

CANTERBURY HISTORY FOUNDATION

Newsletter
December 2018

Christmas Greetings

The President and the Executive take this opportunity to extend to you their best wishes for Christmas and the New Year. Have a safe and enjoyable holiday season.

Twenty Years (1999-2019)

In 2019 the Foundation will have been in existence 20 years. Indeed, some members may recall attending the inaugural meeting held on 31 March 1999, when Ian Leggat was elected our first President. The Vice-Chancellor of the University (Prof. Daryl Le Grew) was present and congratulated the initiators on an important 'coming together of the community and the Department of History'.

Since then four Presidents have presided over the appointment of thirteen Community Historians and the award of seventeen A.C. Rhodes Medals. About \$70,000 has been allocated to authors to assist the publication of their work, to thesis students to help with travel and other research expenses, and to major sponsorship of conferences in Christchurch.

John Cookson, presently Vice-President and Chair of the Executive, was an original member of the Committee and has served continuously ever since.

In Memoriam Janet Holm (1923-2018)

Janet Holm passed away on 14 July. In later years she lived in Wellington but people will remember her as actively engaged on many fronts in the life of the Christchurch community. She was equally prominent as an environmentalist and as a local historian. One of the first causes she took up was to bring air pollution in

Christchurch to the attention of the City Fathers and general public long before air quality became the 'headline' issue it is today. The Clean Air Society morphed into the Christchurch Environment Centre, in which Janet had no lesser involvement. She was awarded an MBE in 1988 for her services to the environmental movement.

Janet was an early life member of the History Foundation. She had studied History at Canterbury in the days of James Hight and Alice Candy.

In her sixties she came back to the History Department to complete her M.A. and a history of her own family, the Rutherfords of North Canterbury, followed. *Nothing But Grass and Wind* (1992) was an epic story of impoverished settler survival on the land against the odds.

Her next book, with the witty title, *Caught Mapping* (2005), was about early surveyors. A third (2008) was about individual explorers and pioneers.

In her younger days, Janet had been an intrepid and wide-ranging mountaineer and she proved invaluable to Canterbury Museum when it began cataloguing its collection of 'back country' photographs.

The common theme pervading her work seems to be the adventurous, not to say 'heroic', encounter of colonial settlers, surveyors, miners, explorers and mountaineers with tough conditions in a new land.

The Foundation acknowledged Janet's contribution to History with the award of the Rhodes Medal in 2005.

The Holm family has generously endowed a University prize in New Zealand History in Janet's memory.

Re-visiting 'That Terrible Time'

Geoff Rice, our Secretary and an international authority on the 1918 influenza pandemic, has had a busy year helping to mark its centenary. The Foundation's Gardner Memorial Lecture was one of over 20 public lectures given around the country.

An unusual event for any historian is to see his/her work performed on stage. Drama students from Victoria University produced a play based on Geoff's book,

Black November, which he himself was able to attend.

Recently he also addressed a conference of health emergency managers in Wellington on lessons still relevant from the 1918 experience, and spoke at a memorial service at Karori Cemetery for the 600 flu victims buried there. Having lobbied the government for a national memorial to the 9,000 New Zealanders who died in the pandemic, it was pleasing to hear the Minister of Finance, Grant Robertson, announce at the Karori event that a memorial will go ahead next year at Pukeahu, the national war memorial in Wellington.

The Christchurch City Council has erected an information board near the Bridge of Remembrance in advance of a more permanent memorial to the 458 Christchurch victims.

Geoff has also published a collection of eye-witness accounts of the pandemic: *That Terrible Time*. This is available for \$24.99 from nationwidebooks.co.nz.

Conference: Reflections on the Commemoration of World War One

The Foundation was a major sponsor of this international conference held in Christchurch on 22-23 November. The venue was the new Library Building, Tūranga, in the Square. Its facilities were all that could be desired, a happy endorsement of a key component of the rebuilt city.

The programme was organised by a local group comprising representatives from the Library, Canterbury Museum and the University's History Department.

What else is there to say about World War I? Plenty, it appears, going by the papers that were presented. Little 'battlefields' history was put up for discussion. We, too, seem to have put behind us the malignant phrase, 'lions led by donkeys' – it was not heard. Gallipoli, that Anzac appropriation of a predominantly Anglo-French expedition, was, more or less, passed over completely – some might have said, "thank goodness"!

The most interesting exception was a paper on the Salonika front or Macedonian campaign where a mixed force, including

a small token Russian contingent, fought what we could regard as the Third Balkan War. The Mesopotamia theatre remains very much neglected, one speaker comparing it to Burma in World War II.

All this mattered because attention was focussed on the soldiers' culture, and it was readily conceded that there were significant differences in this respect between the Western Front and fighting that occurred elsewhere.

There can be no doubt that where large numbers of 'civilian' soldiers gathered and endured the stress and deprivations of combat, they modified, sometimes rejected, familiar beliefs and behaviour and re-made relationships to put in place a markedly different kind of society. But Egypt was not Flanders, nor was Salonika Basra. As we know, veterans in their post-war societies displayed great cohesiveness, imperfectly absorbed back into the 'home' world - never more so than in Germany.

There was fascinating documentation of the soldiers' world, via, for example, the place of swearing, alcohol, sports and acceptance of death. A different kind of 'trench art' also was described. Soldiers seem to have been inveterate souvenir hunters, sending home battlefield mementos and trophies. The most common souvenir, apparently, was the shell case made into a decorated vase.

The Indian Army clearly remains much neglected and little understood, even though its numbers made it a major component of the Allied forces. Of particular interest was a paper describing the fate of Indian soldiers' wives. Such soldiers were drawn from poor families and when called to overseas service, their dependents were largely left to shift for themselves in a society where male protection provided the most basic security.

Tuahiwi Visit

Plans are well advanced for a party from the Foundation to make a visit to Tuahiwi marae on 17 March. This is an opportunity not to be missed, thanks to the kind offer of hospitality from Ngāi Tūāhiriri. Further information forthcoming.