

missionaries provided guns; we know that Marsden was responsible for the missionaries and loved to make money; hence Marsden was responsible. But there is no hard evidence despite much recent research into the traffic in arms.

The book is barbed and bitter, full of sharp puns and satirical innuendo, and while some of it is justified, it simplifies Marsden's character, implying that he was nothing other than a gun runner and mercenary money maker. Quinn has added to the evidence of the strength of his mercenary motivation, especially later in his life, but it was never that simple. People rarely are.

PETER LINEHAM

Massey University – Albany

NOTE

1 A.T. Yarwood, *Samuel Marsden: The Great Survivor*, Wellington, 1977, p.281.

The Amazing World of James Hector. Edited by Simon Nathan and Mary Varnham. Awa Press, Wellington, 2008. 185pp. NZ price: \$25.00. ISBN 978-0-9582750-7-1.

AMIDST A RECENT SPATE OF PUBLICATIONS about New Zealand's scientific history aimed at the general reader comes a book specifically devoted to the lasting legacy of a man who has been dubbed New Zealand's 'Mr Science': James Hector. *The Amazing World of James Hector* investigates the life of this Scottish doctor and geologist who was 28 years old when he arrived in Dunedin in 1862 to carry out a geological survey of Otago and Southland. Seven and a half years later, Hector had cemented for himself the position of New Zealand's foremost scientific authority and manager; he had founded and was in control of all the major scientific institutions in New Zealand. This dominance has led historian C.A. Fleming to label the years from 1867 to 1903 the era of 'Hector hegemony'.¹

This collection consists of 14 pieces which were originally given as presentations at a one-day symposium, held in 2007, which commemorated the centenary of Hector's death. The symposium was held at Te Papa Tongarewa, and was sponsored by three modern incarnations of institutions founded by Hector: Geological and Nuclear Sciences (GNS); the Royal Society of New Zealand; and Te Papa itself. The authors of the essays collected here come from a wide array of professions and disciplines, including scientists, palaeontologists, historians, museologists, and some of Hector's own descendants; two of his great-grandsons wrote essays. The expertise reflected in the range of essay topics and the diversity of perspectives about Hector's life are among this collection's strengths. The book represents well the multifaceted nature of Hector's own interests and career as an explorer, geologist, government official, administrator, exhibition organizer and family man.

Individual essays focus on Hector's employment with the geological survey in Canada as part of the Palliser expedition, the part he played in Otago and New Zealand geological surveys, his role as the director of the Colonial Museum, and his position as the manager and editor of the New Zealand Institute and its associated publication, the *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute*. His roles in establishing the Colonial Botanic Gardens, heading the Meteorological Department and Colonial Observatory, and as the Chancellor of the University of New Zealand are also foci. His interests and publications in palaeontology, zoology and botany also form the basis of essays.

This representation of the broad span of Hector's career and interests, while providing strength to this collection, also creates a weakness. The book lacks unity and focus. Each

of the essays and authors places Hector in a different context, and in some he becomes a tangential rather than central element. This is particularly evident in the essays by John Adam and Louise Beaumont about his property at Ratanui, and Tim Beaglehole's piece, 'Educating — or Examining', which focuses on the development of the University of New Zealand.

In the introduction, Hamish Campbell labels Hector a personal 'hero' and 'a visionary', while George Gibbs attributes to him 'an uncanny ability to see ahead of his time'. A similar spirit of uncritical and vaguely hagiographic celebration of Hector's achievements and legacy infuses many of the essays. Often the institutions founded by Hector are linked to their modern successors; their endurance is seen as a testimonial to Hector's character, import and influence. As a consequence some of the essays seem more concerned with the present legacy of Hector, than with his actions in the past. While aiming to address who Hector was, 'what made him tick', and 'what set him apart' from his contemporaries, this collection reveals more about what he did and his modern legacies than who *he* was. Though the essays vary in quality and length, most of the contributions are conversational and chatty in tone, reflecting their genesis as speeches. They are short in length and easy to read, dealing mainly with the broad contextual and central biographical details of Hector's life.

Some of the better essays take a more analytical approach and offer an understanding of Hector within his milieu, as a 'man of his time'. Conal McCarthy's contribution examines Hector's role as a museum and exhibition organizer, outlining well the changing ideological and increasingly professional context of museum display in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. McCarthy charts both the rise *and* fall of Hector's career and notes the mounting criticism he faced as he failed to keep his museum up to date towards the end of his career. It is interesting that Jock Phillips highlights Hector's parsimonious nature, noting that he was happy to reduce the colonial weather observers' pay. Phillips also records Hector's interpersonal conflicts with Captain Robert Edwin of the Marine Department over control of weather forecasting. Limited attention is paid to other interpersonal conflicts in which Hector was involved, such as his clash with labourer Alexander McKay and Julius von Haast; an issue recounted, albeit exceptionally briefly, in Ewan Fordyce's piece about Hector's contributions to vertebrae palaeontology.

In the collection's final essay, Simon Nathan examines the posthumous honours and commemorations Hector has received and argues that his formative role in New Zealand science was overlooked in the first half of the twentieth century because of the increasingly specialized nature of science. Hector's 'old fashioned' role as an administrator, advisor and scientific generalist in the era before the emergence of professional science in New Zealand is one of the unifying themes noted by several essays, and as such it is surprising it is not emphasized or utilized more. The image most people have of Hector as an old, rather than a vibrant, energetic young man, is something these essays may go some way to redressing, in particular those which focus on his early career and adventures during the Palliser expedition in Canada.

On the whole this collection is well-illustrated and presented. Those with a particular interest in one of the many facets of Hector's multifaceted life can easily dip in and find a summary of relevance to their field. This collection will prove less useful to the more serious scholar as all but two of the essays (those by Jock Phillips and Chris Hector) lack endnotes indicating the source of cited material. A list of 'Further Reading' is appended; however, this is hardly exhaustive. A list of plant and animal taxa whose names commemorate Hector is also appended, but the inclusion here of common alongside scientific names would have been useful.

This collection sits comfortably alongside Rebecca Priestley's recent publication, *The Awa Book of New Zealand Science*, an anthology of notable New Zealand scientists' writings, and her collaboration with Veronika Meduna, *Atoms, Dinosaurs and DNA*, a

reference work containing biographical profiles of important New Zealand scientists. These works all serve as accessible introductions to New Zealand's scientific history for the general audience. While this publication successfully champions Hector's legacy and his importance to the establishment of New Zealand's scientific institutions, those already acquainted with Hector and his myriad accomplishments, looking for a work that reveals less about Hector's amazing legacy and more about his amazing life, may wish to wait for the publication of the more focussed biography of Hector that Simon Nathan is currently researching.

ELINOR HARRIS

The University of Auckland

NOTE

¹ C.A. Fleming, *Science, Settlers and Scholars: The Centennial History of the Royal Society of New Zealand*, Wellington, 1987, p.11.

Rita Angus: An Artist's Life. By Jill Trevelyan. Te Papa Press, Wellington, 2008. xi + 420pp. NZ price: \$70.00. ISBN 978-1-877385-39-1.

LAST YEAR WAS THE YEAR OF RITA ANGUS (1908–1970), with an edited collection of her life and art,¹ a touring exhibition of her paintings organized by Te Papa and a major biography by Jill Trevelyan. Before writing this review of the biography, I made a visit to Rita Angus's house in Wellington — her final home, from 1955 — to find a heritage plaque on the gate. But the house itself is set back from the street and almost completely obscured by the two double-storied roadside dwellings on either side. To be sure, the light and colour of the city was one appeal in her decision to relocate to Wellington. But the house itself epitomizes its former occupant's somewhat inaccessible personality and desire for privacy, and Trevelyan is under no illusions that Angus would have resolutely opposed a biography during her lifetime. By the time Rita Angus moved to Wellington, she was recognized as one of New Zealand's foremost artists, along with Toss Woollaston and Colin McCahon, and was much admired for her landscapes and portraits. She was part of a broad movement of artists, musicians and writers (including historians), dating from at least the 1930s through to the early 1960s, whose work reflected their country rather than replicating the cultural endeavour of the Old World.

One of the themes of Trevelyan's excellent and beautifully produced biography centres on the difficulties confronting a full-time artist in an environment with little tradition of professionalism or of state sponsorship for the arts generally. Earning a living and sometimes even making ends meet was fraught, and Trevelyan points out that Angus was fortunate in having understanding parents who provided emotional and financial help. She could not have pursued an artist's career otherwise. All the same, it was a frugal existence and, with a nod to her earlier socialist principles, Angus never owned a fridge, washing machine or vacuum cleaner, much less a car or a television set. Nor did it help that she was hopeless at self-promotion, and she added to her difficulties by so often refusing to sell her work. Rather, she would lend out a painting and frequently enough ask for it back to do further work on it. It was her misfortune, unlike McCahon and Woollaston, not to have had influential art critics to boost her work and reputation. At the same time, she tried to control the narrative of her life and fiercely guarded her reputation, often counter-productively inveighing against her critics.

All this reflects the difficult personality that she was, beginning as a rather indulged child with an unfortunate sense of her own self-importance: when she was 11 she refused