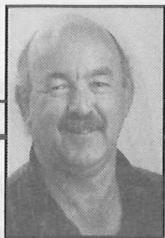


# Memorials someone forgot



By DAVID BRUCE

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MOST of us get a buzz out of developing our gardens, seeing them grow and mature.

We enjoy the new additions that we bring home from the garden centre or grow from seeds and cuttings. For some the construction of pergolas, decks and fences create challenges and the satisfaction, on completion, of a job well done. As our gardens mature we add the special touches, the plants that once we could not grow, the garden bench where we can sit and enjoy the shade on a sunny afternoon, perhaps even an ornament or two.

These are the high points of owning a garden, but along the way we have to maintain them and for some this is the rub!

Weeding can be tedious, especially if you are fated to have the dubious pleasures of couch grass and oxalis, while many may regard lawn mowing as a chore and happily hand this over to the local contractor. As for painting the fence or pergola, fixing the broken plank in the deck? Well maybe we'll get around to it next weekend!

It is amazing how, when the novelty wears off, we can let things slide and before we know it the rot sets in. It happens with gardens, it happens to cars and houses and to relationships.

The wind wand now oscillating over downtown New Plymouth is a novelty. Over the past few months it has provoked a fair amount of controversy, now that it is in place it is provoking more.

Some love it, others hate it, all seem to have an opinion on it and eavesdropping on some of the discussions that it has provoked has been one of the highlights of the past week. One opinion that appealed to me went something like this: "Irrespective of the artistic merit or our individual preference, this is a piece of civic art and our city has finally, after 160 years, got around to installing a sculptural artifact. Now I know that there are a few carved boulders lurking amongst the shrubs around the council offices, if you are looking for public art, this folks is it!"

Not so, scattered around the city there are several examples of civic art, sculptures in their own way that reflect and tell the history of our town.

Most, like the wind wand, were erected or installed with due ceremony and brouhaha to commemorate an "unforgettable" event, circumstance or personality.

Most, with the passage of time and the ebbing of hype, have been neglected and allowed to fall into disrepair.

Not more than a stones throw away at Pukeariki landing is a recent piece, the ceramic art work commissioned for 150 year celebrations only nine years ago.

Poorly lit, inconspicuous and unprotected it shows the effects of vandalism.



**NEGLECTED AGAIN:** After a few years in the Devon Mall this Boer war memorial is back sprouting weeds on Marsland Hill.

Photo: MARK DWYER

Fifty years older, and at the base of Paritutu in Centennial Park, is a stone seat, erected to commemorate the centennial and the contribution of the pioneer women of New Plymouth and district. To use this seat you will have to await a fine day, for the stone base holds water and the wooden slats rotted away years ago and have never been replaced.

Alongside is a mystery, a plaque erected in 1984 giving the history of the mast of the Australind, wrecked in Port Taranaki in 1882 and re-erected on this site. The mast is gone, but the plaque lingers on.

In Regina Place we have the Honeyfield fountain, an exquisite piece, an Edwardian mini masterpiece in sandstone, marble and wrought iron.

I stopped and chatted with two very pleasant ladies the other day who, like me were admiring its faded charm.

"What a pity it isn't working, after walking the foreshore we could enjoy a drop of water". We were not alone, others stopped, visitors to our town. "There were lights on top I guess" and "isn't it a shame!"

I agreed. Alice Brown Honeyfield thought a lot of our town to give us this fountain and it and she certainly deserves better.

And what of the 15 forgotten Taranaki heroes from the Boer War. When it suited us we brought their memorial fountain down from its hilltop to play for a while in our ill-starred mall.

It is back up there now, its lower pool filled with earth and weed infested, the boxing still in place around the plinth. In an age when it is possible to uplift such a structure at whim and relocate it, it seems incredible that it should not be restored and working.

There should be a memorial on Marsland Hill for the dead memorials it houses. Beside the Boer War fountain, another broken slatted stone seat com-

memorates Bernard Aris — the "painter of Taranaki" — and there is the broken and battered Taranaki Wars memorial as well.

Not even the carillon could be described as pristine. Nearby the antique iron railings in front of Saint Mary's Church are gradually rotting into oblivion.

Maintenance, care, a bit of pride, is as important in our cityscape as it is in our home gardens.

Our parks and gardens are hailed as the jewels in our tourism crown and bylaws and designations have been rightly put in place to protect the trees, the greenery on which we base this premise.

We give a lot of time and effort to the greenery. Board riders plant pohutukawa on the coastline, schoolchildren participate actively on Arbor Day, our parks and our traffic islands are a picture to be proud of. Every day a fleet of trucks and vans carry a small army of garden workers to weed the borders and tend our trees. Wondrous mowing machines groom our acres of civic grass.

The structural works of mankind, the buildings, the seats, fountains, gateways, murals and memorials are part of this garden too. All have significance as part of our history, all have artistic merit and all are worthy of protection, recognition and maintenance.

So what will be the fate of the wind wand? The latest of a long line of additions to our city garden. Will we treasure it when its warranty runs out? Will we take it apart and refurbish it every few years so that future generations can argue its merit? Will we designate it like a tree to be protected at all costs? Will it take its place among the other restored and revered memorials to our past history? Or will we leave it to rot in the weeds and long grass and move on to something else?