

OBITUARY

PROFESSOR ALAN DUDLEY WARD ONZM, 1935–2014



ALAN WARD was New Zealand's leading public historian. His career was dedicated to the intersection of history with contemporary political and social problems, from his doctorate at ANU, which was produced with an eye to the Hunn report, to the months before his death, when he provided Australians with historical background to the tensions in the Ukraine. Alan took some time to find his way into a career in history, but the journey would greatly influence his understanding of his role as a historian. He was born in Gisborne in 1935 and grew up near Te Karaka.¹ His time at Victoria University of Wellington led to his abandonment of the rural conservatism of his upbringing, while his early contact with Māori evolved into a critique of nineteenth-century colonization and its consequences in the present. He would always see himself as tied to his rural East Coast past and his family still there, even as he became alienated from the politics of both.

After university he tried secondary teaching and theological college until his mentors at Victoria, Freddie Wood and Peter Munz, encouraged him to enrol at ANU for a PhD in Pacific History with J.W. Davidson. But he did not settle and returned to teaching. Thankfully, Davidson eventually enticed him back, seeing in Alan something of his own passion for 'participant history', history that could be applied to living people in real situations. From Poverty Bay Alan gained a sense of the interconnectedness of the Māori and Pākehā worlds, from Victoria a critical historical sensibility, from his Anglicanism a belief in the moral importance of history and from Davidson a commitment to applied history.

Alan was already a public historian long before the Fourth Labour government opened the doors to a reconsideration of Māori experience of colonization from 1840 to the present. His early experience of public history occurred in the pressing political and administrative processes of decolonization in the Pacific during the 1970s and early 1980s, in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. He was one of the very few who anticipated the consequences of opening the door so widely to the accumulated grievances of almost a century and a half of colonization. He warned the government of the consequences of the proposed change to the legislation in 1985.

In 1987, Edward Durie, the Chairman of the Waitangi Tribunal, called on him to advise the tribunal on the Ngāi Tahu hearings. The government had appointed only one historian, Keith Sorrenson, when it began its historical review of New Zealand's history of colonization. Sorrenson was an alternate member and not on the Ngāi Tahu panel. Despite being in the process of shifting from La Trobe to take up a chair at the University of Newcastle, Ward would spend the rest of his life crossing the Tasman, a committed servant of the Waitangi Tribunal's inquiries and more recently, the negotiation of treaty settlements.

When Chief Judge Durie explained Alan's role at the commencement of the Ngāi Tahu hearings, he asked whether any investigation was necessary as 'Alan had already written the book'. *A Show of Justice: Racial 'Amalgamation' in Nineteenth Century New Zealand* (1974) remains the best overview of the relationship between the Crown and Māori during the nineteenth century, although published a year before the tribunal's creation and based on his 1967 PhD thesis. *A Show of Justice* focused on the Crown and remained state centred, just at a time when historians were questioning the importance of the role of the state as a unifying theme and preferring to work with individual iwi and their leaders. While the Waitangi Tribunal's history was driven by individual Māori claims, its investigation has been dominated by the history of the Crown in its relationship with Māori. Alan's *Show of Justice* not only provided a useful resource for the tribunal in exploring its expanded jurisdiction, but it became a model for evidence presented to the tribunal and even for the way the tribunal wrote its historical reports.

While Alan was well aware of the difference between the tribunal's legal and policy roles and the writing of history, his own view of history as a history of possibilities had much in common with the tribunal's statutory responsibility to test what happened in the past against an idealized standard, the principles of the treaty, and to look for an idealized future where Māori had overcome the experience of colonization. The possibilities that things could have been better and that the future should improve on the present were unifying themes in Alan's history. His belief that colonization could have treated Māori equitably and was not irredeemable did not blind him to what he would see as the injustice of Crown treatment of Māori. Believing that the European world had models for acting differently only made him more critical of what had occurred in New Zealand's past, in the work of the Native Land Court, the propensity of governors and premiers to call out the troops and the denial of Māori rights to self-government.

This sense of moral indignation was not a form of presentism. Alan fought against any suggestion that the past should be assessed against present standards. The tests for judging the Crown in the nineteenth century were always the promises made at the time, the commitment to the rhetoric of humanitarianism and the betrayal of personal relationships established between Māori and governors, native ministers and premiers. Reconciliation was never an excuse for partisan history.

As well as *A Show of Justice* and *An Unsettled History: Treaty claims in New Zealand today* (1999), his revisiting of these ideas following a decade of tribunal history, he produced many important articles. His emphasis on law and sovereignty on the frontier, as a major factor contributing to imperial violence and the wars of the 1860s, would be picked up by James Belich in his *New Zealand Wars*. His contribution to Pacific history was demonstrated through his editorship of the *Journal of Pacific History* and a wide range of articles on land and contemporary political issues. Like his publications on the work of the Waitangi Tribunal, they were often studies of a work in progress, as much on public policy as history, and always provisional as the questions they posed could only be answered in the future.

Alan's contributions to the work of the tribunal included major research reports for Ngāi Tahu, Whanganui, the Northern South Island and Wellington. He took the lead in the Rangahaua Whānui project, designed to provide an overview of issues the tribunal would face in its district inquiry model. This model has provided the basis for managing its historical claims over the last two decades. He led the historical team which in the early 1990s successfully returned surplus railway land to iwi. Alan also made a major contribution to the writing of the Tribunal's Hauraki report, among others.

Alan's commitment to public history involved using the historian's art to contribute to the resolution of real and intractable problems in the present, particularly those involving indigenous rights and indigenous titles to land. He saw history almost as a form of moral philosophy, a tool for creating good public policy and for the reconciliation of human conflict. At heart, he never lost his belief that good history, understanding the past through historians' meticulous use of historical evidence, had a moral purpose. When there was conflict, Alan sowed footnotes. However, he did not see good public history as useful merely because it allowed participants in conflict to see another's point of view. Good public history discovered what really happened, distinguishing the mythological histories which supported human divisions and exploitation from discoverable truth. Knowing this

truth was essential in creating an understanding from which some form of equitable policy could emerge. While he shared these values with many others of his generation, Alan was almost uniquely placed to test them in practice in New Zealand.

In his view, good history could resolve the challenging problems arising from conflict over customary rights in the indigenous cultures of the Pacific. Many of the ongoing tensions caused by colonization he attributed to the conflict between different indigenous and European systems of land tenure. This was a position he developed in Canberra in the 1960s in his coverage of the Native Land Court, and one reinforced by his experience on the ground in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. While he was on secondment to the University of Papua New Guinea in 1971, a paper aimed to prevent the adoption of the equivalent of the Māori Land Court put him offside with the Australian administration. A decade later, his attempt to prevent what he saw as an inequitable land tenure policy in Vanuatu led to his early resignation and return to Australia. While he would see New Zealand's approach to Māori land title as informing his understanding of Pacific problems, once attached to the tribunal he believed his Pacific experience would help untangle the mess created by the Native Land Court's awards of Māori freehold title.

Alan's faith in the persuasiveness of good history was often tested in New Zealand, as it had been in the Pacific. When a Ngāi Tahu claimant maintained it was a Royal Navy vessel that brought a vengeful Te Rauparaha to Akaroa in November 1830, Alan made a public statement that the brig *Elizabeth* was a privately owned ship. The claimant walked out in disgust, even more convinced of the enduring wickedness and duplicity of the British Crown. Alan also became concerned about what he saw as ahistorical claims in relationship to Māori sovereignty in the tribunal's Northland hearings, leading him to appear as a witness for the Crown.

For the Office of Treaty Settlements, he became an expert reviewer of claimants' historical accounts, the brief historical overviews of the relationship between claimants and the Crown which form the justification for each Treaty Settlement. This role suited him well. He was able to bring balance, objectivity and rigour to a process committed to these outcomes but often careless of them in the tense process of negotiation.

Alan believed strongly in family. His role as public historian, however, took him away much of the time from his wife Helen, his children Justine, Megan, Ingrid, Tamara and Matthew, and his grandchildren. Just when they believed he was through with all that and could give more time to them, they lost him very quickly to cancer. In the months that followed, two

others who worked with him also died: Gordon Orr and Donald Loveridge, whose own major contributions to the work of the Waitangi Tribunal were greatly influenced by his passion and commitment to good history. He was a generous mentor, an entertaining and inspirational colleague and a loyal friend.

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NOTES

1 This obituary relies extensively on Peter Hempenstall, 'Tasman Epiphanies: The "Participant History" of Alan Ward', *Journal of New Zealand Studies*, 4, 5 (2006), p.66.