

P. T. Jenkins 1927–2006

“What grandpa didn’t know. . . wasn’t worth knowing.”

This quote from a grandchild in the order of service for the celebration of Peter Jenkins’ life, held at St Bede’s Parish church on 23 November 2006, was also an apt description of Peter’s breadth of knowledge as a professional plant pathologist.

Peter Thomas Jenkins died on 17 November 2006, aged 79 years. He graduated in Agricultural Science from Melbourne University soon after the end of the Second World War and joined the Victorian Department of Agriculture on 7 February 1949 at the Plant Research Laboratory (later known as the Plant Research Institute) at Burnley. Here he worked, initially with Eileen Fisher, on fungal diseases of fruit crops, under the Chief Biologist of the institute, Stan Fish.

Early publications reported trials on the control of summer spot of pears and on apricot diseases, as well as extension notes on *Armillaria* and crown gall. Later work focussed on the biology and control of brown rot of stone fruit, precipitated by massive crop losses in previous years throughout the stone fruit areas of south-eastern Australia. This work, which was part of a national program, yielded a number of publications on the *Sclerotinia* (*Monilinia*) pathogens including heat therapy to control losses in canning peaches, quiescent infection, conidial dispersal and detection of *Sclerotinia laxa* for the first time in Australia.

Spore trapping work also extended to black spot of apple and pear, and his knowledge and application of aerobiology extended to pollination studies with Don Langridge on a range of fruit crops. Work on strawberries followed in cooperation with nematology colleagues at Burnley, demonstrating for the first time an interaction between root-rot nematode and *Verticillium*. Grey mould on strawberries was also examined and soil management treatments (mulching) as well as fungicides were shown to be important in reducing disease. Studies on selective fungicides demonstrated the importance of the host-plant microflora in suppressing potential pathogens. Early studies on antagonistic bacteria against the brown rot pathogen were also documented (and cited decades later by US workers studying the biocontrol of brown rot).

Peter was awarded his Masters degree in Agricultural Science in 1970, based on his extensive research on brown rot of stone fruit. He was always full of ideas and he was also keen to encourage staff to develop these and other topics as profitable areas of research. He developed strong networks and close links with pathologists and others both within Australia (e.g. Maurice Carter at the Waite Institute) and overseas (e.g. John Gilpatrick at Cornell, in the USA, and fruit pathology researchers at East Malling and Long Ashton in the UK). His work extended from airborne pathogens of fruit to Phytophthora root rots on stone fruit, apples and ornamentals, pathogens



in the mushroom industry and biocontrol studies with CSIRO on skeleton weed. Disease forecasting and fungicide mode of action were other areas which occupied Peter’s fertile mind and contacts such as Tony Powell at the Bureau of Meteorology enabled the establishment of brown rot warnings for stone fruit growers. He brought a range of new techniques and equipment to Burnley, most notably the volumetric and other suction traps, including the Hirst and Burkard spore traps and the Anderson sampler.

Peter was a generalist who worked on a broad range of research topics, only some of which are outlined above. He was well respected by industry for the practical outcomes of his work. His peers also respected his ideas, knowledge and advice on a range of topics, including his support for the mighty Swans football club. He had a deep interest in the library resources of the institute and showed a very far-sighted concern for his staff and their careers. More than one of his team can thank him for the opportunity and encouragement to develop their careers through further studies or changes in job direction.

Peter became Principal Plant Pathologist in 1975–76 and he retired from the Department as Director of the Plant Research Institute, Burnley, in July 1986. He subsequently engaged in a number of consultancies but soon found more and more time for his family, friends and interests such as golf, his church and French language studies. Peter proudly attended the centenary of the School of Agriculture at the University of Melbourne in April 2006 in Ormond College Hall. His great sense of humour was epitomised by his resounding laugh which was always discernable even in a crowded room. He was well known for his infallible filing system – the pile method – and cleaners knew well that to disturb the mountains of papers, letters, files and notebooks in his office would cause hours of anguish, as he sought out that elusive article. He always had a friendly greeting for staff and others around the institute. He was ‘the full bottle’ and ‘scone hot’ in his chosen field (two of his favourite descriptions of work colleagues). We extend our sympathies to his family and friends. We will all miss him.

*Bill Washington, Ian Pascoe, Peter Merriman
and Frank Greenhalgh*