

*Mr Jones' Wives: War Brides of New Zealand Servicemen*. Auckland Museum, Domain Drive, Auckland. Curated by Georgina White. Reviewed 15 July 2011. Internet: <http://www.aucklandmuseum.com/?t=1587>.

VISITORS ARRIVE AT THIS EXHIBITION, located in a small gallery between the permanent 'Scars on the Heart' exhibition and the Museum library, to find a dark room where lights illuminate a number of desks and a pile of suitcases. Playing on a screen in one corner are newsreel clips of servicemen, war brides and children arriving in New Zealand by ship. The darkness of the room, and the ghostly — because silent — arrival scenes playing in the corner, lend a somewhat sombre feel to the exhibition.

The exhibition is called *Mr Jones' Wives* because these war brides were given that nickname by a newspaper. It alludes to the fact that it was the job of Minister of Defence Frederick Jones to organise the travel of the brides to New Zealand. Between 1942 and 1948, around 3700 women (and 1000 children), from 37 different countries, came to New Zealand to start married life. The exhibition is based on research done by Gabrielle Fortune for her PhD thesis, completed in 2005.

The desks, each with a chair, are intended to convey the idea of writing letters, because that is how the brides kept in touch with their fiancés and husbands, and with their families back in Italy, Greece, the United Kingdom and elsewhere. Each desk has one bride's story conveyed by letters and telegrams, along with other artefacts, such as bridal veils and head-dresses. These add an intimacy to the exhibition which the rather unimaginative use of letters and telegrams does not give it.

At another desk, the photograph album of Onslow Thompson has been digitised so that visitors can flip through some of the images on a screen. Onslow was killed in action a month after he married Joyce Williams in England. Joyce has never visited New Zealand. At first sight, this may seem rather tangential to the exhibition, but it does serve to remind us that some of these marriages were very short-lived. While this is not spelt out in the exhibition, Onslow's album also reminds the visitor why these relationships occurred — they were often the result of brief encounters during a time of heightened emotions, when awareness of the fragility of life was keen. It was a time when opportunities had to be seized, and many marriages took place after a very short time of acquaintance.

On the other hand, the inclusion of Lawrie Birks's story seems very out of place. While Lawrie served overseas during the Second World War, he did not meet his future wife there. In fact, he did not marry until 1957. The reasoning behind including Lawrie's story needs to be spelt out to the visitor.

At another table, there are excerpts from oral history interviews available. Visitors listen to them through pseudo old-fashioned telephone receivers, which is a nice touch. The sound quality on two of the excerpts is not very good. The three women talk about what it was like for them adapting to life in New Zealand, and give the sort of personal and detailed reflections that oral history interviews are so good at providing.

The stand-out is Claire Dunlop, who is reflective and insightful about her experiences — life, she said, started again when she stepped ashore in New Zealand. In this country, she stated, 'I had no past'. This lack of shared memories, relations and friends made the new lives of these war brides complicated. Claire, at least, spoke English; imagine how lonely it was for the women from Greece and Italy and other non-English-speaking countries.

Another lovely touch in the exhibition is the opportunity to contribute memories. Visitors can write short accounts on pieces of paper which are then pinned on a wall, thus adding more of the personal insights to the interview excerpts. People have taken this opportunity, and there is a nice collection of comments from war brides themselves, and from their family members and acquaintances.

I came away feeling slightly disappointed. It was partly because I disliked there being

so little light in the room, but mostly it was because the exhibition felt disjointed. The technique of using individual stories to illuminate the story of the whole — microhistory, if you like — can be very successful, but in this case the larger story remained obscure. It is, however, pleasing to see the Auckland Museum depicting the war experience more broadly with exhibitions such as *Mr Jones' Wives*.

MEGAN HUTCHING

*Auckland*

Reserve Bank of New Zealand Museum. Ground Floor, 2 The Terrace, Wellington. Reviewed 3 August 2011. Internet: <http://www.rbnzmuseum.govt.nz>.

Bank of New Zealand Museum. Level 1, Harbour Quays, 60 Waterloo Quay, Wellington. Reviewed 3 August 2011. Internet: <http://www.bnz.co.nz/about-us/history/bnz-museum>.

THESE TWO SMALL MUSEUMS are well laid out and are of considerable interest. Both, naturally, are designed to inform the public about the history and activities of their respective organisations, and in this they succeed. There is a considerable emphasis on artefacts and memorabilia, with audio-visual materials as well.

Panels in the Reserve Bank Museum outline both the economic history of New Zealand since first Polynesian settlement and the history of the bank since its establishment in 1933. Periodisation is a key issue in historical explanation, and that emphasised here accurately identifies a national development era from 1933 until 1972, with a difficult transition from then until 1993. Some might dispute that the 'open economy' only began in 1993; when I was an undergraduate, 30 years ago, New Zealand was described as an open economy in the sense of being trade dependent. The 1993 date privileges Ruth Richardson's period as minister of finance. Some do regard that period as the final instalment of 'reform', but the matter is disputed.

Much of the content in the display panels is uncontentiously presented. In many cases this is appropriate, but sometimes more controversial matters are elided. The bank's establishment is presented as the natural outcome of policy development, when Gordon Coates went to some lengths to push it through against the apathy or opposition of some Cabinet colleagues. The Reserve Bank Act 1989 is presented in a similarly depoliticised fashion; inflation targeting may well be a sensible way to ensure price stability and the appropriate focus of monetary policy, but this is not undisputed. Preceding decades are summarised as if error was patently obvious; yet exchange rate controls and credit controls were not self-evidently 'unsuccessful' ways of controlling inflation. Some might say they worked quite well in the 1950s and for part of the 1960s (moreover, the Official Cash Rate is also a control). More to the point is that New Zealand was far from unique in the developed world in its policy mix after 1945. Some explanation of the changing external environment might have been helpful here; it is at least arguable that the post-war regime was not flawed from the start, but became less workable in the context of a changing world economy from the mid-1960s. Despite these reservations, the panels are informative and short, and perceptive discussions of each governor frame the bank's history.

The artefacts and memorabilia are interesting, with a good deal of them concerning currency. There is a comprehensive range of specimen banknotes, including a pound note issued by Te Peeke o Aotearoa, under Tawhiao. There are also balances, seals and the fine china off which governors dined until the 1980s. The undoubted highlight, however, is a working Moniac hydraulic computer, designed and built in 1949 by the New Zealander Bill Phillips (of Phillips Curve fame) for modelling economic phenomena. The Moniac is put through its paces on the first Wednesday of every month, but a virtual Moniac can be seen on the museum's informative website.