

# New Zealand 2020: A Virtual Willow World

By Jeff Siptak

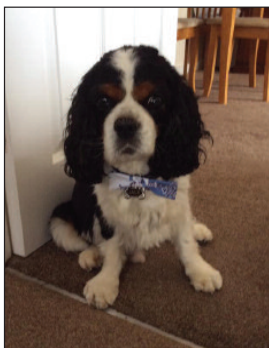
While the Coronavirus did its best to separate willow collectors around the world this past spring, Hugh, Kathy and Sarah Sykes of New Zealand, did their best to bring us all together. They organized IWC's first virtual convention, July 11-12, and it was a huge hit. With the creation of a new group for IWC Facebook members called "New Zealand 2020: A Virtual Willow World," online attendees enjoyed several days of posts and messages from fellow collectors.

IWC member Irene Black first offered the suggestion of the possibility of members connecting in some way online during convention week once we knew the Oklahoma City convention would not happen as planned. Fellow members Rachel McCain and Charles Hollingsworth even suggested a Zoom online conference call that would bring members together.

While the IWC board entertained ideas of how a non-traditional convention might look, the Sykes quickly stepped up to take on something we never thought possible: a virtual convention. They soon got the Facebook group created, invited members to join, and began the process of planning events with ideas and suggestions from other collectors. It was truly uncharted territory, but the Sykes worked tirelessly in planning, and the end result was one for the record books. (cont'd)



Sarah, Hugh and Kathy Sykes





They began in early May and decided to incorporate as many activities and events as possible from our traditional “on-the-ground” conventions. As Hugh said, “We probably will never have the chance to host an actual convention in New Zealand, so here is our opportunity to do one virtually.”

Since Facebook was the format for the event, unfortunately only current IWC members with a Facebook account could participate. More than 100 members connected, with that number being even higher with many couples and friends joining in under one name. Many of our favorite events were featured, from show & tell to the place setting competition to raffles and the final-night banquet. Two favorites—the sale and auction—were not part of the event for obvious reasons. The Sykes created many teaser videos leading up to the weekend and enlisted the video help of some major star power, including The Rock, Bruce Willis and The Minions. They also included videos and images from past conventions, so our first timers had an idea of what our conventions were like.

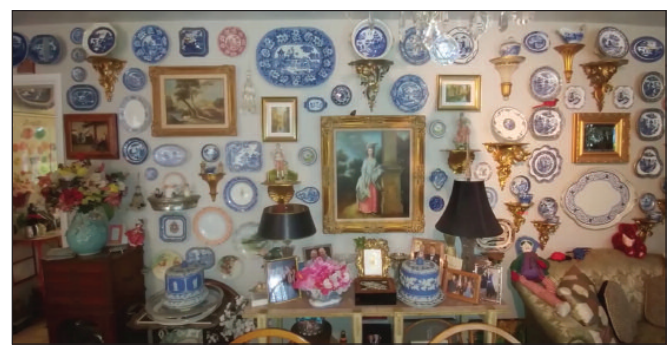
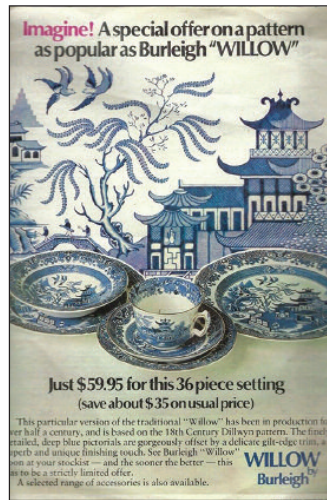
Although the Sykes were quick to thank the almost 15 members who contributed videos and presentations, extreme gratitude needs to go to them for creating dozens of videos, which included welcomes and local tours, crafts and cooking, area antique shopping and willow to wear, personal collections and favorites, New Zealand-made willow and giveaways, and the list goes on. All in all, well over 40 videos were posted, plus hundreds of photos.

The convention was divided into four main areas: show & tell, a place setting competition, the arts and craft contest, and BYOB (Bring Your Own Banquet). The Sykes asked members to post within those areas at particular times over the weekend. There was even a raffle for those who participated in these events, with a drawing for a free 2021 convention registration. Sarah Sykes drew the winning name, which was Robin Hill. *Congrats, Robin!*

Truth be told, we do love our show & tell — and members did not disappoint. Everyone was quick to showcase their willow collections, whether it be an entire wall or individual pieces. Some posted videos, some photos. Although we missed the chance to see so much great willow in person, the virtual convention format allowed us to see pieces that may never make it to a traditional convention.

The competitions always bring out the best in friendly rivalry. It is nice to see someone's collection as a tablescape or place setting with the benefit of complementary accoutrements! We saw such a variety of colors and styles with the theme "There's No Place Like Home." And some weren't afraid to mix and match their willow to create some outstanding displays...and to give us all ideas on what we might do at home with our willow. We also have our share of artists and crafters. They always bring their A-game to the convention with ideas that showcase some great willow creativity and skills. You can see all the winners on page 9.

Although we did not have our grand sale, the Sykes brought to this convention one of the main components of the sale (after willow and money,)...the shopping bag, which we all need for our new-bought treasures. They asked members to MYOB (Make Your Own Bag) with the New Zealand convention logo or anything else willow-related. (cont'd)





On Saturday night everyone was asked to have their own willow banquet and then share photos. We saw more great willow and, of course, some great food. Members gathered around their willow-filled tables, some inviting family and friends to join, and then posted photos of their “final-night banquet.”



As with all of our conventions, this one came to a close on Sunday. James Cail delivered a blessing and the Sykes gave us a chance to explore New Zealand with one final, post-convention video. We said our goodbyes and everyone thanked our wonderful hosts.

I hope to see all of you next year—in person! Happy collecting!



*Special Note: In addition to a huge THANK YOU to Kathy, Hugh and Sarah for all they did to make this virtual convention possible, I would like to also thank everyone who joined in the fun. You all made this a success and gave me more images than I could ever use in this newsletter. I enjoyed seeing so many interesting collections. Take a look at some of what was shared starting on page 15 in the Convention Photo Showcase .*



# Place Setting and Art & Craft Winners

Two favorite and long-established events at our conventions are the Place Setting Competition and the Art & Craft Contest. Members put on their creative hats and got busy with ideas. This year's place setting theme was "There's No Place Like Home." First-place winners received a \$30 membership credit, Second - \$20; and Third - \$10. Here are the 2020 winning entries posted in the Facebook group, selected by non-member judges in New Zealand, Australia and England!

## Place Setting Competition



FIRST PLACE: Christy Sturtevant



SECOND PLACE: Peggy Grimes



THIRD PLACE: Marianne Elsmann

## Art & Craft Contest



FIRST PLACE: Scot Rogers



SECOND PLACE: Brenda Nottingham



THIRD PLACE: Judy Cail