

IN MEMORIAM: DAME ALISON QUENTIN-BAXTER



Dame Alison died peacefully at her home in Kelburn on Saturday 30 September 2023, at the age of 93.

Alison was the first woman to chair the Auckland University College law students' society. She said she could have joined a law firm in Auckland, having been a law clerk there, and with prospects of becoming a partner. But she thought that foreign affairs might be more interesting. She contacted the head of the Department, Alister McIntosh, and asked for an interview, to which he agreed. McIntosh referred the matter to Colin Aikman, then the head of the legal division, and he offered Alison a job. She liked to tell the story of McIntosh, saying that he would go down on his knees were she a first-class shorthand typist! She arrived at the (then) Department of External Affairs in 1952, the Department having been established only in 1943. The Department was then housed in a prefabricated building, erected during the Second World War, on the top of Parliament Buildings.

Alison became the head of the legal division in 1956 at the age of 26. She participated in the two sessions on the law of the sea in Geneva in 1958 (the more successful) and 1960 which failed to resolve the issues of the width of the territorial seas and fishing zones. Another member of that delegation was Robert Quentin Quentin-Baxter, who was to become her husband in 1961. Before that, Alison was the first secretary in the Embassy in Washington for about two years, while Quentin was posted to Ottawa. Following her marriage, under the public service rules of the time, her proposal that she take leave without pay was rejected and she accompanied Quentin as a diplomatic wife to his posting in Tokyo. (He had earlier been the assistant to Justice Northcroft, the New Zealand judge, at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, held in Tokyo.)

Alison then became involved in the making of constitutions, first in Niue, with Quentin, in 1970, in the Marshall Islands and in St Helena. For some years she was a member of the Niue Public Service Commission. She was legal counsel to the team which, in 1995–1996, prepared a constitution for Fiji, headed by Sir Paul Reeves; the other members were Tomasi Vakatora (nominated by the Government) and Brij Lal, an Indo-Fijian academic (nominated by the Opposition).

In 1972 and 1973 she was a valued member of the team in the proceedings in the International Court of Justice brought by New Zealand against France in respect of the testing of nuclear weapons in the South Pacific (where her typing skills were called upon!). The other members of that team consisted of Quentin, as agent, the Attorney-General, Dr Martyn Finlay, the Solicitor-General, Richard Savage, Kenneth Keith, Christopher Beeby and the Ambassador in the Hague, Vincent Roberts, as co-agent.

Alison was an outstanding Director of the Law Commission from 1986. She was the architect of the Letters Patent Constituting the Office of Governor-General of New Zealand 1983 and, with Janet McLean, a co-author of *This Realm of New Zealand: The Sovereign, the Governor-General, the Crown*.¹

Alison contributed to the law's literature in several other ways, with many articles in the *Law Review* of Victoria University of Wellington, an institution where she also taught in the late 1960s, and in many other publications.

Alison was made a Companion of the Queen's Service Order in 1993, a Dame Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit in 2007 for services to the law, and in 2003 she was awarded an honorary doctorate of laws by Victoria University of Wellington.

A mighty tōtara has fallen in the forest of Tāne. Haere, Alison, haere, haere rā.

AH Angelo

KJ Keith

¹ Alison Quentin-Baxter and Janet McLean *This Realm of New Zealand: The Sovereign, the Governor-General, the Crown* (Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2017).