



PETER RANBY (1926-2012)

Peter Ranby was a larger-than-life figure who served as Secretary of the Polynesian Society for 18 years, and a further two years as a Council member. He succeeded Bernie Kernot as Secretary in 1973, when the Society's offices were still in Wellington, and remained Secretary after the office's relocation to Auckland in 1980, serving until 1991.

Peter was a foundation student at Ardmore Teachers College, and went on to a career as an outstanding teacher at schools in the Waikato and Auckland. In the 1950s he worked through his BA part-time, and went on to complete a Masters degree in Anthropology in the 1960s. It was during this time that he became part of the team organised by Professor Bruce Biggs to work on his Polynesian lexicographical database (POLLEX). Peter was one of the researchers who contributed to the first published version of POLLEX (Walsh and Biggs 1966). He did fieldwork on the Nanumea dialect of the Tūvalu language, working with seamen and other people from Nanumea who were resident in Auckland and Mālua, Western Samoa. His description of Nanumea syntax constituted his MA thesis (1973), and his lexicographical work was incorporated in his *Nanumea Lexicon* (1980) in which he provided an etymology for every new word, thus also providing material for many new reconstructions.

Peter spent several years as a Research Officer with the Te Wāhanga Kaupapa Māori (Māori Research Unit) of the New Zealand Council for Educational Research, and played an important role in organising and supervising the fieldwork for the Survey of Language Use in Māori Households and Communities (1973-79), which provided the background data for many subsequent initiatives, including the establishment of Kōhanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa Māori. I had the privilege, as Head of the Māori Research Unit, of working with Peter at this time, and our families spent many weeks together helping with the fieldwork throughout the North Island.

Peter's warm and outgoing personality and breadth of interests attracted a wide circle of friends. In Wellington Peter was at the centre of a group which met at the Abel Tasman Hotel after work on a Friday; they included his NZCER colleague the poet Alistair Campbell, poets Peter Bland and Lauris Edmond, novelist and NZ Listener editor Ian Cross, along with several Tuvaluans, whom Peter knew from his thesis days and who were resident in Wellington to study for their First Mate and Master's seagoing qualifications. Peter blended the two groups, along with visitors to the office whom he persuaded to join them, everyone conversing together.

In the 1980s he returned to Auckland and for some years was a part-time lecturer at the University of Auckland, teaching the course in Comparative Polynesian Linguistics. He was an active member of a group including Professor Bruce Biggs and his colleagues Andrew Pawley and Ross Clark who worked enthusiastically on enlarging and improving the POLLEX database. The 61 reconstructions marked (Rby) in the current on-line version of POLLEX are evidence of his substantial contribution to this work. It was during this period too that an exchange of papers between Peter and Bruce highlighting the complex phonological history of the Anuta language was published in *Te Reo* (Biggs 1980, Ranby 1982). In Auckland Peter also maintained his extensive social links; Andrew Pawley (pers. comm.) recalls "an evening party in the Anthropology Department common room when Peter brought a bunch of Tuvaluan and Samoan mates along and there was singing and conviviality", and several speakers at his funeral noted Peter's love of conversation and his wide range of friends—farmers, artists, writers, factory workers, academics, sailors and school teachers—whom he effortlessly brought together.

Following the death of his wife, Sharon, about a year ago, Peter lived in retirement in Howick. He is survived by his children, Michael, John and Frances, and by his granddaughter Claire, to whom, on behalf of the Council and Officers of the Society, I extend sympathy on their loss.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Richard Benton

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