

Matthew George Easton FNZIS

1919 – 2008

Prepared by Ian McIntyre



George was born on the 30 April 1919 in Wellington. He was one of five and the family moved to Wairoa where George's father, also Matthew George Easton, was employed as a PWD engineer on the Napier to Gisborne railway. George started school in Wairoa and then won a scholarship to Scots College in Wellington.

He signed his cadet articles with Mr R. McMowat and commenced work in Wairoa. World War II interrupted his training and he was directed to carry out survey work on the Masterton aerodrome. George was called up to initially go to the Pacific Islands but under the direction of the Surveyor-General was sent south for 18 months to the Auckland Island (Latitude 50 south) to join the coast watching group established to watch for enemy shipping movements. And 'in your spare time George could you carry out a survey of the Island and also determine its accurate location.' This was a daunting challenge for a young cadet fresh from Wairoa but they were desperate days. His earlier experiences in surveying the rugged hills and gullies of the East Coast helped him conquer the harsh unforgiving weather, the unrelenting topography and to battle through and under the storm sculpted vegetation. George often commented that he had observed coastline waterfalls flowing upwards, such was the force of the Antarctic gales.

Upon his return, and over a period until 1946, he worked with Mr Arthur Sandell, attended the School of Engineering in Christchurch and joined the Wellington firm of Seaton Sladden & Pavitt in 1946. On 27 October 1947 George became a Registered Surveyor and a member of the New Zealand Institute of Surveyors.

In 1951 he moved to Auckland initially joining up with Mr Stanley Orbell. He then established his extensive practice in the suburb of New Lynn where he stayed for well in excess of 40 years. Within the community he was an active member of the then Titirangi Country Town Committee and as a member of Rotary.

George's passionate promotion of engineering standards for surveyors involved in development work led to the issue by the

NZIS of sets of standard documents for the letting of contracts, tenders and bonds for the use of members. Coupled with that was the regular work of keeping these publications up to date to reflect current practice.

From the introduction of electronic computations, George was an avid devotee seeing far ahead the use of e-lodgement. He worked tirelessly particularly with the company Wang to tailor programming to suit survey use. He was urging the Department to accept his traverse sheets, boundary data, area closes and calculations in digital form on floppy disc at least 20 years before the Department was finally ready to receive them.

George devoted much of his life in service to the NZIS. He was Secretary, Vice-Chairman and Chairman of the Auckland Branch before being elected as a Councillor in 1965. He served as a Councillor until 1971, was Vice-President 1971-1973 and President from 1973 to 1975. He was elected a Fellow in 1975.

He represented the Institute at the Papua-New Guinea Survey Congress in 1972, the Australian Institution Congresses in Melbourne in 1974 and in Perth in 1975.

George's interest in surveying never faded. As something of a curator he championed the collection of historical survey instruments now held by the Auckland Branch. He ensured that the seal of the Surveyors Association Province of Auckland 1865 was gifted to the Auckland Museum in 2006. George also ensured that his complete bound collection of the New Zealand Survey Journals was given to the NZIS in 2008.

While George had retired from practice in 2004 his interest in surveying did not fade. He spent much of his retirement researching and recording the history of earlier members with the long term thought that such information could one day be transcribed into the electronic mode. George died in Auckland on 8 February 2008 and is survived by his wife, Myrtle, three children and four grandchildren.