A Warning to the Curious: Medieval and Early Modern Collections in Aotearoa New Zealand
Chris Jones

At once all Dennistoun’s cherished dreams of finding priceless manuscripts in untrodden corners … flashed up, to die down again the next moment. It was probably a stupid missal of Plantin’s printing, about 1580. Where was the likelihood that a place … would not have been ransacked long ago by collectors?¹

In the tale of ‘Canon Alberic’s Scrap-book’, M. R. James, the quintessential cataloguer, paints in Dennistoun the archetypal amateur des vieux livres who learns, without specifics, of ‘something that might interest him’: instant elation is quickly dampened by realism and the anticipation of inevitable disappointment. James himself was doubtless aware that, more often than not, the item in question turns out to be the work of the – somewhat unfairly – maligned Christophe Plantin (d. 1589) rather than, as it transpires in Dennistoun’s ultimately unhappy case, ‘twenty leaves of uncial writing in Latin, which, as a few words seen here and there told him at once, must belong to some very early unknown patristic treatise’.² And yet surprising discoveries are made: the most striking in recent years is the unearthing of a previously unknown Magna Carta confirmation in the Kent Archives.³ Do Aotearoa New Zealand’s frequently overlooked holdings retain anything of similar significance yet to be revealed?

While this Special Issue is not able to announce the discovery of a lost text of Magna Carta, its intention remains to establish that there is much to be discovered in Aotearoa, including previously unknown fragments of the earliest medieval manuscript in the Southern Hemisphere.

This introductory essay will begin by assessing the present state of research into New Zealand’s medieval and early modern manuscripts, rare books, and documents before offering


²James, p. 9. For Plantin’s liturgical printing, which was indeed prodigious and for which he held both papal and royal privileges, see Colin Clair, Christopher Plantin (London: Cassell & Company, 1960), pp. 87–104; for missals in particular, see ibid., pp. 93–95. Plantin once claimed to Philip II he could print 2,000 missals every three months; in the six-year period up to 1576, he printed 52,000 service books (ibid., pp. 92, 95). As Clair (p. 97) noted: ‘The industry of the man is almost inconceivable.’

³Nicholas Vincent, ‘Discovering the Sandwich Magna Carta’ (20 February 2015), available online through The Magna Carta Project’s blog <http://magnacartaresearch.blogspot.co.uk> [accessed 30 October 2015]. Professor Vincent’s Magna Carta: Origins and Legacy (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2015) was not yet published at the time of writing.
a case study intended to establish the value of what might, at first glance, appear far from promising material. It will then consider how the nine articles that comprise this Special Issue advance scholarship: firstly, in terms of our specific understanding of the history of Europe between the Carolingian era and the Enlightenment; and secondly, and no less importantly, in terms of our understanding of the mentalities that shaped colonial societies. It will conclude with some reflections on the potential direction of future research.

There is no one reason why New Zealand collections have been – and continue to be – the focus of comparatively little investigation. The most important factor is their relative inaccessibility. Even in an age of cheap airfares, travel between Aotearoa and its nearest neighbour often takes the same average flight time as the journey from London to Warsaw or New York to Chicago. The basic consequences of geography are compounded by a variety of other issues. The population is – and has always been – small. The number of serious nineteenth- and twentieth-century collectors can be counted in single figures, and none of them possessed resources remotely approaching those of a J. P. Morgan or the Folgers. There is also an understandable tendency among the custodians of the country’s collections that is by no means unique to New Zealand. Nicholas Vincent sums up this latter: material is sometimes overlooked, ‘simply because the idea of possessing an unknown Magna Carta has appeared to the cataloguer to be as absurd as suddenly stumbling upon an unknown play by Shakespeare or an unknown canvas by Vermeer’.4 Together, these factors help maintain the assumption that there is nothing much to see in New Zealand’s collections, and that what does exist is already well known.

There is certainly little incentive to explore Aotearoa’s holdings in the present day. ‘Priority 1’ of the New Zealand Ministry of Education’s long-term strategy for tertiary education is headed ‘Delivering Skills for Industry’. It outlines the present government’s key aim in the following terms:

The priority is to ensure that the skills people develop in tertiary education are well matched to labour market needs. This includes addressing new and emerging shortages in specific areas, such as information and communications technology (ICT) and the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills needed for innovation and economic growth.

4Vincent, ‘Discovering the Sandwich Magna Carta’.
It is a strategy that has little room for the Arts unless they are interpreted as a pathway to ‘ensuring tertiary education supports development of transferable skills’. While the Hon. Steven Joyce’s policy would doubtless have even the less-than-Bohemian Dennistoun reaching for the absinthe, it can, by no means, be held entirely responsible for the ongoing lack of interest in exploring medieval and early modern collections. One long-term contributing factor, although potentially one not so significant as is sometimes assumed, may be New Zealand’s much vaunted tradition of anti-intellectualism. Ultimately, though, neither government policies nor semi-mythical social trends provide sufficient explanation.

It might be argued, admittedly somewhat contrarily, that the problem was compounded in 1989 by the appearance of Margaret Manion, Vera Vines, and Christopher de Hamel’s catalogue of just over 180 manuscripts held in institutional and private collections. This outstanding work of scholarship seemed to put paid to the hopes of would-be Dennistouns: there appeared to be nothing more to discover. As this Special Issue establishes, that is not quite true. Perhaps most surprisingly, however, the appearance of the catalogue has not led to considerable scholarly interest in exploring what does exist. Since its publication, only one significant book-length work has appeared with a focus on New Zealand-specific manuscripts: the 2007 Migrations collection edited by Stephanie Hollis and Alexandra Barratt. This offers important studies of some of the key collections and, in its second part, seven essays that bring new insights to individual manuscripts. Yet a great many manuscripts in New Zealand remain the subject of little to no scholarly research.

---


7Manion, Vines, and de Hamel.

8For an overview of how the key collections in Auckland, Dunedin, and Wellington were assembled, see Stephanie Hollis and Alexandra Barratt, ‘Introduction: The Formation and Reception of Medieval Manuscript Collections in New Zealand’, in Migrations, eds Hollis and Barratt, pp. 1–30 (pp. 8–21). For an overview of Sir George Grey’s and A. H. Reed’s interests, see Christopher de Hamel, ‘Medieval Manuscripts and New Zealand’, in ibid., pp. 33–48.
While at least some work has been undertaken into manuscripts, Aotearoa’s incunabula, along with its post-1500 early modern books and documents remain nearly as untouched as some of the country’s national parks. One illustrative example highlights the key issue. In June 2012, Professor David Norton visited Christchurch to view a copy of the University of Canterbury’s prized, if slightly tatty, 1611 first impression of the King James Bible.\(^9\) After requesting the volume, both he and I were surprised when a previously unknown 1613 edition was mistakenly delivered to the reading room. A cataloguing oversight combined with a loss of institutional memory had meant that the latter had lingered neglected in the stacks since its donation by a local artist.\(^10\) Work on New Zealand’s rare books has tended to be limited in part, as the above case demonstrates, because what constitutes the country’s holdings in this area is difficult to determine. Striking examples feature alongside manuscripts in a recent overview of the University of Canterbury’s own Special Collections, but that volume remains the only substantial published guide to a New Zealand collection featuring manuscripts and rare books.\(^11\) Similarly arresting specimens have appeared in exhibitions such as the University of Otago’s *Faces of Authorship* (2011) and Canterbury’s *Canterbury Tales* (2012), both of which retain a digital presence;\(^12\) most recently, several early modern books were displayed as part of Canterbury’s *The Mana of the Magna Carta: The New Zealand Experience of a Medieval Legacy* (2015). Yet Donald Kerr’s 2006 study of


Sir George Grey as a collector remains one of few in-depth works to consider this material. Studies of individual books have been rare. But the question remains, the occasional King James Bible aside, is it not all just missals by Plantin?

As 2015 marks its eight hundredth anniversary, we might employ Magna Carta as a touchstone to assess the value of these remote collections. A document with continuing legal relevance in New Zealand, Magna Carta’s anniversary has been duly feted, albeit with slightly less self-congratulation than in Britain, and its contemporary significance debated. Yet for the medievalist the terrain does not appear promising. As Manion, Vines, and de Hamel revealed in 1989, there are no fragments – let alone complete texts – of the Charter in Aotearoa. Today, the oldest copies of Magna Carta in institutional hands are two sixteenth-century printings. Neither edition is particularly rare; both may be accessed in the form of copies in other collections via Early English Books Online (EEBO). And yet both still have much to reveal about not only the original context in which they were produced but also colonial New Zealand society.

The University of Canterbury’s Special Collections holds the oldest copy in New Zealand, a 1531–32 printing of Magna Carta, cu[m] aliis antiquis statutis by the King’s Printer, Thomas Berthelet. This is a Latin edition, in which Edward I’s 1300 confirmation of

---

13Kerr, Amassing Treasures; see also Donald Kerr, ‘Sir George Grey and Henry Shaw: Antipodean Collectors of Medieval Manuscripts’, in Migrations, eds Hollis and Barratt, pp. 49–71; and most recently Jo Birks, ‘Mapping the Networks of Ownership and Distribution of Rare Books in Special Collections at the University of Auckland General Library’ (unpublished MIS thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2015).

14One example that focuses on bindings was completed by Heather Sutton as part of a student internship at the University of Canterbury. See her blog of the project Bound in Books <http://hrs48.wordpress.com/2013/07/20/rare-book-bindings-internship/> [accessed 30 October 2015].


16For a comprehensive list of anniversary events, see Magna Carta 800 NZ <magnacartanz.wordpress.com/> [accessed 31 October 2015].

17Early English Books Online is a key online resource for early printed English works, available (with subscription) at <http://eebo.chadwyck.com> (ProQuest, 2003–15).

18For Berthelet’s life and career, see Colin Clair, ‘Thomas Berthelet, Royal Printer’, Gutenberg Jahrbuch, (1966), 177–81; and K. F. Pantzer, ‘Berthelet [Berthelot], Thomas (d. 1555)’, in Oxford Dictionary of National
the thirty-seven clauses that comprise the 1225 re-issue of the Charter – the same text as the newly discovered Sandwich confirmation – appears prominently at the head of the first of two volumes bound as one (fols 2r–8r).\(^9\) The edition is interesting both for the early history of English legal printing and for the broader history of Henry VIII’s reign. It is not the first edition of the statutes to include Magna Carta, but, in addition to being an outstanding example of the printer’s craft – Berthelet is known for the quality of his work\(^{20}\) – it illustrates a period of renewed interest in the Charter.

While Magna Carta had by no means been forgotten in Lancastrian England, it ceased to be confirmed by English kings from the reign of Henry VI.\(^{21}\) It does not appear in a hand-written fifteenth-century legal collection now in the Auckland Libraries,\(^{22}\) nor was it part of the earliest printed collections of English statutes, such as that produced by Berthelet’s predecessor as King’s Printer, Richard Pynson, in 1502, a fragment of which has similarly come to rest in Auckland.\(^{23}\) Its status began to change with Pynson’s decision to issue a new collection of statutes in 1508. Like Berthelet’s later work, this began with the Charter.\(^{24}\) The following years saw two further editions produced by Pynson (in 1514 and 1519) but the

---


\(^{22}\)Manion, Vines, and de Hamel, no. 39, pp. 69–70.

\(^{23}\)Novua statute ([London]: Richard Pynson, 1502); AL copy: shelfmark 1500 ENGL; ESTC, S121421. This is, properly speaking, a short excerpt from the 1502 edition in a modern binding. The Auckland copy, which contains the final 15 per cent of the original text, begins with the statutes for 1 Hen. VII and concludes on fol. 44\(^{f}\) with 12 Hen. VII (1496/97). Cf. images 262–305 of EEBO’s copy, reference STC 9265.

years between 1525 and 1541 saw a veritable flurry of editions, with at least seven new versions produced by Berthelet and his arch-rival in legal printing Robert Redman, ‘or more rightly, Rudeman’, as Pynson once acidly described him. These works reflected a growing market within the English legal profession for printed texts. At the same time, it is unlikely that the flood of Magna Cartas at this particular juncture was unconnected with the sweeping changes the King’s ‘Great Matter’ was ushering in in the 1530s. Berthelet himself, as much of his output testifies, was an intimate part of the Tudor propaganda machine. His position as King’s Printer closely associated his work in contemporary perception with Henry VIII’s perspective. This, his first edition of Magna Carta, appeared in the second half of 1531, a point at which the royal propaganda campaign was intensifying. Berthelet’s press published it alongside works in defence of the royal cause, such as A Glass of Truth, published anonymously but widely rumoured to be the product of Henry’s own pen, an edition of the tract Disputatio inter clericum et militem, which constituted an attack on papal authority, as well as contemporary legislation. It might be suggested that, at a time when Henry’s government was contemplating a legislative programme that would culminate in the break with Rome, a printing of Magna Carta by the King’s Printer was intended to help reinforce the firmness of the English legal tradition’s foundations.

So far, so EEBO. And yet the University of Canterbury Magna Carta has more to tell us. This particular copy’s uniqueness lies on its title page where the letters ‘R’ and ‘S’ appear within classical columns and an inscription in secretary below notes: ‘Rycharde Sampson

---


26For an overview, see Harvey, Law Emprynted and Englysshed, pp. 71–90.


30Compare with Turner’s view (Magna Carta, p. 135) that Magna Carta ‘played little part in the political controversies of Henry VIII’s reign’.
dothe owne me’ (see Figure 1).

This is Richard Sampson (d. 1554), a man described by Andrew Chibi as ‘practically indispensable to both Wolsey and the king’. Although sufficiently conservative in religious matters to be sent to the Tower by Cromwell in the 1540s, Sampson frequently worked on behalf of the royal government in the 1520s and 1530s, published a defence of royal supremacy in 1533, and acted as Henry’s proctor in the case against Anne Boleyn in 1536. While, as Elton noted long ago, it is difficult to determine the effectiveness of Henry’s propaganda campaign, Sampson’s ownership of the Berthelet Magna Carta may tell us something of the way in which the English statutes were received in this period. Indeed, it is interesting that a noted scholar of canon and civil law owned a copy of the English statutes at all. It reflects the connection between Renaissance humanism and legal printing remarked on by David Harvey, a point reinforced by the time Sampson spent at the universities of Paris, Perugia, and Siena. It also suggests an additional audience for legal publishing beyond that outlined by Harvey, and points towards the possibility that the importance of the relationship between the Roman and canon law tradition and English common law has been underestimated.

The early provenance of New Zealand’s second sixteenth-century Magna Carta, a copy of Christopher Barker’s 1587 printing of an English translation of the statutes, has yet to be established. Like the Canterbury copy, the text, now held by Auckland Libraries, is both

31The cross superimposed over the ‘m’ in ‘Sampson’ may indicate that this particular book was purchased before the owner’s elevation to the bishopric of Chichester in 1536. I am very grateful to Greg Waite for his assistance with this transcription.

32Andrew A. Chibi, ‘Sampson, Richard (d. 1554)’, *ODNB*, eds Matthew and Harrison, XLVIII, 800–02.

33Elton, *Policy and Police*, pp. 207–08. Abbreviated legal references appear scattered throughout the volume in two hands, one of which appears to belong to Sampson. The other is a post-Tudor hand whose author includes references to the works of Sir Edward Coke (d. 1634). That the book has been trimmed down makes both sets of notes difficult to read.


35My doctoral student, Lindsay Breach, is presently researching the role of the civil law in the development of English jurisprudence. For an example of the interaction between the two in this period, see the case of Thomas Wentworth’s *The Office and Duty of Executors* (1589) in Lindsay Breach, ‘Testator and Will-Maker’, *New Zealand Family Law Journal*, 8.2 (2014), 39–42 (p. 40).

36AL copy: shelfmark 1587 GREA; *ESTC*, S101176; Beale, *Law Books*, S31. On the upper right hand corner of the end paper to the back cover, there are traces of what may be a shelfmark but there are no other signs of provenance.
Edward I’s confirmation of 1300 and accessible via EEBO. It is also similar in that it has a place in understanding the history of legal publishing and, perhaps, the broader Tudor worldview. From the perspective of a study of material in New Zealand collections, however, its primary importance lies in what it has to say about early settler society. This is no less true of a third sixteenth-century Magna Carta known to have been part of a private collection in the nineteenth century. It is a topic on which the Canterbury Charter can also cast light.

Magna Carta was certainly considered important by early Europeans who settled in Aotearoa. ‘A more unjust, a more arbitrary, unequal, and despotic measure has never before been concocted in any British colony’, fulminated the Southern Cross on 11 January 1845 with respect to the General Dealers’ Licensing Bill; its journalists invoked Magna Carta alongside the Bill of Rights and the Coronation Oath in defence of the colonists’ position as ‘free subjects’. The presence of multiple copies of the Charter in the colony bears out this perceived importance. Canterbury’s copy is listed on a shipping manifest – ‘Magna Charta 1532 – 1 [copy]’ – for books belonging to the Canterbury Association packed on 25 September 1852 (see Figure 2). The Association, the brain child of John Robert Godley and Edward Gibbon Wakefield, aimed to establish a Church of England settlement in the new colony. Magna Carta had a clear part to play in this plan to transplant England and its values to New Zealand. It is probable that the book’s first home was Christ’s College, Christchurch, which lists a copy in its 1869 library catalogue. It came to the University via the donation of


38 Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kāwanatanga Christchurch Regional Office, ‘Captain Simeon to Committee – list of books belonging to the Canterbury Association – 25/09/1852 (R21007184)’, Archives Reference: CH290, box 138, record no 6/7 1015, p. 2. This significant discovery was made by Damian Cairns, University of Canterbury Special Collections Librarian, and I am grateful to him for sharing it with me.


40 Catalogue of The Library: Of Christ’s College, NZ (1869) (Christchurch: William Reeves, 1869; with handwritten entries for 1870–77), University of Canterbury Library, shelfmark Z 976 .C556 .C556 1869, p. 45. The catalogue does not supply the date of the edition. It does provide a shelfmark (‘5 A 13’) but there remains no trace of this in the Canterbury copy, which lost its spine and front papers at an undetermined date. For Christ’s
A. G. Flower, whose father rescued it when a particularly idiosyncratic headmaster dispersed many of Christ’s College’s books. The 1587 edition followed a very different path. A striking feature, with respect to the history of colonial New Zealand, is that it entered Auckland Libraries via the collection of Henry Shaw and not that of Sir George Grey.

Grey was by no means uninterested in the early history of English law. The manuscript he gifted Auckland contains the statutes from 1 Edw. III to 22 Hen. VI; the excerpt from Pynson’s 1502 Nova Statuta supplements this with those for the first twelve years of Henry VII’s reign. In other words, this curious mix represents the earliest iteration of the collected English statutes formed at the point of transition between manuscript and print. It was an iteration that was created prior to, but swiftly displaced by, the version Pynson later produced incorporating Magna Carta. While a later printing of the Charter itself would not have been difficult to come by, as Shaw later proved, there are no indications Grey sought to acquire one. This was either the result of a remarkable lacuna in the market or a deliberate decision. Grey’s motivations in assembling his Auckland collection are explored in greater depth in this Special Issue by Stephanie Hollis. Yet whatever Grey’s reasoning, Shaw certainly felt the need to rectify the oversight of the man whose collection he supplemented.

The importance attached to Magna Carta in the colony is equally evident in nineteenth-century Aotearoa’s third sixteenth-century edition.

According to the catalogue, a 1556 printing of Magna Carta and the statutes by Richard Tottel once formed part of the private library assembled by John J. Grimes (d. 1915), the first Roman Catholic bishop of Christchurch. Tottel was a man who had his own important part to play in the evolution of English legal printing. He was the first to hold the College material at the University more generally, see Bronwyn Matthews, ‘Special Collections at the University of Canterbury Library: A History’, in Treasures, eds Jones and Matthews, pp. 8–13 (pp. 11–12).

41 This information was conveyed to me by Mrs Philippa Graham (email correspondence 4 December 2015). No record of the donation has been retained by the University, which makes it difficult to determine the precise point at which it entered the collection but after visiting The Mana of the Magna Carta exhibition, Mrs Graham identified the Canterbury copy as a book she had seen in her grandfather’s safe as a young girl.

42 As Stephanie Hollis notes in her contribution to this volume, it is certain that this manuscript was part of Grey’s collection, not Shaw’s; cf. Manion, Vines, and de Hamel, no. 39.

common law patent, and consequently became involved in lengthy litigation with the Queen’s Printer, Christopher Barker – the man responsible for the Auckland Magna Carta – over what each had the right to print.\textsuperscript{44} The ultimate fate of this particular product of Tottel’s press, most probably his improved and annotated version of the Charter, is unclear.\textsuperscript{45} Its significance, however, lies in the place it occupied in the collection of a Victorian English Catholic bishop keen, in the face of an often reluctant congregation many of whom had strong Irish roots, to emphasise the compatibility between Roman Catholicism and Englishness. Not only did Grimes order a \textit{Te Deum} to celebrate Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee in 1897, write a letter in praise of the Queen, and keep a 1562 edition of Henry VIII’s \textit{Assertio septem sacramentorum} on his shelves, but he also indulged a taste for ecumenical discussion and enjoyed a warm relationship with the Anglican bishop of Christchurch.\textsuperscript{46} That Grimes once possessed his own copy of Magna Carta and the early statutes is further evidence in support of his vision of a Church that was fully integrated into a settlement consciously founded on English values. There is, in sum, much to be found in New Zealand in what might at first appear unpromising material. The issue of provenance, in particular, has the potential to draw medieval and early modern scholars into wider debates concerning colonial identity for which their training makes them uniquely equipped to participate.

If the danger of making the medieval and early modern world ‘relevant’ is enough to instil a ‘deadly, inconceivable terror’ of the kind Dennistoun came to experience,\textsuperscript{47} the reader should rest assured that the articles collected in this Special Issue are unashamedly unconcerned with ‘transferable skills’. They are divided into three sections, two of which

\textsuperscript{44}Harvey, \textit{Law Emprynted and Englysshed}, pp. 96–104.

\textsuperscript{45}\textit{Magna Charta, cum statutis que antiqua vocantur, iam recens excusa, \\& summa fide emendata, in\textit{specta vetusta exemplaria ad Parliamenti rotulos examinata: quibus accesserunt nonnulla nunc primum typis edita} (London: Richard Totell, 1556); \textit{ESTC}, S101069; Beale, \textit{Law Books}, S17.


\textsuperscript{47}James, ‘Canon Alberic’s Scrap-book’, p. 16.
explore, primarily, what a selection of New Zealand manuscripts and rare books can tell us about the periods in which they were originally produced, and a third, which focuses on what this material can tell us about New Zealand society.

In the first section, ‘Fragments and Myths’, Alexandra Barratt’s search for manuscript fragments in the Sir George Grey Special Collections of the Auckland Libraries brings us closest to the world of M. R. James. Professor Barratt’s work includes an astounding discovery: not one but multiple fragments from what was once a Carolingian Bible long forgotten and buried within a fifteenth-century printed text. Not only has Barratt found this material but she successfully establishes a link between the Carolingian fragments and manuscripts now in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek. As a result, she is able to make a convincing case for these being not only the oldest manuscript fragments now in Australasia, but also most probably the work of a female scribe. And this is only one of Professor Barratt’s many finds that expands and updates the catalogue of Manion, Vines, and de Hamel. In the second contribution in this section, Maree Shirota suggests new ways in which we might read a manuscript that is both largely intact and that has long been relatively accessible. The ‘Canterbury Roll’ is a fifteenth-century English genealogical text originally drawn up during the early years of Henry VI’s reign. An edition was published nearly a century ago. Shirota argues that a document normally read for what it has to say about dynastic relationships has much to reveal about political ideas when its compiler’s approach to a concept such as deposition is explored. By considering what new approaches can reveal about familiar material, Shirota highlights the continuing value of ‘heritage collections’: far from being simple curiosities for occasional public display even well-known manuscripts have a potential part to play at the cutting edge of research.

In ‘Early Modern Discoveries and Reflections’, we turn to Aotearoa’s most neglected holdings. Professor Barratt has already established the value of taking a closer look at printed books. In this section two articles, by Judith Collard and Geoff Kemp, consider works now in institutional collections, while two by Professor Glynnis Cropp and Greg Waite explore the importance of material preserved in private hands. Collard and Cropp focus on the insights offered by particular editions. They range from William Dugdale’s 1658 *History of St Pauls Cathedral in London* with engravings by Wenceslaus Hollar to two seventeenth-century French translations of Boethius’s *Consolatio Philosophiae* by René de Ceriziers and Nicolas Régnier. Kemp and Waite, on the other hand, are interested in unique documents that have found their way via varied routes to a former colony. Kemp corrects a significant misidentification of papers now in the keeping of Auckland Libraries. In doing so, he
provides important new insights into Cromwell’s Protectorate. Waite’s study of William Thomas’s notebook offers a window onto the political and religious tensions of the Civil War and its aftermath from a completely different perspective. It would be hard to find a greater contrast than that which exists between Sir George Grey’s Cromwellian ‘secret treaty’ and Thomas’s Puritan notebook. Both are a reminder that there remains much to find in New Zealand, and, in the latter case, that not all of it is to be found in the libraries of institutions.

Collard and Kemp provide more than simply new analysis of material in its original context; they offer fresh insights into collecting and the mentalities that fuelled it. For Collard, this means an exploration of expatriate New Zealander Esmond de Beer’s complicated relationship with both Dunedin and academia. This sheds light on one of New Zealand’s few significant donors in the second half of the twentieth century. In Kemp’s case, it means offering an assessment of Sir George Grey’s devotion to the ‘cult of Cromwell’ and its legacy for Auckland. In this collection’s final section, ‘Colonial Receptions and Interpretations’, it is this relationship between Aotearoa’s holdings and nineteenth-century mentalities that becomes our principal focus.

Simone Celine Marshall’s study of John Carter’s Exeter Cathedral book returns us to a world of private collectors. Marshall employs a copy of Carter’s architectural study now in private hands to offer not only the first in-depth analysis of the work, but also to explore the wider question of Carter’s relationship with the Gothic revival and its legacy. With Stephanie Hollis, we then return to Sir George Grey. In a controversial and stimulating contribution that compares the libraries Grey assembled in Cape Town and Auckland, Professor Hollis reconsiders the factors that shaped both collections. Were Grey’s purchases simply the result of what was available? Although the market was certainly an important factor, Hollis argues that Grey’s approach to the acquisition of incunabula was driven in each case by different considerations: at the Cape, Grey was collecting for himself; in Auckland, it was with the long-term intention of donating his collection to the city. The latter, Hollis suggests, played a critical role in determining Grey’s acquisitions, particularly his acquisitions in English. There is, she argues, an overlooked link in Grey’s thought between language and format. It led him, despite a strong commitment to the English language, to acquire no Middle English manuscripts despite their availability; market forces simultaneously frustrated his efforts to acquire English works in an ‘appropriate’ format, incunabula.

In the final contribution to this collection, Robert Rouse considers another aspect of Grey’s collecting alongside a work now held in the Roman Catholic bishop of Auckland’s personal library. The first case involves the creation of a faux-medieval Gospel in Awabakal,
a now extinct Australian aboriginal language; the second concerns the addition of an inscription in Te Reo Māori to a sixteenth-century Book of Hours. Rouse employs both to explore the link between British imperialism and medievalism. Like the article by Professor Hollis, Rouse’s contribution draws attention to the powerful connections between New Zealand, despite its geographical isolation, and the wider British world of the nineteenth century. While this isolation can never entirely be overcome, today the Internet raises the possibility of connecting Aotearoa with the world in ways that would have been unimaginable even twenty years ago.

Alexandra Barratt’s contribution to this Special Issue is a reminder of the importance of digital resources in conducting future research. Ranging from library catalogues to EEBO, these considerably enhance the possibility of identifying material. The flipside to the digital coin is that it provides an opportunity to make New Zealand’s material more widely available to researchers. For medieval and early modern studies, a number of important manuscripts are now accessible in their entirety – notably via Auckland Libraries and the University of Canterbury – but the bulk of the country’s collections remain, for the moment, offline or restricted to a few key images. Despite the development of a number of ‘showcase’ projects, such as Papers Past, as Jock Phillips notes, New Zealand’s historians have been slow to embrace publishing on the Internet let alone innovative large-scale digitisation projects particularly those that involve cooperation. His assessment that ‘[i]n New Zealand the archivists and librarians have gone hell for leather digitizing content, but have not yet drawn on historians’, is certainly true but might be supplemented by noting that the medieval and early modern field is an area where even the leather remains decidedly rigid and inflexible.

While a certain lack of sympathy for any such projects in the present political climate might be lamented, it is perhaps here that one might find a happy juxtaposition of significant


possibilities for valuable research with the opportunity to foster ‘transferrable skills’, particularly those connected with information and communications technology.

Is there more to discover in the collections of Aotearoa New Zealand? The fate of Bishop Grimes’s library provides some indication of potentially fertile soil. In 1980, Grimes’s successor donated 4,597 volumes to the University of Canterbury, the core of which was Grimes’s own collection. At the time of acquisition, the items were noted on a card catalogue but only material deemed significant was later allocated an electronic record before being incorporated into the collections. The remainder (equivalent to six pallets) is currently located in a secure library storage area. According to the University Chronicle, 195 of the donated books were published before 1820, and most of these before 1800. Today, Canterbury’s Special Collections hold eighty-two books originating in the Grimes’s library; what has happened to the remainder is, at present, something of a mystery. Grimes’s library, like Grimes himself, remains under researched.

Doubtless we should be wary of the fate of Dennistoun, pursued by a demon he inadvertently released from the folios of Canon Alberic’s scrap-book. And yet New Zealand’s collections remain a rich resource worth further exploration. There is certainly more to be discovered. As Dennistoun remarks to himself when considering whether to pursue his own investigation further, ‘it would be foolish not to go; he would reproach himself for ever after if he refused. So they set off.’

University of Canterbury

---


51 This figure was established by my research assistant Jennifer Dorsey following an extensive review of Grimes-related material in Canterbury’s Special Collections. Some of the absent books appear to have been requisitioned by staff at the time the collection was catalogued; others may still be in storage.


53 James, ‘Canon Alberic’s Scrap-book’, p. 6.