



The Right Honourable Dame Helen Winkelmann

CHIEF JUSTICE OF NEW ZEALAND | TE TUMU WHAKAWĀ O AOTEAROA

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MEDIA STATEMENT

Chief Justice pays tribute to Anne Gambrill CNZM



Caption: Master Anne Gertrude Shorland Gambrill CNZM (1934 – 2026)
(Photo credit: Nga Tawa Diocesan School)

The Chief Justice, the Rt Hon Dame Helen Winkelmann, today paid tribute on behalf of New Zealand’s judiciary to Master Anne Gertrude Shorland Gambrill CNZM, who passed away on 10 February 2026.

“On behalf of the New Zealand judiciary, I acknowledge Master Anne Gambrill’s service to the judiciary and extend my deepest sympathy to her family. Anne entered the law at a time when women were simply not seen in the senior ranks of the profession. She was one of the first to break that barrier. When she was appointed as a Master of the High Court in 1987 (a

role now known as Associate Judge) she became the first woman to sit as a judicial officer of that court. Anne was exemplary in her discharge of the role: hard working, efficient and legally sound. She helped to establish the role as a permanent and important one within High Court of New Zealand. She was known for her direct manner in court. Counsel could be sure of a fair hearing but equally sure that Anne would be forthright with her constructive criticism, where she considered it due.”

Anne was born in Wellington in 1934, the only child of the Honourable Mr Justice William Perry Shorland and Olive Shorland. Her lifelong dedication to the law began early. While still at school, she took her first steps into the legal world, working as a junior office assistant at Chapman Tripp & Co. She studied at Victoria University of Wellington and the University of Auckland, graduating with her LLB from the latter in 1958.

Anne’s career in the law is properly described as trailblazing. She made history in 1955 as Russell McVeagh’s first female law clerk. She was admitted as a solicitor in 1958 and as a barrister in 1960.

In 1965, she was employed by MH Vautier QC (the future Justice Vautier), practising as a solicitor for five years. In 1970, she moved to Mackay & Gambrill, her husband Christopher’s firm, becoming a partner the following year.

In 1987, Anne became the first woman appointed to sit in the High Court in a judicial capacity when she was one of the first two individuals appointed to the role of Master of the High Court in New Zealand. The role was needed. The stock market crash of 1987 resulted in a dramatic increase in the civil workload of the court. Anne, along with her colleague Master Pat Towle, worked tirelessly to deal with the considerable proportion of that workload that fell to the Masters, particularly within the insolvency jurisdiction of the court.

Following her retirement from the High Court in 2002 she continued, until 2004, to sit from time to time under an Acting Warrant.

Throughout her career, Anne was committed to advancing women in the law. In 1976, she convened the first women’s group of the Auckland District Law Society, which later grew into the Auckland Women Lawyers’ Association. In 1993, she was the High Court representative at the International Women Judges’ Conference, celebrating the centenary of women’s suffrage in New Zealand. In 2016, Anne agreed to participate in the New Zealand Women Judges Oral History project and was able to reflect upon her career of over 50 years in the law. This project is in itself a legacy, providing the first national, publicly accessible record of the lives and careers of New Zealand’s trailblazing women lawyers and judges.

Beyond the courtroom, Anne made significant contributions to the community. She was a founding member of the Zonta Club of Auckland, a committee member of the Laura Fergusson Trust, and Chair of the Auckland Branch of the Samuel Marsden Collegiate Old Girls Association throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

In 2003, Anne was appointed a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit (CNZM) for services as a Master of the High Court.

Anne is survived by her three children, William, Richard and Elizabeth, and five granddaughters.