

Simon Roberts (1926–2009)

Prominent Pietermaritzburg lawyer Simon Roberts died in the city last November at the age of 83 after a long period of indifferent health.

He was educated at Cordwalles (where he was head boy in 1939) and Michaelhouse (where he played first team cricket and rugby and was captain of both the school and Natal Schools XIs in 1943). World War II had not finished when he left school and he thus saw service in the South African Navy.

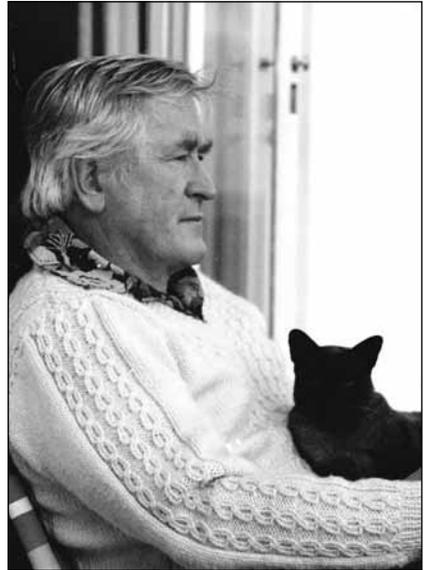
In 1946 he won an Elsie Ballot Scholarship which took him to Cambridge where he read History and Geography before returning to the University of Natal in 1950 to do an LLB degree. He was admitted as an attorney in 1954 and was to practise for the next 45 years, with Tomlinson Frances until 1989 and with Venn Nemeth and Hart for a further 10 years thereafter until 1999.

Roberts made a significant contribution to legal matters outside

his own practice. He was a member of the council of the Natal Law Society from 1967 to 1977 and its president in 1976. He was a member of the council of the Association of Law Societies of Southern Africa as well as chairman of that body's sub-committee on Legal Ethics and Public Relations. He served as a member of the statutory board of control of the Attorneys' Fidelity Fund and was twice a delegate to the International Bar Associations' Conference, in Stockholm in 1976 and in Sydney in 1978.

Roberts specialised in litigation, licensing, matrimonial, commercial, property and transportation matters. He was valued in local government affairs and an ad hoc legal adviser to the Pietermaritzburg City Council and the Local Health Commission. He served on commissions of inquiry into matters in Pinetown and Verulam and was an ad hoc member of a sub-committee appointed by the Goldstone Commission of Inquiry into the illegal importation of automatic and semi-automatic weapons into South Africa. He was also, inter alia, chairman of the Statutory Natal Arbitration Board, chairman of the Provincial Town Planning Appeals Board from c1985 to 2000, deciding over 600 appeals in that period, chairman of the Provincial Appeals Tribunal and chairman of the Provincial Planning and Development Act No 5 of 1998.

Apart from his profession as a lawyer, Roberts had many interests. He was the first chairman of the local branch of the Simon van der Stel Foundation, an NGO concerned with conserving significant buildings (such as Macrorie House) in the city and elsewhere. He was chairman of the board of trustees of the Macrorie



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House Museum. He was a founder in the early 1960s of the American Field Scholarship scheme in the province, president of the Michaelhouse Old Boys' Club (in 1976), member of the Board of Administration under the Will of Joseph Baynes (which administers Baynesfield), chairman of the Victoria Club as it then was, president of the Natal Society when it ran the library on behalf of the city council and a trustee of the subsequent Natal Society Foundation Trust. He was a member of the Liberal Party and, together with fellow attorney Leslie Weinberg, gave wise advice and generous assistance to many people involved in the struggle against apartheid.

Roberts was married twice: to Lorraine (in 1953), with whom he had his four children, three daughters and a son, and to Joy (in 1967), then a widow with two children, who survives him.

Oliver Hart, a former colleague, said of him: 'Simon Roberts was a brilliant lawyer, respected and admired by

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his attorney legal colleagues and by members of the Bar and Judiciary. He was a formidable opponent but always fair and sensible. His legal opinions were models of clarity with the law being applied properly to the facts. It is a great pity that, in the years that he

practised, attorneys did not qualify to become judges. He would have made an excellent judge.'

Roberts's memorial service took place in the Church of the Ascension in Hilton.

JACK FROST