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## FAREWELL TO FOUNDATION MEMBERS

**BERTHA ALLISON**

**06 MARCH 1916 – 14 MAY 2010**

Obituary  
"The Press"  
29 May 2010



**"Scholar fully committed in every sphere"**

Bertha Allison was one of Canterbury University's better-known early female academics. She combined a successful career with rich family life and passion for the arts.

As well as teaching, Allison published 30 scientific papers. She advocated for women's rights and believed women should have the opportunity to realise their potential in the true feminist sense. Her commitment to her family of three daughters and five grandchildren was absolute but she was not afraid to go against mainstream opinion.

She was born Frances Nurse. Her father managed the Lakes Station, at Lake Sumner in North Canterbury, so she attended Miss Webb's Preparatory School and then St Margaret's College in Christchurch. She enjoyed the city's educational opportunities and the freedom and richness of the high country. She was an enthusiastic trumper, swimmer and horse rider, excelled academically and in sport and made many friends.

Introduction to Edward Percival, then professor of biology at Canterbury University, through his field work in the Lake Sumner area inspired her interest in wildlife. She enrolled in biology at the university in 1934, graduating BSc in 1938 and MSc (Hons) in 1940. Realising her true focus was zoology, she spent a further year studying additional papers in zoology, winning the Charles Cook Warwick House Memorial Scholarship.

Allison was inspired also by Dr Karl Popper, an international figure in scientific philosophy, who was lecturing at the university. Popper's scientific methodology influenced her research and approach to science throughout her life.

Allison worked as a demonstrator in zoology in 1942 and 1943. She was then "thrown into the deep end" when an assistant lectureship was offered and she became the second member of the zoology teaching staff, alongside Percival. They managed the zoology department until the end of the war. She was then appointed to the permanent staff.

In 1943, she married Russell Allison, a biochemistry graduate with the Wheat Research Institute at Lincoln College. In 1950, she took a year's study leave at Oxford University, studying histology and histo-chemistry.

Allison was acting head of department in 1951 while Percival took sabbatical leave. She was expecting her first child in November, so was glad that Dr Bob Pilgrim returned from London in late August and provided much-needed support.

On the day before her due date, the doctor discovered two heartbeats instead of one. Following the delivery of the twins, Allison marked exam papers while still in hospital.

She continued to work part-time with the help of her mother and a nanny. When the twins were a year old, she parented them on her own for two years while her husband completed a PhD in the United States, living with her mother and relying on her support. After her husband's return, their third child was born. She continued to work part-time until the three children were

at school, when she returned to work fulltime.

In the 1950s era of the homemaker housewife, she was frequently criticised for working. She even remembered one of her children saying: "Why don't you stay home and make us cake the same as other mothers?"

Allison taught at Canterbury for almost four decades. Many students recall her as an inspiring teacher, particularly in field work and research. She always practised Percival's philosophy, that "biology is essentially functional and dynamic. Animals and plants do things in situations, they are alive in their environments and hence there is a need to study them in the field. A biologist must be something of a naturalist who enjoys nature and has a feeling for it."

Allison joined the Australian and British parasitological societies and attended many international conferences. She instigated first an honours, then a third year parasitology course at Canterbury. She published 30 scientific papers between 1945 and 2007 and completed her last paper aged 92.

Her husband died in 1972. She continued to work and travel extensively until retiring in 1980. She then joined her long-term friend and subsequent partner, Dr Lloyd Whitten, teaching at the University of Pertanian in Kuala Lumpur. While teaching histology and embryology to veterinary students, she was responsible for substituting chick embryos for pig embryos, to make the course more acceptable in a Muslim society.

She and Whitten were active in the Malay Nature Society and enjoyed many field trips, including looking for tigers in Tamannegara.

After her full retirement in 1983 she made expeditions to Nepal, Mali, Trinidad and China, always with a naturalist focus. She immersed herself also in painting and print making. She became a volunteer guide at the Robert MacDougall Art Gallery and was a volunteer researcher at the Canterbury Museum.

## BOB PILGRIM

26 AUGUST 1921 - 07 APRIL 2010

**A** flea is tiny, but understanding it could have great significance in disease prevention.

Bob Pilgrim spent many years researching fleas and their larvae. He gained international renown for his work. He had a huge collection of specimens. He had almost completed a new academic paper on fleas when he died suddenly last week, aged 88.

The University of Canterbury Emeritus Professor of Zoology found working on fleas opened new horizons. Most research on the subject had been done by Chinese and Russian scientists. He learned their, and other languages, to a level which enabled him to read old scientific texts.

His colleague, University of Manitoba (Canada) professor of entomology Terry Galloway, says Pilgrim's work is revolutionising the study of fleas worldwide. Galloway is in Christchurch to prepare Pilgrim's final paper for publication.

"The ramifications of his work go around the world," Galloway says.

Pilgrim developed a system enabling first time the identification and classification of flea larvae. His work in this, and related fields, in about 80 published papers, has provided useful material for specialist evolutionary biologists.

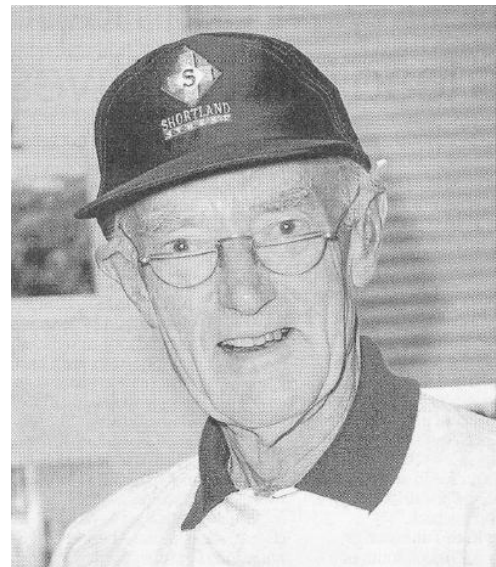
Pilgrim was "very precise" in all he did, Galloway says.

Pilgrim lived all his life in Christchurch. His father's business failed in the Depression and Pilgrim had to leave Christchurch Boys' High School after the sixth form to earn a living. This meant abandoning his dream of being a doctor, for the reality of work with the Department of Agriculture.

Another effect of the Depression was damaged feet from ill-fitting boots. In later years Pilgrim had to have the small toe on each foot amputated. He made a paper-weight from the bones of one toe.

**"Professor dedicated to flea study"**

**Obituary  
"The Press"  
17 April 2010**



The death noticed stated "while working on his flea paper"

He did part-time studies at Canterbury University and graduated BSc in 1943. A keen trumper, he met Joy Davies at Arthurs Pass in 1942 and they married after World War II.

His scientific expertise led to his recruitment to the army's Force General Hospital in New Caledonia, where New Zealand soldiers were being treated for ailments conveyed by tropical bugs. When the hospital was disbanded, he entered Burnham Army Camp. He was scheduled to sail with reinforcements to Italy when he was diverted to experimental work at Ruakura Research Station, near Hamilton.

Canterbury University urged him to return as a junior lecturer after the war. He began lecturing in 1945, then completed doctoral studies, aided by a scholarship, at University College London, from

1948 to 1951. Research for his thesis on nerve cells in crustacea confirmed his path as a physiologist. He later established the physiology department at Canterbury, where he worked his way up to appointment as Professor of Zoology in 1969. He co-ordinated the introduction of biochemistry and biophysics courses.

Scholarships took Pilgrim to the United States, Britain and Italy, for research on crustacea, in the 1950s and 60s. He told The Press in 1962 that those studies were driven by recent findings having "thrown considerable light on difficult medical problems" in humans. Similar possibilities led him to focus on fleas, as the only known carriers of bubonic plague, which was still a problem in some countries.

Pilgrim developed a reputation at Canterbury as an excellent lecturer. He most enjoyed leading groups of students on field trips to Kaikoura, Cass and Banks Peninsula. From these and other trips he developed huge collections of specimens. Galloway says Pilgrim's collection of fleas and flea larvae is "easily the biggest and most diverse in the world", with 10,000 specimens on glass slides and several thousand more in preserving fluid. They come from more than 100 countries and even from the Antarctic.

Pilgrim's unfinished paper on *The External Morphologies of Flea Larvae, With a Critical Review of the Literature*, was his magnum-opus from the time of his retirement in 1983. His wife says he worked on it until late every night, up to his sudden death. Galloway says it will be the starting point for all future scientists studying fleas. In it, Pilgrim has corrected many errors found in previous studies.

Daughter Susan says her father was a modest, retiring man, most at home among "ordinary" people.

His interests ranged broadly, through history, linguistics, Egyptology, classical music, gardening, woodwork, tramping and stamp collecting. He had wide tastes in reading. Wife Joy says he was a handyman, who enjoyed fixing things around the house. He always focused sharply on what he was doing.

Pilgrim's family placed a flea taken from a white-tailed penguin at Lyttelton Harbour's Godley Head, in his coffin. It was taped to a British Museum bookmark, inside the book *Forgotten Scripts* — an account of ancient languages.

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**HENRY TWAALHOVEN**

**28 MAY 1929 – 03 JUN 2010**

Henry was not a current member of the Society but was a Foundation Member having attended the inaugural meeting at Victoria University in 1972.

Henry was a technician in the Parasitology Section at Wallaceville working on the internal parasites of sheep and cattle under Dr Ron Brunsdon leadership. In the late 70's he was transferred to the Hydatids Section where he worked as a technician for Dr Stan Parmeter. Henry was later made redundant during a restructuring.

In recent years Henry lost his short term memory and was resident in the Ferguson Rest Home, Upper Hutt.

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### The Press 10/4/10 Professor dies

>> Internationally renowned Canterbury University parasitologist and flea expert, Professor Bob Pilgrim, died on Wednesday. He was 88. In April 1966 at Sumner beach Pilgrim became only the third person in the world to find a rare New Zealand marine animal akin to sea anemones and jellyfish. He was an expert on flea larvae.

### FROM THE PRESIDENT

The science sector in New Zealand is undergoing some significant changes at the moment (what's new, I hear you ask?). The recent review of the Crown Research Institutes has been broadly welcomed by organisations such as AgResearch, who employ many of our members. One of the biggest changes will be an increase in bulk funding to the CRIs which will enable them to more easily support areas of strategic importance for NZ - and hopefully provide a more stable funding base. It is now up to us to get the message across that there could be few more obvious areas of strategic importance to the New Zealand economy than parasites. There is also a recommendation that CRIs and the universities work more closely together; this can be difficult as the models are so different, but the willingness is obviously there amongst most of the major players in our area. Keep on watching this space - things are happening.

On a personal note, the first of these missives I remember sending finished off with a comment that I was just about to leave for the UK for some decent beer; well, it's that time of year again. Even better, now that the UK economy has gone into meltdown the exchange rate will make it significantly cheaper!

Ian

### QUIZ # 6 ANSWERS

1. *Pilobolus* is implicated in the dispersal of which parasite?  
> *Dictyocaulus* spp. (lungworm)
2. Which human parasite can be half again as long as a mature killer whale?  
> *Diphyllobothrium latum* (tapeworm)
3. With where in the house would you associate *Cimex lectularius*?  
> Bedroom (bed bug)
4. Which actress starred in the 1982 movie 'Parasite'?  
> Demi Moore

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## BOOK REVIEW

### **Keys to the Trematoda, Volume 2**

Editors: A Jones, RA Bray & DI Gibson  
CABI Publishing and The Natural History Museum,  
Wallingford, UK, 2005  
ISBN: 0 85199 587 X. Hardback, 768 pages. £150 (US\$275)

This book is a substantial tome that is the second part of a 3 volume series. Volume 1 covered the Subclass Aspidogastrea and Order Strigeida. This Volume 2 covers the Order Echinostomida and some of those in the Order Plagiorchiida, with keys for their identification at the superfamily, family, subfamily and generic levels. Volume 3 will cover the remaining members of the Order Plagiorchiida.

This volume includes 7 echinostomidan superfamilies [the echinostomatoids, haploporoids, haplospilichnoids, heronimoids, microscaphidioids, paramphistomatoids and pronoccephaloids] and 2 plagiorchiidan superfamilies [the allocreadioids and lepocreadioids].

I seldom work with trematodes, but this volume does involve the families Fasciolidae, Echinostomatidae, Paramphistomatidae and Notocotylidae which are of medical and veterinary importance. Others are of interest to fish parasitologists. The information in the book is well presented, the text and illustrations are clear, it is an invaluable source of knowledge about trematodes.

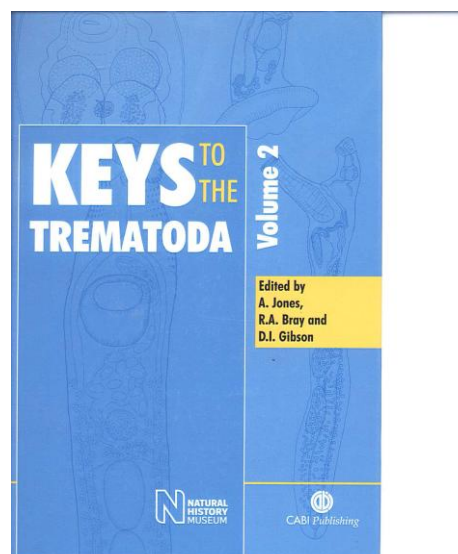
This is a book for the specialist. I imagine that a lot of work went into bringing it together. From a purely parochial point of view it is good to see that Australasian scientists have made significant contributions, notably David Blair who has been a member of the NZSP. Few individuals will buy this book, but since it is likely to be a significant reference for many years into the future it will be a useful resource which should be available in the appropriate libraries.

Paul Mason

## CONFERENCE REVIEW

### **PAN-PACIFIC VETERINARY CONGRESS**

This meeting was held in the Brisbane Convention Centre on South Bank on the 23rd to the 28th May. Delegates included veterinarians, scientists and pharmaceutical company staff - mostly, but not confined to, Australian and New Zealand. Of most relevance to NZSP members was the programme content of the first day and a half which had one of the nine concurrent sessions focused on parasitology. This started off with the presentation of Startec, Pfizer's new combination sheep anthelmintic, closely followed by Dave Leathwick's first talk of the day which examined the advantage of new active families used in combinations. This was followed by a Novartis presentation which introduced Zolvix to the Australian industry. Dave Leathwick then combined with Brown Besier from WA to discuss options for sustainable control of internal parasites. Later in the day, two talks on the issue of anthelmintic resistance in cattle (including a third presentation by Dave Leathwick) stimulated an energetic discussion on topics such as the efficacy of pour-on drenches. On Tuesday morning, Mike Tate (Tate & Matthews Consulting) presented a paper on new technologies for diagnosing anthelmintic and parasite resistance, which covered research largely carried out by AgResearch



scientists. There was significant interest from the Australians present in this talk, particularly around the CarLA Saliva Test, developed by AgResearch with funding from Ovita.

All in all, an enjoyable and stimulating conference, made even better by the location (and the weather).

Ian Sutherland

### **INTERNATIONAL SEA LICE 2010 CONFERENCE – VICTORIA, B.C., CANADA**

In attendance at the International Sea Lice 2010 conference in Victoria, BC Canada (09 – 12 May) was Barry Hosking. Barry noted that one of the guest speakers was Robert Poulin. His plenary session presentation was "Evolution of sea lice in salmon farms". Barry managed to obtain a photo of Robert in action....



### **UPCOMING CONFERENCES**

#### **ICOPA XII**

15–20 August 2010, Melbourne [<http://www.icopaxii.org>]

#### **NZSP CONFERENCE 2010**

The dates and venue have been set with registration and abstracts to be called for in late July / early August.

**Date:** 28 & 29 October (1½ days)  
**Venue:** ICLT, Massey University  
**Conference Dinner:** 28 October at the Travelodge Hotel

**Accommodation:** a reduced rate will be available at the Travelodge Hotel.

**Next Newsletter:** August 2010

Please send news items, notices etc. to  
Tania

Email: [tania.waghorn@agresearch.co.nz](mailto:tania.waghorn@agresearch.co.nz)

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