

*News and the British World: The Emergence of an Imperial Press System, 1876–1922.* By Simon J. Potter. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2003. xiv, 246 pp. UK price: £50.00. ISBN 0-19-926512-7.

SIMON J. POTTER'S BOOK examines the development of a 'press system' linking Britain and the settler colonies from the late nineteenth century to the creation of the Irish Free State. This was a system of relations and exchanges both at the level of individual journalists and newspapers and at the level of news organizations such as the London-based Reuters and regional networks such as the Argus combine in Australia and New Zealand. *News and the British World* reaches into many national fields and is based on prodigious research. Potter has done archival work in numerous repositories in Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States, and he draws on an impressive sample of British, South African, Canadian, Australian and New Zealand newspapers. I cannot properly assess his coverage of Canada, Australia and South Africa, but Potter has a firm grasp of the workings of the London press (the standardizing of the British provincial press that began in this period is not addressed), and his command of the New Zealand material is excellent. Unlike many projects of international scope, *News and the British World* is not the product of a detailed knowledge of one case coupled with only a sketchy treatment of several others. The thoroughness and breadth of the research Potter has undertaken for what began as a doctoral thesis rival what some team projects manage.

Potter has interesting things to say about a great many topics. His discussion of the press and the South African war provides him with a context in which to reassess J.A. Hobson's influential arguments about the relationship between the press and mining interests on the eve of the war. The discussion of the imperial politics of the press sheds light on the role of advertising in the process of drumming up British investment in colonial development, and the account of the 1909–1911 debate over a reciprocal tariff agreement between Canada and the United States reveals how informal links between politicians and journalists around the empire could exert a 'subtle and successful influence over political debate' (p.180). The narrative spine of the book is the succession of attempts in this period to increase the flow of news around the empire, through different press agencies and projects for new telegraphic cables and government intervention in the administration of existing cables. Here Potter examines the efforts of editors, press magnates and 'constructive imperialists' — proponents of closer links between Britain and the Dominions such as Leopold Amery, Alfred Milner, the pamphleteer Richard Jebb, who will be familiar to New Zealand historians, and Sir Sandford Fleming of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the architect (or engineer) of the Pacific cable.

Many of the constructive-imperialist campaigns Potter chronicles ended in something less than fulfilment. Such successes as they had came about when desires for a more integrated empire coincided with the commercial interests of particular press concerns. Potter persistently demonstrates that perceived commercial interests were decisive in shaping the outcome of imperial initiatives in the press; imperial unity and colonial nationalism provided justification for commercial strategies rather than shaping them in their own right. There is an interesting discussion of how the South African newspaper chains that banded together in 1908–1909 to rebel against Reuters' hold on cable news deployed colonial-nationalist arguments against the alleged political bias of Reuters items and their orientation toward English-speaking South Africans. Colonial and imperial identities could be mobilized against each other, but there was no fundamental conflict between them. 'The rigorous pursuit of local agendas', he argues, 'was entirely compatible with a wider sense of British loyalty' (p.210).

Potter's insistence on the primacy of commercial judgments and the fairly peaceful coexistence of different identities means that 'identity' carries little explanatory weight

in this book. Identity is always part of a counter-argument to be refuted. Potter's case is convincing, but it means that there is a certain lack of fit between the substantive chapters and the invocation of the Seeley–Colley literature on Britishness in the book's introduction and conclusion. Potter wants to stress that imperial identity is significant generally *and* that it is not the most important variable in explaining the increasing links between British and Dominion news organizations up to 1918 and through the interwar period. These two positions are compatible, but a discussion of the one will be of limited use in illuminating the other, and vice versa. Different aspects of the imperial past are concerned, and different kinds of historical inquiry are required to explore them. As Potter's book shows, the imperial integration of the press was not primarily an ideological project. There were ideological preconditions for this press system — for instance, the interest of colonial readers in metropolitan news — but these are not matters that can be explained by writing about the politics and infrastructure of news. Potter's decision to concentrate on the business and politics of news is a perfectly legitimate one, and I would rather have a book on the press system than another study of the *Trivalliteratur* of empire: but this choice means that identity is not as useful a rubric for the subject as Potter suggests.

This criticism notwithstanding, *News and the British World* is a path-breaking book. It deserves a scholarly readership as broad as Potter's own research horizons. I am assigning it to my honours students this year; it is a pity that, at £50, it is not a book that one could ever ask them to buy.

CHRIS HILLIARD

*John Pascoe*. By Chris Maclean. Craig Potton Publishing, Nelson, 2003. 344 pp. NZ price: \$59.95. ISBN 1-877333-06-9.

IN THE CHRISTCHURCH OFFICE of Archives New Zealand there is a stained-glass window depicting Main Divide passes and river valleys, and notable explorers associated with them. John Pascoe is included — appropriately, for he was a mountaineer, historian and Chief Archivist as well as a distinguished photographer.

Each chapter is clearly thematic as well as being chronological, for each of Pascoe's personae dominated at a certain period of his life — but always there were the mountains. John Pascoe and his twin Paul were born small and prematurely, and John, the elder, was expected to follow his father into the law. He never qualified, but building on family holidays in the Canterbury foothills, devoted his energy to mountaineering (and was by no means the only despair of a high school physical education master to win alpine renown). The late 1920s saw the discovery of the potential which the Southern Alps, north and south of the Mount Cook region, had for unguided climbing and tramping. Pascoe excelled on long and arduous expeditions; not only was he the 'intelligence officer' responsible for planning routes — no small job then — he seems to have been better on mixed terrain rather than the more technical peaks of Mount Cook. Maclean's account of this critical phase in the development of tramping and climbing is outstanding.

In 1937 the 29-year-old Pascoe sought work in Wellington. He hoped to write guidebooks; instead he became an editor, specializing in photographs in the embryonic historical publications wing of Joe Heenan's Department of Internal Affairs. There Pascoe truly found his niche. At this time too he hit the international stage with the publication of his first book, *Unclimbed New Zealand*. For the rest of his life, Pascoe the writer and editor co-existed with Pascoe the bushman and Pascoe the photographer. He married the equally remarkable Dorothy Harding in 1940 — a marriage which humanized the rather gauche young man she met in the late 1930s. Wartime saw Pascoe develop his skill as