OF VERANDAHS AND FISH AND CHIPS AND FOOTIE ON SATURDAY AFTERNOON

REFLECTIONS ON 100 YEARS OF NEW ZEALAND HISTORIOGRAPHY

IF 1990 is a year to reflect on New Zealand history, it is also a time to reflect on the historians who have given us that history.\(^1\) The invitation to contribute an overview for this journal was intelligently conceived. But I was loath to accept. I was a recent convert to the study of New Zealand history, having done all my training in other fields. The invitation seemed but an opportunity to expose my ignorance and to make enemies by invidious comments about my peers.

Two events changed my mind. First I visited Gallipoli. Walking over those precipitous hills, stumbling over the unburied leg-bones of nameless Anzacs and even a skull blown dry in the wind, I kept thinking of that powerful and ambivalent statement on the New Zealand memorial at Chunuk Bair, 'From the uttermost ends of the earth'. What business was it for men from the distant South Pacific to die here? — and such thoughts were only intensified by the uncanny resemblance of the landscape to New Zealand hills. Gallipoli brought home the tragedy of a colonial and (in view of the Maori names on the memorial there) a colonized people. I returned to New Zealand in time for Anzac Day, in time to hear politicians and even, it has to be said, a historian arguing that at Gallipoli New Zealand came of age as a nation. In 1915 New Zealanders certainly made such claims, but this only exposed how much their sense of nationhood was contained within an imperial framework.\(^2\) The texts and images on the Great War memorials were overwhelmingly of a British derivation.\(^3\) To hear the nationalistic claims about Gallipoli repeated in 1990 was intolerable to one who had just returned from the place. Surely historians could do better than this? If, in this year of commemoration, New Zealanders wished to remember the nation’s growth to identity, we needed to provide a more accurate and meaningful history than an exclusive focus upon 25 April 1915. But where could I turn for a richer and more honest account of our evolution? I wanted a history which explored in detail the

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\(^1\) I wish to acknowledge the assistance of my colleagues John Martin and Robert Rabel in commenting on this paper.


evidence of a distinctive culture, a culture conceived in broader terms than simply our ability to fight war; and if indeed we never were a distinctive culture, but merely a province of the old world, or if we were but a gathering of many cultures, then these facts, too, should be documented. The New Zealand people in 1990 were hungry for useful information about the evolution of their ways of life, but what history could we give them?

Such questions were given urgency by a larger problem which had begun to engage me and provided the second reason for accepting this invitation. I found myself privileged to take part in discussions about the new Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa. The team working on the museum wished to provide a brief for the architects. The decision had already been made that the museum was to have three sections. The first treated the natural world (Papatuanuku); and the other two sections represented a division of human life here into those parts which explored the Tangata Whenua, the people of the land; and those which explored the Tangata Tiriti, those who were here by virtue of the Treaty. There was a general confidence that the Papatuanuku and Tangata Whenua departments were viable units. People accepted that a museum could satisfactorily relate displays of Maori art to Maori cosmology and ways of life. But when it came to giving content to the Tangata Tiriti side, there was a major problem. What was Pakeha culture and where did it come from? The problem was intensified, indeed highlighted, by another decision to subdivide the Tangata Tiriti section into a department of art (a device for including a traditional art gallery) and a department of history. But what should go into the department of history? The museum team wished that section to have a distinctive content. They were searching for some sense of Pakeha culture, its origins and development; and they wanted to represent it in material terms, through domestic objects, through the artifacts of work, through photographs. They wished to give Pakeha New Zealanders a sense of their roots and so respond to the complaint of many Maori leaders that it was difficult to deal with a people unsure of their own identity.

The museum builders were not alone in this aspiration. In recent years the schools had also sought to reshape their curricula in this direction. But did we have the written histories which could document this story of Pakeha culture — 'culture' defined not as high literary culture, but in the anthropological sense of the habits, rituals, and ways of life of a people? And the whole enterprise raised doubts which needed answers from the historians — was there indeed one Pakeha culture here, or merely a diversity of subcultures of class, and gender, and different ethnic origin; and what about the impact of Maori culture on the Pakeha, and vice versa? As I had discovered on the slopes of Gallipoli, there were some big questions being asked of New Zealand historiography. Had it ever provided the answers, and if not, why not? Who were the historians, and what had been their animus? These were the problems which encouraged me to go back and examine New Zealand historical writing and, since the subject was so huge, I decided to focus upon four decades separated by 30 years — the 1890s, the 1920s, the 1950s, and the 1980s.
In late nineteenth-century New Zealand Pakeha historians were amateurs outside the university. By 1890 three university colleges existed, and the fourth, Victoria University College, would begin at the end of the decade. Yet history, let alone New Zealand history, was not at the centre of their attention. Neither Auckland nor Otago had professors or lecturers in history; and the first history courses, all on British history, were taught by lawyers, not researching historians. J.A. Tole, the Auckland teacher of constitutional history, could point to only two publications, a lecture on Daniel O’Connell and an inquiry into the wrongful dismissal of a road overseer for alleged misconduct with a married woman. At Canterbury, John Macmillan Brown was Professor of English Language, Literature and History from 1879 to 1895, and his successors Edward Mathew and Arnold Wall also had history responsibilities. Yet each was primarily interested in literature, not history, with Brown writing novels and guides to English literature and Wall publishing poetry. Eventually Macmillan Brown did develop a passionate interest in the ethnology of the Pacific, but significantly he did so after his resignation from the University. As for the curriculum, the focus was British history — England from 449 to 1850, and constitutional history. There was no place for research or even speculation about New Zealand history in the colleges of the 1890s.

The explanation was New Zealand’s colonial status which led the colleges to divide their responsibilities between culture and utility. The utilitarian subjects included engineering, agricultural science, law, and medicine, which were needed to service the material needs of an expanding frontier. ‘Culture’ was not as expressed by the anthropologists, but by Matthew Arnold. J. Rankine Brown, the first Professor of Classics at Victoria University College, described it in his inaugural lecture: ‘Culture implies a refinement of the feelings; an education of the taste . . . a shrinking from all that is gross or personal or vulgar; a love of what is excellent’. Culture required an acquaintance with the universal moral truths to be found in the classics and in fine literature (by which was meant British literature). These would provide a bulwark against ‘anarchy’. Matthew Arnold had been referring to the anarchy of industrialism, but in the colonial situation there was the added fear of frontier anarchy. The colleges could help preserve civilization against frontier barbarism, and as a guarantee of this the curriculum was set and the final examinations were marked in Britain. There was no place for the grossness or the vulgarity of local culture and history. New Zealand history had a poor start in the academic world.

History-writing among nineteenth-century Pakeha, then, was left to people outside the academic walls. Who were they? They were male, and almost inevitably middle-class, since literacy and financial independence were prereq-

4 I am dealing in this article with written history, and not the oral traditions — the whakapapa and myths — to be found on the marae.
7 J. Rankine Brown, 'The Place of the Classics in Modern Education', in Inaugural Lectures, Wellington, 1899, p. 9.
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uisites. One group consisted of former army officers, primarily concerned to explain and then describe the course of military conflict with the Maori. Another group were the pioneer memoirists, men who as they got older wished to record the stirring times of their youth. Largely local history based on personal experience, their work was infused with the booster's sense of progressive achievement. Neither of these groups was likely to ask serious questions about the development of the New Zealand people. A third group of amateur historians were those who had been involved in close contact with the Maori people as missionaries, like Canon Stack, or surveyors like S.P. Smith, and wished to record the details of Maori life before the culture and the race inevitably, so it was believed, disappeared. The founding of the Polynesian Society in 1892 provided a focus for these historians and inspired younger writers like Johannes Anderson. Within the racial ideologies of the time such people did make an impressive contribution. But they were interested in the ethnological question, 'the whence of the Maori', or in offering a rather static portrayal of classical Maori culture. They were less interested in describing the changes in recent Maori society (changes of which they generally disapproved), and they did not make much contribution to the history of Pakeha New Zealand.

Finally, there was a group of historians who had been involved as journalists or politicians in the political development of the colony. Beginning with writers such as W. Gisborne and A. Saunders, whose work was partisan if eloquent, this tradition reached a high point with the appearance in 1898 of W. Pember Reeves's *The Long White Cloud*. This was a well-ordered, intelligent view of New Zealand history, written with colour and verve. A modern reader will be struck by the dominance of the great-man theory of history (Wakefield and Grey loom large), and there is a failure to accept the full force of the European drive for land and sovereignty. But at least Reeves asked some large questions. Like those contemporary foreign observers, André Siegfried, Henry Demarest Lloyd and Albert Métin, with whom Reeves's history may be usefully linked, he was interested in explaining to a foreign audience what was believed to be the unique contribution of New Zealand to world affairs — the expansion of the state in new directions. In asking where this polity had come from, Reeves and the foreign commentators found an answer in terms of a people made practical by the needs of a frontier and freed from the restrictions of inherited classes and established traditions. Here was the basis of a fruitful historiography — an interest in the distinctive nature of New Zealand, and some hypotheses about the origins of New Zealand values.

Yet this point of view is less helpful to the search for Pakeha culture than it appears. The focus upon the 1890s reforms as the distinctive characteristic of


New Zealand life became less relevant as the limited nature of those reforms was perceived and as the New Zealand welfare state system was left behind by other societies, and even abandoned within New Zealand itself. Second, the emphasis upon the ‘pragmatic’ nature of New Zealanders forestalled further investigation. Reeves and the overseas commentators were surely right that New Zealand’s legislative ‘advances’ did not derive from highly-articulated political theory. But the absence of self-conscious ideology did not mean the absence of values, or of a set of working assumptions which defined the bounds of acceptable action. The assumption that New Zealand was a country without ‘tradition’ did not lead people to explore the transmission and transformation of those traditions which had been carried to the new world. Each of the writers did notice some strange paradoxes about New Zealand — Métin commenting on the drive for respectability; Siegfried on the utopian impulse of the colonists and also their strange conservatism and ‘Englishness’. But these observations, potentially fruitful for investigation, were subordinate to the dominant view of colonial freedom from tradition and ideology. Finally, the interest in New Zealand’s political character meant less attention was paid to wider patterns of life in the colony — the nature of family relations, the public rituals, the habits of leisure, the ways of speech, and social interaction. The ethnic, religious, regional, and class diversity of New Zealand, the range of cultures in other words, were not made manifest.

So the founding fathers (a fact, not a sexist remark) of New Zealand history had not provided real precedents for an aspiring historian of New Zealand culture. The nineteenth-century university simply did not spawn students of New Zealand history, and the amateur historians in the form of retired military men or ageing pioneers or preservers of the dying race were not interested in the question of Pakeha society and its values. Reeves and his foreign observers had opened up debate, only to close it down again with the image of the practical do-it-yourself colonial.

Let us move forward a generation to the 1920s. We enter a period when the population was largely literate, and with the country having allegedly obtained nationhood on the slopes of Gallipoli. Surely now some probing discussion might occur about the development of a New Zealand way of life. Some of the earlier groups of amateur historians remained. There were the ex-military men now telling the story of the Great War in official and regimental histories. They nearly all presented a theory of social development in New Zealand, namely, that a rural open-air life had produced a breed of physically superior men who proved themselves in war, and that these men, coming from an egalitarian society, had more initiative and less respect for authority and red tape than the folk at home. But this thesis was simply rehearsed — it was never assessed; and in describing the Anzacs the writers kept strictly to the field of battle. There was little attempt to describe the life away from battle or to analyse the values and mixtures of people who made up the New Zealand army. It was left to two novelists, Robin

Hyde and John A. Lee, to begin uncovering in an unsystematic way some of this 
human richness.12

As for other non-academic history, the pioneer memoirs continued to come 
out, becoming ever more nostalgic and anecdotal as the automobile began to 
der Umnme the old rural culture. There was still an interest in Maori history, no 
longer written by missionaries or surveyors, but by those like Elsdon Best 
attached to museums, or journalists like James Cowan. Although interesting, 
such work continued to deal with a static image of ‘the Maori as he was’ and did 
not tell New Zealanders much about Pakeha culture.

As a journalist, Cowan perhaps belongs more properly in the last group, the 
politicians and journalists. After Reeves’s departure, the emergence of mass 
democracy, with its suspicion of education and gentility, meant that the genus of 
politician/historian had largely disappeared (Downie Stewart being a partial 
exception). Cowan himself was a good representative of the journalist as 
historian. He was a man with a passionate interest in New Zealand history and 
and a determination to make that history live in the minds of the people. His two 
Volumes on the New Zealand Wars were a pioneering piece of oral history. But 
like other journalists he wrote too much; and in order to sell New Zealand history 
he tried to present it in the romantic terms of Hollywood — ‘Romance of the 
Rail’, ‘Hero Stories of New Zealand’ were some of his titles. He was not 
interested in stopping to ask the awkward question, and he felt the need to play 
up to New Zealand myths rather than to challenge them. Since the most 
‘romantic’ of stories tended to be Maori ones, he concentrated much of his 
energy on Maori history; and by the time he turned to Pakeha history, as in his 
1940 centennial volume, Settlers and Pioneers, he was able only to make humble 
obedance before the noble pioneers. So Reeves had no successors. Great things 
were not happening outside the academy.

What, then, was happening inside the academy in the 1920s? Some things had 
not changed. History was still not a major offering in the BA degree, and the 
curriculum and examinations were still externally set. The focus of the curricu-
lum remained British history, although there was a significant increase of 
European history. At Auckand and Wellington the Professors of History (J.P. 
Grossman and F.P. Wilson) were still not researchers or writers of books. 
Grossman’s sole contributions to the national bibliography consist of brief 
pamphlets on bimetallism and the evils of deforestation.

Yet things had also changed. At Otago the professor was John R. Elder, who 
in the ten years 1924–34 published six books on the history of New Zealand. At 
Canterbury the professor was James Hight who had already published a consti-
tutional history of New Zealand (with H.D. Bamford), and who in 1927 
published a history of Canterbury College. The list of courses offered by the 
department in 1925 included one in the second and third terms on the ‘History 
Of New Zealand and the Pacific Islands’, and the Canterbury Calendar of that 
year noted five theses on the history of Canterbury. Here were signs of scholarly 
focus on the local scene. Furthermore, in the neighbouring department of

economics the professor was J.B. Condliffe. In that very year, 1925, he published a short history of New Zealand, and five years later came his pioneering economic history, *New Zealand in the Making*. This was a serious and wide-ranging survey going to the very heart of material life in this part of the world. It would remain the basic text for the next 50 years. But that very fact invites a question. Why were there not other texts of the same scope and value as Condliffe’s to replace it? What happened to these promising signs of academic history in the 1920s?

The contrast of Elder at Otago and Condliffe at Canterbury provides an explanation. Elder largely chose to compete in the popular market for history catered for by writers such as Cowan, or in the next decade by A.H. and A.W. Reed. Although Elder did edit some of the letters and journals of the first Anglican missionaries to New Zealand, his other works, such as *Goldseekers and Bushrangers in New Zealand*, or *The Pioneer Explorers of New Zealand*, were sketchy accounts based on minimal research and did not upset popular prejudices. Condliffe, on the other hand, was a serious scholar, who wished for a larger audience of other serious scholars. He could not find such an audience in New Zealand, and he could not find it while writing about New Zealand topics, and so he left the country to become a distinguished professor at Berkeley, California. In other words, academic history in New Zealand could not survive without an audience. It was squeezed between a people wanting cosy myths and an international world of scholarship not interested in New Zealand. This was not a situation likely to produce intelligent investigation of New Zealand culture and its origins.

Before we leave the university world of 1925, there is an interesting footnote. The assistant lecturer in history at Victoria that year was a young graduate, John Beaglehole. He would depart the following year for London, quite happy to leave for parts with ‘really some history... and not just a few tuppenny-ha’penny scraps and tenth-rate politics’. Beaglehole revelled in the cultural richness of London, and hoped to study sixteenth-century political thought. Yet eventually he found himself back in New Zealand writing New Zealand history. This was partly because A.F. Pollard gave him the colonial push-off for his ambitions to write European history, and partly because there was family, and possibility of jobs at home.13 Yet, as he wrote in ‘The New Zealand Scholar’, ‘to be candid, I was not interested in New Zealand — except in so far as I had to be’.14 His bitterness at the country of his birth was expressed in a brilliantly savage short history, published in 1936. Gradually, as the commissions for books flowed and as Joe Heenan helped to energize the intellectual currents of the country in preparation for the 1940 centennial, Beaglehole did develop an affection for the country and began to explore its cultural history. There was a study of the University of New Zealand; and 12 years later he completed an essay on Victoria University.

College, which marvellously recreated the social and intellectual world of generations of Victoria students. It was a model of cultural history. The centennial publications, both the single volumes and the serial publication ‘New Zealand in the Making’, marked a breakthrough. Of course, they varied in quality — too much of the writing remained superficial and was produced far too quickly; but there was an openness to new topics, such as sports or women, which showed an awareness of both the variety and richness of life here. The use of illustrations was also significant.

But these promising developments were not followed through. Once the centennial passed, the urgency to document New Zealand life evaporated, and the war consumed people’s energies. When state patronage for history revived, it was to document the war effort. As for Beaglehole, a commission from the Hakluyt Society focused his energies for the rest of his scholarly career on the voyages of Captain James Cook. This was a perfect solution for the problems of an academic historian in provincial New Zealand. Cook was obviously a significant figure in New Zealand history and the setting for the work was New Zealand and the South Pacific, yet Beaglehole’s audience, and indeed paymaster, was international, and the culture which he dealt with was not New Zealand culture but the values and traditions of eighteenth-century England. Beaglehole, faced with the same intellectual dilemmas as Condliffe, had not expatriated himself in person, but there was a sense in which he had expatriated himself in mind.

Beaglehole’s career takes us into the next period, the 1950s, and in a number of respects his style of history was reflected in the work of other academic historians in those years. Of course, the tradition of non-academic history continued. There were still the anecdotal pioneer memoirs and the journalist/myth-makers, both sorts published, and on occasion written, by the Reeds. The tradition of military history written by former army men also continued, although the standard of the official war histories of the 1950s was somewhat higher than in the past. There were collections of Maori myths, but little new Maori history. This popular history dealt with matters which were important to New Zealanders, but in a descriptive and unthreatening way. Pioneers were treated, but not pioneer society; local history was told, but not community studies; Maori myths were recounted, but not the history of Maori society.

At the university colleges the previous inhibitions on the study of New Zealand culture still had an influence. The cultural cringe, which saw the mission of the New Zealand university as representing European civilization in a philistine province, was reflected in the history curriculum offered at universities. Although external examining had gone, the courses concentrated upon the old world. It was not until the honours year that the colleges offered papers on New Zealand history; and there were sparse offerings on the other ‘new societies’, such as Australia and the United States. The staff still found themselves trapped between writing for a New Zealand audience, which wanted prejudices confirmed,
or attempting to write for scholars overseas, who were only marginally interested in New Zealand.

It is true that research on New Zealand was being done by the 1950s. About half the tenured staff of history departments had published or would publish in New Zealand history; and there were about a dozen theses in New Zealand history being completed each year. Yet one should not assume that there was a flood of history, full of ideas about the origins of New Zealand culture. For a start, a number of the academics’ publications (those by Neville Phillips, Angus Ross, and Frederick Wood) were commissioned war histories — for it was still difficult to find publishers for serious New Zealand history. And the colonial status of New Zealand historians affected both the content and style of academic New Zealand history. The historians modelled themselves closely upon British styles, hoping both to attract the attention of the scholar overseas, and concerned to uplift New Zealand history along the lines of the Oxford model. This meant an emphasis upon accurate empirical scholarship based on documentary sources. Official documents were the stuff of history, and constitutional history the training ground of the historian. Speculative theory or sweeping interpretations were suspect, for those were continental or American follies. The worship of the document meant a suspicion of oral history as ‘subjective’, and an unthinking acceptance of the evidence of the lettered classes.

The English model also made for an emphasis upon fine writing for, in England, history had been a pursuit of the leisured gentleman, and had won ‘literary’ credentials. It has often been noted that a number of New Zealand historians of the time were also poets. This concern for literary expression was not intended to attract the ordinary New Zealand reader to history, for the model was less Frank Sargeson than Macaulay or Gibbon. History also retained close links with political science, reflecting a focus upon political and constitutional history. On the other hand, historians had few links with the social sciences. This was partly because sociology and social anthropology, the subjects which might have had most to offer historians, had not yet been given admittance to the New Zealand universities.

Another characteristic of 1950s history, which echoed John Beaglehole’s situation, was a concentration of interest upon the first century of European settlement here. One can hypothesize on possible reasons for this. It may have been that New Zealand history up to 1870 could have been seen within a larger historiography of the British Empire and was therefore a field of interest to British scholars; or it may have been that the British sources, which were so essential for that period, attracted students of history, allowing them to combine New Zealand history with a visit to London. It may have been that, as New Zealand historians began the serious study of their past, they naturally started at the beginning, where the sources were more available; and that historians who were discovering their country for the first time should identify with the first discoverers — with the moment of ‘Landfall’, to cite an important cultural symbol of the period. Another possible explanation was that New Zealand intellectuals of the 1950s felt themselves to be a tiny struggling minority among a people who were narrow-minded and anti-intellectual, a nation of ‘fretful
sleepers'. They did not want to soak themselves in a study of contemporary New Zealand culture. They turned to history for escape. Historians were not interested in exploring the world of the ordinary kiwi bloke and sheila. The early nineteenth century offered, like Beaglehole's Cook, a New Zealand setting but English culture, and in the study of the missionaries in a savage land they may well have felt an identification with their own position as cultural uplifters.

All of this did not lead academic historians of the 1950s to investigate the evolution of New Zealand culture in a bold manner, or with any sense of the range or uniqueness of society here. They were not inclined to take the story through to this century. This is not to say there were not some lasting achievements — the discovery of the country, the role of Wakefield and the New Zealand Company, the origins of the New Zealand wars were all much better understood by the end of the decade. And the period established standards of truth and evidence which were essential for quality history.

There were also outstanding short histories by Keith Sinclair and W.H. Oliver. Yet these works, for all their strengths, revealed limitations. Both were works of elegant literature rather than of theory or sociological analysis. Beneath the admirable care of the scholarship and the linguistic wit, it was hard to untangle the large ideas. One thinks, by contrast, of some of the major theories which were being presented in Australia of the time — Russel Ward's *The Australian Legend*, which immediately raised a central debate about the evolution of Australian culture; or, a decade later, Geoffrey Blainey’s *Tyranny of Distance*. There were no equivalent works in New Zealand. Like other 1950s historians, Sinclair and Oliver were stronger on the nineteenth than the twentieth century, and predictably organized their narratives around major political events. Neither ignored social history and both were alive to the history of high culture, but certain aspects of New Zealand ways of life and national identity get few mentions — the family, sport, war, immigrant cultures, popular amusements, food, housing, etc. Cultural conflicts, such as prohibition or anti-Catholicism, were down-played. This is not to criticize these books, but simply to point out that the historians of the 1950s were still interested only in certain forms of history. To be fair, Keith Sinclair in particular did show a sensitivity to some aspects of the culture. If a major theme for his history can be found, it would be the emergence of a national identity and he occasionally looked for evidence not only in politics and literature, as did Oliver, but also in speech and dress and social mores. But these intriguing hints were not picked up by other historians. Finally, both Oliver and Sinclair portrayed a New Zealand culture which lacked diversity and depth. Sinclair emphasized the egalitarian conformity of the people, while Oliver, picking up the analysis offered by Reeves, Métin, and Siegfried, argued that the New Zealand people were above all a materialistic and practical people. Once again we had a people lacking a richness of culture —

acting without ideology, driven by a love of the dollar.

Now let us move forward to the 1980s. Much has changed. The most important and dramatic change is the emergence of a sizeable educated audience at home for New Zealand history. The key here has been the growth of the universities. At the end of the Second World War the total number of New Zealanders who had graduated from the University of New Zealand was some 10,000. Today more than 7000 graduate each year from the country’s seven universities. In the 1950s there were about 20,000 people in New Zealand with university degrees. By 1981 there were 170,000 and by the end of the decade there were over 200,000. Perhaps not a very high proportion of those people had studied history at university; and perhaps fewer were interested in continuing to read about it. But enough had been educated in the serious study of the past to create a significant audience out-of-doors for historians. Furthermore, it was an audience which was struggling to come to terms with issues of national identity and naturally turned to the past to help work out these issues. In particular, the creation of the Waitangi Tribunal placed historical scholarship at the very centre of contemporary policy. At the end of the 1980s the sales of Claudia Orange’s intellectually demanding book on the Treaty of Waitangi were on a scale previously only reached by rugby memoirs. This helped to narrow that crippling gap between popular historians writing superficial truths for a local audience and serious historians looking to the scholarly community overseas. Now free-lance historians were able to write high quality history, find an audience at home and, with the help of new support from a series of fellowships, awards, and Lottery Board grants, could feed themselves. Most of these people had already passed through the university and had high standards. Writers such as Michael King, Stevan Eldred-Grigg, Christopher Pugsley, Frances Porter have made major contributions to the history of New Zealand from outside the academy.

As for the university-based historians, the size of the literate audience has helped convince them that New Zealand history provides a community of sufficient depth that it is worth writing for; and the growing interest in New Zealand history in the community at large has added to the numbers of students wishing to study the subject. So, increasingly, historians who had been appointed in the 1960s or early 1970s to teach the history of other cultures found themselves researching and teaching in New Zealand history. They were joined by younger colleagues who had been trained as New Zealand historians. An increasing proportion of the undergraduate teaching was focused upon the history of this country: such growth enriched the audience for serious historians here. There were colleagues with whom debates could be held; there were students to buy and discuss the work of historians. In addition, trained historians were to be found in a host of new jobs which developed in the past 15 years — in the Waitangi Tribunal, in the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, and the Historical Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs, in museums, in the Historic Places Trust, in libraries and archives, who also began to establish professional credentials and established their own association. As New Zealand history entered the schools, teachers too entered the market for serious New Zealand history.

19 New Zealand Census 1981.
Such developments were reflected in other institutional beginnings — the *New Zealand Journal of History* in 1967, conferences of university historians, beginning also in the mid 1960s and giving birth in 1979 to the New Zealand Historical Association, the creation of the Stout Research Centre in 1984. Publishing responded to the new market with firms like Allen and Unwin, Heinemann, and Dunmore Press joining the university presses in the hunt for intelligent works of New Zealand history.

Alongside this maturing of institutional structures came new intellectual developments. Partly under the influence of the *Annales* school, there emerged a fascination with social and cultural history, which had once been the profession’s poor relations. New social movements strengthened such interests. The women’s movement invited the study of women and the family in the past; a new consciousness among indigenous peoples and ethnic groups provoked questions about patterns of racial dominance and the perpetuation of ethnic sub-cultures. In such matters American history provided an exciting model, while out of Britain came the example of a workers’ history, which was initiated by E.P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* (1968) and given depth by the journal, *History Workshop*. Here too the emphasis was very much upon a worker’s culture, a complete way of life, and not just upon the institution of unions.

A new methodological determination to get beyond the written document, the source of traditional academic history, also became important. First, under the growing influence of sociology, which began to appear in New Zealand universities in the 1960s, historians became more skilled at using figures. From Charles Beard to Lewis Namier, statistics had been part of the armoury of the political historian, although not used very systematically in New Zealand; and now New Zealand sociologists like David Pearson20 or historians like Miles Fairburn21 began to hunt through street directories, marriage statistics, crime statistics, or census records to tell us about the society of the past. Second, historians began to look beyond the letters of the past and listen to the voices. Here the moving figures were at first outside academia — people like Tony Simpson,22 or the New Zealand Oral History Archive (Judith Fyfe and Hugo Manson) — but more recently the tape-recorder has become an essential tool of such historians as Judith Binney or Jeanine Graham. Third, a few historians, and here again one must point to Judith Binney’s two books with Gillian Chaplin, *Mihaia* and *Ngā Mōrehu*,23 have begun to see the value of old photographs as source materials. *Looking Back*, by Keith Sinclair and Wendy Harrex,24 was a significant inspiration, as have been developments in printing and the growing consciousness of photographs by museums and libraries. The National Library’s

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1990 exhibitions, Histories and Empire and Desire, have been outstanding examples of the use of historic photographs.

How have the new institutional supports and the recent methodological developments been reflected in the writings of New Zealand historians? Some idea can be gained by examining the New Zealand Journal of History for the past five years (1985-89). Compared with the first five volumes of the journal (1967-71), the most obvious change is the shift of attention in articles on New Zealand history away from the early nineteenth century, and towards the twentieth century. Whereas in the late 1960s 42.6% of articles dealt with the period before 1860, the last five years have seen only 13.5% of articles on that period. In terms of New Zealand history books reviewed the reduction was from 50% to 14.2%. On the other hand, 45.9% of articles in recent journals dealt with the period since 1910, and 21.9% since 1940. This compares with the figures for the 1967-71 volumes of 20.6% and 1.5% respectively. This reorientation of interest reflects a growing sense by New Zealand historians that their own society and their own immediate past were worth studying, and this, perhaps, was a consequence of a heightened social recognition and support. They were less inclined to hold their own society at a distance and escape into a far-off world. It is also of interest that six (12.5%) of the recent articles were of a broad thematic character and could not be pigeon-holed in a particular period. There was only one of this nature previously. This was a sign that historians were starting to ask larger questions, and were no longer chroniclers of discrete events bounded in time.

The precise fields of interest are also revealing. Not unexpectedly, the interest of the 1950s generation in the discovery of New Zealand and the missionary endeavour all but disappears. The percentages drop from 13.2% of New Zealand articles on discovery in the first five volumes to none at all in the past five years; and from 15.8% of articles about missionaries to a solitary article (2.15%) recently. Writing on New Zealand political history remains surprisingly stable (some six in each period), but there is a clear fall-off in foreign policy history (from 18.4% of New Zealand articles to 4.1%). The most significant new areas of interest are women's or family history (from 5.3% to 16.5%), labour history (from 0% to 14.4%), and the appearance, where none existed in the early period, of some three articles each in intellectual history, health history, and social history. There were indeed special issues of the journal in women's and health history, and earlier, in 1979, there had been a special issue on social history, which subsequently appeared in book form. Maori history showed a slight increase, although still only six (11.5%) of recent articles could be so classified.

These figures make obvious that some of the potential of the new situation facing New Zealand historians has been realized. There is now a large body of serious scholars confronting our past and branching out into new areas of enquiry. They have started to write history which is closer to home — closer both in subject-matter and chronology to people's experience. These have been an exciting few years, and New Zealanders are starting to talk about history books.

and buy them with the enthusiasm which ten years ago was reserved for novels. It is now the history books which win the prizes, and the novels that do, tend to be historical novels.

Yet we are still very far from producing history that can really tell people about the evolution of New Zealand culture — what unites us and makes us different, or what is the range of different ways of life which we contain. There is still not much that makers of school texts or designers of museums can draw upon. We lack the large imaginative synopses.

This is partly because serious history-writing is so recent, and scholars perhaps feel the need to document pieces of the story before they rush in with the larger hypotheses. Perhaps, too, our academic historians, often trained in larger historiographies, model themselves on the current fashions of those histories. But New Zealand historiography is at a much younger stage — the documents are just being uncovered, the main lines are being drawn. We are at the stage American historiography was at in the 1890s or Australian historiography in the 1950s; and we need the Turners, or Beards, the Wards, or the Manning Clark's who can draw some bold sweeps.

There is also a continuing failure to employ the whole range of approaches open to the historian in order to evoke the history of a culture in all its richness — its smells, its tastes, its fashions, its rituals, its words. Let me give some examples, invidious as it may be. We have plenty of local histories but few, with the partial exception of Erik Olssen's history of Otago, which evoke the ways of life and the beliefs of a community in a three-dimensional way. There is nothing that compares with Le Roy Ladurie’s Montaillou or Charles Joyner's intensely vivid evocation of the South Carolina slave fields. We don’t have much ‘thick’ description, as Clifford Geertz puts it, nothing with an eye to ritual and the physical furnishings of culture as in Rhys Isaac’s The Transformation of Virginia.

Despite the British example, we have had much labour history, but it tends to remain a history of unions, not a history of working-class life. We have analysed class structures, but not class values. We know little about the culture of work, and not much about working people at play — and it is the novelists, like Stevan Eldred-Grigg or Eric Beardsley, who have striven to fill out this need. Or again we have had many fine contributions to the history of women, but we do not know a great deal about the values and rituals of female culture, about women’s experience in rearing children, in cooking, in sewing, and we still do not have a large synthetic study of women or even some strong hypotheses with which to deal. Raewyn Dalziel’s essay, ‘The Colonial Helpmeet’, now some 13 years old,

29 Steven Eldred-Grigg, Oracles and Miracles, Auckland, 1987; Eric Beardsley, Blackball 08, Auckland, 1984.
remains the most interpretative piece on colonial New Zealand women yet available.  

In Maori history there have been some marvellous contributions. We know about the Maori military achievement in the New Zealand Wars through James Belich’s stimulating update of James Cowan. We know something about the communities created by Te Puea and Rua Kenana and Te Māhārāoa’s quest for salvation. The Maori understanding of the Treaty of Waitangi has been scrupulously traced by Claudia Orange. But the gaps are immense. We need to know far more about the evolution of Maori society during the nineteenth century to tell us how, and to what extent, European culture and economic practices were adopted, and how Maori culture transformed itself. In the twentieth century a major study of the migration of the Maori to the city and its effect upon the ways of life and culture of the Maori still awaits us. More pertinently, given our concern in this article for Pakeha culture, we do not have a major study of New Zealand racial ideology, especially at the level of popular culture, and we have not explored the impact of Maori culture on the Pakeha.

Finally, the gaps in the history of material culture are large. We know so little about our ways of life, our popular culture — the way we have dressed, the foods we have eaten, the houses we have inhabited, the games we have played. Even rugby, that ritual so central to national identity, awaits a serious historian. My own experience of working in this area — on the history of stained-glass windows and war memorials — suggests that such topics can be surprisingly revealing about, for example, the extent to which New Zealand culture remained British, or the degree of regional identity. Where other such studies have been done, such as Jane Malthus’s work on clothes or Walter Cook’s on gardens, they have not been integrated into the larger picture; nor have historians drawn upon the cultural studies tradition presently represented in New Zealand by the journal Sites.

The sense of New Zealanders as ‘cultureless’ still hangs on in our writing. Take, for example, what is arguably the finest contribution to New Zealand history in the past decade, Miles Fairburn’s The Ideal Society and its Enemies. Its worth lies in its attempt to sum up a whole society (albeit Pakeha society) and the fact that it provides a large and challenging hypothesis. One cost of the boldness of vision is the ludicrously monocausal nature of the argument, which makes for an easy refutation, but what concerns us here is the burden of Fairburn’s major line of argument. For, in essence, the interpretation treats nineteenth-century New Zealanders as a people without culture. Fairburn argues

that late nineteenth-century Pakeha society was a world of unattached individuals, free-floating atoms whose response to the anomie and loneliness, which they inevitably felt, was to lash out at their neighbours and drown their angst in drink. Hence the high levels of interpersonal violence and drunkenness in late nineteenth-century New Zealand.  

Yet the people who were bashing up their fellows and getting drunk were clearly not responding out of a universal human response to loneliness. They were British males, and they were behaving as the dictates of male culture encouraged them. For the Pakeha of nineteenth-century New Zealand were not cultureless people somehow stripped of all habits and traditions by the voyage out. They came from British society, where men who travelled around the rural areas doing odd jobs were recognized as possessing distinct habits. This culture of ‘those who slept rough’ was a culture of drinking in pubs, telling yarns, and being ready with the fists. What happened in nineteenth-century New Zealand was that those who slept rough, instead of being a small proportion of the population as in Britain became, because of the nature of employment and the unequal sex ratio, a major part of the population. Hence the levels of boozing and fighting. The explanation for this behaviour lies in culture, a distinctive male culture, not in an automatic response to loneliness. What Fairburn’s book lacks, for all its brilliance, is a sense behind the cold statistics of human diversity and interaction — there is no sense of people with language, and rituals, and traditions.

In its ignoring of culture, Fairburn’s thesis invites a much richer analysis of the peopling of New Zealand. We cannot understand what made New Zealand different unless we understand the habits and the values of those who came here. We need to trace who those people were and where they came from; and we need to question that naive frontier hypothesis, which simply assumes that it is the frontier that creates a new people. Whether it was the non-academic historians of the 1890s, or the military historians of the 1920s, or Keith Sinclair in 1959, or Miles Fairburn 30 years later, all saw the new environment as the determinative factor in our evolution. This might prove to be the case, but we can ‘test it only when we know…’ more about the inherited cultural baggage. It may be that the new people were created by an exaggeration of a particular form of inherited culture, as Louis Hartz argued 25 years ago. Nor should we ignore the continuing import of culture from abroad, whether in English school texts, or in American television serials. To take one example, it is at least arguable that late nineteenth-century New Zealand was made very different by the imposition of ‘English’ culture on New Zealanders through the school system — taught in poetry and history lessons. This ‘English culture’ may have served to extinguish many of the regional and class cultures that had been brought to New Zealand, and replaced them with a heritage of Englishness derived from the English public.

33 To be fair, in the first section of the book Fairburn does explicitly claim that Pakeha did have a shared culture, to the extent that they had a common judgment about their own society — but this is a direct contradiction of the book’s conclusion, since how could such a common perspective have been established if the society was atomistic?  
school. Alan Mulgan, of Northern Irish blood, grew up at the turn of the century dreaming of a ‘home’ consisting of ‘Westminster Abbey and Bideford . . . the Sussex Downs and Lords’. The sense of New Zealand identity, which emerged at the turn of the twentieth century, was therefore contained within, and in many ways defined by, the values of ‘English imperial culture’. For New Zealand came to be defined as a country which preserved many of the superior virtues of the British race, and saw its role within the world as safeguarding the British Empire from urban decadence.

This suggestion is largely unproven hypothesis, but it does point up how little we really know about the evolution of values and ways of life in this country, and how urgently we need a cultural history, a history which can recover in loving detail the diversity of cultures that once settled here, and the process whereby those diverse cultures were given a New Zealand content. The reawakening of the Maori to their past requires an awakening of the Pakeha to their past also.

If in this sesquicentennial year we are looking for a great drama which can inform our schools and fill our museums, then one possible theme is surely the peopling of New Zealand and the way inherited patterns of life — rituals, material forms, ways of thinking — were brought from the Pacific islands, or Scottish crofts, or the English public schools, interacted with one another, and were transformed into a New Zealand way of life with verandahs and fish and chips and footie on Saturday afternoons.

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36 See, for example, the call of Buddy Mikaere along these lines, *The Dominion Sunday Times*, 3 June 1990, p. 13.