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History of the Rotorua Branch of the Royal Society of New Zealand

The Branch was started in 1952, on the basis of meeting two conditions, namely embarking upon an approved project (getting a proper Rotorua Museum established), and starting a library. There was heavy involvement of the Branch in the Museum Project, through Jim Healy's contribution to setting up a volcanological exhibit. From early on the Branch had a History Section, with Don Stafford heavily involved. The Section was instrumental in creating an exhibit on pioneering housing and clothing for the Museum, that being a personal project of Mostyn Thompson's.

When Rowland Burdon came on board in 1969 Hugo Hinds was President, with Gordon George (Vice President), John Campbell, Jim Healy, Geoff Fish, Eric Bodley (Treasurer) Selwyn Cooper and Jan Gifford on the Council. Hugo had been preceded by Dr Jack Doyle and was succeeded in order by Gordon George, then John Campbell, Dr Allan Pullar, and myself. Membership had reached an ebb that threatened the viability of the Branch but was boosted by vigorous recruiting among scientists at the Forest Research Institute. Nine meetings were held per year, aiming at a broad spread of topics except for a bias towards local scientific research. Rowland was secretary 1969-72; President 1978-80, 1990-8; and councillor almost continuously since 1969.

The Museum was opened in 1970 in the Tudor Towers building, formerly the Government Bathhouse, funded by the City Council which then blocked any further input from the Branch, although the Branch continued to hold its meetings there for some years. The Library project quietly lapsed after a number of years and the books were made over to the Rotorua Public Library. In 1977, at the instigation of then President Alan Pullar, the Branch celebrated its silver jubilee. Around 1980, the Branch shifted its meetings venue to the Forest Research Institute (now Scion), from where it has been largely staffed, and where its regular meetings are held to this day.

In addition to its regular programme of meetings, the Branch staged a number of Public Forums, the topics including Abortion, a proposed Railways' branch line to Rotorua, and Genetic Engineering. Joint meetings have been held with several other organisations, notably the Rotorua Astronomical Society, Rotorua Forest and Bird and Rotorua Botanical Society. Currently, close contact is maintained with U3A.

In 1979 the Branch joined forces with local Kiwanis clubs to organise the first Bay of Plenty schools' Science Fair, taking specific responsibility for organising the judging, a role for the Branch that continued until 2012, although the Branch still maintains some involvement.

In the late 1980s, the Branch effectively went into temporary recess, from which it emerged in 1990.

In 2000 the Branch learned of the plans of the Lakes Water Quality Society (formerly the Lakeweed Control Society) to hold a symposium on "Research Needs for the Rotorua Lakes." Strong backing was offered by the Branch, lending the prestige of the Society's name, with Rowland Burdon sitting on the Organising Committee. The Symposium was a resounding success, leading to Environment Bay of Plenty endowing a Chair of Limnology at Waikato University. Since then Lakes Water Quality Society have been able to stand on their own feet with eight further symposia which have all had high professional standing, while the research programme at Waikato University continues to prosper.

From 1998, presidents have included Robert Franich, Margaret Dick, Jonathan Harrington and Lloyd Donaldson who remains the current president. Membership has declined since 2000 but with recent

support from Royal Society Te Apārangi and the Rotorua Energy Charitable Trust, membership and interest are improving and we are attracting more involvement with younger members. We currently aim for 6 lectures per year although we often exceed that by combining with other groups. Some of these lectures are supported by Royal Society Te Apārangi, notably the Charles Fleming Lecture, and the 10x10 series.

Some past records of the Branch are lodged with the Rotorua Public Library.

Lloyd Donaldson, President