

History of the Australasian Plant Pathology Society

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Attempts to co-ordinate plant pathology throughout Australia can be traced as far back as the conferences on rust in wheat held in Melbourne in 1890, Sydney in 1891, Adelaide in 1892, Brisbane in 1894 and Melbourne in 1896 (Murray 1983). These meetings were also a most significant step in establishing Australian plant pathology on the world scene (Large 1940).

There are records of meetings of State plant pathologists in Sydney in 1923 and in Melbourne in 1927. While only representatives from New South Wales and Victoria attended the Sydney meeting there were resolutions from Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania and Western Australia at the Melbourne meeting.

In 1949 the Australian Agricultural Council (AAC) resolved that CSIR, later CSIRO, convene a Plant Diseases Conference in Melbourne to consider and report on mycological and plant pathological problems. The conference was held 23–27 May 1949 with representatives from each State Department of Agriculture (or equivalent), CSIRO, Commonwealth Departments of Health, Commerce and Agriculture and the Universities of Sydney, Queensland and Adelaide. It was probably the first truly representative gathering of plant pathologists in Australia.

In the same year, The Australian Plant Disease Recorder (APDR) was produced under the auspices of the Biology Branch, NSW Department of Agriculture. The Editor in his preface remarks stated 'There is also the possibility that the Recorder will, in time, assist in the inauguration of an Australian Phytopathological Society' (Butler 1949). There is absolutely no doubt that this publication brought plant pathologists in Australia much closer together and was a potent factor in the later establishment of our Society.

Plant Pathology Conferences sponsored by AAC were held at Hawkesbury College, Richmond, New South Wales in 1955 and the

Waite Agricultural Research Institute, Adelaide in 1961. Although there is nothing recorded from these meetings, I clearly recall out of session discussions about the possibility of a national society.

At the next such conference held at Toowoomba, Queensland in 1966, N.T. Flentje delivered an address on Friday 4 November entitled 'Australian Society of Plant Pathology – Is One Desirable?'. In the ensuing discussions it was agreed in principle to form an Australian Plant Pathology Society. A Steering Committee was set up consisting of N.T. Flentje (convenor), J.W. Meagher, C.J. Shepherd and L.L. Stubbs.

This Steering Committee subsequently distributed its proposals for comment to all the plant pathology groups in Australia through the delegates who had attended the Toowoomba conference. A previous draft had been distributed through members of the Organising Committee for the Toowoomba conference at a post-conference meeting in Melbourne in September 1967.

One of the proposals from the Steering Committee was a constitution based on those of the Australian Society of Microbiology and the Australian Entomological Society. L.L. Stubbs (1968) refers to these developments in a letter to H.H. Flor, President, American Phytopathological Society published in the APDR.

In a communication dated 1 July 1968 distributed to all plant pathologists in Australia, N.T. Flentje indicated that 137 people had expressed a desire to join an Australian Plant Pathology Society. He listed matters where consensus was achieved:

1. The name should be Australian Plant Pathology Society (APPS).
2. Persons in New Zealand and Papua New Guinea should be included.
3. The President should hold office for 1–2 years and the Executive for 2–3 years.

It was further suggested that nominations be called for President, Vice-President, Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer, with the latter three to form the Executive and be situated in Adelaide during the initial term. Election of State Councillors was to be organised through members of the 1966 Conference Organising Committee. The draft constitution was to be discussed at the first Annual General meeting (AGM) of the Society and amended if necessary before being submitted for adoption by ballot of all members. Flentje further indicated that a questionnaire was to be sent out in September 1968 seeking nominations and comments on the suggestion to hold the first Annual General Meeting in association with ANZAAS in 1969.

The first Council of the Society was in place by early 1969 (Anon. 1969) and consisted of

President: N.T. Flentje

Vice President: H.R. Wallace

Honorary Secretary: B.G. Clare

Honorary Treasurer: R.L. Dodman

State Regional Representatives:

New South Wales	A.M. Smith
Victoria	J.W. Meagher
Queensland	G.S. Purss
South Australia	A. Kerr
Western Australia	R.F. Doepel
Tasmania	I.D. Geard
Papua New Guinea	Dorothy E. Shaw

The first AGM of the Society was duly held in conjunction with Section 18 (Plant Pathology) of the 41st Congress of ANZAAS in Adelaide on the evening of 18 August 1969 (Table 1). The draft constitution was adopted by 60 members in attendance.

The constitution was later endorsed by 82 members responding in writing to a circular distributed by the Honorary Secretary. The constitution provided for the establishment of a publication. AGMs were to be held in conjunction with successive meetings of ANZAAS. There were to be three classes of membership: Ordinary, Honorary and Sustaining.

Ordinary membership should be open to all persons interested in the study of plant diseases and their causal organisms.

Honorary membership should be for distinguished plant pathologists who have rendered notable service to the Society.

Sustaining membership should be for interested organisations prepared to pay the annual

subscription determined from time to time in return for listing in Society publications and the privilege of exhibiting products at meetings under specified conditions.

A further Conference sponsored by AAC, the 5th, and as it turned out, the last, was held at Hobart from 7–12 November, 1971. The 2nd AGM of the Society was held on the evening of 10 November at which R.H. Taylor was installed as President. N.T. Flentje gave the first Presidential address entitled 'Cocoa Die-back Disease'.

The meeting approved a number of very significant recommendations and actions of the APPS Council.

1. A quarterly Newsletter 'The Australian Plant Pathology Society Newsletter' (APPS News) should be produced containing items of Society and personal news and also scientific notes, as letters to the Editor.

2. A directory of members should be produced indicating fields of interest. (It is important to record here the earlier efforts of C.J. Shepherd of CSIRO in producing two editions of the 'Directory of Australian Plant Pathologists' (Shepherd 1963; 1966)).

3. A list of post-graduate students in plant pathology and their research topics should be published annually in the APPS Newsletter.

4. The Society had joined the International Society for Plant Pathology (ISPP) with each serving President acting as the Australian representative on the ISPP Council.

The meeting also agreed that a Memorial Lecture in honour of Daniel McAlpine would be given at intervals of not more than five years by eminent plant pathologists chosen by the Council (S. Fish had previously proposed at the Toowoomba Conference that such addresses be given at future AAC Plant Pathology Conferences).

Regional groupings were to receive ten per cent of annual subscriptions to support their various activities. It was agreed to investigate the possibility of affiliation with the Australian Institute of Agricultural Service. The meeting agreed that it was not possible to hold the next AGM in conjunction with ANZAAS for logistic reasons and a perceived incompatibility with the program. The executive, then situated in Sydney (Table 2), produced a bulletin outlining plans for the Society and particularly the first edition of the APPS Newsletter.

Table 1 Annual General Meetings and National Conferences

Year	Locality	Type of Meeting
1969	Adelaide	41st ANZAAS Congress and 1st AGM
1971	Hobart	AAC Plant Pathology Conference and 2nd AGM
1973	Sydney	APPS Workshop on Plant Pathogenic Bacteria and 3rd AGM
1974	Sydney	1st APPS National Conference and 4th AGM
1975	Brisbane	APPS Workshop on Virology and 5th AGM
1976	Brisbane	2nd APPS National Conference and 6th AGM
1977	Auckland	Workshop on Epidemiology and Crop Loss Assessment
1978	Melbourne	3rd APPS National Conference and 7th AGM
1980	Perth	4th APPS National Conference and 8th AGM
1983	Melbourne	4th International Plant Pathology Congress and 9th AGM
1985	Auckland	5th APPS National Conference and 10th AGM
1987	Adelaide	6th APPS National Conference and 11th AGM
1989	Brisbane	7th APPS National Conference and 12th AGM
1991	Sydney	8th APPS National Conference and 13th AGM
1993	Hobart	9th APPS National Conference and 14th AGM

Table 2 The locations of the Executive, members of the Executive, and Editors-in-Chief

Year	Locality	Vice-President	Honorary Secretary	Honorary Treasurer	Editor-in-Chief
1969	Adelaide	H.R. Wallace	B.G. Clare	R.L. Dodman	
1971	Sydney	A.M. Smith	L.W. Burgess	J.K. McGechan	
1974	Brisbane	A.C. Hayward	G.M. Behncken	J.L. Alcorn	
1976	Melbourne	A.A. Holland	P.R. Merriman	A.W. Kellock	
1978	Perth	R.N. Hilton	G. McLean	G.C. MacNish	A.A. Holland G.C. Marks
1979					
1980	Canberra	P.N. Unger	K.M. Old	R. Turner/R. Ikin	
1983	Adelaide	M. Bumbieris	T.C. Lee/G.E. Walker	R.J. van Velsen	
1985	Sydney	L.W. Burgess	S. Bullock	A. Francis	
1986					S. Wimalajeewa
1987	Sydney	J.A. Simpson	C.R. Wellings	L.V. Gunn	
1988					R.L. Dodman
1989	Melbourne	R.J. Sward	J.M. Hinch	P. Revill	
1991	Brisbane	J.L. Alcorn	H.J. Ogle	G.I. Johnson	
1993	Perth	E. Davison	P.A. O'Brien	R.M. Floyd	

The first issue of the Newsletter appeared in March 1972 and included articles, research notes and general information. In the President's message, R.H. Taylor stressed the need for strong regional activities. The first list of full-time, post-graduate students in plant pathology appeared in the second issue in June 1972. The third issue gave notice of the third AGM to be held at the University of Sydney at which a number of amendments to the constitution proposed by the Executive were to be discussed. Nominations were called for President for 1973.

The fourth issue announced the First National Conference of the Society to be held in May 1974. In a letter to the Editor, R.H. Taylor suggested the name Australasian be substituted for Australian. Thus the Newsletter had proved itself in its first year to be a vital element in communication and the development of the Society.

The third AGM was duly held in Sydney on 7 February 1973 in conjunction with the workshop on Plant Pathogenic Bacteria organised by the Society. R.H. Taylor gave his challenging Presidential Address 'Plant Pathology in the Era

of Relevant Research' (Table 3). This address was printed in the Newsletter (Taylor 1973) setting the pattern for subsequent presidential addresses.

The constitutional changes referred to above were approved by a referendum of members. Thus the position of President-Elect was added to the Officers of the Society and references to ANZAAS were deleted with respect to AGMs, which were to be held at the discretion of the Council at intervals of not more than two years and to include a presidential address. Subscription rates were to be determined by a simple majority of financial members voting at the AGM.

The historic First National Conference of the Society was held at the University of Sydney from 12–16 May, 1974 and was opened by the Chancellor of the University, Mr H.D. Black, who also attended the Conference Dinner. The Conference featured plenary and concurrent sessions and was attended by over 100 members and many visitors. Abstracts of submitted and invited papers appeared in the APPS Newsletter. At the 4th AGM held on 15 May 1974, a motion was carried 'That the Society organise a National Conference every two years to coincide with the changeover of the Executive and a workshop in the intervening period and that the Society seek the endorsement of such conferences and workshops by the Standing Committee of Agriculture'.

Members of the Society were shocked to hear of the death of the Foundation President, N.T. Flentje on 25 May 1974. At the time of his death at the age of only 52 years, he was Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University of Adelaide after a long association with the Department of Plant Pathology. There is no doubt he was the greatest single force in the creation of the Society. It is at least fortunate that he lived long enough to see the Society well established with its own publication and National Conference.

The first Directory of Plant Pathologists appeared in 1976. I.F. Muirhead played a major role in this production which listed members under fields of interest and regional location. A copy of the constitution was also included.

The first Daniel McAlpine Memorial Lecture was delivered at the 2nd National Conference held in Brisbane 12–14 May 1976. It was given by Lilian R. Fraser (1976) and entitled 'Diseases of Citrus Trees in Australia – the First Hundred Years' (Table 4). An article on Daniel McAlpine written by Stanislaus Fish (1976) appeared in the APPS Newsletter before the conference and Dr Fraser's lecture was reprinted in the issue after the conference. This set the pattern for all such lectures.

At the AGM held on 14 May 1976, R.C. Close was installed as President, the first from New Zealand. It was also revealed that Standing Committee of Agriculture had not supported a Plant Pathology Conference sponsored by AAC

Table 3 APPS Presidents

Year	Name	Title of Presidential Address
1969–1971	N.T. Flentje	Cocoa dieback disease
1971–1973	R.H. Taylor	Plant pathology in the era of relevant research
1973–1974	G.S. Purss	A personal philosophy for research in plant pathology
1974–1975	L.L. Stubbs	The need for greater awareness of the importance of plant diseases
1975–1976	G. Evans	The role and responsibility of the plant pathologist in plant quarantine
1976–1978	R.C. Close	Education for the profession of plant pathology
1978–1980	C.J. Shepherd	No address was given
1980–1983	A. Kerr	(No presidential address because of International Congress)
1983–1985	D.M. Griffin	On the pathology of arborescent plants
1985–1987	K.J. Scott	Obligate parasitism
1987–1989	B.J. Deverall	Molecular bases of fungal parasitism
1989–1991	R.H. Brown	A perspective on plant protection research in the private sector
1991–1993	A.C. Hayward	Phytopathogenic prokaryotes 1962–1992 – an Australasian perspective
1993–	G.C. MacNish	

for 1977. It would seem that the conferences organised by the Society had been accepted as meeting the needs previously provided by the Government sponsored meetings. Although SCA would not sponsor APPS conferences, its implied support was evident in the attendance at such conferences by delegates from Departments of Agriculture and CSIRO.

In 1977 a workshop on Epidemiology and Crop Loss Assessment was sponsored by the Society and was held outside Australia at Lincoln College, Canterbury, New Zealand. During that year a poll of members favoured the holding of the International Congress of Plant Pathology in Melbourne in 1983.

The name of the Newsletter was changed in 1978 to Australasian Plant Pathology and the Editor, previously the Honorary Secretary, was replaced by an Editorial Panel under an Editor-in-Chief (Holland 1978). In taking this step, the Society established the only scientific journal published in Australia that was devoted exclusively to plant pathology.

In 1978 a Steering Committee was set up in Melbourne under Gretna Weste (Weste 1978) to draw up a proposal to hold the 4th International Congress in Plant Pathology in Melbourne in August 1983. This proposal was accepted at the 3rd Congress held in Munich in August 1978 and had the support of the Australian Academy of Science and the AAC.

A new executive was appointed at the AGM held in Perth in 1980 to serve the Society for three years instead of the usual two year term to allow for organisation of the Congress and A. Kerr was to be President for this term. At this

meeting two constitutional amendments were approved with the Society name becoming the Australasian Plant Pathology Society and honorary members to be elected by the Council after a recommendation of a sub-committee of the President and two previous Presidents.

The Society's activities became centred around the 4th International Congress held in Melbourne in August 1983. It was opened by the Governor of Victoria, His Excellency Rear Admiral Sir Brian Murray and in his address he outlined some of the early history of plant pathology in Australia. The David McAlpine Memorial Lecture was delivered by R.E.F. Matthews at the opening session. The Congress, a Victorian initiative, was extremely successful with over 1100 delegates attending. It was a landmark in the history of the Society and a most important element in our recognition within the international scientific community.

N.H. White, formerly Professor of Plant Pathology at the University of Sydney, was elected the first Honorary Member of the Society at the 9th AGM held in conjunction with the Congress.

APP appeared in a new format in 1984 and in January 1988, APPS News was produced to replace the News Section in APP. This latter innovation allowed more details of the Society's activities to be promulgated to members.

Dorothy Shaw was elected the second Honorary Member in 1987. J.H. Simmonds was similarly honoured in 1992 and Gretna Weste in 1994.

In 1990, Allan Kerr, APPS President 1980–83 and McAlpine Memorial Lecturer in 1987 was a

Table 4 Daniel McAlpine Memorial Lectures

Year	Name	Title of Lecture
1976	Lilian R. Fraser	Diseases of citrus in Australia – the first hundred years
1978	D.M. Griffin	Looking ahead
1980	J. Walker	Taxonomy, specimens and plant diseases
1983	R.E.F. Matthews	Relationships between plant pathology and molecular biology
1985	R.A. McIntosh & C.R. Wellings	Wheat rust resistance – the continuing challenge
1987	A. Kerr	Agrobacterium: pathogen, genetic engineer and biological control agent
1989	A. Rovira	Ecology, epidemiology and control of take-all, Rhizoctonia bare patch and cereal cyst nematode in wheat
1991	J. Walker	Plants, diseases and pathologists in Australia – a personal view
1993	J.W. Randles	Plant viruses, viroids and virologists of Australasia

co-winner of the Inaugural Australia Prize established by the Federal Government as part of its Science and Technology Awareness program.

Incorporation became an issue in the Society in the 1990s. After considerable work by the Executive centred in Brisbane (Table 2), the AGM held in Hobart on 5 July 1993 carried motions to allow the Society to proceed to incorporation under the Association's Incorporation Act in Queensland. This incorporation was finally achieved on 21 January 1994. Incorporation required considerable revision to the constitution and placed more discipline on the Society on such matters as AGMs, Management Committee meetings and minutes and financial records. I can see great merit in such discipline having laboured with often quite inadequate records in documenting this history.

Changes in the constitution associated with incorporation provide for a membership category of Fellow, open to members who have rendered distinguished service to the science of plant pathology. Honorary membership is reserved for those who have rendered distinguished service to the Society. There is also a category of Associate Member open to those with a peripheral interest in plant pathology.

It is interesting to look at numbers over the life of the Society. From the 137 people expressing an interest in joining in 1968, membership had grown to 241 by 1972. By 1978 there were 440, 450 by 1984 and 565 in 1994. There has been a problem with unfinancial members for some time and this has become critical with drastic action now contemplated by the Management Committee. Continuing support from Sustaining Members has been an important element in our membership.

The first 25 years has seen the Society bring plant pathologists in Australia much closer together. This is a considerable achievement with the widely scattered groups characteristic of this country. The Executives, now Management Committees, deserve considerable credit for meeting continuing challenges and developing a Society with the highest scientific standards of which we are all proud to be members. It would be comforting to feel that the hardest tasks are behind us. Unfortunately in my view that is not the situation.

The Society has been concerned about the public image of the profession almost since its

inception. Many of the early Presidents, Taylor, Purss and particularly Stubbs (Table 3), made reference to this in their Presidential Addresses as did Walker more recently in his last McAlpine Memorial Lecture (Table 4). Successive Executives have expressed concern and undertaken structured steps in this direction. It is now becoming critical. Government policy in many parts of Australia is leading to the dispersal of key groups of agricultural scientists in the name of regionalisation and so called accountability. The core groups of plant pathologists which gave support to young practitioners and the profession in general are being broken up in many areas.

The great challenge facing our profession and Society is to present a strong public voice to those in authority, reminding them of our achievements and the need to maintain strength in our discipline. We need to look carefully again at our links with other agricultural scientists to ensure we present a united force.

The greatest need now and into the future is for the Society to fill the void created by the dispersal of these key groups with respect to the encouragement and development of plant pathologists once their formal training is complete.

The Society has many outstanding members. A number of these have been honoured by being President (Table 3) or McAlpine Memorial Lecturers (Table 4). Now that we are in a position to elect Fellows, we must move quickly and get maximum publicity in the media for their achievements.

Acknowledgements

The author is indebted to Dr. R.L. Dodman for continued assistance in locating information for this paper. He also read and offered helpful criticism of the manuscript and arranged the necessary typing. Gratitude is also due to Dr. Helen Ogle and Dr. Michele Dale for the supply of records and other information.

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Much of the information in this paper has been obtained from the Australian Plant Pathology Newsletter and Australasian Plant Pathology in items such as 'News from the Executive'. It was not considered necessary to reference this separately.

Use was also made of files compiled within the Queensland Department of Primary Industries.