

Vale - Robert Alexander Buchanan AM

The Institute regrets to announce the passing of Dr RA(Alex) Buchanan.

Alex was born at Korumburra, Victoria in 1934, the first and only son of eight children to Archie and Elsie Buchanan who were the proprietors of the local Poowong Butter Factory. At the completion of his studies at Scotch College, Alex was awarded a Victorian Department of Agriculture scholarship to attend Massey University in NZ from 1953-56. After completing these studies, Alex returned home to work as a Milk Products Officer within the Department of Agriculture. In 1959 he won a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship to study at Iowa State University, USA where he was awarded an MS in Dairy Bacteriology and Agricultural Economics.

Returning to Australia, Alex continued working for the Victorian Department of Agriculture but in 1962 spent a year as Assistant Manager of the Rochester Butter Factory. A few days after commencing he met a local schoolteacher, Jo Regan, and they were married twelve months later. Although Alex had been quite determined to continue a career in rural dairy factory management, a fortuitous meeting with Geoff Loftus Hills changed all that. Loftus Hills (the 1971 AIFST Award of Merit recipient) was Officer-in-Charge of CSIRO Dairy Research at Highett in 1963 and shortly after returning from his honeymoon, Alex started work as head of the New Foods Group at Highett. A few years later, with a CSIRO studentship and a supportive wife, Alex completed a PhD from University of London while working at Rothamsted Experimental Station, Hertfordshire, UK in 1968.

Returning to Melbourne with CSIRO Dairy Research New Foods group he developed the Australian Milk Biscuit, and later the High Energy Biscuit in conjunction with Brockhoff's Frank Townsend (AIFST Award of Merit recipient 1988), which were produced by the Brockhoff Biscuit Company for over twenty-five years. The biscuits were a major component of Australia's food aid to developing countries with a 100-tonne stockpile (paid for by the Federal Government) held at Arnott-Brockhoff-Guest warehouses for emergency relief purposes. The most vulnerable groups in refugee camps were always the infants and young children who needed more than rice to combat their hunger. This rewarding experience confirmed Alex's commitment to applied research.

In 1973, the Australian Development Assistance Bureau (later AusAID) seconded Alex from CSIRO and appointed him as a 'Colombo Plan Expert' to Thailand on a two-year contract. He was invited by Professor Amara Bhumiratana at IFRPD, Kasetsart University, Bangkok, to develop a new economical weaning food. In SE Asia in the 1970s new mothers were entering the paid workforce and had no affordable milk or dairy products for weaning. The product Kaset Infant Food developed by Alex with a team at Kasetsart from local non-dairy ingredients was a highly successful low-cost response. It is still produced and sold widely across SE Asia.

Alex's notable warmth and genuine respect for fellow scientists in the Asian Region contributed in part to the Australian Government asking him in 1975 to lead as the Australian Liaison Officer for the ASEAN Australia Economic Cooperation Program. With Alex's co-

ordination, food technologists throughout South East Asia developed co-operative food research projects, which became the model for the now successful technical co-operation between the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries.

Alex became a Fellow of AIFST in 1970 and on 31 May 1978 at the AIFST Convention in Melbourne, Alex was awarded the 1978 AIFST Award of Merit. His Award address was entitled “ASEAN – Australia economic and technical co-operation” – a very appropriate title as his position at the time, based at the Australian High Commission, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia was *Australian Liaison Officer ASEAN Sub-committee on Protein*. At the conclusion of this conference, the Victorian (then Southern Branch) of AIFST proposed that it forego its turn to host its next convention in Melbourne and join with the Singapore and Malaysian Institutes of Food Technology to hold *Food Conference 1982* in Singapore. It was also proposed to follow the meeting with a study tour, by bus, from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur. Alex was the obvious person to Chair the Organising Committee of this historic event and he did so with aplomb. What has since been renamed the First ASEAN Food Conference attracted over six hundred delegates from thirty countries and was a great success. Until 1985 the majority of his liaising was across ASEAN and Australia. It led to the ASEAN Australian Economic Cooperation Program being so successful that it received increased AusAID funding.

On his return to Australia Alex fulfilled a number of challenging roles prior to his retirement in 1999. These included Administrative Director of the Centre for Molecular Biology and Medicine, Monash University (1986-89), Foundation Member of the Council of Victoria University (1993-95), and Executive Director of the ATSE Crawford Fund, an activity of the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering (1995-99). Rotary International also had a major influence on Alex’s life - in 2009 he received The Rotary Foundation Global Alumni Service to Humanity Award in Birmingham, UK before an audience of twenty thousand.

He was awarded a Centenary Medal in 2001 and was appointed a Member in the General Division of the Order of Australia (AM) on Australia Day 2009. Outside of his professional and scientific commitments, Alex’s family was his pride and joy. He is survived by his wife Jo, his children Rebecca (Bain) and Ben and grandchildren Sam, Archie, Daisy, Ted, and Billie.

Alan Mortimer AM and Dr Ken Buckle