

R.M. (Mac) SINCLAIR, MSc.(Hons), FNZIC (1920-2007)



In retirement

Robert Malcolm Sinclair was born in Christchurch on 15 June 1920, and died there on 2 May 2007. He was a Scientist, Science Manager and Innovator in the professional development of colleagues and young people.

Mac, as he was known to many, was educated at Christchurch Boys High School (1933-37) and, following matriculation, at-

tended Canterbury College of the then University of New Zealand. He graduated MSc Chem (Hons.) in 1942 and subsequently was admitted as MNZIC and later honoured with Fellowship.

Following graduation, and at a time of urgency due to the war effort, he was initially drafted into the Army Medical Corps in February 1942. In May of that year he was assigned to the Melbourne Munition Supply Laboratories (part of Australian Defence at Maribyrnong) where he worked with Larry Hill and other colleagues under the formidable John Rischbeth for 5 years. These were his formative years in learning skills associated with coatings technology. Over this period he made some lasting friendships with personalities within the Australian coatings industry.

Mac returned to New Zealand in 1947 and took up a position as Chief Chemist with International Paints Ltd., in Miramar, Wellington. In December of that year he married Betty, at St Mary's Merivale, a church that touched his life at its beginning, zenith, and ending.

Undoubtedly, from a career perspective, the transition from government-structured wartime service to commercial reality must have proved challenging, and reflected the norms of that period. In a letter to this writer in 2003 he was moved to comment: *"When I joined International Paints in 1947 as Chief Chemist, I wasn't given a copy of the Code used for identifying raw materials – I was only a technical person. I of course quickly picked it up from the containers when sampling for quality control"*.

Mac was then offered a position at the DSIR Dominion Laboratory at Gracefield and in 1948 became Section Leader of the Paint and Oil Section of Chemistry Division. This position he held until his retirement in 1980 during which time he ably took an additional management responsibility as a Group Leader – with some three Sections (in various scientific disciplines) under his immediate care.

Research into paints had been carried out at Chemistry Division since the early 1930s with studies of paint du-

rability on timber initiated by L.W. (Les) Wilkinson and carried on by G. Chamberlain. These were paralleled by tests on radiata pine by Forest Products initiated by A. W. (Alan) Mackney and I. J. (Van) Hodder. Under Mac Sinclair, the paint group was responsible for extending these studies to cover the effect of preservative treatments and the degradation of wood surfaces under clear coatings by light. In fulfilling its role of evaluating paint performance for government use it studied metal protective paints, underwater paints, road marking paints, and many others. When the writer joined the section in 1972 there was already a long established but small group of dedicated people attending to this work (including Len Bruce, John Kos and Sam Lister) and we all supported Mac in contributing advice to government agencies and the public at large. The Section's work also included oils under the guidance of Barry Jackson, Gavin Dougherty and Charles Harkin. Many within DSIR and the industry envied the reputation established by the Paint and Oils Section under Mac's guidance.

When the writer joined the Paint and Oil Section he was immediately taken under the wings of Mac Sinclair and Len Bruce. This was a very formative period for the writer and the essential disciplines of integrity, professionalism, and precision of expression in verbal and written English were instilled then; Mac's prowess as a teacher and mentor will never be forgotten. His mentoring also extended to another young scientist of that time, Mr Gavin Dougherty, who also remained his close friend in retirement.

Mac's professional interests in coatings extended well beyond the confines of the Laboratory. He was one of several dedicated personalities who established the fledgling Oil & Colour Chemists' Association in 1951 as the NZ Section of the parent UK body, being the founding Secretary. Later, in 1959, Mac was honoured by his election as Vice-President. He supported the Association in a quiet and unassuming manner, and with diplomatic skill, continuously until his retirement in 1980. The Association in 2001 further honoured him (along with Phil Hunt and Tom Slinn) with Life Membership on the recommendation of this writer.

In retirement Mac and Betty moved, first to Devonport and then subsequently to his beloved hometown of Christchurch. At this time his talents were turned to the enjoyment of literary groups and writing.

In conclusion, it can be said that Mac brought to his chosen profession, and in all his dealings with people, an unequalled integrity and sensitivity. He was an inspirational life model to all who had the privilege of his company. *"He lived respected and died regretted by all who knew him."*

His delightful wife Betty, children John and James and his four grandchildren survive him.

K.W. Dalzell, FNZIC