

Obituaries

Professor G.T.S. Baylis, RN, FRSNZ, AHRIH 1913-2003

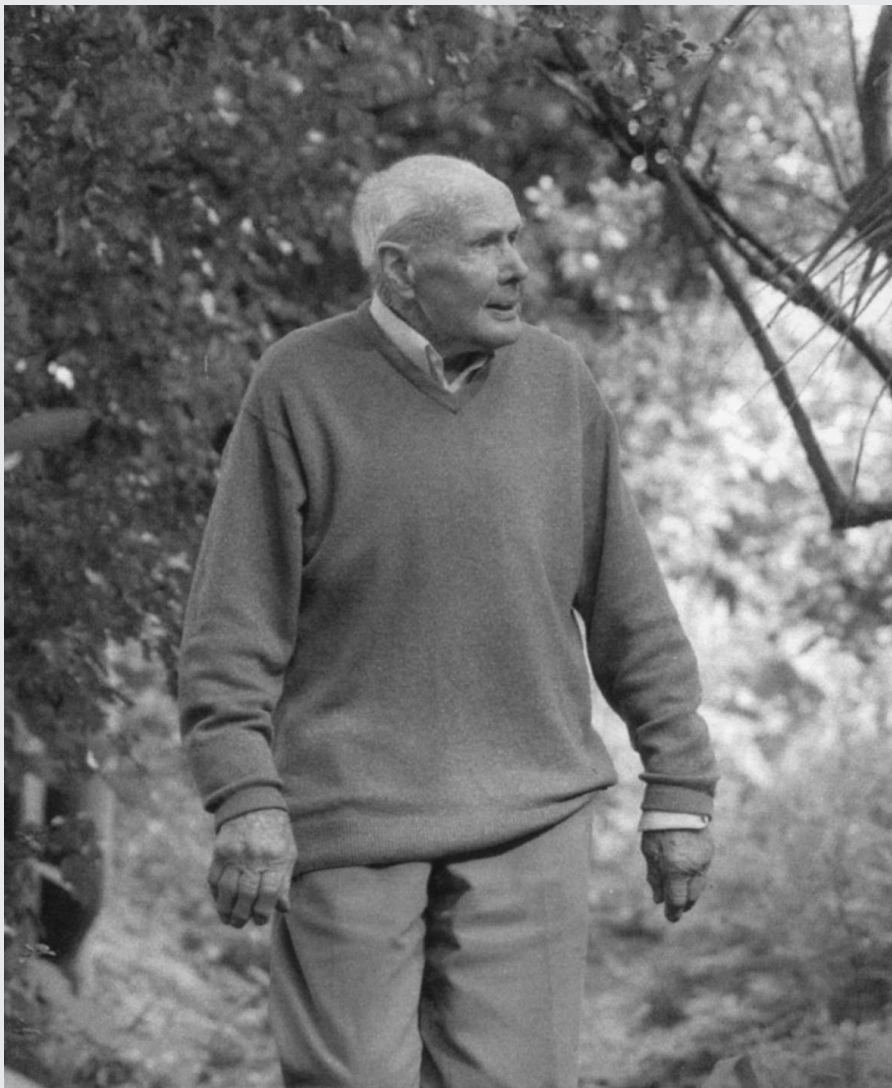
On the last day of last year, the death occurred in Auckland of Professor Geoff Baylis, Associate of Honour of the Institute and Emeritus Professor of Botany at the University of Otago. Only a month earlier Professor Baylis had celebrated his 90th birthday, a very happy and successful occasion on which he was joined by his family, former students and colleagues, and friends.

Professor Baylis was educated at Auckland University College and then completed a PhD at Imperial College, London. During World War II he enlisted with the Royal Navy. He was

commissioned in 1942, and Mentioned in Despatches in 1943. After the war, he moved to the University of Otago where he became Head of the Department of Botany (1945-1978). Teaching loads were heavy, but he undertook a most impressive programme of research centering on arbuscular mycorrhizas (beneficial root fungi), the cytotaxonomy of the *Solanum laciniatum*/*S. aviculare* complex, and vegetation studies. Scientifically his most important and novel work was on the contribution of mycorrhizas to plant growth, particularly as a result of facilitating phosphorus

uptake. Most horticulturists, however, probably know him best for his work at the Three Kings Islands, and his involvement in the discovery or description of plants such as *Tecomanthe speciosa*, *Elingamita johnsonii* and *Pennantia (Plectomirtha) baylisiana*. Several other plants also received specific names honouring him.

Geoff joined the Institute 1947 and was thus a member for more than half a century, a record equalled by very few, if any. His sister's husband, the late Dr Ted Chamberlain, was also an Associate of Honour of the Institute. Geoff was a superb plantsman and he had a lively interest in both native and introduced plants. He maintained several gardens in Dunedin as well as his garden at Campbell's Bay next to his old family home. He also received a citation from the New Zealand Historic Places Trust for his restoration of two splendid old Dunedin houses. Geoff was a great raconteur and a delightful companion with a dry sense of humour. He was also an excellent host.



Donn Estcourt 1946-2003

Death is always a difficult deal, but Donn Estcourt's unexpected passing was a body-blow to those of us who counted ourselves amongst his many friends. We were gutted.

It is not an easy exercise to succinctly sum up the man. There were many threads and dimensions to his life and none of us bore witness to them all. A man of many parts, quiet, unassuming, he was a doer, not a trumpeter. Some of Donn's dimensions we only learnt about at his funeral. But there is a common thread to be discerned: his positive affirmation and support for the human condition.

Take the teaching. No person had more time for, or genuine empathy with, the needs of the horticultural student. This commitment consumed much of his professional life, both within and outside the Open Polytechnic, where he worked. For Donn was not just a long-range, distance-mode expert; he was equally gifted at classroom teaching. There are many hundreds of horticultural students today who remember with gratitude his classroom sessions, where he would outline the most complex concepts with elegant simplicity.

If you had asked him about this, he would have disavowed it. Nevertheless, his actions sustain the belief that at some point he had concluded that good teaching practices were just not enough. He was driven to do more. Accordingly, he became an examiner for the Trades Certification Board and the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture. He later became expert at both writing instructional material to support the newly introduced horticulture unit standards, and latterly, rewriting new standards for the Horticulture ITO.

What all this does not say is that Donn was also an expert professional horticulturist who was very highly respected within the industry, and within which he continued to maintain strong relationships. He started his

horticultural career in February 1963 as an apprentice at Wilson's Nursery in Hastings. Three year's later he had achieved the Trade Certificate in Horticulture and Gardening, then later, the National Diploma in Horticulture. For his diploma thesis, he researched and evaluated various methods for propagating roses - a work of very high standard that provided real benefits for professional rose growers. After graduating he served for three years as a Ministry of Agriculture Field Officer and then purchased and ran his own Nursery.

Donn loved growing and propagating plants and it is therefore no great surprise to learn that from 1972 until 1981 he ran horticulture and landscape evening classes at Hastings Boys High School. Although approached to join the then TCI, he declined, because he preferred the practical work. However, the years of hard physical work finally took their toll and he suffered serious back injury. It was time for a change of direction and he joined the Technical Correspondence Institute as a horticulture tutor on 17 July 1984.

In no time at all Donn was immersed in local horticultural activities. He was elected to the committee of the Wellington Branch of the RNZIH in 1984. He took on the responsibility of Newsletter Editor and produced a very readable and informative newsletter from that time until his death. His articles were well researched and written, to be read and enjoyed by all gardeners. He was also minutes secretary for many years, keeping accurate and reliable records for the Wellington Branch.

He was on the organising committees for the successful RNZIH conferences held in Wellington in 1992 and 1999, and was the contact person for other horticultural groups when the Wellington Branch compiled and published *A Gardener's Diary for the Wellington Region*. Until the advent of NZQA Donn also found time to pass on his practical expertise to students though student meetings and at pruning demonstrations organised by the Wellington Branch. Each November he was an examiner for the NDH practical examinations.

Given all this service, it is little wonder that Donn felt the need to escape from time to time - to sea. There is little as therapeutic as a few days sailing with some warm summer's sun, benign weather and fair breezes. And that's how Donn left us: sailing his yacht, living his mission, trimming the sail, making things flow better. Doing what he loved best, then instantly, another ocean, new horizons...

Given that your time is up, it's probably as good a way as any to make the transformation. OK for him, that is, but a gut-wrenching affair for the rest of us. All we now have are his legacy and the memories. It's not enough by far and it's not a fair deal. But it's all we've got, so it will have to do. No need to ask Donn for the last word: he'd just get up and quietly get on with it.

This is an adaptation by Mike Burtenshaw of an obituary for Donn Estcourt by Rob Lucas that appeared in the Open Polytechnic Newsletter, with additional information from Denis Hicks.

