

main themes. The central feature of early Canterbury rural society was the large family, statistically unequalled in New Zealand. From that base sprang the chief features of country social life, and much of farming development. Large families fuelled urban drift and internal migration. Unfortunately there is not a sufficient research base for a separate chapter on women. Schools were the first community centres, reaching their highest numbers about 1910; churches nearly matched schools in numbers in some parts of rural Canterbury. Country hospitals were established by strong community effort. Indeed, the swiftness with which Canterbury working immigrants produced leaders in local bodies and associations has not been sufficiently appreciated.

The mass of ordinary people are necessarily anonymous in summary accounts. Their leading men and women should not be. G.W. Forbes was Canterbury's longest-serving rural MP. He appears, unidentified, on p.108. Sir Walter Mulholland was probably New Zealand's leading farmers' advocate. Innovator in farm machinery and skilful photographer (four of his prints are used here), he deserves greater exposure than he is given on p.88. I suggest that the 75 cameos, which do not seem to follow any plan, could have been restructured to include biographies of outstanding men and women. I could nominate nearly a score.

JIM GARDNER

Christchurch

Southern Capital: Christchurch: Towards a City Biography 1850–2000. Edited by John Cookson and Graeme Dunstall. Canterbury University Press, Christchurch, 2000. 395 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 0-908812-87-6.

CANTERBURY UNIVERSITY is to be congratulated on publishing this volume of essays on its city. This is local history at its best, looking at broad themes over a comparatively long period, and relating the local experience to wider trends. Christchurch has been the subject of much historical research and the contributors have harvested the fruits of that research, while adding much of their own. Judging by the impressive list of theses on local topics now being undertaken at Canterbury, it will not be long before there will be ample material for another volume.

Inevitably the reputed 'Englishness' of the city is a theme that recurs. John Cookson, in particular, explores the development of this 'feat of imagination' ('Christchurch has always been more recognisable as a colonial and New World town') and its significance. One possible function of the myth — to draw a negative contrast between a supposed traditional 'English' rural social harmony and disruptive doctrines of class conflict — is perhaps overlooked. It was, after all, a myth largely nurtured by the better-off. The chapter by Katie Pickles on 'Workers and Workplaces' and Jim McAloon's on 'Radical Christchurch' demonstrate that Christchurch working people were frequently ready to contest the view that everything was lovely in 'the Garden City'. Pickles makes extremely effective use of quotations from the University of Canterbury Oral History Project on 'Work in Christchurch 1920–1950' in seeking to capture the experience of working people at their urban places of employment. There is a very long tradition of presenting the rural as the 'real' New Zealand and our larger towns as incidental, artificial, even parasitic. Trevor Burnard rightly reminds us in 'An Artisanal Town — The Economic Sinews of Christchurch' that 'Christchurch exists because it was willed into being; its early settlers wanted to live in towns, and fashioned Christchurch as the town in which they would live.' W. David McIntyre writes wittily on the architecture of the city and agrees with Cookson that Australasian and American

influences have been 'more important in the long run than Englishness'. There is a lively chapter on 'The High Arts in a Regional culture — From Englishness to Self-Reliance', though 'diversity' seems more apt than 'self-reliance' and it is unfortunate that Christchurch's famed brass bands fail to meet the criteria for inclusion. In looking at 'Sport in Christchurch', Greg Ryan demonstrates yet again the powerful influence of class in shaping citizens' experience of leisure as well as work.

Historical geographers have made enormous contributions to New Zealand historiography and are well represented here. Eric Pawson examines the attitudes that Christchurch's citizens have taken to their environment, the challenges the city's site posed (and continues to pose) to them and the environmental impact that development has had. This chimes nicely with Tipene O'Regan's foreword, which speculates as to how a proposal to build Christchurch today might be treated by the planning process. He is probably right that it would be rejected. Peter Perry's chapter on local government surveys the long struggle over amalgamation. He also reflects usefully on the way that roughly contemporaneous changes in local government in Britain might have influenced the authorities created here.

The Ngai Tahu dimension receives considerable coverage. Te Maire Tau discusses the significance of the landscape and genealogy in Maori traditions, and suggests some interesting European parallels. Chapters by Te Maire Tau and Ann Parsonson trace the history of Ngai Tahu since European contact, largely from the point of view of interaction with political authorities. Understandably, much of this work is dominated by grievances against those authorities, but it is strongly argued that recent settlements have helped to provide another basis for tribal identity in commercial success.

One of the functions of this type of work is to encourage readers to explore more widely and to appreciate that history is debated territory. Most contributors survey the existing published work on their area in their notes and further reading. Unfortunately McAloon ignores the work of Stevan Eldred-Grigg that deals extensively with the Christchurch élite. Criticizing such work is one thing, pretending it does not exist quite another. There again, perhaps an excommunication is to be preferred to a burning.

There are arguments one might debate, such as the claim that the people of Christchurch have typically looked inland rather than to the sea. Major transport projects, not least the construction of the Lyttelton Rail Tunnel only a few years after the founding of the Canterbury Settlement, demonstrated the port's significance. The city's tram routes headed rapidly across largely open country towards Sumner and New Brighton, long before they looked to the hills. Then there are all those twentieth-century photographs of hordes of Christchurchians baking on their beaches. The Antipodean obsession with sand and saltwater flourished even in the teeth of the 'beastly easterly'. There is also curiously little mention of Dunedin — it is almost always Wellington and Auckland that provide the counterpoint. Yet Dunedin was the 'Southern Capital' that Christchurch eclipsed.

This is an exciting publication. Hopefully university historians in other centres will someday get the opportunity to follow suit and examine the histories of their own cities. Christchurch's historians have set them a high standard.

JAMES WATSON

Massey University, Palmerston North