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REVIEW

Keith Sinclair (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of New Zealand*. Oxford University Press, Auckland. 1990. 389 pp. \$59.95.

Scientists, archaeologists and historians are generally regarded as being engaged in pursuits remote from wider public understanding. When an attempt to popularise is made, it falls into one of two traps. It is either done by someone without specialised insight and speaks poorly to the value and interest of the subject area; or if done by the specialist, lapses into the recondite or the merely patronising. Journalists in particular, briefly raising their heads from the Hollywood gossip column, are likely to offer such a criticism. Someone said recently at a meeting which I attended: 'If it's passé in the profession, then it's new information to the public; if it's commonplace insight, then it's startlingly new and radical; and if it's exploring a new area, then it will be completely irrelevant or misinterpreted by the public.'

This *Oxford Illustrated History* takes the reasonable middle ground in this three-way dilemma, offering what I suspect is the commonplace of contemporary New Zealand historical studies and presenting it in a radically different public interpretation. It is demanding and the more welcome for that. The novelty for a general history lies in the emphasis on social history (including women), economic development, political ideologies and labour relations. Occasionally, it goes too far, as in the pawky and ill-considered hypotheses of James Belich. In one case an author feels obliged to apologise for demolishing the received views. This is in an excellent chapter by Miles Fairburn, 'The Farmers Take Over', covering a period (1912-1930) usually seen as regressive, where he develops the view that the Reform Government achieved a remarkable degree of social cohesion in an era racked with collective dissension within New Zealand society.

Nine of the fourteen chapters are of particular interest to the New Zealand archaeological community. Other chapters of lesser interest cover the Depression and the rise of the Labour Party, foreign policy since World War I, the National Party era, and Pacific Island relations.

There are minor failings of an editorial nature. The illustrations, although mostly novel, are not as compelling as the superbly presented coverage in the competing Allen and Unwin publication, *The People and the Land: Te Tangata me Te Whenua*. It is customary to question the scholarly mechanics of such texts, the lack of detailed references and so on, but this is only a bother in the case of unattributed quotations in some of Judith Binney's text. Elsewhere quotations are attributed in the encompassing text. One of the photographs of Taranaki is, I understand, of an armed constabulary camp near Parihaka in the 1880s and not of a British military base of 1865.

To consider the individual chapters briefly, Maori issues first. The merest concession to the depth of archaeological knowledge is made in Bruce Biggs' 'In the Beginning', although the brief summary is well balanced. This chapter is novel in that it also offers a linguistics- and tradition-based account of voyaging, expansion and settlement opportunities and hazards, again distressingly brief. Claudia Orange's chapter on 'The Maori and the Crown' is more than half devoted

to early European contact issues, but eventually develops the familiar constitutional narrative up to the signing of the Treaty without resolving the modern political ambiguities.

Other chapters devoted primarily or in large part to Maori perspectives include 'The Governors and the Maori' by James Belich. He briefly and unsatisfactorily develops the thesis that the capacity to punish (judicially one assumes) is the measure of the true extent of sovereignty. If one accepts such attenuation of the concept, then the Police actions against Rua Kenana at Ruatahuna are the first expressions of sovereignty in the Urewera. To express the economic interdependence of Maori and European communities in the 1850s as like 'Siamese twins joined at the wallet' is surely an example of an image that has run away with the commonplace insight that it carries.

The chapters by Judith Binney, 'Ancestral Voices: Maori Prophet Leaders', and Keith Sorrenson on 20th century Maori political history are excellent. Judith Binney's is a fine and novel essay given here an appropriately wide audience. The first northern leader, Papahurihia, is set in the continued, ever freshly expressed, construction of Biblical narrative, carried on through Pai Marire, Ringatu and Ratana.

The two principal chapters on European history of interest to archaeologists pretending to deal with European sites are Raewyn Dalziel's on the Vogel era, 'Railways and Relief Centres', where New Zealand's continuing infatuation with incurring public debt and relief works had its beginning; and David Hamer on the Liberal era, 'Centralisation and Nationalisation' - King Dick and all that. Together these cover the two generations from 1870, and the formation of a modern New Zealand that is instantly recognisable in its political institutions, land tenure, landscape and exploitation patterns.

Although broadly chronological as these chapters demonstrate, the arrangement does break out into broader thematic issues, notably on Maori-related topics, which are very fully covered with the exception of the history that attaches to pre-European archaeology. I find it difficult to accept that no archaeologist could have been found to contribute, especially given the extraordinary visual materials at our command. In an era when the very concept of a prehistory is questioned, the failure to include a chapter or rather more than one chapter on the period before European arrival is remarkable. The omission is all the more surprising given the relative expansiveness of the coverage of the volume. For all that the volume is a landmark record of the wide sympathy of contemporary New Zealand professional historians, this one failing still marks an insular discipline - but no worse than archaeology, perhaps.

Kevin Jones