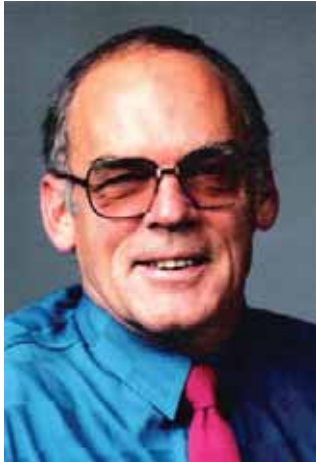


Ronald Richard Flook AHRIH

14 September 1932 – 9 January 2006



“Trees are a symbol of endurance and are paramount in our lives. They must be planted and handed over intact from generation to generation.”

Ron Flook

A stalwart of the RNZIH, Ron Flook’s passing was like a totara falling in the forest. Ron contributed so much to so many, both in his work as a professional landscape architect and in his involvement with several horticultural and community

organisations that it is a pleasure to share with you some of the achievements of this “man of trees”.

An executive member of the RNZIH since 1985, Ron also spent several years as chairman and virtually single-handedly set up and managed the Notable Trees New Zealand scheme for the purpose of registering and preserving this country’s tree heritage. But it was a long way from New Zealand that Ron’s interest in trees and the

landscape began. Born and raised in South Africa, Ron travelled overseas as a young man and on his first visit to New Zealand met his wife-to-be Cindy. They moved to England where Ron worked as a landscape contractor and grew plants in his own nursery. He later gained formal landscape architecture qualifications from the then Gloucester College of Art and Design. While in England he found and listed 80 Heritage Landscapes of national importance and became a member of the world-wide environment organisation Men of Trees, started by the renowned tree enthusiast Richard St Barbe Baker.

On moving to New Zealand at the end of 1979, Ron worked first for Wellington City Council as senior landscape architect then in the mid-1980s joined the consulting firm Boffa Miskell. The many projects he contributed to include the Tourist Design Award-winning tea house and stage at Wellington Botanic Gardens, Midland Park; Frank Kitts Park, Wellington; Cuba Mall, Wellington; extension of the historic landscape at Cornwall Park, Auckland; Manukau Civic Centre; restoration of gardens surrounding Antrim House, headquarters of the NZ Historic Places Trust; and restoration of the early whaling station, Fyffe House, Kaikoura. Ron was also team leader for the National Design Competition winning entry "Gateway to Auckland".

In his home town of Nelson, Ron will also be remembered for his contribution to the successful design of the Trafalgar Street improvements of the early 1990s, specifically the street furniture and seats. To quote friend and fellow landscape architect Tom Carter, "Ron was especially interested in how people used a space. One of his principles was that landscape wasn't meant to startle, but was meant to be satisfying and comfortable. He believed the human element of landscape was fundamental."

In describing his own philosophy Ron once wrote, "My design work is based on 'Signature of

Place' which my travels and observations have identified to me as paramount. Design should have simplicity. Public spaces are not to startle but to provide rest, comfort and enjoyable observation. That should be the ambience of space."

Ron dedicated countless hours of voluntary time to both professional and community organisations. He was an active member of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects, serving two terms as president from 1989 to 1993. An active member of the RNZIH for many years, Ron was made a Fellow of the institute in 1988, an Associate of Honour in 1995, and from 1997 until 2000 he held the position of chairman of the executive committee. During his time as chair Ron was a strong supporter of the ideas and proposals that eventually led to the formation of the now very successful New Zealand Gardens Trust.

From the early 1980s as a RNZIH member Ron worked on the Notable Trees New Zealand scheme at a time when many of the country's large, old trees were disappearing with the pace of development. Ron became the scheme's coordinator and, with the help of registration officers, compiled a list of thousands of tree throughout the country. In addition to identifying the trees, valuable information about them was recorded and has since been used to incorporate trees in regional plans all around New Zealand, affording varying degrees of statutory protection. In 2004, in conjunction with website developer Kieren Simon, Ron achieved yet another milestone when the now Notable Trees New Zealand database of trees was launched online (www.notabletrees.org.nz) to allow more public access and wider recognition of what a wonderful resource we have in mature trees. Through Ron's efforts more than 400 plaques now adorn trees, or groups of trees, throughout the country to publicly announce their recognition as Notable Trees of New Zealand.

Ron's interest in trees helped spawn the New Zealand Arboricultural Association in 1988, firstly under the umbrella of RNZIH and later as a stand alone organisation. In 1994 the NZAA established an award in Ron's name, the Ron Flook Award, in recognition of the high standard of aesthetics and the effectiveness in which he used trees in his landscape designs. The Ron Flook Award is presented to those who have demonstrated good practices in arboriculture, whether functional or aesthetic in any stage of development including tree raising, tree health and management and amenity tree protection. David Glenn, president of NZAA, says "If anyone was worthy of receiving such an award then it was Ron himself."

Ron felt strongly that tree appreciation was essential for their protection and one way of achieving this was to publish a book of notable trees. In 1994 *An Introduction to the Notable Trees of New Zealand*, compiled by Ron, was published in conjunction with the RNZIH and NZAA. Listing notable trees, both native and exotic, by geographic area, the book enables tree enthusiasts and interested people to visit and appreciate these wonderful trees. In his introduction to the book Ron wrote, "This record is of national importance. The recording of these significant trees is an attempt to locate and identify one of the great treasures of New Zealand, which is its heritage of venerable trees. By registering and labelling these outstanding trees public attention will be drawn to them and in this way they receive a measure of protection by being acknowledged as important. So many trees are lost because their significance is unknown. There are many more significant trees needing registration."

Ron also designed and published, in 1988, *A Tree Evaluation Method for New Zealand* by which a monetary value could be calculated for individual trees for use by interest groups, tree advocates, communities and councils when

registering and preserving notable trees. This led to Ron producing *STEM, A Standard Tree Evaluation Method*, a standard textbook for tree professionals.

Ron will be sadly missed, of course by Cindy and family, but also by all those who knew him in his many activities. He will be missed too by those trees that he loved and cherished. But a far greater

number of people and generations to come will benefit from the legacy he leaves behind.

The writer acknowledges the following as sources of some material used in preparation of this obituary:

- *Living Legacy*, The Nelson Mail, 20 January 2006, editor Bill Moore. Reproduced in *Tree Matters* 29, March 2006, p. 2–3.

- In Memorium Ronald Flook, *RNZIH Newsletter* 2006, No. 1, p. 9.
- <http://www.nzarbor.org.nz/newsarchives.html>, January 2006, David Glenn, president, New Zealand Arboricultural Association.

Obituary compiled by Andrew Maloy; ra.maloy@xtra.co.nz