

# CHAPTER TEN

## THE ADMINISTRATORS

### They who made it all happen

Someone had to do it - keep the records, administer the Executive Committee, ensure the Conferences were organised, and that the subscriptions and the bills were paid.

The first meeting appointed RP Connell as Secretary and Treasurer and he did an admirable job until he died in 1949. Stephen Saxby took on the role, until Mrs Hazel Foster stepped into the breach in 1955.

She reigned and put in a mighty effort until retiring in 1973. DSIR Grasslands then provided and accommodated a secretary and Massey University's Agronomy Department appointed a treasurer from its staff. The remainder of the Executive Committee were elected at the AGM. These people were all "willing volunteers" keen to see NZGA thriving and this worked well until 1991 when the Government adopted a commercial approach to its departments.

NZGA decided that it needed a professional administration in 2001 and appointed **Mick Calder** as a part-time executive officer (EO). The move to a full-time Executive Officer took place in 2005 when **Ross White** was appointed. However, in 2009 Ross White had to resign because of ill-health, so **Marie Casey** stepped into the EO position temporarily.

Marie and President and Otago farmer/businessman Pat Garden found that NZGA was in disarray and in a poor financial situation. They set out to turn it around and Marie worked with successive presidents to re-develop it as a successful forum for pasture matters.

However, the backroom people managed to achieve miracles and NZGA has, over 90 years, communicated verified science advances to many thousands of farmers and businessmen for the significant benefit of New Zealand.

### The Secretaries

**RP Connell** (1931-48) worked in the Fields Division (later the MAF Advisory Service) of the Department of Agriculture as a farm adviser and served as secretary from the Inaugural meeting onwards, until his death in 1949 at 58 years of age. He gave a presentation at the First Conference on grazing management in dairying, and continued in 1933 at Christchurch, where he spoke about advisory issues with dairy farmers. The

next year he presented an address on pastures for pigs and in 1936, a paper on supplementary feeding of dairy cows. In 1937 at Dunedin, Richard Connell joined with colleague Ivor Elliot, a future NZGA President, to present findings from an agricultural survey of Hawke's Bay. At the next conference Richard Connell presented yet another challenging paper on the changes in land use in recent years, especially with regard to topdressing and pasture renewal. His final presentation was in 1948, after moving to Christchurch as the field superintendent in charge of the advisory service, so discussed the pasture farming situation in that region. Thus in the period before his death, he covered a broad range of subjects in the papers he gave at nearly all the conferences, in addition to organising these events and making them run smoothly.

**Stephen Saxby** (1948-54) proved to be an able successor to Richard Connell. In 1948, Stephen Saxby had been appointed as an assistant agrostologist (grass specialist) at the Plant Research Station in Palmerston North. He worked with Bruce Levy when the latter was investigating the different types and strains in ryegrass and white clover.

In 1936 he rejoined the Department of Agriculture as an instructor in agriculture, based in Dunedin; and in 1945 Saxby was appointed as an agrostologist in the Department of Agriculture in Wellington. He was promoted to Assistant Director of the Department of Agriculture's Extension Division in 1957.

Stephen Saxby joined NZGA at the 1933 Conference in Christchurch and took a active part in its continued progress. When he was Secretary from 1948 to 1954, he boosted its membership impressively, from 268 in 1950 to 784 in 1954.

He went on to serve as President in 1956-57 and as Organising Secretary for the 7th International Congress held in Palmerston North, ensuring its great success. Stephen Saxby received the Inaugural NZGA Award in 1957 and was later elected as a Life Member.

So far as we know, **DJ Glue** (1954-55) and **Russ Scott** (1955-57) were in the Department of Agriculture's Head Office, and they passed on the NZGA work to their secretary **Mrs Hazel Foster**. She did such a good job that she was elected to the post instead.

**Hazel Foster** (1957-73) was a temporary clerk in the Wellington Head Office of the Department of Agriculture during the 1950s. Her husband died and she missed him dearly, so she tolerated the male-dominated office work to help her to surmount her grief.



*Hazel Foster*

Nearly all that extra workload fell upon Hazel, so she tackled the NZGA administration and being alone, she often worked in her Central Wellington office alone through the weekend. She organised the annual conferences and all communication associated with them.

During a weekend she often wrote more than 50 letters in her neat, easily-read handwriting. She was Secretary, Treasurer and Editor as well as conference organiser, and all were done in addition to her regular MAF work.

Sadly, she had to tolerate harassment from her male colleagues during those years. She would arrive at the office on a Monday morning to discover that all her files boxes had been emptied into a heap on the floor. However, she persisted with her effort and She held the secretary's position until 1973, well after she had retired from what had become the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF).

In 1970, NZGA funded her attendance at the Tenth International Grassland Congress held in Surfers Paradise, Australia. Later she undertook a tour in Japan, where she was given VIP treatment.

NZGA made Hazel a Life Member, presenting her with an engraved clock that she had beside her to the end. In retirement Hazel continued to write personally every year to the NZGA President, Secretary and Treasurer just before each annual conference. She told me that she followed the daily events by reading her conference programme and afterwards, the Conference Proceedings. Hazel lived to her late eighties but she suffered from failing health and died in January 1991.

Once the NZGA concept of hosting the headquarters in Palmerston North had been established, the retired head of MAF Advisory Services, **Angus Burgess** (1973-77) took on the role. However, he wasn't accustomed to handling card files, and one day he dropped the Membership Box containing all the cards, which Treasurer Ted Roberts had just painstakingly sorted. Ted was not amused!

**Howard Bezar** (1977-81) took over the position. Howard had recently been appointed to a new position of liaison officer at Grasslands, to handle the increasing need of science promotion. He was a very effective communicator and doubled the NZGA membership from 400 to 800 in the time he was Secretary. But Howard was head-hunted by DSIR Crop Research Division in Lincoln, and was offered far more leeway than Ray Brougham had allowed him in the role, so he moved south. Sadly, Howard was killed in a small plane crash at Christchurch Airport some years later.

**Deric Charlton** (1981-84) took on the NZGA Secretary in April 1981. Grasslands Agronomy group leader John Lancashire asked him to become NZGA Secretary; at the same time, his wife Patricia became its publications officer.



*Deric Charlton*

Deric paused his research work for six months to learn the Secretary's role and NZGA flourished with the team effort at Palmerston North - the Association membership rose to a peak of 1500 in the next three years.

He developed the Conference Digest, comprising popular summaries of all the papers, and a guide to organising the conference for others to follow. Deric was joined in 1983 by an assistant secretary, his Grasslands colleague Derek Woodfield; and with Massey's Alec Chu as treasurer, the NZGA funds increased from a low base to a healthy status.

After three years Deric was elected to the NZGA Executive Committee and in 1987 he served as President. He was made an Honorary Life Member at Hanmer Springs in 1994.

**Derek Woodfield** (1984-87) took over as Secretary in 1984. He had excelled in his degree at Lincoln and was appointed to the Plant Breeding Group at DSIR Grasslands in 1982 to breed clovers.



*Derek Woodfield*

He soon became an NZGA enthusiast and was appointed as Assistant Secretary in 1983, and then served as Secretary before heading to the USA to study for a doctorate in Wisconsin. Derek served as President in 2002 and was elected a Life Member in 2003. Derek now serves on the NZGT.



*Marges Knighton*

**Philip Theobald** (1987-90) and **Marges Knighton** (1990-91) were technical assistants at DSIR Grasslands.

Phil worked in the Plant Nutrition Group and Marges, in her spare time, enjoyed three-day horse riding, and she was part of the New Zealand team that won bronze medals at the Olympic Games in South Korea.

They all served effectively as Secretaries, as did Grasslands administration assistant **Bruce Jamieson** (1991-96). He was the purchasing officer in the administration group. Bruce hailed from rural Hawke's Bay but was last heard of working

in the UK.

AgResearch journalist **Noel Humm** (1996-2001), worked with Deric Charlton on science communication in the new organisation, AgResearch, from its establishment in 1992. Noel had excellent secretarial experience and had led the MAF Poultry Advisory section for some years before it ceased, and was then a journalist at MAFTech's Bachelor House Unit in Palmerston North.

All these people had worked with enthusiasm to ensure that NZGA developed as a thriving organisation, until government policies changed the situation from the 1990s onwards, necessitating adoption of professional administration.

## The Executive Officers



*Mick Calder*

**Mick Calder (2001-04)** had a wealth of experience in writing, editing and proof-reading articles and papers relating to agriculture, economics, marketing and business management. He was appointed in 2001 by Colin Brown, Derek Woodfield and Richard Green, following two years of planning by these Executive members to determine the most suitable structure for NZGA's future growth and development.

Mick had over 30 years of experience in the agricultural sector after obtaining a MAgSc in agricultural marketing at Lincoln. He worked for several farmer organisations and was a director of five meat companies. He was based in Wellington, following in the footsteps of Hazel Foster.

Mick visited, worked and occasionally holidayed in many countries across Europe, North and South America, the Middle East and South East Asia. He wrote countless reports, newsletters and articles for magazines and newspapers. He co-authored 'Meat Acts' a history of the meat industry; this also involved some of the editing activities.

With the presidents, he organised well attended conferences in Greymouth, Palmerston North and Ashburton while working part-time as Executive Officer. Mick is still a self-employed blog writer working from Marlborough.

### **Ross White (2005-09)**

Ross joined NZGA as its first full time Executive Officer in 2005, following part-time Executive Officer Mick Calder. The role was established during the leadership of Colin Brown and Richard Green in response to an ever-increasing demand on the Association for a professional model from a growing membership.



*Ross White*

Ross had a wide and varied career in marketing and management before joining NZGA. He was an articulate, professional advocate for the Association, maintaining the running of the Association through his experiences as a lawyer. His tenure as Executive Officer was cut short by the illness that finally took his life.

An escalation of his Parkinson's Disease symptoms led to his withdrawal from the position of Executive Officer in early 2009, and unfortunately, this was to be his last full-time role. He assisted in the transition and supported Marie with settling in as Executive Officer.

### **Marie Casey (2009-onwards)**

Marie has been the backbone of NZGA since 2009 - the Association and communication of pastoral agriculture would be in a sorry state, were it not for her as the Executive Officer.



*Marie Casey*

Marie was born in Blenheim, but grew up and attended school in Christchurch before studying at Lincoln. There she met and got together with David Stevens while he completed his Masters degree, and they've been a productive team (in more ways than one) ever since.

After Lincoln they moved to Gore where David worked for DSIR Grasslands; and Marie worked there seasonally, giving technical assistance to Grasslands and Crop Research divisions that were both based there.

Marie was supported by John Lancashire to complete her Masters degree at Lincoln in 1992, using her trial work from the Gore research station.

Marie and David then moved to North Carolina for three years, enabling David to undertake a doctorate. Marie worked for North Carolina State, managing clover breeding trials undertaken in conjunction with DSIR Grasslands researchers John Hay, John Caradus and Derek Woodfield - a North Carolina State and New Zealand dairy farm system comparison.

During these years Marie and David had a son and daughter - David (an engineer with Fisher & Paykel Appliances); and Caitlin (completing her doctorate at Otago University in computational chemistry).

Since then, Marie's career has focused on farming systems and agricultural extension design and management. She worked with Agriculture NZ, which was purchased from MAF by Wrightson Ltd, during 1998 to 2005.

She was then the business services manager for Thomas Electronics (2005) Ltd, a business that 2004 NZGA President Colin Brown had bought to give him the background for starting his *Tracmap* fertiliser-spreading software business.

Marie returned to PGG Wrightson when Colin sold Thomas Electronics, as technical consultant working on developing business opportunities for GPS in farm mapping; and then marketing technical support of a do-it-yourself farm mapping package.

However, there's no stopping Marie!

Since 2009 she has been both a consultant and the Executive Officer of NZGA, based in Mosgiel. In both of these roles there is significant emphasis on project management, at the implementation and financial guidance levels.

This role was defined by the NZGA Executive in 2001, as a strategic initiative to shift the NZGA management to a more professional role and allow the Executive to concentrate on the governance of the Association. The professional management of NZGA by the Executive Officer (EO) has been increasingly important in recent years.

In 1992, the Government moved to a more commercial policy and formed the crown-owned research institutes. The previous NZGA supporters, such as AgResearch, were unwilling to provide the support they had traditionally given, so the change to professional management was a timely move with Mick Calder's appointment in a part-time role as EO in 2001. The NZGA increased the position in 2005 to a full-time capacity when Ross White came into the role.

Marie stepped into the EO position temporarily in 2009 when Ross White had to resign because of ill-health. Until the policy change in 2001, NZGA had been managed by a series of executive members who had learned "on the hoof" as enthusiastic volunteers appointed by their hierarchy.

Since its formation in 1931 NZGA was run by an ad-hoc organising executive committee. Then in 1955 Mrs Hazel Foster, a secretary in MAF Head Office, Wellington, organised and ran the Association and its conferences. When Hazel Foster eventually retired in the 1970s, Ray Brougham and Watty Watkin saw that DSIR Grasslands provided a secretary and Massey University's Agronomy Department a treasurer, with the remainder of the Executive Committee being elected at the AGM. These people were all "willing volunteers" keen to see NZGA thriving.

So in 2009, Marie Casey, together with NZGA President and Otago farmer/businessman Pat Garden, discovered that the Association was in disarray and in a poor financial situation. They set out to turn it around and with former Thomas Electronics co-owner, Glenis Thomas as finance administrator, they have succeeded.

Over the last decade Marie has worked with the Presidents and Executive members to achieve a thriving NZGA once more. In 2015 she asked the NZGA Executive to have the role of Executive Officer professionally 'job-sized' and a year later this went through after an independent review.

But wait - there's more!

Marie has also spent 18 years on three different school Boards of Trustees so has developed an excellent understanding of the differing roles of governance and management.

She has also successfully overseen the event management of 13 conferences and 3 symposia. And over this period she has been an author/co-author for ten NZGA papers, including one on the NZGA history.

It's certainly a credit to her - and some far-thinking executive members who decided that NZGA needed professional organisation - that NZGA is still alive and kicking.

## **The Treasurers**

Until 1976 the secretaries had also been treasurers, but when NZGA headquarters was established at Palmerston North, Massey University's Agronomy Department found one of its staff who was willing to be a treasurer. **Murray Hill**, the seed specialist was the first of these officers, but he did the job for only a year.

**Ted Roberts**, who specialised in beekeeping, was the next in the office, until 1980. Ted was a warm and equable personality, but when Secretary Angus Burgess upset the membership cards all over the office floor, Ted just turned around and walked around the Grasslands campus until he had recovered, and then went back to work.

Tragically, Ted's wife was killed as a passenger in a car at the notorious Colyton crossroads near Feilding, and a friend took Ted out to the accident scene, where he saw her in the car.

**Alex Chu** was the next treasurer, and managing money was his strong point. NZGA was in financial straits when he joined me as two recruits to the office and NZGA had to pay for the printing of Volume 41 of the Proceedings (at \$11,000) from a printer that was about to go under, and we only had a bank balance of \$4,000 at the time. However, we discovered excesses of previous Proceedings in the NZGA Store at Grasslands, so had a "fire sale", offering them at five for \$5.00 and that effort raised enough to cover the debt.

Alex then had a subscription increase approved, while I had the next Proceedings volume printed at almost half the previous price by a local printer, but without any loss in quality. From then on, the bank balance increased and we managed so well that the

next treasurer, **Parry Matthews**, apologised for the appreciative sum in the bank, although as retiring secretary, I was content that NZGA was in good financial health.

Parry Matthews continued his three-year period of duty, and then in 1984 handed over to the laconic **Peter Kemp**, a New South Welshman. Peter continued successfully in the treasurer's role and was succeeded by **Cory Matthew** in 1994. I knew Cory from the years he worked at Grasslands, eventually crossing the road to join John Hodgson in Massey Plant Science.



*Cory Matthew*

Cory continued until 2001, and his colleague **Ian Valentine** then served as treasurer until 1998. Ian had come to Massey from Victoria, so the trans-Tasman connection continued. Ian served as treasurer, working with part-time executive officer Mick Calder until he retired back to Australia, and Ross White, the full-time Executive Officer began in

2005

## The Editors

The first Editor was appointed in 1968, probably by Ray Brougham, who had his long-time colleague **Bill Thurston** take on the same position at DSIR Grasslands.

Bill was an effective editor who organised spontaneous editorial committees among the staff for almost every science paper that went out from the Division.



*Bill Thurston*

Once it had been edited, the paper went to the section leader and thence to the director, Ray Brougham, for final approval before being mailed away to the relevant journal. DSIR had its own journals in Wellington for publishing the science.

Bill Thurston knew enough researchers and others in NZGA to use them as referees, and he started a tight regime that ensured only real results were published. Thus began an effective procedure that has persisted over the years in the NZGA Proceedings.

Ten years later, when Bill retired, Grasslands pasture ecologist **John Brock** became NZGA editor. John was another experienced scientist who had published and presented papers at the conferences, so he followed in Bill Thurston's footsteps until 1985.



*John Brock*

Former All-Black **Robert Burgess**, who worked on the developing science funding bidding process at Grasslands, then became editor for two years, until 1987.

Bill Thurston's position had been filled by the reserved **Michael Baker**, who Ray Brougham had discovered in the Wellington DSIR publishing department. Mike quietly worked on NZGA papers, having them refereed by NZGA members selected for their particular expertise, and retired in 1998 when restructuring was affecting staff at AgResearch.



*Mike Baker*

Entomologist-clover breeder **Chris Mercer**, who was selecting white clover for nematode tolerance at Grasslands, became editor in 1998, followed by soil scientist **Jeff Morton** in 2002.

**Dr Alison Popay**, who has studied the grass endophyte fungus in recent decades, based at Ruakura, took on the editor's position during 2006 to 2008.



*Jeff Morton*

**Dr Errol Thom**, DairyNZ scientist for many years, assumed the role for the first time in 2009-11 and then again in 2016-18. In between, an editor who had been in MAFTech at Levin, David Swain, was NZGA Editor during 2012-15 until he retired to Australia.



*Errol Thom*

Throughout all these years, the only two problems I ever heard that were encountered, were from one researcher who reported selected results from different trials and tried to combine them as one outcome. That person soon left the industry.

Mike Baker went on to be Editor for the impressive International Grassland Congress Proceedings, from 1999 until 2004. Sadly Mike died suddenly after having a massive heart attack at his home.

## **Many More Volunteers...**

In the past 90 years there have been many more enthusiasts who believed in NZGA and what it was doing to help communication of new ideas and resolving the problems of livestock farming.

It is impossible to list them all but their invaluable assistance during the year and at the conferences is of immeasurable value.

We acknowledge, for example, those who served on the Local Organising Committees over the decades, managed the venue and visual equipment that enable researchers and others to illustrate their presentations, usually without any flaws.

Quite a few people were elected to the Executive Committee but then retired after a year or two, for different reasons. Their input was also much appreciated. It was often in these jobs that women proved more reliable, and I remember that it was mostly women who acted as Local Secretary at the Annual Conferences.

As a newcomer to this country I was aware of some rivalry between some organisations and companies during the years, but always admired the way we “removed our corporate jackets” and worked as teams in NZGA. The spirit was admirable and I made so many friends throughout the country.