

In November, 1919, the Shaw Savill steamer 'Kia Ora' arrived at New Plymouth. She was only the fourteenth 'home liner' to come since March 1917 and such arrivals created public interest. Equally interested in what he was seeing was the Kia Ora's wireless operator, Bernard Aris, born at Wallington, Surrey. What he saw changed his life for the next 58 years.

Ever a restless spirit, he had tried banking as his father wished, but looked for a challenge that might satisfy him. He loved the sea and seafaring, despite being torpedoed twice during the war. His mother, who died when he was six, bequeathed him a love of art and an ability to record his environment. In Taranaki mountain, bush, sea and nature combined to hold him. His wanderings ended.

Life ashore never came easy for Bernard. From 1922 when he worked on North Egmont tracks and in the Okato region as a farm labourer, the mountain dominated his eye and drew him to his sketching board. In New Plymouth later he explored art's many-sided media - line-work, water-colour, etching, oils. Men at work in an engineering shop or at breakwater construction alike challenged him.

Fame as the outstanding recorder of the mountain kept him busy but he was never one to place a high value on the stream of paintings that came from his humble cottage. Egmonts by Aris travelled far, from the office of a Prime Minister to homes of world tourists, but their very number brought an aloofness from art critics.

This exhibition in its wide range explains why one of the leading artists in Taranaki today honours Bernard Aris as the 'old master'. It explains also why in 1972 at the age of 85 he was given the unique distinction of the Freedom of the City of New Plymouth.

A B Scanlan

Historian, New Plymouth

This selection of works by Bernard Aris is intended to demonstrate the ability and versatility of Aris, the artist.

It is, perhaps, unfortunate that Aris' considerable artistic talents have tended to be subjugated by the 'assembly line' works of his later years.

There have, however, been few who can, apparently so effortlessly, capture the often transient moods of Taranaki - the bright detail of early morning or the hazy distance of midsummer noon.

This exhibition unashamedly concentrates on two of Bernard Aris' loves - the mountain and the sea. It is in these two fields that his ability truly manifests itself. It is also unusual in that many of the works are preliminary sketches, not finished works. It is from these sketches that the viewer can gain the measure of the man. They record landscape through the eyes and mind of the artist refreshingly unfettered by the requirements of the purchasing public.

Taranaki's mountain and its exposed western coasts have now inspired a new generation of artists including, among others, Michael Smither and Peter Lambert. Their works may differ in style from those on display, but they in their own way capture the essence of Taranaki.

R E Lambert

Director, Taranaki Museum



BERNARD FORD ARIS CHRONOLOGY

- 1887** Born in Surrey, England.
- 1904** Began work in British bank.
- 1908** Came to New Zealand for health reasons.
- 1910** Observed Halley's Comet, East Coast N.Z.
- 1914** Trained as wireless operator (England).
- 1915** War service with Merchant Navy.
- 1919** First visit to New Plymouth Port.
- 1922** Returned to live in Taranaki.
- 1920** Returned to staff of North Egmont Hostel. Worked on illustrations for botanical book of Mt Egmont. Some 600 sketches and watercolours were accomplished towards this end.
- 1970** Elected Patron of New Plymouth Astronomical Society.
- 1972** Freedom of the city of New Plymouth, combined with Exhibition of Aris Art in War Memorial Hall.
- 1977** Death in New Plymouth; ashes scattered on Egmont slopes.
- 1979** Memorial seat on Marsland Hill dedicated to the memory of Bernard Aris.