The final two essays are about the new processes for ensuring ethical conduct, in particular ethics committees. They ask the question ‘Could it happen again?’ Associate Professor Jan Crosthwaite examines the New Zealand system, and concludes that while it could happen again, that will be a rare occurrence. I hope she is right. One can never entirely eliminate unethical behaviour. Simply ‘having systems in place’ is not alone enough; those systems have to be observed and applied. Heavy workloads resulting from lack of resources, coupled with tight deadlines, can sometimes lead to corners being cut. More seriously, the flush of enthusiasm generated by ground-breaking research with exciting but unknown potential can sometimes blind the researcher to the ethical implications. But the current processes are thorough, and more importantly, have engendered a culture and awareness that means things will usually be done properly. So, overall, I share the author’s optimism.

It may be different in the international sphere, though, as the final essay by Alistair Campbell, Voo Teuk Chuan and Jacqueline Chin demonstrates. When research is sponsored by large corporates in developing countries, the host country may lack the facilities or expertise, in both medicine and process, to do a good job. Proper vigilance becomes a responsibility of the partners in the enterprise. Ethical behaviour must not stop at our back door.

So, in summary, this is an interesting and stimulating book. It reaches a wide audience or, rather, different bits of it reach different audiences. Some of the content is for everyone; some is for historians; some is for medical specialists; some is of real interest to lawyers like me. However, in the end, it is the debate about the Bryder book which overshadows the rest. It is that which makes this collection part of a controversy.

JOHN BURROWS

Law Commission

Reading on the Farm: Victorian Fiction and the Colonial World. By Lydia Wevers. Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2010. 344pp. NZ price: $40.00. ISBN 978–0–864736–35–2.

BRANCEPETH (THE ORIGIN, SPELLING AND PRONUNCIATION of this strange and beautiful word are never fully explained) was established as a sheep run in the 1850s by the Beetham family, near the town of Masterton. It expanded and prospered through the second half of the nineteenth century, but was broken up into smaller farms in the early part of the twentieth century. Like some other rural properties, Brancepeth had a ‘station library’ provided for the use of the workforce, which was quite separate from the Beethams’ family library. *Reading on the Farm* is a book-length study of the Brancepeth station library. As such, it is a daring move by both author and publisher in a field — the history of reading — where scanty and ambiguous evidence has made methodological improvization and innovation almost a necessity.

Lydia Wevers begins her exploration by evoking the ‘romance of the archive’ in a poetically heightened description of her visit to Brancepeth Station itself, still a working farm, in order to inhabit the physical space in which the library used to operate. The books themselves were gifted to the Victoria University Library in Wellington in the 1960s where (thankfully) they have been preserved as an intact collection, awaiting a scholar of Wevers’s intelligence, imagination and perseverance to do it justice. She justifies the large scale and limited focus of the study partly in terms of the library’s several unusual features: it is a large collection of 2000 volumes; it is a private library, but not a personal or family library; it has not been reduced by frequent culling, as would have been the case in a public library; and it seems to have been a recreational library (containing some 88% of fiction,

most of it Victorian), and therefore likely to be a better reflection of what people actually read and wanted to read than a self-improvement library full of worthy but largely unread books. Furthermore, while some written records, frustratingly, are lost — a Lending Book that would have revealed what individual readers read, and a Suggestion Book for new acquisitions that would have pointed to evolving tastes and preferences — others, such as library subscriber lists and a station diary, have survived, and these shed light on the library's daily management, social functions, and evolution over time.

The most significant factor in persuading Wevers that the project was indeed feasible at book-length was the ubiquitous and at times quite palpable 'presence' of the Brancepeth station clerk and librarian, John Vaughan Miller, in many different parts of the surviving archive: in the station diary (of which he was the sole author for 13 years), in the articles and editorials he wrote for several of the local newspapers (remarkably, the listed total is precisely a hundred), and, last but not least, in the annotations he wrote in many of the books held in the station library. Miller arrived at Brancepeth in late 1893, at the peak of the depression, a 55-year-old English immigrant with a classical education and an insatiable love of reading. Forced by circumstances to seek work apart from his wife and nine children, he left the station 14 years later and disappears from the historical record until his death in 1925.

Miller's personality, embodied in an unceasing flow of semi-private commentary on his own troubles, his employers, the station workers, the books in the library, and — through his newspaper articles — an extraordinarily wide range of public issues, becomes the main lens through which Brancepeth and its readers are slowly brought into focus. As a device for bringing the library to life as a functioning collection, Wevers's use of Miller's perspective (the 'Clerk's Tale' as she calls it) succeeds brilliantly, because it shows how intricately involved the library was in the farm's day-to-day rhythms of work and relaxation, learning and dreaming, happiness and unhappiness, as mediated (and often enough judged) through the near-omniscient consciousness of the man in charge of it.

Miller's is not the only perspective brought to bear, however. Other, more shadowy, readers hover in the background — employees, members of the Beetham family (whose own library was the source of some of the common-use collection), and even the occasional 'swagger' passing through. It may be worth saying, *en passant*, that Wevers's consistent refusal to gloss New Zealand-specific and Maori terms (e.g. 'whare'), however impeccable its politics, can sometimes be an obstacle, even for a well-disposed Australian reader such as myself. This is, after all, a book that aims for, and richly deserves to have, an international, as well as a New Zealand, audience.

Any worthwhile book of scholarship makes demands on the reader, and this is no exception. The first half of *Reading on the Farm* can be hard-going. It provides detailed information about the history of the farm itself; the genealogy of the Beetham family (including biographical notes on some not-so-famous English writers called Beetham, or Betham, but no advice on pronouncing the name); the early life of John Vaughan Miller; the attitudes and activities of successive generations of the Beethams; the social relations between them and the wider community, especially local Maori, and much else. In all of this, the subject of reading often seems to disappear for pages at a time, and the question 'Is all this strictly necessary?' can sometimes arise.

The question is answered, largely in the affirmative, by the second half of the book. Here, in a series of absorbing chapters, Wevers relates the books in the library intimately, at times speculatively, but always interestingly, to the people reading them in a particular time and place. She is able to weave this fabric of explanatory connections, however, only because the earlier information-rich chapters on history, genealogy, the district, forms of social organization and interaction, and individual lives have already created, for the reader, a bank of detailed factual knowledge which can later be referred to — with great economy — to reflect on the significance not just of 'reading fiction' in a general sense, but

of reading — and not reading — specific genres, authors and books, and reading them in different ways, with greater or lesser frequency, and with differing intensities of response. Her strategy is perhaps more opaque in its purpose than it needed to be, but I cannot myself see how else Wevers could have created the conditions for such an illuminating interplay than by 'front-loading' her study in the way she has.

This interplay is especially fruitful in Chapter Five ('What They Read'), where a generous sampling of titles is considered. Wevers claims, I think with some justice, that the historiography of reading 'has paid almost no attention to content', and in this chapter she shows repeatedly how content — specific plots, characters, settings and sentiments — reflect and mediate the lives of Brancepeth readers. It is pleasing to note here the influence, in Wevers's pointed and well-crafted story synopses, of one of the most engaging of the forgotten pioneers of the history of reading. Amy Cruse, like Wevers, saw her work on readers and reading as the platform for a new way of writing literary history.

Undoubtedly, though, the presiding influence on the second half of the book is H.J. Jackson, whose wonderful 2001 study of 'marginalia' (a plural noun, by the way) is here applied and extended with imaginative rigour to generate ways of interpreting the annotations, comments, underlinings, food stains, finger smudges, scorch marks, and pressed flowers in the library books. Even the books' dilapidation and disappearance can be made (if at times a little speculatively) to yield real insights into the reading culture, not just of Brancepeth farm, but of the colonial society of which it was to some degree a microcosm. In this respect, especially, Lydia Wevers's book constitutes a real advance in the historiography of reading.

PATRICK BUCKRIDGE

Griffith University

A Man for all Seasons: The Life and Times of Ken Douglas. By David Grant. Random House New Zealand Ltd., Auckland, 2010. 493pp. NZ price: $45.00. ISBN 978-1-869793-89-0.

KEN DOUGLAS WAS A MAJOR FIGURE in New Zealand trade unionism through the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Now aged 75 he is by no means retired, although most of his activity now takes place in the local context of Titahi Bay and the Porirua City Council. A biography of Douglas, then, will inevitably be a study of the history of New Zealand trade unionism through turbulent decades. In this, David Grant has succeeded admirably.

The early chapters are a detailed and sensitive study of Ken Douglas's early life, and emphasize the vitality of the Wellington working-class culture into which he was born. Commitment to the union was taken for granted in Douglas's family, and most of his relations were also firm supporters of the Labour Party. If it was a culture which emphasized the dignity of work and the importance of mutual support, it was frequently a life of material hardship. These early chapters are a significant contribution to labour history after 1918.

Some of the paradoxical dimensions of Douglas's character appeared early. The politically conscious working-class lad nevertheless thoroughly enjoyed his years at the bourgeoisie's Wellington College, and seriously contemplated a career in the army. Throughout the book, Douglas's capacity for insensitivity as well as generosity is explored in due context. If Grant deserves credit for an even-handed discussion, his subject also deserves credit for honest reflection.

Douglas rose rapidly through the ranks of the drivers' union. For Douglas, and his comrades in the union, his own skill as a driver was an important dimension of his credibility as a trade unionist. No one reading these pages will doubt that driving is skilled work; another useful point made is that while union membership was legally compulsory, enforcement was entirely up to union officials. Some did not bother; Douglas was a very active unionist.