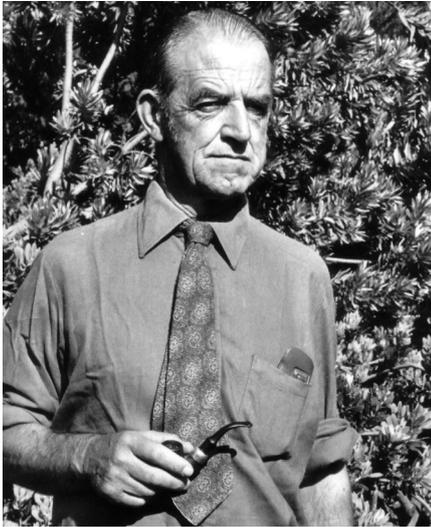


# Obituaries

## Arthur John Francis Healy 3 March 1917 – 25 September 2011



Arthur Healy: A “one-man biosecurity department”.

The invasive nasella tussock plant once threatened to destroy Canterbury grasslands. That threat met a stout foe in Arthur Healy. The quietly determined Christchurch botanist died recently. He was 94.

Healy fought to prevent the entry to New Zealand of weeds that could damage the country’s agriculture. Nasella tussock, a native of South America, was already established in the Waipara and Cheviot counties, and beyond. He battled at the highest level for its eradication.

His campaign included sitting in the debating chamber of Parliament to advise the minister of agriculture during passage of the Nasella Tussock Act in 1946. His influence was demonstrated when he found a railway siding and tracks being prepared near Waipara for loading shingle that would be used as ballast around New Zealand. He called the minister and explained how this could spread the noxious plant widely. The new tracks and siding were immediately ripped out.

Healy was the only child of a Manawatu grain and seed agent, from whom he acquired a love of plants and an appreciation of the need for weed control. This interest was furthered as a student at Feilding

High School under Dr H.H. Allan, who would become the first director of the Botany Division of DSIR.

While studying at Massey Agricultural College Healy indulged his love of the outdoors and tramping. He became involved in Search and Rescue and, on an operation in the Tararua Ranges, suffered a serious leg injury which left him unfit for active service in World War Two.

He graduated Bachelor of Agricultural Science in 1940 and then did three months’ training in the army medical service. However, he was again prevented from going overseas as he had joined his old teacher, Allan, on the staff of the Botany Division, where his work was classified as essential. It was essential, but some of it must have seemed suspicious. While working on an experimental hemp crop in the outer Marlborough Sounds, Healy was apprehended and locked up on suspicion of spying for the Japanese. This was quickly cleared up and charges were dropped.

Working in the Botany Division at Wellington, Healy completed his Masters degree and met Pat, an office worker there. They married in 1945.

He offered to do ecological work on weeds that posed a risk to the national economy and was assigned to surveying the occurrence of nasella tussock in North Canterbury. He made an immediate impact by writing a monograph which remained the authoritative work on the subject for decades. This led him to helping the minister of agriculture during the 1946 debates.

The 1946 Act established nasella tussock boards in Canterbury and Marlborough. Healy was appointed a foundation member of both boards.

For the next two years he served on a committee considering noxious weeds, which was largely responsible for drawing up the Noxious Weeds Act, 1950. He later sat on a committee of

inquiry whose report led to the revised act, in 1978. In nominating Healy for the Plant Protection Medal of the NZ Plant Protection Society, Ian Popay said many of his pronouncements on weeds were considered by the committee “incontestable”. Popay, who was also on that committee, said Healy “knew more about weeds and their history than the rest of us put together”.

Healy moved to the Public Works Department as soil conservator for Marlborough in late 1946. He was transferred to head office, Wellington, in 1947 and given responsibility for the Waikato region. He returned to the DSIR in 1948 to work on agricultural publications and, in 1949, he went back to the Botany Division, as assistant director, based at Lincoln.

In 25 years as assistant director, Healy combined administrative duties with practical work and loved getting out in the hills. He collected many plant and fungal species, some of which were named after him. He published many papers on plant species, some of which were collected into books. He worked closely in the area of plant importations, investigating how weeds entered New Zealand by accident.

Popay described Healy as a “one-man biosecurity department”.

He took leave from his directorial duties in 1974 to help complete Volume 3 of the major text, *Flora of New Zealand*. Retiring in 1977, he was hailed by his peers for his contribution as taxonomist, collector, researcher, author and ecologist. He was awarded the MBE for services to agriculture.

Son Gregory says Healy “plugged away” in retirement, still collecting plant species. He remained an avid gardener at the family’s Riccarton home. He was a dedicated family man and a stalwart of his local Catholic parish.

Arthur John Francis Healy, born Feilding, March 3, 1917; died Christchurch, September 25, 2011. Survived by wife Patricia, sons John, Bernard, Gregory and Brendan, daughter Phillipa,

nine grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

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Arthur Healy was a long-standing member of the RNZIH and joined in 1954. He was made an Associate of Honour (AHRIH) in 1977.

## Rona Winsome Shepherd (nee Denne) 13 March 1921 – 4 June 2011



Parents – Freda and Archibald Denne. Her father was a secondary school teacher.

Winsome was born in Christchurch. She attended primary schools at Oxford, Dannevirke and Taihape. Her secondary school education was at Samuel Marsden School, Wellington, and St Cuthbert's College, Auckland.

As recounted in Thomson (2001), she knew that she was going to study science at university two years before she left secondary school. In 1942 she graduated with a BSc in botany and zoology from Auckland University College, one of three women in 1000 students to graduate in science that year.

Her first job was working for five years for the DSIR's Plant Diseases Division, Auckland. Her work was in the field of timber preservation, involving timber mycology and technology, and in particular research for a chemical means of treating

*Pinus radiata* so that the timber could be used in house construction. This early work is significant, because it links with and was probably a reason for her later interest in the history of *Pinus radiata* in New Zealand, and the sources of introduced radiata stock.

In relation to her work in the Plant Diseases Division, Winsome commented to A.D. Thomson (2001) on the attitude of some of the male scientists that she worked with. Some of her results on borer and the boric acid treatment of radiata timber were published by the team's Director, Dr D. Spiller, without acknowledgement of her work, her knowledge or approval. "I was regarded not as a scientist, only as a technician. The Director openly said democracy ceased when women got the vote, and that it took five years to train a research worker and a woman will then up and leave and get married, the assumption being that she no longer worked."

It is worth noting here that this sort of experience, as well as her own temperament, made Winsome in later years a tough and determined advocate, and one who had great stickability when it came to achieving her goals, and keeping those in authority honest.

During an Easter Tournament in Christchurch in 1940, Winsome met her future husband, Ron Shepherd. He was also a science student, who joined the navy during World War Two. During the war they kept in touch, but things were difficult for him as he returned from war suffering from TB (tuberculosis). On his return

to health he worked as an industrial chemist for ICI in Christchurch, and he and Winsome married in Napier in 1948. After several years in Christchurch the couple moved to Wellington where ICI's New Zealand head office was located, and they settled in Karori where they had two children, Bryan and Karen.

After she left the Plant Diseases Division of the DSIR, Winsome worked for three years for the Shell Oil Company, and during this time she wrote the pest and disease section of the *Orchardists handbook*<sup>1</sup>.

Following her marriage Winsome developed an interest in horticulture. In Christchurch she was a foundation member of the Riccarton Horticultural Society and member of the Canterbury Cloche Society. In Wellington she served as an executive member of the Wellington Horticultural Society and RNZIH representative of the Wellington District Council, serving for a time as the District Council's secretary. She was also a foundation and life member of the Friends of Wellington Botanic Garden. Winsome had a long involvement in floral art and was a long-serving member of the Wellington Floral Art Club.

Winsome was a loyal and long-standing member of the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture. She joined on 7 Dec 1957, was a member of the Wellington branch of the RNZIH and also served on the national executive. She contributed text for the RNZIH's floral art section in *Flowers for shows* (RNZIH, 1978) and worked to ensure that the *Floral art handbook* (RNZIH, 1980)

<sup>1</sup> Editors' note: we have not been able to confirm this reference, but it may refer to the *Shell handbook on orchard pests and diseases and their control*, probably published in 1950.

was accepted as the standard in New Zealand. She was part of a dedicated group that established the Notable and Historic Trees Scheme in 1977. This work was continued by Ron Flook as Notable Trees New Zealand until his death in 2006, and then under the Notable Trees Trust ([www.notabletrees.org.nz](http://www.notabletrees.org.nz)), where it is enjoying renewed success today. In recognition of her work in horticulture, Winsome was elected as an Associate of Honour (AHRH) of the Institute in 1983 (Anon., 1983).

From the late 1970s Winsome was in the process of constructing a new career for herself. This was to be in the field of landscape and garden history, and the history of plant introduction in New Zealand. This was all the more remarkable because her son Bryan reported that "She confessed she hated English and could not write." Her new career was to involve a lot of writing, and the publication of books and articles. At that time, she was responsible for a home gardener's page in a magazine called the *Dairy Exporter*; she wrote articles for this and cajoled them from other people.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s she took on a research contract with the New Zealand Historic Places Trust relating to early plant introductions into this country. It was during this project that she came across the archive of the Wellington Botanic Garden Board in the National Museum (now Te Papa). This not only resulted in accounts of the foundation of the Wellington Botanic Garden (Shepherd, 1984; Shepherd and Cook, 1988), as one of a number of Government scientific institutions centralised in Wellington after the government moved here in 1865, but it was to be a field of interest that absorbed her for the rest of her life. Prior to Winsome's research, Wellington Botanic Garden was perceived as a public park, with a known history dating from 1918 when the Parks and Reserves Department was created. That the botanic garden had been established in 1869 and was a major centre for plant introduction and distribution over the next twenty years was no longer remembered. She was also able to assert from her research, that the native forest remnants in the garden

were the remains of the original forest on the site, and that even the patches of kānuka scrub predated British settlement. When Winsome's assertion caused officials of the Parks and Reserves Department to scoff at her, she responded by co-opting Dr Eric Godley of Botany Division, DSIR to survey the remnants, and he recognised trees that were between two hundred and three hundred years old which settled the matter.

The work that she did on the history of the Wellington Botanic Garden changed the way it was understood and valued. Today the memorials to the Botanic Garden Board on the entrance gates, the James Hector Memorial, and the James Hector Pinetum have all resulted from Winsome's work, and her belief that the Wellington Botanic Garden was important on a national as well as a local level. Today many of the old conifers are known to date from the early 1870s, and through genetic mapping, one at least, has been shown to have a strong genetic link to the stock in New Zealand's commercial radiata forests. There is also a separate management plan for the native forest remnants. Her final act in relation to the botanic garden was to lead the team that applied for its classification by the Historic Places Trust as a landscape of national historical significance, the first such classification granted by the Trust.

Following the publication of a history of the Wellington Botanic Garden (Shepherd and Cook, 1988), Winsome began research into where the *Pinus radiata* introduced into this country came from. The results of this research was published in 1990 as two papers in *Horticulture in New Zealand* (Shepherd, 1990a,b).

Her husband, Ron Shepherd, had begun research on gold and silversmiths in New Zealand before his death in 1988. Winsome now turned her attention to completing this project and getting it published. *Gold and silversmithing in nineteenth and twentieth century New Zealand* was published in 1995 (Shepherd, 1995). It is a beautifully illustrated book that will stand the test of time as a primary reference work on the subject, and won the Montana New Zealand Book Award for Illustrative Arts in 1996.

After this project Winsome returned to the research that she had done for the Historic Places Trust in the early 1980s. Much of this related to early nurserymen and plant introductions in the Wellington area, but she extended her research to cover gardens and landscapes. The resulting book, *Wellington's heritage: plants, gardens, and landscape*, was published in 2000 (Shepherd, 2000).

During the 1980s and 1990s Winsome was an Honorary Research Associate of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. In 1990 she received a Wellington City Council Civic Award for her work for the Wellington Botanic Garden (e.g., Anon., 1990; Thomson, 2001). In September 1991 she ensured there was a celebration of 100 years of Wellington City Council management of the botanic garden.

In 1998 she was made an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit (ONZM) for services to horticulture.

Winsome Shepherd's knowledge of botany, horticulture and history was highly respected by all. She was a formidable lady – articulate, persuasive, and with a dogged determination to ensure her beloved botanic garden with its pines and remnant native bush remains forever as the brightest jewel in Wellington's crown. Wellingtonians and the country as a whole have lost a strong advocate.

Winsome passed away in her 91st year and is survived by son Bryan, daughter Karen, and four grandchildren.

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**Obituary compiled by Walter Cook, with contributions from Murray Dawson and Richard Nanson**

