

Francis (Frank) Duncan O'Flynn QC, BA, LLB, LLM. (1918-2003)

Francis Edward O'Flynn was born on the 24th October, 1918, in Greymouth. He was always known as Frank.

Frank was the eldest child of Frank and Margaret O'Flynn. He had two sisters: Helen Ritchie O'Flynn, born in 1920, and Kathleen Nina O'Flynn, born in 1930.

Frank's early years were in Runanga, on the West Coast where his father was the headmaster of Runanga School. In 1922, when Frank was four years old the family moved to Christchurch so his father could be the Headmaster at Heathcote School, and later, Hornby School.

Subsequently Frank went to Christchurch Normal District High School and Christchurch Boys' High School.



Frank was very close to his sister Helen in age, and they spent a lot of time together until Frank went to Victoria University in Wellington. Frank and Helen loved swimming in the Hornby School's pool and they won many competitions.

Frank and Helen with some of the many cups and trophies they won at swimming.

Frank's father (also known as Frank) was The Hon Francis Edward O'Flynn M.L.C. As well as being a headmaster, Frank's father was influential in the development of the New Zealand Labour Party and its social justice policies. He was appointed to the Legislative Council of New Zealand in 1937 and served in this distinguished role for 5 years.

Frank's mother, Margaret, died in 1937 as the family was preparing to move to Wellington so his father could take up his new appointment to the Legislative Council. Frank was almost 19 years old and had left school at this time.

On leaving school Frank was employed as a clerk by the Education Department in Wellington and attended Victoria University College part-time. In 1939 he became a clerk to the Wellington Labourers' Union Secretary and completed a BA in 1940. His study was interrupted by the Second World War. He joined the RNZAF in 1942, serving in the Pacific and attaining the rank of Flight Lieutenant.

Frank married Sylvia Elizabeth Hefford in 1942 and they had four children: Maeve, Terence, Rosaleen and Brigid.

At the end of the war Frank became a law clerk in the Wellington firm O'Regan and Arndt. He continued to study law and completed an LLB in 1947 and LLM in 1948. He practised in Wellington as a barrister and solicitor until 1968 when he was made a Queen's Counsel and practised as such until 1972.

Frank's father's influence was evident in Frank during his whole life. As one of New Zealand's most prominent QCs Frank was renowned for his advocacy and willingness to take on the establishment of the time. He was the first (and only) lawyer to sue National Prime Minister Sir Robert Muldoon successfully on behalf of a client. Muldoon was forced to pay out \$5,000 for defaming Frank's client Brian Brooks (who later became a Professor of Law at Victoria University).

Frank's reputation as one of New Zealand's leading advocates was enhanced when he represented 126 survivors and families of victims in the Wahine ferry disaster inquiry held in June 1968.

In the 1972 Frank successfully stood as Labour candidate for the Kapiti parliamentary seat, but was defeated in the 1975 election after serving just one term. Frank returned to law and also became editor of the New Zealand Law Reports. In 1978 he stood for Labour in the safe Island Bay seat, where he was successful. He remained in Parliament until 1987.

With the election of Labour to Government in 1984, Frank was appointed to Cabinet and held a number of ministerial posts: Minister of State, Minister of Defence, Minister in charge of War Pensions, Minister in charge of Rehabilitation, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Associate Minister of Overseas Trade and Marketing.

As Minister of Defence Frank was closely involved in developing New Zealand's nuclear-free policy and was required to defend New Zealand's policy against strong criticism from the United States and Australia.

Frank retired from Parliament in 1987 when health issues decided him against standing for re-election. He suffered a stroke – from which he later recovered – and in a sad irony given his reputation as a distinguished orator, his valedictory speech was read to Parliament by Mike Moore. Mr Moore ended with a fitting tribute to Frank O'Flynn QC: "He is learned, he is distinguished, he is gallant and he is honourable".

Frank lived to be 84 years old and died on 18th October 2003.



The New Zealand Law Society's tribute and obituary for Francis (Frank) Duncan O'Flynn QC, BA, LLB, LLM. can be read here: [Rt Hon Francis Duncan O'Flynn:](#)