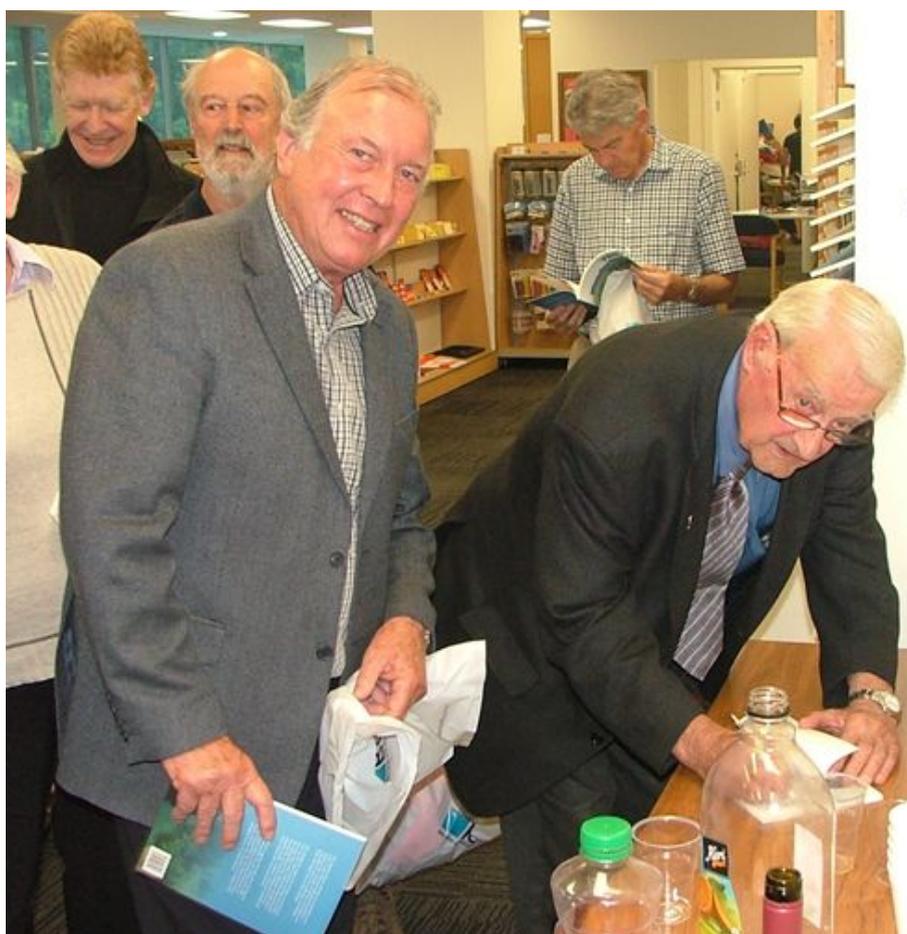


Obituary

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Richard Chapman (1943 – 2020)

We are saddened to advise readers of the passing of Richard Chapman in Hamilton on the 30th of June this year. Since 2000, Richard, based in Hamilton, was consultant and director of his company “Soil and Land Evaluation”. Prior to this, Richard developed a substantial career at the University of Waikato, initially as a senior tutor in the Department of Earth Sciences and then with the BSc (Tech) programme in the School of Science. He excelled in all these roles partly because of his supportive, sound, and empathetic nature and partly because of his farming-related background in both the UK and New Zealand.



Richard (left) with John McCraw in December 2011 at a book launch of 'The Wandering River'

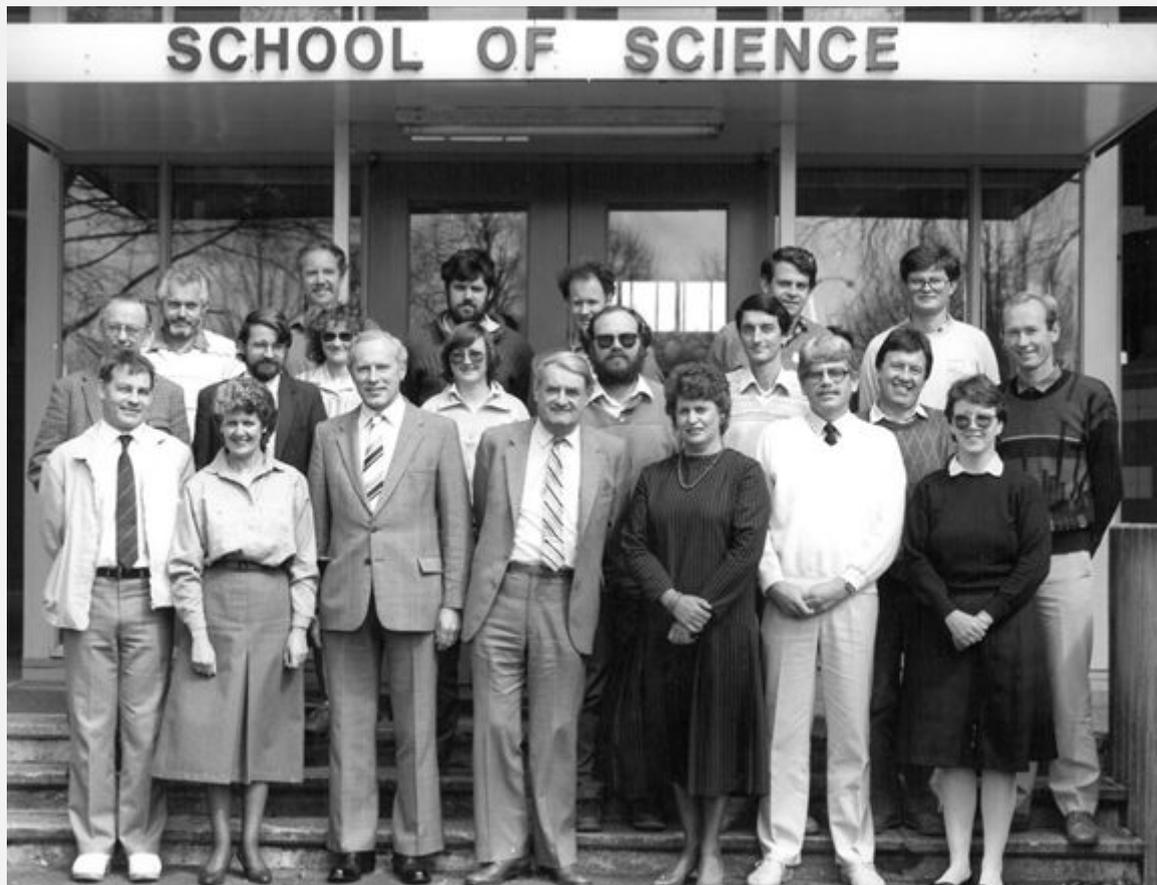
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Richard was born in Yorkshire, UK, on 25 April 1943, and grew up on the family farm, gaining valuable, life-long experience. He augmented that experience with study at the Newton Rigg Agricultural College in Cumbria and then took the decision to immigrate to New Zealand (by sea) in 1969 with his wife, Kate Newbould, whom he had married in 1966. Richard was appointed as a livestock officer in the Department of Agriculture and took up a position in Hamilton from January 1970. He undertook part time study at the local polytechnic (now Wintec) and took some University of Waikato papers, firstly as his interest in soils and Earth sciences, at the heart of farming, increased and secondly to gain qualifications to eventually embark on graduate study. Meanwhile he got to know the landscapes and farming people of the Waikato region.

It was as a well-respected mature student that Richard began a masterate in the Department of Earth Sciences, University of Waikato, in the early 1980s. He examined soils on basaltic materials in the Raglan area with respect to cobalt levels and agriculture for his MSc thesis (Chapman, 1983). The family (including children Michael and Sarah by this time) then returned to the UK where Richard was a lecturer at Writtle Agricultural College near Chelmsford in Essex (now Writtle University College) in the UK from 1983 to 1986. At that point the decision to return permanently to life in New Zealand was made. Richard became senior tutor in the Department of Earth Sciences from 1986, his wide experience, depth of knowledge, and friendly and supportive nature being recognised by department head, Professor John McCraw, who made the appointment. In his own words, Richard wrote (in Tonkin et al., 2015):

“As a part-time mature student in the 1970s I was so grateful to Prof McCraw for his teaching and encouragement during my undergraduate and masterate degrees at Waikato University and also when I returned ‘jobless’ from the UK to Hamilton in 1986, when he offered me a position as a first-year tutor in the Department of Earth Sciences. He was instrumental in supporting my enrolment for a D.Phil. in soil physics research in 1986, which was completed part-time a few years later during a marvellous and exciting growth period in the Department of Earth Sciences, both in student numbers and academic achievement, of which I was privileged to be part.”

Richard began his part-time studies towards a PhD on soil physics with supervisor Dr Bob Allbrook. His PhD (Chapman, 1992) included subsoiling trials on the physical properties of soils at Rugby Park (now Waikato Stadium), Hamilton, in preparation for the internationals held there during the Rugby World Cup of 1987 (Chapman & Allbrook, 1987).



Richard was the ultimate team man (especially including his love for cricket). He is in the second row at right in this 1987 staff photo for the Department of Earth Sciences.



Helping with the next generation: Richard (front right) with a 3rd-year pedology class alongside the Waipa River in 1988

With his freshly-minted doctorate, Richard was appointed to the expanding BSc (Tech) programme around 1992 within the School of Science at the University of

Waikato. This four-year degree contained practical, relevant work experience with employers beyond the university. Richard, with his keen interests in the practice of science outside university and his ability to connect with people, was a perfect fit for this role.

Richard continued to invest in the BSc (Tech) degree and, in 1995, became a founding member of the Cooperative Education Unit, eventually becoming the director of the Unit. Under his leadership, the Unit and the BSc (Tech) degree continued to grow and evolve, and the programme developed into an exemplar work placement programme modelled by other universities. In 2018, the University of Waikato implemented a curriculum enhancement project that included the requirement of all undergraduate students to complete at least one paper (15 credit points) of work-integrated learning that implemented many ideas and ideals that Richard had so passionately worked towards. While director of the Unit, Richard had a keen eye for appointing emerging academic staff, providing them an opportunity to carve out a career in academia, with many of these staff going on to hold senior positions at University of Waikato and other universities.



Richard was always an engaging presence. Here he is at the award-winning University of Waikato stand "Soils: extreme close-up" at the National Fielddays at Mystery Creek near Hamilton in 1996.

The year 2000 was an important year. Richard took the decision to form his own consultancy and left the university in July 2000, forming Soil and Land Evaluation Ltd (SALE). He felt ready because of his wide practical experience, strong theoretical understanding, and well established networks. In October that same year, Jeanette Gillespie, who had taken over as the senior tutor in the department whilst studying towards a PhD, tragically passed away, an event that left its mark on Richard who was a mentor for Jeannette as well as for many other students and colleagues.

Richard was known to everyone for his strong love for his family, which was always placed first. It was with enduring sadness that tragedy struck the family in February 2007 when daughter Sarah, an environmental planner and resource management specialist, passed away shortly after giving birth to Alexander.

Final comments

Richard was one of the most decent people one could hope to meet, described by many as a true English gentleman. Extremely supportive, empathetic, understanding, generous, reliable, hard-working, well spoken, knowledgeable, humble, loyal, and loving are all words that apply to him. Richard had the wonderful capacity to talk as an equal with students, farmers, academics, parents, and children with just the right words and manner. Highly respected, he was very supportive of young academics and was an unofficial mentor to many, including the writers, and took a genuine interest in them and their families. Richard continued to attend many events held at the university, including meetings of the New Zealand Society of Soil Science and the Geoscience Society of New Zealand, showing his support and interest to the end. He is greatly missed. We thank Kate and Michael for their help in compiling this obituary.

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