

Ronald Arden Brown (1914–2002)

Ron Brown died in Oxford on 14 December 2002. He was the University Librarian in Pietermaritzburg from 1962 to 1973, and a member of the Natal Society Council for the whole of this period.

His was the idea that the Natal Society should produce a regular publication on matters relating to Natal. To this end, in 1969 he compiled and edited the bulletin *Natal notes and news*. Four quarterly issues were published in a roneoed form. The intention was five-fold: to concentrate on the natural environment, the early inhabitants, European and Indian settlers, buildings and places, artefacts and plans for the future.

In the second issue he referred to the set of rules adopted by the Natal Society in 1865, reaffirming the Society's objects, which included 'the acquisition and preservation of information of local value and interest, and the general encouragement of habits of study, investigation and research within the colony'.

He pointed out that these objects were at present being carried out by a large number of organisations, but, in many cases, these organisations and other interested persons did not know what one another were doing. An added purpose of *Natal notes and news* was to inform 'interested persons' of research being done in Natal.

In the December number notification was given that this was the bulletin's last appearance in its present form, and from the second half of 1970 it was planned to issue it in 'a superior format' – thus *Natalia* was born. Professor Colin de B. Webb was the first editor, assisted by an editorial board of three. Ron was not a board member for the first issue, but joined it in 1972.

On his retirement in 1973 he returned to England, where for some years he worked for Blackwell's in Oxford. He was much involved in the local activities of the National Trust.

The son of a Stroud, Gloucestershire, medical doctor with strong Oxfordshire roots, Ron had an MA from Oxford. His first post in South Africa was as a teacher at



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Michaelhouse. The Second World War intervened and he enlisted in the British army . Afterwards he returned to South Africa. Immediately, prior to accepting the Pietermaritzburg post he had been the Deputy Librarian at Rhodes University.

He was an excellent organiser (shades of his officer's training?), and had a refreshing attitude towards librarianship. He had a straightforward, no-nonsense approach, which while ensuring accuracy, eschewed the excess of detail that the exacting nature of the profession sometimes engenders.

On many a weekend afternoon Ron could be seen carrying his deck-chair along Alexandra Road as he headed for cricket at the Oval or some other sporting event.

To my mind employees are the best judges of the true characters of their superiors and Ron had a happy working team. That speaks for itself.

SHELAGH SPENCER