

1998 RNZIH Awards

These citations first appeared in the Institute Newsletter. They are reproduced here as a more lasting record, and for those who might have missed their first appearance.

Associate of Honour (AHRIH)

Awarded to persons who have rendered distinguished service to horticulture in New Zealand. Two awards were made.

Allan Ross Ferguson

Dr Ferguson received his secondary education in Gisborne before completing study at Victoria University for a BSc(Hons) in Botany (1965). His subsequent degrees MSc (1st Class Hons in Microbiology (1969) and PhD in Cell Biology (1969) were from the University of Auckland where his thesis topics were on nitrogen nutrition of plants, specifically the metabolism of nitrate, including related enzyme activity. He was one of the very first people to examine enzyme inductions in plants (now a basic part of molecular biology), and to show induction behaviour of nitrate reductase. During this period he was appointed as Scientist to DSIR Fruit Research Division located at the Mt Albert Research Centre, Auckland where he has remained throughout his career, apart from study periods overseas. The original DSIR Division has now been reorganised into the Horticulture and Food Research Institute of New Zealand (HortResearch).

Dr Ferguson's earlier biochemical studies formed the basis for later broader studies on nutrition of kiwifruit, including both laboratory and field research. It was a time when kiwifruit was expanding rapidly as a crop and new knowledge about the vine was eagerly sought. Results obtained were regularly communicated by Dr Ferguson to growers by lectures and series of articles in journals. His work on plant nutrition was recognised internationally, and he served as a

member of the International Committee on Nutrition from 1974-92.

Later in his career, Dr Ferguson developed a long held interest in horticultural botany focusing on the biology of kiwifruit. A study of vitamin C content of *Actinidia* fruits showed the very high levels attained with some species. In cooperation with a Chinese colleague (Dr Liang) he helped redefine the nomenclature of the genus *Actinidia* and identified *A. deliciosa*, the kiwifruit of the western world, as a separate species from *A. chinensis*.

More recently, much of Dr Ferguson's research has supported the kiwifruit breeding programme the Institute undertakes, with studies on aspects such as systematic interpretations and descriptions, identification of ploidy levels, DNA analyses, biochemical indices for sexual determination, and incompatibility. He has a supervisory role for major germplasm collections held by the Institute. His background in biochemistry, plant physiology and botany has meant that he is able to make a considerable contribution to the breeding biology of the crop.

Dr Ferguson is established as a foremost international authority on kiwifruit and has lectured widely both in New Zealand and overseas. He has taken a leading role in international symposia on the crop, which are now held regularly. He is currently the International Registrar for kiwifruit cultivars and is a member of the Fruit Section of the International Horticultural Society. He has a truly international outlook and promotes regular visits to his laboratory of overseas scientists and students. A



particular facet has been his efforts to strengthen scientific links with Chinese institutions, having visited China several times.

Horticultural history is an interest and Dr Ferguson has written a number of articles on the history of the development of kiwifruit as a commercial crop, as well as detailed biographical studies of some of the key individuals involved. He has extended this to writing popular accounts of general plant exploration. He has an associated interest in old botanical prints and paintings, especially those with New Zealand connections. Dr Ferguson is noted for a high level of precise scholarship in his research and his approximately 90 scientific papers testify to his major contribution to New Zealand horticultural science. In 1992 he was elected Fellow of the NZ Society for Horticultural Science.

Dr Ferguson has taken a positive role in RNZIH affairs, as a long term member, Committee member and Chairman of the Auckland branch, and, since 1992, member of National Executive. He was elected a Fellow of the RNZIH in 1990. A keen gardener and avid reader, he has a deep knowledge of a wide range of plants and maintains his own garden. He is an enthusiastic member of the Auckland Garden History Society.

Dr Ferguson's distinguished research career, his broad horticultural activities in the community and his contribution to RNZIH affairs in particular make him a most worthy Associate of Honour of the Institute.

Beverley McConnell

Mrs Beverley McConnell has developed one of New Zealand's great modern gardens at her home 'Ayrilies' at Whitford, near Auckland. This is a very large garden comprising about two and a half hectares intensively planted, and a further twelve hectares landscaped with lakes and plantings of trees. 'Ayrilies' is on a bold scale, much larger than most of us can ever dream of. Its importance, however, is not its size, but the quality of the plantings and the design concepts used.

Mrs McConnell is largely self-taught, although she has attended lectures and courses by some of the most influential garden designers of this century. She trained at the School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury, and this training is expressed in her plantings, demonstrating her eye for colour and her feeling for foliage. She has a great empathy for plants, an empathy particularly inspired in her

by Gordon Collier and the late Hugh Redgrove. She has long had professional assistance with 'Ayrilies', especially from Oliver Briers, a landscaper who has worked with her for nearly twenty-five years. She may have had assistance but there is not doubt, however, that she is a working gardener who gets her hands dirty, that 'Ayrilies' is *her* garden, that the inspiration is *hers*, that the drive is *hers*.

'Ayrilies' is widely recognised as an important garden within New Zealand, and it has also gained international recognition. 'Ayrilies' is now frequently visited by overseas groups of gardeners on tour in New Zealand, as well as by local societies and individuals. Christopher Lloyd in his book *Other People's Gardens*, commented on the exuberance and the boldness of the plantings, the courage with which she has approached her plants and her plantings, and the way in which she accepted challenges - this is no garden that is marking time. On each new visit, even the most casual observer will notice changes, new plants and new visions. More recently, Stephen Lacey wrote in the August 1998 issue of the highly regarded

Architectural Digest "The marvels of 'Ayrilies' is that for all its dashing design and planting, it is a garden that connects to its landscape. It seems to belong".

Mrs McConnell has undoubtedly made a significant contribution to horticulture in this country by developing one of the most important private gardens of this century. She has done much more, however, than simply develop a garden, no matter how great. Her most distinguished contribution to horticulture is probably her organisation with Mrs Judy Laity of the Trinity Garden Festival. This has raised more than \$500,000 towards the completion of the new Anglican Cathedral in Auckland. From the rather different viewpoint of this Institute, it is even more important that the Festival has encouraged tens of thousands of visitors to the many gardens opened. The Trinity Festival is one of the largest, if not the largest and most important single horticultural event ever organised in the Auckland region. The Festival has introduced so many people to the enjoyment of gardens and plants, and it has done much to raise the status of horticulture amongst the general public.

Mrs McConnell has also been an active member of many other horticultural groups, such as the Iris Society, the Heritage Rose Society, the Friends of the Auckland Regional Botanic Gardens, the International Dendrology Society, Rhododendron Auckland, Pukeiti, Eastwoodhill, and our Institute, of which she is a Fellow. She was a trustee of the Friends, Auckland Regional Botanic Gardens, and she has been actively involved in the preparation of the new landscape plan for the Auckland gardens. She was recently elected a Life Member of Pukeiti in recognition of her work and her fund raising.

The award of Associate of Honour is restricted to "those persons who have rendered distinguished service to horticulture". There is no doubt that in her contributions to horticulture and in the development of a major garden, Mrs McConnell is a most worthy Associate of Honour of this Institute.

