

Obituaries

Ronald (Ron) Charles Close AHRIH 11 September 1929 – 27 December 2018



Fig. 1 Dr Ron Close, July 2008.
Photo: Dr Ian Harvey.

Dr Ron Close (Fig. 1–2) was born in Te Kauwhata in the Waikato in 1929 and spent his early life on his father's commercial orchard. He began his undergraduate studying at Auckland University College where he obtained a BSc in botany and related subjects and then completed an MSc in 1953 while serving part time as a plant quarantine officer with the Department of Agriculture.



Fig. 2 DSIR staff photo of Dr Ron Close, 1971.

Ron was appointed a plant pathologist with the Plant Quarantine Service in Wellington in May 1953 and worked in that capacity until 1957. He regarded this period of his career as an important learning experience,

not only in the complexities of plant quarantine but also in the range of diseases affecting plants both in New Zealand and overseas.

He then joined the Crop Research Division of DSIR at Lincoln, Canterbury, as a plant breeder from 1957 until 1965 carrying out studies on virus diseases of potato and developing disease resistant cultivars. Then, from 1960 to 1962 he went to the UK to study at Rothamsted Experimental Station and was awarded a PhD from London University. His thesis was entitled 'Studies on the interactions between potato viruses when multiplying together in plants'.

After returning to New Zealand, his studies at the Crop Research Division, Lincoln, showed that potato leaf roll virus was a major disease of potato in Canterbury. He developed commercial control practices based on the application of systemic insecticides at planting time. His research on aphid flight patterns and aphids on potato crops led to significant changes in the way virus-free seed potatoes were produced in Canterbury.

In 1965 he transferred to become officer-in-charge of the Plant Diseases Division of DSIR at Lincoln. This was an important time for Ron, as over the next eight years he worked on a wide range of diseases of cereals and legumes and also on *Rhizobium* inoculation of lucerne. While studying epidemiology and control of barley yellow dwarf virus and pea top yellow viruses he discovered a new virus – subterranean clover red leaf virus, which was widespread in legume crops in New Zealand and of major importance. This disease is an ongoing problem in the establishment and production of sub clover in New Zealand.

In 1972 he, along with Professor Paul Mulcock of Lincoln University, reported bacterial wilt in lucerne

for the first time in New Zealand. Unfortunately, this and other rather intractable diseases of lucerne, led to a major decline in the area of this crop grown in the South Island at that time. However, he would be heartened to learn that the crop is now making a slow but steady recovery in popularity.

His research during this period was also on seed treatment of cereals, peas, and lucerne, control of eyespot of wheat with benomyl and the minimisation of the losses from bacterial blight of peas.

It was at this time in June 1970 that I first met Ron at Lincoln when I joined the Department of Agriculture. John Hedley and I shared a laboratory with Ron and his team, and there was palpable excitement in the lab as the discovery of bacterial wilt of lucerne was about to be published. There were also endless numbers of visitors to the lab wanting Ron's (and the other Ron in the lab – Ron Mulholland's) advice on disease control in arable crops. Many contracts were drawn up with the major agrochemical companies at the time. Such was his distraction that he was unable to acknowledge my presence in the laboratory for about 4–6 weeks. My fears of him being uncommunicable were allayed in that as soon as the pressure went off, he became a valuable and personable mentor to both John and I. We accompanied him on field trips and crop inspections over the next two seasons, along with two other budding plant pathologists – Richard Falloon and Brian Arnst, plus Pim Sanderson who had just returned from overseas to join the lab at Lincoln. It was during these trips that we discovered that driving was not Ron's forte and elaborate ruses were hatched to ensure that he had minimal time behind the wheel. He never seemed to mind though, and he never mentioned the fact that someone else always seemed to be driving.

In 1973, Ron took the opportunity to join the staff of Lincoln College as Senior Lecturer in Plant Pathology and was promoted to Reader (Associate Professor) in 1978. Although heavily involved in teaching mycology, plant disease management, plant protection and pesticide technology, and in extension activities, he continued research with post-graduate students on a wide range of plant diseases. Many students experienced Ron's enthusiasm and knowledge of plant pathology with many ending up with masters and doctorate post graduate qualifications.

In 1978, Ron published a review paper on theoretical modelling of the aerial dispersal of biological material, especially fungal spores and plant pollen, across the Tasman Sea from Australia. His predictions came to fulfilment a few years later in 1982 with the outbreak of the cereal disease stripe rust in Southland, a disease the cereal industry is contending with to this day. The incursion, of course, was traced to Australian wheat fields. The situation of cross-Tasman disease inoculum spread is ongoing and very immediate with the recent establishment of myrtle rust in the North Island (and now also in the South Island) from Australia via Raoul Island.

Another of many notable achievements by Ron and his colleagues was the detection in 1980 of beet western yellows virus in New Zealand, infecting a range of brassica and legume crops and many weeds. Many a field officer experienced failures of brassica crops, and thinking it was a nutritional deficiency has been relieved to learn that their agronomic advice was largely sound, but not their knowledge of the damage that aphids can unleash in a crop when they transmit this virus. Ron was instrumental along with Nick Ashby and Anastasia Kyriakou in characterising the presence of this virus in New Zealand. His studies of hop viruses led to a scheme for producing virus free tested hop plants. Other completed and published studies were on the epidemiology and control of leaf rust of barley, and on the ecology and control of *Aphanomyces* root rot of peas.

Ron enjoyed visiting Australia and attended many Australian Plant Pathology Conferences over the years. In fact, he joined the society as soon as it was formed back in 1969 because he saw the need for close plant pathological co-operation between Australia and New Zealand. He actively promoted the Society in New Zealand and was instrumental in getting the name changed to the Australasian Plant Pathology Society (APPS), which included Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific Islands and Papua New Guinea.

He and the late Roy Gaunt, the late Pim Sanderson, Athol McCully, Paul Teng and I organised a very successful APPS sponsored international symposium on 'Epidemiology and Crop Loss Assessment' in 1977, which was during his term in 1976 through to 1978 as President of APPS. His Presidential address at the 1978 conference in Canberra was entitled 'Education for the profession of plant pathology'. This presentation reflected his commitment to plant pathology education. He had a vision for a degree in plant pathology that was modelled on human medical or animal veterinary degrees, where the whole concept of plant physiology, anatomy, agronomy and pathology were integrated into a rounded qualification. It is a shame that this concept has never been fully embraced in any of the New Zealand learning institutes.

Throughout his life, Ron was an active and valued member of several institutes and societies, including the Australasian Plant Pathology Society, the New Zealand Institute of Agricultural Science, the New Zealand Microbiological Society, the New Zealand Society of Horticultural Science, the New Zealand Weed and Pest Control Society, and the Royal Society of New Zealand.

Ron was a member of the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture for some 40 years, perhaps more, and remained a member up until his death. He was a written paper and theses examiner for the Institute for many years and became Chairman of the Examining Board of the RNZIH in 1979. At the Conference of the Association of Principals of Agricultural Institutions in Australia

and New Zealand in 1984 he presented a joint paper on 'The Role of the Royal NZ Institute of Horticulture in Training and Education in New Zealand'. In recognition of these and other achievements, Ron was made an Associate of Honour (AHRH) of the RNZIH in 1987.

Ron's full retirement from Lincoln University occurred in July 1994, but he continued to be extremely active in plant protection, as explained below, and other activities.

He was Chairman of the Organising Committee for the 10th biennial APPS Conference in August 1995 at Lincoln University, where he delivered the McAlpine address on 'The Ever-Changing Challenges of Plant Pathology'. I recall this conference vividly, as he and Alison Stewart were instrumental in dragging me off my sorry recuperation bed after a cycling accident in May of that year to help organise and run the event.

Such was our success at organising this conference, that in 1997 Ron and I, together with other plant pathologists from the Lincoln area and Lincoln University event-organising staff, successfully bid for the International Congress of Plant Pathology to be held in Christchurch in February 2003. This led to six years of fun planning, together with a trip to Scotland with Richard Falloon and Lincoln University staff, to see how one of these international conferences were organised and run. The conference was eventually a huge scientific, social and financial success with people talking about the event around the world even to this day. Such was the financial success of the conference, which owed much to the acumen and planning by Ron and Matthew Cromeey, that we are still trying to give the money away to worthy student travel causes 15 years later. Ron also received a medal as an honorary member of the APPS at this conference.

One event that Ron continued to look forward to every year was the annual New Zealand Mycological Society fungal foray. These took him to locations throughout the country where his knowledge of macro fungi – mushrooms and toadstools – was always valued. He even dragged his family along on occasions.

In most people's lives, there is some person who you look to as a mentor and guiding friend. I have had a couple in my life, and Ron stands out as one of them. As I set up and ran PLANTwise in 1997, Ron was always there for me and many hours were spent talking through business and pathological issues. His wise and considered guidance was so much appreciated. He continued to be a valuable mentor to the business up until his move to live in Oxford.

Many young and up and coming plant pathologists can name Ron as an influential figure in their professional

and scientific development. My experience is not unique.

I visited Ron in Oxford in November 2018 to de-brief him on the recent International Congress of Plant Pathology held in Boston, USA. Many people from around the world asked me how Ron was and asked me to pass on their regards to him. He was also looking forward to moving back to Christchurch and possibly increasing his interaction with past professional and academic colleagues, especially through the Lincoln University Alumni Association. Unfortunately, time ran out and this

never eventuated. We will miss Ron in the plant pathological world and his contribution to this branch of New Zealand science will long be valued and remembered.

CLOSE, Ronald Charles (Ron) PhD Passed away peacefully at home in Oxford, North Canterbury on December 27, 2018, aged 89. He was the husband of Pamela (deceased) and Julie. He was the father and father-in-law of Stephen, Norman and Robyn and stepfather of Cathryn and Paul Robson.

**Obituary prepared by
Dr Ian C. Harvey**

Neville Haydon QSM, AHRIH 17 January 1926 – 7 March 2019



Fig. 1 Neville Haydon with his *Camellia* 'Festival of Lights' (a *Camellia pitardii* hybrid) in the background. Photo: Jack Hobbs, 2011.

Neville Haydon (Fig. 1) was one of New Zealand's most distinguished horticulturists and he was acknowledged as a giant in the world of camellias. He was an Honorary Life Member and sometime Patron of the New Zealand Camellia Society, a Life Member of the Friends of the Auckland Botanic Gardens, and in 2006 was elected an Associate of Honour of the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture. In 2010, he received one of the two inaugural President's Medals for outstanding service to the International Camellia Society, an award for those who make extraordinary contributions to the world of camellias. In 2015, a pavilion in the Auckland Botanic Gardens Camellia Garden was named in his honour. He was awarded the Queen's Service Medal in the Queen's Birthday Honours for 2016 for his services to horticulture.

Neville was born in Auckland and brought up at Southdown, where his father was head stockman at the AFFCO freezing works. Secondary schooling was at Auckland Grammar but he left school at the age of 15 to take up office work (at a starting salary of £1 a week) and night school to study for his accountancy qualifications. Accountancy was to keep him busy for the next 30 years apart from six months off in 1954/1955 to watch his then obsession (his words), football (soccer), in England.

Neville was long associated with association football mainly through the Mt Wellington Club (which later amalgamated with the University Club to form Unimount). He had style. One report described him as "a brainy player, sound, light and tireless. He was small, even by the standards of the day, at a touch over 5' 6" and less than ten stone in weight. His special talent came at left half where he gathered up the loose balls by guile and sprayed them to his teammates. It was classic stuff in a time when halfbacks were often chunky, hard men who rattled their opponent's teeth in tackles."

He had a very successful career as a player – as an Auckland representative 1947–1952 and as a North Island representative in 1949. In 1959 he was Auckland Football Association Sportsman of the Year and in 1963 Mt Wellington District

Sportsman of the year as well as being elected a Mt Wellington AFC Life Member. From 1967 to 1973 he was Club President, and he was then Patron for many years. He was also an enthusiastic tennis player.

Neville moved into his own home when he was 30 and "... commenced gardening as a counterpoint to chasing soccer and tennis balls". As one of his nephews remembered, Neville believed that in sport, there was only one winner; in gardening, everybody could be a winner. He "... quickly gravitated to majoring in camellias". He had first seen camellias (C. 'Aspasia Macarthur' and its sports C. 'Anemoniflora' and C. 'Helenor') at his grandmother's garden in Devonport but became completely hooked after visiting one of the first Auckland camellia shows. He liked to specialise. At the age of 47, he left accountancy to found a nursery, Camellia Haven at Takanini, South Auckland. Neville told me that he was at a meeting of accountancy and business colleagues, looked at them and thought, "How boring – I don't want to end up like them!" Camellia Haven soon became the best specialist camellia nursery in the country. Neville quickly learnt "the differences between hobby and commercial horticulture". The business expanded to the stage of having four employees, all of whom had joined as teenagers and were still with him when he sold up and "retired" in 2000.