

## History of Ardmore Nurseries Ltd

### Alen Beaumont

Ardmore Nurseries, Ardmore

Beaumonts Nurseries Ltd was started by our grandfather and father in 1933 at Manurewa as a growing and retailing concern. The emphasis was open ground growing and the location for the nursery was moved several times around Manurewa, until 1970, when a permanent area was purchased in Ardmore. In 1970 the company was divided, creating Beaumonts Garden Centre in Manurewa and Ardmore Nurseries in Ardmore. Ardmore Nurseries is owned and operated by Barry and Allen Beaumont.

### **BEAUMONTS NURSURIES LTD—THE OLD STYLE, HISTORY FROM 1933**

We were introduced to the business in the years when you used clay pots for container growing, and when the plants were sold, they were knocked out and put into paper pots. Hence, most of the plants were grown in the open ground, lifted, and balled in hessian. We had made our own pot washer so we could keep the pots clean and free from disease before reusing. I remember my grandfather sterilizing soil in a 40-gal drum with a fire underneath. We built most of the buildings and glasshouses ourselves and the glasshouse walls were built from timber out of old railway cattle wagons. Some of the glasshouses had a fireplace at one end that heated water which then flowed along second-hand fibrolite pipes; so the first time the fire was stoked up as you can imagine one of the pipes burst. Seed and cutting trays were 1 m long × 60 cm wide × 25 cm thick timber. I could just pick them up by myself but any shorter arms and no chance!

We supplied the entire country by mail and rail plus direct sales to the public in Manurewa, Papakura, Papatoetoe, Pukekohe, Waiuku, and their surrounding rural areas. We had many people coming to the nursery on Saturdays and sometimes we would have over 50 cars parked down the road. Barry and I were the “ball boys”, so every time a customer came in for plants, we were given the labels and went off and dug one peach, one apple, six roses, etc. As you can imagine we got tired of this and decided that during the week we would ball 10 of each evergreen and put them in sawdust beds. We would also dig 10 of each deciduous tree and heel them in bare rooted into sawdust. We made beds with concrete blocks to hold the sawdust, concrete paths for the customers to walk along, and a car park. All plants were labelled.

We, therefore, believe that Beaumont Nurseries started the first self-help garden centre just out of sheer necessity. The nursery was 30 acres and it was not all on the Great South Road. Some was half a mile behind, some in Takanini, and some opposite where the Botanic Gardens is now located. If you have read the September (1993) *Commercial Horticulture* magazine you will have seen that Masons Nurseries (in Te Awamutu) started in 1933, the same year as us. They also grew barberry and many other plants like us. We grew about 1000 types of plants, including apples, peaches, citrus, and many other fruit trees. We must have delivered a group of fruit trees to every section in Manurewa, Papatoetoe, and Papakura plus roses and a couple of hundred hedging plants. We grew hundreds

of thousands of shelter plants for domestic hedging and farm shelter. We would have up to a hectare in barberry every year which was sown with a hand sower in hand raked soil. There were no herbicides so all weeding was by hand. We also grew pines, macrocarpa, cryptomeria, lawsons, gum, cupressus, boxthorn (*Lycium*), all the same way as barberry. Domestic hedging was abelia, escallonias, lonicera, privet, euonymus, eugenia, and feijoa. In 1940, prices were \$3 per hundred for most hedging—barberry was 40¢ per hundred and \$3 per thousand. Most shrubs were 2/6d (equivalent to 50¢[NZ]). I have a few photocopies of our 1940 trade list. For those old enough, you may be able to remember *Acacia baileyana* at 2/6d or 2-year-old *Cupressus macrocarpa* 12-15 in. at 9 lb per 1000. We ploughed the open ground with a single furrow mole plough and then we hoed for planting with walk-behind rotary hoes. Later on, when tractor hoes came, we had a contractor to do the hoeing.

This is a condensed history of some of the silly things we did. But I have told you this so you can see why we have carried on mainly with open ground production and are still going strong even if a bit older and wiser now.

### THE SHIFT TO ARDMORE IN 1970

When we moved to Ardmore in 1970 it was hard to believe the difference in soil from that at Manurewa. Ardmore soil is a consolidated peat—25 m of consolidated peat before reaching anything different, and that was sand.

We started using a double farrow disc plough, ploughing about 50 cm deep and leaving the soil friable and mainly level. We hoed and topdressed, hoed again, and lined out the area to be planted with tightly stretched rope. Rows are 90 cm wide. We have tried mechanical planting but have found, because of the number of different plants and sizes we grow, it did not work very well. Cultivating plants was with a rotary hoe. After buying our first tractor we moved to cultivating with tines on mid-mounted hydraulics.

As we bought more tractors, we upgraded and bought a Farmall Super A and put on high clear wheels so we could cultivate taller plants and also use it for wrenching. We only started doing tractor wrenching when I started working full time. Previously, that was done by spade. Larger trees that cannot be straddle wrenched are cable wrenched. It might look old fashioned but it works. Some of our buyers have said that they prefer our plants to those grown under newer systems.

Bagging open-ground plants has been made quicker by the use of a sleeve. This system also has the advantage of retaining a larger amount of roots. The system was conceived by Vernon Harrison.