

OBITUARY

NOEL GLEESON E. D.

1909-1984

Educated at the Auckland Grammar School and the University of Otago where he graduated in Dentistry in 1934, Noel Gleeson worked at the Auckland Hospital before setting up his own practice. On the outbreak of war he volunteered immediately, sailed with the Second Echelon and spent five years overseas, reaching the rank of Major.

A personal diary, now in the library of the Auckland Museum, reflects the thoughts of a gentle and sensitive New Zealander, as he meets a world so different from that in which he had grown up. Stationed in England near Aldershot, he visited and was welcomed by the aged and famous bird-painter, G. E. Lodge. The friendship which ensued meant much to Noel. A discriminating photographer, he pursued his hobby so successfully in Egypt that one of his pictures' "Desert Landscape" won the highest award at a Cairo Art Exhibition.

Back in New Zealand he retained his interest in the R.N.Z.D.C. commanding 1 Mobile Dental Unit from 1950-56 with the rank of Lieut-Colonel. Later he served as President of the R.N.Z.D.C. Association and became its first Honorary Life Member. In the little spare time he allowed himself, he was busy with his cameras seeking especially birds in scenic settings and joining Peter Stein, his former mathematics master, on his trips to Horuhoru, whence some fine portraits of gannets began to appear.

For ornithological patients a visit to his surgery was not all agony. Because Noel loved beautiful things, choice pictures adorned the walls and a Crested Grebe, the work of a master from Copenhagen, caught the eye. A session was likely to begin with a discussion on a new bird book or an examination of the best of his latest photographs.

For many years Noel was a devotee of the Firth of Thames in all its moods, delighting in the tern colonies, the great flocks of waders and the changing light across its wide open spaces. He mastered the art of counteracting the dazzle of the piled shell banks. He could appreciate and capture the subtle hues of an expanse of salt marsh where the uninitiated would see only drabness. On the west coast he loved Bethells where he also did some productive beach combing; and from its start he realised the dramatic possibilities offered by the new gannetry at Muriwai.

The society has lost a loyal member of long standing who read Notornis from cover to cover. To Noel the aesthetic aspect of ornithology appealed strongly. He was generous in his praise of fine photographs taken by others. He died of a lingering sickness which he bore with quiet fortitude, while his mind remained acutely alert for news of events or developments in New Zealand's world of birds.

Throughout he was nursed devotedly by his wife, Joy, to whom the Ornithological Society offers its warmest sympathy.

R. B. S.