

Newsletter  
March 2015

### The Late Binney Lock

The Executive at its December meeting observed a minute's silence in tribute to Binney who was our first, and a very long-serving, Secretary. Binney's funeral was held in the Transitional Cathedral on 19 November. John Cookson spoke on behalf of the Foundation. Here are some extracts from the eulogy.

"Binney can count as a Founding Father of the Foundation when it was formed in 1999. In the work he did as Secretary, it's hardly an exaggeration to say that he was *the* Foundation. Meticulous in everything he did, full of sensible advice, never complaining about the ball and chain that the office imposed on him, he was the general factotum to whom we all referred and deferred.

Allow me to be facetious and call him the elephant in the room at meetings of our Executive. That is to say, elephants never forget and neither did Binney. He presented as a huge bulk of information and memory that it was extremely difficult for us to sidle around.

Binney had a journalist's and historian's curiosity about events and people. It gave him an immense range of knowledge and understanding, backed, I can add, by a well-stocked private library.

An old colleague of Binney's at *The Press* has described him as the 'ultimate gentleman'. Before the 18<sup>th</sup> century the word 'gentleman' denoted a social rank. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century it began to apply to persons who displayed a set of qualities; in particular, social obligation and what contemporaries called 'politeness' or 'manners'.

This is the model that will always remind us of Binney – agreeable, inquiring, public-minded, big-hearted Binney."

### Community Historians

Two of our Community Historians have recently published their work, both with Canterbury University Press.

Dr Vaughan Wood (2008) *Akaroa Cocksfoot* has more than met our expectations of a valuable contribution to New Zealand's farming history. Cocksfoot in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century became the 'king of grasses' and Banks Peninsula's an international brand and world leader. From the 1880s, for about thirty years, thousands of tonnes of seed were shipped around the world, especially to Europe. On the burnt-over bushlands of the Peninsula cocksfoot flourished at a time when a 'grasslands revolution' was underway in farming economies elsewhere in the world.

Several other factors coincided. For instance, the availability of large numbers of casual or seasonal workers to harvest the seed. The rise of steam shipping also made it possible to harvest in the southern summer and efficiently supply markets in the northern hemisphere.

The Foundation is immensely grateful to PGG Wrightson for subsidising the publication of Vaughan's book.

The second book is Ian Dougherty (2011), *The People's University*, which commemorates the centenary of the Canterbury Workers' Educational Association (1915-2015). It is to be launched on 4 March, again by the Canterbury University Press.

The significance of the WEA in the city and province scarcely needs to be stated, as surely the oldest existing provider of 'second chance' education with an inestimable broadening effect on our cultural life. James Hight, Professor of History, was one of the founders.

## **Annual Gardner Memorial Lecture**

This occasion is the showcase event for the Foundation. Early notice can be given that this year's lecture will be given by Dr Chris Jones, a specialist in medieval history in the University's History Department. The topic will be the Magna Carta to mark the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its signing.

Members and people interested will be informed of the date (usually a Sunday afternoon in late July) and venue in due course.

## **'Cricketing Colonists'**

This is the title of a book due for release later this year which the Foundation has supported with a grant-in-aid of publication.

The book is a double biography of the brothers William Guise Brittan and Joseph Brittan who were among the earliest Canterbury Association settlers. Both became very prominent in the public life of the new settlement. They were also keen cricketers, William being credited with establishing the sport in Canterbury. He outscored Godley in the famous cricket match played on Anniversary Day 1851 between the 'gentlemen' of the Christchurch Cricket Club and a 'Working Men's XI'.

Geoff Rice and Frances Ryman are the authors. For many years Frances owned 'Englefield', William's house near the Fitzgerald Avenue bridge, and gathered much of the material for this biography in England as well as locally.

## **Eva Sullivan**

Eva is known to many local researchers as the City Council Archivist. Latterly she has been based at Harewood, at the Recall facility where the Council's archives have found a home. Before this she and Annabel Armstrong-Clarke had charge of the records at Sockburn Recall.

Eva is now at the City Archives, Wellington.

She will be remembered by her Christchurch 'customers' as most obliging with a wonderful 'sunshine' personality.

## **History Prizegiving**

The University History Department held its annual Awards ceremony on 3 December. There was the usual good attendance of family and friends of the students, as well as members of the Foundation.

We support the Department by meeting some of the catering costs. The Gerald Hunt Prize is also provided out of a fund that the Foundation administers.

The opportunity is taken to publicise the work of the Foundation, one of those occasions when our banner does its real work.

## **Country Historical Societies**

There are probably many more local historical societies in Canterbury country areas than we imagine. The Foundation does its best to recognise their work, mainly through the award of the Rhodes Medal to individuals who have been leading enthusiasts and organisers in their own communities.

Funds are always limited. Most groups cohere around a museum or a heritage site or building. Volunteers to staff public openings are absolutely indispensable. Support from local councils is variable and cannot be guaranteed.

A point of growing concern is the changes that are happening in rural communities as migrants arrive to work dairy farms and vineyards and the younger generation leave to pursue opportunities off the land. It often seems that interest in local history will slowly disappear as increasing age removes those who have the strongest sense of local identity.

Of course, the problem is one that is widely felt beyond the societies themselves. For example, rural districts are finding it harder and harder to field rugby teams and keep the clubs alive.

It is worth getting acquainted with the good work that local historical societies are doing. Next time you drive to Hanmer why not call in at the Waiau Museum, open Sundays, 2-4 pm (summer), 1.30-3.30 pm (winter). Or visit the Cheviot Museum which is also open on Sunday afternoons.