

Obituary

Charles Andrew Sharp 1906-1974

On 8 February 1974, Andrew Sharp, the prominent historian of Pacific exploration, died suddenly in Auckland.

Sharp made his way in life under heavy handicaps, chief of which was indifferent health. His father was killed in an accident three months after Andrew's birth and the son's boyhood in consequence was rather nomadic. He entered the University of Otago in 1924, however, as a formidable student of exceptional promise. This was realized at Otago where he graduated as senior scholar in English and Latin, subjects he jointly continued, winning first class honours in 1927, the year he was awarded a Rhodes scholarship.

Study at St John's, Oxford, brought Sharp into touch with people who encouraged him to take up public service as they conceived it, by becoming an imperial administrator. He was posted to Burma as an officer in the Indian Civil Service. Soon after he was boarded out with what he laconically described later as 'gut trouble'; but his contemporaries speak of his returning to New Zealand in 1932 quite broken in health.

Seven years of farming in Southland brought about a partial physical restoration and in 1939 he entered the civil service, passing by way of Internal Affairs and the Prime Minister's Department to the newly-established Department of External Affairs in 1943. Overseas postings to Australia and Canada followed, but the latter tour was curtailed by ill-health which constrained Sharp in 1951 to retire from External Affairs and re-enter Internal Affairs.

He had been forced to abandon two careers: the mood of frustration and disappointment was strong in a man in his mid-forties who had, it seemed, failed to realize the promise foreshadowed in an outstanding academic record in youth. From a need for self-fulfilment no less than from an undoubted intellectual curiosity, he turned to research and writing and became a denizen in evenings and Saturdays of the Alexander Turnbull Library, a short walk from his Tinakori Road home in Wellington. What followed was a prolific output of publications, all (apart from a history of the Department of Internal Affairs) written outside his office hours as a civil servant whose main concern was cultural affairs. Only high ability, industry and a disciplined professional approach made these books possible.

It would be fair to say that Andrew had gaps in his equipment as historian. He had little background in analytical history and this could show. But the style of research he turned to drew on his strengths. When he began he already had Latin and French, but he acquired fluent reading knowledge of Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian, including the early modern forms

of those languages and their paleography, formidable skills in one who had decided on exploration in the Pacific as his field. And because he had no great stock of academic history with its received ideas, there was scope for the novel, even bizarre, insight that intuition harnessed to intelligence might provide. This was demonstrated by Sharp's third book *Ancient Voyagers in the Pacific* (1956) in which he argued that Hawaii, New Zealand, Easter Island, and other isolated Pacific Islands were settled in prehistoric times by people who had been blown off course or who had otherwise chanced on the landfall. This was a revolutionary hypothesis, the soundness of which is revealed by the way it has become an interpretative commonplace today.

Other books written in Sharp's spare time include *Crisis at Kerikeri* (1958), history in the form of a novel which did not, as he recognized, quite come off, *The Discovery of the Pacific Islands* (1960), *Adventurous Armada: The Story of Legazpi's Expedition* (1961) and *The Discovery of Australia* (1963).

In 1967 Andrew was appointed to be the first Senior Research Fellow in the Arts Faculty of the University of Auckland. For one whose work hitherto had been squeezed into after-office hours the chance to work full time on research was a positive luxury. This he turned to account. Arising out of this three year appointment were works on the journals or discoveries of Jacob Roggeveen, Tasman, and Duperrey. Yet he entered fully into the life of the History Department at Auckland giving sage advice and encouragement to young researchers there.

In 1970 the Auckland University conferred an honorary D.Litt., an award which, secretly, enormously moved and gratified one who had more than his share of ill-health and disappointment. He was still planning fresh researches at the time of his death.

RUSSELL STONE

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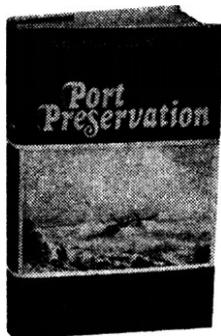
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PETER STUART

Edward Gibbon Wakefield
in New Zealand:
his political career 1853-4

Reviewed in *American Historical Review*, June 1973,
by Helen Taft Manning

Probably the greatest merit of this little volume is that it is not founded, as are most biographical treatments of Wakefield's life, on his own highly misleading account of the important events in which he took part. Fortunately there were other literate and intelligent settlers in Christchurch, Wellington, and Auckland who kept journals and wrote letters and were not unduly biased in Wakefield's favour. Pre-eminent among them was Henry Sewell who went out on the same ship as Wakefield to wind up the affairs of the Canterbury Association, who for their first months together retained his high opinion of Wakefield as an enlightened and original thinker, but who was gradually disillusioned by Wakefield's efforts to assume a dictatorial role in the New Zealand Parliament and especially by his betrayal (as most of his colleagues saw it) of those principles on land policy for which he had always stood. There seems little doubt that this metamorphosis in the Wakefield gospel was due to his desire to win a constituency in the Hutt Valley where the larger part of the voters was landless and (in a good many cases) unemployed labourers. That a change in land policy was needed is probably true, but Wakefield made the efforts of Governor Grey in that direction the main count in Wakefield's violent attack on him.

The most interesting part of the book is the account of the meeting of the first New Zealand Parliament in Auckland. Wakefield was able to pose successfully as the man who had done most to introduce "responsible government" in Canada by persuading the governor general, Sir Charles Bagot, to accept the Baldwin-Lafontaine government. On this point he led astray not only New Zealanders of his own day but also the author. Canadian historians have shown conclusively since the Bagot and Draper papers have been available that Bagot's conversion was due to pressure from his conservative ministers, especially Draper, who forced him to come to terms with Lafontaine and his followers. But if Wakefield had had surprisingly little influence on Canadian politics, he did for a time acquire real leadership among his colleagues in Auckland, and this tale of his last pyrotechnic display of his political and oratorical gifts makes fascinating reading.

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