

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.

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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

on a rather grey, repressed society with a wowsery core has too frequently reinforced the likes of Hamish Keith who insists that ‘New Zealanders as a nation could not cook’ or the more qualified but still over-generalized characterization by Graham Kerr of a people who ‘obliterated’ the delicate flavour of lamb with a ‘murderous marinade’ of mint, sugar and malt vinegar. But in the last five years, following the work of Tony Simpson, the Marsden Funded ‘The Development of New Zealand’s Culinary Traditions’ project, and three related conferences, along with several excellent theses and research essays on both food and eating establishments, a more diverse and flavoursome history has begun to be revealed. *First Catch Your Weka* is a fascinating and innovative addition to this literature.

David Veart has applied his training as an anthropologist and employment as a Department of Conservation historian and archaeologist to the examination of his extensive cookbook collection — seeing them not merely as an assemblage of recipes but as a significant repository of information about changing lifestyle and social patterns within New Zealand society and a measure of the variety of external influences acting upon it. Over time the balance of content between meat, fish, vegetables, sweets, ‘foreign food’ and other elements altered markedly in response to periods of war, depression or prosperity and the availability of new technologies from electric ovens to labour-saving appliances and television with its succession of celebrity chefs. Those who want to keep their cookbooks in pristine condition behind plastic recipe holders are doing no favours to Veart. The more splattered and stained a page, sometimes replete with added comments pencilled by the owner, the more one can assume that a recipe is popular and well used. A further indicator of popularity is revealed in Veart’s move beyond commercially available cookbooks to the vast array of community cookbooks produced as fundraisers by churches, schools, clubs and occasionally political parties. These contain the recipes ordinary New Zealanders wished to share with others — a seemingly inexhaustible range of cakes and biscuits but also, as times changed, such ‘exotics’ as Indonesian fried rice or pork chow mein. In all, more than 160 recipes, conveniently indexed at the end, guide the reader through 17 broadly chronological chapters featuring important thematic excursions into such areas as interactions between Maori and Pakeha food, colonial bread-making, the emergence of domestic science, and food for children. The personal histories of a number of the cookbook writers, shaped by experiences in the British and other empires, are equally fascinating. A lavish spread of illustrations, many of them revealing the well-handled authenticity of many of the cookbooks under discussion, also enhance the text.

Our culinary history, like the broader canvas, is more than a simple wrestle between cultural nationalism and better-Britishness/recolonization. Inevitably the dominant cultural baggage of settlement dictated a strong British tradition augmented by a certain admiration for classic French. Christmas is the most notable instance where, despite the best efforts of such innovations as the 1937 Davis Gelatine cookbook’s cold plum pudding, the different seasons and climate of New Zealand consistently failed to produce a festive cuisine to challenge tradition. On the other hand, American influences must not be underestimated. During the nineteenth century recipes and techniques from the developing United States offered a better model for New Zealand’s frontier society than Britain, and from the 1940s the irrepressible Aunt Daisy also took a good deal of her inspiration from frequent visits to the US. Other recipes were subjected to what Veart describes as an ‘erosion of authenticity’ as they were adapted to the availability and convenience of local ingredients. The emergence of a more obviously nationalist cuisine during the 1920s, dominated by oysters, mussels, whitebait and kumara, was regrettably undermined by the onset of the Depression and World War Two. Although the government extended the sugar ration during the fruit harvest to sustain the New Zealand tradition of preserving and bottling, others offered recipes for stewed liver and macaroni as a key

to wartime efficiency. But these years did produce an entirely palatable and widespread interest in health foods.

Although a number of cooks and food writers, beginning with Katrine Mackay during the 1920s, emphasized the relevance of lighter Mediterranean and Asian cooking, the drive to modern culinary diversity was more a product of the late 1960s and 1970s as new migrants came in, more New Zealanders travelled and television alerted us to the possibilities of the wider world. Now the variety of distinct cuisines, fusions, ingredients, eateries and cookbooks is seemingly endless. As diet and work patterns changed, the mountains of baking gradually retreated.

This history could have been written with more contextual and statistical detail — such as levels of production and consumption of particular commodities or analysis of the changing protein economy — but this would rather undermine David Veart's achievement in presenting a more personal and conversational journey through a unique archive. Unlike most other themes in New Zealand history one is genuinely inspired to try this one at home.

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Australia's Empire. Edited by Deryck M. Schreuder and Stuart Ward. Oxford University Press, New York, 2008. xiii + 419pp. US price: \$70.00. ISBN 978-0-19-927373-7.

AFTER GLANCING AT THE TITLE, but before looking over the contents of this book, serious students of Australian history might suppose that it is all about Australia's interests in Oceania; that it will deal with that country's increasing influence over the peoples of Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia; and that it will trace Australia's role in the region from the development of several Australasian colonies' Monroe Doctrine of the South Pacific in the late nineteenth century to Australia's role as the United States's deputy sheriff in this part of the world today. While the editors of this lengthy tome are quite conscious that this is part of their story they seem unaware that the title is misleading. Their attempt to justify it (p.9) is far from convincing; the principal reason for it appears to be simply that the book is one volume of a companion series entitled the *Oxford History of the British Empire* and the editors were saddled with what they were given.

What, then, *is* the book about? According to the editors it is to do with the British Empire in Australia from its sudden beginnings in the late eighteenth century to its slow decline in the mid and late twentieth century and beyond. They herald it as 'a wide-ranging assessment of Australia's imperial experience' (p.7). Herein lies the root of perhaps one of the book's major faults: it simply tries to do too much and has too many foci. The principal questions the editors pose are: in what ways was what came to be known as Australia incorporated into the British Empire and what impact did that empire have on the continent? But the questions they answer are more to do with the 'loss' rather than the establishment of the empire in Australia. What became of the British Empire here? Did the stimulus for its decline come from Australia, the UK, or both? What are 'the material and cultural legacies' (p.22) of the British Empire in Australia? And, of course, those most perennial of questions: what has it meant — and what does it now mean — to be an Australian? There are many others, and one gets the sense that many contributors found it difficult to focus simply because they were required to address more questions than they could sensibly answer.

These contributors number 17, and most would not be out of place in a *Who's Who* of Australian historians. Few if any are trying to establish a reputation by publishing in a prestigious publication. Rather, most are professors/associate professors — some retired