Obituaries

Gorou Iimure

Gorou Iimure, who served as ICS director for Japan and other Asia regions from 1995 to 2003, died suddenly on February 7 at the age of 90. He joined the ICS in 1980, was the oldest Japanese member, and inspired many in Japan to join the ICS.

He participated in many International Camellia Society congresses around the world, bringing Japanese delegates with him. He coordinated the ICS congresses in Maizuru in 1990 and Miyazaki in 1999, contributing greatly to the success of both.

Gorou was president of the Japan Camellia Society from 2004 to 2006, following a long period as Vice President in support of Dr. Kaoru Hagiya and Miss Toko Adachi in their terms as President.

He made many contributions in leading the JCS to the heights it enjoys today. For example, he played an important role on the committee that spent six years steering the monumental *Nippon Tsubaki – Sazanka Meikan* (The Nomenclature of Japanese Camellias and Sasanquas) through to publication in 1998. He also was heavily involved in the publication of *Cultural History of Japanese Camellias Observed in Old Documents* the following year.

He had a treasured copy of J.R. Sealy’s *A Revision of the Genus Camellia* that had been presented to him by an American friend. For many years he wanted to have it translated to share with Japanese readers. His dream came true in 2005, following permission from Sealy’s widow, Stella Ross-Craig.

Gorou was especially interested in Edo-period camellias, those raised in Tokyo between 1600 and 1867 when the city was called Edo. In 2002, he formed an Edo camellias research group within the JCS. The group has found about 120 Edo-camellia cultivars that still survive today.

The many guests who visited him at his home in Nerima-ku, Tokyo, enjoyed viewing the spacious garden fulled with camellias and sasanquas, all cared for to perfection. It will be maintained by his family in his memory.

Shigeo Matsumoto
Ron lived his entire life on the Waiuku, New Zealand, property established by his grandparents as a dairy farm. Ron later converted it into a Pedigree Hereford Stud, and in his stoic way he was tending to his animals up to a few days before his death.

Ron met his late wife Pat, a friend of his sister Shirley, on his first overseas trip, to Australia, and from then it was a joint story of developing the farm, raising children Wendy and Graeme, serving on local community boards, and pursuing their passion for horticulture which was to take them on so many overseas ventures. An early highlight of these was with an ICS group to China in 1984, going to many places where they were the first Westeners to visit since the Cultural Revolution.

Records are not available, but it is probable that they attended every ICS Congress, with Ron continuing alone up to last year at Chuxiong. But many other trips to exotic locations were undertaken to observe plants and wildlife. The last of these was a visit to the Antarctic by Ron in 2012. He was a keen and expert photographer, and patron of his local camera club. For many years his slide show evenings of the latest trip, with Pat acting as commentator, were a highlight of the Auckland Camellia Society programmes.

And all the time, in what is a familiar story with New Zealand plant enthusiasts, the garden boundaries at the farm, “Westlyn”, were being pushed out regularly to accommodate the various treasures unearthed from all over the country. The property became a virtual botanic garden, in which plants from cold to subtropical climates co-existed happily side by side. One of the last of many groups to visit was the Royal NZ Institute of Horticulture, of which he had been made a Fellow. They later wrote a glowing account of the visit in their Journal.

Ron acted as Membership Representative of the ICS New Zealand Region for many years, and was a member of the small Management Committee which conducted ICS affairs from Eve Murphy’s office during the years of Pat’s Presidency. He was also a very popular and respected Chairman of the Auckland Branch of the NZ Camellia Society for a decade. The heading for his obituary in the Waiuku Post newspaper was very fitting, “From Waipipi to the World, Ron’s was a life well lived”.

Ronald John Macdonald
1924 -2013
Ross was born in Mittagong, NSW, on 13 April 1922, and passed away in Brisbane on 5 May 2013.

His family lost its farm in the Depression then moved to Gerringong, NSW, where his parents leased a property. He attended Nowra Intermediate High School before leaving at age 15 to join the Bank of NSW in Griffith, NSW. World War II service followed at age 19 for 5 years, and included service in New Guinea from 1942 to 1945.

When Ross returned to Australia he decided to study medicine at the University of Sydney. Ross established his own general practice in Albury and remained in practice for more than 30 years.

He was twice happily married and twice widowed, having lost both wives, Jennie and Jane, due to natural causes. Jennie died at age 50. In the early 1980s, he met his second wife, Jane, on a dendrology trip in eastern Australia. Their marriage was a true partnership of equals, both of them having a passionate interest in trees, shrubs and horticultural flora in general.

In 2006, Ross moved to Wingham to be closer to his daughter, Kate Blenkin. One of Ross’s sons predeceased him. He is survived by two children and by grandchildren.

Ross’s professional experience undoubtedly assisted him with relating to people of diverse kinds. He had a systematic approach to knowledge, loved learning and enjoyed intellectual challenges.

An intelligent and educated man, he expected high academic standards in the societies to which he belonged. This applied to local garden clubs as much as to specialist national and international horticultural organisations.

While living in Albury, Ross was active in the local Horticultural Society and became its president. He and his first wife moved to a new, five-acre garden, ‘The Diggings’, at Yackandandah, Victoria. To the last, Ross was an active member of the local garden club in Taree and strove to increase interest in camellias.

Ross made ten trips to China, often to collect seeds rather than to see plants at their florescent best.

Ross and his second wife, Jane, further developed the garden at the ‘The Diggings’. It included a ‘national collection’ of liquidambars, numerous wild collected rhododendrons, camellias, magnolias, maples, willows and a fine selection of horticultural flora. The house had a lovely view over the hilly countryside.

Tom Savige, the distinguished author and compiler of The International Camellia Register, was one of his friends and was one of Jennie’s occasional verbal sparring partners.

He was Vice President (1988-1990) and National President of the Australian Camellia Research Society (1991-93) and travelled extensively around Australia and to New Zealand. Later he was awarded President Emeritus status of the Society. Ross wrote many articles for the societies to which he belonged and was one who tried to heal historic breaches in the Camellia world (trying, for example, to coax Queensland to return to the national body). He was an accredited camellia judge.

Ross was a founder member of the Hume Branch of the Australian Camellia Research Society in 1976 and its second president, and remained a member of Hume for the remainder of his life. He had many cultivars and species that
Ross was a man of concise words and large enthusiasm for plants and horticulture. He was a man who possessed a strong commitment to the intellectual foundations and objects of the organisations to which he belonged. His interest in camellias and plants in general was deep and thorough as evidenced by his profound knowledge and his personal library. He liked to share his knowledge with others and this is reflected in the list of his publications.

As Ross was an inveterate traveller, I got to know him and his second wife, Jane, much better through a one month trip to Yunnan in 1992. Before then, I knew him slightly through the Australian Camellia Research Society. I also saw them at International Camellia Society events in Nanning and Miyazaki and at numerous national Congresses of the former Australian Camellia Research Society and, later Camellias Australia. Ross’s travels would leave most of us breathless. Consider this list from the last 16 months, at a time when he had metastatic prostate cancer: he went on five tours with the International Dendrology Society: to Belgium (where he proudly celebrated his 90th birthday), Côte d’Azur in France, Tasmania, the Amazon and Southeast Queensland. The IDS’s Yearbook will include a remembrance of Ross from a European perspective.

Ross was a man of good manners and moderate habits who enjoyed the benefits of outdoors, weight control, sensible exercise and a crepuscular or nocturnal whisky. Whilst kind by actions and intent, he was occasionally a little direct but never malicious, occasionally intimidating people by his inquisitorial style.

Ross was a man who formed very deep emotional attachments, greatly missing his first wife whilst simultaneously attaching himself to his second wife (who also missed her first spouse) and next establishing a loving bond with her adult children. An added bonus for Ross from his travels was the opportunity to meet new friends with common interests and to maintain those contacts. Ross was a man who liked people.

He maintained a positive outlook in relation to his disease but was more a stoic than people ever knew. For Ross, life was for living and not a moment was to be wasted in idleness or futility. He was mentally alert to the end.

Neil Mitchell

David was born and grew up in Cardiff, and like his father, decided on a career in medicine. This he achieved by studying medicine at Balliol College, Oxford and completing his training at the London Hospital in 1947. It was here that David met his future wife, staff nurse Elizabeth Robinson. They married in 1954 and in 1966 moved to Guernsey with their two young children.

As a dedicated Guernsey family doctor, David worked long hours: surgeries often ran from early morning to late evening. In those days a family doctor needed skills and experience in many fields of medicine. This included surgeries and also caring for hospitalized patients, delivering babies, performing minor surgery and administering anesthetics. Treating patients in the Intensive Care and Emergency Departments and also being on call for night visits, was an immense workload and, according to his fellow colleagues, David appeared to thrive on it.

David was a man of many talents and interests and especially enjoyed pottering in his greenhouse and working in his lovely garden. He was very knowledgeable about plants and trees and had a special interest in and love of camellias. With encouragement from both John Allan and myself, David joined the ICS in 1990. Together David and Elizabeth enjoyed many of the ICS Channel Island Group visits to gardens in the UK, Brittany, Portugal, the Azores and Lake Maggiore. They also attended ICS Congress meetings in South Africa, Jersey, Auckland, Miyazaki, Los Angeles, Locarno, Melbourne and Falmouth, Cornwall in 2008.

In 1995 under the Presidency of Mayda Reynolds, David took on the role of ICS Membership Registrar from Walter Krzymowski in the USA. This position he fulfilled with his usual meticulous attention to detail until handing over the workload to Ines Kasimir in 2002.

I have known David and Elizabeth since 1968 and over the years we have enjoyed some very happy times together, especially when taking part in the many ICS activities around the world.

I am privileged to have known David as a friend, and on behalf of the International Camellia Society I record sincere condolences to Elizabeth and the family.

Ann Bushell
It is with great sadness that all Portuguese camellia lovers celebrate the life of José Alberto Veiga Ferreira. His life was taken away from us all too soon and it is hard to understand why tragic things like this happen to such a good friend. I want therefore to celebrate his life and remember all the remarkable things Veiga Ferreira accomplished and how I respected him more than words can say.

I met José Alberto Veiga Ferreira many years ago. My dear father – ICS director for Portugal at the time – introduced me to him at a camellia show in Porto. Along with Valdemar Cordeiro, director of Porto Garden Department then, Veiga Ferreira and my father reintroduced camellia shows in our city of Porto. The show was indeed a great success as Porto dwellers have always been camellia lovers and longed for such an event for many years. Veiga Ferreira eventually became the director of Porto Garden Department and was successful in bringing together Porto Town Hall’s cultural events and camellia collectors and producers, willing to show their gorgeous flowers.

Veiga Ferreira and his wife were the authors of the first Portuguese book on camellias ever to be written. The success was such that soon it was out of stock. This book was actually the decisive step to the public awareness of the importance of camellias in the Portuguese gardens and landscape.

It is incredibly sad that his life ended so soon and I cannot put into words how much I will miss his friendship and support. His memory will live on in all of us.

Clara Gil de Seabra
Dr. William Ackerman

Dr William L. Ackerman, one of the world’s foremost camellia horticulturists, died in early July, age 89. He had been in slowly failing health following a fall in which he broke a vertebra two years ago.

Bill was best known for his work in extending the range of camellia growing by developing cold-hardy varieties that have taken camellias to Nova Scotia, Toronto in Canada, the Mid-West in the USA, and northern Europe. In addition to many articles, he wrote two books on the subject: ‘Growing Camellias in Cold Climates’ and ‘Beyond the Camellia Belt’. He also left, unpublished, a manuscript on camellia hybridization.

In 1999, he received the American Horticultural Society’s Luther Burbank Award for outstanding achievements in the field of plant breeding, particularly in the development of cold-hardy camellias and of Iris ensata (1999 Journal, p. 27-28). And last year, he received an ICS President’s Medal for contributions of great value to the camellia world.

Bill became involved with camellias in 1959 when he was transferred by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to its U.S. Plant Introduction Station in Glen Dale, Maryland. As horticulturist in charge, he inherited a camellia collection that included 24 species, three related genera, and several hundred cultivar imports from Japan.

Previously, he had been at the USDA station in Chico, California, as a research pomologist working with tree fruit and nuts, after earning B.S. and M.S. degrees in horticulture from Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Bill said that, although camellias were taken for granted as a common garden plant in the mild California climate, his only contact with them there was a large C. japonica ‘Brilliant’ growing in front of the house he and his wife, Kitty, were renting in the early 1950s.

He quickly realized that the Glen Dale collection was a plant breeder’s dream. The distribution of many of these species by the USDA was already encouraging their interspecific hybridization with C. japonica, C. sasanqua and C. reticulata, the species most widely grown at that time in the U.S. camellia belt of the southern states and Pacific Coast.

In 1960, a program of interspecific hybridization was begun by Glen Dale, which Bill hoped would lead to improving cold hardiness, extending the blooming period, providing flower fragrance, expanding the range of flower colour (including yellow) and that of young foliage, and improving flowering and plant habit. A total of 8,741 controlled pollinations were made, representing 219 interspecific combinations.
This resulted in a total of 459 hybrid plants in 106 combinations.

The research helped to identify promising interspecific crosses and it generally supported the interrelationships by which J. Robert Sealy had divided the species into sections in his ‘A Revision of the Genus Camellia’, published in 1958. The entire Glen Dale research project and results were described in detail by Bill in ‘Genetic and Cytological Studies With Camellia and Related Genera’ the USDA Agricultural Research Service’s Technical Bulletin No. 1427 (copies are available from the ICS President).

The project enabled Bill to produce several fragrant hybrids, including ‘Fragrant Pink’, a C. rusticana x C. lutchuensis cross, introduced commercially in 1966, and ‘Cinnamon Cindy’, a C. japonica x C. lutchuensis cross that first flowered in 1967. Among other hybrids that were produced: ‘Sun Worshiper’, a C. hongkongensis x C. rusticana cross, first flowered in 1975, that could withstand direct sun in areas of the southern U.S. where camellias usually required shade protection, and ‘Frost Princess’, a C. hiemalis ‘Bill Wylam’ x C. oleifera cross, also first flowered in 1975, that was considered very cold hardy.

The project also helped Bill obtain a Ph.D. in plant genetics. He had begun studying part-time in 1960 at the nearby University of Maryland; his unpublished 1969 thesis topic was: Interspecific and Intergeneric Hybridization of Camellias.

In 1974, Bill was transferred to the U.S. National Arboretum in Washington, D.C., 15 miles down the road from Glen Dale. But he became a regular commuter between the two as his laboratory, greenhouse and field facilities remained at Glen Dale. It was an arrangement that seemed to anticipate the severe winters of 1976-1977 and 1977-1978 that devastated the arboretum’s camellia collection. Of the 956 specimens, only 12 C. japonica, 2 C. sasanqua and 1 C. hiemalis survived into the 1980s. However, C. oleifera specimens that were scattered through the plantings had only a small amount of leaf drop. And C. oleifera hybrid crosses made in 1969 with C. sasanqua and C. hiemalis and planted in the collection in the spring of 1977 survived with minimum damage.

It was soon discovered, however, that only two of eight oleifera strains introduced from China in 1948 were truly cold hardy. And the more attractive one, later named ‘Lu Shan Snow’ from Lu Shan Botanic Garden in Guling, was not quite as cold hardy as the one later named ‘Plain Jane’ from Sun Yat-Sen’s Memorial Park Commission, Nanjing. During field trials, ‘Lu Shan Snow’ suffered modest leaf damage at -26C (-15F) while ‘Plain Jane’ was untouched.

But neither ‘Plain Jane’, nor ‘Lu Shan Snow’ had flowers of commercial quality so 10,000 crosses were made between 1978 and 1982 with reasonably hardy cultivars with good flower characteristics. Drawing on his interspecific hybridization work of the 1960s, Bill was able to make the extremely difficult crosses with C. japonica and C. x williamsii as well as the relatively easy ones with C. sasanqua and C. hiemalis. The resulting 2,500 seedlings were grown in the greenhouse for two years and then field tested at 14 cooperating institutions.

After his retirement, the work continued at Bill’s home in Ashton, Maryland, where he had built greenhouse and laboratory facilities. Thus, names such as ‘Ashton’s Pride’ (C. oleifera ‘Plain Jane’ x C. sasanqua ‘Santôzaki’) appear along with the long list of Winter’s names, such as ‘Winter’s Moonlight’ (C. japonica ‘Lady de Saumarez’ x C. oleifera ‘Plain Jane’) and ‘Winter’s Star’ (C. oleifera ‘Lu Shan Snow’ x C. hiemalis ‘Showa-no-sakae’).

Bill was a tall, unassuming man with a twinkle in his eye, who loved to listen to classical music and opera as he worked. In addition to his many hybrids, he is survived by his wife Kitty and daughter Jeanne.

Herb Short
Olive held no official ICS post, nor perhaps was she personally responsible for activities influencing the camellia world, however, she was very much part of that world and an enormous support to Tom in the monumental and arduous project he undertook, which eventually led to publication of the International Camellia Register and the first supplement to the Register. Her value to the world of camellias was recognized by her Australian compatriots, who named her as patron of the Australian national camellia society, Camellias Australia. Friends and colleagues round the world will be saddened by her death.