

this author–sleuth — to conceal from everyone her secret, special, intimate and lifelong relationship with Sylvia Fox and their shared eternity as a couple beyond the grave. It seems clear that Drayton believes she has solved the central enigma of Marsh’s reticent being and probably cracked ‘the Ngaio code’ of covert sexual inversion despite formally insisting that she could not give closure to such a claim. She *might* be right about Marsh as a woman infatuated with women, but this is asserted at the expense of not exploring some of Marsh’s strong heterosexual ‘interests’ and arguing clearly against the grain of Marsh’s statement to me that she was chary of discussing why she never married for fear of being deemed lesbian, which she insisted she was ‘*emphatically not*’.² I always found Dame Ngaio remarkably truthful and direct, and so I think the friendship between ‘Ngaio’ and ‘Syl’ was probably asexual and less charged than is suggested here. And when Drayton fingers Mrs Marjorie Chambers and the widow Anita Muling as sharing a house ‘and what many people believed was a lesbian relationship’ which involved both women ‘as regular guests’ at Marsh’s home (p.231) I begin to quail. Presumably some kind of associative logic is operating here and yet Drayton fails to quantify how ‘many’ people believed this inflexion to the Chambers–Muling friendship when only one person is sourced (and not a member of Marsh’s circle). Marsh’s secretary for 25 years, Rosemary Greene, has offered her opinion that ‘Ngaio would have coped with [Drayton’s] remarks O.K. as she [had] suffered this kind of thing before, but Ngaio’s very dear friends, Sylvia, Anita and Marjorie, coming from a different generation than that of Drayton’s sex-saturated one, I think would find it very hurtful’.³ Drayton concedes that in Marsh’s lifetime such probing ‘would have been problematic for her. But if she’d carried on living, I think she would have changed and evolved as we all have, and I think she would have been pretty open to it.’ Sorry, but I, who knew Dame Ngaio far better, cannot remotely concur. Let me be clear: I respect Dr Drayton for asking and testing the questions (as Lewis did not in her authorized text). My problem is the hyped marketing and rhetorical over-blow from the author about what amazing revelations she has fashioned when she has not in fact unearthed anything but speculation.

In cautiously welcoming this informative book as an addition to the growing corpus of tomes on the fascinating Dame, I am relieved to know that its author would agree with me that it certainly is *not* the last word on the complex, elusive and iconic Ngaio Marsh.

BRUCE HARDING

University of Canterbury

NOTES

1 John Osborne, *A Better Class of Person: An Autobiography 1929–1956*, Harmondsworth, p.257.

2 Dame Ngaio Marsh to author (personal communication), 8 April 1979, Marton Cottage.

3 Rosemary Greene, personal letter to Bruce Harding, 18 November 2008.

The History of Epsom. Edited by Graham W.A. Bush. Epsom and Eden District Historical Society Inc., Auckland, 2006 (reprint 2007). xvi + 468pp. NZ price: \$65.00. ISBN 0-473-11102-0.

THE QUINTESSENCE OF HISTORY may well be biography, as Disraeli and Emerson aver. But where, and amidst what surroundings, things happened is scarcely less useful for understanding the deeds, experiences and observations of people. For individual lives occur in and are shaped by place, as well as by time, and are influenced by the lives, interests and avocations of other inhabitants of the locality. Hence, as Graham Bush makes

clear in a notably insightful preface that bears on the nature of historical enquiry itself, and can be read as a contribution to methodology, 'local history' is inescapably important. As inductive logic teaches, the details from which generalities and broad 'truths' can be abstracted are generated in particular places. Life within a given neighbourhood might illustrate processes that also operate much further afield. At the same time, a distinctive local character may endure, and be discernable to those with eyes to see.

That has certainly been the case with *The History of Epsom*. A chronicle of the Auckland suburb of that name, it is a model of its kind. It is a record of immediate relevance for the residents, but it also bears on — and could supply evidence for — many larger histories and widely pervasive themes. It offers, as Blake might have said, 'a universe in a grain of sand'.

The first six chapters, moving from natural history to current planning concerns consequent upon residential demographics, occupy a quarter of the book. They narrate the overall development of Epsom as a (more or less) geographically discrete entity; but Bush also acknowledges subtle adjustments over the years of boundaries and of nomenclature (including a tendency among some citizens from across the border who pretend to live in Epsom). Then follow 17 chapters, each standing independently. These deal with particular features of that development, and its associated institutions, consequent upon the growth of European settlement and activity in the area from the 1840s; that is, in the transition from farmland to the distinctive suburban entity that it has become. 'Epsom is the antithesis of Anywheresville' (p.96).

Logically, local government and its agencies and public facilities are dealt with first in this sequence. Then come chapters on churches, medical services, schools, businesses, sports clubs, the arts and so on. Supporting the main text are numerous inserts and photographs with extended captions that highlight specific individuals, buildings and activities. Overall, the result is encyclopaedic, and, surprisingly for a multi-authored work, thoroughly coherent.

Published by a society set up in 2000 to promote knowledge and understanding of a major component of their city, the book contains contributions from 56 writers organized into a project group under the management of a respected historian, Professor Graham Bush. Among them was a high level of professional expertise. Notable contributors include John Shaw (89 items), Ann Baxter (29), Helen Laurensen (18), Bryan Boon (12), Valerie Sherwood (8) and Christine Black, the president of the society (5).

Sherwood is especially to be commended for a full-page essay on 'the Epsom murder' (of Packer by Winiata?) of 1876. Oddly, though, her provocative thesis on the topic (MLitt, The University of Auckland, 2003) is not cited in this otherwise richly referenced book. Perhaps that was out of modesty. If so, it was false modesty, for there is nothing at all calling for modesty in this bounteously informed and generously illustrated tome. May there be more such.

HUGH LARACY

The University of Auckland

First Catch Your Weka: A Story of New Zealand Cooking. By David Veart. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2008. 330pp. NZ price: \$49.99. ISBN 978-1-86940-410-9.

AMONG THE MYRIAD OF THINGS that could preoccupy New Zealand historians perhaps the most essential — eating — has received surprisingly little attention. Certainly food, and especially a surfeit of pork and potatoes, appears frequently in nineteenth-century explorer and settler memoirs, but until recently little has been offered by way of context or analysis of this consumption. Indeed, the historiographical and literary over-emphasis