

## Arthur Curtis - 1938-2015



We were fortunate to have celebrated Wellesley's Centenary in 2014 with former Principal Arthur Curtis (1972-1977) and his family, before his death recently. Arthur is survived by his wife Elizabeth and sons James and John.

Arthur had been brought up in the North East of England, but even from a young age he knew the difference between good and bad educational techniques.

After three years service in the RAF he was propelled to make education his career, and received formal teacher training at Durham University in the UK, after some time teaching in the field in Australia at Mentone Grammar School, Victoria. It was in the UK where he met and married his wife Elizabeth (also a fellow teacher), but who was then a music student at the Guildhall.



Arthur's philosophy was simple—"I knew I wanted children to be taught as I had been.... with firm, warm discipline, no corporal punishment, humour, top teaching of subject matter and a mutual respect between all ages."

After returning to NZ and a five year stint at Kings Prep in Auckland, Arthur was only 33 when he took up the position of Headmaster at Wellesley and although the task in front of him was daunting, with a hugely supportive Board, staff and Parents' Association he made his lasting mark on a school in transition. All working together project by project, the school buildings (including an artroom and swimming pool) were developed and funds were used to buy more modern teaching and reading materials. There was also a revitalisation of the arts, both drama and music and a push to developing sporting competency. As former teacher under his leadership Euan Purdie, said at his funeral, "He built a team, he rebuilt the brand and although in five years the roll grew by 45%, it was the sense of *family* that was instilled in the team that I recall. It was an environment where everyone could flourish—the boys, the staff and the Board. "

Central to the teaching and learning philosophy was his understanding about the need to change the emphasis of education to deductive reasoning, communication skills and the best use of leisure time. These progressive principles, were carried on and expanded by his successors Graeme Dreadon and Warren Owen.

Arthur said in his editorial of a school publication- “whatever the future brings, our boys will face it with the unvarying strength that comes from sympathy, the integrity of one’s own personality and honest effort in all things.” These echo the strong values at Wellesley’s heart today.

After five years at Days Bay, with the roll having grown from 128 to 174 pupils, Arthur was called upon by Hereworth (a boys independent prep school in Hawke’s Bay), to lead their school. He left knowing that Graeme Dreadon, a key staff member was in the wings as his replacement.

After his time at Hereworth, Arthur moved back into the state system as Headmaster at Mayfair school in Hastings. A serious spinal injury forced him to quit teaching in the school setting, but he still managed to tutor children after school.

Arthur always spoke of Wellesley with great fondness, as it does of him.