



Canterbury History Foundation  
Newsletter  
May 2021

### **Dr Geoffrey Rice ONZM**

We were delighted to see our Secretary's name on the New Year Honours List, appointed ONZM for 'services to historical research and tertiary education'.

Geoff was a devoted teacher in Canterbury's History Department for nearly 40 years, skills which he carried into retirement as a U3A lecturer much in demand. He has always been interested in taking History to the wider community, as his numerous publications on local history attest. He has also been a long-serving secretary of both the Canterbury Historical Association and, of course, the Foundation. His work on the 1918 flu pandemic has received international attention.



### **2021 Gardner Lecture**

The Jim Gardner Memorial Lecture is an annual event to which the public is invited. This year's lecturer is Craig Thornhill who teaches History at Christchurch Girls' High School.

The title of the 2021 lecture is: 'Whose History? Changing History Curricula in Aotearoa New Zealand Schools'.

His subject has topical interest, especially for teachers, relating as it does to the proposal for compulsory NZ History in the primary and junior high school curriculum.

Craig Thornhill is one of those involved in writing a draft curriculum for the Ministry of Education.

The lecture will be held on Sunday, 25 July. Further information will be provided nearer the date.

### **Rhodes Medal Award**

Your Executive has decided that this year's Medal be awarded to Rita Wright.

Rita spent over twenty years as the sole staff member of the Ashburton Museum and developed it from a small voluntary institution to a modern museum in a new building with two full-time staff.

She has published booklets about the history of local organizations, especially the role of women, and has developed the research side of the museum.

A further notable contribution has been her work for the Ashburton District Family History Group, helping them to set up a new home in the Ashburton Heritage Centre.

The Rhodes Medal is customarily presented on the same occasion as the Gardner Lecture.

### **New Member of Executive**

Jeff Field, known to many as Registrar of the University of Canterbury, but now retired, has joined the Executive by co-option.

### **Recent Grants**

A grant has been made to Colin Amodeo to assist the publication of his biography of Thomas Cass, the early Canterbury surveyor.

Colin's latest work may be said to complete his trilogy of figures important in the foundation of the Canterbury settlement but whose lives have been little known. Cass has been preceded by studies of Captain Thomas and John Watson, magistrate at Akaroa during the 1840s.

The CHF's Shona Mann bequest is used to support the professional development of History teachers. Up to \$2000 has been made available to enable up to eight Canterbury teachers attend the national conference of the History Teachers' Association at Waitangi in July.

A third grant is in support of the on-line publication of the Canterbury Roll, a medieval genealogy of the English royal line which belonged to the family of Nurse Maude. It is now in the manuscripts collection of the University of Canterbury.

In recent years the Roll has received intense scholarly attention, both at Canterbury and overseas. Its value is acknowledged internationally to make it an exceptional local taonga.

About 1,000 names are entered on the Roll. In order to complete the process of converting the document into an on-line resource, a database providing information on each individual who appears is being assembled.

Jayson Boon, the recipient of the grant, is a former student who has done postgraduate work for the project and is exceptionally well-qualified to contribute to this research aid.

### **Chris Adam, Archivist**

To many people, especially Christchurch people, the name of Chris Adam is inseparable from the Christchurch office of Archives New Zealand. He served as Regional Archivist from 1984 until his retirement in October last year.

Chris studied History at the University of Canterbury, 1973-6. He joined the public service in 1978 working in three different Departments before beginning his career as an archivist. National Archives (as Archives NZ was then known) opened a Christchurch branch in 1982, so to date Chris can count as virtually its only manager.

In this role he handled the 'repatriation' from Wellington of records of particular regional significance to Canterbury and Westland.

From 1990 these were housed in the familiar Peterborough Street building specially designed for the purpose and incorporating the latest advances in archives management.

The 2010-11 earthquakes, thankfully, largely spared the archival holdings. By then, the real problem was lack of space. Another shift became necessary, this time (2018) to the present site in Wigram. We should not underestimate the immense logistical task Chris had to organize and execute on two occasions.

The digitisation of archives can be regarded as the other great challenge of Chris's career. Archives NZ coined the phrase 'practical obscurity' to explain the practical barriers that impeded access to public records - the travel involved, time spent in finding relevant material, and the limited information listing could provide.

Chris understood the possibilities of the new technology sooner than most. In the late 1980s the Christchurch office had the first 'computerised' (the term then used) finding lists. The keyword search had come to stay.

Yet in discussion about the issues digitisation raised, he readily conceded that there were limitations and problems as well as benefits. His was always a totally thoughtful approach.

Chris freely provided advice to other archives wanting to improve public access and the organization of their collections.

The popularity of Family History research during his career particularly affected archive-keeping. At Christchurch, probate records accounted for over half the items requested by researchers.

In 2011 Chris instigated a fruitful collaboration with the Mormon Church which put on-line, free to the public, digitised images of wills and probate records for Christchurch, the West Coast and Timaru. Again, the rest of the country followed where Christchurch had led. FamilySearch remains a primary genealogical site combining national and local, public and private sources of information.

Chris was not one to blow his own trumpet despite his outstanding capabilities. That he stayed in the same position for such a long time surely indicates that he found more than ample satisfaction in the work he was doing.

All of us in the History community will want to wish him a long and enjoyable retirement.

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