

Kirk Horn Flask and Medal

The best way to describe the award is to quote from an address given by then President of the Royal Society of New Zealand when he made the first presentation of the award at the Institute's AGM in 1988:

"The Kirk Horn Flask is the most historically valuable award in all New Zealand science.

It commemorates the recipient - Thomas Kirk - a man with no formal schooling but who became one of New Zealand's foremost botanical explorer/scientists and teacher at the Auckland Institute and Museum. It also commemorates the donor – Captain Campbell-Walker – a member of the Indian Forest Service who came to New Zealand in March 1876 as the first Conservator of Forests on a year's trial. And it symbolizes the start of Forestry in New Zealand, not tree-felling but forestry, for Campbell-Walker read the first forestry paper in New Zealand to the Otago Philosophical Society in 1876 - "State Forestry: its aims and objects".

Thomas Kirk and Campbell-Walker travelled the length and breadth of the country together inspecting and studying the forests and, as a first step towards a system of conservation, Campbell-Walker recommended all the forests at the headwaters of all rivers in Canterbury be reserved.

Three years before, in response to public agitation about indiscriminate burning and logging of forests, the Government had passed the New Zealand Forests Act, but ironically, adverse economic times and vested interests caused the Forest Act Repeal Bill to be passed by the House of Representatives, though as in so many cases the Upper House showed much greater sense and threw out the Bill; but they could not ensure money was forthcoming to continue the conservation initiative.

At the end of his stay in 1877, Campbell-Walker commemorated his association with Kirk by presenting him with a silver-mounted flask suitably engraved.

In 1967 the flask was offered to the Royal Society by Mrs Lana Brown and Mr A.D. McKinnon "in the hope the Society may see fit to institute a prize for research in New Zealand forest vegetation and forestry, using the flask as a trophy to be held by each winner of the award in succession".

It took some time before the Royal Society made decisions on the award, but in 1988 the Society and the Institute agreed the Kirk Horn would be passed to the Institute for a two yearly award recognising outstanding contributions in the field of forestry in New Zealand. The awardee has temporary possession of this 133 year-old drinking horn plus a medal which they retain.