

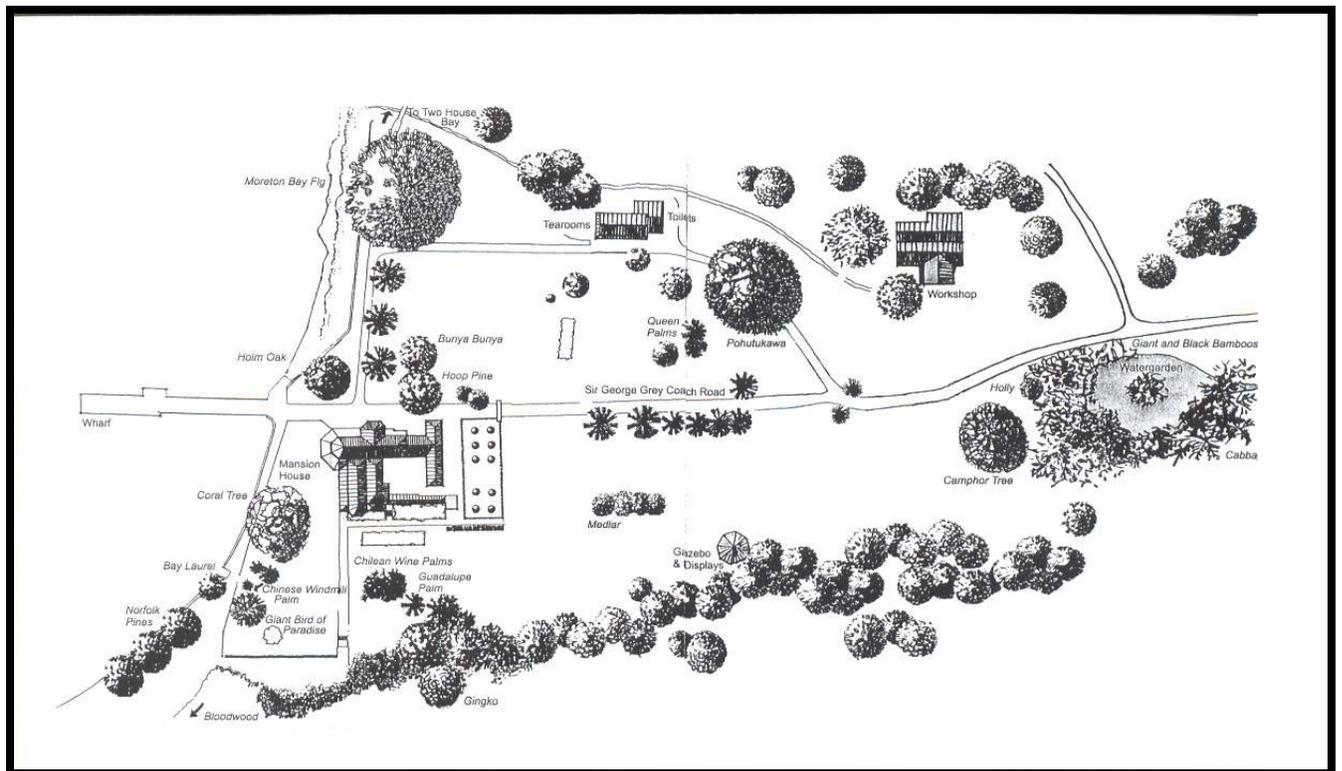
Kawau Island Flora

Early History

Te Kawau-tu-Marō, named after the Maori name for the motionless shag, was known to the Maori for 700 years prior to European occupation. The island is thought to have remained relatively unmodified during that time. Now, the shags have gone, and the native bush that once covered the low hilly slopes has been replaced by an amazing variety of vegetation. Exotic trees from different climates grow harmoniously with the native species of New Zealand. The major changes to the land first began when the Cornish miners came to Kawau after the discovery of manganese and copper in the early 1840s. They brought with them not only livestock but also seeds and plants. Small areas were cultivated and some of the bush was converted to pasture.

Sir George Grey's Era

Sir George Grey purchased Kawau in 1862 and poured all of his energy, effort and fortune into this 2000 hectare island. He was an enthusiastic collector of exotic plants and keenly interested in their acclimatisation, he obtained seeds and cuttings from noted botanists all over the world. Even today, more than a century later, Kawau has one of the oddest mixtures of plants found anywhere in New Zealand.



Mansion House Gardens. Exotic species planted by Sir George Grey can be seen in the present day garden.

The following are but a few of the plants introduced by Sir George Grey during his 26 years ownership of Kawau:

- Blue jacaranda, red gum, wattle and eucalyptus from Australia
- Silver fir from the slopes of Table Mountain, South Africa
- Oleander, cork tree, walnut and olive from the Mediterranean
- Oak from the USA and Europe
- Acer from Japan
- Elm of many different kind from Siberia, China and Britain
- Spider lily, bamboo and climbing plants from Fiji.

There were also plants from Africa, the Himalayas, New Guinea, Chile, India and many other countries.

The New Zealand grapefruit was grown from a plant introduced by Sir George Grey, who named it the “Poormans Orange” as it had heavy fruiting qualities. The first bud wood was given to Mr Edward Morrison of Warkworth who developed the “Morrison Seedless” strain. In 1876 the botanist John Buchanan reported:

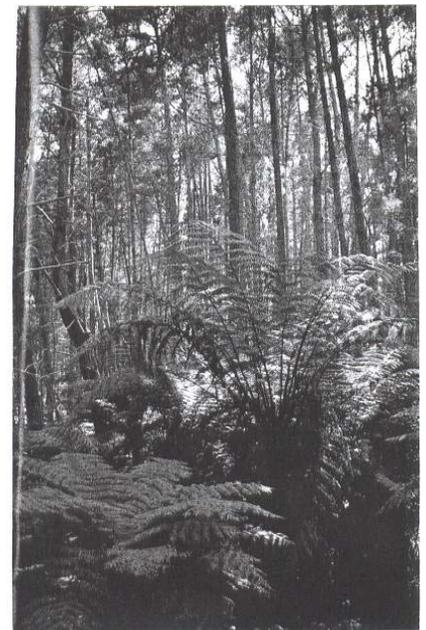
On leaving the island from Momona Bay by steamer, the extreme beauty of the landscape is very pleasing. Sir George Grey’s residence is surrounded by rare and beautiful shrubs. On the lawn may be seen Erythrina caffra, the coral tree, covered with brilliant scarlet flowers. Fourcroyia gigantea, a plant of the Amaryllis family, which grows well without any cultivation on the worst clay hills. Musa textiles, the banana fibre tree from which the manilla fibre of commerce is produced: Stilingia sebifera, the tallow tree used by the Japanese to manufacture candles; Quercus suber, the cork tree.....”

Sir George also grew pomegranates, olives, Natal plums, figs, custard apples, St John brea, loquats, mulberries, ginger, tea, coffee, oranges, citrons, liquorice, arrowroot and many different nuts.

Forest Flora

Unfortunately Sir George Grey did not foresee the impact the fauna would have on his island. Buchanan’s “On the Botany of Kawau” describes 348 species and varieties of indigenous plants, of which few are left today. Wallabies, possums and agriculture have eliminated possibly hundreds of native plant species. These animals still have a major influence on the vegetation, resulting in unpalatable species becoming dominant.

The major vegetation cover in the reserve (170 hectares) with the exception of the Mansion House valley is provided by the fast growing Radiata pine from California and the equally rapid growing Pinaster pine which originates from North Africa and Mediterranean regions. There are also substantial areas of manuka and kanuka. The pines are apparently self sewn – ascendants of the huge old specimens that were as shelter on the original farm land.



Tree ferns grow underneath a canopy of radiate pine

Although most of Kawau has manuka/kanuka scrub cover, there are only two significant areas that these species dominate – both on the eastern boundary of the park. Kanuka is distinguished from manuka by its greater height, less rounded leaves and lack of pink coloration in the centre of its white flowers. These two species provided the basis of a thriving *export* industry from 1868 to 1870, in 1908 and again in the 1930s and 1940s when they were cut and shipped to Auckland for firewood.

One of the few reminders of the former native cover is the extensive under storey of tree fern in parts of the forest. The ponga or silver tree fern is smaller and does not have the hexagonal trunk scars of the mamaku or black tree fern. The other obvious difference is the silvery-white underside of the fronds of the ponga. Other native plants which still exist in relative abundance are the coastal pohutukawa, and karaka, puriri, kohekohe, taraire, and whau, survive on the more exposed sites. There is a small area of mangrove forest in the stream estuary on the park's boundary at Schoolhouse Bay in Bon Accord Harbor.

Considerable areas of Kawau still display remnants of a once flourishing crop of arum lily. These provided a useful source of income for some of the island families who sold them to florists New Zealand wide. They may be seen in bloom in early winter.

The Redwood Track passes examples of other exotic species contributing to the forest cover, including the redwood of south-western USA, the Australian bush cherry (now rapidly spreading around the site of the old dairy cottage), huge microfarad specimens, and a stand of predominantly black wattle behind Lady's Bay. Several bunya-bunya pines are also found on this route.

The future

The Department of Conservation is the current caretaker of the historic and recreational reserves on Kawau Island (approximately 170 hectares of the 2000hectares that make up Kawau Island). Restoration of the house and gardens as they would have been during Sir George Grey's occupation is a long term management goal. In 1999 the house exterior was painted, sections of the roof re-tiled and remedial work carried out on the verandah and the wharf in Mansion House Bay. In time, and with the appropriate funding, other parts of the house currently closed to the public will be refurbished and opened for viewing.

A conservation plan has been drawn up for restoration of the gardens. Work has already begun in accordance with this plan. Structures and buildings erected in Mansion House grounds after Sir George Grey lived on Kawau have been removed. Although the knowledge is available to make the gardens historically accurate, many of the plants are not. Varieties that appeared in the catalogues of last century have been superseded by new varieties and hybrids. Rather than plant inappropriate stock, the garden will gradually be filled with donated specimens from other old gardens. Although by this method the garden will take many years to re-establish, it will eventually reflect the garden content of Sir George Grey's original gardens.

There are a number of old trees and shrubs which are either original Grey plantings or descendants of them. Some of these are:

- Bunya-bunya *Araucaria bawdily*.

Australia: A large wide-spreading pyramidal tree which produces huge pineapple shaped cones. Each segment of the cone has an edible pleasant tasting nut.

- Hoop pine *Araucaria Cunninghamii*
New Guinea
- Norfolk Island pine *Araucaria heterophylla*
Norfolk Island
- Redwood *Sequoia sempervirens*
Western USA. A long-lived conifer and the world's tallest tree. Redwoods of up to 2000 years old and 340 feet tall have been recorded in Oregon and California, USA.
- Japanese Cedar *Cryptomeria japonica*
Japan
- Bloodwood *Baloghia lucida*
Norfolk Island
- Coral tree *Erythrina caffra*
South Africa. This is a large beautifully shaped tree which blooms profusely during November and December. Its bare branches are covered with bright scarlet flowers which gives way to foliage in early February.
- Giant bird of paradise *Strelitzia nicolai*
South Africa. Tree like and has large leaves resembling those of the banana. Its flowers are white but relatively inconspicuous unlike the beautiful orange and blue flower of the common *Strelitzia reginae*.
- Bay laurel *Laurus nobilis*
Mediterranean region. It has several common names such as sweet bay, true bay and Grecian laurel. The leaves are used for seasoning foods (bouquet garni) and oil extracted from the purple-black berries is used to make perfume.
- Oleander *Nerium oleander*
Europe. Appropriately "oleander" means "beware" It is a poisonous plant and the absorption of its juices has proved fatal.
- Chilean Wine Palm *Jubaea spectabilis*
Chile. Also known as choquito nut palm. This is perhaps the most famous exotic tree on Kawau. Unfortunately in South America this unique and slow growing species has been destroyed in large numbers to make palm syrup – honey. A whole tree, perhaps a century old is felled. Over some months 200-400 litres of sap is obtained by repeatedly slicing the trunk near the apex, but destruction of vegetation does not end with felling the palm. Many other species are cut down for fuel to boil the syrup in large copper urns. This palm is related to the coconut but its fruits are only 3-4 cm long – choquito nuts. In Chile the nuts are sometimes fed to cattle for the outer juicy flesh. The clear nuts are then left to dry, cracked open and sold at street stalls and shops to be used in baking.
- Moreton Bay Fig *Ficus macrophylla*
Australia. This enormous tree, with its roots bulging and surfacing around the trunk, can spread 150 feet or more. It has inedible one inch figs.
- Holm oak *Quercus ilex*
Southern Europe. Its leaves resemble that of the holly, hence it's other common name holly oak. Owners acquire oak trees in either of two ways, they plant an acorn themselves or let squirrels do it for them.