

obituary

John W. Lyttelton, plant biochemist at the Applied Biochemistry Division, Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, Palmerston North, New Zealand died unexpectedly on May 30 at the age of 55.

A graduate from Auckland University (M.Sc., 1942) and Lister Institute, London (Ph.D., 1951) he was internationally known for his identification of fraction 1 leaf protein as ribulose carboxylase in the Calvin C4 photosynthetic pathway. Other achievements were his isolation of ribosomes from spinach chloroplasts and studies on plant saliva proteins as factors in cattle bloat. His contribution to New Zealand science ranged widely and included being organiser of Quantitative Biology meetings, Chairman of the New Zealand Biochemical Society, and Member of the National Committee of Biochemistry and Biophysics. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand in 1967.

Sir Eric Thompson, KBE, FBA, the world's leading authority on Ancient Mayan civilisations, has died in Cambridge at the age of 76.

After leaving Winchester College to serve in the army (under age) during World War I, he worked as a *gaucho* on a cattle ranch in South America. His interests in the civilisations there, particularly the Maya, led him to study under A. C. Haddon at Cambridge in 1924. He later went to work for Sylvanus T. Morley on the Carnegie Institute of Washington's major project of research and restoration at the great Mayan site of Chichén Itzá in Mexico. From 1926–35, he was on the staff of the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, during which time he carried out most of his purely archeological fieldwork. In 1927 he was seconded to the British Museum Expedition to British Honduras (now Belize), which was excavating at Lubaantum under the direction of T. A. Joyce. Fierce rivalry arose between the two men, but Thompson's conclusions were nevertheless published in the official report (together with comments from Joyce). At this time Thompson had discovered the important Mayan site of Busilha, near Lubaantum. He continued his researches by leading a number of other Field Museum expeditions to British Honduras, in the Cayo District and at San José, choosing a

smaller site in the hope that it might better reflect the nature of Mayan culture. From present-day Mayan descendants he was to cull an enormous amount of anthropological information about agricultural and religious practices and folklore, documenting the persistence of Pre-Columbian beliefs in a predominantly Catholic Society. By extrapolating backwards he hoped to illuminate the extremely fragmentary archeological record, and in fact threw much light on Mayan deities and the role of cacao and tobacco in ritual and commerce. Thompson joined the Carnegie Institution of Washington in 1935 and remained there until he retired in 1958. Under their auspices, he devoted much of his time to the decipherment of Mayan hieroglyphs, found on the numerous stone stelae at many sites, and comprising the most sophisticated means of recording and communication ever developed in the Ancient Americas.

One of his earliest achievements was to calculate the correlation, generally known as the Thompson Correlation, between the Mayan and Christian Calendars, which enables eleven events in the history of her civilisation to be precisely placed in time.

His monograph, *Maya Hieroglyphic Writing*, and his concordance, *A Catalogue of Maya Hieroglyphs*, will be essential reading for all future investigations. In 1972, he published a commentary on the earliest and most important of the three surviving Mayan manuscripts, the Dresden Codex. These were to comprise only a small part of a rich stream of deductive writing. In 1941 he was made Professor of the Museo Nacional de Mexico and in 1953 a consultant of the Centro de Investigaciones Antropológicas Mexicanas. On retiring to England he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1959, and recently received a KBE. The Mexican government presented him with the Sahagun Medal in 1972.

Paul Lassenius Kramp, who died on July 13, in his 89th year, was the world's foremost authority on the cnidarian class Hydromedusae. His interest in marine biology was aroused while he was a student at Copenhagen University by three cruises on the 'Thor', and he used the wide practical experience that he had gained in sub-

sequent cruises.

His association with the University Museum of Zoology started in 1908, and when he retired in 1957 he was the chief curator of invertebrates. Apart from two early works (on chaetognaths, and fish eggs and young) practically all his work was devoted to hydroids and medusae. He published the classic work *The Hydromedusae of the Danish Waters* in 1927, where he pointed out the value of medusae as indicators of hydrographical conditions.

After a busy career, he published in his retirement three works which now form a necessary foundation for all engaged in this branch of science. These are *The Hydromedusae of the Atlantic Ocean and Adjacent Waters*, *Synopsis of the Medusae of the World*, and *The Hydromedusae of the Pacific and Indian Oceans*.

Professor **Erich Baer**, who died on September 23, aged 74, received his education in Germany. After his Ph.D. and further research in Berlin, he moved, first to Switzerland (in 1932) and then to Canada (in 1937). He stayed in the University of Toronto for the rest of his career, in the Chemistry Department initially, and then in the Banting and Best Department of Medical Research, where he was appointed professor in 1951. Among his many honours he gained the Chemical Institute of Canada medal in 1962, and the American Oil Chemists Society Award in 1964.

In his very active career, he published more than 150 papers in three main areas of research. His first success was the isolation of optically active 3-carbon compounds (particularly well-known is the 'Fischer-Baer' ester). Starting from these compounds he went on to synthesise phospholipids. For thirty years he worked in this field, developing elegant techniques for the synthesis of compounds of precisely known structure. Finally, he devoted the last ten years of his life to the synthesis of even more complex compounds—the phospholipids.

The availability of these synthetic compounds of precisely determined form was of immense assistance to biologists; the study of glucose and phospholipid metabolism were both greatly advanced by his work, as was the study of the role that phospholipids play in cell membranes and blood clotting.