

# Treasury of knowledge for the profession

Stanley Dennis Richardson

28 March 1925 to 23 November 2000

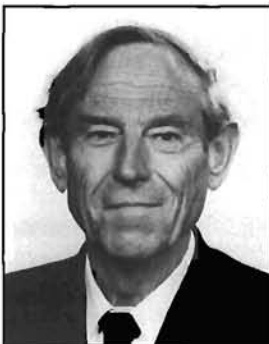
Professor Dennis Richardson, or SDR as he was affectionately known by many of his students, had a profound effect on forestry and social issues all over the world. New Zealand forestry was just one such recipient, and the New Zealand Institute of Foresters (as it was then called) recognised this by bestowing the award of Honorary Life Member in 1967, after only five years of his being in New Zealand (well some of the time!) as the Forest Service's Director of Research. Within that short period, he transformed the FRI and laid a foundation for its future and to its great benefit. Dennis was the archetypal peripatetic and could not resist offers to do the same for other forestry institutions in many other parts of the world. He was exceedingly well read, applied his keen intellect and wide knowledge to identify important aspects that really mattered, and communicated ideas incisively in wonderful lucid prose and often with a great sense of humour.

Dennis started off his career in forestry as an innovator and continued in that vein for more than 50 years. In his own words, while taking a break from his study of history at university, he was "cutting 300 year old oak and beech woods to produce slats for the manufacture of ammunition boxes" with the first mechanical chainsaw to be used in Britain. But, the chainsaw broke down and so he "joined the Marines". He was proud of his military service during the Second World War, especially the time he served as honour guard for Churchill at the Allied Conference at Yalta.

In 1945 he resumed his university studies, but the only scholarship place he could secure at Oxford was in forestry. After earning the degrees of M.A. and B.Sc, he went on to undertake a D.Phil in tree physiology. His work in that field won him a position at Aberdeen University, early publications in prestigious journals such as the *New Phytologist* and also an invitation to work with the eminent tree physiologists of the day, Ted Kozlowski, Paul Kramer and Phil Larson, in North America.

From Aberdeen University he was recruited to become Director of Research at FRI, Rotorua. I well remember Lindsay Poole coming to the Forestry Department in Aberdeen to conduct a preliminary interview there in 1960; Dennis was conducting his usual stimulating lunchtime seminar with another student and me at the time. What a brilliant researcher, teacher and communicator he was and there are many who can acknowledge the considerable and beneficial influence Dennis had on their educational development and subsequent careers.

While based at FRI from 1961-65, Dennis set about changing the face of forestry research, its focus and facilities here in this country. There are many research leaders in New Zealand today such as Harry Bunn, John Kininmonth, Colin Bassett, Colin O'Loughlin, to name but a few, who can confirm that his direction was an inspiration to them. He also commanded the respect of



industry leaders, because he encouraged people to embrace a holistic scientific, environmental, social and cultural perspective to problem-solving.

From FRI, he was appointed Professor and Head of the Department of Forestry and Wood Science at the University of Wales from 1966-74, Senior Forestry Specialist at the Asian Development Bank from 1975-80, Professor and Head of Department of Forestry at the University of Technology, PNG, then back to New Zealand as Director of the NZ Forestry Council in

Wellington from 1982-85. Throughout, and subsequently from his home for the last 15 years in Motueka, he was consulting for international and regional agencies in many parts of the world, always making major impacts, even though not necessarily welcomed by bureaucrats and politicians.

He had a special interest in China and its forestry. His book "Forestry in Communist China" (John Hopkins University Press, 1965) was a pioneering insight into social as well as forestry related activities in a country shrouded by the bamboo curtain. A second book followed, "Forests and Forestry in China", published in 1990 by Island Press. Dennis was able to re-visit all the forests and places in China during his 1987 tour that he had observed in 1963 and his acute observations and perceptions have been a valuable source of material for scholars and commentators on China. Both visits were assisted by the New Zealand government as this country has, of course, a special relationship with China. But his 1987 visit also produced the famous Cotchell report, a strategic guide for China to adopt in her modernisation programme. Much of the vision in that report was adopted with typical Chinese thoroughness. Recent ITTO statistics confirm this. His abilities were recognised in various ways, such as Governing Councillor of the Commonwealth Forestry Association, Director-at-Large of the International Society of Tropical Foresters, Honorary Member of the American Society of Foresters, Member and Chairman of the FAO Advisory Committee on Forestry Education. He was all too briefly a member and chairman of the University of Canterbury's School of Forestry Advisory Committee.

Dennis, always the perfectionist with the written word, was not entirely happy with his final book, "Forestry, People and Places: selected writings from five decades" published in 2000 by Business Media Services Ltd., Rotorua, but the auto-biographical canvas it covers represents, in my view, a wonderful memorial of insightful observations and analyses. All New Zealand foresters should read this collection of essays and marvel at the perspicacity Dennis conferred on forestry and society throughout five decades. These contributions and recollections over the years leave truly fine memories for his family, colleagues and friends to treasure.

**A.G.D. Whyte**