

OBITUARY

John Henry Warcup 1921–1998

Jack Warcup died on 15 May 1998 having become one of the world's most highly respected mycologists. His work attracted attention from the first, many papers being landmarks in their fields. His contribution was recognised in 1996 when he was made a British Mycological Society Centenary Fellow. He was Patron of the Australasian Mycological Society.

Jack was unpretentious and unassuming, an excellent speaker, an effective teacher, and a scholarly writer. He immersed himself in the world of soil fungi which he knew better than most. One past postgraduate believes his study was not work or a hobby, but an extension of himself. He was greatly appreciated by his post-graduates in whom he inspired loyalty, respect and affection.

Born in Auckland, Jack attended Waltham Primary School, won a bursary to Christ's College Canterbury (NZ), then a scholarship to University. From 1940 to 1942, he gained a BSc from Canterbury University College, and during 1943 to 1944, a first class Masters degree from Wellington University College, both part of the University of New Zealand. In 1944, he won one of only two post-graduate scholarships in science awarded by his university. Then, because PhD training was not available in New Zealand he went to Cambridge Botany Department where in 1949 he gained his PhD for investigating the distribution of fungi through soil profiles at Lackenheath Warren. His supervisors were Professor F.T. Brooks and Dr. Allan Burgess. He remained in Botany on staff of the UK Forestry Commission until 1951 when he accepted the post of senior microbiologist in the Department of Plant Pathology at the Waite Agricultural Research Institute where he remained until he retired in 1986.

From his first publication, his research attracted international respect. It formed a continuous and fascinating story of soil basidiomycetes and their ecology. He was technically excellent. He could take a crumb of soil, disperse it in water and, under a binocular microscope, select pieces of hyphae which he grew on agar, succeeding where others failed. He took washed orchid stolons, popped individual mycorrhizal coils from single cortical cells



and transferred them to media on which they usually grew. His acute observation, dexterity, patience and ability to grow fungi, his enormous insight into the nature of fungi and their relationships with their hosts, combined with his knowledge of the literature and his intellect, made him one of the most effective mycologists of his day who has left a highly valued legacy. Jack was self effacing. He was not ambitious for himself in career or material terms, only in wanting to learn about his science. He was confident of what he knew and what he did not! He was an iconoclast, not always popular for upsetting well established theories. He was a loyal friend and a power of strength where confidence and guidance were needed.

He seldom showed emotion other than a twinkle in his eye when amused or pleased. He was always available to students and colleagues, he enjoyed company and he and Margaret warmly welcomed visitors. His friends, his home, his dogs and his family were all important to him.

He is survived by Sue and Cathy, John and Andrew, his daughter-in-law and two grand children to whom we extend our sympathy.

D.G. Parbery