

ELECTION OF HONORARY LIFE MEMBER

R. A. BARTON

Dip. Ag. (Massey), M. Inst. Meat, F.N.Z.I.A.S.

Robert Aitken Barton, nominated for election as an Honorary Life Member of the Society was born in Westmere, near Wanganui, but spent most of his early years in Auckland. One would expect that this was not the most auspicious milieu for encouraging a lasting interest in agriculture. However, the long summer holidays spent each year on "Waipuna", the property owned by his mother's family at Brunswick near Wanganui, generated an enthusiasm for farming. This was further enhanced when his family moved to Gore and he attended the Gore High School where many of his classmates were farmers' sons and opportunities for weekends and holidays on the land were abundant.

On completing high school, he worked on the farm of the late Mr Adam Nichol of Waikaka Valley, near Gore, a stud breeder of Romney and Southdown sheep and Angus cattle. In 1939, he reluctantly entered the course for the Diploma in Agriculture at Massey Agricultural College which he completed in 1940, being awarded the Students' Association Prize for top student of his year.

In the preceding years, he had been developing an interest in the breeding of sheep and cattle and was working towards employment in a stock and station agency. However, the late Sir Geoffrey Peren prevailed upon him to accept an offer to become a technician in the Sheep Husbandry Department working with Mr E. A. Clarke. He has been with the Sheep Husbandry Department at Massey since that time, being appointed in succession Junior Lecturer in 1945, Lecturer in 1950, Senior Lecturer in 1955 and Reader in 1967.

Mr Barton's research interests have covered a wide field in animal production. His principal contribution has been in the area of carcass composition and meat quality where he is author or co-author of more than 60 publications. His introduction to this field came early in his career when in 1942 he was involved in complete dissection of carcasses sampled in order to characterise the grades of lamb and mutton then being produced in New Zealand. This information on carcass composition according to grade was sought by the British Ministry of Food for its meat rationing programme and was carried out under the direction of the late Dr C. P. McMeekan and Mr E. A. Clarke. It was, I am sure, the sheer tedium of this full dissection technique which at a later stage



encouraged his examination, with A. H. Kirton, of the mincing and sampling of the carcass for chemical analysis, a less time-consuming technique.

Characterisation of the different grades of lamb and beef in terms of carcass composition and carcass measurement has been a continuing interest, notably in the work with Dr James D. Kemp of the Department of Animal Science, University of Kentucky, who was a Fulbright Scholar in the Department of Sheep Husbandry at Massey University.

The problem of excessive fatness of sheep and beef carcasses has been a major theme in his meat studies. Examples are his work on the effects of thyroxine treatment and nutritional levels on carcass composition with A. H. Kirton and the late G. K. Hight; investigations of the effects of different strains of ryegrass and white clover on growth and carcass composition of sheep with M. J. Ulyatt and their effects on tenderness, flavour and odour of the meat with D. A. Cramer, F. B. Shorland and R. W. Purchas; and the identification and characterisation of fat and lean types of cattle and sheep, particularly in Southdown sheep which is one of his current interests in meat research.

Another important area of his research interests has been in beef cattle production. In the early 1960s, he started comparisons of the growth and carcass composition of steers of different breeds and crosses. This series of 9 trials, covering most of the locally available beef and dairy breeds and their crosses was of very great importance in showing the merits of the Friesian and Friesian cross cattle for beef production and in indicating deficiencies in the traditional beef

breeds. Later trials comparing rangy and compact types of cattle within the beef breeds also contributed to an understanding of the relation between type and carcass merit.

He has also undertaken research in the management and nutrition of the beef breeding cow and has published a number of papers with his students covering the use of a feeding pad for wintering cows and on the effects of reduced feeding levels at various stages in late pregnancy on subsequent production and re-breeding.

Mr Barton has also made research contributions at various stages of his career to the study of reproductive rate and lamb mortality in Romney sheep, the effects of face cover on production in Romney sheep and to a number of other sheep breeding problems.

I would now like to refer to Mr Barton's contribution to the sheep and beef cattle industries and to the meat industry. In the past 25 years, Mr Barton through his writings, extra-mural lectures, radio talks and direct contact with farmers and breeders has had a tremendous influence on the thinking and practices of the sheep and beef cattle producers. Time permits reference to only some of these contributions.

In the 1960s he was responsible in large measure for laying the basis of the dairy-beef industry in New Zealand and has continued to contribute to its development. He was Chairman of the Working Party on Dairy Beef and Veal set up by the Agricultural Production Council to investigate and encourage dairy beef production.

He has had a major influence in encouraging beef cattle breeders and producers towards the production of a meat-type of carcass. He has made important contributions to the innovations of bull-beef production, feed-lotting and to the overall encouragement of beef production in New Zealand.

There has been no more severe critic of the ram and bull breeders and their breed societies wherever there have been grounds for criticism of their performance. Yet, there is no one in animal production research or extension who has such a wide range of contacts and friends among breeders, nor anyone who has such a realistic understanding of the problems and practices of the breeder; nor in fact anyone who has been so willing to devote his skills and his own private time and effort to help them find practical solutions to these problems. As an example, I refer here to the great effort he has put into Live Animal Evaluation Clinics for sheep and beef cattle breeders over the last 12 years. In essence, his philosophy in this work recognises that there is still no easily and widely-usable objective technique available to the breeder and producer for measuring carcass merit on the live animal. Furthermore, trained and skilled people can assess degrees of

fatness with considerable accuracy. Hence the need has been to assist those who are most involved (the breeder and the producer) to obtain the necessary skills. He has also accepted the challenge of applying these techniques to ranking animals in the show-ring and has now judged, for many breed societies, at shows ranging from small local events to the Royal Show and in Australia. He has also assisted some breed societies, either by actual membership of their Council or through serving on their technical committees. He is an honorary life member of four such societies.

It is appropriate in this year 1982, the centennial of the first refrigerated shipment of meat from New Zealand, that Mr Barton should be elected to Honorary Life Membership of this Society. He has, over the years, at the expense of long hours on the killing floor, in chillers, boning rooms and in management offices, developed a very close liaison with many meat export companies. His work with the processing industry as well as with production has given a unique knowledge of meat from farm through to consumer. One of his major concerns has been to ensure that the export and local consumption grading systems should take account of the changing patterns of consumer requirements and should reflect these changes through to the producer in an equitable manner. To these ends, he has held regular discussion with the Supervising Graders of the New Zealand Meat Producers Board and has served on committees set up by the Board and by the Standards Association of New Zealand to examine grading problems. He has also been much concerned to encourage the introduction of premium grades for well-musclcd, lean lamb carcasses and to develop heavy-weight lamb production as a significant component of the meat industry.

During his teaching career of some 41 years, Mr Barton has covered at various times a very wide range of topics in Sheep Husbandry, Meat Science, Wool and Beef Cattle Production at all levels of the degree and diploma classes at Massey University. He is a most effective teacher who in discussion can draw on his wide knowledge of agriculture. He has supervised the work of some 22 Masterate students in Meat Science and Beef Production.

Many of these students such as A. H. Kirton, M. J. Ulyatt, the late G. K. Hight, A. J. F. Russel and R. W. Purchas have achieved eminence in research in animal production in New Zealand and overseas. In this work, his emphasis on clarity of thought and in writing has become well recognised.

Mr Barton's involvement with this Society and its affairs has been extensive. He has been:

Secretary-Treasurer	1949/1952
Committee Member	1956/75
Editor	1958/1960
Vice-President	1962/63