OBITUARY

Alan Lindsay Ferguson, 1952-2025



By Brad Patterson and Kathryn Patterson

It was with great sadness that family, friends and colleagues learnt of the accidental death on 22 March 2025 of Alan Lindsay Ferguson, known to most as Lindsay, to some as Alf. While there will be fond memories for many who worked with him at Archives New Zealand, he may have been unknown to many current ARANZ members. For over 30 years, Lindsay was a stalwart contributor to, and campaigner for, the causes of archives and records management in New Zealand.

Although born in Sydney, Lindsay grew up in Christchurch. The elder son of a politically active family, he imbibed early a strong sense of ethics and a commitment to honesty and social justice, and with these, a corresponding lack of patience with cant.

Educated at Aranui High School in Christchurch, he achieved some early distinction as a cricketer, also playing senior rugby league at age 16. After leaving school, he joined the public service, later studying as a mature student at Canterbury and Victoria Universities and ultimately completing a Master of Public Policy at the latter.

Transferring to Wellington in the early 1980s, Lindsay rose to be a Deputy Registrar at Lands and Deeds, joining Archives New Zealand (National Archives as it was then) in early 1992, initially as Corporate Manager and then Finance and Business Manager. His appointment was the result of an internal restructuring following the institution's 1991 move to the Mulgrave Street building, with the new Chief Archivist believing that additional experienced managerial support was necessary.

It was to prove a sound choice. Lindsay was to be instrumental in the setting up of new regional offices in Dunedin and Auckland, while at the same time proving himself expert at making limited funding go further. He was always keen to develop networks through the public service and beyond - links which could be drawn upon when needed. Invariably, he was thinking ahead, always keeping a close eye on expenditure. Critically, he also immersed himself in understanding the purpose of a national archives, recognising the paramountcy of the

constitutional role. When late in the 1990s Archives New Zealand was confronted with Internal Affairs 'reforming' zealotry, he was unstinting in his personal support for successive Chief Archivists, and despite his deep disapproval of the reforms themselves, maintained a professional stance at all times.

Lindsay came into his own with the incoming 1999 Labour government's decision to remove Archives New Zealand from Internal Affairs control and set up a separate state department. In the resulting disengagement, he was an astute operator in the severing of previous links and the reallocation of resources, notwithstanding the State Services Commission's reluctance at the time. As Group Manager, Finance and Business in the new department, he was at the forefront of a number of new initiatives, perhaps foremost was the acquisition of a site for, and the construction of, a new Auckland building at Mangere for the Archives New Zealand Auckland Office. It was no doubt helpful that he established excellent working relationships with the offices of two Ministers responsible for Archives New Zealand - Hon Marian Hobbs and Hon Judith Tizard, and perhaps even more significantly, the office of the Minister of Finance, the Hon Dr Michael Cullen.

During Lindsay's stewardship of ways and means at Archives New Zealand, the institution won high rankings from KPMG and Treasury and was described by the State Services Commission as 'a well-functioning department', a model for other smaller ministries and agencies. Yet by the mid-2000s, it was apparent there was a lack of harmony at the most senior levels of the department. Lindsay's abrupt departure in early 2006 was considered by many colleagues to be the institution's loss.

From mid-2006, Lindsay embarked on consultancy and contracting work on his own behalf, establishing two companies - E-Recordkeeping Limited and Body Corporates Limited. Through the former he offered advice on policy and implementation, particularly in respect of electronic records systems and legislation, to a number of government departments, including the Inland Revenue and Justice. In more recent years, he moved more towards advising, in some cases personally managing, small body corporates. Utilising his deep knowledge of property law, he proved a strong advocate when representing the interests of small proprietors and owners against monied developers and their lawyers, the latter finding him a hard nut to crack. At the time of his death, he was contemplating taking on further responsibilities in the area.

Joining ARANZ soon after his appointment to Archives New Zealand, Lindsay was a constant

supporter, assisting in many quiet ways while never taking a conspicuous role. He remained a forceful supporter of Archives New Zealand. His disapproval of what he considered the retrograde reincorporation of the institution back into Internal Affairs in 2011 was evidenced by letters to the paper and a stream of probing Official Information requests. He was part of a small group which, upon request, drew up policy papers bringing a Labour pledge into its 2017 manifesto to restore the independence of Archives New Zealand. Unfortunately, Lindsay was disillusioned by Labour's failure to deliver.

In 2007, he accepted an invitation to become Secretary-Treasurer of the newly formed Ian McLean Wards Memorial Trust, set up to support and defend the integrity of archival repositories and research libraries. He played a key part in making decisions over the award of the Trust's Research Scholarship. Further indication of Lindsay's ongoing commitment was his decision some years ago to enrol part-time for a PhD examining the significance of privacy considerations in the use of archives and records. It was a matter of regret that health considerations and business commitments eventually necessitated suspension.

A person with wide-ranging interests, an ever-inquisitive mind, a conversation with Lindsay was generally stimulating. Whether the topic was the Crusaders' season, political theory, or the virtues of particular vintages (he was a connoisseur), the discussion was likely to be extended, frequently over a glass. If the world order could not be changed during such encounters, at least a fair attempt would have been made. In addition, for around 18 years, Lindsay was a part-time Uber driver. While undoubtedly the earnings provided useful supplementary income, there must be at least a suspicion that there was more to this continuing involvement. Lindsay was a gregarious man; he thrived on discourse. He was delighted to pick up certain passengers, senior public servants, MPs, other relevant dignitaries, whom he could then inform just what needed to be done to restore the constitutional standing of Archives New Zealand. It is a sad irony that his death should occur in the course of one of his evening stints.

A mark of the respect and affection with which Lindsay was widely held was the presence at his funeral of a large number of family, friends and acquaintances from all walks of life, from Archives New Zealand, the public service, academia, locals encountered through morning coffee, and not least other Uber drivers. Family had travelled from the United Kingdom and Australia, along with friends and acquaintances from all parts of New Zealand, joining locals in celebrating Lindsay's life.