

A Life of J.C. Beaglehole New Zealand Scholar. By Tim Beaglehole. Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2006. 559 pp. NZ price: \$69.95. ISBN 0-86473-535-9.

J.C. BEAGLEHOLE HAS DESERVED A BIOGRAPHY that would do him full justice, and Tim Beaglehole has written one. The foundations of Beaglehole's scholarly interests were laid in childhood experience. He was born into a network of Beaglehole relatives who lived close to each other and enjoyed each other's company. There was music, charades and other youthful high spirits as well as serious talk about social and political matters. Reading and talk about books were important parts of family life. A speech stutter led John self-protectively to prefer expressing himself in writing. He wrote his first handwritten publication, a family magazine, at the age of 11. At 17 he produced a volume of verse for his father's birthday which demonstrated his knowledge of the conventions of book layout and was a precursor of the aesthetic of his adult typography and book design. He became a dedicated writer of letters to family members and close friends. The family went to the Unitarian church and, at the age of 16, John was its organist and choirmaster. Through the church he made his first acquaintance with Sir Robert Stout, Professor Hugh McKenzie and members of the Richmond-Atkinson families whose friendship he would come to value.

He was reading remarkably widely by the time he enrolled at Victoria University College, where he found the life of the college clubs more challenging than the formal teaching. He published verse and prose in *Spike*, the college magazine, and edited it for three years. The free discussions club brought him under Professor Hunter's influence. Through the tramping club he met Elsie Holmes whom he would marry in 1930. He graduated MA with first class honours, won a coveted travelling scholarship, and went to London to do postgraduate research. Harold Laski, his supervisor, showed him how the role of university teacher and mentor could be performed. He thrived on London's music, theatre, galleries and bookshops. He became deeply ambivalent about New Zealand and returned to it by default.

He found temporary work as a WEA tutor in Otago, then in the Waikato, and, in 1932, as a temporary lecturer in history at Auckland University College. Feelings ran high in Auckland after the April riot. When he defended the right to free speech, some leading members of the college council branded him a 'dangerous young man' with 'advanced views'. His temporary appointment was not renewed. Unemployed, his undeserved reputation followed him back to Wellington, where the Victoria University College Council, setting aside the recommendation of its appointments sub-committee, decided not to appoint him to the chair in history. This was the blackest moment of his professional career.

But there were also bright spots during these years. Happily married, he was soon the father of three young sons. He was still writing poems and having them published. He was discovering New Zealand painters whose works he admired. He had three books published: *Captain Cook and the New Zealand Company*, his MA thesis; *The Exploration of the Pacific*, a book he had been invited to write for a series on world exploration; and *New Zealand: A Short History*, an incisive reading of New Zealand history as a case study of British capitalism in its imperial-colonial mode. He was working on his fourth book, *The History of the University of New Zealand*, which would be published in 1937.

The sun began to shine for him again in 1936 and continued to do so for the rest of his life. He and Fred Wood warmed to each other and worked harmoniously together in the Victoria history department for 30 years. Laudatory reviews of *The Exploration of the Pacific* gave him standing in the eyes of his colleagues. His contributions to the country's official centennial publications as author, editor, typographical adviser and book designer were praised, as was, later, his expert guidance of the Historical Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs. He made the first purchases for what became

the university art collection. His jubilee history *Victoria University College; An Essay Towards a History* was widely admired.

He worked with others in efforts to keep wartime restrictions on speech and publications to a minimum. He played his part in the moves that led to the creation of the Wellington Chamber Music Society and, later, the New Zealand Federation of Chamber Music Societies. He took the lead in the defence of civil liberties during the 1951 waterfront crisis, and became the long-serving and highly respected president of the New Zealand Council for Civil Liberties that was formed soon after.

Beaglehole's feeling for his homeland had slowly become much more positive. He came to see himself as a member of a culture which, though it had yet to reach some kind of maturity, was not to be written off. In 1954, in his commemorative public lecture *The New Zealand Scholar* — the title did homage to Emerson — he suggested that New Zealanders were perhaps experiencing an intellectual revolution comparable with the one Americans had been through a century previously.

By then he was well into the immense labour of preparing Cook's and Banks's journals of Cook's Pacific voyages for publication and writing Cook's biography, works which would be acknowledged to be among the great achievements of twentieth-century scholarship. The two long chapters that recount what stood behind that achievement are appropriately titled 'the Scholar at Work' and are the climax of the biography.

John Beaglehole's writings on Cook remain definitive. Some later researchers, among them Anne Salmond, have offered variant explanations of the Hawaiian cultural background to Cook's death. But, as Tim Beaglehole notes, Cook himself remains essentially as John Beaglehole left him.

Among the many pleasures of this fine biography, I particularly liked Tim Beaglehole's deft use of John Beaglehole's letters to get inside his mind at important moments in his life.

WILLIAM RENWICK

Wellington

The Bookmen's Dominion: Cultural Life in New Zealand 1920–1950. By Chris Hilliard. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2006. 136 pp. NZ price: \$34.99. ISBN 1-86940-362-2.

NEW ZEALAND HISTORICAL WRITING has not been strong in intellectual history. For over 60 years E.H. McCormick's centennial history, *Letters and Art in New Zealand*, has stood as the founding text. Its conclusions have been enriched by a number of biographies of individual scholars and writers, some excellent work on ideas about the Maori, and at last several studies of literary groups by scholars like Lawrence Jones and Mark Williams. But the study of intellectuals as a social group, which includes non-fiction authors alongside the so-called 'creative' writers and explores the relationship between intellectuals' social role and their ideas, has been sadly lacking. *The Bookmen's Dominion*, the third in AUP's lively argumentative series of short book-essays in cultural and social history, is to be greatly welcomed.

In four pacy and entertaining chapters Chris Hilliard sets out to describe the boosters and promoters who essentially ruled New Zealand's book world in the inter-war period. This is not a story of great minds or profound ideas. Hilliard's interests are, first, in the cultural apparatus of writing and publishing in these years. So institutions like Author's Week, journals like *Art in New Zealand*, or *The New Zealand Artists' Annual*, and episodes like the hilarious effort to write a detective novel collectively, are explored. Second, Hilliard provides a series of short portraits of some of the leading figures of