

Obituary

Ralph Ballinger OBE, AHRIH 5 November 1915 – 21 February 2015



Ralph Ballinger (2012) at a public tree planting ceremony, Shep's Park, in Springlands, Blenheim.

Ralph Ballinger passed away recently in his 100th year. Not only did the New Zealand Arboricultural Association (NZARB) lose an esteemed recipient of the Ronald Flook Award, but also a devoted supporter of the establishment of an arboricultural association in this country.

NZARB's cradle is after all, in the lap of the Royal New Zealand Institute for Horticulture.

Ralph had been active in the RNZIH for many years in various functions, and up to his passing he was a Vice Patron of the RNZIH.

When I met Ralph for the first time (as an executive member of RNZIH) in the early 1990s he was, as a keen plantsman, very receptive and supportive of the idea that the RNZIH would make efforts to help the arboricultural industry along.

Ralph was also one of the stronger voices of support when it emerged that NZARB should become an independent entity. And as a result NZARB had, for many years, a place on the executive of the RNZIH to maintain close ties with the horticultural industry at large.

Ralph, Vice Patron of NZARB in those days, always came to the board meetings and often gave me thoughtful advice with respect to governance of our then young organisation.

In the early days NZARB and the Notable Trees New Zealand scheme (now a trust of the RNZIH) were closely interlinked and Ralph was instrumental in securing funding for notable tree plaques from the Peter Skellerup Plant Conservation Scholarship.

In this respect Ralph was what we call these days an excellent networker. In the field he was also very much a hands-on person. In the latter part of his life Ralph put much of his energy into landscape restoration and the establishment of an arboretum in Blenheim, his hometown.

In view of Ralph's lifelong dedication to horticulture and his support of arboriculture it was indeed very appropriate that Ralph was made a recipient of the NZARB Ronald Flook Award in 2013¹.

We will miss a good friend.

**Obituary compiled by
Frank Buddingh' MSc.Hol.Sc**

¹ Reproduced after this obituary.



Citation Ralph J. Ballinger – Ron Flook Award 2013

Ralph was born on November 5, 1915 at Woodend, North Canterbury. He graduated from Lincoln College with a Bachelor of Agricultural Science in 1939 after which he embarked on a rich and diversified horticultural career.

Immediately after his studies he joined Crop Research with the DSIR at Lincoln and in 1940, at the outbreak of World War II, he, like many other young New Zealand men at the time answered the call to duty.

After two years in the Royal Navy, his horticultural knowledge was called upon to help boost the acute shortage of food in Britain. This saw Ralph transferred to the National Institute of Agricultural Botany in Cambridge to assist with the food production programme.

He returned to the DSIR at Lincoln in 1946 to set up the Vegetable Research Section, but in 1949 left to set up the Rehabilitation farm at Blenheim to set up his own research and trial grounds. Here he grew 82 different crops and established air freighting of asparagus to Britain. It was during this time that he wrote series of gardening books which sold over 80,000 copies.

His intense interest in horticulture resulted in a request to join the board of the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture in 1967. Ralph dedicated a great deal of his time in the RNZIH to further horticulture in general.

Through his involvement in the RNZIH he became an avid supporter of the Notable Trees Scheme, as it was known as at that time. He was also instrumental in the funding of the Notable Trees Registration Plaques during his term as president of the Institute during the 1980s and contributed to the registration of over 45 trees in the Marlborough district.

Ralph firmly supported the establishment of an Arboricultural Branch within the RNZIH, thereby effectively providing a platform for the then fledgling arboricultural industry. Later, in his capacity as Vice-Patron of the RNZIH, Ralph wholeheartedly supported the establishment of the New Zealand Arboricultural Association as an independent entity; the rest of course is history.

The New Zealand Arboricultural Association wishes to express its gratitude to Ralph for his efforts and foresight, which in no insignificant manner has contributed to the establishment of the Association. Without that early support and encouragement, we are sure that NZARB would not be in the advanced position that it is today.

Awards and Services:

- Bledisloe Medal Lincoln College 1971 for Service to horticultural industry
- OBE (Order of the British Empire) 1978 Services to horticulture and community
- President RNZIH 1983–1991 and Vice patron 1991–current [2015]
- Associate of Honour (AHRIH), RNZIH 1987
- Served on the Lincoln College Council 1968–1974
- Served on the Nelson Polytechnic Council 1988–1990
- In 1991 was made NMIT Patron of Honour (Horticulture).

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Notes for contributors to *The New Zealand Garden Journal*

- *The New Zealand Garden Journal* is a professional journal aimed at those with an in-depth interest in plants, and an enthusiasm for sharing ideas and knowledge of their origins, conservation, cultivation and use in gardens, parks and open spaces.
- The journal is published twice a year in June and December. Copy dates are 1 April and 1 October, respectively.
- Articles should be informative, accurate and well-founded. They are not treated to a formal refereeing process, but we encourage the more technical papers to be peer reviewed before submission. For more technical articles, we may seek independent advice and feedback.
- References should follow the convention adopted in recent issues.
- Articles can be up to 5000 words, preferably submitted electronically in Microsoft Word or RTF format, either on disk or as an email attachment.
- Articles will be returned to authors only if major editorial changes are required, or on request.
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- Online versions of the journal are uploaded on the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture website at www.rnzih.org.nz.