

subject to sustained, and sometimes vituperative, criticism from a vocal lobby which, apparently, will be satisfied with nothing less than rebuilding the cathedral precisely as it was. Pickles's discussion includes some good points about how Cathedral Square had changed, from a space ringed by commercial and professional premises to one devoted to the consumption of 'heritage'. She makes some telling points, too, about how much of the insistence on cathedral restoration comes from the unchurched, and here quotes a former Dean and others to the effect that few of these advocates seemed to have much idea of what used to go on inside the building, or, indeed, much familiarity with the forms of Anglican worship. What was required, apparently, was an 'iconic' structure that could serve as a civic centre. This discussion might have been extended by considering why the fate of the also very badly damaged Catholic cathedral – of superior architectural merit in the opinion of Bernard Shaw – has attracted far less controversy.

Pickles's argument, in its essentials, is that the old Christchurch has been irretrievably lost. In dissecting some of the myths, she suggests that it was in any case as much an imaginary city as a real one. Therefore, 'history' may not, or might not, be deployed as an argument for a reversion to the status quo ante, for it is both possible and necessary to build a different city, inclusive of all who live there and informed by the twenty-first century rather than an idealized nineteenth. What that city will look like, only time will tell.

JIM McALOON

Victoria University of Wellington

Working Lives c 1900: A Photographic Essay. By Erik Olssen. Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2014. 167pp. NZ price: \$50. ISBN 9871877578519.

Erik Olssen has long been New Zealand's premier labour historian. His career and the recording of the history of the Dunedin working class have gone together like hand and glove. Thanks to Olssen's work we know an awful lot more about the history of life and work in Dunedin, especially in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, than anywhere else in New Zealand. Many of us feel a strong sense of knowledge, perhaps even ownership, of the suburb of Caversham, and specific sites like Hillside Railway Workshops. His work has always been deeply based on research and perhaps on occasion this has made it a little dense for some. This volume, while still richly researched, is anything but dense.

Working Lives takes the form of a photographic essay. This is not an entirely new genre for New Zealand labour history. Bert Roth's *Toil and Trouble*, while considerably lighter on text, is one example and is still mined by many of us to illustrate lectures and public talks. This volume supplements but will not replace Roth as the 'go to' source for images of working New Zealand and the labour movement.

Olssen's intention is to provide a visual (and written) snapshot of working Dunedin at around 1900. This is at once the strength and weakness of *Working Lives*. The strength is the richness of coverage of the multi-dimensional lives of the Dunedin working class. We are guided on a visual tour of place, both the physical geography

and in the built environment, in chapters one and two. The richest and longest chapter is the third which explores crafts, jobs and profession. We see the diversity, technical skill, quality and scale of manufacturing and other employment. Scale was both at the micro-level, but one is also struck by the number of large-scale enterprises. The sweat and physical labour of the men and women is captured well. This is a welcome reminder that even in the South Island the economy of the time was built by human labour rather than acquired off a sheep's back.

Two shorter chapters round off the book, one on equality and one on organized labour. These are less compelling visually than the preceding chapters, as much because of the quality of the images available as anything more conceptual.

The snapshot in time approach also provides the most serious weakness of *Working Lives*. Olssen is aware of this. In his introduction he acknowledges that photographs can obscure change over time, the life blood of the discipline of history. One cannot disagree. Yet when linked over time, photographs can create a rich visual narrative that conveys change with both power and nuance. It is disappointing that Olssen did not attempt this. As a result we are left with a somewhat static and particular past. One could even say it is a snapshot of the glory days of Dunedin, for both working people and capital.

The story of the rise, and continued rise, of the Dunedin working class is not unfamiliar thanks to Olssen. This volume makes the peak of this era more visually memorable and probably a little more accessible. For this we should be grateful. Yet we have been less well served by historical accounts of the decline (or was it the transformation?) of the Dunedin working class. The glory days of city and class have long gone and this process is no less interesting or important than stories of progress. The ways decline has challenged well-established communities – socially, economically and politically – and the opportunities as well as the trials that this brought demand our attention if we are not to slip into nostalgia for a past long left behind. This massive task of historical reconstruction and imagination will provide an opportunity. The job advertisement, no doubt online, would read something like this: Labour Historian wanted to study the history and transformation of the Dunedin working class in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Big boots to fill, solid foundations and mentoring provided!

Who will step up to the task? Who will dare to stand in the shadow of Erik Olssen?

KERRY TAYLOR

Massey University