

*Wellington's Heritage Plants, Gardens and Landscape*. By Winsome Shepherd. Te Papa Press, Wellington, 2000. 256 pp. NZ price: \$49.95. ISBN 0-909010-73-0.

THIS BOOK originated from an archival study, commissioned by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust in 1979, of plant introductions after the missionary period. The information gathered has now been presented, the author says, as an eco-history of Wellington. That is altogether too large a claim. The material is presented in 11 chapters and an appendix. The first five chapters cover early emigration and survival, development of town and country properties in the Hutt and Lambton districts and what the author calls gardens of special significance. The author's argument, that the exigencies of transforming the Wellington landscape contributed to a breakdown of the English class system, however true that might be, is not sustained, particularly in the chapters dealing with horticulture and A & P societies, Wellington's pioneer nursery and seedsmen and the city's early tea gardens. Later chapters, covering recent developments in the city's parks and landscapes are also unsatisfying insofar as they fail to do justice to major issues like the loss of institutional knowledge and expertise from local body reserves departments following in the wake of the managerial madness of the 1980s and 1990s. The final chapter and appendix provide a rather haphazard account of some early plant introductions and a small selection of nursery catalogues. As a record of people who have either introduced or propagated plants and created gardens of one sort or another across the wider Wellington district, the book may be useful. It would be more accessible if the index had extended beyond the names of individuals mentioned in the text to include at least plants, by both common and botanical names, and localities.

As an eco-history, the book is seriously flawed, initially, by a flat denial and eventually a grudging acceptance that Wellington's early settlers and their successors brought with them clear-cut conceptual and aesthetic constructs, like 'picturesque' and 'gardenesque', which underpinned their colonization of the landscape. These ideas were constructed from both contemporary and historical discourses about the essence of natural and modified environments and how one might be transformed into the other by human agency. That it is counterfactual to suggest otherwise is evident from a lengthy extract that Shepherd reproduces (pp.62–63) from an 1844 letter by Supreme Court Justice H.S. Chapman to his father. This sets out in both text and drawings the development of his 'Homewood' estate in what is clearly a 'picturesque' idiom. This is reinforced by inclusion in the book of a copy of the 1851 sale notice for 'Homewood' (p.65). In it Chapman announced that '30 acres are more or less cleared . . . in such a manner as to produce a picturesque effect, by preserving belts of Trees [sic] and opening distant prospects.' That Chapman was not alone in holding an aesthetic theory, and that not only the aspiring gentry did, is also evident from several illustrations presented of the country sections of yeomen farmers like William Swainson, Thomas Mason and Alfred Ludlum. There is a concession later in the book (p.95) that 'a few' might have 'aspired to . . . sweeping lawns or pasture interrupted with groups of trees or shrubs'. But, we are told, 'the reality of the topography, the limited area of flat land, and the wind . . . must have squashed their grand intentions'. Perhaps so, but that is not the same thing as absence of an aesthetic ideal, however much that had to be modified by reality. Nor were climate and terrain the only agencies that tipped the balance away from the settlers' early landscaping and gardening aspirations. Their situations were far more complex than that. And, like each of the New Zealand Company colonies, not all of the contingencies that shaped Wellington's landscapes and gardens and the plantings within them were ecological. Wellington was the first New Zealand settlement in which an attempt was made to colonize what Rollo Arnold has described as Arden, woodland, and transform it into Feldon, open field country.<sup>1</sup> Although the Company's land regulations, based on European norms, were found in short order to be almost entirely incompatible with New Zealand's environments, a considerable

transformation had been achieved within 30 years. This was in spite of tensions between the Company, the Crown and Maori over land titles, a paucity of both capital and cheap labour, misjudgements about soil fertility and a high degree of individual mobility.

These were just a few of the factors that circumscribed the ways settlers could transform their landscapes. And when that happened, how did they respond? How did they adjust and go on readjusting their aspirations and redefining their aesthetic ideal? And what of Miles Fairburn's suggestion that settlers found in their gardens solace from their isolation? Or Gordon Ell's notion that introduced flowers record settlers' emotional links back into the Old World? These and other questions, which might have assisted in understanding Wellington's eco-history, are unanswered. In Auckland and Dunedin there have been recent contributions to those cities' environmental histories. Wellington, it would appear, awaits a similar body of historical research that encompasses the conceptual and perceptual dimensions of human interactions with and transformations of its environments, rather than just a record of changes in the material landscape, narrowly interpreted within a heritage rubric.

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1 Rollo Arnold, *The Farthest Promised Land: English Villagers, New Zealand Immigrants of the 1870s*, Wellington, 1981, p.262.

*Eastbourne. A History of the Eastern Bays of Wellington Harbour.* By Anne Beaglehole with Alison Carew. The Historical Society of Eastbourne Inc., Eastbourne, 2001. 318 pp. NZ price: \$49.00. ISBN 0-473-07966-6.

'Gone?'

'Gone!'

Oh, the relief, the difference it made to have the men out of the house . . . Beryl . . . wanted, somehow, to celebrate the fact that they could do what they liked now. There was no man to disturb them; the whole perfect day was theirs.

MANY EASTBOURNE RESIDENTS, like Katherine Mansfield's parents, began their association as summer weekenders but moved in for the summer when 'the men' could catch a reliable ferry or bus to work, leaving a beachside community of women and children. These commuters were the resource that sustained the permanent residents, the storekeepers, tradesmen and bus-drivers. Eastbourne is one of a select group of New Zealand settlements that includes Devonport, Sumner and Portobello. Situated near a major city, they have grown not by necessity but by choice. The national economy would be little poorer without them. They exist to prove that life is not constrained entirely by the iron laws of economics. Their people gain a living from the nearby city, but reside where they can put a stretch of country or — better still — of water between home and office. They are an indulgence of the spirit.

Anne Beaglehole shows that Eastbourne and its neighbours have often inspired ideas that looked good at the time until frustration at difficult access set in. Travellers and drovers on the bleak seashore road to the Wairarapa were tempted by its sunny gullies to try farming there, but by the 1890s most of these attempts had failed. As early as the 1850s, 'weekend people' would charter small coastal steamers for picnics in Lowry or York Bay. In 1865 most of Lowry Bay was purchased as a retreat for the governor,