

Muriel Mary Lysaght Watt AILA

(1917-2005)

My Brilliant Career

By John Adam and Louise Beaumont for Australian Gardens History Society Wellington,
New Zealand, Conference 26 October 2019



Miss Lysaght at work in her office.



'Punarima', the Lysaght homestead at Mokoia,
South Taranaki.



Botanic Gardens staff late-1930s, Rhododendron dell.
Mary on right, third from back.



Botanic Gardens staff mid-1930s.



Studying in the wood museum.

SOCIAL AND PERSONAL

The North Dunedin branch of the Home Economics Association held its monthly meeting on Thursday evening last. Mrs Abbott presided over a good attendance of members. Miss M. Lysaght, from the Botanic Gardens, gave an interesting and instructive talk on winter flowering plants and initiated members into the mysteries of getting some of these plants to flower. Mrs Rathbone moved a hearty vote of thanks to the speaker, and a chat over a cup of tea brought an interesting evening to a close.

Evening Star, 22/5/1940

The Gardening Circle of the Otago Women's Club held its monthly meeting on Tuesday afternoon. The subject was colour schemes in the garden, and the speaker was Miss Lysaght, of the Botanic Gardens staff, who was introduced by the chairwoman, Mrs Orr Campbell. The speaker gave an idea of what flowers and colours were suitable to make an attractive display in both large and small gardens for each season. Starting with spring, crocuses with iris reticulata make an effective combination for border planting. Beds of wallflower, forget-me-nots, and tulips give a wide range of colour, followed by anemones, ranunculuses, and sweet william, with antirrhinums and dahlias as the main summer group. Dahlias, said the speaker, were perhaps the best perennial for small gardens, ageratum with pink antirrhinums making a nice show in late summer.

Evening Star, 18/8/1945



FLOWER BEDDING SCHEMES

Suggestions for Southern Districts of New Zealand

By MISS M. LYSAGHT, N.D.H.(N.Z.)

NOW that there is so much to choose from, we should not let any mental slothfulness stand in the way of thinking and watching and comparing, so as to arrive at a just appreciation of the merits and uses of all our garden plants.

"It is not possible to use to any good effect all the plants that are to be had. In my own case I should wish to grow many more than just those I have, but if I do not find a place where my critical garden conscience approves of having any one plant I would rather be without it. It is better for me to deny myself the pleasure of having it than to endure the mild sense of guilt of having placed it where it neither does itself justice nor accords with its neighbours, and where it reproaches me every time I pass it."
(From "The Gardeners' Companion," p. 270.)

"It is indeed a great pity that New Zealand, as a community, should be so lamentably lacking in civic pride and the appreciation of beauty." p. 14

"Of all the sources of damage, the public may often be considered responsible for the greatest proportion..." p. 14

Mary Lysaght, Flower Bedding Schemes,
Journal of the RNZIH, 1947.



Top left: Brenda Colvin
Top right: Dame Sylvia Crowe



Lower left: Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe
Lower right: Sir Peter Shepheard

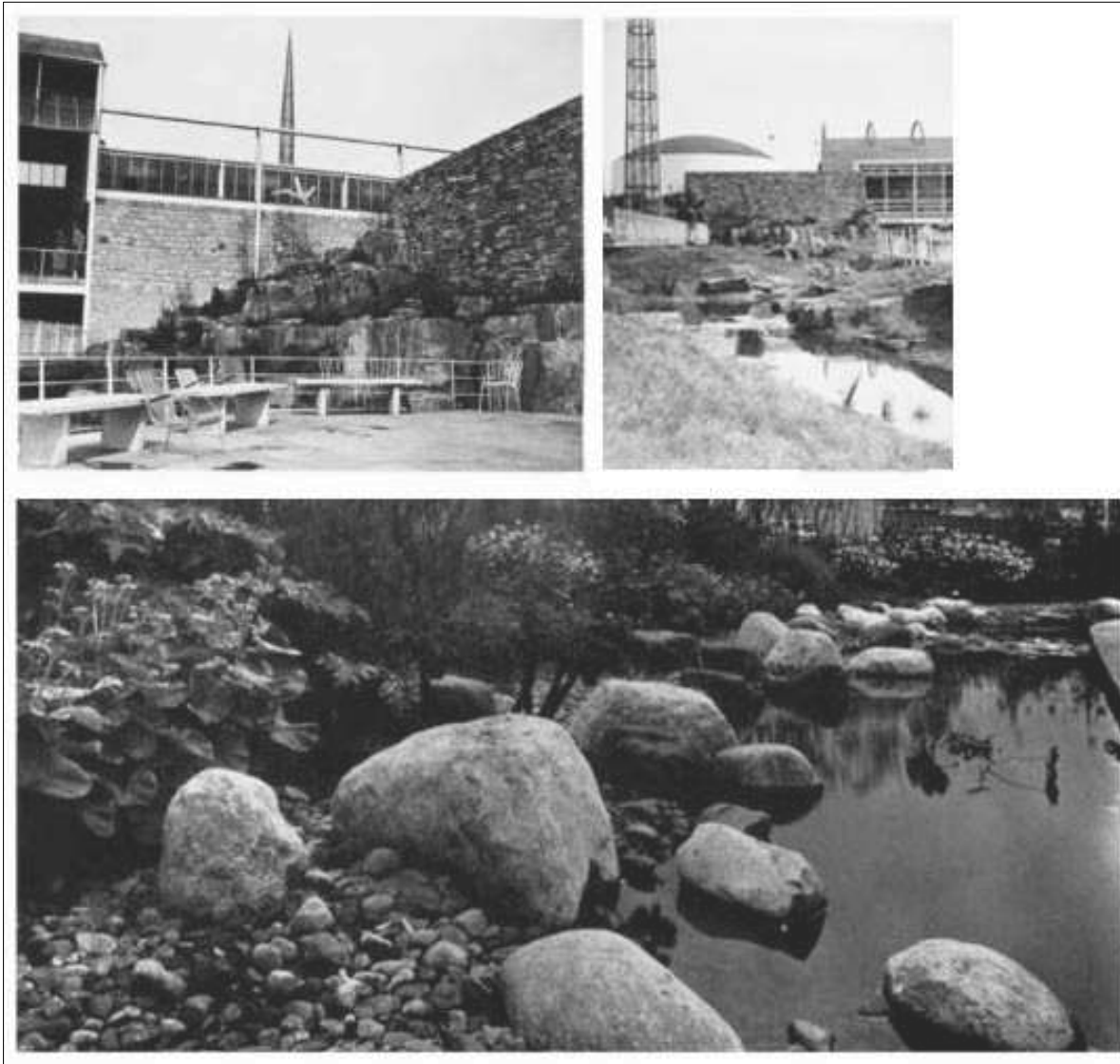


Brynmawr Rubber Factory, Gwent,
Wales, 1951.





London Festival, Southbank landscape 1951.



Peter Youngman's Westmoreland rock formation (top) and Moat Garden (bottom), London Festival, 1951.

To whom it may concern

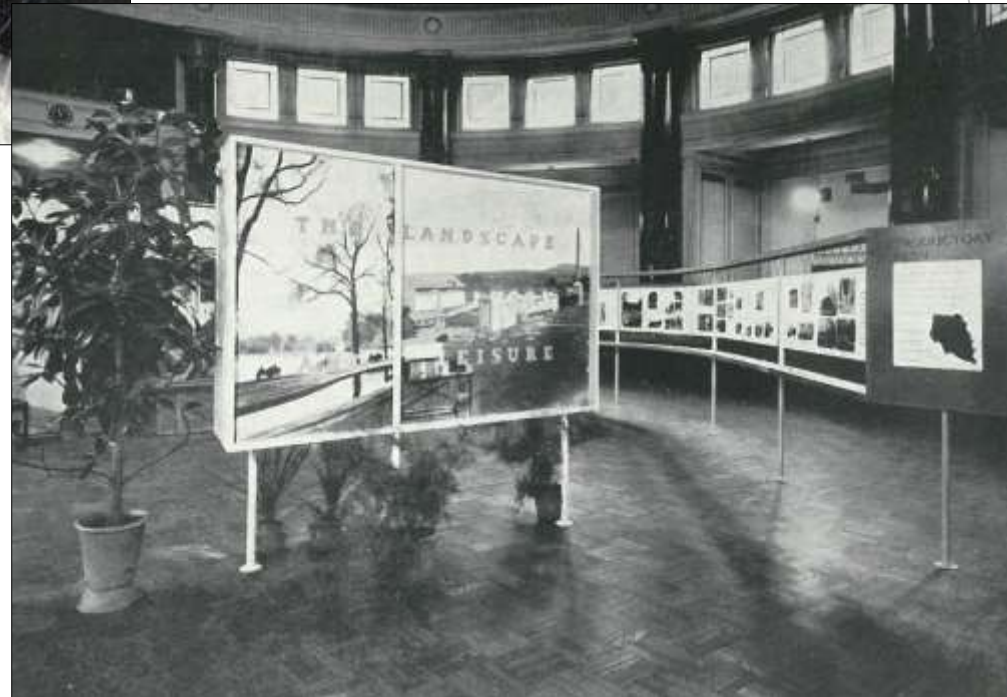
...[Miss Lysaght] “has spent a year at this college, principally in the School of Architecture but also in the School of Textiles and the School of Graphic Design. Her studies have included an appreciation of architecture in particular relation to her profession, the use of plant and flower forms in the design of textiles, and calligraphy.

She spent a week at the country house of the Le Play Institute of Sociology, Ledbury, Hertfordshire, doing a special course arranged by that Institute, including the study of gardens in English Country Houses.”

Peter Youngman, 5th Dec. 1950. MA FILA AMTPI.



First International Conference on
Landscape Architecture, London
1948.



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE AT MADRID

The second International Conference of Landscape Architects was held in Madrid on September 20-24, 1950, after Spain had been selected as the place for this meeting by the delegates at the London Conference in 1948. From the official opening of the Conference on Wednesday noon in the shaded patio at the Museo Romantico to the farewell meeting on Sunday evening there prevailed a well-balanced program of Conference meetings, carefully planned excursions to points of interest, and warm and friendly social events.

One hundred seventy-two delegates met in Madrid, representing twenty-two countries, namely:

Argentina	Egypt	Morocco
Austria	Eire	Portugal
Belgium	El Salvador	Spain
Bolivia	Finland	Sweden
Brazil	France	Switzerland
Chile	Great Britain	United States
Cuba	Italy	Uruguay
Denmark		

The wish that the United States might have sent official delegates and representatives to the Conference in strength was strongly expressed by the officers of the International Federation of Landscape Architects and many of the Conference delegates. Many of the governments represented at the Conference gave official and financial support to their delegates, making it difficult for some to understand that we landscape architects in America receive no similar assistance, and that our own convention in California this last July could have been such a severe drain on the finances of our members.

Purpose of the Conference

The purpose of this second International Conference of Landscape Architects was the discussion of the combined function of art and utility in the landscape. This theme was proclaimed by Mr. G. A. Jellicoe, president of the IFLA, in his opening address.

Second International Conference on Landscape Architecture,
Madrid 1950.

“I’m specially interested in designing public and semi-public parks and gardens, ...Large gardens,...Large spaces such as parks, institutional gardens, show grounds and hospitals offer more scope for imaginative planning with a long-term result in view.

Once you’re planning, say a hospital, providing for the various needs of patients and staff, the institution goes on being a hospital, and you know your planning will be useful – unlike some private homes where the owners leave for various reasons soon after they have begun work on the planned garden.”

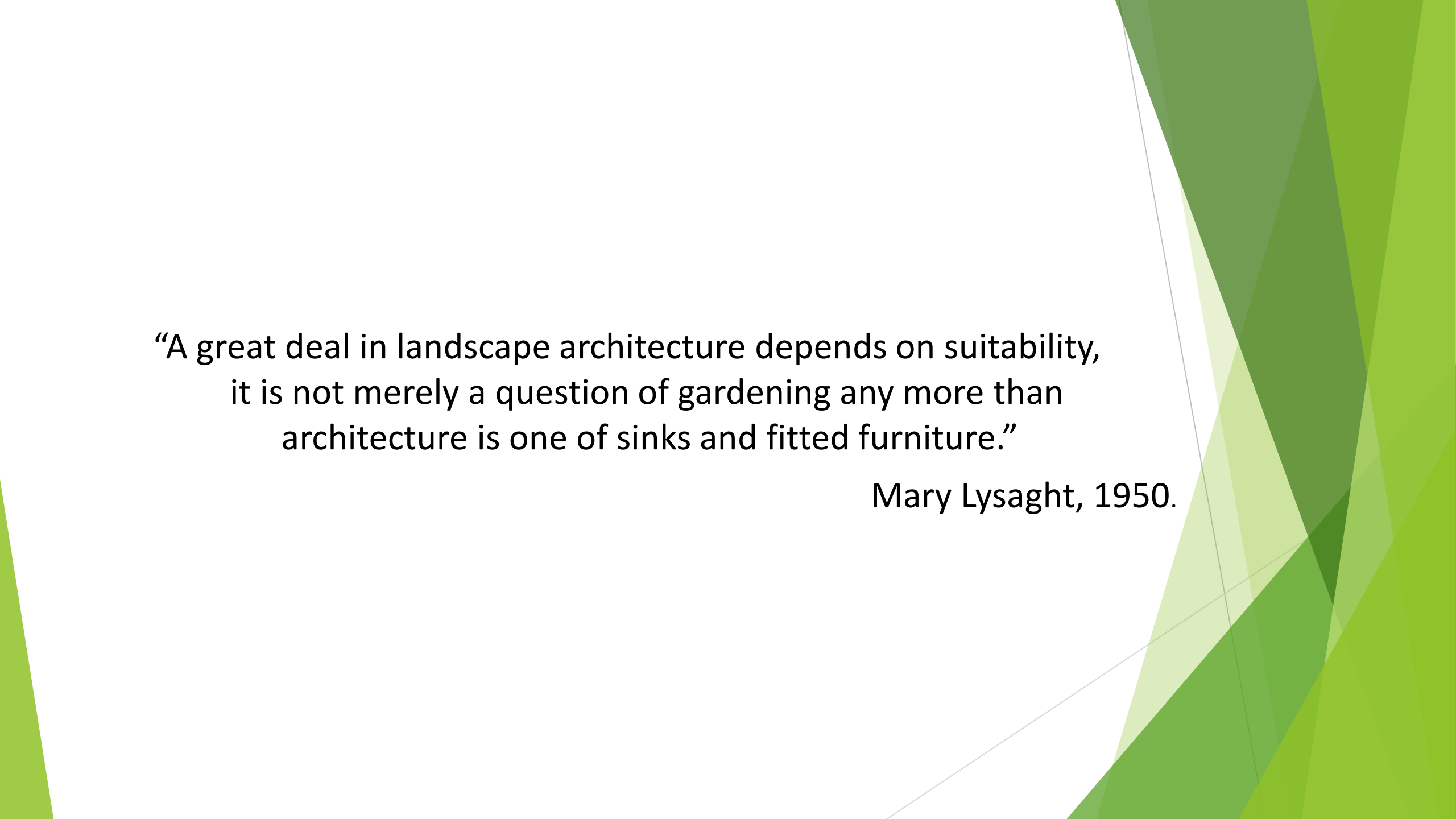
Mary Lysaght, 1953.



Miss Lysaght at work in her office.

“Because she insists on viewing a landscape from the point of view of function as well as that of design, Miss Lysaght’s bookshelf have sociology texts as well as gardening manuals...”.

Interview 1953.

The background of the slide features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of green, ranging from light lime to dark forest green. These shapes are primarily located on the right side and bottom of the frame, creating a modern, layered effect. The main text is centered on the left side of the slide.

“A great deal in landscape architecture depends on suitability,
it is not merely a question of gardening any more than
architecture is one of sinks and fitted furniture.”

Mary Lysaght, 1950.

Examples of Mary's New Zealand projects and papers

Landscapes

- Dr William B. Sutch garden Brooklyn, Wellington 1952-1955
- Contributor to second prize entry for Wanganui War Memorial Hall, 1956
- Sir R. Kennedy, Waikanae
- Lady Patricia Harris, Waikanae
- Dennis McGrath, Homewood Avenue, Karori
- D. George Porter, Simla Crescent, Kandallah
- Gardens in Havelock North, Hastings, Marton and Kohimarama

Papers and Talks

- *Some applications of landscape architecture in New Zealand related to developments overseas.* An illustrated paper read at the NZ Branch of the Town Planning Institute, 1952
- *Need for Harmony when Planning Gardens.* Talk to the Hutt Valley & Petone District Council of RNZIH, undated



New Zealanders influential in Mary's career

- Sir Basil Ward, architect
- Noeline Baker, suffragist, gardener, peace educator & wartime women's labour administrator

Situating Mary within the wider context of the New Zealand modernist planning, architecture and the arts community

- John Cox, lawyer, town planner, administrator
- George Porter, architect
- Nancy Northcross, leading New Zealand town planner.



Primary sources:

MS-Papers-11784-01/12. Muriel Mary Watt, Alexander Turnbull Library, New Zealand.

Lysaght, Mary. 1949. First Impressions of Foreign Travel by a New Zealander. In, *Journal of the Institute of Landscape Architects*. No 15. pp. 9-12.

A Landscape Architects Qualifications [Mary Lysaght]. *New Zealand Journal of New Zealand Institute of Architects*, Vol. 18. No 7. 1951. P116.

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