

# Obituary

Thérèse Ann Angelo  
1962 – 2018

Following Thérèse's death on 15 October last year Prime Minister Jacinda Adern warmly praised her 'tireless and substantial contribution to the New Zealand heritage sector'. She had been 'an extraordinary role model and would be much missed'. The tribute was well merited. Thérèse died far too young. There was so much more she would have wanted to, and could have done. Even so, her achievements were formidable, most publicly as Director of the Air Force Museum, but in several fields. Thankfully, a goodly measure of public recognition had already been bestowed. For her leadership of the Museum Thérèse received commendations from the Chief of Air Force and the Chief of Defence Force. There was also international recognition. Of recent years there were various other awards, examples including Museums Aotearoa's Individual Achievement Award (2010), the Canterbury History Foundation's Rhodes Medal (2013) and conferral of Membership of the New Zealand Order of Merit (2011). No less significantly, there was peer recognition. Election to Fellowship of Museums Aotearoa in 2015 was a fitting acknowledgement of her dedicated service to that organisation, including three terms as its Chair. It was not, of course, the first such organisation she had served unstintingly. Nearly twenty years ago, as older members of ARANZ will recall, following three terms as President, at age 38 Thérèse was elected the Association's sixth Honorary Life Member, an honour both logical and extraordinarily well merited.

Thérèse was born in Bristol, the second of the four children of Anthony and Myra Luxton. From a working-class background, she early exhibited a keen academic mind and won a scholarship to a public school at the age of 11. Within two years, however, the family moved to New Zealand, to the small East Coast town of Wairoa, the shift almost certainly a culture shock for a British teenager. There was a later family shift to New Plymouth. For whatever reason, Thérèse did not immediately embark upon post-school tertiary study instead opting for library work. For some years she was on the staff of the Whanganui Public Library. In 1987 Thérèse moved to Christchurch and, just a few months after the facility opened, joined the Air Force Museum at Wigram as Research

Officer. She subsequently became the Museum's Collections Manager. As she later wrote in the 25th anniversary issue of *Archifacts*, while she could 'admit to having worked with archives and managed special research collections', she had never claimed to be 'a proper archivist'. In reality, this was a splitting of hairs. Her interest in, and commitment to, the preservation and use of documentary records soon motivated her to become actively involved in ARANZ.

When Thérèse joined the ARANZ Council in 1990 the organisation was regrouping after a period of bitter and turbulent division, its very continued existence having come into question in the previous year. Many members were puzzled by the infighting which had led to the exodus of many previous supporters. Characteristically forthright in her questions, Thérèse equally characteristically accepted a challenge to back her criticisms with ameliorative action. In the course of the next ten years she was to be a lynchpin in the Association's activities, ultimately serving in every elected position. After an initial year on Council, Thérèse served three consecutive terms as Secretary, later returning for a fourth to fill an unexpected gap. She also served terms as Treasurer and Vice-President before being elected President in 1997, a critical role at that time, which she filled with distinction until 2000. Others who have occupied these positions will be conscious of the heavy time demands involved. Throughout the 1990s Thérèse was never simply a time server; she was constantly proactive, exercising initiative and judgement, exhibiting the nascent exceptional leadership skills which were to become more widely appreciated in her later career. From her arrival on Council she evinced a keen interest in education and professional training, contributing significantly to organisation of the related 1993 review by Professor Jerry Ham. She was also instrumental in ensuring ARANZ's administrative systems were placed on a properly business-like basis. In addition, throughout her time on the executive, she concurrently filled the often onerous position of Membership Secretary. Hers has been an almost unique record of service to the Association.

Although ARANZ had regained its poise when Thérèse took up the presidency in 1997, she immediately confronted challenges experienced by no predecessor. From its foundation the Association had lobbied strongly for strengthening of the National Archives (now Archives New Zealand), viewing the institution as the cornerstone of the nation's archiving and public recordkeeping. As enthusiasm for neo-liberalism and public sector reform took hold, however, moves to restructure the Archives, to diminish its constitutional authority, brought

ARANZ, with the support of the New Zealand Society of Genealogists, into open conflict with the National government and senior officials of the Department of Internal Affairs. The unprecedented outcome, when considered representations were to no avail, was application to the High Court for judicial review, two hearings, and then recourse to the Court of Appeal. As never before, ARANZ was in the public gaze, with Thérèse as its calm and considered public face. Working closely with a specially established Wellington action group, she contributed to strategising the campaign, dealt with media requests, and became the principal negotiator with politicians and key public servants. If either, and especially the latter, believed they would be able to browbeat this personable young woman they were to be soon disabused of the notion. Invariably courteous, she was nevertheless unflinching in holding to her convictions. The Association's persistence under Thérèse's leadership led directly to new policy from the incoming 1999 Labour government, including the creation of Archives New Zealand as a separate department of state, boosted resourcing, and new legislation. It was this writer's privilege to formally move her election to Honorary Life Membership at ARANZ's 25th anniversary conference in 2001.

Thérèse's direct involvement with ARANZ attenuated as her responsibilities in the museums sector expanded, although her interest and contacts were maintained. Her subsequent distinguished career has been fully outlined elsewhere. Central was her appointment as the first civilian Director of the Air Force Museum in 2002. As the Chair of the Trust Board confessed at her funeral, interviewing her was initially considered little more than a courtesy, a gesture given her extended service at the Museum. In his words, the interviewers were simply 'blown away' by her goals and vision for the institution. By this time she was equipped with a postgraduate qualification in museology, acquired significantly in her own time and at her own expense, coupled with experience and above average analytical skills. The appointment was to be one the trust Board never regretted. Over the next decade Thérèse oversaw the transformation of a much expanded Museum into an innovative world-class facility. Influential in Canterbury and much further afield, for six years following the 2010/11 earthquakes it became the hub of the Canterbury Cultural Recovery Centre. It stood to reason that Thérèse's long term concern for professionalism and raising educational standard would also impel her to involvement and leadership in Museums New Zealand, she chairing the Board of that organisation for six years. Tributes from that quarter, in addition to encomiums such as 'luminary'

and 'a powerhouse' dwell fondly upon her warmth, her tirelessness, and her generosity in mentoring and assisting others.

The high regard in which Thérèse was held is demonstrated by the more than 500 people who turned out for her funeral, fittingly at the Air Force Museum, on 23 October 2018, not to mention the many that followed the service by livestream. While she has gone, she touched many people during her life, and with the constant support of her husband Rob achieved more than most in her chosen fields. She will be remembered, her place in the histories of archives and museums in New Zealand assured.

Brad Patterson