

## HONORARY GRADUATE

### Christopher Frederick Cresswell

Christopher Frederick Cresswell was born in Johannesburg in 1933. After school he commenced his university education at Rhodes University where he completed his Bachelor of Science and Honours degrees in Botany. He completed his Master of Science in the field of plant physiology and, whilst in receipt of a Boots Research Scholarship, read for a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Plant Biochemistry at Bristol University.

During his student days at Rhodes University, Christopher Cresswell showed his potential as a leader. He was involved in student affairs and politics as Chairman of the Students Science Society, a member of the Students Representative Council and Chairman of the local NUSAS committee.

After completing his doctorate in 1961 Cresswell lectured at Kings College, University of London before deciding to return to South Africa to take up a lecturing position in the Department of Botany at the University of the Witwatersrand. His enthusiasm and leadership ability was soon recognised and he was promoted to senior lecturer. During the period 1964 to 1967 he did much to revitalise an ailing and depleted Botany Department which had suffered greatly with the banning of Edward Roux a senior staff member and eventual head of department.

In 1967 Christopher Cresswell was appointed head of the Department of Botany and in 1975 as head of the Department of Botany and Microbiology. Later as Dean of the Faculty of Science, he became the first Dean at the University of the Witwatersrand to be re-elected to a full second term of office.

During his tenure at the University of the Witwatersrand Christopher Cresswell was responsible for a number of major academic developments. In 1972 the Department of Biology became the first school within the Faculty of Science; bringing together under one umbrella all the biological science departments. This union was the early forerunner of the concept of topicalisation, which is now a major development within the faculty. He pioneered the split between the disciplines of Botany and Microbiology, making the latter an independent department. Another major development for which he is responsible was the formation of the School of Science Education.

One of Christopher Cresswell's greatest contributions to the University was undoubtedly his vision in the establishment of the College of Science. His original idea was to establish a Junior College within the Science Faculty. Out of this concept the College of Science grew and developed into a successful venture with an initial grant of five million rand from the Anglo American Chairman's Fund. The College of Science has now been in existence for seven years, catering for students who have academic potential but who because of their deficient schooling, are not able to meet the normal entrance requirements for the Faculty of Science. This concept has now been extended to include students within the Faculty of Engineering, and more recently the Faculty of Health Sciences. The success of this venture can be seen in the number of students graduating this evening who came through the College of Science during the first two years of their degree.

In 1988 Christopher Cresswell was appointed Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-Principal of the Durban campus of the University of Natal. In 1993 he was appointed Principal of the Durban campus, a position he held until his retirement.

Professor Cresswell was not only a successful administrator with remarkable vision but a highly respected researcher whose worth was recognised by his appointment as Director of a joint CSIR/University of the Witwatersrand Photosynthetic Nitrogen Metabolism Unit. He continued as Director of the unit when it was accepted as a Research Unit at the University of Natal.

His ability as a teacher and a researcher has been widely recognised both nationally and internationally. He has held visiting professorial appointments at the University of California at Santa Cruz, Ben Gurion University, Israel, and the University of Cape Town, and was a visiting senior researcher at the John Innes Research Institute in the United Kingdom. He has also served on a number of important committees, the most notable being the Meiring Naude Commission of Enquiry into the position of National Botanic Gardens of South Africa. The findings of this commission had far-reaching implications for botany and resulted in many changes now being implemented by the National Botanical Institute.

Christopher Cresswell has always had a passion for and loyalty to his major discipline, botany. He was a founding member of the South African Association of Botanists, which he served with distinction as a Council member and President. His contributions were recognised by the award to him of the Association's Senior Medal and honorary life membership. A recent issue of the *South African Journal of Botany* was dedicated to him in honour of his services to botany.

He has received many other awards and honours in recognition of his enormous contribution not only to botany but to science in general. Some of the most noteworthy were: his election as a Fellow of the Royal Society of South Africa; the Claude Leon Harris Foundation Award; Fellowship of the University of Natal; the Gold Medal of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science, and an Honorary Doctorate of Science from the University of Natal.

Christopher Cresswell has always been an inspiring lecturer, research worker and supervisor of postgraduate students, many of whom now hold senior positions at universities and in the private sector. He is fondly remembered by all who have worked with him as a person of outstanding integrity. Above all he will be remembered as a caring human being who, despite his busy schedule, would always find time to listen and offer wise counsel and advice to all who sought it.

How fitting it is that, in the year in which it celebrates the seventy-fifth anniversary of its foundation, the University should show its deep appreciation of the dedicated services of Christopher Cresswell to its academic well-being, the advancement of botany, science in general and tertiary education in particular, by conferring on him its highest degree, that of Doctor of Science *honoris causa*.