

A HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL IN 100 OBJECTS

A GORSE BUSH

Size: c 50 – 60 in 1270 mm – 1520 mm in all three dimensions.

Description: A single plant of the common gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) on the boundary of the School's grounds. It is a "middle-aged" plant – older plants are more leggy.



Discussion: In the early days of the School pretty much the whole school was covered in gorse. An unknown author in the first *The Albertian* of 1922 remarked under the heading "Per Angust -."

"A large grey building – a mere shell, and incomplete at that – in a setting of clay, gorse, rubble, timber, and broken bricks – such it was as welcomed us at the beginning of the year."

In his first Headmaster's report, published in the 1922 *School List*, FW Gamble noted:

"The absence of playing fields at the School, and the remoteness of public grounds robbed the boys of full benefits of out-of-door activities. The small ground on the south side of the building was cleared of gorse and roughly patched up by the boys themselves for use as a kick-about ground." The Hall occupies a good part of that site now.

Gamble went on to mention that the boys had also excavated a cricket pitch area for the following year, cleared away "a large accumulation of, building rubble" and had also demolished, "dangerous stone walls about the grounds". He referred to them as "... model boys such as, are supposed to have existed a generation ago."

His closing remarks were:

"... the School heartily welcomes the projected enterprise of putting our grounds in order by voluntary efforts. Mr Ward-Baker and his Committee have already launched a campaign ..."

Mr Ward-Baker, a member of the Grammar School Board, sent an undated memo to parents. It went:

“CIRCULAR LETTER
TO THE PARENTS AND GUARDIANS OF BOYS ATTENDING MT ALBERT GRAMMAR SCHOOL

As most people know the grounds of the above school are in a state of nature and the boys have not even got a cricket pitch though the school is now a year old.

“There are no Government funds available so it is a question of self-help.

“A committee of parents has been formed for the purpose of taking in hand the improvement of the playing grounds and it has been decided to hold a ‘Working Bee’ on Saturday, the 13th January next.

“The committee appeals to every able-bodied father or guardian to take part in the ‘Bee’.

“One or more horse teams, with plough and scoop, will be engaged to do the heavy work.

“An appeal is also made to those who cannot give their time and labour – any such are invited to subscribe something towards the cost of the teams.

“Volunteers are asked to bring either a pick or a shove. A ladies committee will provide light refreshments.

“If you cannot come yourself send a substitute.

“The ‘Working Bee’ will commence at 8 a.m.

If you cannot come then come when you can during the day.

E.H. Potter,	W.G. Fletcher
A.J. Jenkins,	A. Hall-Skelton
J.H. Kinnear,	G. Norton
C. Freeman	

W. WARD-BAKER, convenor, 15 View Road, Mt Eden.”

As Mr Ward-Baker indicated, that, as well as gorse, there was a great deal of landscaping necessary to produce level playing areas. Evidence of this can be seen in the banks, walls, slopes and steps of today.

The work involved the movement of huge amounts of clay. Along with gorse, clay was an everpresent phenomenon in the early years of the School.



The image shows the groundsman, Joe Williams (left) with a group of boys and perhaps fathers on what may be the 'Working Bee'. This photograph is a gift from Audry Thompson-Davies in August 2000. She is the sister of AL (Bert) Dodds who is in the photograph.

In his 1923 report the Headmaster noted that:

"The School is grateful for many acts of generosity shown during the year. Mr W. Ward-Baker, as Chair of the Parents' Committee has earned more thanks than we can express."

Looking back over 50 years N.A. Freeman N.A. (Ray) Freeman in *Golden Jubilee*, JG Brown (1971), p17 reported:

"Imagine my surprise and horror at the first sight of a half-finished school dropped in a wilderness of gorse, builders rubble and concrete mixers. I wheeled my bike up a rough path through the gorse, wandering about the 'choice' that had been thrust upon me."

Two pages on R.O. Buchanan, a foundation master reminisced:

"A rough gorse-covered hillside reaching up to an unsightly quarry on the top of Mt Albert, with a stark, raw, new building dumped down close to the road."

By 1924 the practice wicket had disappeared and the Headmaster reported at the end of the year that:

“Our first playing field is also ready to be sown.”

So some clearing of gorse had been undertaken. Further work was done in the Depression of the early 1930s. JG Brown reported in his *Golden Jubilee* (1971) p30:

“In conjunction with the Mount Albert Borough Council up to 400 relief workers with pick and shovel and wheelbarrow were employed at starvation wages to build the two main football grounds below the top ground. [The top ground is now a carpark and aquatic centre.] All this work was under the control of Mr R.B. Hardy, who took advantage of the opportunity to design as well other playing fields below the old tennis courts and the Hall. The rifle range was also shifted to the site it occupied until the Cadet Corps was abandoned. Thus out of evil came forth good.”

[The tennis courts referred to were on the platform now occupied by the library building and the rifle range – and the swimming pool and the cricket nets – have been replaced by the E Block.]

An additional 18 acres of land was gazetted, to extend the School area, in September 1948. Much of this would have been covered in gorse.

The boys had narrow tracks through it to cleared areas where they would hide from military drill or use the cover of gorse to smoke. They had been known to take revenge on people who displeased them by such acts as throwing their shoes or kicking their footballs into the gorse. On one occasion the Headmaster rang the bell early and waited for the smokers to emerge lastly from the gorse, to their discomfort.

In *The Albertian* of 1954, A.W.A. Spec. V5. [A.W. Aston] penned these lines:

THAT GORSE

Too soon the dreaded news has come,
A joy for most, but sad for some,
And now they have to leave their home
The gorse in which they used to roam,
Has gone.

No longer can they run and play,
While Military Drill fills out their day,
No need there was to fear the gaze,
Of prying eyes that stalked the maze
Of gorse.

But now the tractors done its worst,
We hope someday some seeds will burst
And bring us back those field we knew!
Alas! Those haunts for me and you
Are gone!

In *Golden Jubilee*, P11, Brown remarked:

“The whole area, except for the patch in front of the main building was covered in gorse, which had been kept in check by annual summer burns.” That would have insured that the poet’s hope “that someday some seeds will burst” would likely come to pass. Buring is a sure-fired way to have new gorse plants the following year.

Gorse was introduced into New Zealand in colonial times as it is a recognised hedgerow plant in Europe. In the more temperate New Zealand climate the hardy plant soon became a weed. It did remain a widespread hedge until the 1950s when it was largely replaced by post and wire which has no windbreak or shelter qualities.

Gorse is a source of food for bees, a nursery for endemic plants, which, when they grow succeed it, and it can be completely eliminated by goats.

However, its growth is so widespread that a number of biological control organisms have been introduced. The first was the gorse seed weevil, *Exapion ulicis*, it, and the gorse pod moth *Cydia succedana*, are, together the most effective agents.

The last major scrub and gorse area was dealt to by English teacher Roy Clements in the 1980s. he and his legion of boy helpers planted hundreds of trees and laid paths in what is now The Roy Clements Treeway. Thus, ensuring that large patches of gorse are but a fading memory.

Brian Murphy