

Ralph Gerard Ward

Emeritus Professor Ralph Gerard Ward is one of The University of Auckland's most distinguished geography graduates. Fifty years ago, in 1953, Gerard Ward graduated with a BA in Geography at this university. Three years later, with one of the first Masters degrees awarded in the Auckland department, he was appointed to a lectureship and "catapulted into the field of Pacific Island studies".

I will not try and summarize Gerard Ward's outstanding contribution to scholarship in the Pacific. John Overton and I have attempted this in a special issue of *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* on the occasion of Gerard's retirement from the Department of Human Geography at the Australian National University in 1998 (Bedford and Overton, 1999). I simply want to touch here on a few highlights in the illustrious career of "the quintessential Pacific geographer". – someone who is at "home" on both sides of the Tasman, as well as in many of the islands of Oceania.

Following completion of a PhD at University College, London, Gerard became the Foundation Professor of Geography at the University of Papua New Guinea at the ripe old age of 33 years. Four years later, in 1971, he was elected to Fellowship of the Australian Academy of Social Sciences – the first New Zealand geographer to receive this honour. In the same year he was appointed to the Chair of Human Geography in the Research School of Pacific Studies (as it was known then) at the ANU.

During the 31 years he was Professor, Head of Department and, for many years, Director of the Research School of Pacific Studies, he published extensively on many aspects of Pacific geography, demography, prehistory, history and contemporary development (see Bedford and Overton, 1999 for a full list of publications to that date). He also made an outstanding contribution to the governance of three Pacific Universities, serving at various times on the Councils of the University of Papua New Guinea, the Université Française du Pacifique, and the National University of Samoa. During the time he was at ANU he also participated in the academic reviews of 25 Departments, including the recent review of Environmental Studies at the University of Auckland. On the international scene, Gerard has been a major player in the Pacific Science Association for 35 years, serving as its President from 1999-2003. He also served for several years on the Australian National Commission for UNESCO, chairing its Advisory Committee on Pacific Island Cultures.

Through all this Australian, Pacific and international work, Gerard never forgot his roots. His Masters thesis was on land development around Taupo – an area with which he has close family connections. His first refereed

publications are on Taupo – Maori settlement, land development and land tenure. One of his current research projects is a book of recollections of "Journeys to Taupo" reconstructions of the pathways and passages people over the generations have had to the Central North Island. Gerard has a fascination with connections between place, mobility, transport, communications. His latest book, a best seller by all accounts, is entitled *And then the Engines Stopped Flying in Papua New Guinea*.

Colleagues, it gives me great pleasure to invite R. Gerard Ward to accept the "New Zealand Distinguished Geographer" medal – the highest honour the Society can award.

Reference

Bedford, R.D. and Overton, J.D. 1999: R. Gerard Ward: Quintessential Pacific Geographer, *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 40(2), 111-35.