

This book is the natural sequel to May's other two works that have focused on the 'discovery' of early childhood, and the family lives of Pakeha women in the post-war years. The themes raised there have come together in *Politics in the Playground*, a book that will be of value to those interested in education, and the contentious issues surrounding women, families and the state.

BRONWYN DALLEY

Ministry for Culture and Heritage

'Unfortunate Folk': Essays on Mental Health Treatment 1863–1992. Edited by Barbara Brookes and Jane Thomson. University of Otago Press, Dunedin, 2001, 302 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 1-877276-09-X.

POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS from New Zealand's university history departments over the years have produced much outstanding work that has never been accessible to the wider community. The Otago University history department, and in particular Barbara Brookes and her co-editor Jane Thomson, are to be congratulated for bringing together in a single attractive volume the work and ideas of 15 such students, who produced dissertations over the last 30 years, mostly during the past decade. As Brookes explains in her introduction, not only was the excellent research in danger of being lost, but so too were the experiences of those they were writing about, the mentally ill or 'unfortunate folk' of the past. The students of Otago were uniquely placed to undertake this research owing to the rich records of local mental health institutions, as well as being on the site of New Zealand's only medical school before the 1960s. Much of the research relates to Seacliff Mental Asylum, New Zealand's largest and arguably — under the medical superintendence of Sir Frederic Truby King — most innovative mental hospital in the early twentieth century. Another focal point is Ashburn Hall, also located in Otago. Founded in 1882, this has particular significance as New Zealand's only private mental asylum.

The volume is divided into three sections, the first dealing with mental health provision in nineteenth-century Otago, the second with twentieth-century developments, and the third with national issues in the history of psychiatry. Because of the centrality of Otago to mental health developments in New Zealand, some of the themes developed in the third section have already been explored, leading to repetition, especially in relation to legislation, methods of treatment, and specialization. Yet the final chapter by Susannah Grant, exploring the separate worlds of madness and reason, and drawing extensively on Janet Frame's work, provides a powerful ending to the book. None of the essays are narrow institutional accounts, but are reflective of modern trends in the historiography of mental health care and social history. One of the book's strengths is the primacy given to patients' experiences. While none of the authors chose to engage in any depth with, or pursue the methodology of Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilisation*, Judith Holloway does take issue, in her chapter on admissions to Seacliff in the 1930s, with social control models as being overly simplistic and ignoring the realities of mental illness.

In her chapter, Cheryl Caldwell describes the innovative regime Truby King inaugurated at Seacliff. She nevertheless concludes from the statistics on recoveries that the results at Seacliff were no better than elsewhere, so that 'environmental engineering could not, in fact, cure deep-seated psychological problems' (p.48). Another author, Alan Somerville, cites British mental health historian, Anne Digby, who queried whether the criterion of recovery was an accurate guide to the work of an asylum. Digby argued

that humane treatment was 'surely an equally valid, if less quantifiable, measure of success' (p.91). This could also have applied to Seacliff. Medical statistics are in themselves problematic. As Somerville notes for Ashburn, a certain Louisa M. contributed four recoveries to the statistics in ten years. Susan E. was also discharged as recovered and remained at Ashburn Hall 'as a guest', dying three days later. Nor should doctors' own assessments be accepted at face value. It is hard to believe the assessments recorded unquestioningly by Susan Fennell in her chapter on Seacliff, 1912–1948, that injections of malarial serum to treat general paralysis of the insane produced 'remarkable results' and that 'responses were also favourable using tuberculin' (a treatment developed in the early twentieth century for tuberculosis, which was soon found to be totally ineffective, though a useful diagnostic tool).

I have one minor point to contribute to the history of Ashburn Hall. Alan Somerville notes that the names of the wards reflected inspiration from the great nineteenth-century psychiatrists (or 'alienists'), Tuke, Pinel and Conolly, although he pondered where the name of one ward, Mitchell, came from. This was almost certainly S. Weir Mitchell, the famous American neurologist, who set up a special hospital for neurology in Philadelphia in 1863 and pioneered the 'rest cure' for neurasthenics.

This is the second set of essays to come from postgraduate student work in the Otago history department (the first being *When the Waves Rolled in Upon Us: Essays in Nineteenth-Century Maori History*). The volume fills a real gap in the historiography of mental illness in New Zealand and will serve as a model to other university history departments of the contributions that postgraduate students can make to wider historical endeavour.

LINDA BRYDER

The University of Auckland

In Step With Time: A History of the Sisters of St Joseph of Nazareth, Wanganui, New Zealand. By Diane Strevens. David Ling Publishing, Auckland, 2001. 331 pp. NZ price: \$34.95. ISBN 0-908990-74-X.

DESPITE the Gothic animadversions of many of its critics, from within no less than from without the fold, the Catholic Church is not monolithic. Nor has it ever been, the council of Trent — and various well-publicized authoritarian episodes — notwithstanding. True, its institutional structures may be hierarchical, its doctrines based on assumptions of transcendence, and its formal disciplinary tradition directive rather than indulgently consensual. Yet it has always possessed, and rampantly so since the Second Vatican Council of the 1960s, a measured capacity for flexibility that has allowed an appreciable degree of adaptation and innovation, although rarely enough to satisfy those of its critics strongly wedded to fashionable causes. Heterodoxy has sometimes flowed from orthodoxy and always the noumenal essence of the Church is expressed in a multitude of tangible institutions. Although grounded in faith, these are at once mutable and imperfect, flourishing and faltering in specific niches of time and place, where historians snare them.

It is a particular — and rare — merit of Diane Streven's well-titled book that the narrowly focused narrative indicated in the subtitle is set within a broad context that acknowledges the theological and ecclesiastical ramifications of her subject. Why is it that so much church history seems to ignore religion? That is not the case here. This is not just an institutional chronicle, but it is one that shows an intellectually invigorating understanding of the Catholic church within which the 'Black Joes' had their being, and as part of which they marked out a considerable place for themselves in New Zealand history.