⁴ The return, in a situation of extremity, to the old, traditional wedding flowers is interesting and perhaps reflects the uncertainty of the times as much as the obvious difficulty in obtaining more exotic flowers at short notice.

Conclusion

Gardens and flowers were inextricably entwined with many cultural courtship and wedding customs. The garden was seen as an appropriate place for courting rituals to be performed. Religious beliefs supported the cultural identification of women with gardens and nature as did popular culture in the form of poetry and books. In the early colonial period, because of the small size of most dwellings, gardens also afforded couples one of the few places available for private meetings. Even in the later colonial period, when houses were considerably more grand, couples made use of garden designs which encouraged courtship. By the latter period, more energetic, mixed gender games reflecting fashionable ideals of racial health and national fitness took place in the gardens of estates and homesteads. Working-class women who adhered to middle-class standards of behaviour were also permitted to use estate gardens for courting.

Other cultural ideas about the importance of health and fitness within wedlock meant some women who did not meet those standards were discouraged from marrying altogether. For them, the garden became an important space to experience some independence and freedom, as well as being a site wherein they could retain their fitness and usefulness to the family. But for those women who did not end up as ‘old maids’, colonial weddings were permeated with the presence of flowers and the garden, both metaphorically and literally. The simplicity and improvisation of the early settlers, who used whatever was available from their gardens for

²⁵³ ‘Weddings’, *Timaru Herald*, 26 September 1914, p. 3.

²⁵⁴ *ibid.*

church decorations and bouquets, contrasted with the elaborate late-Victorian ceremonies which represented the very latest floral extravagances that could be obtained through new fashions, technologies, and occupations such as floristry.

Although by the early-twentieth century there was criticism by religious and social commentators on the ridiculous heights of lavishness displayed at contemporary weddings, not every occasion was an elaborate society event. With games and dancing in paddocks and barns, many garden weddings and receptions were remarkably relaxed, and were thus important events in maintaining community cohesion. Another advantage was that a wedding or reception in the garden also meant that families had more control over how they wished to represent themselves, and their cultural heritage, to the local community and beyond.

By the early-twentieth century, the ostentatiousness of Victorian weddings slowly went out of fashion and the new technologies now available, such as motor cars, meant that some traditions such as mass floral decorations on the wedding vehicle were now impractical. The advent of war in 1914 meant that weddings became simpler, starker and were often organised at short notice. The one aspect that did last was the idea of the garden as a wedding venue and an appropriate place for couples to begin married life. The next chapter examines aspects of that married life and looks at both working and romantic partnerships in the garden, and what happened when the garden ceased to be an idyllic space and became instead a place of conflict.

Chapter 2:

Married Life

Introduction

The first creation of a garden around settler homesteads was often the result of marriage plans and most settler wives would have expected at least a functioning kitchen garden to be in place after the wedding, even if the pleasure garden had to wait. Most husbands were aware of this and usually went to considerable effort to have some form of garden ready to show their bride when she arrived at their new home. Women generally welcomed a garden around the often small, rough and ready houses of the colonial period. This was for aesthetic reasons as well as the fact that the garden played an important part in their expected duties as food producer for the family. Men who refused or were unable to provide their wives with the basics of a garden were seen to be not fulfilling part of their accepted marital duties.

Gardens were sites of cooperative partnerships between men and women and the success of many early colonial economic ventures was predicated on this being the case. Because many colonial women were left alone to manage farms and estates, they too played a key role in the environmental transformation of the South Island landscape. Their impact on the environment, particularly in the area of gorse plant production has received little academic attention and their contribution to the colonial economy has likewise been minimalised.

Another aspect of colonial married life that has been noticeable by its absence in the historiography, is that of romantic relationships between settler husband and wives. The garden was one of the places in which it was considered appropriate to display affection and many married couples found the garden a source of mutual pleasure, a place to relax and talk and, in their later years, a fully established symbol of all their endeavours and hopes for the future.

However, not all marriages were unequivocally happy. The garden was an ambiguous place as the boundary site between public and private places. It could have a similarly ambiguous status for women who used it as a source and site of resistance, both within their marriage, and within their community. Occasionally they could use the familiar cultural identification of women with the garden as a tool to achieve their own purposes, but at other times conflict in the garden

could reflect women who were at odds with the prevailing attitudes towards gender and race in colonial society.

Gardens and Newly-Weds

Gardens were considered such a vital part of the lives of colonial women that when a man was soon to marry it was expected that he would start work on the garden for his future spouse. Strongman has asserted that “the pleasure garden on the homestead often entered the mind of the pioneer farmer only when he married”.²⁵⁵ The evidence does suggest that impending marriage frequently led to improvements of the homestead gardens and surroundings. It was important symbolically for men because it indicated their wealth and means, and thus their ability to provide for a wife. When John Barton Acland’s engagement to Emily Harper was finalised in the late 1850s, he started to design flowerbeds for his homestead, including one that “was made especially for Emily’s use”.²⁵⁶ He even used his choice of roses to pay tribute to his new bride, as one of the varieties he selected was named ‘Belle Emilie’.²⁵⁷ When Charles Tripp of Orari Gorge built his homestead he made sure that “a garden was begun immediately with shrubs and saplings brought down from Christchurch on a dray”, before he took his wife there in the mid-1860s.²⁵⁸

However while the ‘pleasure garden’ was important both psychologically and aesthetically to women it should not be forgotten that the colonial wife also expected (and usually needed) to possess a fully functioning kitchen garden with vegetables and fruit trees. This was particularly important to the first two generations of settler women (1850–1880s) who were often living in rural situations with an inadequate transportation infrastructure. Indeed, the health and survival of the family at that time could depend upon the success of colonial wives growing food in the garden. As Charlotte Macdonald suggests “colonial households also tended to be self-sufficient. Most produced their own eggs, poultry and butter as well as growing and preserving fruit and vegetables”.²⁵⁹ When a husband did not bother to provide kitchen garden necessities for his wife he risked incurring the disapproval of the local community.

²⁵⁵ Thelma Strongman, *The Gardens of Canterbury: A History* (Wellington: A. H. & A. W Reed Ltd, 1984), p. 36.

²⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 81.

²⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 87.

²⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 76.

²⁵⁹ Charlotte MacDonald, *A Woman of Good Character* (Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1990), p. 122.

Sarah Ann Walker moved to upper Lincoln, outside Christchurch, in 1861, with her unreliable and sometimes violent husband. Within weeks the local community had taken the measure of the man and began providing his wife and children with things that would, in normal circumstances, have been considered his responsibility. Sarah described the events in a letter back home to her family in Britain. She wrote “the next thing I heard the master [local estate owner] had been enquiring into our circumstances and behold up comes the dray with the master and his wife ... it stopped at the door and he hauls out two sacks of potatoes, one for eating and one for planting ... in a day or two another neighbour sends a lot of all sorts of plants and young trees such as gooseberries, currants ... elderberries and many plants around the house for shelter”.²⁶⁰ This was obviously a gesture of support for the beleaguered wife and children as well as a gesture of scorn for an inadequate provider. It is an interesting incident for it demonstrates that a wife who had no legal rights in an unhappy marriage, could, however, gain the tacit support of the local community.

As well as many rights and privileges, the patriarchal system imposed obligations on men—those men who did not fulfil these obligations could be regarded with contempt. This system of unofficial support from prominent male members of the community could also extend to women who were coping on their own, often due to being widowed or deserted by their husbands. Helen Gibb’s husband Stewart drowned in 1867, soon after purchasing 60 acres at Cabbage Tree Flat, near Cheviot.²⁶¹ Helen Gibb decided to stay and make a go of the land by establishing an accommodation house for travellers going to and from the North Canterbury stations. She was described as a hard-working, godly Scotswoman (no alcohol was served at her boarding house) and quickly won the admiration and support of the local community for the way in which she successfully ran the business whilst bringing up a young family of three boys and a girl. William Robinson of Cheviot Station recognised the important economic role Helen played in facilitating trade and contact in the local area. He provided her with fruit trees and flowers for the accommodation house garden, both to brighten the place up so that she could attract more custom, and to provide another source of food for the kitchens. Any fruit from those trees might also have been cooked on a “cooking range from Joubert and Twopenny in Christchurch” that William also paid for from his account.²⁶² Certainly there was an element

²⁶⁰ Ian Pidgeon, ed., *Letters from New Zealand (1859–1883); Sarah Ann Walker* (St Albans: Privately Published, 2002), p. 65.

²⁶¹ Margaret Wrigley, ‘Ready Money’, *The Life of William Robinson of Hill River, South Australia and Cheviot Hills, North Canterbury* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2006), p. 270.

²⁶² *ibid.*, p. 271.

of commercial opportunism in William's help, but more noticeable was the communal appreciation for this woman who "never stopped working".²⁶³ Helping her establish a garden could have made her feel that she was under some sort of feudal obligation to him, but Helen seems to have been very much aware of the vital economic role that she played in the community and accepted the gesture as it was intended—as an acknowledgment of all her hard work, despite the tragic loss of her husband.

In 1874, Alpheus Hayes of South Canterbury was preparing to marry his fiancée, Anna. He built a cottage and "round it he put up a white picket fence with enough ground enclosed for a small garden". Only after all this was ready did the marriage take place.²⁶⁴ There was obviously a deep-seated feeling in colonial culture that a house without a functioning garden was not properly finished. The completion of a house and garden for a new wife became a way in which husbands could indicate their level of care, and their abilities as provider for the family.

If a husband was not able to provide an already established garden for his new bride—usually because the land had only just been purchased—it could have a negative psychological impact on her first glimpse of her new home. This, too, was more common in the first two decades of settlement when large areas of land still remained to be made 'productive', or 'civilised' in settler terminology. Some men were aware of this fact and tried their best to hurry along progress at their new homesteads. F. H. Smith of Cheviot wrote of how his sweetheart Ada was "back in Ashburton ... and I kept her informed of all our doings ... as soon as we were ring-fenced and stocked we had carpenters add a two-roomed house to the hut and here in November 1894 I brought Ada as my bride. There was only an iron chimney ... no trees for shelter, and generally speaking rough conditions indeed for a woman".²⁶⁵

²⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 272.

²⁶⁴ M. Anna Hayes, *From The Toss of a Coin: The story of Alpheus Hayes and Normanvale South Canterbury* (Christchurch: Pegasus Press, 1978), p. 16.

²⁶⁵ Douglas Cresswell, *The Story of Cheviot* (Cheviot: Cheviot County Council, 1951), p. 143.



Figure 2.1: photograph of the Mount Peel Station building circa 1850 (Courtesy of Macmillan Brown Library).²⁶⁶

The women themselves often recorded their disappointment in the basic conditions at an unfinished homestead and garden, such as that shown in the early days of settlement at Mount Peel Station, 1850s, in Figure 2.1. Note how the crinolined figures of the women, on the left of the photograph, are dwarfed by the stark tussock-covered hills. Many women felt overwhelmed by what they saw as the desolation of the landscape. Effie Channon had honeymooned in Akaroa in 1860, with her new husband Michael Studholme and seen some beautifully established gardens.²⁶⁷ The comparison of such places with the site of her new home, Te Waimate, obviously made her feel rather bleak. In her memoirs she described how she

tried to walk out, but the ground was sloppy, and the creek uncrossable. The only cleared piece of ground was a small paddock, now the vegetable garden; and, be it remembered it was the depths of winter. The garden was a blank excepting some cabbages ... there were some fruit trees ... the weather

²⁶⁶ MB 44, Acland Family papers, Reference code 116, 'Mesopotamia Station, Upper Rangitata', Photographer E. P. Sealy, Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury.

²⁶⁷ E. C. Studholme, *Te Waimate: Early Station Life in New Zealand* (Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed, 1954), p. 53.

continued bad ... the ground was rough and uncultivated; tall flax, grasses and scrub, most unpleasant when wet and no object in walking²⁶⁸

A cultivated garden could make all the difference, as seen by her reaction to the same scene when returning to Te Waimate some time later after a trip away. By this time, she “found the house nearly finished ... the garden was bright with blossoming fruit trees, and when I remembered the place, in its former desolation ... it seemed to me to be perfectly beautiful”.²⁶⁹

Arriving in a raw, barren landscape was disheartening for a new bride, particularly if she came from an urban background or indeed straight from Britain. Those married women who came to their new homes and found a finished house and blooming garden seem to have had a psychological advantage in starting out on married life. To be greeted with a beautiful, well-tended garden, perhaps draped in a welcome sign by the family or the estate workers as in Figure 2.2 could give new, and presumably nervous, wives a genuine sense of belonging. Frances Caverhill had an overwhelmingly positive first impression of the surroundings of her new home. On 1 February 1859 she noted that “I like the place very much. John took us to see both gardens, everything looks well, plenty of apples and peaches, it seems altogether pleasant and homelike”.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ E. C. Studholme, p. 65.

²⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 70.

²⁷⁰ Barbara Harper *Petticoat Pioneers: South Island Women of the Colonial Era Vol. 3* (Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed Ltd, 1980), p. 30.



Figure 2.2: Acland bride Evelyn being welcomed home to Mt. Peel gardens, early 1900s (Courtesy of Macmillan Brown Library).²⁷¹

Similarly Aline Studholme, who, as the daughter of the Archbishop of York, was used to living in a refined and elegant setting, was welcomed to her new home, at Coldstream Station in 1897, by a mass planting effort initiated by her new mother-in-law. In an appreciative letter to thank his mother for her hard work, Jack Studholme wrote “The garden is beginning to look very bright with flowers thanks to you, and the primroses and daffodils are making a great show and are greatly admired”.²⁷² Such kind gestures not only helped brides settle into what could be a very alien (and alienating) environment, but often cemented family ties. After the birth of her first child Aline wrote to her mother-in-law urging her to come and stay because “It seems such

²⁷¹ MB 44, Acland Family papers, Reference code 137, ‘Hugh Acland and wife Evelyn on their arrival at Mt Peel Station after their marriage in England’, Unknown Photographer, Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury.

²⁷² E. J. Studholme, *Coldstream: The Story of a Sheep Station on the Canterbury Plains 1854–1934* (Upper Hutt: Wright and Carman Ltd, 1985), p. 46.

ages since you were last here and your spring garden is looking perfectly glorious and a joy to me every minute”.²⁷³

If a garden was not yet begun (or completed) before the wedding day, many couples utilised the fairly recent tradition of the honeymoon as an opportunity to collect useful or exotic flora for their gardens. The honeymoon had begun to be an important factor in early wedded life from the early-nineteenth century.²⁷⁴ For young middle- or upper- class couples in Britain it often involved a European tour, with a particular emphasis on visiting gardens both for their appropriately romantic Edenic imagery and for the potential seclusion they offered. Obviously the European option was not available to early New Zealand settlers, but the link with the garden seems to have been transferred wholesale to the colonies.

The Christchurch *Press* in 1905 gave a satirical slant to honeymoons centred around the garden in a piece entitled ‘*Is Married Life Dull?*’ The journalist wrote

I have never gone through a honeymoon ... Perhaps when I do ... I too, shall sit on a garden bench by my chosen bride, staring at nothing and punctuating the enchanted silences with those grimaces which denote the birth and death of the partially suppressed yawn²⁷⁵

Despite the cynical tone this article emphasised one truth about the honeymoon—that for the majority of middle- or upper- class couples it might be the first time they had spent any length of consistently private time together.

In the early years of settlement in Canterbury, before major towns and amenities were well-established, honeymooners of the appropriate class were likely to be invited to stay on the estates of local landowners. Not only did the gardens of such homesteads act as replacements for the pleasure gardens of Britain and Europe, but they were also a source for plants, cuttings and seeds that the host might give to the new bride for her own future garden. For the first generation of settlers such gifts were far more common than the status-linked material goods considered appropriate for wedding presents towards the end of the nineteenth century.

²⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 56.

²⁷⁴ John R. Gillis, *For Better or For Worse, British Marriages 1600 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 38.

²⁷⁵ ‘*Is Married Life Dull?*’, *The Press*, 13 July 1905, p. 2.

In 1860 Michael Studholme “took his bride to Te Waimate” and stopped off en route to stay with “Mr Woolcombe who was magistrate for the area”.²⁷⁶ The new Mrs Studholme received a present of “some cuttings of a jessamine [jasmine] that was growing luxuriantly round his house”.²⁷⁷ Garden produce was also considered an appropriate gift for a honeymooning couple, particularly fruit which provided fresh food as well as potential seeds for new trees and plants. The Studholmes were given a large bunch of grapes at Akaroa, and they would have been expected to keep the seeds to create their own vines after they arrived at their new home.²⁷⁸ It is yet another reminder of the vital role women played in food production for their future households.

For later generations of settlers, when subsistence gardening was no longer so essential, the honeymoon was often centred around visiting places that would provide beautiful or unusual plants or trees for the garden. One of the more exotic honeymoons on record for colonial Canterbury was that of Heaton Rhodes of Otahuna, and bride Jessie in 1891, to the newly fashionable, and accessible, islands of Japan. Whilst there they visited the famous garden of Kinkakuji, the Golden Pavilion. Jessie, who came from a prominent Australian floricultural family, described the wooded riverside foliage around her as “beautiful, cryptomerias, larches, bamboos, maples, beeches, all growing in rank profusion”.²⁷⁹ They also took the opportunity to purchase exotic new flowers from a Japanese bulb nursery for the garden they were already planning back in Canterbury.²⁸⁰

There were few other settlers who could afford a similar honeymoon trip but many still chose to base their honeymoon on obtaining plants and seeds for the garden. Another member of the Rhodes family, Robert Heaton Rhodes, took his wife (another Jessy!) to Stewart Island for their honeymoon and Jessy seems to have spent most of her time finding “young trees” to take home, including a “rimu, two ratas and a red beech”.²⁸¹ In 1890, Annie Brown went on honeymoon to the West Coast of the South Island with her new husband Herbert Brown of Mt Thomas Station. They collected different varieties of ferns on their trip, which were planted as soon as they arrived back at the homestead. Their plant collecting habit was to continue throughout

²⁷⁶ E. C. Studholme, p. 56.

²⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 56.

²⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 53.

²⁷⁹ Geoffrey W. Rice, *Heaton Rhodes of Otahuna: The Illustrated Biography* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2001), p. 78.

²⁸⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 78–80.

²⁸¹ A. E. Woodhouse, *Blue Cliffs: The Biography of a South Canterbury Sheep Station 1856–1970* (Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed, 1982), p. 58.

their marriage with plants coming back to Mt Thomas from as far away as Fiji, Holland and Yokohama, Japan.²⁸² Annie took over the greenhouse and “together they planned their garden for the following spring”.²⁸³ For them, as for many newlyweds, the creation of a garden was one of their first priorities. The fact that the sourcing of plants for the garden played a significant role in such an intimate experience as the honeymoon demonstrates the extent to which gardens were for many couples a cooperative and personal endeavour.

Gardens were an integral part of the newly-wed experience for middle- and upper-class colonists. For women they provided an essential space for food production, and a welcome aesthetic dimension to their new homes; so much so that when a garden had not been prepared for them and the land was left in its raw, natural state many women felt their new homes to be gloomy and depressing. Colonial men felt that it was an important part of their role as husbands, to provide both kitchen and pleasure gardens for their wives, as a way of demonstrating their means and ability to care. Men who failed in their duty to give their spouses the basics needed for family food production, were treated with contempt. Creating gardens also became the method through which other family members could welcome the bride to the family and thus firmly fix ties across the generations. New brides were often given gifts of plants, seeds, and cuttings from their accommodation hosts on honeymoon, particularly in the early colonial period 1850–1880 when it was common to honeymoon as guests of already established families. This was a recognised way for brides to gain the necessary resources to start their own garden, and hosts usually provided both edible and decorative plants. By the end of the nineteenth century this practice was dying out. Many new wives already had plans and ideas for their gardens and the rise of more further afield honeymoon destinations—including those overseas—meant that women had greater choice of fashionable and exotic plants. Plant-collecting became a popular part of the honeymoon experience.

Married Life and Relationships in the Garden

The ‘breaking in’ of the land was a joint endeavour between husbands and wives, and for many colonial couples the garden symbolised the future they hoped to build together. The garden was a space of multiple uses and meanings. It functioned as an area for food production, shelter, entertainment, relaxation after a hard day’s work and a place of rare privacy for discussions, decision making and companionate walks. The *Ashburton Guardian* of October 1897

²⁸² Strongman, pp. 154–156.

²⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 152.

summarised the ideal image of husbands and wives on the land. “Where many of these farms are now,” the writer enthused, there was once “a waste of golden tussock. Now there is presented to the eye a sea of dark green” and “it is no uncommon thing to see the goodwife with the husband, busy in either the flower or the vegetable garden”.²⁸⁴ The rural idyll portrayed in this statement is emphasised by the use of the archaic English term ‘goodwife’. It shows the significance of women as a key component in the European picture of advancing civilisation.

This was an ideal promulgated by early colonial promoters such as Edward Jerningham Wakefield who saw the partnership between men and women as central to the colonising process.²⁸⁵ However, despite this, there has been little research on the co-operative emotional, social and economic relationships between spouses in colonial society and a disproportionate emphasis on marital discord and gender differences. The evidence from many letters and diaries of middle- and upper- class settlers demonstrates that there was a surprising degree of closeness, trust and support among many husbands and wives.

It should be asked why so many New Zealand historians have overlooked this partnership, as for many women it could have been the most meaningful relationship of their lives. Erik Olssen examined families in the colonial period in *The Gendered Kiwi* and concluded that: “For wives alone in households without other women, life could be hard. Some obtained certain solace from writing and receiving letters, and the colonists could be great correspondents. Yet most women had some daughters and many obtained considerable satisfaction from managing their own households”.²⁸⁶ It is obvious that in some situations, such as labour and childbirth, the presence of another woman could be a comfort or even a godsend, however, Olssen’s statement strangely neutralises any emotional support or friendship that a colonial wife might derive from the company of her husband. Yet Jeanine Graham’s work on pioneer families came to the conclusion that “anxieties were, for the most part, shared within the marriage rather than outside it” and “the men and women who coped best” with the vicissitudes of settler life “were those in supportive relationships”.²⁸⁷ The evidence here supports that argument and adds

²⁸⁴ ‘Highbank’, Ashburton Guardian, 16 October 1897, p. 2.

²⁸⁵ Erik Olssen, ‘Families and the Gendering of European New Zealand in the Colonial Period, 1840–1880’ in *The Gendered Kiwi*, ed. by Caroline Daley and Deborah Montgomerie (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1999), pp. 36–62.

²⁸⁶ *ibid.*

²⁸⁷ Jeanine Graham ‘The Pioneers’ in *The Oxford Illustrated History of New Zealand* ed. by Keith Sinclair (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 49–74.

significantly to the inevitable conclusion—that the cooperative partnerships between husbands and wives were essential to the economic and social success of the province of Canterbury.

The economic emphasis in nineteenth century middle- and upper-class marriages has often led historians to believe that love, compatibility and sexual attraction were of lesser importance when choosing a spouse.²⁸⁸ There is a great deal of evidence to refute this and it is a very modern assessment. Victorian settlers would have had few cultural or psychological issues with the concept of economic prospects playing a large part in a person's attractiveness as a future partner, yet love was also an important part of marriage. For most men, for example, the measure of their success as a husband and their level of love depended upon how well they could provide for their wives.

When examining the role that gardens played in the life of married women in the colonial period it is obvious from the evidence that many colonial marriages were both loving relationships and successful working partnerships. The garden, as the nexus between public and private spheres, often became the prime site of female and male domestic cooperation.

Married Life: The Garden and Economic Partnerships

The ideal colonial wife was capable, hard-working and economically shrewd. She was also, if necessary, ready and willing to carry on her husband's work at short notice in case of absence, illness or death. The economic contribution of women to the colonial economy has often been seen in terms of subsidiary income; in other words how much extra money could they add to the family finances through activities such as selling eggs, butter or garden produce. It is certainly true that many women did make a valuable contribution in this way to their family's financial circumstances, as Caroline Daley suggested in her study of women's lives in Taradale, Hawkes Bay.²⁸⁹ The Christchurch *Star* of November 1894, went so far as to state as fact that "a woman with a knowledge of flower gardening, fruit culture, and kitchen gardening will make a more efficient wife for the farmer, suburban resident or country mechanic".²⁹⁰ However, there were also the many women who, whilst granted no legal rights in their husband's trade, farm or business, were still indispensable to it and seen as such by both their husbands and the surrounding community. This was particularly true of the early and mid-

²⁸⁸ James Belich, *Making Peoples: A History of the New Zealanders from Polynesian Settlement to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Auckland: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1996), p. 391.

²⁸⁹ Caroline Daley, *Girls and Women, Men and Boys: Gender in Taradale 1886–1930* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1999), pp. 51–52.

²⁹⁰ 'Ladies Gossip', *The Star*, 19 November 1894, p. 4.

colonial period when most settlers were struggling to establish themselves on the land. These women remain the hidden contributors to the colonial economy, and the majority of their efforts centred on managing the land and garden production.

In 1852, John Deans of Riccarton, Christchurch sailed home to Scotland to collect new bride Jane. He left the farm, orchards and gardens of his property in the capable hands of his manager, Mr Williams. Mr Williams died soon afterwards, and it was his wife who took over management of the grounds. She was described by an admiring fellow settler as “indefatigable in her efforts to fill her late husband’s place in the management of farming operations, and when Mr John Deans returned with his wife ... he found all in great order”.²⁹¹ She was not the only woman to step in and manage capably when the male landowner was not available. Fanny Fitzgerald was another colonial wife who made a considerable contribution to the success of both her husband—who appears to have suffered from some form of mental illness—and their station. Her abilities were greatly admired by a much younger settler Charles Bowen who wrote “Mrs FG is wonderful ... She manages all those children and sometimes the station, and yet is always jolly”.²⁹² For women such as Mrs Williams and Fanny Fitzgerald, taking on the managerial role on their farms when the male owner was absent for whatever reason, was merely an accepted part of their duties. It is interesting to note that far from causing resentment amongst male settlers, their undoubted abilities won them nothing but praise.

In the 1860s, Frances Caverhill of Hawkswood station in North Canterbury was also an enthusiastic and seemingly tireless gardener, whose efforts in food production kept both her family and employees supplied with a constant stream of healthy food. She processed enormous quantities of produce and her mass bottling, preserving and pickling sessions usually took place at the height of the hot, dry Canterbury summer. On a typical day in 1868 she wrote how “Eliza helped me pick some more raspberries and Nellie and Aggy picked red currants ... after tea Jane and I ... picked a lot of blackcurrants for preserving.” Her husband was often absent, and suffered from bouts of illness that left him bed-ridden for days. Frances was described in a local history of the area as “the rock on which the Caverhill family life was built” and that “far from being overshadowed by her husband” she was the “calm centre” of station life.²⁹³ It is certain that any prosperity of the station was due just as much to the efforts of Mrs,

²⁹¹ Hannah Longmuir Guthrie Hay, *Anmandale Past and Present 1839–1900* (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs Ltd, 1901), p. 138.

²⁹² Jennifer Roberts, *Fitz: The Colonial Adventures of James Edward Fitzgerald* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2014), p. 219.

²⁹³ W. J. Gardner, *The Amuri: A County History* (Christchurch: The Amuri County Council, 1983), p. 178.

as well as Mr, Caverhill. Her son Leonard, when looking back at those early days, described his father as “an excitable man but Mother was an extremely calm person. She would never allow herself to be worried during a financial crisis and in this way I always felt Mother was a tremendous help to Father”.²⁹⁴

Another woman central to the prosperity of her family in 1850s and 1860s Canterbury was Sarah Baker of Waimakariri district. Her family of eleven “absolutely depended upon her skills in both the garden and the kitchen for the necessities of life”.²⁹⁵ If that was not exhausting enough, labour shortages of agricultural workers in this early period meant that in addition she often had to “help the boys and James on the farm”.²⁹⁶ Like many owners of small farms, her husband James often had to supplement the family income by taking on temporary jobs. When he was away fencing or harvesting, Sarah ran the farm alone and looked after her family. There is no indication in available sources that Sarah was considered in any way unfeminine or that her attempts to provide for her family were considered socially unacceptable, despite the fact that they crossed over from the supplementary work expected of colonial wives into the more ‘masculine’ role of a small farmer.

Ida Peache of Mount Somers Station “used to make enormous boilings of jam, from the fruit in the garden ... she always made enough for the men’s cookshop ... and also filled hundreds of bottles of fruit each year”.²⁹⁷ While the men who worked on colonial farms often had easy access to a protein-rich diet of meat, it was usually the women of the homesteads whose garden and kitchen efforts ensured that the workforce had a balanced diet including fruit and vegetables. Hard work in the garden ensured a healthy and, presumably, productive workforce (not to mention giving workers the morale boost of a change from a constant diet of boiled mutton). As if her efforts in the garden weren’t enough, Ida was widowed early and thereafter ran the station herself. A grandchild remembered how “on Sunday mornings Mr Morgan [the station manager] would come up to the homestead. ... and Gran would give him a beer or a glass of sherry and they would discuss the running of the place and the prospects of the markets for sheep and wool”.²⁹⁸ These examples are merely some of many that demonstrate the immense contribution women made to the daily workings of households, farms and stations, quite apart

²⁹⁴ Barbara Harper, *The Kettle on the Fuchsia* (Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed, 1967), p. 73.

²⁹⁵ P. J. Wood, *Women of the Waimakariri* (Rangiora: The Waimakariri District Women’s Suffrage Centennial Committee, 1993), p. 17.

²⁹⁶ *ibid.*

²⁹⁷ Constance Gray, ed., *Quiet with The Hills: the Life of Alfred Edward Peache of Mount Somers* (Christchurch: Pegasus Press, 1970), p. 207.

²⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 208.

from their standard role in food production from the garden. Nor should the importance of that food production be underestimated. The efforts of colonial wives in the kitchen garden was “an integral part of the maintenance of rural community”, helped to sustain strong, social networks in farming districts”,²⁹⁹ and “provided protection against shortages” and “raw isolation”.³⁰⁰

As well as many instances of women managing alone there were also frequent occasions when husbands and wives worked enthusiastically side-by-side and they are often centred around the garden. John Acland’s diaries of the 1860s are filled with references to the joint work that he and wife Emily contributed to the garden. Even before their marriage Acland had taken Emily’s opinion seriously on choices for planting. On September 17 1859, he “looked over seeds with Mrs Tripp and Miss Harper”.³⁰¹ Their garden plans continued after their marriage with descriptions in Acland’s diaries of the day that “Emily and I ... transplanted oak, fuchsia, pumpkins from the greenhouse”.³⁰² Acland referred to going “with Emily ... to Hislops [sic] nursery”.³⁰³ He also spent another “morning with Emily to Jacobs for Roses etc.” and described how “we planted the little ground with Cypress Laurestinus, Roses and small plants”.³⁰⁴ A similar trip occurred some time later in 1864 when they went “to Hislop’s where we ... ordered trees”.³⁰⁵ In January 1866 Acland demonstrated that their working partnership reached even into the supposedly female-only realm of the kitchen, when he helped “Emily to pick strawberries for ... jam making”.³⁰⁶ Alternatively she seems to have aided him in the heavier forms of gardening work sometimes considered inappropriate for women. In December 1867 they had to deal with a bee swarm, but together they managed to get them “hived safely out with Emily at back and in garden”.³⁰⁷ A month later he spent the afternoon in the “garden with Emily pruning and etc.”³⁰⁸ Their plant collecting also continued, but not all of the specimens came from commercial nurseries. Acland refers to an “afternoon up in bush with E. and Mrs

²⁹⁹ Kate Hunter and Lynette Squire, ‘Bread and Butter: Rural Women at the Stove and Churn in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century’ in *Eating In, Dining Out: Proceedings of the New Zealand Culinary History Conference*, 14–15 November 2005 Victoria University of Wellington, ed. by Kate Hunter and Michael Symons, p. 44.

³⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p. 43.

³⁰¹ J. B. A. Acland Diaries, Entry for 17 September 1859.

³⁰² *ibid.*, Entry for 7 December 1859.

³⁰³ *ibid.*, Entry for 10 April 1863.

³⁰⁴ *ibid.*, Entry for 26 June 1863.

³⁰⁵ *ibid.*, Entry for 19 August 1864.

³⁰⁶ *ibid.*, Entry for 3 January 1866.

³⁰⁷ *ibid.*, Entry for 2 December 1867.

³⁰⁸ *ibid.*, Entry for 28 January 1868.

Foster for ferns”.³⁰⁹ Their garden was still a joint enterprise as late as 1879 when Acland was “out with Emily fixing places for planting”.³¹⁰

The Christchurch *Press* analysed another example of a marriage partnership based on mutual hard work and decision-making when, in 1886, a report was published on Hunt’s farm in Ashburton. This prosperous small farm had been created, enthused the Christchurch *Press*, “by sheer hard work on the part of himself, [and] his good lady (a genuine example of the Somersetshire farmer’s kindly wife)”.³¹¹ Unlike her husband, Mrs Hunt’s first name is not given in the text of the article, but it was obviously due to a combined effort that a “waste of tussock with the dry bed of an old creek running through it’ was transformed into a “highly cultivated and enviable homestead ... one of the most delightful little spots in Canterbury”. This was achieved by both husband, wife and children in “less than eight years”.³¹²

Wives were often valued for their opinions and advice and it is obvious from many letters and diaries that decisions on the upkeep, improvement and economic potential of gardens and grounds could be made jointly. In 1902, Arthur Hope of Raincliff Station, wrote to a friend about potentially investing in “some [trees] to make a shelter round the house up there”.³¹³ He was not sure about the opportunity because, as he explained, his wife “Frances is cautious, and would almost risk our not planting, on the chance of selling out”.³¹⁴ Arthur, on the other hand, could not “help thinking that it is a pity to lose one year, when shelter is such a consideration up there. Can you... say what you would advise as to planting or not”.³¹⁵ This correspondence not only shows that in some cases women had a substantial input into economic and environmental decisions but also that it was quite expected they should do so. Although Arthur did not want to take her advice he was obviously wavering between his own business instinct and the feeling that she might be right. He also made the assumption that his friend would take Frances’ opinion seriously when offering advice. Such examples as this bear out Graham’s conclusion that “where men and women were in successful working partnerships, mutual respect meant a wide range of topics were discussed”.³¹⁶

³⁰⁹ *ibid.*, Entry for 15 April 1867.

³¹⁰ *ibid.*, Entry for 29 April 1879.

³¹¹ ‘Hunt’s farm, Ashburton’, *The Press*, 18 January 1886, p. 3.

³¹² *ibid.*

³¹³ David Reynolds, and Louise Donnithorne, *Two Raincliffe Pioneers* (Christchurch: Microfilm Digital Print Ltd., 2006), p. 96.

³¹⁴ *ibid.*

³¹⁵ *ibid.*

³¹⁶ Graham, p. 55.

Historian Jim McAloon has analysed the example of Mary Dawson, wife of Ashburton farmer Andrew Dawson. Mr Dawson died in 1909, leaving his whole estate to his wife. McAloon describes why Dawson made that decision.

On the face of it, Mary was an inactive party ... she was, however, equally involved in the development of family wealth. Besides child-rearing and housework, she had run the very lucrative dairies ... and directed the planting of trees to improve the properties. Moreover Mary had apparently selected the site of the last farm herself³¹⁷

In a province such as Canterbury, that suffered from low-lying land and large areas with poor drainage, the ability to choose an effective and economic site for a farm would take considerable knowledge of the agricultural and environmental challenges of any given landscape. Such choices could make the difference between farming success or failure for families. Mary's farming experience must have been extensive for her to have chosen such a successful site and her husband must have had absolute faith in her judgement to have left it to her to make the decision.

The farming of New Zealand, involving as it did the breaking in, landscaping, drainage and replanting of the countryside is often seen, even now, as a male endeavour. Women farmers and women who frequently ran properties on their own as the result of the absence or incapacity of their partner have been largely ignored in historical writing, and their impact on environmental transformation minimalised. Yet the above examples alone demonstrate that the decisions made by women who could be in charge of rural properties for long periods of time, or ran them as 'equals' with their husbands, should be taken into account when any analysis of the changes made by European settlers is attempted.

The spread of the invasive gorse plant in the South Island is a case in point. Examining the role of women in the propagation and distribution of gorse seedlings, provides valuable information on the origins of what was to become a major environmental issue both then, and continuing on into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Gorse was used regularly from the 1850s onwards for hedging. Environmental historians Tom Brooking and Eric Pawson have described the process. "A typical gorse hedge was sown as

³¹⁷ Jim McAloon, *No Idle Rich: The Wealthy in Canterbury and Otago 1840–1914* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2002), pp.77–78.

seed on a clay wall about 0.75 metres high and 0.5 metres wide, the wall being made of layers of sod”.³¹⁸ These gorse fences were “used initially to keep stock out ... as well as in”.³¹⁹ The fence lines that were created “also served more symbolic roles, imposing ‘narrative landmarks’ in such extensive country, enabling blocks and paddocks to be named, and the history of the place to be constructed”.³²⁰ If this is so, then in Canterbury it appears to be the women who constructed the landscape and the narrative history, for evidence in memoirs and diaries shows that it was female settlers who were largely responsible for the successful mass propagation and distribution of gorse seeds.

In the late 1870s at Blue Cliffs Station, Ellen Meyer grew the gorse plants for the fencing of her farm “in the garden”.³²¹ When the seedlings were large enough to be transplanted it was Ellen who used to distribute the “gorse plants for the fencers to plant out on top of the sod walls prepared for them”.³²²

In the 1880s, on the Rangitata plains, the local women had “water collecting days” when they “had an opportunity to meet and talk” and to “exchange ... pine or gorse seeds”.³²³ Annie Clement, whose husband William bought part of the Cracroft estate at Rangitata in 1889, was in charge of gorse planting on her farm. Barbara Harper has described in her local history of the region how “with loving care, Annie ... watered and tended the gorse plants which were to surround the farm. Her young children were severely reprimanded if they ventured on the sod banks where gorse was growing”.³²⁴ Nor was she the only woman in her district to play a major role in gorse production. There were also “other wives who endeavoured to buy, beg or steal gorse seeds”.³²⁵ The production of gorse was intensified when the women discovered how to ‘force’ the seed. “They placed the tiny treasures in dishes of sand which they heated in their ovens to hasten germination”.³²⁶ This was a breakthrough in gorse propagation as the slow germination process had previously caused problems and one settler had complained that “other weeds come up so rapidly that the ground where the gorse seed has been sown is a dense

³¹⁸ Tom Brooking, and Eric Pawson, *Seeds of Empire: The Environmental Transformation of New Zealand* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2011), p. 25.

³¹⁹ *ibid.*

³²⁰ *ibid.*

³²¹ Woodhouse, *Blue Cliffs*, p. 23.

³²² *ibid.*

³²³ Barbara Harper, *Wind in the Tussocks: the Story of the Rangitata Plains* (Dunedin: John McIndoe Ltd, 1972), p. 44.

³²⁴ *ibid.*

³²⁵ *ibid.*

³²⁶ *ibid.*

carpet before the gorse appears”.³²⁷ This exchange of ideas on propagation between the women in this region of Canterbury is a classic example of what feminist architectural historian Dianne Harris has referred to as women’s “networks of skill-sharing”. Within these networks knowledge was typically disseminated “in the form of lore, rather than as technical ‘expert’ advice”.³²⁸ The disadvantage of this type of female knowledge sharing is that it leaves little physical trace in the official sources, thus the increasing the likelihood of women’s achievements being forgotten.

Not surprisingly then, the contribution of women to the fencing of Canterbury pastoral lands through gorse propagation, and therefore their contribution to the successful containment of valuable stock, has not been examined fully in any environmental or gardening histories of New Zealand settlers. This, and other examples, suggest the need to re-examine women’s activities and their environmental impact, in the historiography.

Women’s work in the garden could also be used to facilitate business connections and smooth the way for business opportunities. In the early colonial period through to the 1880s, women’s role in promoting community cohesion centred around hospitality and food production, in a rural landscape with few roads and even fewer hotels. A Mrs Leach, who in 1861 owned part of Snowdon Run with her husband, contributed to the community spirit by giving a dinner for the local landowners and cadets. She was obviously a generous and very convivial hostess. An eighteen-year-old fellow landowner Frank Mathias, left a candid description of the entertainment, which not only shows the impressive level of kitchen garden production sustained by colonial women in order to cope with many guests, but also demolishes the stereotype of staid, humourless Victorian matrons beyond recovery.

There were thirty in all I should think at dinner, we had a first rate feed ... all the toasts were drunk with full honours [including] myself which I acknowledged in a most interesting speech no doubt but I don’t remember much about it ... [Sale] got up ... he said, “I beg topoposh a toast which I’m sure nobody has yet poposhed ... Our noble selves” he then disappeared for

³²⁷ Peter Holland, *Home in the Howling Wilderness: Settlers and the Environment in Southern New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2013), p. 168.

³²⁸ Dianne Harris, Cultivating Power: the Language of Feminism in Women’s Garden Literature, 1870–1920, in *Landscape Journal* 13.2 (1994), pp. 113–123.

the evening under the table, in fact we had a jolly night of it, nearly all being screwed³²⁹

Presumably this was Victorian slang for drunk rather than its modern meaning! It would be interesting to know whether the ‘nearly all’ included Mrs Leach. Certainly if she wasn’t partaking she must have been very tolerant, for later on in the evening Frank describes how Mr “Leach sung on in Welsh. I slipt on the floor. Broke up at 12 Mn”.³³⁰ The role that such social interactions played in building up a sense of community were vital at such an early stage of settlement, although Mrs Leach was hardly being the civilising beacon of gentility that women were supposed to represent. Perhaps it was just as well for the colony’s ability to attract jolly and energetic young men that there were some women like Mrs Leach, as well as Lady Barker’s ideal woman who “represents culture and refinement”.³³¹

In the mid-1860s, Frances Caverhill represented her husband John at a meeting of the Road Board that occurred while he was away on business. She also acted as the hostess on this occasion and conducted the whole enterprise so successfully that her fellow landowner and neighbour William Robinson sent her “two choice shrubs” as “thanks for her hospitality”.³³² Presumably the end result of this meeting was a favourable decision on roading for the whole community, thus Robinson’s generous gesture. It is perhaps notable that his gift was something for her garden, thus demonstrating that male settlers were aware of women’s fondness for, and reliance on, their gardens. Her hospitality would have consisted of both accommodation and meals, and it is an indication of the success of her prodigious efforts at preserving her garden produce, that she was able to efficiently provide food for so many visitors. This evidence reinforces Dianne Lawrence’s study on genteel women in the British colonies. Lawrence, too, suggested that not only “the household and the business were entwined” but that colonists did not necessarily “adhere to the separate spheres lifestyle they had followed whilst in Britain, but instead started from a less clearly defined separateness, with more overlap”.³³³ Elsewhere in the empire, other women like Frances Caverhill were also doing “a lot of entertaining, presumably to ‘oil the wheels’ of their [family’s] business”.³³⁴

³²⁹ Janet Holm, *On Zealand’s Hills Where Tigers Steal Along* (Wellington: Steele Roberts Publishers, 2008), p. 100.

³³⁰ *ibid.*

³³¹ Lady Barker, *Station Life in New Zealand* (Christchurch: The Golden Press Pty Ltd, 1973), p. 105.

³³² Margaret Wrigley, p. 265.

³³³ Dianne Lawrence, *Genteel Women: Empire and Domestic Material Culture, 1840–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 224.

³³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 224.

Charlotte Coles of South Canterbury was a settler who attempted to use her food production skills, and skills as a hostess, to her family's financial advantage. In 1900, she and her husband entertained the "Inspector of leasehold farms" at a time when decisions made on the status of their farm could affect their livelihood.³³⁵ Charlotte served him "liberally with [homemade] wine" and generally lavished all her culinary talents on fresh food from her garden and orchard.³³⁶ "It was her hope that he would be sufficiently influenced to make a good report".³³⁷ Whether it was because of the famous home-made wine or not, the inspector did grant them a leasehold on the land. Charlotte is representative of countless colonial wives whose gardening achievements were used in direct ways to increase family prosperity and social cohesion.

Historians such as Jock Phillips have suggested that the cooperative working relationship between men and women tailed off after the 1880s with an increasing sense of separate spheres for men and women in settler culture.³³⁸ There is less evidence of this in the 'sphere' of the garden, where joint efforts continued to be the norm, and the family-centred nature of most colonial gardens of any great size meant that they continued to be enjoyed equally by men and women.

Married Life: The Garden and Romantic Partnerships

The aptness of gardens for courting has already been examined but marriage was not always the end of any romance, and many long-married couples continued to appreciate the privacy and relaxing beauty of the garden too. Gardens were also a useful retreat for wives and husbands from the claustrophobia of houses that could be filled with children, servants and guests. Figure 2.3 shows just how cluttered colonial rooms could be, to such an extent that it is not surprising so many couples enjoyed spending time outdoors as a pleasanter alternative. Companionate walks in the garden also provided married couples with a daily look at how their grounds were progressing and an opportunity to talk in private and just enjoy each other's company.

³³⁵ Don Pearce, *A History of the Coles Family: Somerset to South Canterbury 1874–1974* (Timaru: W. J. Traves, 1975), p. 5.

³³⁶ *ibid.*

³³⁷ *ibid.*

³³⁸ Jock Phillips, *A Man's Country: The Image of the Pakeha Male—A History* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 222.



Figure 2.3: Cluttered and crowded Victorian interiors encouraged socialising in the garden (Courtesy of Macmillan Brown Library).³³⁹

At Blue Cliffs Station in South Canterbury in the late 1850s, Ellen and Charles Meyer, whose marriage was a product of an intense love match despite their twenty-year age difference, were known for taking long walks together through the station grounds. One vantage point on a ridge was so popular a part of their daily route that the station workers' children remembered that it was always referred to as 'Nell's Walk'.³⁴⁰ When Blue Cliffs eventually came into the ownership of the Rhodes family, the tradition of private time for couples in the garden continued with Robert Heaton Rhodes and his wife Jessy. An employee recalled many years later that "in the summer evenings it was lovely to see Mr and Mrs Rhodes walking around the garden, arm in arm. They seemed so happy together".³⁴¹

Husbands, too, recorded the pleasure of private walks in the garden. In December 1859 John Acland wrote of how he and Emily went up to "the bush and sat on a tree and talked".³⁴² A day later things between them were still "all very pleasant and happy ... walk in the garden, talk at

³³⁹ MB 44, Acland Family papers, Reference code 237, 'Interior, Mt. Peel Station', Unknown Photographer, Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury.

³⁴⁰ Woodhouse, *Blue Cliffs*, p. 22.

³⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 70.

³⁴² J. B. A. Acland Diaries, Entry for 4 December 1859.

night”.³⁴³ Throughout the 1860s and 1870s there are numerous entries that provide variations on the theme “walk in the garden with Emily” or “garden with Emily to look at trees”.

In the 1860s, Francis Caverhill enjoyed the rare times she was able to walk with her husband in the garden and noted them down in her diary. As he was often busy or ill, their time together was precious and she made every effort to join him in the garden even if it was inconvenient or uncomfortable. Her diary entry for November 1st 1865 reads: “I walked in the garden with John but found it very hot”.³⁴⁴ Francis was prone to getting what appears to have been migraines, so a walk in hot sun was not a sensible idea. Two weeks before they had had a much pleasanter morning, when “John and I went down to the garden directly after breakfast” before the heat of the day began.³⁴⁵

By the turn of the century many gardens were thoroughly established and, together with the presence of grandchildren, could represent all that a couple had achieved together in their lifetime of companionship. The garden of Annie and Herbert Brown was a successful, ever-evolving example of cooperation between the spouses, from the 1880s right through into the twentieth century. Annie grew the flowers, and Herbert made, trimmed, and maintained the beds for her.³⁴⁶ Annie took over his gardening duties after he injured his foot in the early 1900s, and he took her on a plant-hunting trip to Fiji when she began to suffer from depression in 1903.³⁴⁷ He made a fernery and bog garden and she made a “garden of a thousand roses” with her own cuttings, and roses from Buxton’s nursery in Opawa.³⁴⁸ They surveyed their estate together and Annie then drew up garden plans for other projects including a pond and extended shrubbery.³⁴⁹ Despite having to take on more of Herbert’s gardening work when he became ill in 1912, Annie became a prize-winning rosarian.³⁵⁰ Their garden was such a joint endeavour that Strongman suggests that “their personalities, their marriage and their hopes all became encapsulated within the garden”.³⁵¹

A descendent of Banks Peninsula pioneer Edward William Harris has described the sense of satisfaction and contentment Harris and his wife Adeline felt in their garden, by the early-

³⁴³ *ibid.*, Entry for 5 December 1859.

³⁴⁴ Caverhill, *A Year at Hawkswood*, Vol. 2, p.49.

³⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 44.

³⁴⁶ Strongman, p. 153.

³⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 154.

³⁴⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 154–155.

³⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 154.

³⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 156.

³⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 152.

twentieth century. Whilst the picture of them both is somewhat romanticised, their pride in their success (as symbolised by their garden) was undoubtedly echoed amongst many settlers. This description also contains a reminder of the way in which gardens acted as social facilitators in settler society.

He sat out in the sunshine on his verandah, nursing his cat, admiring the flowers in the garden ... Grandma Adeline ... would join him when her household tasks were done and would immediately be joined by another cat. It was a daily routine when the weather was fine. There the pair held 'open house' and relatives came and chatted as well as neighbours going to the shop ... It was a pleasant way to spend the evening of their days, enjoying their garden, their cats, their children and grandchildren popping in³⁵²

Rose-tinted memoirs might very well come to that conclusion. However there is supporting evidence that demonstrates the way in which established gardens came to symbolise family achievements: the prevalence of the garden as the settlers' choice of venue for that ultimate celebration of long-term wedded bliss—the golden wedding. Numerous colonial-era photographs portray the popularity of golden wedding parties in the garden, and, as Figure 2.4 shows, because of the typical age of the wedded couple it was usually a highly significant opportunity for multiple generations of the family to pose for posterity.



Figure 2.4 Golden wedding celebrations were often held in the garden (Courtesy of Kete Selwyn).³⁵³

³⁵² Mary Ada Kirk, *Edward William Harris: Pioneer, Okains Bay* (Christchurch: Bascand Ltd, 1979), p. 20.

³⁵³ 'Wedding of George Gudsell to Fanny Rogers, 1902', Selwyn Library (Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 New Zealand License)

The garden became the centre of economic and emotional partnerships between husbands and wives of the colonial era. Women made vital practical and economic contributions to family life, and husbands relied on their wives' good judgement, hard work and managerial skills for food production, and for caretaking the property if their husbands were absent. Despite the existence of a considerable amount of primary evidence demonstrating women settlers' contributions in farming and gardening, there is still little focus on, or analysis of, women's impact on the environment in the historiography of colonial times. Likewise absent is any major analysis of romantic, cooperative partnerships between husbands and wives and the way in which these relationships might have contributed to the social and economic success of the colonial settlements. Examining the work and private lives of men and women through the medium of the garden highlights, however, just how important these partnerships were, and how they can enhance our understanding of the day to day struggles and hopes that characterised the lives of many colonists.

Married Life and the Garden: The Garden as a Site, or Source, of Conflict

The garden was a 'contested area' throughout the colonial period, involving as it did the ambiguity of being both a public and private space, at once enclosed and supposedly civilised, yet also on display and open to intrusion. It is not surprising that it became a common arena in which women struggled to assert themselves in their marriages, and in their local community.

For some women, the garden could be a refuge from a difficult marriage. By 1870 Eunice Upton was experiencing her first year of married life with new husband, Everard Upton. The marriage was not one of social equals, with Everard being the scion of an old English gentry family and Eunice being the daughter of a lodging house owner. Somehow Eunice had learnt the rudiments of genteel behaviour—possibly at a boarding school—but her entire life with her husband was based on hiding her true background from local society and his family back in Britain. The psychological strain this put upon Eunice was incalculable and she seized upon the garden as a neutral topic of discussion in her letters to her in-laws to avoid family conflict. From then on, her garden was the primary emphasis of her letters and obviously made her feel more comfortable writing to her husband's family.

<http://keteselwyn.peoplesnetworknz.info/family_history/images/show/431-wedding-of-george-gudsell-to-fanny-rogers-1902>.

In 1874, she wrote “we have nothing in our garden this year—I thought we were going to have a great many strawberries and gooseberries but the north west winds have spoilt them all—because we have no trees about the place to shelter them”.³⁵⁴ Her strategy of using the garden as a neutral topic to disguise her background seemed to work. Her sister-in-law in England, for instance, received a letter from a friend stating how “I am extremely obliged to you for giving me the opportunity of seeing the fresh and original letter of your relative ... Her account of the garden troubles ... are fit for any book, and gives us a vivid idea of the conditions in that distant land”.³⁵⁵

The garden remained the usual theme of communication with her in-laws through the births of her children and beyond, although the stress of the pretence eventually became too much and due to various tensions the marriage finally collapsed in 1893. In earlier times she had written to Britain describing the lovely rocking horse made by a station worker that was her son’s prized possession. She was unable to add that the station worker concerned was her father, whose lodging house business had been unsuccessful and was now working for her husband. The garden as a neutral space of interest had helped Eunice deal with the marital and class tensions imposed upon her by her marriage and the psychological and emotional conflict that was the almost inevitable result.

Another marriage that was struggling in the 1870s was that of Mary and William Rolleston. William was an enthusiastic gardener and spent a substantial part of his income on plants for his garden, or gifts and donations to other people.³⁵⁶ Mary resented the amount of money he spent on the garden, when at the same time he refused to allow her money for new clothes. Her concerns were not as trivial as they appear. William Rolleston was one of New Zealand’s most prominent politicians and his wife had a certain social standing to keep up. Her failure to do so could not only reflect badly on her socially, but also on him politically, and his political career was their main source of income. She felt she had tried to be reasonable by settling on black velvet as the choice for a dress because, being long-wearing, it would be “cheapest in the end”.³⁵⁷ Mary wrote “I dare not get it—and yet I know I ought to settle on something soon”.³⁵⁸ William stubbornly refused to pay for the dress, so Mary was forced to think up a solution and

³⁵⁴ Audrey Adams, *Mr and Mrs U**: The Story of a High Country Marriage in Early Canterbury* (Masterton: Fraser Books, 2007), p. 125.

³⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 104.

³⁵⁶ Rosamond Rolleston, *William and Mary Rolleston* (Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed, 1971), p. 70

³⁵⁷ *ibid.* p. 78.

³⁵⁸ *ibid.*

the fact that it involved the garden might have given her a sense of poetic justice. She could afford to buy a new dress herself, because she had “made fifteen pounds by [selling] the fruit” from the orchard.³⁵⁹ Unfortunately there is no evidence to show whether Mary did in the end defy William and buy the velvet dress, using money she had earned from the sale of orchard fruit.

Mary also used the feminine accomplishment of flower arranging, and her own expertise at it, to negotiate a longer stay with friends after William had decided to leave early. In this she was supported by a Mrs Dennistoun with whom she was staying, as it was made clear to William and the other males in the house that Mary’s presence was essential if the flowers were to get done at all. Mary achieved her purpose and “stayed on to arrange the flowers (‘bowls of clematis, geraniums and ferns’).³⁶⁰

Mary was not always happy in her marriage, or in her isolated existence in the country fulfilling her husband’s dream of a rural idyll, while he remained at the centre of social and political life in both Canterbury and Wellington. However, both Mary Rolleston and Eunice Upton used the cultural identification of women with the garden to negotiate a position of greater power for themselves and the chance at least to feel that they had some measure of control over their lives.

Women like Eunice and Mary at least had the advantage of being—with their husbands—the heads of nuclear families established on their own land. Single families on single plots of land were in fact the colonial norm. Occasionally economic circumstances dictated a return to less common types of family structure, where sons stayed and worked on their father’s land until they had earned enough money to set up an independent establishment. Women put in the situation of living with their in-laws had a much greater struggle to define their own boundaries, physical and mental, and to form a positive relationship with their surrounding environment.

In 1883 in Timaru, a woman named Emily Hunt appeared in the magistrate’s court charged with assault against her father-in-law, Thomas Hunt. The case demonstrates the multiple cultural and social meanings attached to the space of the garden and women’s place within it. The Hunt’s garden in 1883 became a site of domination and resistance.

³⁵⁹ *ibid.*

³⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 116.

Emily Hunt was married to Samuel, Thomas Hunt's son, and their "house was situated in Thomas Hunt's ground".³⁶¹ The relationship between father-in-law and daughter-in-law was, for whatever reason, obviously strained, with Emily claiming in court that while her husband was out working during the day she was "annoyed by Thomas Hunt in every way".³⁶² Her main complaint was that he used the garden gate to control her movements and her relationships with people outside the family. He would fasten the garden gate "up early every evening and [the] witness had no other way in or out".³⁶³

Thomas seems not only to have disapproved of Emily going out, but also of her friends coming in. The incident involving the assault occurred when he went outside to "put a woman named Giles off the garden at his house, and in doing so Emily Hunt called him bad names and struck him on the head ... they had a scuffle and both fell".³⁶⁴ Mrs Giles seems to have been in his garden just because it was the only way to get to Emily's house, but Thomas Hunt appeared to dislike her personally and had previously, as she told the court, spread "bad stories" about her.³⁶⁵ The situation had been deteriorating for some time before Emily finally snapped and lashed out, and she spoke of how she had "asked her husband to leave that house" so they could set up their own home "but he had not done so".³⁶⁶ Emily's ingress and egress through the garden had become an issue of power and resistance and symbolised the ambiguous status of women in the garden when the garden was not their own.

Emily Hunt was not the only wife in colonial Canterbury charged with assault because of an incident in the garden. In Emily's case an already tense situation was fuelled by the very nature of gardens as private spaces that the public could, and sometimes did, have to access. For women involved in creating gardens as business enterprises, the public would, of necessity, be able to enter the garden space. Privacy then, could become a vexed issue and the idea of the garden as a refuge from outside stresses became problematic. How invasive were the public allowed to be? For reasons of private dislike or antagonism, did a woman have the right to bar a member of the public from stepping into gardens that were a public business? What if the entire situation was exacerbated by possible bigotry and racial tension?

³⁶¹ 'Resident Magistrate's Court', *Timaru Herald*, 5 October 1883, p. 3.

³⁶² *ibid.*

³⁶³ *ibid.*

³⁶⁴ *ibid.*

³⁶⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶⁶ *ibid.*

A case from the 1880s throws an intriguing light on these issues. Eliza Ching George was a woman of European descent married to a Chinese market gardener in 1880s suburban Christchurch.³⁶⁷ That in itself would automatically have marked Eliza out in a city—and country—rife with racism and increasing paranoia about the so-called ‘yellow peril’. However Eliza was also hot-tempered and wildly outspoken, and she, and to a lesser extent her husband Ching George, seem to have become entangled in a feud with a neighbouring married couple, the Exalls.

The first evidence of this dates from January 1880 when, in a court case, Eliza was charged with use of abusive language in public towards Joseph Exall.³⁶⁸ Eliza denied the charge but did herself no favours by conducting “herself in a very violent and extraordinary manner” in the courtroom.³⁶⁹ Eliza attempted to get her maid to back up her defence that Joseph Exall had provoked the situation by being “in the habit of intruding himself on her premises”, in other words, in her market garden.³⁷⁰ The opinion of her husband to this is unrecorded, as despite being sworn in as a witness his evidence was dismissed as “not material to the case”.³⁷¹ Eliza was fined, told to abstain “from annoying the defendant and his family” in the future, and the case was closed.³⁷²

The feud was not, however over, and Eliza was soon back in court again, this time under the more serious charge of assault against Henrietta Exall. In this case we learn a few more helpful background details. The Exalls, for instance, lived directly opposite the “Chinese market garden”. Mrs Exall had gone to the garden to see Ching Won (presumably Eliza’s brother-in-law) “on business” and “met Mrs Ching George coming down the pathway and crossed over ... to avoid her”.³⁷³ Eliza Ching George followed her, said “off you go”, and hit her with a stick. Mrs Exall ran into Ching Won’s house for help, and Eliza came after her and told her that if it had been her husband Joseph on her property “he would never have gone in or out the gate again”.³⁷⁴

Eliza’s side of the story was that after the previous court case the Exall’s had been told to keep out of the market garden and Henrietta Exall had not only entered it but had not used the

³⁶⁷ ‘Magisterial’, *The Press*, 11 May 1880, p. 3.

³⁶⁸ ‘Magisterial’, *The Press*, 21 January 1880, p. 3.

³⁶⁹ ‘Magisterial’, *The Press*, 11 May 1880, p. 3.

³⁷⁰ *ibid.*

³⁷¹ *ibid.*

³⁷² *ibid.*

³⁷³ *ibid.*

³⁷⁴ *ibid.*

“regular pathway”.³⁷⁵ Her husband’s statement was allowed this time, and he accused Henrietta of trespassing, which provoked his wife into hitting her. However, although allowed, much of Mr Ching’s testimony “could not be understood” because of his difficulties with English.³⁷⁶ Eliza further testified that “I only want peace and quietness” and the Exalls had caused her “constant annoyance” which, if true, could imply that she and her husband had been suffering from ongoing harassment.³⁷⁷ Eliza Ching George was fined nearly six pounds and when she told the court she could not pay the fine, she was told that she would then go to prison for one month with hard labour. Eliza could not afford the fine, so accepted the prison term.³⁷⁸

Eliza certainly did not conform to the sort of behaviour expected of a ‘respectable’ woman of the time, whether through her use of inappropriate language, or her choice of marriage partner. No matter how easily antagonised Eliza might have been, however, there are several unpleasant undertones in this case. Because Eliza and her husband lived on the same property as the market garden, and given that they had been warned to keep away from the Exall’s, it might be considered unnecessarily provocative for Mrs Exall to have entered Eliza’s garden, even if it could have been considered public territory. There were other market gardens available in St Albans at the time if she had wanted to buy vegetables. The one person who could have shed more light on the incident, Eliza’s husband, was disadvantaged in defending her by his lack of English. In the background is the possibility that the presence of Chinese gardeners in the neighbourhood was resented. Two years prior to these incidents for example, a St Albans market garden, which might have been that belonging to Eliza and her husband, had been reported, presumably by locals, to the health inspector for their use of manure on the fields.³⁷⁹

From this distance in time it is impossible to prove that racial antagonism played a part in these disputes, but for Eliza Ching George, the garden was not simply a way of earning a living, nor was it a protected haven where she could feel safe and in control. It was a site of cultural and social conflict, where her private disagreements were played out in a public arena, to the detriment of her position in the neighbourhood and the economic security of her business.

³⁷⁵ *ibid.*

³⁷⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷⁷ *ibid.*

³⁷⁸ *ibid.*

³⁷⁹ ‘Board of Health’, *The Press*, 5 October 1878, p. 5.

Conclusion

The garden played a vital role in the married lives of settler women. The creation of kitchen or pleasure gardens in the first years of married life gave women a positive start as new wives, and often helped them settle more easily into their new homes than those women who had to start from scratch in an isolated environment.

Once established in their roles as spouses, women and men set down to the task of further transforming the landscape with tree-planting, gorse-fencing, garden extensions and general farm improvements. Women also often ran farms and stations in their own right so had even greater influence on environmental decisions. New Zealand's environmental historians have not yet adequately addressed this aspect of colonial life. Many colonial women were highly involved with economic decisions within their marriages.

The garden acted as a site of emotional comfort, and emotional conflict, within colonial marriages. For some women, the garden was a place to further their relationships, and their diaries, letters and memoirs are filled with references to walking, talking, and cooperatively working in the garden with their husbands. For other women, the garden became a place that came to symbolise the problems they had within their marriage, and with their local community. The role the garden played in the emotional lives of settler women is an example of the complex cultural and psychological meanings gardens represented, both for them and their society. A site of power and resistance, of relaxation and tension, of privacy and public intrusion, it is emblematic of the fluctuating gender ideals of colonial women.

Chapter 3:

Children

Introduction

In the early part of the colonial period, 1850s to the 1880s, gardens played a key role in helping women cope with the physical and emotional stresses of pregnancy and childbirth. Settler women were encouraged to ‘take’ fresh air; while gentle walks during late pregnancy were thought to be beneficial for mother and baby. After the birth, the garden space often became the first place of contact with the outside world, as women came out of confinement to recover in the fresh air and quiet. Their presence in the garden became the signal that they were ready to re-enter society.

The garden later became the primary site of relaxed and playful interaction between family members. Many women wrote in diaries and letters of their pleasure in walking, exploring, or just working in the garden with their children. Photography from the time also reflects this, as well as the fact that gardens were places where there was a surprising amount of flexibility in gender, and even class, roles.

Most gardens of the middle- and upper-classes had been designed with posterity in mind and the layout and content of a garden were often a product of family connections and traditions, looking back to ancestral homes as well as forward to future children and grandchildren. This was particularly true for colonial gardens, which were tangible expressions of settler aspirations in a new land and memories of old homes.

Gardens also played an important educative role. Mothers used the garden as a site for educating their children about natural history, botany, food production and the necessity of hard work and patience. The aesthetic education the garden provided was likewise important and sketching or painting plants, flowers or landscapes was considered an essential part of education for young ‘ladies’. Some women used this skill learned in childhood to create artistic careers for themselves as adults.

Gardens were also intricately linked with settler perceptions and ideals of childhood and health, in which motherhood played a key role. These ideas gradually evolved due to changing social

and political circumstances. From the 1880s onwards, this became more obvious as eugenic concerns about European racial health and its perceived deterioration meant that women were encouraged to think of the raising of healthy children as their primary imperial mission. This message was promulgated by politicians, various popular media such as newspapers, and the newly established medical system. The emphasis of the message was on the growth of healthy minds and bodies through exposure to native fresh air, physical activity, and the pure mental stimulation provided by aesthetically pleasing landscapes and scenery. This would counteract any “detrimental environment ... [which together with] interracial sex and the reproduction of unfit people” were “possible dangers to the future of the race”.³⁸⁰ Contemporary commentators theorised that garden activity would help fight the larrikinism and degeneration perceived to have been caused by increased urbanisation. Gardening could create hard-working citizens with a love of nature and sophisticated appreciation of aesthetic ideals. Mothers were at the forefront of this racial battle to create strong, healthy and morally upright citizens for the Empire, and the space of the garden was considered one of their most important weapons.

The Role of the Garden in Motherhood

Pregnancy and childbirth were usually times of great stress and danger for colonial women. There were high mortality rates for both mothers and children. Settler women were living in a society with little medical understanding of the female reproductive system, or foetal development. Birth historian Alison Clarke cites the example of the weeks of bedrest commonly recommended for middle-class women after having given birth. The continual rest and lack of movement resulting from this, would in fact have increased women’s chances of suffering from blood clots or embolisms.³⁸¹ Health care and knowledge of infection was also rudimentary. The result was that in 1874 “something like 135 out of every 1000 babies born in the province were dead before they reached twelve months of age ... infant mortality was markedly higher in Canterbury than in most other parts of New Zealand”.³⁸² Ideas about cleanliness and antiseptics slowly filtered through after the 1890s but the high mortality rates due to infection only began to fall with the introduction of antibiotics in the 1940s.³⁸³

³⁸⁰ Kathrin Levitan, *A Cultural History of the British Census: Envisioning the Multitude in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 175.

³⁸¹ Alison Clarke, *Born to a Changing World: Childbirth in Nineteenth Century New Zealand* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books Ltd, 2012), p. 67.

³⁸² Stevan Eldred-Grigg, *A New History of Canterbury* (Dunedin: John McIndoe Ltd, 1982), p. 44.

³⁸³ Alison Clarke, *Born to a Changing World*, p. 57.

In the early stages of colonial development doctors were rarely accessible, particularly for rural women, and Joanna Bishop's work on women and medical practice in New Zealand demonstrates that local women who might act as midwives also had to travel long distances or might themselves be laid up in confinement awaiting their own labour.³⁸⁴ It is noticeable therefore, that in a situation where most women must have felt they had little control over their own bodies, the few small things they could do to maintain their health took on a greater significance.

Climate also played a considerable part in why pregnant women might appreciate garden walks as part of a health regime. Canterbury, particularly inland, is prone to extremely hot, dry summers exacerbated by days of nor' west winds. One of the few historians to analyse the effects of the nor'west on the development of Canterbury is Katie Pickles who concluded that the "nor'wester has a deep psychological effect on many people subjected to its strong, hot, dry nature".³⁸⁵ For colonial women wearing many layers of petticoats, and especially towards the end of their pregnancies probably feeling increasingly heavy and cumbersome, gardens were welcome sanctuaries of shade away from the wind and the heat. In the late 1870s, Eunice Upton wrote of enjoying the garden as a respite from the heat. She mentioned that "in the garden there are rustic seats placed about under large and shady trees, it is most delightful to sit under these trees on a hot day when one cannot find a cool place in the house. It is charming to hear the murmur of the water below and the quantity of bellbirds singing in the trees".³⁸⁶

Another description from George Clifford of Stonyhurst Station, also in the 1870s, gives similar reasons as to why pregnant women might enjoy garden walks at the height of summer. In a letter to England describing his garden he mentioned "there is a gully which makes a most perfect wilderness of uncultivated bush with walks cut through it, sometimes arching, sometimes allowing the sun to strike through it and above all a perfectly clear cold stream running through it. It is a perfect paradise on a burning summer day of which we have had many of. Of course on a sheep station the homestead is only an oasis in the great desert of unwooded bare grass land".³⁸⁷

³⁸⁴ Joanna Bishop, *Muddy Doctors and Mustard Poultices: Medical Knowledge and Practices in Colonial New Zealand*, unpublished Master's thesis, University of Waikato, 2010 pp. 101–103.

³⁸⁵ Katie Pickles, 'Post-Colonial Environments' in *Making a New Land: Environmental Histories of New Zealand*, ed. by Eric Pawson and Tom Brooking, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 261–276.

³⁸⁶ Audrey Adams, *Mr and Mrs U**: The Story of a High Country Marriage in Early Canterbury* (Masterton: Fraser Books, 2007), p. 79.

³⁸⁷ Thelma Strongman, *The Gardens of Canterbury: A History* (Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed Ltd, 1984), p. 91.

The effect of climate on the development of social actions and activities in colonial New Zealand is often underestimated, or overlooked altogether. Yet severe weather conditions were a fact of life in the Canterbury region, which was prone to frequent droughts, and such freak weather events as the ‘Great Snow of 1895’ and the ‘Easter Flood’ of 1897. Environmental historians Don Garden and James Beattie have also each separately analysed this topic and the effects of the environment on the lives of settler women in Australasia, who “were recognised as particularly vulnerable” to “becoming weak and weary under the stresses”.³⁸⁸ Summer heat and droughts were difficult for women to cope with and “most buildings were ... impossible to keep cool”.³⁸⁹ These conditions would be hard enough for women dealing with constant housework, farm work and childcare alone, but frequent pregnancies in such circumstances must have been trying at the best and completely debilitating at the worst. The popularity of the garden as a refuge during pregnancy demonstrates how environmental factors as well as contemporary ideas about health, medicine, and culture should be taken into account when examining the actions of women in colonial society.

Another reason that colonial women of the mid-Victorian period (1850–1880s) might have enjoyed their gardens so much prior to giving birth, was the knowledge that medical tradition of the time recommended days, or even weeks, of bed-rest for middle- and upper-class mothers after undergoing labour. After several days (or weeks if it had been a particularly traumatic labour) women were then brought into the sitting room for several days, and only after that were they allowed, or encouraged, to walk or sit in the garden. Most women seem to have very much enjoyed being outside again after weeks of being confined to their room. Thus in late October 1853, Fanny Fitzgerald, who had given birth a few weeks before, was described as “very jolly and trotting about her garden again, rather disconcerted in advocating former theories about boys having now got one of her own”.³⁹⁰

The evidence demonstrates that it was only after this, their first foray outside, that social etiquette finally allowed them to have visitors. Garden visits were, as Strongman suggests “the first significant outing for the mother and for the child”.³⁹¹ Most of the primary sources suggest that an outing in the garden was a signal to the outside world that mother and baby had

³⁸⁸ Don Garden, ‘Extreme Weather and ENSO: Their Social and Cultural Ramifications in New Zealand and Australia in the 1890s’ in *Climate, Science and Colonization: Histories from Australia and New Zealand*, ed. by James Beattie, Emily O’Gorman, and Matthew Henry, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 71.

³⁸⁹ *ibid.*

³⁹⁰ Jennifer Roberts, *Fitz: The Colonial Adventures of James Edward Fitzgerald* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2014), p. 131.

³⁹¹ Strongman, p. 37.

‘recovered’ from the birth and, usually, that they were both in good health. That was certainly the case when a relative of Rose Hall discussed her progress after childbirth, in a letter in 1863. “Rose is so well and has taken a walk in the garden for the last four days. Dear baby has been out for the last week”.³⁹² That Rose was so active, by middle-class Victorian standards, was a definite sign of well-being, and as Rose had already lost one child her family would have been pleased to hear of such obvious progress.³⁹³

In 1864 South Canterbury settler Kate Sheath was just recovering from her confinement. She notes with relief in her diary how “I went into the sitting room again and into the garden with Jim”.³⁹⁴ Another aspect of childbirth in colonial times that is often overlooked, is the role played by husbands in making sure of their wives’ comfort. Men, as well as women, were very much aware of the high potential mortality rates for mothers giving birth, and seeing to their wife’s comfort in the house or garden might have been one of the few ways in which they felt they could make a difference. Some colonial husbands, aware of the psychological importance of gardens to the physical health of their wives during pregnancy, put in new plantings of particular favourites. Charles Tripp at Orari Gorge planted sweet williams *en masse* for his wife Ellen, just before she gave birth to their first child in the early 1860s.³⁹⁵

John Acland’s diary of June 1865 mentions walking “about the garden with children, pruned some trees, sat with Emily”.³⁹⁶ Emily Acland had recently given birth, and there had been complications. As previously mentioned, the danger of giving birth in colonial times should not be underestimated and it is possible that many women spent their first garden outing just being thankful to be alive in the open air.

Lady Barker was invited to the Christchurch estate of Ilam, in 1866, to recover from the birth of her first child. She described days of leisurely peace, reading by the river, walking or picking fruit in the garden and playing croquet in the afternoons. It was, she wrote, an escape “from the region of conventionalities”. Nor was the garden simply a collection of ‘civilised’ amenities. The owners had, by retaining and not shutting out the view of the Southern Alps, created an

³⁹² Jean Garner, and Kate Foster, eds, *Letters to Grace: Writing Home From Colonial New Zealand* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2011), p. 76.

³⁹³ *ibid.*, p. 54.

³⁹⁴ Kate Sheath, Diary Transcript, Dec. 1862–Dec. 1864, South Canterbury Museum, Object ID 2237A, Entry for 18 March 1864.

³⁹⁵ Strongman, p. 36.

³⁹⁶ J. B. A. Acland Diaries, Entry for 15 June 1865.

aesthetically impressive space where the visitor could “feast [their] eyes on the glorious chain of mountains”.³⁹⁷

The garden’s role as a place for contemplation and reflection was just as important to colonial women as its role as a place of physical rest. For some women, particularly as their families grew ever larger with corresponding leaps in the need for housework, childcare and food production, the days or weeks of enforced idleness after giving birth would be the only socially sanctioned opportunity they might get to be alone with their thoughts.

From the 1880s onwards, when fitness became both fashionable and culturally important, some women were remarkably active in their gardens right up until the beginning of labour. Walking in the garden was one popular strategy to maximise both women’s health, and the health of their babies. This could be done under medical orders, as was the case with Christchurch woman Amy Barkas in 1889. When attempts to induce the birth of her baby had failed, “the nurse attending her” suggested “a hot bath and a brisk walk around the garden”. Amy went into labour soon afterwards. Childbirth historian Alison Clarke suggests that Amy “was clearly determined to have all the intervention she could”.³⁹⁸ This appears to be a more unusual circumstance. The evidence suggests that garden walks were more commonly recommended for strengthening mother and baby, not for inducing labour.

Most women used garden walks as a way to keep their minds tranquil and their bodies fit in the days leading up to the birth. This fitted in with the ideals promoted in popular medical and even pseudo-medical books that recommended that “regular and systematic exercise should be daily taken” for pregnant women.³⁹⁹ “Walking is the most excellent form of exercise for women in this condition, as it calls into gentle activity nearly all the muscles of the trunk”.⁴⁰⁰ Garden walks were suggested not only as exercise but as an “occupation of mind”. In 1895, James Kellogg’s *Ladies Guide in Health and Disease* suggests that “an ample supply of fresh air and sunshine ... can be obtained only by exercise in the open air” and is a necessity for “the maintenance of the high degree of bodily health”.⁴⁰¹ One settler who followed this advice is Ida Peache of Mount Somers Station. By 1897 Ida had already given birth to several children who were already teenagers or adults. She became pregnant again but, as a much older mother,

³⁹⁷ Strongman, p. 45.

³⁹⁸ Clarke, *Born to a Changing World*, p. 55.

³⁹⁹ James Kellogg, *Ladies Guide in Health and Disease* (London: International Tract Society Ltd, 1895), p. 414.

⁴⁰⁰ *ibid.*

⁴⁰¹ *ibid.*

was worried about how her body would cope, especially as her health had taken a long time to recover after previous births. She moved to Christchurch in October 1897, to be near the services of a doctor. Her husband joined her and “they went for long walks in the Botanic gardens and Hagley Park”.⁴⁰²

Changes in popular notions of women’s health, and increased sporting opportunities from the 1890s, saw the promotion of exercise as commensurate with potential for child-bearing. To be seen as sports-loving by society was now infinitely preferable to being seen as frail and weak. A popular British girl’s magazine of the time outlined the ideal: “The modern girl ... is a creature of the open air; she ... glories in being a sportswoman, and in every form of physical culture”.⁴⁰³ This was an equally potent image in the colonies and far more realistic given the much milder climate in New Zealand. Although no date was given (it was probably in the late 1880s or 1890s), a relative recalled seeing Charlotte Rutherford of South Canterbury (whom she described as “excessively fun-loving”) drop “her tennis racquet” and rush “inside to have yet another baby”.⁴⁰⁴ Even by modern standards Charlotte Rutherford was obviously unusually active for someone so advanced in pregnancy. Newspaper articles, such as one in the *Press* in May 1909, stated that “of all the factors bearing on the perfect health of mother and offspring the most essential is exercise”.⁴⁰⁵ However, it is unlikely that health guides of the time had vigorous games of tennis in mind for pregnant women. In fact, an article in the *Star* of Christchurch, in 1909, specifically recommended croquet as “a less strenuous and less violent form of recreation”.⁴⁰⁶

Throughout the period 1850–1880s, gardens were used by colonial women during pregnancy as places of gentle exercise, shelter from climatic extremes that could harm their health and sites of relaxation and contemplation. Due to the many dangers and complications that could result from pregnancy in colonial times women often felt vulnerable and anxious. Light exercise and fresh air was a way in which they could gain back a sense of control over their own health. After their confinements the presence of settler women in the garden for their first

⁴⁰² Constance Gray, ed., *Quiet with the Hills: The Life of Alfred Edward Peache of Mount Somers* (Christchurch: Pegasus Press, 1970), p. 161.

⁴⁰³ Margaret Beetham, and Kay Boardman, eds, *Victorian Magazines: An Anthology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 216.

⁴⁰⁴ Janet Holm, *Nothing but Grass and Wind: The Rutherfords of Canterbury* (Christchurch: Hazard Press, 1992), pp. 34–35.

⁴⁰⁵ ‘Our Babies’, *The Press*, 12 May 1909, p. 2.

⁴⁰⁶ ‘Our Babies’, *The Star*, 13 March 1909, p. 3.

excursion outside after the birth was a recognised signal that they were now ‘well’ and ready to rejoin society.

From the 1880s onwards there was more emphasis in popular culture on health and physical exercise. Newly fashionable sports such as tennis were promoted to encourage fitness and strong, healthy girls were considered to have more potential as future mothers, and have less problems bearing children.

Mothers, Childhood and Education in the Garden

Playing outdoors was a natural and expected part of everyday life for colonial children, far more so than it would be for middle-class children back in Britain. In the colonial period, the temperate climate in New Zealand meant that a great deal of family life and interactions took place in the grounds and gardens of homesteads, and even special events such as parties and dances were often held outdoors. Children were taken out into the garden as babies in prams, as excitable toddlers and as energetic boys and girls of school age. It was an essential part of their upbringing and seems to have played a similar role in New Zealand as the nursery did for children in Britain—it was the place where they spent most of their time and that they remembered most vividly in later years. Many colonial mothers were enthusiastic in introducing their children to the joys of nature in the garden from an incredibly early age.

Outside activity in cold, fresh air was considered by colonial mothers and doctors as healthy for children. Rosy cheeks, healthy lungs and sturdy muscles were understood to be the product of the outdoor life and it was the enervating effect of heat that British settlers dreaded as linked with indolence and illness. Environmental historian James Beattie demonstrates that the experience of other British settlers in the climates of countries such India, had strengthened the connection in colonial minds between oppressive damp, heat and humidity and dangerous diseases such as malaria and typhoid.⁴⁰⁷

This was of particular concern in the region of Canterbury, which had numerous swamps and whose main city Christchurch was set on a swampy plain. Settler Rebecca Dawber was not alone in commenting that “Christchurch is not a healthy place”.⁴⁰⁸ The full effect of Canterbury climate and geography on settler health will be examined in the next chapter but it certainly

⁴⁰⁷ James Beattie, ‘Imperial Landscapes of Health: Place, Plants and People between India and Australia, 1800s-1900s’ in *Health and History*, 14.1, (2012), pp. 100–120.

⁴⁰⁸ Robert Dawber and Rebecca Dawber, *Diaries and Records* (Privately Published, University of Waikato Library, New Zealand Collection, date unknown), p. 85.

played a large part in women's attempts to use gardens, trees, and shrubs to transform the landscape. Their children benefited from this both in terms of health, and as garden spaces became more interesting and safer for play after the introduction of fencing and various other structures such as bridges and paths.

Colonial society had made the connection between outside activity and good health for children from a very early stage. It was not just a colonial ideal however. From the 1840s the trend had been widespread in Britain, following the example of the royal family. Queen Victoria believed in "the benefits of fresh air and bracing temperatures ... open windows" and "plenty of exercise in the open air" for her children.⁴⁰⁹ Popular culture in Britain soon followed the Queen's example and these ideas were still immensely influential a generation later. In Canterbury, in the late 1860s to early 1870s, a settler named Janetta Cookson commented on Fanny Fitzgerald's family. "The FGs are living at the Springs with their six healthy strong children ... William, and Amy and Robert all ride and scramble about and lead very healthy outdoor lives".⁴¹⁰

Francis Caverhill was a keen gardener and walker. Some weeks after her son's birth in 1865, she wrote in her diary, "fine warm day after the frost cleared away ... I took Johnnie in his carriage down the garden".⁴¹¹ The weather was obviously not an issue, for despite it being the middle of a South Island winter, up in the high country, Frances mentions two months later that "Aggie and I took Johnnie in his carriage down the garden". However even the toughness of a colonial woman had its limits, as she admitted that "the wind was cold and we did not stay out long". She tried again three days later but "we had hardly got him to the garden when it began to rain again".⁴¹² By August the weather was improving somewhat, so she noted that "I and the children went round the garden and paddock".⁴¹³ Luckily (for Johnnie) Frances was just as keen on summer walks and her December entry "Had a walk round the garden with the children" was repeated many times over the next few years.⁴¹⁴ Rather than being a distant authority figure that her children saw only rarely, Francis was a very involved mother and enjoyed spending time in the environs of the garden with them.

⁴⁰⁹ Kate Hubbard, *Serving Victoria: Life in the Royal Household* (London: Vintage Books, 2013), p. 60.

⁴¹⁰ Roberts, p. 200.

⁴¹¹ Frances Caverhill, *A Year at Hawkswood: The Diary of Frances Caverhill for 1865: in Two Volumes, Vol. 1, January-June* (Christchurch: Nags Head Press, 1981), p. 56.

⁴¹² Caverhill, *A Year at Hawkswood, Vol. 2, July-December*, p. 17.

⁴¹³ *ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 61.

It was almost certainly easier for women to be more relaxed with their children outside the confines of busy, cluttered and often overcrowded homes. While just speculation, presumably the behaviour of children might have been better as well, given space to run, play and blow off steam. Not surprisingly many colonial women write of their pleasure in taking work out to the garden and doing it in the fresh air, whilst being entertained by the antics of their children. Even women who were not mothers but had been temporarily placed in the position of caregiver seem to have enjoyed the combination of work and play. In the mid-1870s, Ellen Meyer of Blue Cliffs station was a young wife struggling with infertility, in a society that saw childbirth as a woman's primary purpose in life. She used to offer to take care of the children of her head shepherd Charles Hendry. One of the Hendry children remembered that Ellen, "such a loveable lady", used to "sit down on the grass and take her sewing or crochet out of her little bag while we children played about".⁴¹⁵

In 1883 Eunice Upton described how "I have made a nice seat in our garden I ... take Ethel there and watch her while I write letters. I often darn socks and stockings in the garden while she plays about".⁴¹⁶ Aline Studholme at Coldstream combined checking on her garden with spending time with her first baby, Ian, born in 1898: "I have little Ian out most mornings now and it is delicious sauntering about amongst those lovely flowers".⁴¹⁷ She also later wrote of entertaining adult guests at a game of croquet in the garden on a social occasion, while the "children would fly off to play hide and seek amongst the trees".⁴¹⁸

Governesses and nursemaids, too, were expected to take children into the garden for walks and supervise their play there. Miss Gray, governess to Frances Caverhill's children, often took her charges out into the garden. A typical entry in Frances' diary in 1865 mentions "Miss Gray and I and the children went round the garden and paddock".⁴¹⁹ However an equally typical entry from the same year demonstrates Frances' concern for the well-being of her staff. She wrote that "Miss Gray has such a bad headache she could not get up till about 4 o'clock ... I walked around the garden with the children, though I am a sort of invalid too, having sick headache and rheumatism in my right wrist".⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁵ A. E. Woodhouse, *Blue Cliffs: The Biography of a South Canterbury Sheep Station* (Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed Ltd, 1982), p.22.

⁴¹⁶ Adams, p. 237.

⁴¹⁷ E. J. Studholme, *Coldstream: The Story of a Sheep Station on the Canterbury Plains 1854–1934* (Upper Hutt: Wright and Carman Ltd, 1985), p. 56.

⁴¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 92.

⁴¹⁹ Caverhill, Vol. 2, p. 24.

⁴²⁰ Caverhill, Vol. 1, p. 58.

The importance of the garden to children's play was enhanced in the 1890s through the development of new garden structures such as arbours and tea houses, and new ideas that came from the movement to put playgrounds in public gardens.⁴²¹ It had an immediate impact on the gardens of the wealthy. In the 1890s, Airini Rhodes of Blue Cliffs was encouraged to play out in the garden where newly fashionable garden buildings, such as the summerhouse, made it even more convenient for her nurse to look after her. On warm days "the nurse sat inside [the summerhouse] with her sewing while Airini ... played nearby".⁴²²

The garden also provided an important educative function in the lives of those children taught by governesses. A large part of a governess's duties were in the garden rather than the school room. In fact, in many cases a governess might use the garden as a school room. Miss Gray, governess to Francis Caverhill, spent a great deal of time collecting plant specimens, including ferns and seaweeds from the nearby coast, so that she and her pupils could catalogue and study them.⁴²³ On fine days the Studholme children were taught by their governess in the "open summerhouse" which "backed on to a plantation and faced the sun and the glorious line of hills".⁴²⁴

However, the study of nature in the garden could sometimes clash with Victorian mores. When it was a contest between middle-class modesty and the educational benefits of natural science, modesty tended to win. In 1911 Derek Studholme's governess organised a nature study lesson.

The boys had been asked to observe and write about something they could discover themselves in the garden. It was mating time for the dragonflies over the pond. Fascinated by them, and in total ignorance, Derek not only described but illustrated them flitting in tandem over the water, and wondered why no comment on his homework was forthcoming, his book confiscated, and nature study as a subject dropped from the curriculum⁴²⁵

Nature study, botany and botanical illustration had long been an accepted part of upper- and middle-class education. The garden became particularly important for girls, as for some of

⁴²¹ Caroline Daley, *Leisure and Pleasure: Reshaping and Revealing the New Zealand Body 1900–1960* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2003), p. 216.

⁴²² Strongman, p. 100.

⁴²³ Caverhill, Vol. 1, p. 37.

⁴²⁴ E. J. Studholme, p. 112.

⁴²⁵ *ibid.*

them it might be the only place where they could indulge in serious study of science and art in a way that was still socially acceptable.

In the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries “pursuits focused on nature, such as botany, horticulture and drawing from the landscape” became linked with women’s education.⁴²⁶ The religious elements of botanical study, such as an appreciation of God’s creation, and the burgeoning Romantic movement with its emphasis on heightened emotional connections with nature, meant that the garden was one of the few places in which it was considered appropriate for women to indulge in intellectual and artistic pursuits.⁴²⁷

The ability to draw or paint from nature became part of the range of accomplishments expected of a young lady. Historian Caroline Jordan has examined colonial women artists in Australia, and concluded that for them “sketching was a way to learn about flora and fauna, to record their colonial dwellings and children for distant families, to ward off depression and ennui when they felt isolated, to cling to the things that defined a ‘lady’”.⁴²⁸ The New Zealand evidence suggests women artists here shared similar motivations, with the most important being learning about native flora, and using their painting and sketching skills as a way to retain and display a sense of gentility in such a raw, rapidly changing new society.

The study of nature in a colony such as New Zealand had the added dimension of intellectual and artistic investigation, as native flora and fauna was being labelled, and catalogued, according to European scientific principles for the first time. Not surprisingly, girls who were from families that encouraged the study of native flora, not only developed an artistic appreciation for it but also became far more interested in issues of conservation, and promoting its preservation.

Margaret Stoddard grew up in the 1860s and 1870s in Governor’s Bay near the port of Lyttelton. She was to become “arguably this country’s best known flower painter”.⁴²⁹ Her career as an artist had its origins in a childhood with an “enterprising and cultivated family” and a close relationship with her father, an early naturalist and conservationist.⁴³⁰ She was a

⁴²⁶ Caroline Jordan, *Picturesque Pursuits: Colonial Women Artists and the Amateur Tradition* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2005), p. 16.

⁴²⁷ Ann B. Shteir, *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science: Flora’s Daughters and Botany in England 1760–1860* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 3–4.

⁴²⁸ Jordan, pp. 12–13.

⁴²⁹ Julie King, *Flowers into Landscape: Margaret Stoddard 1865–1934* (Christchurch: Robert McDougall Art Gallery & Hazard Press Ltd, 1997), p. 14.

⁴³⁰ King, p. 19.

talented illustrator of New Zealand plants and enjoyed expeditions to places such as the Chatham Islands in search of new species.⁴³¹ She also grew up at a time when the landscape of the countryside around her was undergoing a rapid and highly visible transformation.⁴³² This background became an important factor in her work and she became one of the many young women in Canterbury who used the fact that that flower painting was socially acceptable, to study art and science, and even attempt to make a career out of it.

Parental support was always a major encouragement to girls who wished to take up art and science, whether formally at institutions such as the Canterbury School of Art or informally, at home with governesses or school-mistresses. Sometimes it was purely for social reasons such as with the Peache girls in the 1890s at Mt Somers, for whom painting was merely one of a number of accomplishments they possessed, as this letter from their father makes clear

Con especially always gets up at 6 o'clock and practises for an hour on the piano and then Zoe and Florence follow her. They are fond of drawing and painting ... Con and Florence are doing dogs' heads and Zoe some flowers⁴³³

Yet just because some pastimes could be looked upon by society as mere accomplishments should not be taken to mean that the girls who performed these activities did not take them seriously, or invest a great deal of energy and skill in participating in them. Jordan's work on Australian women artists makes it clear that some of them were very talented indeed, and their amateur status was more to do with social attitudes of the time than being a true reflection of their abilities or even sometimes of their relationship to money-making.⁴³⁴ The fact that the Peache girls were 'fond' of drawing and painting—granted this is their father's interpretation of their attitudes and not theirs, so should be used with some caution—shows the sense of personal and possibly even intellectual satisfaction that could be obtained from artistic pursuits in the garden.

In the early 1900s, Marion Saunders of Cheviot was lucky enough to have both parents who were amateur naturalists, and keen enough to take her "botanising to Gore Bay". As with many girls with a comprehensive background in natural history she developed conservation instincts from an early age. While admitting that the tussock burn offs used for clearing pastoral land

⁴³¹ *ibid.*, pp. 54–55.

⁴³² *ibid.*, pp. 25–26.

⁴³³ Gray, p. 125.

⁴³⁴ Jordan, p. 145.

were “spectacular at night,” she also recalled that they “caused many regrets in my mind”.⁴³⁵ There was a strong connection between knowledge and appreciation of native plants inculcated by parents or teachers, and the growing identification with the environment and the increasing attempts by the late colonial period to preserve aspects of it and to associate it with a burgeoning nationalism. It is no coincidence that it was at this time that colonial gardens began to contain a greater variety of New Zealand plants than just the ubiquitous cabbage tree or flax bushes. Gardens were becoming spaces in which families could display a growing sense of national identity.

The garden also became a space where women could leave their work behind and just enjoy playing with their children or watching their children play. What comes through strongly in the primary evidence is that the garden, as a more neutral, open space than that of the house, allowed many colonial parents to be more relaxed when interacting with their children. For example, Rebecca Dawber of Banks Peninsula recalled how in September 1870 she and her husband “spent the whole day in the bush with the children. We enjoyed it very much”.⁴³⁶ In another diary from 1881 she writes on New Year’s Eve that “the children and I took our tea out in the garden and they are now running about in the moonlight—it is a glorious night”.⁴³⁷ These moments of appreciation of the natural beauty of her new home and acknowledgement of how much her children loved it were all the more poignant because Rebecca struggled with severe depression and homesickness. Just a month before she had confided in her diary how she had tried “so hard to give up the yearnings after my old buried life in the brightest land on earth with all her fogs and winds and rains and frosts and snows. Dear Old England, this country can never be home to me never”.⁴³⁸

In another example, Eunice Upton wrote in 1873 of playing with her little boy, nicknamed Tich. After winter, the grass “was so long that if Tich lay down in it we could not see the least bit of him ... he thought it great fun to see me looking all over the garden for him”.⁴³⁹ Many of Eunice’s letters focus on the outdoors and her children. She must have felt able to behave more naturally away from the social and class restrictions of the house. Her son’s behaviour also

⁴³⁵ John Wilson, *Cheviot: Kingdom to County* (Cheviot: Cheviot Historical Records Society Inc., 1993), p. 168.

⁴³⁶ Robert Dawber and Rebecca Dawber, p. 196.

⁴³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 253.

⁴³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 250

⁴³⁹ Adams, p. 118.

showed that children found the garden a liberating place, where they could tease, or deceive the all-powerful adult figures in their lives.

Children were also expected to help with work in the garden. In the early colonial period, it was necessary to have every able-bodied member of the family making a contribution just to be able to function in daily life. Later, once homes and infrastructure were more developed, gardening for children was still encouraged. It was believed that gardening inculcated traits of hard work, patience, perseverance, and a useful knowledge and awareness of nature.

In the 1860s, Emily Acland's children were given their own small garden to design as they wished, but their parents, realising the limited patience levels of most children, encouraged them to plant quickly sprouting plants and vegetables such as radishes.⁴⁴⁰

Francis Caverhill also made sure her children were kept occupied in summer by helping with fruit picking from the garden. Given the prodigious amount of bottling and preserving done by Francis in the kitchen, their efforts were almost certainly appreciated as well as needed. On Christmas Day 1865, for instance it was "fine and very hot" and "the children picked all the raspberries and I made some jam".⁴⁴¹ There is not necessarily any reason to think that the children were reluctant workers. Given Francis' tolerant attitude in other areas of her life she presumably expected that not all the fruit would make it as far as the kitchen.

Enthusiasm about working in the garden was not always just imposed upon children from above. In the late 1860s Adie M. Hall, a teenager who had only recently arrived in New Zealand, took her young cousins into Christchurch to spend their Christmas money. The children "agreed to club together and buy a set of gardening tools with which they are highly pleased, and began to use directly they arrived home".⁴⁴²

The contribution of children could also be an important part of environmental transformation in the Canterbury high country, when they put skills learned in the garden to good effect. During their holidays in the late 1860s, Ellen Tripp's children "rode over the hills of Orari Gorge and into the backcountry" with pockets stuffed full of "cocksfoot, clover and other

⁴⁴⁰ Strongman, p. 85.

⁴⁴¹ Caverhill, Vol. 2, p. 63.

⁴⁴² Garner and Foster, p. 168.

seeds”. They then scattered the seeds “as their ponies carried them along the tracks and up the more gentle slopes”.⁴⁴³ Their efforts ensured an increase in available high country pastureland.

After the early colonial period gardens became more established and people became interested in gardens for fashion and status rather than just for subsistence. However, children were still encouraged to help. Garden work for children was seen as morally uplifting, and a useful way to get children involved with practical family activities. When ferns became fashionable in the 1880s, the Acland’s grandchildren were encouraged to help build an outdoor fernery. “Its construction seems to have occupied the family for some time and it was a great source of fun”.⁴⁴⁴ Emily, John and the gardeners did the heavy work, such as arranging the stones, while the children helped by finding fern seedlings and moss from the “extensive patches of bush containing ferns” that grew “close to the homestead”.⁴⁴⁵

It wasn’t all necessarily about gardens for show however, even at this stage of colonial development. Also during the 1880s for instance, Mary Rolleston was left alone with her children on an isolated farm in South Canterbury while her husband pursued his political career in Wellington. Despite William’s position money was tight, and one year when the economically vital potato crop almost failed, “she and the children spent a back-breaking afternoon in a high wind, picking up and bagging the precious remnants”.⁴⁴⁶ It is a reflection of how farming success in the colonial period was often a joint family endeavour, and all members had the potential to have an economic impact. The children’s ability to work in the garden and on the land could make a significant difference to a family’s income. In the minds of the settlers, it also ensured healthy, active, hard-working offspring who would be an economic benefit not just to the families, but to the future prosperity of the colony.

Memory, Longing and Loss in the Garden

The pervasiveness in colonial society of the sentimental Victorian ideal of mothers and children in the garden is demonstrated powerfully by the case of Jessie Rhodes of Otahuna. Jessie had wealth and status but had remained childless. By the early 1900s the psychological strain of

⁴⁴³ Oliver A. Gillespie, *South Canterbury: A Record of Settlement* (Timaru: The South Canterbury Centennial History Committee, 1978), p. 335.

⁴⁴⁴ Strongman, p. 89.

⁴⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁴⁶ Rosamond Rolleston, *William and Mary Rolleston* (Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed, 1971), p. 106.

what she must have perceived as her own failure caused Jessie to have a severe nervous breakdown. The behaviour she manifested during her breakdown was both sad and telling.

She would take walks in the grounds of Otahuna, crooning to a doll cradled in her arms as if it were a live baby. Several times she slipped out of the house unnoticed and the staff would be sent to look for her in case she tried to drown herself in the reservoir⁴⁴⁷

Many gardens had been planned by colonial couples with their future families in mind. The design and layout of parts of the garden often took into account trees to climb, paths for children to explore and, as with the Acland family, little patches of ground set aside for the children's use where they could plant whatever they wanted.

A letter from Tai Tapu settler Elizabeth Peryman to her mother Mary Saunders demonstrates the ease with which settler thoughts about the garden led on automatically to thoughts of home, children, family and the future.

I expect your violets and ours will be flowering together this year, unless kept back by the frosts, ours will soon blossom. I have planted and sowed some on our bank- the little treasures never seem to look so sweet against the black earth in the garden as against the grass and weeds. I often think what a source of pleasure the old violet banks and primrose woods and cowslip fields were to us. Our children have not those treats. It came into my head quite as news the other day that they would not suffer so much from one privation which we have felt much. If they should set in families their children will not be without uncles, aunts and cousins. It had never occurred to me that in one generation this would be set aright again⁴⁴⁸

This letter provides a perfect juxtaposition of the way in which settler gardens both reflected a much-loved past in another country, and the knowledge that the family line continued on, into the future in a new land.

⁴⁴⁷ Geoffrey W. Rice, *Heaton Rhodes of Otahuna: the Illustrated Biography* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2001), p. 151.

⁴⁴⁸ Frances Porter and Charlotte MacDonald, eds, *My Hand Will Write what my Heart Dictates: The Unsettled Lives of Women in Nineteenth Century New Zealand As revealed to Sisters, Families and Friends*, (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1996), p. 99.

Settlers then, planted gardens not only for themselves, but for posterity. The emotional distress that resulted when the longed-for children did not arrive, was for some women such as Jessie Rhodes, overwhelming, and the garden would have been a continual reminder. Infertility was a tragedy in a society that held motherhood to be a woman's highest vocation. Class or status was no protection from its negative effects.

Ellen Meyer of Blue Cliffs had, as a new bride in the 1870s, "planted for the future" with her husband and "provided their successors with ... many beautiful trees".⁴⁴⁹ None of those successors were to bear the name Meyer, however, as at the age of 26, after three years of marriage with no sign of a pregnancy, she was persuaded by a doctor to undergo an operation that would solve the problem. She died on the operating table in 1878.⁴⁵⁰ Any operation in Victorian times was a dangerous undertaking, but the fact that such a young woman was willing to take such a drastic step so early on in her married life is an indication of the immense pressure put on women to reproduce in colonial society.

Ellen's vision of the landscape of Blue Cliffs in the future had included a church in a picturesque valley beneath the homestead. Presumably she and her husband Charles intended it to be a family church, such as Holy Innocents at Mt Peel. Her husband built it in her memory soon after her death but died himself before it was finished.⁴⁵¹ The church and their garden were left for others to enjoy. Given the fragility of life at the time and how quickly death could completely negate a family's claim to, and hold on, the land it is no wonder that gardens and trees that could long outlast a human lifespan became so important symbolically for settlers.

It is probably for this reason that, instead of the older, common tradition in Britain of using the family bible to write down names and birthdates to record the arrival of each new generation, some Canterbury settlers seem to have been fonder of creating an open-air record of family progress through the medium of the garden. The practice of planting trees to commemorate the birth of each new child was widespread. It was a way for settler families to metaphorically put down roots in a new land and embody themselves in the landscape.

Samuel Hewlings and his wife were one of the first couples to settle in what was to become the town of Geraldine. In 1854, they planted a totara tree "to commemorate the birth of [their] daughter, the first child of European descent to be born in the district". It was still standing in

⁴⁴⁹ Strongman, p. 99.

⁴⁵⁰ Woodhouse, *Blue Cliffs*, p. 26.

⁴⁵¹ *ibid.*, pp. 26–27.

the main street as late as 1971”.⁴⁵² The use of a New Zealand native tree, the totara, for this commemoration was unusual, and it was possibly the choice of Samuel’s wife who was of Maori descent. Historian Alison Clarke has shown how in Maori tradition the burying of a child’s umbilical cord near a special tree could act as a signifier of “territorial right” to “certain land”.⁴⁵³

While differing considerably from Maori in spiritual meanings, a similar desire to mark out a family’s claim to the land seems to have been the impetus for this practise for Europeans in colonial times. L. Tripp in his memoir, recalled what happened the day his sister Ella [Eleanor] was born in 1867. The occasion was marked by his father planting “an acorn near the spring bridge. It had come from his father’s garden in England. It grew into a beautiful tree”.⁴⁵⁴ It was quite common for commemorative trees to reflect the family’s background and ancestry. The planting of the tree was a dual act of remembering. Holmes, Martin and Mirmohamadi describe settlers’ gardens as cultivating a “double vision. They look back to lost places and homes and at the same time... they look forward to a different future”.⁴⁵⁵

The garden of Te Waimate station also contained trees commemorating the birth of children. When Effie and Michael Studholme had their first two daughters, they planted two oaks in their ornamental garden to celebrate each event.⁴⁵⁶ As with the Tripp family it was no coincidence that the tree chosen was an oak. The oak has been a prominent component of England’s popular culture and romanticised past. From Druids in oak groves, and King Charles hiding in an oak tree, to the great oak beam roofs of Westminster Hall and Hampton Court Palace, and the timber yards that used oak to equip Drake’s and Nelson’s fleets; it was a tree that was powerfully symbolic of the history of the ‘Mother Country’. Historian Peter Ackroyd has examined the anthropological role of ancient trees such as the oak in British culture. He has suggested that “the tree encloses a communal memory—beyond the memory of anyone now living ... and from it derives that sense of place, of literal rootedness”.⁴⁵⁷ Oak was also, quite literally, part of the fabric of settler’s past lives in Britain, because in England alone “over 90 per cent of building timbers are oak”.⁴⁵⁸ Botanic historian Oliver Rackham has described the oak, aptly,

⁴⁵² Gillespie, p. 192.

⁴⁵³ Clarke, *Born To A Changing World*, p. 32.

⁴⁵⁴ L. O. H. Tripp, *Memoirs* (Timaru: Herald Printing Works, 1958), p. 18.

⁴⁵⁵ Katie Holmes, Susan K. Martin, and Kylie Mirmohamadi, *Reading the Garden: the Settlement of Australia* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2008), p. 30.

⁴⁵⁶ Strongman, p. 59.

⁴⁵⁷ Peter Ackroyd, *The Origins of the English Imagination* (London: Vintage, 2004), pp. 5–6.

⁴⁵⁸ Oliver Rackham, *The History of the Countryside* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1989), p. 86.

as a “pioneer tree ... which [could] easily invade vacant ground”.⁴⁵⁹ For these reasons, symbolic and practical, it is hardly surprising that oak was most often the tree of choice to mark the birth of the next generation in the New Zealand colony.

Some families did make different choices however. Thelma Strongman noted that at Holmeslee Station in the late 1870s through to the 1880s, “following the birth of each of the twelve Holmes children, a fruit tree was planted to mark the event, and it is thought that the one remaining tree, a pear tree, belonged to Mr A. W. Holmes, the present owner’s father”.⁴⁶⁰ The choice of fruit trees is interesting. They are not the most long-lived of trees—as the fact that only one of these plantings survives demonstrates—and can be more prone than other exotics to diseases, blight, and damage in extreme weather conditions. The trees might have been chosen because of their obvious symbolism—fruitfulness and Britain’s rural past—or more prosaically so that every child in the family could have her or his own tree to pick fruit from, thereby preventing quarrels. If there was any symbolism involved in selecting fruit trees it might very well not have been at a conscious level. It was however an eminently practical choice of tribute.

Planting trees to memorialise family members was not just a phenomenon that occurred on large rural estates. In 1883, Jennie and William Smith moved to a small estate in Upper Riccarton, at that time on the outskirts of Christchurch. Like many other families of that era they were worried about the deleterious effects of increasing urbanisation on their family’s health and moved “for the sake of the healthier air and country lifestyle”. Outside the city, they had room to develop “a good garden” and also created “an orchard where every tree was named for a member of the family”.⁴⁶¹

The colonists and their families were aware of the symbolism of such gestures. In the small settlement of Waikakahi, South Canterbury, Mr Farquhar McRae, a descendent of the original settlers of the district, made a speech for the town’s jubilee in 1957. He said “that a tree symbolised for him the life and experience of man. The tree had had its roots taken up and placed in a new district—pioneers, like the tree, had taken up their roots and planted them in the Waikakahi settlement. Through the buffeting of winds of adversity, hard work and a strong will, their roots went well down into the soil ... and their fruits were perfected. As a tree throws

⁴⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 67.

⁴⁶⁰ Strongman, p. 113.

⁴⁶¹ Judith Devaliant, *Kate Sheppard* (Auckland: Penguin, 1992), p. 15.

forth its branches, so the families of these people had spread about the country”.⁴⁶² The comment in this speech about fruit being perfected is another glimpse into the way in which the colonists viewed posterity. The images of trees and gardens seem to have been widespread in colonial metaphoric language.

This is demonstrated in another, seemingly trivial, connection between gardens and naming practices that reflects the increasing importance of the image of the garden in colonial society. In Clarke’s work on childbirth in New Zealand, she notes the rise in popularity from the 1880s, of flower and plant names for girl babies both in Britain and the colonies. While the name Rose had always had a certain amount of popularity, it was this period that saw it joined by the newly fashionable “Ivy, Lily, Myrtle, Olive and Violet”.⁴⁶³ There has been little work done in New Zealand on naming practices, but it would be an interesting path for further research to see if the popularity of these flower names went across all classes or simply reflected middle-class concerns.

Clarke’s research also demonstrated that the third- most popular name for girls overall, in 1891, was May, a flower-linked name that had come into prominence “from nowhere”.⁴⁶⁴ In fact, the popularity of this name was a result of the avidity with which colonial women followed the lives of royalty. The name May became fashionable at this date because of a very specific event of deep interest to many colonial women—the betrothal of the heir to the throne, Prince Albert Victor to Princess May of Teck. Rumours of their courtship had begun in 1891, and their official betrothal was announced early the next year in 1892.⁴⁶⁵ Royal names always had a certain amount of social cachet, however the connections of this name with the currently fashionable flower and garden imagery certainly would have increased its popular appeal.

Photography: Picturing gender in the garden

The popularity of family life in the garden is well represented by the considerable number of colonial photographs on the topic which still exist in both archival and private collections. Jeanine Graham, in her study of pioneer life seen through the lens of surviving photographs, concluded that “life for colonial children was dominated neither by the formality nor the

⁴⁶² William Vance, *Land of Promise: The Story of Waikakahi* (Timaru: Timaru Herald Company Ltd, 1957), p. 162.

⁴⁶³ Clarke, *Born to a Changing World*, p. 170.

⁴⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁶⁵ Jane Ridley, *Bertie: A Life of Edward VII* (London: Vintage, 2013), p. 294.

footwear depicted in the family portraits”.⁴⁶⁶ The studio portraits that she analysed were designed to represent the stereotype of patriarchal, hierarchical families, but interestingly, photographs taken in the garden sometimes depict a very different image of settler life. As Graham suggests, both formality and footwear were seen less as an accepted part of life and more as optional extras.

In 1879 Eliza McIlrath of Kowhai Pass, had a photograph taken of her family in the garden to send to her parents. Her description of the photography session provides a chaotic antidote to the staged formality of studio shots.

We are sending you a view of our house but we are not taken well ourselves. There are two of the children you cannot see at all the sun was too hot at the time and the man had to stand too far off us. I had William on my knee ... Jainey is lying at my feet James is beside her but you cannot see them at all ... Little Ham is standing alongside his papa with his dog. John-Robert is sitting on the grass beside me but it is very badly taken. The house is very well taken because it sat still⁴⁶⁷

Many colonial women must have wished for pictures of neat, genteel children posing patiently in their Sunday best to send back to relatives in Britain. However, the casual depictions of family life that typically resulted from garden photography sessions often provide valuable evidence that the monolithic, patriarchal, hierarchical culture associated with nineteenth century settlers was more of an ideal than a reality. It certainly supports family historian Erik Olssen’s view that “the idea of separate spheres was more honoured in the breach than the observance”.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁶ Jeanine Graham, ‘The Pioneers’ in *The Oxford Illustrated History of New Zealand*, ed. by Keith Sinclair (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 49–74.

⁴⁶⁷ John Bassett, ed., *The McIlrath Letters: A Family History in Letters from New Zealand to Ireland 1860–1915* (Killyleagh: Killyleagh Branch, North of Ireland Family History Society, 2009), p. 84.

⁴⁶⁸ Erik Olssen, ‘Families and the Gendering of European New Zealand in the Colonial Period’, in *The Gendered Kiwi*, ed. by Caroline Daley and Deborah Montgomerie (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1999), pp. 36–62.



Figure 3.1: A picture of gentility? Emily Acland and family in the garden (Courtesy of Macmillan Brown Library).⁴⁶⁹

This is not to say that settlers did not use photography in the garden to represent their cultured and dignified status, and to support their claim to the land through portrayals of the continuing family line of grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Many of their attempts to do so, however, contain contradictions and resistance to this message, whether conscious or not, and come far closer to depicting the reality of family relationships and existence than studio shots. Figure 3.1 is a photograph of Emily Acland with her grandchildren—the future heirs who would inherit the estate, and the prestige of the Acland name. It is immediately obvious however, that this is not necessarily a representation of a family with pretensions to gentility. Her oldest grandson stands with casual jacket and crumpled shirt. Her oldest granddaughter has untidy straggles of hair over her forehead and leans in against her grandmother protectively. The toddler grandchild sits on the ground, hair tousled and looking distinctly uncombed, and with open mouth because she is, almost certainly, about to break into a loud tantrum. Even the baby looks slightly startled. The air of calm authority and control that pervades many Victorian studio

⁴⁶⁹ MB 44, Acland Family papers, Reference code 284, ‘Emily Acland (seated) with her grandchildren’, Unknown photographer, Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury.

photographs is not in evidence here except in the figure of Emily who turns her straightforward gaze to the camera.



*Figure 3.2: The extended Acland family
(Courtesy of Macmillan Brown Library).⁴⁷⁰*

Another photograph of the extended Acland family also provides some interesting insights into gender and family relationships. Figure 3.2 shows the Acland clan posing on the stone steps of a house near a verandah covered with roses. It is true that the men of the family are in the most prominent position, on the lower steps nearest the camera, but their posture is slightly hunched and awkward as they squeeze up to make room for the other family members, and the young man in the dark suit at the front does not appear to be enjoying himself. One young girl is seated on her father's lap with her arm casually and confidently draped over his shoulder. They are obviously close. The tantrum-prone toddler from the previous photograph is there but unable to stand still resulting in a vaguely blurry image, and in front of an older male relative who looks annoyed at being jammed in behind her. The family is posed in the shape of a triangle, the apex of which is Emily Acland and another woman who bears a distinct family resemblance to Emily—could this be the other former Miss Harper, Ellen Tripp? These women are portrayed as the matriarchs of the family.

⁴⁷⁰ MB 44, Acland Family papers, Reference code 299, 'Group, Acland family on steps to homestead, Mt Peel Station', Unknown photographer, Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury.



*Figure 3.3: Mt Peel Station employees and their family
(Courtesy Macmillan Brown Library).⁴⁷¹*

Even families who lacked the wealth of the Aclands liked to portray themselves in the garden surveying their land. Figure 3.3 shows employees from Mt Peel Station, and their family, posing for a photo. They posed, symbolically enough for settlers, on an uprooted tree. The eldest boy and girl have climbed onto the trunk and stand amidst the branches, the father and grandmother are seated while the wife stands with her hand on the shoulder of one of her younger sons. The children are all decently dressed with good footwear but the clothes are worn, as are the father's trousers. There is a distinct age gap between the oldest boy and girl and the younger children, which means the two older children were probably used to playing together and providing companionship for one another. The daughter is not in a ladylike pose nor are there any obvious signs that she did not choose her position in the photograph herself. She appears to be a very confident young girl.

⁴⁷¹ MB 44, Acland Family papers, Reference code 277, 'Mt Peel Station employees and their family', Unknown photographer, Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury.

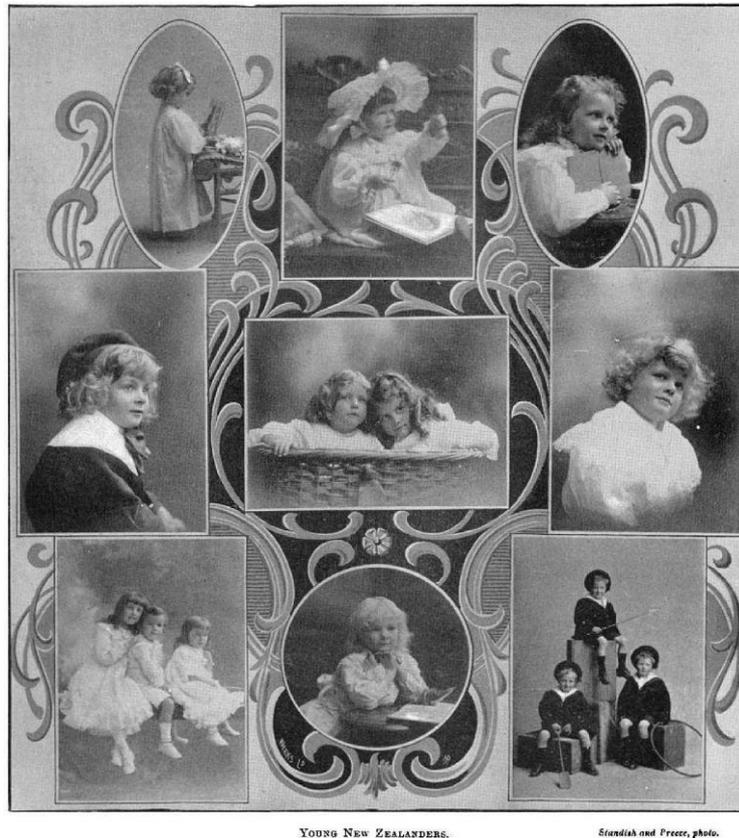


Figure 3.4: “Young New Zealanders”—the colonial ideal
(Courtesy of NZETC, Victoria University of Wellington).⁴⁷²

It is interesting to see how far removed these photographs are from the ideal of children promoted at the time. Towards the end of the nineteenth century the montage of idealised young colonials shown in Figure 3.4 was published. The cultural assumptions behind this display are numerous but perhaps the most noteworthy is the sheer preponderance of blonde, Anglo-Saxon, smooth-skinned cherubs with not a freckle, tan, dirt smudge, or untidy wisp of wind-tangled dark hair in sight. The differences between these ideals and the reality of life for colonial children as depicted in most garden photographs are so extreme as to be even faintly ridiculous. Even the wealth and status of a family such as the Aclands did not result in photographs of children looking like this. It is in fact, tempting to wonder how the Acland toddler gearing up into full tantrum mode in Figure 3.1 would have enjoyed playing with one of the perfect little angels portrayed here. This montage is a reminder of the increasing importance of the ideals of racial fitness in popular discourse of the 1890s and the way in which New Zealand was

⁴⁷² ‘Young New Zealanders. Standish and Preece, photo’ part of *The Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, NZETC, Victoria University of Wellington (Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 New Zealand Licence) <<http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/Cyc03Cycl-fig-Cyc03Cycl0287a.html>>.

expected to function as a breeding source of strong, healthy, glowing children for the good of the Empire.

Gender Relations in the Garden

Gardens were not just sites where the constraints of family life could be relaxed, but were also sites of gender negotiation. A later generation of McIlraths posed for another photograph in the garden in 1901, and the young Edith McIlrath sent a written description to a cousin.

By the photo you will see mother sitting down, to her right is Olive dressed in white, and Frank is on our pony (which belongs to us girls) Jim is the one holding the bike, Emy and I are standing together only I am the child nearest to Jim with my hand on the dogs head⁴⁷³

This description is a vivid reminder that gardens were contested spaces. It is interesting to note that the pony mentioned belongs to the girls, and not the boys of the family, as Edith takes some pains to point out. She also uses her pose in the photograph to lay claim to the affections, if not the ownership, of the family dog. Gardens then, were not sites that excluded girls, nor are colonial girls' memories of garden purely centred around stereotypical feminine activities such as picking flowers or sewing in the shade.

Airini Rhodes remembered spending time with her mother in the garden at Blue Cliffs in the late 1890s. Her mother “taught me how to dress flax and make crackers for my whip, an art she had learned from Maori friends at Pihautea”.⁴⁷⁴ Her father taught her “to know the different paddocks by name, to judge whether the crops were doing well, and to watch for weeds”.⁴⁷⁵ She was friends with Alice Hendry, daughter of a former maid at Blue Cliffs, and together they spent their days with their “ponies to ride” and “pet lambs, chickens and young ducks to look after”.⁴⁷⁶ Later, in the early 1900s, when she was a teenager, Airini was taught how to muster sheep and would ride “out with the shepherds”⁴⁷⁷ although “working with cattle” was her “chief joy”. As her parents' only child Airini was treated as the heir to the estate and her upbringing seems to have included the same level of instruction that would have been given to a male heir.

⁴⁷³ Bassett, p. 106.

⁴⁷⁴ Woodhouse, *Blue Cliffs*, p. 111.

⁴⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p. 92.

⁴⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 94.

⁴⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 111.

In terms of class, gender and cultural relations, the activities of Airini Rhodes in the garden suggest the potential for far greater flexibility in settler society than is generally thought. In terms of gender assumptions, even when boys on the Blue Cliffs estate were privileged over the girls, it was not tamely accepted by the girls in question. Airini recalled a visiting brother and sister, Godfrey and Lillian Holdsworth who rode around the grounds on a “quiet old grey horse ... Godfrey always in front, Lillian hanging on behind. They quarrelled so much (no doubt because of the unfair seating arrangement) that Lane told my mother he was afraid they would turn his hair grey”.⁴⁷⁸

In the late 1890s, the Giles children of Mt Parnassus, four of whom were girls, used to play a game called ‘Garlie Rivers’ in their garden “in which a model landscape was created in the sand brought down by the water race. Pieces of bark would represent homesteads, and acorn and gum nuts were sheep and cattle”.⁴⁷⁹ The children thus controlled the fate of their own ‘Stations’. Parnassus was quite an isolated locality and the children had to rely on each other for company. The ‘Garlie Rivers’ game in this instance bears similarities to the ‘Glass Town’ games of the Bronte sisters in England.⁴⁸⁰ In both cases isolated children had created their own replica of an adult world in which they had control. The Giles girls had become managers of their very own agricultural estate. Strongman suggests that this game helped give the children “a true understanding and expression of the world around them”.⁴⁸¹

The New Zealand environment gave children, and girls specifically, greater flexibility of play and movement. When parents of rural homesteads went visiting families who could live some distance away, there were often too many children to fit in carriages and wagons, so the children had to make their own way there. The journeys could involve riding up hills and fording rivers and the children were away from parental control for the whole trip. The children of the Elworthy family, growing up in the early years of the twentieth century, took full advantage of these opportunities for freedom. The memoirs of Harold Elworthy describe a game based on using the produce of their apple trees from the orchard “to roll a girl off a pony” as all the children rode out to visit friends.⁴⁸² The boys enjoyed the effects of the “impact of a large, hard

⁴⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 83.

⁴⁷⁹ Strongman, p. 123.

⁴⁸⁰ Margot Peters, *Unquiet Soul: A Biography of Charlotte Bronte* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1987), p. 21.

⁴⁸¹ Strongman, p. 124.

⁴⁸² Deborah Seller, *When I was a child: Reminiscences of childhood in New Zealand* (Christchurch: Shoal Bay Press, 1998), p. 63.

apple” or the slightly different effect of a “rotten one”.⁴⁸³ It was not an unequal competition however, because the girls of the family were trying to do the same thing to the boys, and while the boys (Harold claims) had a “better aim”, the girls were “more numerous, and on average older” which made the contest about even.⁴⁸⁴

The Elworthy children also used the “cabbage tree leaves as sleds. When the hills browned off in the summer you could travel at a wicked pace” down to the bottom where “we could lie in the long grass and chatter”.⁴⁸⁵ A similarly vigorous and adventurous childhood was experienced in North Canterbury, where Gretta Sinclair of Cheviot fondly remembered “carefree days spent in the lovely plantations at Cheviot Hills—building huts with wattle saplings, making jam out of hawthorn berries and putting it into tin match-boxes”.⁴⁸⁶

In the early 1900s, the granddaughter of Banks Peninsula pioneer Edward Harris could remember her grandfather sending all the children off on a quest in the garden. “It delighted his sense of humour to pretend that in the garden there grew a “lolly” tree. We spent much time searching for this magic tree but, needless to say without success. When we finally gave up the search he would say with a laugh, ‘I can always find it. Look!’ And from his pocket he would produce the lollies”.⁴⁸⁷

Memoirs of childhood, such as the above examples, need to be analysed carefully. There is a tendency to glamourise or romanticise the past, or compare it with the inadequate present. A common theme in several childhood memoirs is of how few opportunities modern children have for genuine rough and tumble play. It is, of course, vital to the pioneer image that they be portrayed as hard-working and tough—making sacrifices in order to provide a more comfortable lifestyle for the next generation. All these issues must be taken into account when examining anecdotes from memoirs. However, the events that tended to stay in the mind from childhood were times of great freedom and enjoyment, or times of great unfairness or frustration. Both can be equally revealing examples of gender relations.

Another important factor that influenced the role of gender in children’s play was the difficulty colonial parents had in retaining nurses and governesses. The New Zealand servant shortage was a fact of life for the middle- and upper-classes from the very beginning of settlement. Busy

⁴⁸³ *ibid.*

⁴⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p. 62.

⁴⁸⁶ Margaret Marion (Gretta) Sinclair, *Memoirs*, Cheviot Museum, p. 20.

⁴⁸⁷ Mary Ada Kirk, *Edward William Harris: Pioneer, Okains Bay* (Christchurch: Bascand Ltd, 1979), p. 22.

parents in Britain had more choice in providing their children with a highly structured nursery routine. Colonial families were often lacking, or possibly just in-between, governesses, and parents still had their normal duties to perform in order to retain or improve their livelihoods. Children were therefore often left, and expected, to entertain themselves. In such circumstances the older children were then put in a supervisory role over younger siblings. It is important to realise that age, as well as gender, was an important part of the hierarchical structure of the colonial family. A boy might be the one to inherit the farm eventually, but if he had an older sister it would still often be she who was in charge at play time.

Even children's fiction—a useful reflection of the values of the time—portrayed the greater freedom colonial girls experienced. One of the most popular New Zealand children's books of the early-twentieth century was Esther Glen's *Six Little New Zealanders*, published in 1917, but set in Canterbury just prior to World War One. In it there is a passage that neatly undercuts many assumptions about prim and proper children in this era. In this excerpt the characters have just arrived and are being shown around the estate, including the mischievous Pipi who “looks like an angel, but isn't one” and Ngaire the narrator, age twelve:

We began to see our company was not welcomed, especially when Mrs McPherson told us to ‘Play outside in the sun, and not come cluttering under her feet all day.’ At first we wouldn't take the hint, but, unfortunately Pipi's fingers fell into the cream, and Mrs McPherson ordered us off ... Jan wouldn't come with us.

‘I'm not going to be ordered around like a chit of a child’, she said angrily. ‘Fancy telling me to run outside and play. I'll stay here all the morning if I feel like it’ ...

‘Let's climb to the top of the hill now,’ I suggested.

‘The horses first,’ cried Jock.

‘The pigs,’ said Pipi.

And as Pipi usually gets her way we went to inspect the pigs ...⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁸ Esther Glen, *Six Little New Zealanders* (Auckland: Kotare Books, 1983), pp. 33–34.

These examples, fictional and otherwise, demonstrate that there was a great deal of flexibility in gender relations in the garden. The tendency of the New Zealand environment to encourage more relaxed attitudes was acknowledged at the time. A typical non-fiction children's book, *The Wonder Book of Empire*, provides an enlightening view of perceived differences between British and colonial New Zealand childhoods.

Their life is very much like life in England, except that, the climate being warmer, more time is spent in the open air ... most boys and girls learn to ride horses and live an outdoor life ... Both boys and girls play tennis and hockey⁴⁸⁹

It is true that girls were encouraged to exhibit ladylike behaviour and activities, by both social pressure and fashion—the white dresses and elaborate hats typical of middle-class Edwardian fashions for children were not designed to make romping around the garden easy! However, in reality a surprising number of children spent most of their time playing unsupervised and often negotiated their own status in garden play. From sledding, horse-riding, and throwing rotten apples, to searching for magical trees and running their own make-believe sheep or cattle station, colonial girls were quick to utilise any opportunities for fun and freedom, and to use garden spaces to manipulate or even defy gender expectations.

Gender, Gardens, Racial Degeneration and Urbanisation

1890s-1914

By the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, gardens were inextricably linked with the process of civilising children into becoming worthy citizens. Garden work and play had become an important part of a burgeoning nationalism in the Australasian colonies. It was now the role of middle- and upper-class mothers particularly, to nurture in their children a love of nature and the outdoors, as a way of ensuring their physical and mental health. As the *Christchurch Press* stated in 1901 “the wholesomeness and healthfulness of gardening are medicine alike to body and mind”.⁴⁹⁰

The idea that working, running, and playing in the garden was good for children's health was not new, or even specific to colonial society. What was new from the later part of the nineteenth century, was the intensity with which mothers were now encouraged to be responsible for a

⁴⁸⁹ Harry Golding, ed., *The Wonder Book of Empire*, 2nd edn (London: Ward, Lock & Co Ltd, date unknown), p. 151.

⁴⁹⁰ ‘The Gardening Season’, *The Press*, 11 September 1901, p. 6.

healthy childhood through providing children with a clean, fresh, open-air environment. Women had always been the primary promulgators and providers of healthcare and information within families in colonial society. Joanna Bishop's work on settler women and their use of medicinal plants has demonstrated the centrality of women to colonial health care.⁴⁹¹ Despite this, their home-based contributions were usually ignored by the official medical system of the time, and by later historians of health in New Zealand. From the 1890s, however, both the New Zealand Government and the most popular forms of media such as newspapers confirmed women's place at the centre of domestic health practices, by targeting them specifically to promote new health imperatives.

Once knowledge of germs began to permeate public culture by the late-Victorian period, mothers were considered by political and social commentators as best placed to be "at the forefront of the battle against the 'invisible enemies' that spread disease".⁴⁹² There was an increasing belief that prevention was the key to good health. Cleanliness, "outside play and walks" and "exposure to fresh air" became part of a mother's arsenal against germs and illness in her family.⁴⁹³ The garden had multiple functions. It was not just the perfect environment for healthy children to play in—as indeed it had been considered from the early days of colonial settlement—but would also provide them with the fruit and vegetables now considered necessary to leaven the colonists' predominantly meat based diet.

There has been little academic work done so far on the role of gardens and the outdoors in children's lives in the colonial period, particularly for Canterbury. More work is needed on where perceptions of childhood, motherhood and gardens, both private and public, exactly fit into these growing ideological uncertainties of the late colonial period from the 1880s onwards. Academic emphasis has tended to centre on the slightly later post World War One period, perhaps because the programmes put in place at this time by the government and social organisations have such strong political and cultural links to theories of eugenics and thus to greater world events.

Canterbury organisations such as Cora Wilding's Sunlight League, which promoted holistic approaches to health care by suggesting that good health stemmed from moral and aesthetic

⁴⁹¹ Bishop, p. 105.

⁴⁹² Barbara Brookes, Annabel Cooper, and Robin Law, *Sites of Gender: Women, Men and Modernity in Southern Dunedin, 1890–1939* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2003), p. 292.

⁴⁹³ *ibid.*, p. 295.

education as well as physical exercise, have been subjects of academic studies.⁴⁹⁴ However all these twentieth century organisations have their roots in the earlier period of increased imperial anxiety about health, urban degeneracy and racial deterioration in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth century. These worries centred particularly around the effect of the environment on children.

Juvenile delinquency was “frequently held to be a product of close, squalid, unhygienic ... urban life” and “the increasing entry of women into the paid workforce and their subsequent neglect of family responsibilities”.⁴⁹⁵ There were fears that this “breakdown of family life” could become a “threat to social order”.⁴⁹⁶ Women who took the time to perform their parental duties and provide their children with healthy, “pastoral environments” were praised and held up as community role-models.⁴⁹⁷ Commentators of the time felt that it was impossible for a “depraved nature” to co-exist with the “humanising effect” of gardens and natural beauty.⁴⁹⁸ To promote gardening was therefore to lessen the criminal tendencies of the lower classes.

Children, particularly girls, were seen to be increasingly at risk in urban environments and from the 1880s onwards there was an immense surge in government attempts to deal with the situation. It is no coincidence therefore that the reformatory schools established by the state were deliberately sited in rural environments. Te Oranga Reformatory School for Girls in Canterbury was designed to solve the problem of criminal tendencies in young women. Set in the Canterbury countryside, the institution was based around the ethos that the best way of “influencing the inmates for good was to cultivate their sympathy for the higher and purer life”.⁴⁹⁹ According to the members of the Canterbury Women’s Institute, to do this it was essential “that the children should come under the influence of the Home before they are irretrievably corrupted by their surroundings”.⁵⁰⁰ Only the “rejuvenating atmosphere” of a

⁴⁹⁴ Nadia Gush, ‘The Beauty of Health: Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League’ in *The New Zealand Journal of History*, 43.1 (2009) 1–18.

⁴⁹⁵ Bronwyn Dalley, ‘From Demi-mondes to Slaveys: Aspects of the Management of the Te Oranga Reformatory for Delinquent Young Women, 1900–1918’ in Barbara Brookes, Charlotte MacDonald, and Margaret Tennant, eds, *Women in History 2: Essays on European Women in New Zealand* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1992), p. 151.

⁴⁹⁶ Bronwyn Dalley, *Family Matters: Child Welfare in Twentieth Century New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1998), p. 17.

⁴⁹⁷ Dalley, ‘From Demi-mondes to Slaveys’, p. 151.

⁴⁹⁸ Louise Shaw, *Southern Gardening: A History of the Dunedin Horticultural Society* (Dunedin: Dunedin Horticultural Society, 2000), p. 22.

⁴⁹⁹ Dalley, ‘From Demi-mondes to Slaveys’, p. 163.

⁵⁰⁰ ‘Neglected Children’, *The Press*, 10 March 1897, p. 6.

“pastoral environment” could halt what was seen as the inevitable slide of these girls into lives of degradation.⁵⁰¹

Mothers were encouraged in these kinds of anxieties about degradation and the moral well-being of their children by newspaper reports, popular magazines and government pronouncements. In the 1890s the Christchurch *Star* printed an article which hinted at the negative effects attendant upon neglecting gardening and nature studies for children.

The influence of this branch of education upon the youth of both sexes is very powerful. During the earlier days, children are most receptive, and the unborn love of nature can be either stimulated so as to exert a healthful influence over the whole life, or be blunted and lost by neglect⁵⁰²

The message was clear—mothers could be responsible for the success and health of their child’s future life, or equally, be responsible for ruining it.

By the early 1900s, according to the Christchurch *Press*, New Zealand was felt to be going through a “process of rural depopulation ... which if not arrested, means a weakening of national health and strength which can scarcely be repaired”.⁵⁰³ It was believed that the degenerate physical surroundings caused by urban poverty, not to mention the mild, warm climate, encouraged children to roam, or to lurk “on street corners instead of running through fields”.⁵⁰⁴ The persistence of what was seen to be ‘larrikin’ behaviour, amongst the working-classes in particular, was to be abhorred. Gardens became linked with government attempts at socially engineering their population, so that “tomorrow’s citizens would be of good character and not repeat the mistakes of the past”.⁵⁰⁵

These issues had a political, as well as a social, dimension. Historian Jock Phillips has noted that by the early-twentieth century there was a general feeling that the world was involved in “a struggle for the survival of the fittest races”, and that perceived British superiority in that struggle was threatened by the rise of “the Germans and Japanese”.⁵⁰⁶ New Zealand newspapers therefore followed German advances in agriculture and horticulture—specifically

⁵⁰¹ Dalley, ‘From Demi-mondes to Slaveys’, p. 151.

⁵⁰² ‘Ladies’ Gossip’, *The Star*, 19 November 1894, p. 4.

⁵⁰³ ‘School Gardens’, *The Press*, 8 December 1906, p. 11.

⁵⁰⁴ Daley, *Leisure and Pleasure*, p. 7.

⁵⁰⁵ Kirstie Ross, *Going Bush: New Zealanders and Nature in the Twentieth Century* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2008), p. 21.

⁵⁰⁶ Jock Phillips, *A Man’s Country: The Image of The Pakeha Male—A History* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 98.

in their schooling system—with somewhat fevered interest. The fact that it “was believed that the environment was crucial in moulding the strength of nations” meant those countries that could provide their citizens with access to sport and leisure in the healthy outdoors would have the advantage.⁵⁰⁷ A Christchurch *Press* article from 1906 states baldly “it is a singular and deplorable fact that in the matter of elementary instruction in agriculture, the countries forming the British Empire are woefully behind foreign nations”.⁵⁰⁸ Gardening and love for nature became one of the many activities promoted as a sign of a country’s moral and physical strength.

At the centre of the Empire there was a similar message going out to the people. In London, in 1913, two new parks were opened, one in Surrey and one in Beckenham. These events were covered in a newspaper article from the Christchurch *Press* entitled “London’s Lungs: New Parks Opened”.⁵⁰⁹ In a widely reported speech, Lord Curzon opened the park in Surrey with the claim that “England ... wanted outlets for her population. Her people were stunned by the work-a-day world, jaded by excitement, and afflicted by the burden of life”.⁵¹⁰ The other ‘lung’, a park in Beckenham, was “handed over to the people” by Mr John Burns.⁵¹¹ His speech contained a similar message. He pronounced “that the future of the race depended upon its good physique and its high ideals”.⁵¹² He did not know of anything, he claimed “that would more really encourage the moral and physical virtues that made a nation than good, fresh air and recreation”.⁵¹³ The feeling of malaise amongst the establishment was obviously empire wide.

To create a more populist base for improving the nation’s health in New Zealand, it was made clear that it was not just wealthy women with large, elegant gardens who were being targeted. A Christchurch *Press* article of May 1909 implied that there was no reason that gardening and beautifying could not be extended to the smaller gardens of the urban working-classes.

The tending of a few favourite flowers and even the growth of some small fruit and vegetables, in one’s own garden ... show how much could be done to make the surroundings of our own homes a greater source of health and attraction to

⁵⁰⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁰⁸ ‘School Gardens: Elementary Instruction in Agriculture’, *The Press*, 8 December 1906, p. 11

⁵⁰⁹ ‘London’s Lungs: New Parks Opened’, *The Press*, 11 June 1913, p. 2.

⁵¹⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹¹ *ibid.*

⁵¹² *ibid.*

⁵¹³ *ibid.*

the whole family and ... a way to health for the wife and mother who needs something to draw her out into the open air and sunshine⁵¹⁴

The effectiveness of this message in persuading its target audience must be in doubt. It was quite likely that working-class women had quite enough to draw them into the open air and sunshine, including having to hang out their own washing, walk to the shops rather than ride in a carriage, feed any livestock or animals and most likely fetch their own water for daily household work from pumps or springs in the garden. However the ability of working-class women to influence their family life for the better was taken seriously by colonial governments, and they, as well as middle-and upper-class mothers, were considered useful allies in the fight against larrikinism and urban squalor.

Evidence for this comes from the fact that the same message was being promoted simultaneously in Australia, where, as Holmes, Martin and Mirmohamadi point out, “the garden became a metaphor for all the qualities middle-class reformers wished to encourage among the labouring classes”.⁵¹⁵ It was an age “influenced by a growing international alarm over juvenile delinquency” in which the public perception was of increasing urban decay.⁵¹⁶ This contrasted with the ideal of a rural life of hard work, close to nature, as experienced by the first generation of pioneers.

These worries were partially the result of the new levels of political independence that colonies were experiencing across the British Empire. Many leaders and socio-political commentators were concerned with the type of society that would be created in this new era. They were eager not to replicate the old world problems of urban slums, poverty and criminal behaviour. The key to possessing a nation of useful and law-abiding citizens was not just to encourage civilising activities such as gardening, which led to more “refined sensibilities” but to actively discourage “poverty and squalor ... not conducive to happy, healthy and contented citizens”.⁵¹⁷

It is also for this reason that mainstream schools began to promote gardening and agricultural studies for both boys and girls, particularly amongst the working-classes. In New Zealand the emphasis on nature study and school gardens was specifically connected with concerns about rural depopulation and urban drift. By encouraging in children a love for nature, educationalists

⁵¹⁴ ‘Our Babies’, *The Press*, 12 May 1909, p. 2.

⁵¹⁵ Holmes, Martin, and Mirmohamadi, p. 18.

⁵¹⁶ Dalley, *Family Matters*, p. 17.

⁵¹⁷ Holmes, Martin, and Mirmohamadi, p. 94.

not only hoped to make good citizens but to keep families on the land rather than have them moving to the cities. The imposition of the North American holiday Arbor Day into the New Zealand education system from 1890 onwards, was typical of government attempts to add “much more systematic nature work to the school syllabus” in this period.⁵¹⁸

School Gardens and the Gender Issue

The general historical assumption has been that school gardening in this era was a highly gendered activity. According to this view, gardening for girls was restricted to decorative or subsidiary actions.⁵¹⁹ It was, after all, designed to create a future rural workforce wherein men were encouraged to perform “wholesome outside work in healthy surroundings, and women, the occupation most closely associated with home life”.⁵²⁰ Therefore boys were encouraged to grow vegetables, plant trees and perform heavy manual labour, while girls oversaw flower gardens and making floral displays for the classroom.

The situation was more nuanced in reality, with primary evidence from contemporary newspaper reports showing that gender relations in the garden could be more malleable than expected. Educational historian Colin McGeorge’s work on nature study in New Zealand primary schools suggests the curriculum of this period was rife with mixed messages.⁵²¹ Environmental historian Kirstie Ross agrees, stating that national school gardening initiatives were implemented “ad hoc” at local levels and “could be managed to meet a wide range of expectations, both official and unofficial”.⁵²² Nowhere is this more obvious than with gender. Ideological assumptions promoted at the top level often were far more muted, or even dispensed with altogether at local level.

In 1898, according to a newspaper article, the pupils at Hampstead School, Ashburton, planted some new trees and “the bigger boys, ably assisted by the bigger girls soon had the holes dug”.⁵²³ While it is certainly the case that the language of this article puts the girls firmly in the role of helpers rather than main initiators, the task of digging is not portrayed as unfeminine nor are their capabilities patronised—on the contrary they are described as ‘able’ and there is admiration for their quickness and efficiency. In a speech afterwards, their headmaster, Mr

⁵¹⁸ Ross, p. 21.

⁵¹⁹ Holmes, Martin, and Mirmohamadi, p. 113.

⁵²⁰ ‘Our Educational System’, *The Press*, 19 May 1906, p. 4.

⁵²¹ Colin McGeorge, ‘The Presentation of the Natural World in New Zealand Primary Schools 1880–1914’ in *History of Education Review*, 2.23, 1994, pp. 32–45.

⁵²² Ross, p. 39.

⁵²³ ‘Hampstead School’ *Ashburton Guardian*, 5 August 1892, p. 3.

Malcolm, seemed to be confirming the gender stereotype when he declared that “he would like to see garden plots allotted to the girls for the cultivation of flowers”.⁵²⁴ Interestingly though, he then added that he “was sorry that there was no ground to give the boys little flower gardens also”.⁵²⁵

There was an extensive article in the Christchurch *Press* in August 1905, entitled ‘Beautifying School Playgrounds’.⁵²⁶ It looked at school gardens in the working-class suburbs of Christchurch which were considered typical examples of the very places most at risk of urban decay. At St Albans school, there were “fourteen small gardens in one spot for the boys and another fourteen in another spot for the girls”.⁵²⁷ Far from the choices of plantings for those plots being proscribed by gender, the children were in fact encouraged to “select and bring their own seeds and plants”.⁵²⁸ The contents of their plots would therefore reflect what was available in their home gardens as well as whether their parents had the means, or inclination, to buy them extra seeds or seedlings. The sense of agency the children gained from being able to choose the contents of their school gardens was circumscribed in this case by availability and opportunity, rather than gender.

Addington School appeared to be more traditional, with many of the girls’ plots “having been marked off for the sowing of various kinds of annuals”.⁵²⁹ This, the article claims, had been done “chiefly” for the girls thus implying that some of the boys at least had also wanted flowering annuals.⁵³⁰ Certainly at Addington, the “girls hold two-thirds of the plots, and generally take a keener interest in the work of keeping their plots in order than do the boys”.⁵³¹ In terms of a learning experience the girls obviously achieved a sense of pride and satisfaction and were praised for their hard work.

Even within the most rigid form of government education, the industrial schools, the “gender boundary was not necessarily rigid”.⁵³² The girls at Te Oranga were used “to clear gorse from the property and maintain the garden”.⁵³³ This was hard physical work and although modern schools would not countenance such blatant use of child labour, the staff of Te Oranga saw it

⁵²⁴ *ibid.*

⁵²⁵ *ibid.*

⁵²⁶ ‘Beautifying School Playgrounds’, *The Press*, 17 August 1905, p. 5.

⁵²⁷ *ibid.*

⁵²⁸ *ibid.*

⁵²⁹ *ibid.*

⁵³⁰ *ibid.*

⁵³¹ *ibid.*

⁵³² Dalley, *Family Matters*, p. 30.

⁵³³ *ibid.*

as a way to channel the “inappropriate behaviour” and energy often linked with female sexuality into “more wholesome directions”.⁵³⁴

It was not just a ‘wholesome’ sense of physical achievement that girls could gain from working in school gardens, but also a feeling of intellectual and creative achievement. In 1909 the Borough School in Ashburton allowed its girl pupils to design the shape of their own garden beds. The resulting “hearts, stars, ovals, shamrocks, circles and crescents”, reflected the individuality of the girls and must have made a considerable difference to the usual uniformity of school playgrounds of the time.⁵³⁵ The plots were designed to contain “28 varieties of rose trees” but also, more practically “five dozen and a half of assorted fruit trees”.⁵³⁶ Later that month on Arbor Day, further “tree-planting commenced” and “there was an ample supply of trees and in the selection of these the girls, as well as the boys, were considered”.⁵³⁷



Figure 3.5: The boys of Waddington Primary School, proud of their achievements in the flower garden, 1907 (Courtesy of Kete Selwyn).⁵³⁸

Just as girls were often able to grow more than just flowers, so the efforts of the boys could also reflect the flexibility of gender relations. Boys were not always confined to heavy digging, tree-planting and hauling manure, as shown in Figure 3.5. where boys of the Selwyn district are

⁵³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 26.

⁵³⁵ ‘Borough School Gardens’, *Ashburton Guardian*, 13 July 1909, p. 4.

⁵³⁶ *ibid.*

⁵³⁷ ‘Arbor Day’, *Ashburton Guardian*, 21 July 1909, p. 3.

⁵³⁸ ‘Waddington School pupils amongst the flowers’, Selwyn Library (Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 New Zealand License) <<http://keteselwyn.peoplesnetworknz.info/site/images/show/363-waddington-school-pupils-amongst-the-flowers>>.

pictured in their own school flower garden. At Waimataitai School, near Timaru in 1912 the children held their first flower show. For the special occasion both sexes had to “adorn their respective rooms as they thought best, with flowers, and the effect ... was really excellent, not to say surprising. Many of the designs were wholly original, the colour blends were in splendid taste and altogether the children excelled themselves”.⁵³⁹ Aesthetic appreciation was linked with civilised values and moral probity. In this respect there was no reason why boys should not be encouraged to take an artistic, as well as a scientific interest in plants. For women and girls, as the traditional upholders of civilization in colonial ideology, it was taken as a given. Many women must have seen gardens as a socially sanctioned way in which to escape the four walls of the classroom or house, even if it was in the name of imperial ideology or a hegemonic discourse of gender and class.

Conclusion

The role that the garden played in pregnancy, birth, and the raising of children for settler women changed gradually over the colonial period. At the beginning of the period, from the 1850s to the 1880s, the garden was viewed as a haven, a place of gentle exercise beneficial to both mother and baby and a place of rest and contemplation after coming out of confinement. Evidence shows that the presence of the mother in the garden was an acknowledged social signal that she was recovered from the birth and ready to rejoin her community.

Opportunities for women increased from the 1880s and the old ideal of frail, delicate females was increasingly superseded by the physically stronger and more active ideal considered appropriate for the mothers of a healthy race. Children were introduced to the garden and the outdoors from an early age, as it was considered good for their mental and physical health. Many colonial women enjoyed spending time in the garden with their children, whether working while they played or joining in the fun, while gardens also became a space to teach children about the skills, self-discipline and hard work needed to become a successful gardeners and to contribute to the family livelihood. The image of the mother with her children in the garden was popular in art and literature, but for women unable to have children, the garden could become a site of regret, sadness and despair. Gardens were designed with future generations in mind and that made the role of childless women in the family garden difficult. Settlers automatically linked gardens in their minds with the possibilities of the future, for themselves and their families. Gardens were used as physical markers of a family’s growth

⁵³⁹ ‘Young Nature Lovers’, Timaru Herald, 2 March 1912, p. 6.

with trees being planted to mark the birth of new members. They became living records of a family's presence on, and claim to, the land.

The colonial garden also functioned as an unofficial classroom where children could be taught not just planting skills but natural history, art and science. The teachers, in this case were usually women, whether mothers or governesses, as gardens were considered one of the few appropriate places for female learning that did not compromise feminine respectability. This enabled some women to use the garden as their path to greater learning or even to a possible career or independence, usually in the field of art. It also meant that most middle- and upper-class children (whether boys or girls) had their initial ideas about nature in colonial society, formed by a specifically feminine point of view. This topic has not been dealt with adequately in existing academic studies of the environment in New Zealand.

As ambiguous spaces, both private and public, and often in colonial times both sheltered and wild, gardens became places where gender relations could be correspondingly ambiguous. The more temperate colonial climate and the informal colonial lifestyle that meant children were often left to entertain themselves. Girls grew up with more physical freedom and opportunities than their British middle- and upper-class counterparts. Status was often negotiated between the children themselves and not always to the detriment of the girls. Girls also used the open spaces of the garden to resist or reject outright the gender stereotypes imposed upon them. This is particularly noticeable in outdoor photography of the time, which provides a very different picture of family life and relations from the staged, idealistic image of the family produced by studio photography.

From the 1890s, this increased physical freedom for girls combined with imperial concerns about racial degeneration, the negative effects on health and morality of increased urbanisation, and new scientific discoveries such as the microbial causes of disease and infection, led to growing paranoia about the country's future. The solution to the problem was the removal of children from unhealthy environments, and a significant emphasis on the mental, physical and moral benefits of being outdoors, close to nature in the fresh air. Gardening was the perfect activity to ensure children had access to these benefits, and this period saw the rise of gardening and natural history in the school curriculum and other initiatives at government level such as promoting Arbor Day. These initiatives were often presented as unashamedly gendered, with girls being encouraged to concentrate on flower gardens and other appropriately decorative options. However at ground level there was a great deal more flexibility and many girls seem

to have relished the challenges and achievements of gardening at school, and enjoyed the experience. Perhaps that was just as well. As the next chapter will demonstrate, for many women the love of gardening would see them through many vicissitudes and traumas, including dealing with isolation, illness, old age and death.

Chapter 4:

Illness, Old Age, and Death

Introduction

The garden, and its plants and flowers, remained a vital part of many women's lives throughout the colonial period, and played a significant part in the way in which women coped with the various tribulations of colonial existence. Through isolation, illness, old age and death colonial women used gardens, flowers and the natural environment as coping mechanisms, and sites of agency in the face of sometimes overwhelming problems and grief.

Flowers and plants had ancient cultural connections with European customs of mourning and death. The Victorian period was notable for its indulgence in the rituals of grief, and people of the time wholeheartedly embraced the symbolism of plants and flowers. For women it was particularly apposite when dealing with the death of children, who were described in floral metaphorical language as buds that never had the chance to bloom. Women were also primarily responsible for the making and the giving of wreaths and bouquets of at funerals and bestowing them on the gravesite. The creation of floral tributes in the early-to-mid colonial period was a gendered activity. This remained the case until the rise of floristry as an occupation in the late-nineteenth century.

Sometimes graves became sites of permanent flowers when families chose to plant gardens around the place where their loved ones were buried; a practice that was common throughout the Empire. These gravesite gardens could take many forms. They could consist of neat, municipal gardens in city cemeteries, gardens on graves dug in paddocks surrounded by trees, near homesteads, or alternatively, they could be burials in native bush, perhaps symbolising returning the bodies to the land.

In urban areas, garden cemeteries and the planting of garden plants on gravesites became a common part of colonial mourning rituals. Flowers and plants in public graveyards were not always treated as a neutral cultural phenomenon however, and some settlers including women resisted the hegemonic status of the church or city cemetery. For various reasons, including poverty and drunkenness, gardens on graves were targets of theft and vandalism, and the

middle-class imagery of the cemetery as hallowed private property remained unconvincing to other members of colonial society.

For rural families the burial of the dead in family graveyards, often specifically designed for the purpose with symbolic plants, trees and layouts, irrevocably identified them with the land. The gravesite became a way of claiming the land and placing it into their narrative history. The fact that grave sites were often linked with the future building of a family church in the area, gave them a great familial significance and equal significance as markers in the landscape. By the later colonial period, due to health concerns, changes in law had seen the move away from family cemeteries in the bush, or on the grounds of family farms, and towards civic burials in approved spaces.

The persistence of burials on private land was mainly due to the remoteness of many settler homesteads. Colonial women in rural Canterbury became used to coping with isolation, as well as an often hostile environment and difficult weather conditions. The garden for them was not necessarily the enclosed, peaceful haven of beauty and solace, but a place of extremes, anxiety and danger.

The lack of infrastructure such as roads, bridges and fences meant that raising children, and communicating with others in times of emergency was fraught with problems. The Canterbury landscape could be a geographical death-trap with its numerous swamps, bushfires in dry summers, and drownings in fast-flowing rivers affecting everyday life. The urban centre of Christchurch could be no less dangerous with rivers, creeks and inlets that attracted unwary little ones, and lack of efficient sewerage systems which resulted in the use of environmentally hazardous cess-pits in the garden.

Women were aware of the threats to the health and safety of both themselves and their families from their surrounding environment. Victorian ideas of the causes of disease linked illness with miasma, or contaminated bad air. Planting a garden for better drainage and air quality thus became an essential strategy for women who wished to keep their families healthy. Gardens also held a firm place in settler ideas of health, as important places of rest and recuperation for invalids, and palliative care for those who were terminally ill.

In times of grief, one of the gardens' numerous functions was commemorating the dead, with many women using trees, plants or garden structures as memorials to those they had lost. The garden thus, contained a family's past and memories as well elements designed for future

generations. The garden also was the conduit for the way in which those future generations would remember this past. When the women who were known for their love of gardens and gardening died they were often identified in garden terms or by the use of garden tropes in their obituaries. In death, women who loved their gardens became symbolically linked with those gardens for posterity.

Flowers and Colonial Mourning Customs

The mourning culture that colonial settlers brought with them from Britain was a highly complex one, in which flowers and plants were a key component. These rites of death and mourning became more elaborate as the century progressed, mainly due to the rise of the middle-class⁵⁴⁰ with which they were extremely popular and Queen Victoria's long widowhood.

Flowers were central to the mourning process and were invested with religious and spiritual meanings, usually of great antiquity. For example, the rose was one of the most popular flowers to be used in Victorian mourning rituals.⁵⁴¹ Since medieval times it had spiritual significance, often symbolising Mary, Queen of Heaven (purity) or Christ's five wounds (passion and love).⁵⁴² Medieval poet John Lydgate used the imagery of the rose to symbolise human frailty and the transience of mortal life. In his poem, *As a Midsummer Rose*, he contrasts the "fast-fading roses of Midsummer with the lasting glories of Christ".⁵⁴³ Lilies were also popular and represented both purity and the Resurrection of Christ. The power of this imagery was particularly apposite when dealing with the death of children. In an age of high child mortality, those who died were described as buds that never had the chance to bloom. These were images that held great appeal for Victorian women, and women used the imagery of flowers, both real and metaphorical, to cope with and help rationalise the grieving process.

Hannah Guthrie Hay of Akaroa, in her memoir *Annandale Past and Present 1839–1900*, described the death of her young relative, Marion Hay, in 1849, from burns caused by an unintended fire. In doing so, Hannah quotes a poem, possibly written by herself or another family member, it is not clear

⁵⁴⁰ Sandra Coney, *Standing in the Sunshine: a History of New Zealand Women Since They Won the Vote* (Auckland: Penguin Books Ltd, 1993), p. 86.

⁵⁴¹ Angela McCarthy, in *Far from Home: The English in New Zealand*, ed. by Lyndon Fraser and Angela McCarthy (Dunedin, Otago University Press, 2012), p. 120.

⁵⁴² Jennifer Potter, *The Rose*, (London: Atlantic Books, 2011), pp. 81–83.

⁵⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 83.

And the Mother gave with tears and pain,
The flowers she most did love ...⁵⁴⁴

The child is represented as a flower, fragile and transient; a gift given and then taken away. This theme remained prevalent throughout the period.

“A wee rosebud and a true emblem of himself lay on his breast and dear old Mrs Harrington brought a tiny bit of forget-me-not we brought from Elloughton”.⁵⁴⁵ This emotional description from Canterbury settler Rose Hall of the laying out of her dead baby son in 1862 also encapsulates the symbolic importance flowers, plants and gardens possessed for Victorian mourners. In Rose Hall’s letter her child becomes both the flower and the symbol of the flower. Further poignancy is added with the addition of forget-me-nots to his death-bed bouquet as the original plant had been brought out from their former home, Elloughton, in Yorkshire. The choice of flower therefore symbolically links the child with his mother’s home and family far away, while its name was an injunction to memory.

Emma and George Murray lost their young son Willie, age 4, in an accident at South Rakaia in 1893. His memoriam notice in the Christchurch *Press* reflects this familiar flower motif. In a poem composed by his parents, Willie becomes “This loving bud, so young and fair,” and a direct connection is made between the little boy and the “funeral flowers we laid upon his grave”.⁵⁴⁶ They, indeed, are transient and “may wither in a day”.⁵⁴⁷ Yet, they cannot compete with the power of parental love, which ensures that “fresh and green his memory within our hearts shall stay”.⁵⁴⁸ The loss of such a loved child was an all too common experience for colonial mothers and the need to permanently memorialise their grief was widespread.

Flowers also played a crucial role in the burial of the dead and became an important part of the healing process for bereaved women. Rose Hall’s wish was to “often go to my darling’s resting place and put flowers on the grave”.⁵⁴⁹ Historian Angela McCarthy has described colonial New Zealand graves as “fresh burial mounds smothered in bouquets”.⁵⁵⁰ Photographs and contemporary press reports of funerals bear out this description. In 1885, Archdeacon Wilson

⁵⁴⁴ Hannah Longmuir Guthrie Hay, *Annandale Past and Present 1839–1900*, NZETC, p. 121.

⁵⁴⁵ Jean Garner and Kate Foster, eds, *Letters to Grace: Writing home from Colonial New Zealand* (Christchurch, Canterbury University Press, 2011), p. 54.

⁵⁴⁶ ‘In Memorium’, *The Press*, 14 May 1894, p. 3.

⁵⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁴⁹ Garner and Foster, p. 56.

⁵⁵⁰ McCarthy, p. 120.

was laid to rest in Riccarton Cemetery, Christchurch. His gravesite, according to press reports, was “covered with floral wreaths and crosses and the grave was strewn with flowers by lady relatives”.⁵⁵¹ The Christchurch *Press* wrote an article in March 1889 on the late Dr Deamer’s funeral. When his coffin was “lowered into the grave a number of beautiful wreaths of flowers were placed upon it by the ladies of the family of the deceased”.⁵⁵²

The *Akaroa Mail and Banks Peninsula Advertiser* of June 1896 depicts the funeral of “departed pioneer” John Thacker.⁵⁵³ Mr Thacker’s coffin was “adorned with the most beautiful flowers” and interestingly, as in the article about Archdeacon Wilson, there is evidence that the practice of giving flowers and wreaths at a funeral was strongly gendered in the colonial period. The emphasis was on personally chosen (and sometimes even personally made) floral arrangements as gestures of respect from the female members of the mourning congregation. The report on Mr Thacker’s funeral mentions “amongst those sending floral gifts ... Mesdames Wallace, Miller, Priest, Hay, Guthrie, C. Moore, Emslie, the Misses Williams, Garforth, Mason and Hay”.⁵⁵⁴ These women had made sure their tributes were “tastefully made” into “wreaths and crosses. We particularly noticed” the report continued, “a wreath of ivy and shamrock from Miss Pearson, and a pretty white cross from his little friend, Miss Hazel Emslie granddaughter of his ... old shipmates Mr and Mrs John Anderson”.⁵⁵⁵

The same pattern occurred at one of the most high-profile elite funerals of nineteenth century Canterbury—that of Sir Julius von Haast. The press report makes it clear that this was an extremely formal occasion and the article gives a detailed description of the rituals that occurred. “Before the coffin was placed in the grave Lady Von Haast ... placed a beautiful wreath of flowers on the coffin ... two or three other ladies also came forward and placed crosses of flowers and wreaths of violets and primroses”.⁵⁵⁶ It is possible this seemingly female ritual was a remnant from the times when it was not expected that women would attend the actual burial, as, historian Debra Powell notes, was common in areas of rural Scotland in the nineteenth century. Perhaps in those circumstances flowers could be seen as an appropriate substitute for the female presence at the gravesite.

⁵⁵¹ ‘The Late Archdeacon Wilson’, *The Press*, 27 January 1886, p. 2–3.

⁵⁵² ‘The Late Dr. Deamer’, *The Press*, 16 March 1889, p. 5.

⁵⁵³ ‘The Funeral of John Edward Thacker’, *Akaroa Mail and Banks Peninsula Advertiser*, 19 June 1896, p. 2.

⁵⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁵⁶ ‘Funeral Sir Julius Von Haast’, *The Press*, 7 September 1887, p. 3.

In another example, the *Timaru Herald* reported that on the occasion of the death of Premier Richard Seddon “a large number of wreaths are being sent from local bodies, also from the women of the district”.⁵⁵⁷ Quite apart from the emotional significance there was presumably an element of social status and personal pride in supplying a wreath or arrangement that reflected well on the giver and honoured the departed.

The idea of flowers being a particularly apt tribute from women resulted from numerous strands of Victorian gender discourse about women. Judith W. Page and Elsie L. Smith suggest that nineteenth century Britain “middle and upper-class women were associated with the decorative delicacy of flowers”.⁵⁵⁸ “Among the virtues considered most suitable for young women ... were modesty, innocence and simplicity, and ... flowers were frequently identified ... as exemplars of this trait”.⁵⁵⁹ Ann Shteir, in her work on English women and botany, agrees that for this period “traditional associations from myth and literature ... link flowers and gardens with ... femininity, modesty and innocence”.⁵⁶⁰ Successful garden-making and therefore flower growing also involved “characteristics [such as] patience, sacrifice and restraint” that were “typically gendered feminine in Victorian culture”.⁵⁶¹

Flowers and wreaths for graves remained popular throughout the colonial period. However by the end of the nineteenth century funeral flowers became less closely associated with women and became a common tribute from both sexes. Changes also resulted from technological advances such as refrigeration and cars, which meant that floristry shops could offer more elaborate and exotic wreaths than the earlier homemade ones, while fashion also influenced the choice of funeral flowers, a development with which not everyone was happy. Opinion-writers in newspapers suggested that the money spent on flowers was “to all intents and purposes wasted, as the flowers soon fade, and no one is benefited by the custom”.⁵⁶²

By the early-twentieth century the excesses of funeral floral tributes had generated a small, but significant backlash. In Christchurch, Archdeacon Averill preached against the practice in a sermon from 1908. He suggested that “too often there was the same love of show and parade

⁵⁵⁷ ‘Memorial Services’, *Timaru Herald*, 19 June 1906, p. 6.

⁵⁵⁸ Judith W. Page and Elsie L. Smith, *Women, Literature and the Domesticated Landscape: England’s Disciples of Flora, 1780–1870*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 92.

⁵⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 28.

⁵⁶⁰ Ann B. Shteir, *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science: Flora’s Daughters and Botany in England 1760–1860* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 3.

⁵⁶¹ Sarah Bilston, ‘Queens of the Garden: Victorian Women Gardeners and the Rise of the Gardening Advice Text’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 36.1 (2008): 1–19.

⁵⁶² ‘Instead of Funeral Wreaths’, *The Press*, 4 May 1912, p. 111.

which disfigured weddings”.⁵⁶³ The public were, he thundered, “in danger of killing the beautiful significance of putting a few flowers upon the coffin as a symbol of the resurrection”.⁵⁶⁴ The archdeacon was not a lone voice and a reaction to Victorian middle-class funeral customs can be clearly seen in the increasing number of Canterbury funeral notices after 1900, requesting ‘no flowers’.

Gardens on Gravesites

The alternative to bouquets and wreaths was, of course, to use plants on a grave to create a permanent garden. Eliza Maundrell of Lyttelton, whose husband died in 1854, wrote of her intention to get a “handsome tombstone and iron railings for his grave as I wish to put flowers over it that will flower summer and winter”.⁵⁶⁵ It was certain that she was thinking of English flowers to connect her dead husband with the memory of home as “he was so anxious to ... die and be buried in England”.⁵⁶⁶ As she was unable to fulfil his dying wish, it would have made sense to make his final resting place as like England as possible. Flowers would serve both an aesthetic and psychological purpose for she wrote that “I have seen my darling’s grave today. It is indeed a dismal looking place. I am so anxious to do something for it”.⁵⁶⁷

The desire to plant flowers, shrubs or trees rather than simply placing bouquets and wreaths seems to have been widespread amongst women in Canterbury throughout the colonial era. Emily Acland of Mt Peel station lost a child in April 1865. Her husband’s diary then records how he went “to the cemetery to mark out the little one’s restin’ place”.⁵⁶⁸ Once he was finished he went “afterwards with Emily to the same”.⁵⁶⁹ A few days later he went again “with Emily to the cemetery ... settled about bed round grave”.⁵⁷⁰ Finally when the grave was ready they set about landscaping the graveyard with protective trees. A diary entry from 28 April, describes how numerous hollies were planted near the grave by her husband John, but “one third” were also planted by Emily.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶³ ‘A Rebuke from the Pulpit’, *The Press*, 20 October 1908, p. 3.

⁵⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁵ Frances Porter and Charlotte Macdonald, eds, *My Hand Will Write What my Heart Dictates: The Unsettled Lives of Women in Nineteenth Century New Zealand As revealed to Sisters, Families and Friends* (Auckland, Auckland University Press, 1996), p. 463.

⁵⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁸ John Barton Acland, *Diaries 1865–67, Vol 1*, 4 April 1865.

⁵⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁷⁰ *ibid.* 5 April 1865.

⁵⁷¹ *ibid.* 28 April 1865.

In 1899, Catherine Adamson of Whakaroa—at an early point still part of the province of Canterbury although later designated Westland—was another bereaved mother. In her diary, she records in stark, short sentences how “self, Kate and Annie called at cemetery planted few trees and shrubs” on the grave of her son Robbie.⁵⁷² Two days later she returned there writing in her diary that “self and Hetty” were “at cemetery planting”. Until this entry, Adamson’s diary is quite prosaic which makes the emotional sentences on her son’s death all the more poignant. Her days were usually completely filled with essential tasks around the house, garden and farm. “Self and children weeding all day long” is a typical entry.⁵⁷³ The fact that such a necessarily busy woman would take time out of her already tiring schedule to walk to the cemetery and spend days planting speaks volumes about her grief and the need to have it commemorated. Her actions reinforce observations on research done on colonial Australia in Katie Holmes, Susan K. Martin and Kylie Mirmohamadi’s study *Reading the Garden: The Settlement of Australia*. They suggest that “The act of gardening, of creating a memorial site was a marker of grieving and loss but it was also a way of getting through that loss”.⁵⁷⁴

Several years later in 1905, Aline Studholme of Coldstream Station had a difficult pregnancy and the child Humphrey died several months later. Baby Humphrey’s grave was “enclosed ... with a high trellis fence” and then planted over with daffodils.⁵⁷⁵ These were flowers that had, for British-born settlers, strong religious connotations linked with Easter and the Resurrection. The act of planting flowers and shrubs in remembrance also crossed class boundaries. Catherine Adamson was the overworked wife of a struggling small farmer, and Aline the daughter of the Archbishop of York, and therefore a member of the most elite ranks of the British establishment. For both women, grieving was eased by the symbolic act of making a garden for their lost loved ones.

Holmes, Martin and Mirmohamadi suggest that “the planting out of flowers on graves was singled out ... as a distinctive settler-*Australian* mourning practice”⁵⁷⁶ (my italics). These Canterbury examples demonstrate that this statement is problematic. Clearly it was not just Australian settlers who thought that this was an appropriate cultural response to bereavement.

⁵⁷² Catherine Adamson Diaries, Entry for 27–29 June 1901, Macmillan Brown Library, Reference Code: 86733.

⁵⁷³ Catherine Adamson Diaries, Entry for 9 January 1897, Macmillan Brown Library, Reference Code: 86732.

⁵⁷⁴ Katie Holmes, Susan K. Martin, and Kylie Mirmohamadi, *Reading the Garden: the Settlement of Australia* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2008), p. 52.

⁵⁷⁵ E. J. Studholme, *Coldstream: The Story of a Sheep Station on the Canterbury plains 1854–1934*, (Upper Hutt: Wright & Carman Ltd, 1985), p. 89.

⁵⁷⁶ Holmes, Martin and Mirmohamadi, p. 52.

Further evidence of its widespread nature across numerous colonial societies comes from India. Charlotte Canning who died in 1861, was “buried, fittingly, in a corner of Barrackpore that she had always thought of as her garden”.⁵⁷⁷ Lord Canning wrote a letter to Queen Victoria in which he specifically referred to the “bright shrubs and flowers” surrounding the grave.⁵⁷⁸ A more famous grave site from 1857, was the well in which British women and children had been thrown in one of the most notorious events of what settlers of the time referred to as the Indian Mutiny. The grave became a memorial garden “of such richness and beauty as to be exceeded by none in England... a scene of melancholy grandeur”.⁵⁷⁹ While planting gardens on graves was a very popular practice in colonial societies, it was not in fact peculiar to them and was an already widespread tradition in Europe.⁵⁸⁰

The popularity of the tradition continued right through the colonial period in New Zealand. A *Lyttelton Times* article, from 1866, on the Church of England cemetery in Barbadoes Street, Christchurch, describes the “sacred flowers which affectionate hands have planted in memory of the departed”.⁵⁸¹ This article is particularly interesting for the language it uses which places the cemetery firmly in a middle-class, domestic setting. Its plots are not graves, but “small freeholds of the dead”.⁵⁸² The grounds contain a “leafy alley” which is described in similar terms to the ubiquitous shrubberies of middle-class gardens, and even serves the same purpose of giving “refreshing shade even at midday”.⁵⁸³ The cemetery with its garden-like appearance has become a “pleasant abode of death”.⁵⁸⁴

The practice of creating a garden on graves was so prevalent in colonial Canterbury that newspapers wrote short articles recommending the hardiest plants suitable for burial sites. Plants intended for graves, according to an 1890 advice-column in the *Christchurch Press*, should be “enduring, strong-growing and stand drought well [and] some degree of neglect”.⁵⁸⁵ Grave plants should also ‘cover the surface densely, keep down weeds’ and “present striking contrasts in colour both in bloom and in leaf”.⁵⁸⁶ The column-writer’s choice to fulfil these

⁵⁷⁷ Eugenia W. Herbert, *Flora’s Empire: British Gardens in India*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, p. 94.

⁵⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 194.

⁵⁸⁰ Jack Goody, *The Culture of Flowers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 302.

⁵⁸¹ ‘The Belt and Streets of Christchurch’, *Lyttelton Times*, 20 March 1866, p 2.

⁵⁸² *ibid.*

⁵⁸³ *ibid.*

⁵⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁸⁵ ‘Some Prunings’, *The Press*, 1 October 1890, p. 6.

⁵⁸⁶ *ibid.*

requirements was “Irish ivy” or “silver leafed mouse-ear” (*Cerastium tomentosum*) as once it was established it “would be very little trouble to keep in order”.⁵⁸⁷

Michael Wheeler has suggested that for Victorians in Britain “the idea of the churchyard as a garden ... has comforting domestic associations and thus strengthens the link between the grave and heaven as a place of rest ... our last home”.⁵⁸⁸ This seems to have been an idea that settlers brought over to New Zealand with little variation. In an article from 1904, the *Timaru Herald* also used domestic imagery when talking about the gardens of the local cemetery and the monkey puzzle tree contained therein, with its “candelabra-like Branches”.⁵⁸⁹ “The majority [of the graves] are planted with flowers or small shrubs,” the article enthuses, “and at this season the cemetery is a veritable flower garden”.⁵⁹⁰ This article contains a significant example of the way in which the flora of the graveyard apparently served a metaphorical purpose, as well as becoming part of the physical landscape. The description notes how the gravesites provided a perfect “foothold for lichens or ivy (two or three headstones are quite hidden by a covering of ivy) ... exceedingly suitable for funereal memorials, a moss-covered stone ... symbolising much better than the polished stones the sadness of death and the vanity of earthly ambitions”.⁵⁹¹

Cemeteries, Gardens and Vandalism

The family or friends of the deceased might feel that planting a garden on a grave enhanced its status as a sacred space, but there is considerable evidence that not everybody in colonial society agreed. In 1866, the *Christchurch Press* covered a court case in which “Elizabeth Wright and Sarah Middleton, two well-known characters in Christchurch who have been convicted before, were ... charged with wilfully destroying property in the cemetery. From the evidence, it appeared that the prisoners were found picking flowers off graves in the cemetery”.⁵⁹²

The problem was widespread in Canterbury. Rangiora had a case reported in September 1889 by the *Christchurch Press* in which

Maggie Fitzgerald, a good-looking young lady was charged with removing

⁵⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸⁸ Michael Wheeler, *Heaven, Hell and the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 65.

⁵⁸⁹ ‘The Timaru Cemetery: Old and New’, *Timaru Herald*, 24 October 1904, p. 3.

⁵⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁵⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁵⁹² ‘Resident Magistrates’ Courts’, *The Press*, 31 October 1866, p. 2.

plants from graves in the Church of England cemetery. The offence was denied. T. Hurrell gave evidence of seeing the defendant pluck flowers and tread upon graves ... Defendant ... said she plucked the flowers only. The Bench pointed out that persons had no more right in a cemetery than they would in a private garden⁵⁹³

It would be interesting to know more about Maggie's motivations. Her name sounds Irish so it is possible her actions in a Church of England cemetery were a form of protest. The connection made by the magistrate between cemeteries and private gardens is also noteworthy and reflects the strong domestic connotations of the garden cemetery ideal. The middle-class ideal of private property as sacrosanct is portrayed as a more powerful deterrent than any blasphemy or sacrilege towards the graves of the dead and reinforces its centrality to middle-class European society. Private property, along with a good work ethic, was the key to 'getting on' in colonial society and its importance continued even after death.

On 5 October 1889, the *Oxford Observer* printed a short article on the "Desecration of Graves".⁵⁹⁴ It related how "valuable flowers planted by the hands of a loving son on the grave of his deceased mother have been ruthlessly destroyed".⁵⁹⁵ In Timaru the cemetery was said to be "completely ... in the hands of Philistines, jumping over the graves, grabbing and trampling the flowers".⁵⁹⁶

More common among the province's cemeteries than the pointless vandalism of plants and flowers, was the purloining of them. This was not an uncommon occurrence amongst all provincial cemeteries. A letter to the *Lyttelton Times* in 1864 wished to "direct the attention of your readers to the disgraceful conduct of some of the inhabitants of Christchurch who ... steal the plants and flowers that have been planted on and around the graves of our departed".⁵⁹⁷ The writer describes how "yesterday not only were the shrubs nearly stripped of all their blossoms... but a valuable fuchsia and a pretty native evergreen were dug up and carried off from the plot ... where my children are interred".⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹³ 'Rangiora', *The Press*, 4 September 1889, p. 6.

⁵⁹⁴ 'Desecration of Graves', *Oxford Observer*, 5 October 1889, p. 4.

⁵⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁹⁶ 'Notes', *Timaru Herald*, 18 September 1882, p. 2.

⁵⁹⁷ 'Letters to the Editor', *Lyttelton Times*, 24 November 1864, p. 5.

⁵⁹⁸ *ibid.*

In fact, the problem was so pervasive that in 1896 the *Timaru Herald* commented that “Complaints reach us of thefts of flowers from graves in the [Timaru] cemetery. It is not much good complaining perhaps, as the thieves are most likely mischievous children, who fancy the flowers one moment, enough to steal them, and the next moment pull them to pieces”.⁵⁹⁹ The financial consequences of such damage were a constant drain on the cemetery boards, but these actions could also be emotionally devastating for families struggling to cope with loss. It is difficult from this distance in time to give precise reasons as to the motivations of those who stole flowers, plants, and other things besides, from cemeteries. Some culprits, as the *Timaru Herald* suggested, were probably just children attracted to anything pretty or interesting. Indeed, it seems possible that most thefts were inspired more by socio-political protest than deliberate cruelty.

Powell’s study of attitudes to death amongst working-class Scottish settlers in New Zealand supports this view by highlighting the differences between the “intricate formalities of the upper middle-classes” and the “actualities of death among the Scottish poor” which focused on an “earthy, unromantic approach to the corpse”.⁶⁰⁰ These people dealing with lives of deprivation and the ever-present spectre of death—whether poor Scots, Irish, English, or French—might not see the point of a valuable fuchsia on a grave when it could be sold, perhaps, for money to feed a family. It is possible that the flowers and plants were seen as symbolising “the elaborate funeral and mourning customs of the middle classes [that] reinforced in death the subtle gradations of social hierarchy established in life” and consequentially were resented and targeted.⁶⁰¹

Gravesites in Rural Gardens, 1850-1914

Gardens could literally become memorial markers to the dead when they functioned as cemeteries themselves. As Thelma Strongman suggests, the isolated nature of many settler properties “far from churches and churchyards” meant that “many settlers were laid to rest in a peaceful corner of their homestead garden”.⁶⁰² This was especially prevalent at the beginning of the colonial period, until 1882, when the Cemeteries Act was passed. This Act stated that: “It shall not be lawful to inter any body upon any land whatsoever not being a cemetery or

⁵⁹⁹ ‘Town & Country’, *Timaru Herald*, 30 November 1896, p. 2.

⁶⁰⁰ Debra Powell, *‘It was hard to die frae hame’: Death and mourning among nineteenth century Scottish migrants to New Zealand* (Saarbrücken: VDM, 2009), pp. 12–13.

⁶⁰¹ Wheeler, p. 29.

⁶⁰² Strongman, p. 38.

burial-ground or burial vault” if there was already an existing cemetery nearby.⁶⁰³ If families did want to bury their loved ones on private land, they now had to apply for special sanction from the local “magistrate or Justices”.⁶⁰⁴ Many did apply, and until the infrastructure of the province improved in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, with roads and bridges making transporting the dead easier, the private burial ground remained some people’s only option. However the drawbacks to private burials in the garden can be seen in Figure 4.1 which shows a woman identified as Mrs Lydia Williams standing contemplatively in front of a grave in a Canterbury homestead garden. The grave is extremely close to what appears to be the homestead’s water tank. This in direct opposition to that same Cemeteries Act, of which Section 54 states that the penalty for burying a body in a place “whereby the water therein shall be fouled” is a fine of up to “fifty pounds”.⁶⁰⁵ It is hard to know exactly how many private burials dug by non-professionals in colonial gardens might have been positioned too close to the ground surface, or, as in the photograph, too close to a water supply and subsequently been potential sources of ill health.

For settler families, the advantage of private burials in the garden was that the presence of a graveyard on the family land created a space for reflection and mourning. Holmes, Martin and Mirmohamadi’s study suggests it could also perform the function of legitimising settler ownership of the land. Their conclusion for the Australian evidence is that “the cultivated graves of their ... loved ones” cemented the settlers’ own “attachment to, and claim on [a] place”.⁶⁰⁶ Powell’s study of death rituals amongst nineteenth century Scottish settlers in New Zealand supports this theory, stating that “for many new migrants it was the act of burying their dead in New Zealand soil that confirmed for them a feeling of identity with the new land and established a sense of belonging”.⁶⁰⁷

⁶⁰³ Cemeteries Act 1882 (46 VICT 1882 No 39) Sections 83–85 (Private Burials),
<http://www.nzlii.org/nz/legis/hist_act/ca188246v1882n39190/>.

⁶⁰⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁰⁵ *ibid.*, Section 54.

⁶⁰⁶ Holmes, Martin and Mirmohamadi, p. 42.

⁶⁰⁷ Powell, p. 62.



Figure 4.1: Lydia Williams looking at grave site next to large tank, with house and garden in background, Canterbury region (Courtesy of Edgar Williams Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library).⁶⁰⁸

A similar reaction is suggested by the Canterbury evidence, especially as a grave was often chosen with future plans in mind to build a family-sponsored church and churchyard, both for themselves and the surrounding community. This was the case at Mt. Peel Station where “plans for a church... were put into effect in the early years and land was laid aside ... at the far end of the garden”.⁶⁰⁹ In this case, the garden encompassed the immediate cultivated plot and the landscape panorama around it, including any stands of native bush that were attached to the property. At Mt Peel, even the name of the family church that was built there reflected the family’s sorrow at the loss of their child, when it was consecrated as the Church of the Holy Innocents.⁶¹⁰

While, as at Mt Peel, settlers often used traditional mourning trees for planting around churches and graves this was not always the case. For some settlers, it seems that the native bush could symbolise both beauty, and a welcoming, safe enclosure. In 1849, the grieving parents of

⁶⁰⁸ ‘Lydia Williams looking at grave site next to large tank, with house and garden in background, Canterbury Region’, Photographer William Williams, Edgar Williams Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library <<http://tapuhi.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/spydus/NAV/GLOBAL/OPHDR/1/1542923>>.

⁶⁰⁹ Strongman, p. 86.

⁶¹⁰ G. W. Harte, *Mt Peel is a Hundred: The Story of the First High Country Sheep Station in Canterbury* (Timaru: Herald Printing Works, 1956), p. 64.

Marion Hay, for example, “conveyed her remains by boat to a lovely quiet spot, encircled by native bush, at the entrance to Holmes Bay, where they laid her to rest”.⁶¹¹ The presence of the native bush here is seen as a positive, even protective, element for the little grave.

This contrasts with a description given by Eunice Upton of a visit to Rockwood Station in 1872 “with its green lawn and paddocks which looked like beautiful green carpets ... and the small cemetery which is very pretty”.⁶¹² According to Strongman the cemetery is “within the bush, where ... two pines mark the entrance” and it is “enclosed by a paling fence”.⁶¹³ The positioning of this cemetery, part of, and yet protectively fenced off from, the native bush, perhaps reflects an ambivalence on the part of the inhabitants of Rockwood in their relationship with their new land.

Island Hills homestead was the home of the McLeods, a husband and wife who were both employees at the Glens of Tekoa estate. Angus McLeod was the head shepherd at Tekoa and his wife, (name unknown) a housemaid. Like so many colonial families they suffered from the high child mortality rate and, in the 1880s, laid two of their children to rest “under the oak tree in a corner of the garden”.⁶¹⁴ The McRae family who employed the McLeods fared no better, and also lost two children. Roderick John McRae died in his first year, in 1886, and, together with his cousin Wallace Gordon, was buried in a “little cemetery in the plantation behind the Glens of Tekoa” homestead.⁶¹⁵ Four large trees were planted at each corner of the little grave “to mark the site” and act as protective sentinels over it.

When Aline Studholme of Coldstream lost her baby son in 1905, it appears to have been the spur to create a family burial ground. The small cemetery was situated “in a paddock adjoining the main Hinds-Rangitata Mouth road, not very far from the main homestead. A blue gum plantation borders one side of the little graveyard” and there was a distant prospect of the sea.⁶¹⁶ At the Longbeach estate outside Ashburton, home of Martha and John Griggs, the church was quite literally in the garden, just a short walk from the house and “four generations of Griggs are buried beside it in consecrated ground”.⁶¹⁷ The original planting scheme contained those

⁶¹¹ Hannah Longmuir Guthrie Hay, p. 121.

⁶¹² Audrey Adams, *Mr and Mrs U***: The Story of a High Country Marriage in Early Canterbury* (Masterton: Fraser Books, 2007), p. 91.

⁶¹³ Strongman, p. 52.

⁶¹⁴ Shona McRae, *By the Braes of Balquether* (Christchurch: Pegasus Press, 1963), Photographic Caption between pp. 64–65.

⁶¹⁵ Shona McRae, *Glens of Tekoa*, (Christchurch: Raven Press, 1968), no page numbers given

⁶¹⁶ E. J. Studholme, pp. 89–90.

⁶¹⁷ Barbara Lea Taylor, ‘The Garden at Longbeach’ in *The Gardener’s Journal* 1 (Feb 2008) 43–66.

most traditional of mourning trees, the yew and the cypress which surrounded the pretty church and its gravestones.⁶¹⁸

Gardens, Rural Homesteads, and Isolation

The natural landscape was not always so attractive and gentle. Most academic studies by British authors on the topic of women and gardens assume that the majority of Victorian middle-class women were gardening in safe environments. There is very little attention in most of these general histories given to British women in the colonies, despite the fact that large numbers did emigrate and, more to the point, that these women would still have considered themselves very much as British citizens, at least arguably for the first two generations. The differences between the gardening experiences of a British woman from a Home Counties country parsonage or house would differ markedly from the same woman being placed in the isolated high country of the South Island or the outback of Australia.

It is hard for the modern mind to grasp the sense of physical and mental isolation the majority of rural women must have felt, in the early years of settlement at least. While most communities were eventually to benefit from the building of roads and bridges, most of these projects did not get underway at a local or national level until the late-nineteenth or early-twentieth century.

City	1892	1896	1901	1906	1911
Christchurch(*)	16223	51330	57041	56020	80193
Lyttelton	4087	3898	4023	3941	4058
Timaru	3668	3613	6424	7615	11280
Ashburton	1900	2082	2322	2563	2671
Rangiora	1783	1869	1768	1723	1834
Waimate	1378	1286	1359	1637	1762
Kaipoi	1371	1828	1795	1804	1823
Akaroa	571	613	559	557	622

(*) Includes the city and the suburbs

Table 4.1: Population of major Canterbury towns 1893–1911
(Source: *The New Zealand Official Yearbooks*).⁶¹⁹

Table 4.1 shows the populations of Canterbury towns over the period 1892–1911, sourced from *The New Zealand Official Yearbooks*. Figure 4.2 presents this information in bar-graph form. Several trends can be seen. The most obvious trend is the steady growth of Christchurch and Timaru. This contrasts with other centres—such as Akaroa and Lyttelton—which experienced

⁶¹⁸ *ibid.*

⁶¹⁹ Department of Statistics New Zealand, *New Zealand Official Yearbook (1893–1911)*.

more or less static populations through this period. In the case of Lyttelton, its population in 1911 was in fact smaller than in 1892, despite the fact that transportation infrastructure was more developed by the early-twentieth century. For those settlers who lived outside these centres, the population distribution was even more thinly spread.

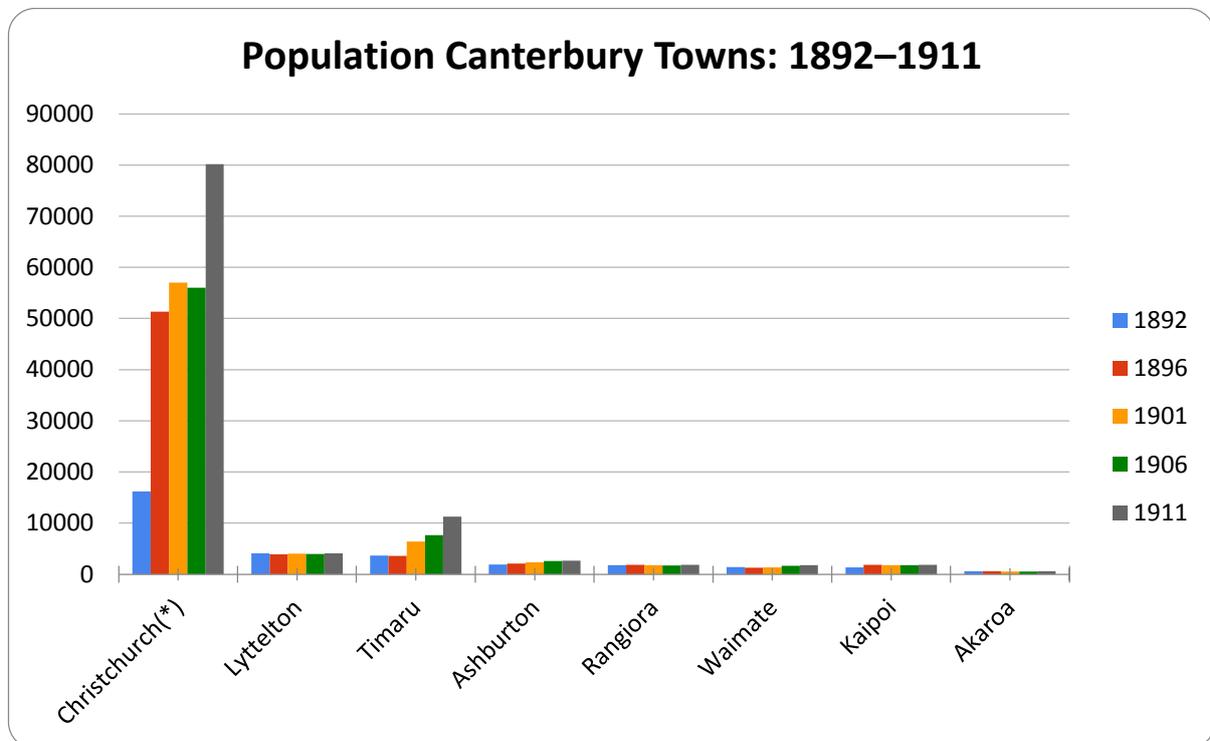


Figure 4.2: Graph visualizing the population of major Canterbury towns 1892–1911.

It is no wonder that many settlers still felt that they lived in quite isolated communities. There were even settlements such as O’Kain’s Bay in Banks Peninsula where the landscape was “almost perpendicular” and as late as 1979 “steep hills and winding unsealed roads still isolate[d] the five bays of the parish from one another”.⁶²⁰ Thus, even women in the twentieth century with access to motorcars could still find these places lonely and remote.

For the early settlers, these places could feel like the end of the Earth. A few examples will illustrate this aspect of the lives of women in colonial Canterbury who certainly did not feel that they were viewing the world from a “protected vantage point” when in their gardens.⁶²¹ Many lived lives like that of John Macfarlane’s wife and family, who were living in Loburn,

⁶²⁰ Mary Ada Kirk, *Edward William Harris: Pioneer, Okains Bay* (Christchurch: Bascand Ltd, 1979), p. 12.

⁶²¹ Page, and Smith, p. 2.

North Canterbury in 1851–1853, and were described as being “terrified by the loneliness of the place”.⁶²²

Other parts of the Canterbury region were no more congenial. In South Canterbury in the late 1850s, Emily Acland lived at Mt Peel Station. Her homestead was described as being “cut off from Christchurch, and indeed the whole of civilisation, by a river difficult enough to cross at any time and liable to sudden floods that made it absolutely impassable”.⁶²³ The other side of the station was “hemmed in by the impenetrable bush of Peel Forest”.⁶²⁴ During the same time period, Charles Tripp’s wife Ellen was too afraid of another hazard of the bush, the “wild pigs,” to walk far, so she stayed in her house at Orari Gorge while her husband was absent and read the few books they possessed over and over again.⁶²⁵ “She was sometimes afraid she would forget her own language” with “no one to talk to but a very uncongenial maid”.⁶²⁶ The isolation of some settler women in South Canterbury had not improved a generation later, when in 1873, Mrs Leonard Harper visited Mt Cook station. This remote station was run by Catherine and Andrew Burnett, and Mrs Harper realised with shock that she was “the only woman who had ever visited her” [Catherine] and that the Burnett children “had seen no other women but their mother”.⁶²⁷

Loburn had also shown little improvement nearly a generation later. Another Loburn settler, Mary O’Connor, in 1869 managed a farm in the middle of the country “without roads, bridges, or fences”.⁶²⁸ A dog became one of her farm’s most valuable assets, because “it retrieved both cows and children when they wandered away over the unfenced wastes”.⁶²⁹ O’Connor’s only option when travelling to Ashley Bank for supplies with a small cart that could only fit one child, was to leave the oldest child at home tied up “so that it would not get lost in the scrub while the mother was away”.⁶³⁰ She would not be the only woman settler who feared the potential for injury or death in the sparsely populated landscape. Eliza Thompson of Loburn

⁶²² D. N. Hawkins, *Beyond the Waimakariri: A Regional History* (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs Ltd, 1957), p. 96.

⁶²³ R. M. Burdon, *High Country: The Evolution of a New Zealand Sheep Station* (Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs Ltd, 1938), p. 72.

⁶²⁴ *ibid.*

⁶²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 87.

⁶²⁶ A. E. Woodhouse, ed., *Tales of Pioneer Women*, 2nd edn (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs Ltd, 1940), p. 243.

⁶²⁷ Oliver A. Gillespie, *South Canterbury: A Record of Settlement* (Timaru: The South Canterbury Centennial History Committee, 1978), p. 100.

⁶²⁸ Hawkins, p. 108.

⁶²⁹ *ibid.*

⁶³⁰ *ibid.*

was left “on her own” by her husband Arthur in the late 1870s “whenever the family needed supplies from either Christchurch or Rangiora.” “When he was held up by flooded rivers Eliza was often alone for days with no near neighbours”.⁶³¹

On the Canterbury Plains, Margaret Butterick of Woodlands farm near Ashburton suffered from a similar problem in the early days of settlement in the 1860s, before “fences were erected”. Her “toddlers used to wander off and one was put into a pen, but would still get out ... the family kept watch and found that a dog scratched a hole and the toddler was enterprising enough to crawl under and away to freedom”.⁶³²

Settler women were busy people and their gardens which might be seen as “apparently safe, gentle, controllable spaces”⁶³³ could just as suddenly become spaces of danger and “unbearable loss”.⁶³⁴ The isolation of settler homesteads meant that gardens were not necessarily ‘safe’ psychologically or physically. As late as 1913, a rural homestead near Ashburton was the scene of a terrifying case of a “brutal assault” on an unnamed farmer’s wife. The *Timaru Herald* recounted how the woman “was in the garden when [a] stranger appeared and asked for work, and this not being available, for food”. The stranger then followed the woman as she went to the kitchen and attempted to rape her.⁶³⁵ It is hard to pinpoint what seems to have shocked the rural community more, the violent attack itself, or the cynical misuse of the unwritten laws of hospitality for itinerant workers that enabled the assault to take place.

The geography of Canterbury also held its own dangers. Part of the high mortality rate in colonial Canterbury was not just due to the ‘old world’ problems of disease and lack of medical knowledge, exacerbated by poverty. Rather, some of the dangers of settler life were caused by both the natural landscape, and the process of cultivating the land and turning it into ‘productive’ farms. Previous research into accidental deaths in New Zealand shows that river drowning rates for the South Island were more than double those of the North.⁶³⁶ Canterbury was a difficult province in which to raise a child safely.

⁶³¹ P. J. Wood, ed., *Women of the Waimakariri* (Rangiora: The Waimakariri District Women’s Suffrage Centennial Committee, 1993), p. 22.

⁶³² Alison Ryde, and M. B. Thompson, eds, *Essays on Pioneer Women: Ashburton Centenary 1878–1978* (Ashburton: Bruce Printing Co. Ltd, 1978), p. 24.

⁶³³ Holmes, Martin and Mirmohamadi, p. 44.

⁶³⁴ *ibid.*

⁶³⁵ ‘Brutal Assault’, *Timaru Herald*, 29 November 1913, p. 5.

⁶³⁶ Powell, p. 73.

Canterbury was prone to a “greater incidence of flooding” than other regions of the South Island due to its rivers being inundated with water from their alpine catchment areas during nor’west storms.⁶³⁷ In the early days settler families’ vulnerability was increased by inadequate or non-existent fencing, houses that could be shoddily built or positioned in dangerous, isolated situations, and in addition, a complete lack of roading and communication infrastructure. Add to this the fact that almost all colonial homesteads and cottages in rural areas were built, of necessity, near streams, creeks or rivers for a water supply, and the garden becomes not an enclosed haven of safety but a space full of potential dangers.

The *Lyttelton Times* of 6 November 1865 reported on the state of the town of Kaiapoi after a flood.

Considerable consternation was caused, most of the houses being inhabited merely by women and children, the men being away either at the West coast or up-country shearing ... so flooded were the streets and gardens, that there was no difficulty sailing [a boat] up and down, freighted with women and children ... it might have been taken for a vast lake with floating houses. Not a scrap of vegetation was anywhere to be seen ... This is the more to be regretted as ... the male population are away ... and only the women left to repair the damages⁶³⁸

The dismissive language used in this article to describe women settlers—‘merely’ and ‘only’—is typical of the time and squares oddly with the fact that the women of Kaiapoi were obviously managing to run their properties and households quite successfully in their own right before the extreme conditions caused by the flooding.

The biggest urban centre, Christchurch, with its two rivers—the Avon and the Heathcote—together with their various small creeks and inlets, was scarcely less dangerous. Jane Deans was a keen gardener who went for daily walks around her Riccarton property. In her memoir, she describes the day that (carrying her toddler) she went “to the garden to order the vegetables for dinner”. She “had scarcely reached the garden when Aunt Grace came running out to tell me the boys were in the river and could not get out. I threw your father down and asked Mrs Hislop, the gardener’s wife to bring him down with her own child the same age”.⁶³⁹ Deans then

⁶³⁷ Peter Holland, *Home in the Howling Wilderness* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2013), p. 85.

⁶³⁸ ‘The Waimakariri’, *Lyttelton Times*, 6 November 1865, p. 2.

⁶³⁹ Jane Deans, *Letters to my Grandchildren* (Christchurch: The Canterbury Publishing Co. Ltd, 1923), p. 19.

hurried to the river bank to see if she could be of use but neither she nor the estate workers who turned out to help were able to save the boys.

Catherine Macfarlane of Coldstream suffered a great deal of “anxiety and trouble” trying to ensure the safety of her children in the late 1850s.⁶⁴⁰ A descendent has described how “a deep stream ran through the garden, and on one occasion while she was lying in bed with a baby a few days old, an elder child burst into the room crying that her little brother was drowning”.⁶⁴¹ The desperate mother “rushed to the stream, waded into the water up to her waist and rescued the child. A few years later, in 1863, however, one of her little boys was drowned before help arrived”.⁶⁴²

Sadly too, the Barker family of Fendalton in Christchurch lost their two year old daughter in 1885. She had been missed at about half-past nine in the morning and was found in the fishponds “about fifty yards from the house” by the gardener’s boy John Fisher. The view of the garden and pond must have been forever charged with traumatic associations for her parents and family.⁶⁴³

However, it was not just children who were vulnerable to the potential dangers in the gardens of settler homesteads. In the district of Greendale in South Canterbury, arboriculturalist T. W. Adams ended up mourning the death of his wife, Lucy Pannett, “who was accidentally drowned in 1869 when drawing water from a well”.⁶⁴⁴ Three years later, Eunice Upton wrote to her English in-laws of the tragic loss of a worker going about his daily duties at Acheron Bank Station in 1872. She describes how “he went down [a well] to mend something ... and when he was taken up again he was found dead it is supposed the foul air killed him, he was the gardener and his wife cook ... they have one little boy”.⁶⁴⁵

Even as late as the 1890s when fences, roads and drainage ditches were well-established, tragedies could still happen in homestead gardens as demonstrated by the “sad drowning case” of an elderly woman, Esther Wilds in Timaru, 1894. Her husband returned home from work and “walked down the garden, and on coming to the dam, which is about 10 yards square and runs from 4 to 6 feet deep ... he was horrified to find see the body of his wife floating on the

⁶⁴⁰ Woodhouse, *Tales of Pioneer Women*, p. 216.

⁶⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁶⁴² *ibid.*

⁶⁴³ ‘Sad Case of Drowning’, *The Press*, 30 October 1885, p. 3.

⁶⁴⁴ M. E. Adams, *Greendale Centennial Story: A Brief History of the District Covering the Years 1865–1972* (Greendale: Greendale Centennial Committee, 1972), p. 24.

⁶⁴⁵ Adams, p. 101.

water of the dam”.⁶⁴⁶ A further description of the scene of the tragedy blamed the accident on the fact that “there are trees and bushes about the dam, the sides of which are steep and slippery, and that the deceased was in the habit of going round the trees gathering eggs”.⁶⁴⁷ In this case it was the attempt to control the natural environment through damming the water that had created a deadly hazard for city dwellers. Eric Pawson has analysed the colonist’s attitudes towards environmental hazards and concluded that in most cases settlers felt that rivers “should not be allowed to interfere with the work of building a city”.⁶⁴⁸ This attitude meant that structural works such as dams and barriers became an integral part of town planning in Canterbury. Keeping cities such as Christchurch and Timaru safe could increase the dangers for the individual citizens whose properties bordered these structures.

In 1909, the five colonists shown in Figure 4.3 died in a single boating accident on the Rakaia River.⁶⁴⁹ The river, even at this late stage of colonial development, was so unpredictable that the initial searches for the bodies failed, in the area where they should have been washed up by the currents. Bridges, road building and other means by which colonists tried to control the river environment had not managed to completely tame the Rakaia.

The danger of dying the ‘New Zealand death’ was so prevalent that some mothers made it a constant refrain to their children. In what sounds like an oft-repeated anecdote, Hannah Guthrie Hay tells of how her young relative Jack would often be found by the edge of the water, for as she rather sensibly realised “what small boy could resist the delights of a stream running through his father’s garden?”⁶⁵⁰ This was obviously a source of great anxiety to his mother who resorted to repeatedly warning him “you will be drowned if you fall in,” a tactic that “failed in its effect”.⁶⁵¹ Then, in 1878, “one day after a punishment the culprit turned the tables on his mother by marching off in the direction of the harbour ... saying ‘I’m going to drown myself’”.⁶⁵² Suddenly he found himself seized from behind, carried back to the creek, and plunged head under water, clothes and all. This inspiration of his long-suffering mother,” Guthrie concludes, “had the desired effect of checking his aquatic tendencies for a time”.⁶⁵³

⁶⁴⁶ ‘Sad Drowning Case’, *Timaru Herald*, 13 November 1894, p. 3.

⁶⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁴⁸ Eric Pawson, ‘Confronting Nature,’ in John Cookson, and Graeme Dunstall, *Southern Capital Christchurch: Towards a City Biography 1850–2000* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2000), pp. 60–84.

⁶⁴⁹ ‘The Boating Fatality’, *The Press*, 13 November 1894, p. 3.

⁶⁵⁰ Hannah Longmuir Guthrie Hay, p. 273.

⁶⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁶⁵² *ibid.*

⁶⁵³ *ibid.*



Figure 4.3: The drowned victims of a boating disaster at the mouth of the Rakaia River, Canterbury, 1909 (Courtesy of Kete Selwyn).⁶⁵⁴

That a parent would resort to such desperate measures to make her child aware of the dangers lurking in the supposedly safe surrounds of the garden merely emphasises the worry and strain colonial wives and mothers must have endured, surrounded by flood-prone rivers, tinder-dry grasslands, and boggy wetlands.

“Swamps were almost continuous along the coastal fringe of the Canterbury Plains” and even in the “general Christchurch region, an unbroken stretch of wetlands extended from Rangiora to Lake Ellesmere”.⁶⁵⁵ There was also “a large area of swamp” in the district of Ashburton and

⁶⁵⁴ ‘Rakaia River drowning, the victims’, Selwyn Library (Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 New Zealand License) <<http://keteselwyn.peoplesnetworknz.info/site/images/show/192-rakaia-river-drowning-the-victims>>.

⁶⁵⁵ Robert Peden, *Making Sheep Country: Mt Peel Station and the Transformation of the Tussock Lands* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2011), p. 160.

“extensive coastal swamps near Temuka and Waimate”.⁶⁵⁶ While these wetlands would eventually be dealt with by drainage, the substantial ditches created to facilitate this process could also be a lethal danger for children or unwary adults.

Geoff Park has suggested that settlers saw the swamplands as “places of disease and decay, melancholy and horror, absolutely inimical to modern ways”.⁶⁵⁷ They were not unknown environments to British settlers, some of whom came from the fenland areas of East Anglia and Lincolnshire. Even back in England these areas were associated with the “ague”, and the “reek o’ the rotten fens” was to be feared as a breeding ground for illness.⁶⁵⁸

The reclamation of these landscapes and the subsequent agricultural and horticultural exploitation of them has been described as a form of “dominance over the indigenous people whose land they occupied, exploited and transformed in appearance”.⁶⁵⁹ In other words, a form of imperialism. However, recent research has widened the scope of enquiries about environmental ideas held by British settlers and linked them with concerns about health and “miasmatic theories”. The “confident and arrogant agents of environmental exploitation” were also members of a vulnerable “society lacking effective medical intervention”.⁶⁶⁰ In fact “settler acknowledgement of the limitations and lack of control of environments and their own health” were “central to colonisation”.⁶⁶¹ “Anxiety” seems to have been a significant part of “colonial engagement with the landscape”.⁶⁶²

Evidence for this is particularly strong when the lives of settler women are examined. It was they who bore the brunt of family illness, and risked their lives in childbirth. They also had to deal with the psychological impact of high child mortality rates. In some cases women were also coping with these situations alone as their husbands were absent finding work. Political and ideological theories of imperial control and exploitation of the environment probably informed the attempts of these women to contain the environmental hazards around them to

⁶⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁵⁷ Geoff Park, *Theatre Country: Essays on Landscapes and Whenua*, (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2006), p. 187.

⁶⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 181.

⁶⁵⁹ Katherine Raine, ‘Domesticating The Land: Colonial Women’s Gardening’, in *Fragments: New Zealand Social and Cultural History*, ed. by Bronwyn Dalley and Bronwyn Labrum (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2000), pp. 76–96.

⁶⁶⁰ James Beattie, ‘Colonial Geographies of Settlement: Vegetation, Towns, Disease and Well-being in Aotearoa/New Zealand, 1830s–1930s’, *Environment and History*, 14.4 (November, 2008) 583–610.

⁶⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶⁶² *ibid.*

some extent; but more important would have been the constant struggle to keep their families and communities healthy and alive in the face of potentially hostile landscapes.

Two of the most prevalent types of environmental hazards for Canterbury settlers were the nor'west gales and fire. The full force of a Canterbury nor'wester was described by early settler Mark Stoddart as the "curse of New Zealand," causing "a most howling scene of devastation".⁶⁶³ A recent study states that in "the most severe storms, peak gusts of 160 kph and sustained winds of around 115 kph have been recorded".⁶⁶⁴ The devastation caused by this wind was a fact of life for women living on the exposed Canterbury plains.

One such settler was Marion Chisnall of Hinds, near Ashburton. When she and her family started farming at Hinds in the early 1860s

for several years theirs was the only house around ... the two-storeyed house was dreadfully exposed and during the full force of the nor'westers would creak and groan. While some of the worst gales lashed the house, Marion would take the children outside where they would lie down and hold on to tussocks⁶⁶⁵

It is not surprising that "Marion, with the help of others, planted many trees" to try and ameliorate the effect of the wind.⁶⁶⁶ Planting trees in a garden might be a "sign of imperial power"⁶⁶⁷ but it was also sometimes just the most sensible thing to do.

Marion Chisnall was no stranger to that other great colonial hazard, of fire, either. Controlled burnings and accidental bush fires—sometimes caused by the 'controlled' burnings—were a regular part of rural life. Marion's health and family were directly affected by environmental change when in summer "the acres of tussock" around her "turned tinder dry". Fire broke out on a neighbouring property and "everyone—armed with wet sacks—went to quell it. Marion gave birth to [her son] Colin that year and during delivery a tiny dead twin arrived too; evidently, the baby had died during the fire-fighting or shortly after".⁶⁶⁸ Lack of control over

⁶⁶³ David Relph, 'A Mighty Wind: In the Teeth of the Canterbury Nor' Wester', *New Zealand Geographic*, 70, Nov–Dec 2004, 62–75.

⁶⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁶⁵ Ryde and Thompson, p. 29.

⁶⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁶⁷ Holmes, Martin and Mirmohamadi, p. 8.

⁶⁶⁸ Ryde and Thompson, p.30.

her environment and its potential effects on her health would presumably be a feeling with which Marion Chisnall would be very familiar.

Chisnall was not the only woman settler to see her garden and surrounding landscape as a source of danger. In 1873, G. A. Morris and his wife bought a smaller farm on the boundary of Blue Cliffs Station in South Canterbury. According to her daughter, Mrs Morris had virtually no contact with any other women in this isolated countryside

until one day when a grass fire spread over from Blue Cliffs. All the men were trying to put it out. The wind brought it down to our house. Mother was expecting her second baby. She was quite alone. As the flames came nearer she put Charlie [her toddler] in a box on a piece of dug ground and tried to beat the fire out. She beat and beat, all on her own, till she could beat no longer. She remembered nothing more until she woke up in her own bed. And there was Mrs Meyer [wife of Blue Cliffs owner] in her riding habit sitting on the end of the bed ... Mrs Meyer had seen the fire, realised that Mother might be in danger and ridden down to give what help she could⁶⁶⁹

This anecdote is a particularly vivid illustration of the dangers settler women faced in their daily lives, and also of how it was often alleviated by the help, common sense and compassion of other women, no matter what their social class. It is important to remember, as historian Rollo Arnold has pointed out that “the reeking haze of the burning season [which] set eyes smarting and nostrils tingling” was an “important element in the colonist’s consciousness” and an inescapable part of rural life.⁶⁷⁰ Every woman, no matter what her social status, would be familiar with this smell and what it portended. Fire was a regular hazard that settler women of all classes had to learn how to cope with from a very early stage of colonial development. Arnold’s research on fire in colonial New Zealand has demonstrated that in some years, such as 1885–1886, for example, Canterbury experienced “recurrent outbreaks” of fire “from late November until early March”.⁶⁷¹

The environmental threat from bush fires was still there a generation later in 1898 when the Canterbury town of Oxford was devastated by an inferno fed by nor’west gales. Mrs W. O.

⁶⁶⁹ Woodhouse, *Blue Cliffs*, p. 26.

⁶⁷⁰ Rollo Arnold, *New Zealand’s Burning: The Settlers’ World in the Mid 1880s* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1994), p. 11.

⁶⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 90.

Jones (like so many settler women her first name is unknown) found her garden, in the part of town known as “the Terrace”, became anything but an “idyllic realm”. A newspaper report outlines the terrifying incident:

the flames were carried towards Mr Jones’s house where, fortunately, a high laurel hedge acted as a screen, but they passed round the back of his little kitchen garden, seized upon the shed ... and reached within a few feet of the house ... Mr Jones and his family had taken refuge in the garden and having the foresight to take the water barrel with them they were able to run forward with the water each time it was required. Seeing that the house was all but surrounded by fire, it must have seemed an almost impossible task to save it⁶⁷²

Their house survived but their neighbour Mr R. Williams was not so lucky. His “comfortable home” with its “neat garden” and “well-stocked orchard” was “completely wrecked”.⁶⁷³ The Jones and Williams families were just some of many whose lives were irrevocably changed by the disaster and the newspaper article summarises succinctly just what these events would mean for the local community:

With a few exceptions the men whose homes have been destroyed earned their livelihood by working in the bush, principally in connection with the sawmills. They are almost all married and have families, and the fire has not only rendered them homeless, but has deprived them of their means of living. The sawmills have been destroyed ... so that a large number of men will be thrown out of employment. The homeless women and children, meanwhile, have kindly been sheltered by neighbours, but provision will have to be made for the future. Most of the houses and furniture destroyed was uninsured⁶⁷⁴

Despite the arguments put forward by Robert Peden—that high-country farmers knew how to use firing selectively⁶⁷⁵—it is hard to imagine that the citizens of Oxford township felt anything but anxious and vulnerable in the face of this hostile environment. Indeed, the environmental issues raised by this event—bushfires caused by drought, then fanned by nor’west winds—are

⁶⁷² ‘The Oxford Fire’, The Press, 18 January 1898, p. 2.

⁶⁷³ *ibid.*

⁶⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁷⁵ Peden, p. 63.

a continuing concern to the people of Canterbury into the twenty first century. Settler women had a hard struggle just to keep their families alive sometimes, let alone healthy.

Gardens and Health

The earlier years of settler society in Canterbury was a period before the scientific understanding of bacteria, and the ways in which diseases could be spread, was commonly known. Rather, miasma, or the noxious air and gases resulting from bad smells, decaying matter and vegetation, and damp, unhealthy ground was considered responsible for many potentially fatal diseases. Trees, plants and gardens were useful tools in combating miasma, providing extra drainage and fresh scents to improve the quality of the air and environment around them. This became vitally important in areas that were set aside for the disposal of human remains—the cemeteries. These were, particularly in low-lying Christchurch, thought to be obvious sources of dangerous miasmas.

In the early 1860s Lady Barker had commented on Barbados Street Cemetery in Christchurch and concluded that “owing to the flatness of the site of the town, it is almost impossible to get a proper system of drainage [in the cemetery] and the arrangements seem very bad, if you are to judge the evil smells that are abroad in the evening”.⁶⁷⁶ Several years after this, in 1867, the Church of England cemetery board had requested their secretary to “communicate with Mrs Deans, of Riccarton, with a view of obtaining some ornamental shrubs” to plant in the graveyard.⁶⁷⁷ Presumably these were native shrubs from Riccarton Bush, as the cemetery board already had connections with professional Canterbury nurserymen such as “Messrs Hislop and Wilson” who could have provided almost any exotics needed.⁶⁷⁸

The notable dampness of the site might have ensured that these original plants from the 1860s failed to thrive, or perhaps they were not considered adequate to deal with the problem because two decades later the unsanitary nature of the cemetery was still a cause for public concern. In 1883, the Christchurch medical officer of health, Dr C. Nedwill summarised Victorian beliefs about miasma quite effectively in his report on the condition of Barbadoes Street Cemetery. “It is universally recognised,” he wrote, “that the air of grave yards is prejudicial to health”. He

⁶⁷⁶ Lady Barker, *Station Life in New Zealand* (Christchurch: The Golden Press Pty Ltd, 1973), p. 58.

⁶⁷⁷ ‘Town and Country’, *Lyttelton Times*, 10 September 1867, p. 2.

⁶⁷⁸ *ibid.*

suggested “that the planting of trees and shrubs of rapid growth should be encouraged, with the double objective of absorbing dampness from the soil and noxious exhalations”.⁶⁷⁹

In his opinion other parts of the city were equally dangerous, specifically, “St Albans and other portions of the Avon district”, where the “ground is low-lying and damp and badly drained, and is suffering from the effects of years of soil pollutions ... Exhalations are constantly arising from the soil to contaminate the air, and to render those who breathe it more susceptible of contracting disease”.⁶⁸⁰ In 1877 he recorded the case of a Mrs Wills of Christchurch who was recovering from a case of typhoid fever. She lived on “a low-lying site” which was “quite undrained” and “the ground at the back” of the house was “saturated with moisture”.⁶⁸¹ Additionally “holes were being dug in the gardens for the reception of the night soil”.⁶⁸² Befouled soils were not the only problem with Christchurch, Dr Nedwill concluded. “The Avon River also requires to be looked after, its banks are in some places covered with decaying weeds ... which exhale most unpleasant smells injurious to health”.⁶⁸³ His opinions were backed up by Dr Turnbull at a meeting of the Canterbury Philosophical Society. Turnbull pointed out the danger of “the north-east winds which were prevalent in Christchurch” because they “passed over a very noxious piece of swamp near the estuary”.⁶⁸⁴ This meant that the “wind had a very hurtful effect on health”.⁶⁸⁵

The solution, of course, was obvious. “If a belt of trees were planted along the shore, they would neutralise the bad effects of these winds altogether”.⁶⁸⁶ This was a matter of vital concern to all the inhabitants of Christchurch, which was “notoriously New Zealand’s unhealthiest city in the 1870s” after returning the “highest death rates for typhoid fever and diphtheria”.⁶⁸⁷ In fact, Christchurch’s “general death rate in 1875 was... almost double the national figure”.⁶⁸⁸ The origins of the Christchurch obsession with gardens almost certainly owes just as much to

⁶⁷⁹ R. C. Lamb, *From the Banks of the Avon* (Wellington: Reed Publishing, 1981), p. 72.

⁶⁸⁰ ‘Health Report’, *The Press*, 15 February 1883, p. 3.

⁶⁸¹ ‘Local Board of Health’, *The Press*, 20 February 1877, p. 3.

⁶⁸² *ibid.*

⁶⁸³ ‘Health Report’, *The Press*, 15 February 1883, p. 3.

⁶⁸⁴ ‘Meeting of the Philosophical Society in Christchurch’, *The Press*, 3 November 1870, p. 2.

⁶⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁸⁷ Geoffrey W. Rice, ‘Public Health in Christchurch 1875–1910: Mortality and Sanitation’ in Bryer, Linda, ed., *A Healthy country: Essays on the Social History of Medicine in New Zealand* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books Ltd, 1991), p. 88.

⁶⁸⁸ *ibid.*

these statistics as to the motivations of status, political control, patriotism, and middle-class morality previously claimed as its prime impetus.⁶⁸⁹

The planting of appropriate trees was not just a way of managing the urban environment of Christchurch. Shelterbelt trees were also used to combat miasma when Aline Studholme's baby was buried at rural Coldstream in 1905. Eucalyptus trees were planted around the perimeter of the burial ground and in hot weather "the whole area" was "drenched with the smell" of the leaves.⁶⁹⁰ The popularity of the Australian tree was not just due to its pungent, medicinal smell which was thought to be efficacious in dispelling miasmatic vapours, but also because certain varieties could dry up swamps and marshy landscapes as they were "great consumers of water".⁶⁹¹ It is likely that they were used at Coldstream, rather than the traditional graveyard trees of yew and cypress, for both of those reasons.

The issue of garden plants and their effects on health and environmental cleanliness was one that was discussed at many levels of society at this period. The mid-1900s was a time of high-level government concern about the physical and moral effects of lack of open garden space, particularly for the poor. The Health Department was a new government entity that could deal with such issues and its head, Malcolm Mason, suggested that some medical and social problems were exacerbated by "inadequate yard space".⁶⁹² Gardens became part of government strategies to improve the health of the working-class. Mason believed that "small houses and no gardens mean ill-health, discontent, and lack of interest in the home ... Between the mental effect of living in a small house with a horizon bounded by the backs of similar uninteresting edifices, and living in a cottage with a flower garden in front, and a vegetable garden behind, there is a very great deal".⁶⁹³

As Mason's comment implies, for people of this time gardens did not just have decorative function. When a garden was carefully laid out in a dry, airy situation with fresh-smelling, healthy plants it was considered an indispensable part of the healing process, dispelling

⁶⁸⁹ Matt Morris, 'A History of Christchurch Home Gardening from Colonisation to the Queen's Visit: Gardening Culture in a Particular Society and Environment' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Canterbury, 2006).

⁶⁹⁰ E. J. Studholme, p. 89.

⁶⁹¹ Diana Menefy, and Warren Judd, 'Eucalypts: Trees of the Future?', in *New Zealand Geographic*, 58 (2002), p. 49.

⁶⁹² Margaret Tennant, 'The Decay of Home Life: The Home in Early Welfare Discourses', in *At Home in New Zealand*, ed. by Barbara Brookes, (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2000), p. 28.

⁶⁹³ *ibid.*

miasma. It also provided a suitably calm and restorative environment for the convalescence.⁶⁹⁴ When Fanny Fitzgerald's adult son Willie was critically injured in an accident involving handling dynamite, her friend Dr Alfred Barker of Christchurch offered the use of his house and garden for Willie's convalescence. "She tended her son in Barker's house for almost five weeks; his bed was carried out into the garden every day so he could enjoy the summer sunshine".⁶⁹⁵ Those hours in the garden would have been seen as an important part of Willie's eventual recovery, although his injuries were so severe that his health was permanently undermined. For Fitzgerald as well, the garden would be considered part of keeping her well and strong enough to tend her son successfully. The garden made a huge difference to her mental health whilst dealing with the strain and worry, and a photograph taken by Dr Barker when Willie was finally out of immediate danger shows her peacefully reading in the shade of a large tree, a picture of tranquillity.⁶⁹⁶

Agnes Emma Hall wrote, in an 1865 letter to her sister-in-law Grace back in England, about recuperating from an illness and how "I am not allowed to do anything more energetic than a gentle walk for half an hour round the garden".⁶⁹⁷ However efficacious strolling or resting in the garden might be, working there was considered too much for some invalids, as Agnes lamented. "The garden was such a wilderness of weeds in consequence of my not being, for many months, able to work in it; ... I long to be able to do so again; but were I to venture again on the subject I fear Dr Christy might order me to my sofa again".⁶⁹⁸

Annie Curry, wife of Edmund Curry of Mount Torlesse, also successfully convalesced in the garden thanks to the thoughtfulness of her husband. "I got her into a sheltered spot in the garden where she sat reading and eating strawberries for a couple of hours or so," he wrote. Consequentially she was "much improved" he noted in a relieved tone.⁶⁹⁹ Helping someone rest and relax in the garden was something that even those who had no medical knowledge or experience could do to help their loved ones in a time of illness or injury, and it therefore gave family members a sense of agency in the recuperation of the patient.

⁶⁹⁴ James Beattie, 'Colonial Geographies of Settlement: Vegetation, Towns, Disease and Well-being in Aotearoa/New Zealand, 1830s–1930s', *Environment and History*, 14.4 (November, 2008), pp. 590–591.

⁶⁹⁵ Jennifer Roberts, *Fitz: The Colonial Adventures of James Edward Fitzgerald* (Dunedin, Otago University Press, 2014), p. 285.

⁶⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 286.

⁶⁹⁷ Garner and Foster, p. 96.

⁶⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 98.

⁶⁹⁹ Strongman, p. 38.

Fresh air in the garden was considered particularly efficacious for the elderly and it was a matter of pride to many women that, even whilst suffering the infirmities of old age, they still appeared active and useful. Women, therefore, tried to keep up their daily gardening routines for as long as possible. It also fostered a sense of independence at a time where they became increasingly reliant on the goodwill and support of their family and friends. Ellen Tripp of Orari Gorge was confined in a wheelchair in later life yet she still “liked to be taken to this part of the garden [the Green Walk] where the nurse was asked to continue the gardening work while she watched and gave encouragement”.⁷⁰⁰ Those who were more mobile often kept working outdoors, even if they were lucky enough to have a “competent and willing staff of gardeners”.⁷⁰¹ Minnie Macfarlane at Kaiwara homestead in North Canterbury “loved to work in the garden herself and clipped the lawn edges with her long handled clippers until a few weeks before her death. She liked perfection in her garden and generally achieved it”.⁷⁰²

The curative properties of gardens also were involved in the treatment of the mentally ill in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In 1877, a stabbing at the Timaru asylum was indirectly linked with the lack of outdoor recreation for male patients in the garden. The superintendent explained that “the women have the gardens to walk in, the men have none ... The more fresh air they can get the more likely they are to recover”.⁷⁰³

Similarly in 1898 Dr Levinge, the medical superintendent of Sunnyside asylum in Christchurch, promoted a scheme “for employing some of the female patients in light gardening operations”.⁷⁰⁴ He mentioned such work as “collecting and drying seeds, staking plants, preparing cuttings, gathering and arranging flowers for the wards ...” and other “gardening operations suitable for women, might, with a great advantage to themselves from a curative point of view be introduced into their daily occupation”.⁷⁰⁵ The women were already allowed to “take their needlework and sit under the trees under the care of an attendant”.⁷⁰⁶ Those in the convalescent stages were even given the privilege of playing croquet in the garden after tea. Gardens, and exposure to exercise and fresh air played an integral part in the growth of more humane treatment for the mentally ill from the 1870s onwards.

⁷⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p. 77.

⁷⁰¹ Shona McRae, *The Sons and Daughters: Tales of the Macfarlanes, farmers of North Canterbury* (Privately Published, University of Waikato, New Zealand Collection, 1991), p. 39.

⁷⁰² *ibid.*

⁷⁰³ ‘The Stabbing Case at the Lunatic Asylum’, *Timaru Herald*, 2 July 1877, p. 3.

⁷⁰⁴ ‘Current Topics’, *The Star*, 12 July 1898, p. 3.

⁷⁰⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁰⁶ ‘Sunnyside Asylum’, *The Press*, 28 February 1872, p. 2.

Lack of medical knowledge, or effective treatments, in colonial New Zealand meant that death could not only come suddenly, through inherent dangers in the landscape or indeed in working accidents, but could also be long and drawn-out as the result of lingering illnesses. In these cases women usually became responsible for the palliative care of the invalid, and the presence of a garden could be instrumental in the mental and physical well-being of both the patient and the carer.

Mary Rolleston, wife of prominent Canterbury politician William Rolleston, found the garden a great psychological support during her husband's last illness in 1903. William, a frequently moody man, had been increasingly obsessed with re-creating in Canterbury the beloved garden of his childhood home, Maltby Hall, in Yorkshire, England.⁷⁰⁷ The attention he paid to the garden and the money he spent on it had often been a source of tension between the couple, as noted in chapter two. There are also hints that his final decline was partly linked with depression. A descendent has suggested that he was "weighed down by the intolerable burden of memory" of his home back in Britain.⁷⁰⁸

In their later life, Mary used the previously contested territory of the garden as a form of healing for her husband who was no longer strong enough, physically or mentally, to go outside. Mary became his conduit to the garden, despite having formerly disliked gardening as an activity. "All she could do was bring him flowers from the garden grown from English seed, report on the progress of his trees and shrubs and minister to his every whim".⁷⁰⁹ He would summon her (*à la* Captain Von Trapp) with "a shrill blast" from a whistle and "as Mary had to be within earshot of this sound, for nearly eighteen months she hardly went outside the garden gate".⁷¹⁰ To an outside observer the garden would seem to have become an informal prison.

Mary Rolleston, however, was a strong personality and the garden turned out after all those years to be a source of delight. It gave both her and William a break from the stifling atmosphere of the sick-room and she knew William was at his happiest when he could sit "for an hour or two each day in an easy chair at his open window which commands a good view of the garden".⁷¹¹ For Mary, it was a refuge and she wrote, "I find gardening a blessed resource and I can work in the garden and still be at my post or within easy reach or call of William's

⁷⁰⁷ Rosamond Rolleston, *William and Mary Rolleston* (Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed, 1971), p. 99.

⁷⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p. 128.

⁷⁰⁹ *ibid.*

⁷¹⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹¹ Porter, and MacDonald, p. 479.

window”.⁷¹² Her possibly unconscious use of military terminology when describing her duty of care for her husband reflects how constricting the situation felt for this extremely lively and sociable woman. The garden enabled her to carry on despite the difficult circumstances.

Emily McIlrath of Springfield, Banks Peninsula, shared in the care of her invalid father. Her description of his last days in 1915, although marginally outside the time period of this thesis, still demonstrates how essential a garden could be in keeping up the spirits of settler families even when the final outcome was obvious. “Father was awfully patient and hopeful of recovery till almost the last,” she wrote, “... we used to wheel him out in an invalid chair until the last day. He always kept a beautiful garden and everyone said it was the best for miles around. A few days before he died I had him out in the garden, and he was showing me where to plant bulbs”.⁷¹³

Symbols of Mourning in the Garden

Gardens could also help with the mourning process for colonial women. Elements of the actual garden itself could be used to symbolically represent someone or something lost to the family. Widow Helen Nicholls, of White Rock farm in North Canterbury, already had a large, distinguished garden when tragedy struck her family. Her two eldest daughters were on a touring holiday at Waimangu at Rotorua when they were killed by a freak geyser eruption. Both girls were only in their late teens. Their mother, who “was almost distracted with the loss of her girls”,⁷¹⁴ used her garden to help cope with the grief. “Two trees were planted at White Rock in memory of the two girls” and both were lovingly tended.⁷¹⁵

The garden was not just a site to mourn the loss of human life. Annie Moore, of Glenmark estate, was often described as a lonely, overprotected, rather eccentric heiress who invested a great deal of her emotions into animals. “When her favourite house dog Dashie died, she had a specially carved memorial in its likeness made in Italy which was mounted ... above the rose walk, north of the mansion”.⁷¹⁶ The companionship of dogs was celebrated too, at Longbeach estate, home of the Griggs family. As described by current owner Penny Thomas, a corner of

⁷¹² *ibid.*, p. 480.

⁷¹³ John Bassett, ed., *The McIlrath Letters: A Family History in Letters from New Zealand to Ireland 1860–1915* (Killyleagh: Killyleagh Branch, North of Ireland Family History Society, 2009), p. 132.

⁷¹⁴ ‘The Rotorua Drowning Cases’, *Timaru Herald*, 1 September 1903, p.3.

⁷¹⁵ Shona McRae, *The Sons and Daughters*, p. 69.

⁷¹⁶ David Gee, and Herbert Farrant, *Moore of Glenmark: The Richest Man in the Land* (Auckland: Polygraphia Ltd, 2006), p. 109.

the garden was laid out as a pet cemetery where the family's canines (presumably both house dogs and valuable hunting dogs) were commemorated.

The reality of the death of loved pets was seen as a good way to prepare children for dealing with grief in later life. The ceremonial ritual of burying the animal was seen as psychologically vital and usually took place in suitably pretty surroundings. When 12-year-old Lucy Ford of Christchurch wrote to a magazine editor in 1888 about the loss of her beloved pet duck, she described how "I buried her at the bottom of mother's garden and planted daisies all over her grave".⁷¹⁷

Dianne Lawrence has analysed the flower garden of the lady of the house in colonial times for Australia, New Zealand and India, and concludes that "it was an area that was very much on display. As an area of female expertise it could be a source of pride, though as with all facets of genteel performance, it had the potential to be a source of anxiety, lest the design, plantings and maintenance prove not to meet the exacting standards of the local genteel circle".⁷¹⁸ The fact that the mother allowed the child to use such a socially valuable display area for a pet's grave covered in daisies, demonstrates the importance colonial parents attached to the mental health benefits of ritually farewelling loved animals.

Animals were likewise mourned and remembered in the garden at Cheviot Station, home of Eliza and William Robinson. On 29 April 1870 "seven draught horses were burnt to death in their stable" and the loss of such essential, valuable and well-loved animals meant "all on the station were most upset about the tragedy". The Robinsons ordered seven *Sequoia Gigantica* "to be planted as a memorial" to the lost horses—"Tommy, Duke, Dinah, Prince, Dido, Lucy and Captain".⁷¹⁹

The centrality of animals to the economic, social and emotional lives of settlers in a pre-motorised world is easily forgotten. Animals served their owners in both work and leisure and were critical to both. The loss of the experienced horses at Cheviot, for example, would have been a devastating blow, and the gesture of planting memorial trees to them (particularly the poignant choice of large sequoias to represent the gentle giants of the horse world) would be

⁷¹⁷ Nancy Swarbrick, *Creature Comforts: New Zealanders and their Pets, an Illustrated history* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2013), p. 58.

⁷¹⁸ Dianne Lawrence, *Genteel Women: Empire and Domestic Material Culture, 1840–1910* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 139.

⁷¹⁹ Margaret Marion (Gretta) Sinclair, *Memoirs*, Cheviot Museum, p. 12.

no mere sentimental whim but a recognition of their vital contribution to the well-being of the community.

The Last Word: Gardens and the Obituaries of Settler Women

If the death of animals left an emotional gap in these communities with their small populations, how much more of a loss must have been sustained with the deaths of local stalwarts who had supported their neighbours through the early travails of colonial life? When these stalwarts were women settlers, the obituaries and eulogies would often focus on the things that were important to them when they were alive, particularly their gardens.

Jane Deans died in 1911. She was matriarch of the family, and the woman who was instrumental not only in saving the precious remnant of podocarp forest known as Riccarton Bush or Putaringamotu, but in creating one of the most widely admired stately gardens in the city. Her garden had been chosen in this most Anglican of New Zealand cities as the venue for Christchurch's first-ever royal visit in 1869, yet she herself was a highly devout Presbyterian. After her death, her eulogy, fittingly, centred around the garden as a symbol of her beliefs. "The secret of the manner of her life and death was that what she was and what she did had been the produce of her faith in God through Jesus Christ. That had been the living spring within her heart that watered all the garden of her life and made it beautiful".⁷²⁰

Even with less prominent, but still respected personalities, the garden could be mentioned as an important factor in their lives. In South Canterbury, the *Timaru Herald* of May 1906 reported on the funeral of a Mrs Webster of Winchester. Her standing in the community was very much linked with her garden, which was the centre of a social network. "Mrs Webster," the paper stated, "will be missed at 'Websters Corner' where, at her little garden gate, she had always a kindly word for friends or passersby".⁷²¹ If, as Lawrence suggests in her study on genteel women in the colonies, the front garden "was the face the genteel household presented to the world" then Mrs Webster's garden represented the informal friendliness and closeness of rural communities.⁷²²

Elizabeth Greenstreet was a well-liked citizen of the Christchurch suburb of Linwood who died in February 1912. She had "led a somewhat retired life" towards the end, mainly due to ill health, but as her obituary points out that life was "brightened by her artistic tastes, and an

⁷²⁰ 'The Late Mrs John Deans', *The Press*, 23 January 1911, p. 8.

⁷²¹ 'Town and Country', *Timaru Herald*, 10 May 1906, p. 4.

⁷²² Lawrence, p. 137.

intense love of flowers, which made her a successful and enthusiastic gardener”.⁷²³ Perhaps her love of outdoor work in the garden was connected with her rural earlier life, where after her husband’s death she, personally, had carried “on the station management for some time”.⁷²⁴

Those women with larger gardens could provide an even more obvious role in the social cohesion of new settlements. In 1912, the *Timaru Herald* printed another obituary of a woman who loved her garden—the Australian-born Mrs J.W White, wife of South Canterbury’s Crown Prosecutor. When she and her husband arrived in South Canterbury and purchased the Grasmere Estate in 1864, it was “thanks not a little to the good taste of Mrs White” that their “home soon became surrounded by one of the most beautiful grounds in Timaru”.⁷²⁵ Consequently, in the years before the town council created public gardens, “Mr and Mrs White kindly threw open their delightful grounds to the public on Sundays, and many a large garden party for church purposes has been held there”.⁷²⁶ Her love of gardening seems to have been strongly influenced by her sense of religious duty and “from the profusion of her garden ... she supplied [flowers] for the decoration of St Mary’s Church”. Mrs White was well-known for being “very fond of flowers”.⁷²⁷

It was not common for women to be given obituaries in colonial times, and the women who did appear in the newspapers in this way were those who were thought to have made a significant contribution to the establishment of civilised virtues and social values. Often it was not enough to merely be a keen gardener. The women who received praise were those who had used their gardens to serve their communities. This could be linked with the religious obligations women felt towards their fellow citizens, as it certainly was in the cases of Mrs White and Jane Deans. Equally it could be connected with the need to contribute to the community in social or aesthetic terms. Either way, the prominence these women achieved through their gardening allowed them to present their ideals and ideas in a public way, and still work within the gender bounds of their society.

Conclusion

Gardens were integral to the way in which middle- and upper-class colonial women responded to, and dealt with, environmental dangers, illness, old age, mourning and death. Flowers had

⁷²³ ‘In Memoriam’, *The Press*, 13 February 1912, p. 7.

⁷²⁴ *ibid.*

⁷²⁵ ‘Obituary’, *Timaru Herald*, 10 September 1912, p. 5.

⁷²⁶ *ibid.*

⁷²⁷ *ibid.*

always been a part of European funeral customs, and the religious and cultural symbolism of resurrection. In the colonial setting, flowers, plants and trees looked back to past lives, as well as to future hopes, and giving additional psychological comfort to those women in mourning. The use of masses of flowers was common at colonial funerals, although the increasing lavishness and sophistication of floral displays was criticised by churches and social commentators alike. Funeral flowers and wreaths were, at the early stage of settlement, particularly associated with women. The reason for this is unclear and would repay further research. It might have had connections with older British rural traditions where women were not expected to be present at the interment.

Whether it was graves in gardens or gardens in graveyards, nineteenth century colonial death rites placed a huge significance on the natural world. This was the case right across the empire. Colonial women went to a great deal of effort to ensure their loved ones were laid to rest in natural surroundings. This was for medical reasons—the plants and trees would help dispel any miasma lurking as a consequence of the burial, and religious reasons—and because gardens were examples of natural cycles of decay and rebirth and thus symbolic of the expected resurrection. In Victorian theology ideas about heaven had become domesticated, reflecting the increasing influence of the middle-classes. By the time the Canterbury settlement was underway, the idea of heaven as a last, peaceful home of rest was firmly established in British middle-class culture. Garden cemeteries were simply an extension of these ideas.

Lack of roads and transport meant that often it was easier for families to create graveyards on their land. By returning their loved ones to the land, families cemented their claims on their property and transformed the landscape into part of their family history. This continued until 1882, when the passing of the Cemeteries Act made burial on private land illegal except with permission from the local magistrate in cases of urgency. When family members were buried on private land, there were often memorial markers placed which could range from small fences or large trees protecting the gravesite, to the building of a family church in later years to formalise the site as a cemetery.

The ideal of the garden as a place of associations with Eden and innocence meant it became specifically associated with women, and in Britain it was seen to be a protected, enclosed space from which women could see, but not necessarily engage with, the wider world. In colonial Canterbury, however, women were forced to engage with the landscape and wider world whether they wanted to or not. Rural women lived comparatively isolated lives and had to

contend with numerous environmental hazards, such as drought, bushfires, swamps, fast-flowing rivers, and gale-force nor'west winds. They were unlikely to hold complacent ideas about their ability to control nature and its effects on the health of themselves and their families.

The settlers did believe however, that they could help alleviate some of the negative health effects of living in a damp, swampy province prone to miasma. The planting of suitable plants and trees to help drain the soil and freshen the air was something that every colonial woman could do to protect her family's health. This was seen as not just a rural problem. Low-lying Christchurch with its rivers, creeks and tributaries was considered a city at risk, and its high death rates from typhoid and diphtheria became a national scandal. In addition gardens were used for places of healing and to disperse any miasmatic smells or air. They gave women a sense of agency in the protection and healing of family members, and were considered the best places for invalids to recuperate. Nor was it thought to be just physical illnesses that could be cured by time in the garden. The garden played an important role in the development of more humane treatment for the mentally ill, and under Dr Levinge in the 1890s, the patients at Sunnyside asylum in Christchurch were provided with gardens and allowed sport and recreation outside. Gardens also became part of palliative care for the dying and women often looked after relatives in the garden so that that they could experience fresh air and sunshine in their final days.

The memories of those who had been lost to the family were often commemorated in the garden. This is not just true of people who had died, but animals as well and in the pre-industrial colonial world, animals played an essential role as companions as well as labour. Settlers planted memorial trees, established dog cemeteries, and put up plaques and statues to those they mourned.

Even formal, written memorials such as obituaries often focussed on gardens when they were describing the lives of female settlers. The contribution of colonial women to social and religious development and cohesion in their communities through their gardening skills was a usual theme. In the later colonial period, 1880–1914, there was an undercurrent of theological and cultural gender discourse, which enabled the physical creation of a garden by a settler woman to metaphorically represent “the garden of her life”.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the role of the garden in terms of the expected life stages of upper- and middle-class women of colonial Canterbury. It concluded that the garden was of vital significance to many cultural, social and emotional aspects of colonial existence for middle- and upper-class women. Further, because gardens were sites of spatial and hierarchical ambiguity, some colonial women were able to use this fact to resist, reject and often renegotiate the mores of their society.

By analysing gardens through the medium of the emotional and physical stages of women's lives, this thesis highlighted the richness and complexity of female responses to the garden. It has demonstrated that garden-making was both a practical response to the practical problems posed by colonising a new land, and a reflection of the social, religious and cultural values that the settlers brought with them from Britain.

Through the use of letters, diaries and memoirs written by women, this thesis has given primacy to women's voices and points of view. When looked at through the eyes of women settlers, the transformation of the South Island landscape through colonisation becomes a result not just of capitalist exploitation or imperial arrogance, but also a way of ensuring the physical and economic survival of their families in a harsh, isolated, and often unforgiving environment. To see these women as mere unthinking agents of an imperial ideology or snobbish exponents of a closed class-system of 'gentry' suggests a misreading, or a distortion, of their own experience as preserved in the surviving sources such as the Acland Papers, Francis Caverhill's diaries, and the memoirs of Sarah Amelia Courage. This is not to argue that these elements did not exist in colonial society, but that the motivations of most women were far too complex to be easily defined in such broad terms.

This thesis suggests that because gardens were so closely entwined with the important events in women's lives, they provide a useful starting point for any analysis of middle-class colonial society. Gardens were places, and examples, of social and community cohesion, essential to the long-term success of 'the colonial experiment'. The role played by gardens in social events could vary, from being an elaborate stage backdrop for wedding rituals, places of welcome for

new brides, the first time outside for newborn babies and their mothers after confinement, to sites of burial and remembrance. These social occasions fixed the garden space firmly into the narrative histories of settlers' lives, and confirmed their growing identification with the land.

As a physical space that was both private and public, gardens gave women a field for action outside the domestic confines of the house. However, at the same time, the very openness of the space to both the public and the elements could transform what should have been a safe haven into a place of uncertainty, even danger. There was a contradiction between the ideal image of the garden as an idyllic Eden and the reality experienced by many settler women. The thesis has also analysed the consequences when gardens failed to be places of cohesion and instead became points of conflict. Tensions arose between the ideals of womanhood presented in contemporary writings, and the actual way in which women use the garden. Often, as this thesis shows, some women chose the culturally complex site of the garden to perform actions of assertion or resistance.

This thesis argues for a greater acknowledgement of the role of colonial women in the transformation of the Canterbury landscape. It suggests that historians have, in the main, ignored the environmental impact of female settlers. Most academic work tends to stress the actions of male colonists, particularly pastoralists, and women are conspicuous by their absence. Yet through their activities in the garden, such as tree-planting and the propagation of gorse plants, the contribution of colonial women in modifying the landscape merits greater investigation. This is also quite apart from the fact that a great many women managed farms and sheep stations in their own right, because of ill, absent or deceased husbands, or because they themselves had bought the land. These women, in their farming activities, presumably made similar choices about environmental development to the men. Or did they? Further research is urgently needed on this topic.

Lastly, this thesis has examined the complexities of cultural transfer both within and outside colonial New Zealand. As previously mentioned, the Canterbury environment forced settlers to considerably modify attempts to simply reconstruct the English countryside, and it is a debatable point whether that was their intention anyway. Whilst settler women did bring many types of English flora into their gardens, such as roses, violets and primroses, they also enjoyed making ferneries, using toi-toi (*austroderia*) in floral decorations, and designing wedding bouquets with New Zealand clematis and silver fern.

World events also had an impact on garden-making for Canterbury women, with the most obvious being the opening up of Japan to global trade. The elegance of Japanese garden and floral traditions obviously struck a chord, and evidence from the 1880s shows the sheer variety of Japanese influences in Canterbury gardens, from tea kiosks, lanterns and bridges to maples, cherries, and chrysanthemums. Mainly British in overall tone though they might have been, the contents of Canterbury settler gardens reflected the worldwide network of Empire and trade, and an increasing appreciation of the uniqueness of New Zealand's environment.

Chapter Summaries

This research began with the idea of using the life cycle of settler women to provide a structure for an analysis of their interactions with their gardens. Chapter 1 analysed the role of the garden in courtship and wedding rituals for middle- and upper-class women. The garden was considered an appropriate setting for courting rituals for women in New Zealand, because of British traditions based on the theological and mythological identification of women with gardens and flowers. Gardens also served an eminently practical purpose of providing a physical site of privacy for courting couples that contrasted favourably with the cramped nature of most settler dwellings of the time. Whilst the garden was considered an appropriate space for middle-class women, the acceptance of the right of working-class women to use garden spaces was based upon their adherence to middle-class codes of behaviour and the greater flexibility of the class system in colonial Canterbury. The garden also remained an important site for those women that were excluded from marrying by ill-health or disabilities, by providing them with healthy activity, a space in which to be useful and an outlet for the nurturing tendencies thought to be natural to females.

Colonial weddings took place in the garden as well. In the early years of settlement, colonial gardens provided the flora for homemade bouquets and church decorations, all of which were produced by settler women. Changes in these gardens over time brought changes in the types and availability of flowers for weddings. The most obvious transformation was the gradual inclusion of New Zealand native plants and, by the late-nineteenth century, the use of fashionable exotics from countries such as Japan. These changes were symptomatic of a developing national identity and pride, and increasing access through new technology to global plant networks. These changes did not occur without criticism, particularly from the Anglican clergy who were worried that the increasingly lavish spectacle of weddings was distracting people from the status of the marriage ceremony as a religious sacrament.

During the later years of the nineteenth century, settler's gardens became popular as venues for wedding ceremonies and receptions. The lack of an established state church in New Zealand, in conjunction with a milder climate than in Britain, meant that settlers began to take a more relaxed approach to wedding rituals and the popularity of the garden wedding reflects this change. There was greater flexibility in garden weddings and receptions, than those held in a church. This flexibility meant that the garden wedding tradition was easily able to absorb late-nineteenth century concerns about racial fitness and health by incorporating games and sports into the celebrations. It also meant that families could control the way in which they chose to represent themselves both to the community, and to posterity. This was something that was particularly important to the settlers, all of whom came from varied national or regional backgrounds, and who were still trying to create an identity for themselves in this new society.

Chapter 2 analysed examples of cooperation and conflict between married couples in the setting of the garden. It argued that economic and romantic partnerships between colonial husbands and wives have been downplayed by New Zealand historians. This has been the result of a tendency, noted by Katie Pickles, for New Zealand historiography to concentrate on “overtly feminist achievements that challenged and improved women's status in society and not on those of imperial and conservative women who preserved the status quo”.⁷²⁸ Therefore research on the lives of middle-class women who fulfilled the role expected of them has, until recently, been a low priority in colonial historiography. However, as this research demonstrates, to ignore the cooperative, loving nature of a good many colonial marriages is to ignore a key component in the economic and social success of the colony. This chapter examined women's role in managing farms, producing food and in using the garden to grow plants such as gorse which helped transform ‘waste’ land into ‘productive’ land. This thesis suggests that there is an urgent need for a reassessment of women's environmental contribution to rural development in the South Island.

Similarly the lack of research on romantic partnerships, which for settlers, affected everything from economic decision-making, to the way in which colonial couples spent their leisure time, means there are significant lacunae in the historiography of colonial family life. By looking at one site of cooperation alone—the garden, which was often a joint project between husband and wife—this thesis presents evidence that colonial marriages were not as rigid, formal or

⁷²⁸ Katie Pickles, ‘Colonisation, Gender, and Empire’ in *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, ed. by Giselle Byrnes (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 2009) 219–241.

indeed as patriarchal as they might appear on the surface. This topic deserves further investigation. When these factors did present themselves in a relationship, women were able to use the space of the garden as a site of cultural and psychological resistance or negotiation.

Chapter 3 focused on the role of the garden in colonial pregnancy, childbirth, motherhood and childhood. It demonstrated that women used the garden to maintain what they felt to be a semblance of control over their own health during pregnancy and birth. Gardens were also sites where gender relations were continually being renegotiated. Close examination of the primary evidence reveals that gender ideals shaping colonial childhood were more flexible in reality than they appear to be in the abstract. The warmer climate and outdoor lifestyle of the colony gave colonial children greater freedom of movement and opportunity in play. By the 1890s, this freedom, and the increasing urbanisation of the colony, generated social and governmental anxieties, and a greater push for children to be introduced to gardening as a civilising influence and a healthy channel for potentially dangerous energies that could otherwise lead to ‘larrikinism’, or even more depraved behaviour.

Chapter 4 examined ideas of illness, diseases, environmental anxiety, old age and death and how they influenced women’s interactions with their gardens. By analysing Victorian mourning customs in Canterbury, this thesis has demonstrated just how important the garden and garden flowers were, both physically and metaphorically, to the ways in which settler women coped with the grieving process. In fact, some mourning customs, such as the making and giving of wreaths, seem to have been gendered activities in colonial society. The connection between gardens and death was also to be found in the colonial custom of burying the dead on family land. This helped families create a claim to their new territory as well as giving them the consolation of creating gardens around the gravesite with symbolic plants or flowers.

The colonial period coincided with the rise of the garden cemetery in urban areas. Disposing of the dead became a particularly vexed issue in Christchurch, where low-lying, badly drained ground around the Anglican cemetery led to fears of miasma and contagion. These concerns about the effects of an unhealthy environment also played a significant role in the garden-making of Canterbury, as various environmental hazards such as drought, bush fires, swamps, nor’west gales and easily flooded rivers took their toll on South Island settlers. In response, this chapter argues that colonial women used the trees and plants in their gardens to try and gain some measure of control over these environmental factors, most specifically using

shelterbelt trees as protection from the wind, and planting to help with drainage. These environmental factors meant that for some women in the colony the garden was not necessarily an idyllic Eden, but a place of isolation, tension or even fear.

The connection of the garden with settler ideas of health could also work in a positive way, however, and the garden was popular as a prime site for healing and recuperation from physical or mental illness. The fresh air, sunshine and sweet aromas experienced in the garden were believed to be an antidote to ill-health caused by miasma or 'bad air'. The garden could also provide healing in the grieving process, and many settlers used the living, growing space of the garden to create memorials to those they loved, whether human or animal.

For many women, gardens became a consolation in old age, and gentle work in the garden was considered to be beneficial for their health. Many women were so well-known for their love of gardening, and the way in which they often used their gardens in the service of the community or the church, that it was mentioned in their obituaries. The gardens that they had loved in life, then became a metaphor for them in death.

Avenues for Further Research

This thesis has revealed numerous gaps in New Zealand historiography of the colonial period. The opportunities for further research are considerable. For reasons of the availability of evidence, this study has focused on middle- and upper-class women in the garden, but a study of working-class women would be both enlightening and invaluable. It could provide a fascinating look into the extent to which the middle-class ideals that permeated popular garden discourse were accepted by the working-classes. The challenges faced by working-class women when creating gardens in urban environments, and the purposes for which they might have done so, would also repay further investigation.

It has already been suggested that women's environmental impact and the cooperative nature of many colonial marriages are topics neglected in historiography. Another is colonial childhood. The primary evidence presented in this thesis shows that, in Canterbury, gender roles and ideals for children were more flexible in reality than they appear to be in the abstract. One fruitful avenue of enquiry would be to see if this was also true for the other provincial settlements in New Zealand.

One aspect of colonial life that has come through strongly in the evidence is the powerful bonds of friendship among colonial women and the wide social networks they created to deal with

what was often an isolated existence. These friendships could, and often did, cross class boundaries. They also involved the continual circulation of goods that were vital to the running of colonial homesteads such as plants, seeds, food, and even kittens. These networks have yet to be fully researched throughout New Zealand, although historians such as Katharine Raine and Caroline Daley have included them in their works, through their examples of a handful of individual women.

Finally, it would be instructive to examine the gardens of those women who were not British. The province of Canterbury alone had significant minorities of French and German settlers. There were also many settlers in Canterbury who came from Australia and brought their Eucalypts, Wattles and Acacias with them. Did all these settlers share the supposed ideal of recreating England? If not, what ideals were their efforts driven by? How did they cope with the complex process of identifying themselves as New Zealanders?

Final Word

The role of women in the garden in colonial Canterbury was essential to the economic success and the social cohesion of the burgeoning European settlement. The gardens of settler women illuminate many of the social, philosophical and cultural preoccupations of colonial society, as well as aspects of class and gender that still do not receive as much attention in New Zealand historiography as they should. Gardens were for many women places of freedom, action and resistance, and the centre of family life and their social networks. It would be pleasing to think that the arguments provided in this thesis might, in metaphorical terms, help put colonial women out in the fresh air and sunshine where they belong, and suggest directions we could take towards a long overdue re-assessment of how women settlers were vital participants in the creation of an entirely new environment and society.

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