

Christchurch Ruptures. By Katie Pickles. Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2016. 197pp. NZ price: \$14.99. ISBN: 9780908321292.

The BWB Texts, of which this book is one, might be seen as a revival of the old art of pamphleteering. *Christchurch Ruptures* is a provocative and interesting essay in which Katie Pickles engages as a historian with some very contemporary arguments about the future of Christchurch – a future which as a result of the earthquakes of 2010 and 2011 has become uncertain. If I have understood it correctly, Pickles's argument is that the city's imagined past might have been accepted as a version of events until the earthquakes, but such acceptance is now neither desirable nor possible.

That imagined past, it must be discussed in considerable detail, one which was trotted out by civic dignitaries and local worthies, a mythology with significant traction in public discourse, but one which is now purveyed by few if any serious historians. It is, of course, a combination of clichés: 'Englishness', the 'first four ships', and 'the garden city'. It got something of an airing in the three-volume *History of Canterbury*, published between 1957 and 1971, but has since been increasingly confined to some heritage enthusiasts.

The clichés, then, are discussed in considerable detail, and I thought that at times the argument strays into accepting them a little uncritically. Was Christchurch really, before September 2010, 'a systematically planned new-world city on the edge of the British Empire' (p.9)? Were 'the ideas and practice of colonialism' proceeding happily along until 3 September 2010 (p.9) in an atmosphere of 'colonial confidence' (p.10)? The risk is that changing perspectives have been elided into an undifferentiated 14 or 15 decades, and the characterization of pre-quake Christchurch as 'a nostalgic small colonial city that belongs everywhere' (p.16) is strictly arguable.

Pickles is on safer ground in emphasizing that landscapes are cultural and living, and that the seismic destruction of statues like that of John Robert Godley 'symbolise the end of a colonial era' (p.17). Again, though, the symbol came a long time after the reality. This is notwithstanding the continued attachment, well demonstrated in the text, of cultural conservatives who describe the statues of Godley, Rolleston and the like as 'our' history. Notwithstanding the continued effusions of popular writers, the 'traditional settler stories of the Deans brothers and the first four ships' (p.35) were challenged a long, long time ago. In this context, though, the essay usefully discusses how the Ngāi Tahu histories of 'Christchurch' have been marginalized and overlaid, and how influential Jane Deans herself was in the creation of the myths around her (husband's) family. The establishment myths are given a further airing in a discussion of a 1952 promotional film, which is juxtaposed with Peter Jackson's 1994 *Heavenly Creatures*, about the Parker-Hulme murders.

For, as Pickles recognizes and argues at some length, there are other histories of Christchurch, even other 'settler' histories. There is a degree of overstatement in the suggestion that a very competent chapter 'reveals' a 'heritage of radical people and ideas' (p.6), for they are not themes unknown to labour historians, or to readers of some more recent histories of the city. Pickles is quite correct in arguing that this history, too, has been displaced by the earthquakes, but the point is that histories of the place have been contested for a long time.

Perhaps the major flashpoint for the ongoing contestation is the lengthy argument over the future of the Anglican cathedral, which suffered very major damage in succeeding earthquakes. The Anglican diocesan authorities and bishop have been

subject to sustained, and sometimes vituperative, criticism from a vocal lobby which, apparently, will be satisfied with nothing less than rebuilding the cathedral precisely as it was. Pickles's discussion includes some good points about how Cathedral Square had changed, from a space ringed by commercial and professional premises to one devoted to the consumption of 'heritage'. She makes some telling points, too, about how much of the insistence on cathedral restoration comes from the unchurched, and here quotes a former Dean and others to the effect that few of these advocates seemed to have much idea of what used to go on inside the building, or, indeed, much familiarity with the forms of Anglican worship. What was required, apparently, was an 'iconic' structure that could serve as a civic centre. This discussion might have been extended by considering why the fate of the also very badly damaged Catholic cathedral – of superior architectural merit in the opinion of Bernard Shaw – has attracted far less controversy.

Pickles's argument, in its essentials, is that the old Christchurch has been irretrievably lost. In dissecting some of the myths, she suggests that it was in any case as much an imaginary city as a real one. Therefore, 'history' may not, or might not, be deployed as an argument for a reversion to the status quo ante, for it is both possible and necessary to build a different city, inclusive of all who live there and informed by the twenty-first century rather than an idealized nineteenth. What that city will look like, only time will tell.

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Working Lives c 1900: A Photographic Essay. By Erik Olssen. Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2014. 167pp. NZ price: \$50. ISBN 9871877578519.

Erik Olssen has long been New Zealand's premier labour historian. His career and the recording of the history of the Dunedin working class have gone together like hand and glove. Thanks to Olssen's work we know an awful lot more about the history of life and work in Dunedin, especially in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, than anywhere else in New Zealand. Many of us feel a strong sense of knowledge, perhaps even ownership, of the suburb of Caversham, and specific sites like Hillside Railway Workshops. His work has always been deeply based on research and perhaps on occasion this has made it a little dense for some. This volume, while still richly researched, is anything but dense.

Working Lives takes the form of a photographic essay. This is not an entirely new genre for New Zealand labour history. Bert Roth's *Toil and Trouble*, while considerably lighter on text, is one example and is still mined by many of us to illustrate lectures and public talks. This volume supplements but will not replace Roth as the 'go to' source for images of working New Zealand and the labour movement.

Olssen's intention is to provide a visual (and written) snapshot of working Dunedin at around 1900. This is at once the strength and weakness of *Working Lives*. The strength is the richness of coverage of the multi-dimensional lives of the Dunedin working class. We are guided on a visual tour of place, both the physical geography