

simultaneously following international trends, adapting to local conditions and mores, and other influences such as post-war immigration from Europe.

The useful conclusion explains why department stores lost their central place in consumption in New Zealand. Different aesthetic and commercial values of a new generation of consumers did not find that department stores held the same ‘magic promises’ for them any longer as they took their cars to suburban shopping malls. Economic, demographic and cultural changes all contributed to this decline and to the rise of our current shopping habits and desires.

For those interested in the history of clothing, fashion, food, store architecture and window displays, there is much to delight and ponder over. The individual experiences are nicely integrated into the general accounts, so that a clear sense of shopping in and working in a department store is conveyed with well-chosen tales and vignettes. The level of detail was sometimes overwhelming and often several examples were given where one would do. The desire to be comprehensive is clear but misguided in a short book. Nevertheless, the publishers and editors are to be congratulated for bringing postgraduate work to a wider audience and for focusing on crucial subjects that are still too often sidelined in favour of supposedly more important themes in our past.

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Anthony Wilding: A Sporting Life. By Len and Shelley Richardson. Canterbury University Press, Christchurch, 2005. 451 pp. NZ price: \$49.95. ISBN 1-877257-01-X.

ANTHONY WILDING WAS AN EXCEPTIONAL SPORTSMAN from Canterbury who excelled in the first decade of the twentieth century along with Bob Deans in rugby and Richard Arnst in sculling. Wilding won four consecutive Wimbledon titles from 1910 to 1913 (and reached the final in the following year), a feat that was only bettered by Bjorn Borg, who won this event five times in a row from 1976 to 1980. No New Zealand tennis player has won a Wimbledon title since. Wilding and the Australian Norman Brookes formed a formidable partnership which enabled Australasia to dominate the Davis Cup from 1907 to 1914, though oddly Wilding was absent when the defence of the cup took place in his home town of Christchurch in 1912. Wilding also won a bronze medal in the men’s singles at the 1912 Stockholm Olympic Games. Although he had some ambivalence to soldiering, Wilding quickly enlisted in the First World War and was killed at the battle of Aubers Ridge near Neuve Chapelle in 1915. His death at the age of only 31 enhanced his reputation as an ideal sportsman-soldier.

Wilding was a key figure in the change of tennis from gentle pastime — ‘a soft game for curates’ as he put it — to a more strenuous mass spectator sport. He enhanced the appeal of tennis: ‘his youthful vigour, athleticism and strenuous lifestyle were held to be representative of what the New World had to offer to the Old’ (p.353). Wilding played in an era when tennis was becoming more international and he and Brookes both contributed to its global spread. Wilding was a superbly fit athlete who benefited from gym training from an early age, his father having introduced Anthony to the weight training program of Eugen Sandow. Wilding brought a professional approach to tennis with his ‘persistent and at times relentless pursuit of excellence’ (p.389).

Wilding was an ambiguous sporting figure because most of his success occurred in Europe and there were no triumphant returns to New Zealand after his greatest international successes. His achievements were considered even in New Zealand in imperial terms. A writer in the *Christchurch Press* made the following comment on his 1910 Wimbledon victory: ‘Anthony Wilding unites in his single individuality the interests

and good wishes of every British Imperialist' (p. 247). Because he had lived so long in England, the British acclaimed him as one of their own. Strangely, when he played in Australia the media depicted him 'as a representative of the old [European] world'.

This biography throws further light on the problematic character of Australasian sporting teams in tennis and other sports in the first decade of the twentieth century when there were continuing squabbles across the Tasman. The *Canterbury Times* rightly concluded that 'federation had not worked in any sport'. The Australasian partnership in tennis worked primarily because Brookes and Wilding had a deep respect for each other.

Wilding was an 'uncomplicated sportsman' who enjoyed the perks of being an international star. He enjoyed the hospitality of the rich and powerful, becoming a frequent guest at Nancy Astor's Cliveden and a 'conspicuous member of the motor set', often riding long distances to tournaments on his 'ironbike'. He did not smoke, drank only a little and developed a reputation as a romantic and heroic figure. However, when 'young ladies fell at his feet' he was unmoved. Did the middle-class Wilding regard such adulation as distasteful; did he want no distraction from his professional calling; or did he have other reasons for an avoidance of female relationships? There is no clear answer to these questions and the authors leave this intriguing issue open-ended.

His close relationship with his sister Gladys throws some light. Although Wilding believed that Cambridge should be a place for men and made disparaging remarks about female undergraduates there, Gladys was both his confidante and critic. He obviously took notice of what she said. Gladys was critical of her talented brother, contending that he was impetuous, irresponsible and slack, and 'just like a boy' was reluctant to take on adult responsibilities.

Wilding was more than a privileged and pampered sportsman, a tennis troubadour who liked the company of the rich and famous. Behind his seemingly carefree exterior was a shrewd tennis brain; he thought much and wrote incisively about the game. The authors quote extensively from his regular letters home to demonstrate that behind the bravado was a sensitive individual, noting, for instance, that he was ill at ease with the Davis Cup hype in 1909, which he described as 'beastly tennis' (p.219). While Wilding did not want to be considered a product of the English tennis system, he also 'avoided making too much of New Zealand' (p.387). When he was on active service he was deeply critical of the war and he wrote (p.361) that the whole war 'disgusts me to death'. Yet at the same time he found the war 'intensely interesting', particularly when he was assigned the dangerous task of motoring around the front undertaking reconnaissance. His letters underline the enigmatic character of a man who could be highly critical of the war but cheerfully involved in military operations.

This impressive and authoritative biography is meticulously researched and skilfully written. It provides a fine insight into an age that placed great emphasis on the games cult and sporting idealism, and many fascinating insights into the life of a complex and compelling international sports star.

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