

Newsletter
December 2015

Seasonal Greetings

Your Executive extends Christmas Greetings to members and all good wishes for the New Year, especially a safe and enjoyable holiday season.

Distinguished Life Member

At the AGM on 14 September, Paul Rhodes was acknowledged as 'a most generous benefactor over many years'. The Executive had decided to recognise this stalwart support by making him a Distinguished Life Member. His predecessors have been Gerald Hunt and Binney Lock.

Paul and his wife Sally established the A. C. Rhodes Memorial Medal awarded to individuals who serve the community by encouraging research and promoting the interest of the public in the history of Canterbury. They also donated a money prize to go with the conferment of the Medal. There is now an endowment in place to ensure that medal and prize can continue for the foreseeable future.

The Foundation's commendation included the following remarks:

"The first presentation of the Rhodes History Medal was made in 2002. Since then there have been, in all, fourteen recipients, most of them personally congratulated by you and Sally. In the true spirit of the award, the recipients have included not only published authors but also those who have helped to organise museum and archival collections."

New Member of the Executive

Deborah Brosnahan, Principal of Villa Maria College, was elected to join the Executive at the AGM.

New Zealand Historical Association

The Association is holding its biennial conference in Christchurch, 2-4 December. The Foundation has made a grant of \$5,000 towards costs and becomes a principal sponsor.

Further information from nzha.org.nz. Non-members can 'drop in'.

W.H. (Bill) Oliver (1925-2015)

Bill Oliver who died on 16 September was regarded as one of the most distinguished New Zealand historians of his generation, often paired with Keith Sinclair in this respect. Both were notable poets and produced outstanding short histories within a year of each other, Sinclair's *Pelican History* (1959) and Oliver's *Story of New Zealand* (1960). For a long time these remained basic texts.

These days Oliver is probably best remembered for his editorship of the *Dictionary of NZ Biography*. Though he retired after the appearance of the first volume (1769-1869), he established how the project would proceed, especially the idea that it would not exclusively represent the prominent and the successful.

The *Dictionary* was the outcome of Oliver's at first hesitant but long-lasting commitment to New Zealand History. He never possessed Sinclair's secure nationalism. The *Story*, unintentionally, ended up as a sort of riposte to Sinclair in the emphasis it gave to Old World influences as opposed to the settlers' rapid adaptation to colonial conditions. One stressed the derivative in New Zealand's history, the other the distinctive.

Like the rest of his generation, Oliver had to ride a rapidly rising tide of historical scholarship as publication on New Zealand topics proliferated from the 1960s. But he was always essentially a social historian.

He became interested in the sociological and feminist perspectives that developed in the 1970s and later in his career welcomed the emergence of Maori History as integral to understanding the history of the wider society. The *Oxford History of NZ* (1981), which he edited, was the first general history to do justice to the Maori presence in New Zealand's past, something he carried over into the *DNZB*. He later did work on claims that went before the Treaty of Waitangi Tribunal but became disillusioned, of course controversially, with the 'advocacy history' that both sides, crown and iwi, used to defend their cause.

In 2002 he published a memoir, *Looking for the Phoenix*, the title summing up his lasting commitment to the purity or truthfulness of the historian's endeavour.

An obituary was published in the *Dominion-Post* on 26 September (www.stuff.co.nz)

Oliver had only a fleeting connection with Canterbury, holding a university lecturership from 1955-9. But during that time he wrote his *Story* in 'English' Christchurch, as Aucklanders have often pointed out.

J. M. Sherrard Award

This Award is made by the Canterbury Historical Association to encourage scholarly standards in the research and writing of New Zealand local and regional history.

This year's judging, the 20th since the Award was inaugurated in 1972, covered books published in 2010-2013.

The winner is Robert Peden for his book on farming practices in the South Island high country, *Making Sheep Country: Mt Peel Station and the Transformation of the Tussock Lands* (Auckland U.P., 2011).

The judges commented that the book 'rises above the merely local to investigate questions of national importance in the history of New Zealand pastoralism, farming practice and exports'. There is also 'a considered rebuttal of critics who accuse the pastoralists of degrading the land by overgrazing and indiscriminate burning'.

Highly Commended were: Peter Holland, *Home in the Howling Wilderness: Settlers and Environment in Southern New Zealand* (Auckland U.P., 2013), David Verran, *The North Shore: an Illustrated History* (Random House, Auckland, 2010) and John Ward, *A History of the Ashley Forest, including Mt Thomas, Okuku and Omihi Forests, 1939-2010* (Kowai Archives Society, Rangiora, 2010).

Commended were: Ian Church, *Sawyers Bay, including Sawyers Bay School, 1861-2010* (The author, Port Chalmers, 2011) and Jim Graydon, *On the Edge: Wairarapa's Coastal Communities* (Wily Publications, Masterton, 2013).

The next Award will be made in 2016.

Magna Carta Commemoration

Two events at the NZHA Conference may be of particular interest to our members.

The first is an exhibition, 'The Mana of Magna Carta', which highlights the continuing relevance of the Charter for 21st New Zealand and traces its growing significance in post-medieval England and the transfer of that legal and cultural status to the colonial society.

The exhibition will feature the oldest text of Magna Carta in New Zealand – a 16th century printing held by the University of Canterbury that once belonged to one of Henry VIII's chief advisors.

The venue is the Matariki Concourse on the ground floor of the Matariki Building at the University. The exhibition opens on 1 December.

The second event is on 3 December at 3.30-5 pm when a mock trial of the Magna Carta barons will take place. They will be charged with treason and a New Zealand judge, with two others, will preside over the court.

Several other sessions include discussion of the Charter. The Conference schedule can be consulted on the NZHA website.

Members will recall that in July Dr Chris Jones gave the W. J. Gardner Memorial Lecture on Magna Carta. This has been printed and copies may be obtained from the Secretary: geoff.rice@canterbury.ac.nz

