

transformation had been achieved within 30 years. This was in spite of tensions between the Company, the Crown and Maori over land titles, a paucity of both capital and cheap labour, misjudgements about soil fertility and a high degree of individual mobility.

These were just a few of the factors that circumscribed the ways settlers could transform their landscapes. And when that happened, how did they respond? How did they adjust and go on readjusting their aspirations and redefining their aesthetic ideal? And what of Miles Fairburn's suggestion that settlers found in their gardens solace from their isolation? Or Gordon Ell's notion that introduced flowers record settlers' emotional links back into the Old World? These and other questions, which might have assisted in understanding Wellington's eco-history, are unanswered. In Auckland and Dunedin there have been recent contributions to those cities' environmental histories. Wellington, it would appear, awaits a similar body of historical research that encompasses the conceptual and perceptual dimensions of human interactions with and transformations of its environments, rather than just a record of changes in the material landscape, narrowly interpreted within a heritage rubric.

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1 Rollo Arnold, *The Farthest Promised Land: English Villagers, New Zealand Immigrants of the 1870s*, Wellington, 1981, p.262.

Eastbourne. A History of the Eastern Bays of Wellington Harbour. By Anne Beaglehole with Alison Carew. The Historical Society of Eastbourne Inc., Eastbourne, 2001. 318 pp. NZ price: \$49.00. ISBN 0-473-07966-6.

'Gone?'

'Gone!'

Oh, the relief, the difference it made to have the men out of the house . . . Beryl . . . wanted, somehow, to celebrate the fact that they could do what they liked now. There was no man to disturb them; the whole perfect day was theirs.

MANY EASTBOURNE RESIDENTS, like Katherine Mansfield's parents, began their association as summer weekenders but moved in for the summer when 'the men' could catch a reliable ferry or bus to work, leaving a beachside community of women and children. These commuters were the resource that sustained the permanent residents, the storekeepers, tradesmen and bus-drivers. Eastbourne is one of a select group of New Zealand settlements that includes Devonport, Sumner and Portobello. Situated near a major city, they have grown not by necessity but by choice. The national economy would be little poorer without them. They exist to prove that life is not constrained entirely by the iron laws of economics. Their people gain a living from the nearby city, but reside where they can put a stretch of country or — better still — of water between home and office. They are an indulgence of the spirit.

Anne Beaglehole shows that Eastbourne and its neighbours have often inspired ideas that looked good at the time until frustration at difficult access set in. Travellers and drovers on the bleak seashore road to the Wairarapa were tempted by its sunny gullies to try farming there, but by the 1890s most of these attempts had failed. As early as the 1850s, 'weekend people' would charter small coastal steamers for picnics in Lowry or York Bay. In 1865 most of Lowry Bay was purchased as a retreat for the governor,

Sir George Grey, a consolation for forcing his removal from a warmer capital. Bowen, Fergusson and Normanby stayed occasionally, but the property was sold to developers in 1877. Leading families — the Dillon Bells, Hursthouses and Atkinsons — became the new lords of these bays.

The key to success, found by J. H. Williams in the 1890s, was to provide transport as well as entertainment. His little fleet of steamers brought from 3000 to 5000 visitors a day to the resort that he built at Days Bay for the 'blazer, frock and tea-flask brigade'.

A distinctive group was the Italian fishermen who chain-migrated from the island of Stromboli to Rona Bay, dragging their nets until they could afford to return home to collect wives and families.

Landowners found that subdivisions for holiday baches were so much more profitable than rough grazing that farming disappeared. The small permanent population was so swollen each weekend by those who wanted urban comforts that a borough was proclaimed in 1906. Through its lifetime, until a perhaps merciful release by the merger of 1989, Eastbourne's borough council would struggle to provide roads, water and sewerage for a 'town' like a string of beads between harbour and bush. It had to manage an ailing shipping service, an access road pounded by storms and periodic forest fires.

Despite the physical challenges, the area has held the loyalty of its inhabitants, including artists, scholars and civil servants: Kate Atkinson, Joe Heenan, the Freyberg brothers, John Pascoe, Graham Bagnall. Indeed, the latter wrote an earlier history, *Okiwi* (1972), to which Beaglehole's excellent book is indebted.

As the author writes '[t]he history of a small place like Eastbourne can tell us a great deal about New Zealand and about New Zealanders'. Her book is immensely readable, physically attractive and profusely illustrated (with brilliant captions). Anne Beaglehole's intimate knowledge of contemporary social histories provides a foundation for her narrative. This is a history of New Zealand from a specific perspective. At all times the reader is aware of how stronger currents than local affairs have shaped the bays. While many individual personalities emerge strongly, the concerns of women, ethnic minorities and social classes link the local to national studies. It is a striking fact that small towns in the region — Susan Butterworth's Petone, Roberta McIntyre's Martinborough and now Anne Beaglehole's Eastbourne — have been better served by historians than has the city of Wellington.

Writing about New Zealand towns and cities, then, has benefited from the flowering of thematic social history in the last two decades. We are now much better placed to interpret the social interactions in communities. However, the challenges posed by Miles Fairburn in *The Ideal Society and its Enemies* (1989) are by no means resolved yet. Regrettably, also, we have lost the leadership of historians such as David Hamer, Rollo Arnold and the historical geographer Harvey Franklin, who explored the nature and types of urban settlement — origins, site, resources, growth processes, form and function. It is to be hoped that community histories emerge that re-visit these issues, so fundamental to how places work.

Eastbourne will encourage other communities to commission and support books that tell their version of the New Zealand story: a stimulus not only to civic pride but also to critical thinking about the nature and quality of our increasingly urban communities.

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Kapiti Coast