

## OBITUARY

### RAY JACOBS, M.B.E. — AN APPRECIATION

Few people in New Zealand have given so much pleasure to so many others in the portrayal of birds and their habitats than the late Mr R. J. Jacobs who died in Christchurch on 20 February 1974. The galleries of the Canterbury Museum testify to the talents of a man whose memorial they will continue to be. Whether it be in the Edgar Stead Hall of Birds, the reconstructed streets and shops of colonial Christchurch, the dioramas of whaling in the Southern Ocean and the gold towns of the West Coast, or just the simple but effective backdrops to the Oldman collection of Polynesian artifacts, the skill of Ray Jacobs, lately retired as Senior Preparator of the Canterbury Museum, reveals itself to the visitor at every hand. The Spotted Shags of Bank's Peninsula, the terns on the beach at Okarito, the keas at Arthur's Pass, these, my favourite groups, and others I watched in the making during the years I have enjoyed the friendship and inspiration which one gained from knowing Ray Jacobs. He was above all a modest man but his work will continue to tell of him. In the 1974 New Year's Honours List, issued shortly before his death, Mr Jacobs was created a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire and was invested at his bedside by the Governor-General. This was a recognition not only of his own contributions to ornithology by way of museum techniques but of the significant role of the museum preparator in popular education. But let others who worked more closely with him pay their particular tributes to a quiet and unassuming worker.

E. W. D.

To be a trained taxidermist, a skilled preparator, and an artist at home in the expansive requirements of a mural, is a combination of talents rarely found in one person, but Ray Jacobs was such a one.

With taxidermy as a family tradition he had no need to learn from books. Fidelity to nature was a first requirement and it is doubtful if he ever turned out a specimen that was less than perfect within the limits of the art. When display required accessories he had the modelling skills needed to get exactly what the display required. The biggest challenge of all as he saw it was to ensure that his finished display, whatever the scale, was a mirror of nature, capturing both the mood of the wildlife depicted and the atmosphere of the natural habitat. This meant long hours in the field observing, and a balanced assessment of what was needed and what was possible in a static display. The completion of the many outstanding groups in the New Zealand bird hall of the Canterbury Museum is a tribute not only to his skill, but also to personal qualities of temperament and character. It was a privilege to be associated with Ray Jacobs as a colleague. He was patient with people as well as with his refractory materials,

and gentle in the best sense of the term. One of his most refreshing traits was modesty, and the tributes that are now paid to his distinguished professional career are something that he would not have thought of claiming for himself.

R. A. F.

Ray Jacobs will long be remembered not merely as an outstanding museum display artist and taxidermist, but as one of those few who have been able to incorporate a feeling of their enthusiasm, understanding and sympathy for wildlife into static museum displays. The habitat groups at the Canterbury Museum will long stand as a memorial to this outstanding gift.

R. R. F.

Ray Jacobs was one of the finest taxidermists and display artists that New Zealand has produced, and his long association with Canterbury Museum provided many opportunities for him to show his skill.

Perhaps the most spectacular example of his work is the Stead Hall of New Zealand birds, where, under the direction of Mr E. G. Turbott, he, with the co-operation of Mr Ralph Riccalton, created a display which is the admiration, not only of New Zealanders, but which has won acclaim from visitors from many lands. Ray's work will live long after him.

R. J. S.

Ray Jacobs will always be remembered for his superlative natural history dioramas, and especially for the series in the New Zealand Bird Hall of Canterbury Museum the standard of which has attracted world-wide interest; I worked on the Hall with Ray Jacobs and Ralph Riccalton and remember this as a period of productive and stimulating exchange of ideas and vigorous action. Ray had progressive views on every aspect of Museum work. Perhaps his main characteristics were his vigorous approach to even the most demanding task and his belief in the Museum as an educational and cultural force, both resulting in displays which will long be the pride of the Museum.

E. G. T.



#### Dr R. W. WILLETT, FRSNZ

We record, with great regret, the death on 6 June of Dr R. W. Willett who retired as President of the Royal Society of New Zealand in May of this year shortly after leading the first scientific delegation to visit the People's Republic of China.

Dr Willett, who was 61, was Assistant Director-General of the DSIR and formerly Director of the N.Z. Geological Survey. He was a man of action, of forthright opinion and decision, a leader in both