

# Celebration of Vivien Edwards' biography of Mary Sutherland

Scion, 3 June 2021

Chris Goulding

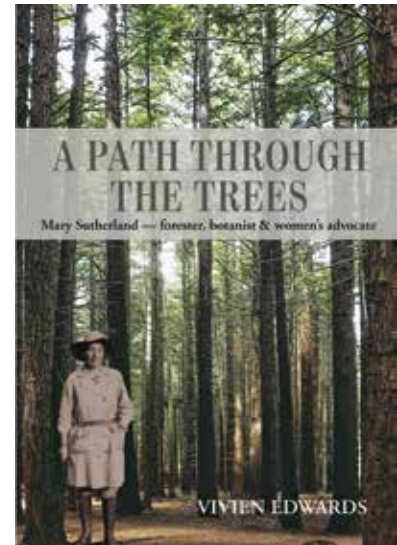


Figure 1: Cover of *A Path Through the Trees* by Vivien Edwards

Mary Sutherland (1893–1955) was the first female professional forester to work in this country and she was employed by the New Zealand Forest Service (NZFS) from 1923 to 1932. Her biography, *A Path Through the Trees* (Writes Hill Press), has just been written by Vivien Edwards. A celebration of the launch of its publication was held at Scion on 3 June 2021.

The event was well attended. Andrew McEwen, Chair of the New Zealand Institute of Forestry Foundation, who organised the event, welcomed over 100 attendees, including relatives of Mary Sutherland. He began by reading a letter from Professor Iwan Davies, President and Vice-Chancellor of Bangor University in Wales where Mary graduated in 1916:

*'Bangor University is immensely proud of the life and career of Mary Sutherland, as such a notable alumna of the University. Her pioneering achievements both as a student in Bangor and in her subsequent career in New Zealand are of global significance in advocating the professional role of women. We are therefore delighted that Vivien Edwards has been inspired to write this landmark biography of Mary to document and celebrate her life. We congratulate Vivien and the colleagues who have enabled this biography to be brought to publication. Bangor remains strongly committed to maintaining its status as a leading global institution in forestry education, with an increasing number of female students following in Mary's footsteps by studying our undergraduate and postgraduate degrees as a pathway to developing their career in this globally crucial profession.'*

Lynn Peck, publisher, Writes Hill Press said a few words, explaining how a plaque dedicated to Mary Sutherland installed by Chris Taylor in the Redwood Grove, Whakarewarewa Forest, Rotorua piqued Vivien Edwards' interest in finding out more about this remarkable woman.

She then introduced Julie Collins, Deputy Director-General Trade and Policy, Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI), to introduce the book.

A book review by Julie Collins can be found in the *New Zealand Journal of Forestry* (May 2021: 42–43). Julie has been instrumental in setting up Te Uru Rākau, the recently renamed New Zealand Forest Service, and she elaborated on the pioneering effect of the NZFS's first female forester, 'the Lady Ranger'. However, it was to be another half century before the NZFS employed their first female forester who graduated in forestry in New Zealand (Heather McKenzie). Julie emphasised that



Figure 2: Vivien Edwards and Chris Taylor at the plaque dedicated to Mary Sutherland in the Redwood Grove, Whakarewarewa Forest, Rotorua



Figure 3: Julie Collins, Deputy Director-General Trade and Policy, MPI

it is a goal of MPI to create the right environment to encourage more female foresters. Currently, there are 35 women forestry undergraduates at the University of Canterbury out of a total of 110 students (just over 30%) and one woman on the staff. (For her own path through the trees, see 'Julie Collins – Her Story', *New Zealand Journal of Forestry*, November 2019: 40–42.)

James Treadwell, President of the NZIF, also said a few words. He commented that the logo of the Institute, the Rimu sprig, was designed by Mary. She was a founding member of the Institute and was elected to its Council. A bequest from her enabled the Mary Sutherland Scholarship to be made annually to a polytechnic student. He apologised that at his forest management company only 24% of the staff were female and stressed that more work is needed to arrive at a more equitable gender diversity. He lamented that Mary was seldom employed in field work due to perceived difficulties in field accommodation. James believes that Mary can be an inspiration for young women thinking about their career and he reminded everyone that diversity brings better results.

Vivien Edwards, the author, spoke next. She reiterated that seeing the memorial plaque in Whakarewarewa Forest interested her enough to research who Mary Sutherland was and to collect the evidence of a fascinating life and outstanding career. She thanked everyone who had encouraged her in what was an enthralling task, but also one where she sometimes thought about giving up. Vivien has a good knowledge of New Zealand forestry, which helped in her research of Mary's life and career.

World War I provided the opportunity for Mary to attend university in what was an all-male domain and to start her career in British forestry. When the men returned, she became unemployed and moved to New Zealand in 1923 to join her sister. A year later, the NZFS, short of university trained foresters, employed her as a forest assistant. When the NZFS down-sized she lost



Figure 4: Vivien Edwards, author (left), and Lynn Peck, publisher, Writes Hill Press

her job again, but obtained a position at the Dominion Museum in Wellington, eventually as a botanist. Later she became a specialist in farm forestry at the Department of Agriculture. Throughout her career she promoted forestry education, supporting sustainable management and guardianship of the natural environment.

Lynn Peck returned to complete this part of the celebration, drawing attention to the support that McLeod's Booksellers, Rotorua had given to the event and to the opportunity for participants to purchase a copy of the book.

Andrew McEwen introduced the final section of the event, the award of the NZIF Foundation's Mary Sutherland Scholarship. He first asked previous winners of the award attending the celebration to come forward, ranging from Dave Lumley (1975 recipient) and Chas Hutton (1980) through to Georgia Paulson who received it in 2018.

He then was pleased to announce that the Foundation Trustees had resolved to award two Mary Sutherland Scholarships in 2021 to mark the publication of the biography. The recipients were Lily Marshall and Pamela Purdie, both studying at Toi Ohomai Institute



Figure 5: Book display, McLeod's Booksellers, Rotorua

of Technology in Rotorua. It is pleasing that at this celebration of the biography of Mary Sutherland both scholarship winners were young women (as have been four of the previous five recipients).

Andrew thanked Te Uru Rākau and PF Olsen for funding the refreshments at the event and Scion for

providing the venue, so close to the plaque in the Redwood Grove that was the inspiration for the Mary Sutherland biography.

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Figure 6: Former and 2021 recipients of the Mary Sutherland Scholarship at the celebration of the publication of the biography of Mary Sutherland. Left to right: Georgia Paulson (2018), Simon Honour (2010), Tina Drummond (1997), Chas Hutton (1980), Dave Lumley (1975), Lily Marshall (2021) and Pamela Purdie (2021)



Figure 7: 2021 recipients of the Mary Sutherland Scholarship. Lily Marshall (left) and Pamela Purdie with NZIF Foundation Trustee, James Treadwell, and Andrew McEwen