



MOUNT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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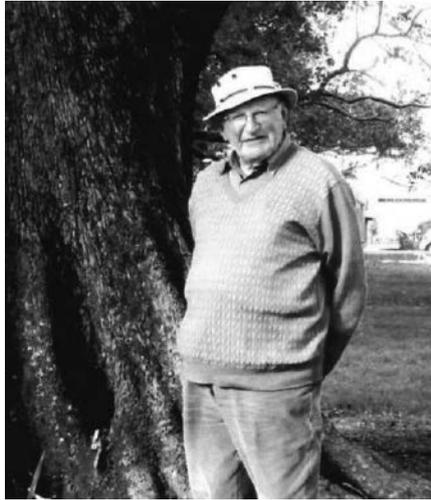
Honouring Richie: Richmond Newman Afford 1922–2020

Richie Afford was presented with a Certificate of Life Membership at the 2014 Mount Albert Historical Society Christmas Function on 29 November. He was a member of the inaugural committee for the society in 2006 and generously donated significant funds to assist in its setup and get the writing of *Mount Albert Then and Now* underway. He continued to be a strong and active supporter of MAHS, and was regularly attending meetings up until COVID-19 intervened in 2020. We will miss him.

In June of 2020 I talked with Richie at his home in Mount Albert Road for a couple of hours. It was amazing to listen to a man in his late 90s speak with such clarity and enthusiasm about his life, and his continued interest in getting some of his old friends and peers from Mount Albert Grammar School days acknowledged. Richie died two months after our meeting and I could not help thinking how wonderful it was that he was able to live such a full life right up until the end, something most of us wish for.

One person he acknowledged in our conversation, and who was largely responsible for his enjoying his last years so much, was fellow MAHS member Beth Wood. She took Richie to the various gatherings and events, and her role in his last years was incredibly important to him, and to those of us who were able to enjoy his company, because she made sure he got out and about. MAHS also acknowledges Beth's care and kindness, even though we know that she shuns the limelight and any praise.

Since I have been writing the MAHS newsletter, Richie has periodically left pieces of his writing in his letter box for me to pick up, in case I could include them in future issues.



Richie Afford, with one of the trees he planted at Gribblehurst Park in 1938.

Richie's writing group at U3A had suggested he do this, and it was with some diffidence that he asked if I would like them. I was delighted to have my request for members' writing answered. I thoroughly enjoyed the piece on the Afford kitchen table, in the July 2018 newsletter, and know that it will have triggered similar memories for most of our members.

Richie also belonged and donated to other historical societies and special interest groups. The Auckland Botanical Society (ABS) was seminal, as his association with it lasted 83 years. A major focus of our conversation was the experience he had, from a very young age, with his uncle John Attwood, a self-taught amateur botanist who lived and worked in the King Country, spending most of his spare time in the National Park area, gathering alpine seeds and plant specimens and keeping in touch with everyone with a botanical interest.

Lucy Cranwell, Curator of Botany at Auckland Museum, as it was then, was a close and much admired friend. Richie and his brother Tom were often involved in plant searches with her and Uncle John.

Paraphrasing Ewen Cameron in the ABS Journal of November 2020: 44 of Richie's pressed herbarium specimens were held in the Auckland Museum herbarium. Two thirds of them were collected in National Park in 1933, when he was only 10–11 years old. They were collected during summer school holidays, no doubt with Uncle John.

In 1937 Lucy Cranwell signed Richie up to membership of the newly-formed Auckland Botanical Society, when he was a 14-year-old Mount Albert Grammar School boy.

In 1932 she established the annual Cheeseman Memorial Prize Native Flower Show, in which Richie and Uncle John were involved from 1934 to 1937. In the Reminiscences Richie wrote for the ABS in 1987, for its 50 year celebration, he describes some of the work he and his brother Tom did with their uncle for these prizes:

I have brushed off Cheeseman Prizes from 1934, 1935, 1936 and 1937, with visions of the work that went into gaining them, the cultivation of a wide variety of native plants, the hiring of a large covered truck to convey them to the steps of the Museum, the struggle to carry them up to the exhibition hall and the setting up of the displays.

My uncle would arrive on the overnight train from Ohakune with crates of alpine material sufficient to fill one complete bay with a reproduction alpine scene. Our reward was a prize and a handshake from the Mayor of Auckland, Sir Ernest Davies, or the Museum Curator, Sir Gilbert Archey.

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We were dedicated youngsters joining in field trips and entering into correspondence with Lucy on numerous botanical questions.

In 1939–40 Lucy went on an expedition to Stewart Island to collect plants, and took Uncle John and Richie.

We collected plants for all over the world.

She was tireless in her energies, replying personally or through her Native Wildlife Circle in the newspapers. Saturday mornings were devoted to helping her with the museum herbarium and, with any luck she would give me a ride home if she was spending the weekend in her weekend retreat in the hills above Henderson.

There was a famous occasion when Richie was enjoying a ride home with Lucy when they ran out of petrol in Owairaka Avenue. She asked Richie to get out and push, and he had to do so until Lucy could coast down Richardson Road to Sampson's Garage, on the corner of Richardson Road and Weston Avenue. She had 2/6 in her purse, enough to get petrol to get her home.

The front page photo of the MAHS November 2007 newsletter is of a group of Mount Albert Grammar School boys planting a tree in Gribblehurst Park, in observance of Arbor Day 1938. On the extreme right is the young Richie, already a rather experienced botanist, as we now know.

In 2013, MAHS members took Richie back to Gribblehurst Park, to take photos of him with one she-oak that he planted. "My, how it has grown in the ensuing 74 years!" he commented. On 31 October 2012, Jim Mora talked on National Radio with Mike Wilcox and Richie in Gribblehurst Park, on the occasion of the 75th Anniversary of the ABS. The recording is still available at <https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/afternoons/audio/2537192/auckland-story-for-31-october-2012-botanical-jubilee-75> and Richie talked to me enthusiastically about this and his wonderful years with the ABS.

The other foci of our conversation were Mount Albert Grammar School

and the boys he wanted remembered, his time in the services, and the family home he and his wife, Leola, created in Mount Albert.

Richie came in from Avondale on a bicycle or by train to school. He remembered Headmaster Gamble and his Deputy, Mr Caradus, known by the boys as Grannie. Murray Nairn, another teacher at the school and a subsequent long-serving principal, taught Richie in the Air Force: "in Rotorua – navigation, I think."

Richie went from school into the army but transferred to the Air Force. "You put up with things. You went from school into the army, there was no between, no planning for the future. When we came back to school after war was declared, Freddie Gamble addressed us: *Boys you will all be expected to do your duty.* You just went. You were conscripted really."



Richie in town, just after the war.

To transfer from the army to the Air Force, you had to get your parents' permission. Richie's Mother was reluctant but eventually gave in.

I had time in the army beforehand – I was all over the place – in Rotorua, up north and Waiouru, on manoeuvres, and Bombay, in camp. Live shoots at Bayly's Beach – they blew up the toheroa. I was a specialist who gave instructions

to the guns – you had to know something about trigonometry.

It was all experience, I suppose. It was very primitive – at Waiouru on the mountainside you had one groundsheet and you did not know whether to sleep on it or put it over you. We were still using WW1 equipment.

Richie became a pilot in the Air Force and was about to go overseas, when they said the war had taken a turn for the better so they were not needed in England. He flew a few times to the Pacific and then returned to civilian life, which was somewhat difficult. "You went to the war, you became a pilot, then when you came home you were an office boy. Very humiliating".

He considered becoming a commercial pilot, but his Father suggested he work for the government. He was accepted in the Lands and Surveys Department and the Land Sales Court.

I had just got established with my young family. The Department wanted to send me to Hamilton and I did not want to go. So I went into insurance and stayed with that and am still on their pension fund – a non-contributing fund. I am still hanging in. They tried to buy you out but I didn't bother.

When Richie and Leola got married, they rented a place in Morningside and then moved to a house Leola had owned before they married, in One Tree Hill.

One day in 1953, after visiting his parents in Blockhouse Bay, Richie and Leola drove past 18 Mount Albert Road, which was pretty derelict. They thought it looked interesting, bought it, and lived there for the rest of their lives. "We stuck it together." Only after they moved in did they find that the house had historic importance, going right back to the 1860s and the Phillips brothers, of Phillips and Impey (see MAHS April 2015 newsletter).

Richie travelled by tram to and from work. An earlier memory was of when it stopped at the terminus in Mount Albert.

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From there, there was a bus service as far as Blockhouse Bay. Of course they cycled a lot in their younger days, and when Richie retired and saw a course at the University related to botany, he remembered cycling into town and flying down Symonds Street.



Richie and Leola's house at 18 Mount Albert Road.

He remembered the Tattersfields and their garden parties, and Captain Keatley and his gardens in Saint Lukes Road. He and Leola created their own beautiful garden in Mount Albert, as well as taking part in other plantings and many excursions with the ABS.

With his family Richie had transformed a blackberry-filled gully in Tiverton Rd, Blockhouse Bay, into a stand of native bush, with plants provided by his uncle. This is still there! And Richie and Leola continued this tradition in Mount Albert.

They were also volunteer planters at Tiritiri Matangi and at the Roy Clements Treeway near Mount Albert Grammar School. Richie planted a kahikatea on Mount Albert. "I did not tell anyone about it. I did little things like that", he said. After Leola died in 2005, Richie placed a seat on the mountain, in her memory, and another in memory of their friend Marie Neverman, who had shared their interests and left her estate to the Native Forest Restoration Trust.

Not surprisingly, our long and wide-ranging conversation kept returning to things botanical, and especially trees, so it was absolutely fitting that in the notice of Richie's memorial service in The New Zealand Herald, we were asked to plant a tree in his memory. We can let him have the last word on that:

The trees planted today and gracing the berms of our roads will be the very trees that in years to come make our district a desirable one in which to live.

Much of our history survives only in fading photographs and fading memories: Partington's Mill, the Old Stone Jug, King George's Hall; but we should cherish what is left, which includes our staunch and venerable trees, for those which are planted today will be of historical importance tomorrow.

Richie A



Richie and Leola planting at the Roy Clements Treeway.

My grateful thanks to Ewen Cameron, for letting us use material from his obituary for Richie in the Auckland Botanical Society Journal for November 2020. The photos he included, and reproduced here, are from the Afford family archive.

M.A.H.S Dates To Remember

Sunday 21st February 2021: Guided walk through Kingsland for members, 2:00–3:30pm.

John Childs will repeat last year's walk at members' requests, looking at older non-residential buildings, including factories, shops, and institutional sites. **We will meet at the corner of Mostyn Street and New North Road at 1:50pm.** Book early as this is limited to 20 people: janetvonrandow@gmail.com or 021 188 3726.

Saturday 20th March 2021: Our first guest speaker for the year, 2pm at Ferndale House

Mary Tallon, a teacher, oral historian, and author, who has contributed to the Wellington and Auckland communities through music, the National Council of Women, and Parliamentary Select Committee work.

Albertians Remembered

Richie hoped that his memories of these men would trigger memories and further information from other members.

Bruce Stewart

Bruce and Richie were in amateur dramatics for a period. After the war, Bruce, a Roman Catholic, was going to go into the church, but then he went to England and settled in Bath. He had a big family and made a name for himself as a dramatist. He contributed episodes for The Onedin Line.

Alan Stewart

Alan came from Whakatane District High School for his last two years at MAGS. He was a School and House Prefect, a member of the First XI for both of those years and captain for one, and winner of the cup awarded to the best tackler in the First XV. As a cricketer, he was a shrewd tactician and capable leader, and one of the finest leg-break bowlers they had.

He was a Junior Rugby representative in 1930, and in 1939 was nominated for the All Black trials. He also represented Mount Albert at swimming, and was awarded a 'blue' in this sport at Massey University College, where he became President of the Students' Association for 1938–39.

In 1937 Alan was awarded the Lord Bledisloe Prize for the leading student of the year, and in 1940, at just 22, he was selected by the Professorial Board of Massey University College as its nominee for a Rhodes Scholarship.

This is an extremely meritorious record, and we are both pleased and proud to be able to point to Stewart as an Old Boy of the School. Better than all he was, and still is, a very fine fellow.

(The Albertian, Number 18, November 1939, p4)

Stewart went on to become one of the leading educators in New Zealand – he was the first Vice Chancellor of Massey University, and was knighted in 1981, for services to education.

David Atkinson

Richie flew with David in the Air Force. At the end of the war, David wrote the MAGS Requiem (Mount Albert Grammar School Silver Jubilee Souvenir, p63). He had always been very good at literature, and won school prizes. He then went to England and went into the prison service, becoming Governor of some major prisons. He finished his career in the Home Office, and when he died he left a certain amount of money, and Richie presented a cup as a prize for literature in David's name, to MAGS.



The David Atkinson Memorial Cup.

Bob Philpott

Richie remembered going to a church in Pukekohe and also one in Waimate North where Bob practised on the organ, while they were on leave from the army. Bob completed a degree in music in Dunedin and went to England, becoming quite a well known conductor in England and on the continent.



From left to right: Bruce & Lianne Whittaker, Siobhan Bowden, Cunitia Wilkinson, Mark Bowden.

Our Christmas Afternoon Tea, held at the old Tattersfield house, 34 Allendale Road, was a great success thanks to the hospitality and generosity of Bruce and Lianne Whittaker, present owners of the house, Mark and Siobhan Bowden, the previous owners, and Cunitia Wilkinson (nee Tattersfield).

Mark spoke of their renovations to the original home and Cunitia spoke about her grandparents and the many visits to the house when they lived there. More photos of the event can be found on our website.

Don Bassett is writing an article about the house for inclusion in a future newsletter.