

Elizabethan tradition burning brightly in the Antipodes, with its own Burghley (Holyoake), Cranmer (Marshall) and second Cecil (Kirk). It would be sensible to overlook such crassness were it not indicative of noteworthy phenomenon. The national vice of bombast inflates a pokey airport coffee bar into 'The Flight Deck Restaurant Lounge', an opponent into 'a traitor', and three frigates into the new Elizabethan navy. A choice architectural example appears late in this book: 'The subtlety of their proportions, the careful use of materials, the profound considerations given to landscape conjured up a paradigm of great simplicity, content, and splendour'. The structure being referred to is the average wooden box that most New Zealanders live in. Or does the author deliberately employ hyperbole? If so he is exceptional. For on the whole the book lacks a sense of proportion. With one or two exceptions, the contributors do not stand back and chuckle at the pretensions. Readers will be reminded of something which has persisted in New Zealand life — a staid, pedestrian, colonial earnestness.

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*Archives in New Zealand: A Report.* By Wilfred I. Smith. Archives and Records Association of New Zealand, Wellington, 1978. 50pp. N.Z. price: \$2.00.

IN an interview in Auckland shortly after his arrival in New Zealand to report on the country's archives Dr Wilfred Smith, Dominion Archivist of Canada, appears to have said that New Zealand was 'one of the few Western countries with the foresight and imagination to co-ordinate its preservation of historical records', and that his report 'would provide a national development plan to show how archives could be used most efficiently with the limited money available.'<sup>1</sup> At the time he looked to be giving the game away before it had begun. The published report does little to alter that impression. Dr Smith makes a number of practical recommendations, especially with regard to National Archives, but nothing he says is new and he says it in terms of such soothing blandness that the impact is negligible.

At the Archives and Records Association seminar, 'Perspectives on the Smith Report', held in Wellington on 4 September 1978, an administrator in National Archives' own Department of Internal Affairs said: 'Legislators must be convinced that archives warrant a higher priority in the allocation of resources. There must be a clear demonstration of their value.'<sup>2</sup> But there was no suggestion that the department should participate in this demonstration, only an unerring passing of the buck to the Archives and Records Association. Has the role assumed by ARANZ in sponsoring the report been self-defeating? A report commissioned by government could hardly have been more gently worded than this one. Could a

<sup>1</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, Auckland, 11 February 1978, p.2; also *ibid.*, 6 March 1978, leading article.

<sup>2</sup> *Archifacts*, Nos 7-8 n.s. (September - December 1978), 31.

report to government have been quite so effortlessly side-stepped by administrators as on this occasion?

Dr Smith notes (p.7): 'The interest in a plan for total archives resources on the part of the Minister of Internal Affairs who is responsible for both archives and local government.' Hunting around for evidence of such a plan this reviewer re-read, with new understanding, a 1977 editorial in *Archifacts*. In a discussion of Dr Smith's forthcoming visit, and after mention of 'the underdeveloped means of preserving archives in this country', the comment was made: 'For once our weakness may be turned to advantage, and perhaps permit implementation of a total archives strategy with some chance of success.'<sup>3</sup> Was ARANZ hoping to implement 'a total archives strategy' in this country, and was the decision to invite the Dominion Archivist of Canada, which has a total archives policy (rather than, say, the Director-General of the Australian Archives), a piece of politicking to this end?

At national level the Smith report accepts the existing New Zealand situation of public archives going to National Archives and non-public archives and manuscripts going elsewhere; but with one notable exception. Recommendation 14 reads: 'That the National Archives be considered the appropriate repository for the papers of political figures and government officials of national significance; and that the inviolability of agreements with donors be guaranteed.' Dr Smith no doubt had the fate of the Nash papers in mind in making the latter part of this recommendation. But was he aware of Turnbull's very considerable holding of political papers and of that library's announced policy regarding further acquisitions?<sup>4</sup>

At regional level Dr Smith supports what appears to be a total archives strategy, although he does not call it that. Indeed, apart from endorsing a paper, 'Local Archives in New Zealand' by S.R. Strachan, and recommending the setting up of a pilot scheme in Otago, he does not go into much detail about regional archives, the principle of which he says (p.17) 'has been endorsed by both archivists and historians.' When and where and in what terms historians endorsed the principle of regional archives is not stated, nor are the views of librarians mentioned. As regards endorsement by archivists, the reference is perhaps to the set of criteria (quoted by Smith) which were adopted by the now defunct Archives Committee of the New Zealand Library Association, presumably in the light of Strachan's paper. But that paper, which was prepared for the 1975 New Zealand Library Association Conference, has never been published. Its arguments should have been at least summarized by Smith.

The Bank of New Zealand archivist has called the Smith report 'a washout as far as business archives in this country are concerned.'<sup>5</sup> Criticism of the report's section on church archives has been no less trenchant from those working in this field.<sup>6</sup> Dr Smith in fact is unconvincing outside the sphere of public archives. He praises the Turnbull Library's high quality service to users (and overlooks the fact that some other libraries with substantial manuscript holdings give an equally good service), but seems somewhat flummoxed by the institution itself. Thus (p.25): 'While the Alexander Turnbull Library is not, strictly speaking, an

3 *ibid.*, No. 2 n.s. (June 1977), 22.

4 J.E. Traue, 'Papers of Members of Parliament', in *Turnbull Library Record*, IX (1976), 4-5.

5 *Archifacts*, Nos 7-8 n.s. (September - December 1978), 17.

6 At the religious archives seminar in Wellington on 5 September 1978, held in conjunction with the second annual conference of ARANZ.

archives, in the context of the total archival resources of the country it has a significant role as the national repository for non-public archives and manuscripts.' Either he is unaware that many would cavil at this designation of Turnbull as *the* national repository for non-public archives and manuscripts and that this role would cut across the regional archives concept earlier endorsed, or he has failed to explain what he means.

It would have been surprising if, in six weeks, any overseas expert could have come to grips with New Zealand's manuscript resources, scattered as they are up and down the country. For users, this fragmentation of material is a major problem. The user's point of view, however, does not get much of an airing in the report, but whether Dr Smith should be blamed for this is open to question. Although his itinerary records meetings with academic staff at several universities, the only discernible echo of these meetings in the report seems to be the statement (p.9): 'the lack of support for the promotion of archives from members of university faculties, with few exceptions, is a significant factor in the underdeveloped and isolated position of archives and archivists in New Zealand today.' The Historical Association did recently make submissions to the Minister of Internal Affairs on the revision of the Archives Act, something Dr Smith fails to mention. Apart from this, his overall criticism of academics is probably justified.

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