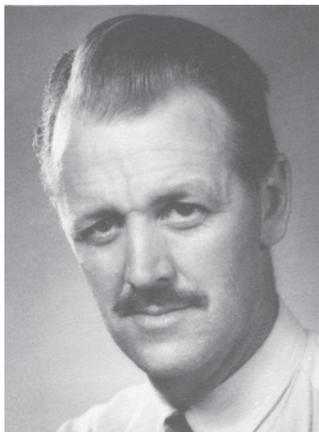


Dr John Maddern Harris

# Top Scientist Completes His Final Bombing Run

**D**r Harris, a distinguished scientist of the old FRI (now Scion), passed away on November 18th at the age of 89. He was active in the Institute and was Chairman of the Rotorua Section in the mid 1950s. He was also involved in local government as a City Councillor and District Councillor, including some time as Deputy Mayor of the Rotorua District up to 1985.



John served throughout World War II in the Bomber Command of the RAF. During his service he became increasingly keen to emigrate to New Zealand and was recruited to unspecified employment in the Forest Service before bringing his family here in 1947. His first taste of our forestry was as a labourer on National Forest Survey in the Coromandel. Some months later he was included in the intake of the Junior Trainee Course of 1948. The group was a mix of school leavers and ex servicemen - he was a bit old to be called Junior at 26! John stood out with his moustache and wearing remnants of his uniform - it wasn't long before he got the obvious nickname, "Bomber" Harris.

Unlike the others who went on to spend their first year in the field, John went straight to University and soon completed his B.Sc. and then an M.Sc. He then began a thirty year career in Rotorua heading and developing a research group under the general title of Wood Quality. Research included evaluation of the intrinsic wood properties of a wide range of species including special purpose timbers such as eucalypts, blackwood etc. However, major emphasis was on understanding the variability of radiata pine and included effects of silviculture on wood properties, and close involvement with tree improvement researchers assessing the wood property implications of tree improvement selections. Among John's many personal contributions, he made the first predictions of the rate of heartwood formation with tree age, carried out the first nationwide survey of wood density, tracheid length and latewood characteristics of radiata (showing a close positive correlation between wood density and mean annual temperature), and developed our understanding of the cause of spiral grain and interaction of spiral grain, microfibril angle and longitudinal shrinkage.

The quality of John's contributions to research was recognized both nationally and internationally. He was awarded a D.Sc. from Victoria University and was elected a Fellow of the International Academy of Wood Science.

John retired from FRI in 1984 and, soon after, he and his wife Beryl moved to Sumner close to Christchurch. He continued to enjoy giving periodic lectures to students at the School of Forestry and was very active in tramping the major South Island tracks, and helping maintain the tracks in the Port Hills.

John is survived by his son and daughter-in-law Jim and Wendy Campbell, his daughter Buzz Dolman, his seven grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Contributed by John Kininmonth

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