

Newsletter
May 2020



That Virus!

COVID-19 has affected everything and everybody. We can be thankful that the health emergency here has been very effectively managed. More to the point, people generally have responded to instruction from above with a high level of compliance and co-operation. Perhaps the crisis has reminded us that freedom is not a value that has absolute priority over social wellbeing.

One historical view is that there is a profound difference between New Zealand and America in the importance the first gives to 'fairness' and the other to 'freedom'. Americans have demonstrated in the streets demanding an end to restrictions and the re-opening of the economy in the name of their 'liberties'. Some of the demonstrators were armed, invoking their 'right' to bear arms as guaranteed by the American constitution.

If Americans have been conditioned since the founding of the republic to focus on their rights, New Zealanders have an equally deep-rooted belief that people deserve a 'fair go'. The government has struck the right note in reminding us that 'kindness', 'responsibility' and 'discipline' are what the present situation requires of us, anything but behaviour that satisfies individuals at the risk of endangering the rest of us.

Of course, if we can keep on track as a country gradually to re-open the economy, public policy will need to return to striking the right balance between maintaining social cohesion by protecting the less fortunate and rewarding individual effort and enterprise.

The Rest of the Year

The May meeting of the Executive was held on 18 May by means of ZOOM. The uncertainty of the times makes it impossible to fix definite dates to our usual events.

The AGM, customarily held in September, is postponed until further notice. It seems likely that the auditor's report will not be received before then anyway because of the backlog of work that has built up during the lockdown.

Better news is that with gatherings of up to 100 permitted, we now hope to be able to hold the Gardner Lecture on 26 July. **See below for further information.**

The Tuahiwi bus trip may prove possible in September or October, or it could be postponed until next March. We have to await advice from the Tuahiwi marae. The money of those who previously registered for this trip is being held by Frieda Looser with their consent.

If the A.C. Rhodes Medal cannot be presented at the Gardner Lecture, an alternative date could be the History Prizegiving Ceremony in December.

No Community Historian will be appointed this year, as no applications had been received by the closing date on 31 March. In any event, the closure of archives would likely have seriously interfered with the approved research project.

Members will receive **subscription notices** as usual. Our subscription income continues to meet necessary operational costs like the annual audit and secretarial expenses, and also publication assistance grants.

Gardner Lecture

Earlier this year Jock Phillips, well-known as author of *A Man's Country: The Image of the Pakeha Male* (1987) and Te Papa adviser, accepted our invitation to deliver this lecture.

Last year Jock published a memoir, *Making History: a New Zealand Story* (Auckland U.P) about his career as a public historian and

protagonist of New Zealand History. Perhaps his singular achievement was to adopt new ways of communicating History to a broad audience in a New Zealand setting.

Talking to a Christchurch audience might be regarded as a kind of homecoming for him since he was raised here and, like others, increasingly resisted what he conceived to be its inherent Englishness. He wanted a New Zealand History for New Zealanders.

It is hoped to hold the Lecture on Sunday, 26 July, COVID-19 restrictions permitting. Further information will be provided to members.

Memorial to Christchurch Victims of the 1918 Influenza Pandemic

We have had a pleasing response to our appeal for funds to enable the City Council to place a small memorial plaque on Oxford Terrace opposite the site of the Royal Hotel, used as an overflow ward for influenza cases in November 1918. Over half of the Christchurch victims died nearby at the old public hospital.

Our target was \$1,500 and donations to date total \$1,275. We invite members who would like to help to send cheques to PO Box 36-766 Christchurch, or by bank transfer to our Appeal Fund at the BNZ: 02-0875-0219179-097.

Latest Grant

Dr Paul Star has been working on a biography of Thomas Potts (1824-1888) of Ohinetahi. Potts was the subject of his Otago Ph.D. thesis completed in 1991.

The Foundation was glad to be able to assist publication of his book with a grant of \$500.

The Potts house by Governor's Bay, with its garden, is well-known to Cantabrians. Less well-known is that at one time he owned Quail Island and quarried stone there to build portions of his mansion.

However, Potts deserves a full biography as an early conservationist and ardent student of New Zealand's natural history. He contributed field notes that Walter Buller used for his *History of the Birds of New Zealand* (1873). Some regard him as more expert than Buller.

In 1878 he wrote an article on 'National Domains' that looked forward to the establishment of national parks in this country from 1894.

A New Economic History of New Zealand

Brian Easton, the distinguished economic historian, can be depended on to produce an original and authoritative history in the field in which he excelled. Published this month by Victoria U.P., it is titled *Not In Narrow Seas: the Economic History of Aotearoa New Zealand* (\$60).

The book takes the long view, starting with New Zealand's geological structures that were its physical endowment and ending with the legacy of Rogernomics. Jacinda Ardern makes an appearance. As it should, this study gives the environment and politics equal treatment.

Some well-embedded national myths are dispatched with aplomb. Britain's entry in to the EEC was not the calamity that the permanent collapse of wool prices in 1966 was. Our egalitarian tradition is also held up for close scrutiny.

Surely we can all agree that understanding our economy is too important to be left to politicians, or even economists!

An Invercargill Innovation

Invercargill's Public Library has developed an 'Archives and Book Club Art Project' to get children aged 8-13 interested in how they might research and learn about Southland's history.

The initial step was to select an image that would catch their attention, in this case the Troopers Memorial (1908) to fallen soldiers in the South African War in the centre of town.

The photograph was scanned, digitally cleaned and enlarged to 1.5m X 4.2m.

Before children were introduced to it, they were taken on a tour of the Archives facility to see the different types of archives that could be found there and how one day they might find information about themselves in school records, and so on.

Then they were shown the archival photograph from the early 1930s which depicted not only the Memorial but a busy street scene. They were left free to create an artwork from people, vehicles, shops or buildings in the picture that caught their fancy.

The final task was introduce them to the Library catalogue in order to explain how they could search the Library for items on Southland and New Zealand History.