

A truly practical and experienced forester

John Alan Church 1926 – 2003

John was best known for his very high work ethic. No matter what work or interest he was involved in he put his everything into it. His wife, Merva, commented that John was an "eager beaver" in all his work and projects.



John, the son of a doctor was brought up in Marton. He went to Nelson Boys College but was too young to be accepted for the Navy's Scheme B. He had a short period of school teaching which was not to his liking. In 1946 he became a Technical Trainee with the Forest Service and attended Victoria University College. Again a change was necessary, so he became a Ranger Trainee. During the next four years, he received the usual wide range of field experiences which were to be the model and basis for the rest of his life. They included time at Dusky Forest, National Forest Survey, pulpwood survey at Kaingaroa, thinning practice and logging training from Waipa Sawmill. In 1951, John married but because there was no house available at Kaingaroa, he took an appointment at N.Z. Forest Products Limited who could offer him a house at Tokoroa. It was there that he worked under Jack Henry and he stayed with the company for the rest of his working life, except for a short break as a logging contractor in 1953/54.

By the early 1950s, the major Central North Island forests had been subjected to disasters and major changes. These included the Taupo fires, substantial mortality due to *Sirex*, rapid increase in logging due to industrial development, damage by *Hylastes* to regeneration and a lack of yield tables or growth models to indicate the significance of these events and what to do about them. Foresters such as John Ure and Jack Henry plus researchers at Forest Research Institute set about trying to solve these problems.

At Kinleith Forest, John became Jack Henry's principal practical assistant verifying sample plot measurements, producing yield figures, looking at natural regeneration problems and subsequent growth rates. At the same time they established seed orchards in collaboration with F.R.I. and put in alternative species trials because of the ongoing threat of *Sirex* to radiata pine. By 1960 they developed a silvicultural programme with John showing how regeneration treatment (stocking thinning) and low pruning could be done. He experienced the early introduction of Work Study, an analytical approach to how field work should be done that never left him. He saw the introduction of aerial seeding, aerial spraying (both fixed wing and helicopter) and the mechanisation of land clearing. That experience

became vital when weed spraying and *Dothistroma* control became necessary. He applied all his experience to his duties as a Fire Officer within the Tokoroa Rural Fire District. As mechanical methods were being introduced more widely, he showed a special interest in its introduction to nursery practice from seed sowing to lifting and sorting, packing and distribution. His overseas trip to study this work was one of his most memorable experiences.

One unusual task he took on with great zeal was the growing of flax (*Phormium tenax*) for the production of very fine specialty papers. He drew on the experience of the old growers from Foxton to the Hauraki Plains for what strains to use. Its introduction to the pumice lands was not easy and eventually the project was abandoned.

By 1985 the Company's expansion into Northland was very extensive, including the Mangakahia joint venture project. John was transferred to Whangarei to add his vast experience to the enthusiastic young team up there. His supportive approach to those who tried hard, his loyalty and fairness were appreciated by all who worked with him. He retired in 1990/91 while in Whangarei and continued to live there.

His support and work for the N.Z. Institute of Forestry was equally earnest. He joined in 1949 and became Hon. Treasurer from 1972 to 1980 after being convenor of the A.G.M. at Taupo in 1971. John was Registrar of the Consultants Committee from 1980 to 1984 and became an Honorary Member in 1986. After moving to Whangarei, he became a keen supporter of the Northland Farm Forestry Association through his friendship with Joel Hosking. Forestry owes John a lot.

John's outside interests included trout fishing, learnt as a boy while holidaying at Lake Taupo. Sailing was followed in his own yacht and as a volunteer with the "Spirit of Adventure" on which he helped with training. He built or did major renovations to at least three houses, he was never idle. Especially in retirement, John made a major contribution to the Masonic Lodge. He travelled up and down the North Island on Lodge business. He particularly enjoyed the Royal Arts Order. The very large attendance at his funeral was evidence of the respect with which he was held in the Lodge.

All who knew him will say thanks to Merva and send our greatest sympathy to her and their two children and extended family.

Tony Grayburn