

WOOD, RONALD KARSLAKE STARR (1919 - 2017), botanist

Name: Ronald Karslake Starr Wood
Date of birth: 1919
Date of death: 2017
Spouse: Marjorie Wood (née Schofield)
Child: Richard Wood
Child: Jess Wood
Parent: Percival Thomas Evans Wood
Parent: Florence Dix Wood (née Starr)
Gender: Male
Occupation: botanist
Area of activity: Science and Mathematics; Nature and Agriculture
Author: Lyn Owen

Ronald Wood was born on 8 April 1919 at 10 Union Street, Ferndale in the Rhondda Valley, the son of Percival Thomas Evans Wood (1891-1975), colliery fitter, and his wife Flossie (née Starr, 1893-1989). He attended Ferndale Grammar School, and in 1937 he gained a scholarship to Imperial College London, where he graduated with a first class degree in botany in 1941. A year spent assisting research into diseases in agricultural crops was his first taste of plant pathology, and he also carried out work at the Ministry of Aircraft Production during the war years. In 1945 he was appointed an assistant lecturer at Imperial, gaining his PhD in 1948 for a study of biological control of a soil-borne pathogen. He married Marjorie Schofield (1925-2014) in 1947, and they had a son Richard and a daughter Jess.

Wood remained at Imperial College throughout his career, where he was appointed professor of plant pathology in 1964, but two periods spent in the USA, at the University of California in Berkeley in 1950 and at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station in 1957, were crucial to the development of his research. He pioneered study of the physiology and biochemistry of the interactions between plants and their pathogens, and his work opened the way to modern molecular plant pathology. 'RKS', as he was known to all, was a highly influential supervisor of research students, many of whom went on to become prominent in the field. In 1967 he published a seminal textbook, *Physiological Plant Pathology*. He was one of the founders of the British Federation (later Society) for Plant Pathology, and he was elected president of the International Society for Plant Pathology, having organised its first international congress at Imperial in 1968. He directed three Nato studies into toxins, resistance and specificity in plant diseases. In 1976 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society, and he also received numerous other fellowships and honorary academic positions in several nations including the United States, Germany and Australia. His publications and many international lecture tours gained him a wide reputation as the 'father' of plant pathology.

In personal life he remain an unassuming man of simple tastes, and a lifelong supporter of Welsh rugby. He died of pneumonia on 26 April 2017 at Oakcroft House care home, West Byfleet, Surrey.

Author

Lyn Owen

Sources

The Times obituary 25 May 2017

Simon A. Archer, R.K.S. Wood FRS, 1919-2017, *Food Security: The Science, Sociology and Economics of Food Production and Access to Food*, 9 (2017), 1139-1141

Simon A. Archer, Wood, Ronald Karslake Starr (1919-2017), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*

Further reading

Wikipedia Article: [Ronald Karslake Starr Wood](#)

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