

# Maverick The Press 27.5.06 unafraid of controversy

Richard Thompson left school early because he did not fit the mould of sports-mad Kiwi and sabre-rattling patriot.

As his daughter, Susan, says, he remained a "maverick" all his life.

He began university studies at 16 and was a lecturer from 22 until ill-health forced his retirement at 62.

Pacifist, peacemaker and protester against racism, Thompson died in Christchurch two weeks ago. He was 81.

Born in London, he moved to New Zealand with his family as a child. Experience of World War 1 had influenced his parents against war and they migrated for a better life, far from nationalistic strife.

Thompson inherited a strong moral conscience from his parents and took it with him to Christ's College, as a student from 1938 to 1941.

He found the accent on sport and military cadets there difficult to handle. His parents were not well-off and paying college fees was a considerable sacrifice, so he left early.

He went straight to Canterbury University but was called up for army service in 1943. He appealed against conscription on pacifist grounds and was directed to work on a Christchurch market garden. He did this while completing his MA degree.

After graduating in 1945, he took an assistant lecturer position at Otago University, teaching psychology.

Returning to Canterbury University in 1947, he began a 40-year lecturing career.

He taught mainly social psychology, at first. His lectures contained considerable sociological content and, as the university had no sociology department, he was asked, in 1958, to extend this focus.

In 1963 he was appointed to teach sociology, which led to the establishment of the discipline at the university.

Thompson specialised in the sociology of religions, race relations and ethnicity, and in community organisation and social problems.

His interest in race issues led to his appointment as counsellor to overseas students at Canterbury University from the early 1950s. This began when the first Ceylonese students arrived under the Colombo Plan (a Government aid programme) and was extended later to all foreign students.

He was concerned for New Zealand race relations and promoted a better deal for Maori.

Thompson was a dedicated Anglican all his life and active in the Quakers in recent years. He was a founder-member of, office holder and long-time activist in, the Citizens' Association for Racial Equality (Care). He was prominent in Christian Pacifists. He served four terms on the Heathcote County Council.

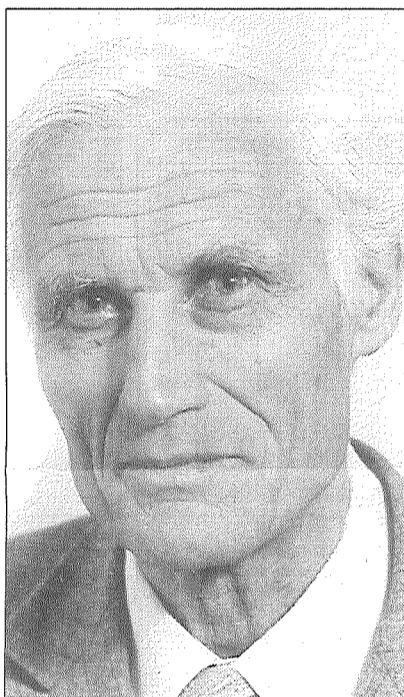
His wife, Jennifer, whom he married in 1953, said Thompson was "intense and passionate" in his beliefs.

"He was a workhorse. He researched and wrote a lot. He burned the midnight oil. He was his own man; he was nobody's 'yes man'. He was a man of humility," she said.

He edited Christian Pacifist newsletter The Peacemaker for many years, up to 2002. Fellow pacifist Jack Rogers says Thompson was "a man of quiet wisdom" who had broad and scholarly knowledge but could speak in the simplest terms.

"He never made a show. He was humble and modest. He was also compassionate and generous," Rogers says.

His parents had kept "open-house" for conscientious objectors during



**Richard Thompson**

World War 2 and Rogers thinks Thompson picked up his interest and sympathies there.

Daughter Susan says Thompson's teaching style of using current issues to challenge students and prompt exploration and debate concerned some university people. He did not care about being controversial.

His wife says Thompson had thought he was destined for a career in church ministry and was glad he had slipped into university life, with its more liberal environment and the opportunity to research and discuss ideas.

His activism began with Care and a protest at Christchurch International Airport when the 1965 South African rugby team arrived.

He continued to protest, including during the 1981 Springbok tour, although not as part of the aggressive demonstrations.

He became friendly with South African anti-apartheid figures Dennis Brutus (whom he hosted on a tour of New Zealand) and Precious McKenzie.

Thompson's involvement in the Hillsborough Residents' Association led to a suggestion that he stand for the Heathcote County Council. He was elected in 1968 and remained on the council until standing down in 1980. He was the council's representative on the Regional Planning Authority for half that time and the Canterbury Museum Trust Board for three years.

He was on the Cashmere High School board of governors for nine years, the last two as chairman.

Daughter Susan says her father personally maintained a two-storey house and expansive hillside section for many years.

While he read voraciously (including personal devotional reading) and drove himself to research and write, he still made time for family.

He read to his children every night, most memorably from C. S. Lewis's Narnia series and A. A. Milne's Winnie the Pooh.

He set the children high standards and encouraged their efforts, especially in music, which was a great love of his.

—Mike Crean

● Richard Hubert Thurlow Thompson, born London, October 9, 1924; died Christchurch, May 9, 2006. Survived by wife Jennifer (nee Wood), daughters Jane, Susan, Sara, Rachel and Bridget, sons Jeremy and Tim, and 11 grandchildren.