

*The Bay: A History of Community at Titahi Bay*. By Linda Fordyce and Kirsten MacLehn. Titahi Bay Residents and Ratepayers Progressive Association, Titahi Bay, 2000. 200 pp. NZ price: \$34.95. ISBN 0-473-06530-4.

*THE BAY* arrived just as I was finishing writing a history of another Wellington 'Bay', Eastbourne. I share with Linda Fordyce and Kirsten MacLehn the challenging experience of trying to do justice to a wide brief in a short time. As they note in their preface, 'We make no "bones" about the fact that we have not produced the definitive, fully-fleshed story of such a wonderful and complex community'. They point out that each chapter could have become a book on its own, 'but time (and money) were not unlimited'. Their brief, which covered 'thousands of years from the formation of the land to the foundation of the present day community at Titahi Bay', was 'to provide the skeleton of a readable story'. The geographical span too was potentially wide and the authors sensibly decided to restrict themselves to the area between Titahi Bay and Takapuwhia and the Whitireia peninsula. They also restricted the number of local identities included in the book and note that many people will go 'unmentioned'. Fordyce and MacLehn observe that: 'Our only excuse has been the lack of time and space to include every one and everything that should be mentioned'. They admit to leaving plenty of 'digging' for future historians to do.

If not a 'fully-fledged history' of a community, what have the writers been able to produce in the time and within the budget available? *The Bay* reads as a jumble of at times unrelated anecdotes about some interesting and some less interesting (to a non-local person) aspects of the area's history. The seven-page history of Mana Island, for example, from prehistory to the present day, includes the following: anecdotes about a Croatian family, the Vellas, associated with the Island; information about the giant weta and the gold striped gecko; the legend of a taniwha who lived in Porirua Harbour; and some facts about the area's geology. Te Rauparaha and sheep and cattle farming are also touched on. In a later part of the book, a dance hall known as the 'Cabaret', symbols of the Depression and the foundation of the Titahi Bay Progressive Association are all covered in less than three pages.

Some topics stand out in spite of the disconcerting way the text leaps from one subject to another. These include the role of the beach as focal point, from food gathering for Maori, landing place for whalers, to resort for holiday-makers and week-enders. The well-known subjects of New Zealand history make an appearance: the conflict between Maori and settlers; the settlers' efforts to farm; the building of roads and bridges; and the building of community, particularly the development of institutions and facilities. Topics specific to the Bay, such as the early efforts to turn the area into a premier seaside resort for wealthy Wellingtonians, are also covered.

The book becomes more coherent the closer it approaches the present. That a wider range of sources was available for such twentieth-century topics as the Second World War years and state housing development in the post-war period, no doubt accounts for this to a large extent. With state housing came the end of the attempt to turn the area into a premier seaside resort. There are glimpses of the Austrian tradesmen who came to build prefabricated housing in the 1950s, and the development of Titahi Bay 'from construction camp to community' is full of interest. The discussion of pollution and other environmental issues provides insights into aspects of the character of the developing Titahi Bay community. This part of the book includes the establishment of the Titahi Bay Beautifying Society in the late 1950s, the opening of the sewerage treatment plant in 1989, and the on-going controversy about cars on Titahi Bay beach.

The question arises about the purpose of a book like *The Bay*. Is it of interest to people outside the area? The best local histories have a wider significance and illuminate aspects of the history of New Zealanders. *The Bay* has something to say about the

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development of seaside suburbs. Both the similarities with Eastbourne (the focus on the beach and the efforts to develop Days Bay into Wellington's 'playground' in the 1890s, for example) and the differences between the two seaside suburbs (a key one is that there was no state housing development in Eastbourne and the Eastern Bays) are revealed.

The text is lively and readable. At times, the clutter of illustrations distracts the reader. These include maps, sketches, reproductions of paintings, and photographs. Many of the photographs have real interest. Two which stood out for me are of the earliest documented race meeting on Titahi Bay beach in March 1862 and the multi-coloured boat sheds at the southern end of the Bay. Other illustrations, however, seem to have no justification for inclusion beyond an attempt to compensate for gaps in the text.

Despite some reservations, there is much to appreciate in *The Bay*. Above all, the achievement of the authors in turning a mass of detail into a readable account in a limited time and within budget is impressive.

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*A Dream of Spires: Benjamin Mountfort and the Gothic Revival.* By Ian Lochhead. Canterbury University Press, Christchurch, 1999. 364 pp. NZ price: \$79.95. ISBN 0-908812-85-X.

BENJAMIN MOUNTFORT was a leading architect in Canterbury through the second half of the nineteenth century. He produced some of the country's most cherished buildings of Gothic Revival influence. Mountfort set a lasting imprint on the city of Christchurch, but his prolific work extended as far as Auckland. In Christchurch his well-known buildings included the wonderful Canterbury Provincial Council Buildings, the Canterbury Museum, Canterbury College, and Trinity Congregational church. Their skilled architecture contributes to the very identity of the city.

In *A Dream of Spires*, Ian Lochhead considers the background to Mountfort's thinking. He reviews both the Victorian Gothic Revival in England, its sources and examples such as the work of Butterfield, but also recognizes the local circumstances, materials, and society, here in New Zealand and how they influenced Mountfort. Although Mountfort was inspired by revivalist thinking, such as that of Cambridge's Ecclesiologists, he nonetheless developed a creative, professional understanding of local materials and circumstances. The original architectural contribution of Mountfort is valued here for its own sake. Lochhead also discusses the development of Benjamin Mountfort as a person; he endeavours to get under the architectural skin.

There is much interesting detail in *A Dream of Spires* on buildings created by Mountfort. For example, the Provincial Council Buildings in Christchurch, while incorporating timber construction with traditional stone, show a strong yet varied Gothic spirit with personally interpreted elegance. The wooden portion (1859) displays local ingenuity such as the rhythmic timber-frame work. The Council Chamber (1865), on the other hand, shows an ornate polychromatic High Victorian character in masonry, regarded as one of the finest of its type. We also have to thank Mountfort for the completion of Christchurch Cathedral. Though originally designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott, who was sceptical of colonial abilities, its final success was also due to Mountfort, as Scott came to acknowledge.

Later, having developed more New Zealand-architectural skills, Mountfort produced St Mary's pro-cathedral, Auckland (1886) with its wonderful open truss-work like an