

OBITUARY
Gilbert Robert Rose
1927 - 2022
Aged 94

I first met Gilbert at the beginning of 1966, when as a callow youth, I and five other raw recruits started as trainee medical laboratory technologists at the Pathology Department, Christchurch Hospital. This first year was all a bit overwhelming and daunting as we learned to understand what was expected of us but our rotation through the Microbiology laboratory quickly became an enjoyable and popular place to be, helped in no small part by the Charge Technologist, Gilbert Rose's amiable and systematic approach to the teaching and development of his acolytes; and which had me specialising and working in this discipline for the next 45 years.

Gilbert commenced as a trainee at the Pathology Dept in 1947 and had a less than auspicious start to his career. Mortuary work was part of the rotational training of the time and it would be fair to say that Health and Safety procedures back then were not as robust as they are today as he contracted tuberculosis when assisting at an autopsy. As this was just prior the introduction of Streptomycin and Isoniazid, the management of Tb at the time was thoracoplasty, a surgical procedure where the affected lung is collapsed and ventilation is impaired, thereby reducing oxygen levels and inhibiting the growth of the oxygen-dependent tubercle bacillus. This was followed by total bed rest for more than a year in the Sanatorium on Cashmere Hill. This now outmoded treatment was, however, successful and another happy outcome of this enforced confinement was where he met Beth, his wife to be.

He went on to qualify with the Certificate of Proficiency in Hospital Laboratory Practice in 1954 and progressed to become Charge Technologist in Microbiology. At a time when rapid diagnostics, minaturisation and automation were starting to be actively developed, Gilbert was awarded the 1976 Wellcome Trust Fund Travel Award which allowed him to travel to Cambridge, England to attend the 2nd International Conference on Rapid Methods and Automation and visit various UK laboratories. He was particularly interested in laboratory computerisation and automated techniques and returned with a vision and direction that was to stand the laboratory in excellent stead for many years to come.

During his tenure he was also co-opted with other responsibilities including the development of new virological and Public Health Laboratory Services, the planning of the new Pathology Laboratories, was Chair of Pathology Services Laboratory Committee, Chair of Allied Health Professions, part time tutor and hospital liaison officer at Christchurch Polytechnic, examiner and moderator for Medical Laboratory Practice Microbiology examinations, an assessor for TELARC (forerunner of IANZ for medical laboratories), was involved in the assessment of and recommendations for re-organisation of small laboratories in the South Island, was on the organising committees for various laboratory conferences and served on the Hospital Service Welfare Society for 15 years. He was also one time Editor for the Institute Journal (when it was then called *Journal of the NZ Association of Bacteriologists*) and was a Life Member of the NZIMLS.

After serving 38 years at the Christchurch Hospital Pathology Dept he retired in 1985 but was not about to spend the rest of his days gardening (which, incidentally, he only did under sufferance!) or playing bowls. Instead he signed up for three years at the Tari Research Unit, PNG where he established a microbiology laboratory for acute respiratory infections (ARI) and assisted with routine work at Tari Hospital. Between 1989 and 1991 he was Tutor Co-ordinator at the Pacific Paramedical Training Centre (now Pacific Pathology Training Centre) in Wellington and up until 1995 undertook short term consultancies for ARI laboratory methods, QC procedures or basic laboratory techniques, visiting Samoa, Fiji, Vanuatu, Cook Islands, Tonga, Lao and Port Moresby and Goroka, PNG.

He then joined Volunteer Service Abroad for two assignments; one was for 15 months as Charge Technologist to a hospital laboratory in Kokopo (East New Britain Province, PNG) the other in Quy Nhon, Viet Nam where, under the auspices of the NZ-Viet Nam Health Trust he spent six months preparing their laboratory for an ISO accreditation which back in 2002 was very much in its infancy.

Gilbert was also on the board of the Pacific Leprosy Foundation for five years.

Away from the laboratory his interests were listening to music, particularly classical and jazz, he was an avid reader of most genre and dabbled eclectically with pursuits such as fishing, photography, spinning and dyeing and calligraphy. He loved travel which, apart from his working trips, included Japan, Europe, Australia on many occasions and India; and he enjoyed a good syrah or aromatic white, single malts and ethnic foods.

Gilbert was an outstanding mentor and it was a privilege to have known and worked with him for twenty years. He was a very unassuming person - avoiding any limelight. Always calm, pragmatic and unflappable, he was diplomatic, non judgemental, highly respected by all throughout the NZ medical laboratory scene and his door was always open to anyone seeking advice or direction. An excellent Chair at meetings, he was very good at negotiating pathways and outcomes, often dealing with some very difficult to please people. Working in PNG, the Pacific Islands and SE Asia gave him particular satisfaction as he enjoyed the teaching of "real microbiology", the un rushed life styles and immersing himself in the cultures of his students.

Gilbert was widowed in 1982 and is survived by his daughters, Mary, Alison and Jill, son Graeme, six grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

Compiled by Graeme Paltridge

Sources: Mary and Jill, Peter Skidmore and Marilyn Eales.

