

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.

Neville introduced many valuable species and cultivars from overseas. He also bred some outstanding camellia cultivars, particularly camellias that were suitable for smaller gardens. He had a special liking for the small-leafed, mass-flowering species and the hybrids developed from them. He selected for plant form, leaf shape and colour, plant size, flower characters and number of flowers. Amongst his notable successes were:

- C. 'Baby Bear', an outstanding miniature camellia plant with an extremely dense dwarf habit
- C. 'Baby Willow', another dwarf but one with a weeping habit, a cross between *Camellia rosaeflora* and a *C. tsaii* hybrid (C. 'Mother Bear')
- C. 'Dr Colin Crisp' (Fig. 2), with white semi-double flowers and a large boss of golden stamens
- C. 'Peggy Burton', a pink semi-double, a *C. pitardii* hybrid, a seedling of C. 'Nicky Crisp'
- C. 'Sun Song' with formal pink blooms
- C. 'Takanini' (Fig. 3), which has deep red anemone-form blooms and a particularly long flowering season
- C. 'Transpink' (Fig. 4), a *C. transnokoensis* hybrid.

In 1991, he was awarded the Plant Raisers' Award of the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture for his work in developing new camellia cultivars (namely for developing *Camellia* 'Baby Bear', C. 'Baby Willow', C. 'Sun Song' and C. 'Takanini').

Neville was a member of the New Zealand Camellia Society for nearly 60 years as well as the Australian, American, Southern Californian and International Camellia Societies. He was an active committee member of the Auckland Branch of the New Zealand Camellia Society for 35 years, was Treasurer of the Branch for many years, and Chairman for seven years. He was a generous donor of plant material to meetings of the Auckland Branch. As a commercial camellia nurseryman, he did not participate in the affairs of the national Camellia Society, to avoid any possible conflicts of interest.



Fig. 2 *Camellia* 'Dr Colin Crisp'.
Photo: Jack Hobbs.



Fig. 3 *Camellia* 'Takanini'.
Photo: © Camellia Glen Wholesale Plant Nursery (www.camelliaglen.com.au).



Fig. 4 *Camellia* 'Transpink'.
Photo: Jack Hobbs.

However, he was an accredited national camellia judge for more than 30 years, judging at both national and local shows, as well as being a guest judge for shows in Australia and California, and he assisted with the organisation of at least four of the national camellia shows held in Auckland. He was made an Honorary Life Member of the New Zealand Camellia Society in 1989.

He served as Director and membership representative for the ICS (International Camellia Society) New Zealand region and then as treasurer for 13 years. He was appointed Camellia Registrar by the ICS from 1990 to 2015 and completed the monumental tasks of preparing the second supplement (480 pages) and transferring the existing *International Camellia Register* (more than 30,000 entries over 1,900 pages) to digital form and adding newly registered cultivars.

Neville's support of research on camellias, particularly on ways to combat camellia petal blight, is amongst the most important of his contributions to the world of camellias. For many years he was a trustee of the New Zealand Camellia Memorial Trust, the most significant funder of camellia research internationally. His expert advice was freely given, as were large amounts of experimental plant material. One research programme alone required some 300 plants, all strictly standardised – all of which he presented to the Trust. For many years he was also the inaugural Chairman of the International Camellia Society Otomo Fund which sponsors camellia research. In 2016, he made a donation of £30,000 to the Otomo Fund and when thanked, said in his typically understated way that he was glad that the cheque was "... a pleasant surprise, which was the intention" – and that now he could "... enjoy watching how you use it".

Neville was also particularly generous in donating his professional skills as an accountant: as well as serving as Treasurer of the Auckland Branch of the New Zealand Camellia Society, he acted as Treasurer of two trusts of the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture, the RNZIH Gardens Trust and the RNZIH Education Trust.

He was also Treasurer of the Friends, Auckland Botanic Gardens, for more than ten years.

In recent years he was a keen supporter of the work of the Auckland Botanic Gardens. He provided hundreds of camellia plants, particularly *Camellia* species, which resulted in the Gardens being named one of 27 International Camellia Gardens of Excellence. He provided much advice and guidance on the plantings in the camellia garden and he encouraged breeding programmes for resistance to camellia petal blight. The Auckland Branch of the New Zealand Camellia Society and the Friends of the Auckland Botanic Gardens, each contributed \$10,000 to establish a fund, named in his honour, to encourage and support research into combatting petal blight. He stressed the importance of breeding using cultivars of the species that had been identified as having resistance.

Until very recently, Neville was actively involved in advising and assisting staff and students and we look forward to seeing the progeny of these crosses when they start flowering. In March of this year, the Auckland Branch of the New Zealand Camellia Society made a further generous donation of \$9,000 to the Haydon Fund and this has been again matched by an equal sum from the Friends of the Auckland Botanic Gardens.

Neville was a quiet man, reserved and rather shy. In his days as a nurseryman, he was certainly no glib salesman and would often cross-examine those who wanted to buy his plants. He wanted to ensure his plants went to good homes. Under a seemingly gruff exterior was a remarkably gentle and kind man who proved himself as a very good friend. We will remember Neville as a distinguished horticulturist: more

importantly, we will remember him as a loyal and generous friend.

This obituary is largely based on citations published in *The Auckland Garden*, newsletter of the Auckland Botanic Gardens and Friends, the *New Zealand Camellia Bulletin* and the *New Zealand Garden Journal*, journal of the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture (Inc.). I also acknowledge information provided by the late Dr Rod Bieleski and Neville's nephew, Warwick Maehl. The quote comes from *From the Farm to the Mountain. The History of the First 75 Years of the Onehunga Mangere Association Football Club, 1921 to 1996* by Trevor Rowse.

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**Obituary prepared by
Dr Ross Ferguson**

