

# CANTERBURY HISTORY FOUNDATION

Newsletter December 2020

Edited by John Cookson

## Christmas Greetings

The President and the Executive take this opportunity to extend to our members their best wishes for Christmas and the New Year. Have a safe and enjoyable holiday season.

## People

Dr Heather Wolfram, who sits on our Committee *ex officio* as head of the History Department, has been promoted to Associate Professor.

At the AGM in October Dr Peter Field was elected to the Executive to fill a vacancy. He is currently Head of the School of Humanities in the College of Arts at Canterbury. Peter was previously on the Executive as Head of History.

We still look for a Treasurer to relieve our hard-pressed Secretary who for over a year has assumed these extra duties. It is not an onerous position, but the key task is to prepare our accounts for the annual audit. Any member who knows of a qualified accountant willing to help us should contact the Secretary.

## Finances

As reported to the AGM, the Foundation was obliged to reorganize its finances following a decision by the University to revise its Trust Fund investments. Inland Revenue had taken exception to organizations like ours holding money with the University when a portion of their expenditure was not applied to University purposes.

Of course, much of our spending goes outside the University because from the outset we were committed to funding research and publication and promoting interest in History in the wider community. We remain primarily a funding body.

Unfortunately there could hardly have been a worse time for us to have to 'go it alone' in managing our investments. We are very aware that we have to take a basically conservative approach since our members have entrusted us with their money and we do not wish to break faith with them by putting the accumulated funds at risk.

The audited accounts will show that we have investment capital amounting to about \$350,000 which has been placed with Craigs Investment Partners.

We selected a Balanced Income Portfolio. The priority is to maintain our capital base, avoiding of course high-yield, high risk investments.

After fees, we cannot expect in the present low interest environment a return better than 2-3%. Suppose inflation runs at 1%, this is further reduced in real terms.

To meet our operating costs we depend heavily on subscriptions which at present give us a little over \$3,000 a year. But too much of this is swallowed up in audit costs. Since we are a small charity, an annual review is an allowable cheaper option, though not significantly cheaper. The AGM has made the decision to make this economy.

So our situation is that in order to continue making grants to assist local historians and student researchers we rely more than ever on the donations that our members generously provide from year to year.

## Christchurch 1918 Influenza Memorial

The generosity of members made this memorial possible. The plaque has been attached to a seat beside the river path on Oxford Terrace. It was installed in September.



## Medical Mini-Histories

Geoff Rice, our indefatigable Secretary, is as indefatigable as an historian. He has recently published several booklet-length histories related to his project on nineteenth century Christchurch doctors that will particularly interest Christchurch readers.

*Surgery in Nineteenth Century Christchurch* covers a period when there were exceptional advances in surgical techniques, most notably in the use of antiseptics and anaesthetics. However, part of the fascination of this record is the gruesome primitiveness of many of the treatments offered patients.

*Chemists and Druggists in early Christchurch, 1850-1900* attempts to identify the early practitioners of what was for many poor people their first line of treatment in health matters.

*A Scientific Welsh Eye-Surgeon* is the biography of Dr Llewellyn Powell, Christchurch's first Medical Officer of Health, 1877-9. He was a significant public health pioneer, persuading the city council to ban cesspits while the sewers were being built. This simple move cut the city's appalling death rates from typhoid fever. He also was the first lecturer in Biology and Chemistry for what became Canterbury College.

*The Notorious Dr Russell of Tristram House* is the story of an American Creole doctor who started practice in Christchurch in 1880 and became notorious as the city's leading abortionist. He spent five years in gaol and was struck off the medical register but returned quite brazenly to continue practice (and malpractice) until his death in 1912. His photograph appears in the 1903 *Cyclopaedia*.

Two other booklets resulted from accidental discoveries in the course of research in *Papers Past*. *Christchurch's Sensational Styche Case of 1900* is a crime thriller, a whodunnit with a denouement suggestive of a mistrial. Styche, a reputable law clerk in the office of Arthur Rhodes, was accused of sending anonymous letters to his wife's doctor offering him £200 to contrive his wife's death.

The letters were typewritten but in court the experts could not agree that the machine that had been used was identifiable. The police used entrapment – a detective behind a curtain – to obtain the clinching evidence they needed. The judge sentenced Styche to imprisonment for seven years with hard labour. An appeal to

failed in spite of the first judge admitting that the jury's verdict went against the weight of evidence. The Styche case was an important precedent in the failed appeals of Peter Ellis in the Christchurch civic crèche case.

*Wellington's Mysterious 'Baron' Mollwo: The Thalia-Histrionic Elocutionary Lecturer* is the account of a remittance man who turned up in Dunedin in 1864 and who eked out an existence for the next thirty years as a public lecturer and entertainer. Tsarist oppression and 'The Eastern Question' were stock topics.

He was not a 'con man' in the ordinary sense, since he defrauded no one and ended his life as a well-known unionist and temperance campaigner and a resident of Wellington's Home for the Aged Needy.

He claimed to be a Russian aristocrat who had run foul of the Tsarist regime for his liberal politics and was forced into exile. New Zealanders generally seem to have believed him.

Copies of any of these titles can be purchased from Hawthorne Press, 73 Halton Street, Christchurch 8052

## Te Rauparaha

South Islanders probably remember the name of Te Rauparaha before that of any other Maori. But not many will know that his son, Tamihana Te Rauparaha, in the 1860s wrote an extensive memoir of his father. The 50,000-word handwritten manuscript has reposed in the Auckland Public Library's Sir George Grey Collection since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Several unsatisfactory translations have been published over the years but we now have an authentic scholarly edition by Ross Calman, *He Pukapuka Tataku: Nga Mahi A Te Rauparaha: A Record of the Life of the Great Te Rauparaha* (Auckland U.P.).

Te Rauparaha was dismissed as a cruel and bloodthirsty 'savage' by Pakeha at the time, and the iwi whom he defeated are inclined to revile him to this day. In this account Tamihana generally admires his father but its most interesting feature is his attempt to explain to outsiders (especially Pakeha) the context within which Te Rauparaha operated. For example, the great warrior knew how to make peace as well as war amid the turbulence the Maori world experienced in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century with migratory pressures and the introduction of the musket.