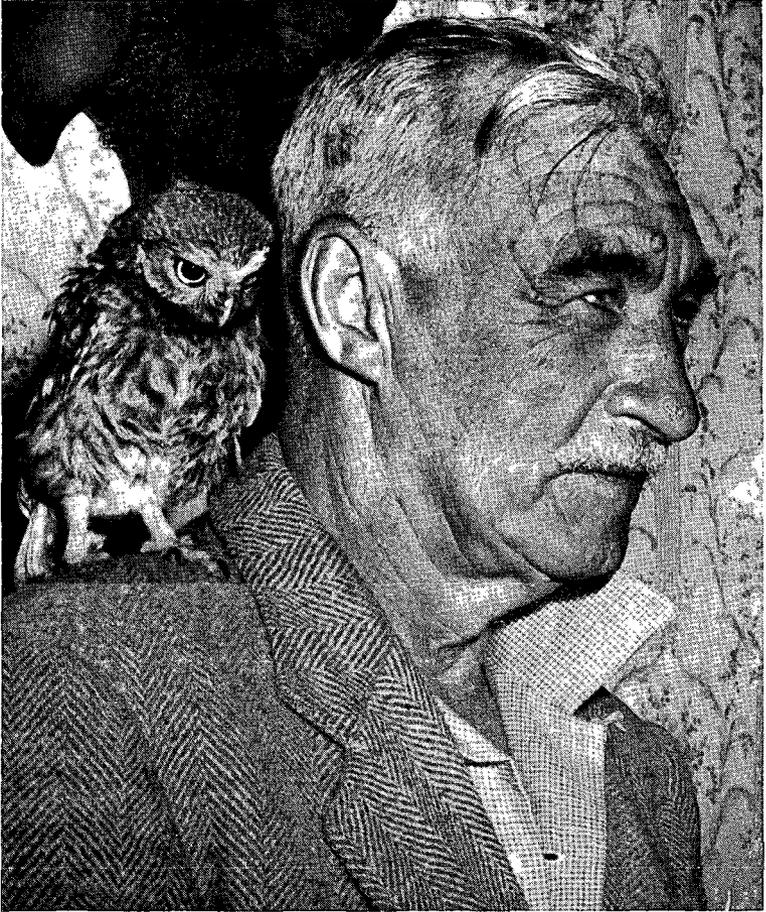


OBITUARY



ALEXANDER THOMSON EDGAR 1900 - 1983

Alexander Thomson Edgar, known to a host of friends throughout New Zealand as Sandy, died on 6 June, and our heartfelt sympathy is extended to his widow Aileen and to the members of his family, Rosemary Nicoreste of Hamilton, Anthony, and Joanna McKegg, both of Auckland.

Sandy was born in Glasgow on 16 September 1900 and was educated in Scotland. At the age of 19 he went to Malaya to manage a rubber plantation, the Suffolk Estate in Perak, where he lived until the Japanese invasion in 1940. During these years, in 1936 he married Aileen Ryan, a visitor to Perak from Hawkes Bay, and his family was all born in Malaya. In 1938 his *Manual of Rubber Planting* was published, which is still known as "the bible of rubber planters," having been rewritten and enlarged in 1960, with a further edition published last year.

Sandy's war service from 1940 to 1945, as an officer in the Malayan Local Forces and later in the Indian Army, included 3½ years as a prisoner of war in Singapore and on the notorious Siam railway, and he suffered from malnutrition as a result. In later years he wrote of this period "Watching birds has been my favourite spare time occupation for sixty years, even as a P.O.W. in Siam, where the birds were good, but the Japanese took away our binoculars, and some slight vitamin deficiency dulled one's eyesight."

Before the Japanese invasion, Sandy was joint founder of the Malayan Nature Society and its first secretary, and he was president in 1952 and subsequently an honorary life member. The Society still flourishes and issues a prestigious journal.

Aileen and the family had safely left Malaya in 1940, and after spending two years in Australia had come to New Zealand; but Sandy returned to Malaya in 1946 to be appointed Planting Advisor to a number of rubber companies, and he finally came to New Zealand in 1959. Throughout all his years in Malaya he was a keen and highly competent observer of the abounding birdlife, and discovered the first ever nests of innumerable species, many of which are described and credited to Sandy in Smythie's *Birds of Borneo*. In 1933 he published a 41-page paper in the *Bulletin of the Raffles Museum* on the nesting of the birds of Perak, and supplied much valuable data to the authors of *The Birds of the Malay Peninsula* (1929-1937), and to Gibson-Hill for his annotated checklist of the birds of Malaya; but he always regretted the destruction of all his valuable records by the Japanese in 1940. At the request of the British Museum of Natural History, he supplied it with the nests and eggs of a number of species, and he contributed substantially to the Raffles Museum in Singapore.

So much for the life history of our well-beloved Sandy during the long years he spent in Malaya. For his services to the Malayan Local Forces he was awarded the MBE in 1939, the ED in 1950, and the OBE in 1953; and for his services to the Malayan rubber industry the JMN in 1960, a high Malayan decoration.

Sandy first became a member of our Society in 1947, while on leave from Malaya, and soon after his arrival in New Zealand in

1959, contributions to classified summarised notes from Titirangi began to arrive; but suburban life had little appeal, and in 1960 Sandy purchased the farm property at Kerikeri. Compact of energy, he immediately began clearing all the gorse from the farm, and Aileen's 'dream house' overlooking the beautiful Kerikeri Inlet was built.

At the same time he continued to contribute extensively to *Notornis*, and was RR for the Far North/Northland Region from 1960 to 1973, in which capacity he encouraged young members and developed the group awareness and initiative of members which have remained characteristic of the region. In 1963 he undertook the massive task of recording and compiling classified summarised notes, and continued with this work until 1977, notwithstanding his willing acceptance in 1962 of the office of honorary secretary to the Society, at my rather tentative suggestion when we were together on an offshore island.

The Society flourished with Sandy at the helm. His regular council circulars kept members of Council fully informed of what was happening in various regions and suggested matters for discussion; and during these years up to 1967 he attended every OSNZ course, from Southland to the Aupori Peninsula. In my recollection Sandy always acted as recorder, later writing up the results for the journal. So his contributions were many, and in addition to years of C.S. Notes and to reports on courses, included articles on the Mercury Islands, the Kermadecs Expedition, Farewell Spit, N.Z. Dotterel, Welcome Swallow, Nankeen Kestrel, and Reef Heron. He regularly studied Parengarenga and Rangauna Harbours, making the movements, numbers, and whereabouts of their birds almost as well known as those of Manukau and Firth of Thames.

Sandy suffered a serious breakdown in health and strength in July 1981, and during his gradual deterioration Aileen undertook the arduous task of nursing him, until our beloved Sandy "goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets."

In conclusion, I can only say *ecco homo* — behold the man!

A. BLACKBURN

[The photograph was taken by Olaf Petersen in the 1960s during the first OSNZ Field Study Course in Southland — Ed.]