

Part II: The New Zealanders

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The experiences of the New Zealand scholars reveal a different pattern to those of their Australian counterparts. The depiction in the previous section is one of cohesiveness, because almost all the dramatis personae were involved in some way or another with the Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs (DORCA); the Army needed anthropologists. In Australia, and in Britain, the state mobilised scholarship as well as brawn, if the distinction might be allowed. But it was different in New Zealand, which was too small and too far from the theatres of war for scholarship to be pressed into the war effort on any scale. There were no New Zealand equivalents to the Committee on National Morale (CNM) or DORCA; there was no Bletchley Park (the British codebreaking facility to intercept high-level German intelligence); there was nothing akin to the British Naval Intelligence project, which provided wide-ranging information to naval operations in a series of 'Admiralty Handbooks'; there was nothing in the nature of British 'Civil Histories' of the domestic war effort.¹ More noticeable was an exodus of young New Zealanders to enlist in the Royal Air Force, including the historian-to-be Brian Dalton, who became Foundation Professor of History at the James Cook University of North Queensland.²

There was, however, some mobilisation of New Zealand scientists during World War II—notably, the Radio Development Laboratory. So named to disguise its real purpose, the laboratory developed types of radar for local defence and ultimately for use in the Pacific War.³ Once it was evident—after the Battle of Midway in June 1942—that the Japanese would not be invading New Zealand,⁴ there was a conscious dispersal of New Zealand's scientific talent abroad. Robin

1 F. H. Hinsley and John Stripp (eds), *Codebreakers: The inside story of Bletchley Park* (Oxford, 1992); Hugh Clout and Cyril Gosme, 'The Naval Intelligence Handbooks: A monument to geographical writing', *Progress in Human Geography*, 27:2 (2003), pp. 153–73; Denys Hay, 'British Historians and the Beginnings of the Civil History of the Second World War', in M. R. D. Foot (ed.), *War and Society: Essays in honour and memory of J. R. Weston, 1928–1971* (London, 1973), pp. 39–57; J. H. Davidson, *A Three-Cornered Life: The historian W. K. Hancock* (Sydney, 2010), ch. 6 ('The Civil Histories').

2 L. H. Thompson, *New Zealanders with the Royal Air Force. Volume 1: European theatre* (Wellington, 1953); Kett Kennedy, 'Foreword: Brian James Dalton, 1924–1996', in Anne Smith and B. J. Dalton (eds), *Doctor on the Landsborough: The memoirs of Joseph Arratta* (Townsville, Qld, 1997), pp. v–vii. Dalton's major work is *War and Politics in New Zealand, 1855–1879* (Sydney, 1967).

3 Ross Galbreath, 'New Zealand Scientists in Action: The Radio Development Laboratory and the Pacific War', in Roy MacLeod (ed.), *Science and the Pacific War: Science and survival in the Pacific, 1939–1945* (Dordrecht, 2000), pp. 211–27; Ross Galbreath, 'Dr Marsden and Admiral Halsey: New Zealand radar scientists in the Pacific War', in John Crawford (ed.), *Kia Kaha: New Zealand in the Second World War* (Melbourne, 2002), pp. 252–63.

4 The widespread fear of invasion was unfounded because Japan never seriously entertained occupying the isolated outpost that New Zealand strategically was. An invasion would have tied up troops and naval vessels

Williams, for example, became a member of the British Group in the Manhattan Project to develop the atomic bomb.⁵ If New Zealand scholars of whatever stripe were going to be mobilised for the war efforts, it would overwhelmingly be overseas and not necessarily in their capacity as scholars.

Hence, two themes of the present section are dispersal and expatriation. The historians Jim Davidson and Neville Phillips, the anthropologist Derek Freeman, and the polymath Dan Davin went to England for basically three reasons: the colonial cringe—the idea that all things British were superior; the associated yearning of people in a small and isolated country, if not to see that wider world then at least to visit the ‘old country’; and the lack of postgraduate training in New Zealand. As Davin later remarked, New Zealand society in the 1930s was so discouraging that ‘we got out in droves’.⁶ A common (and autobiographical) theme in the fiction of the time was the discouraging, even hostile, environment that New Zealand writers had to endure.⁷ Thus, Davidson, Phillips and Davin took the colonial high road, enrolling at Oxbridge on one or other of the few postgraduate scholarships that were available in the mid to late 1930s—in Davin’s case, a Rhodes Scholarship.

Davin, Davidson and Phillips all went to England before 1939 and were then caught up in the war mobilisation. There were basically two paths for young scholars in wartime Britain. There was service of one kind or another in the domestic war machine, such as Bletchley Park, or in one of the government ministries. Such was Davidson’s revulsion of war and his even greater revulsion against killing another human being—not to mention a reluctance to disrupt his studies—that he took all possible steps to avoid being swept into the armed forces. He was, instead, able to finish his PhD thesis and only then was he drawn into war work—as a researcher, writer and editor for the Admiralty’s ‘Naval Intelligence Handbooks’ relating to the Pacific Islands. In contrast, many younger British-based scholars, including Davin and Phillips, saw it as their duty to enlist—as, for example, did John Mulgan, another young New Zealander at Oxford, although he had no ‘illusions about the stupidity of military life’.⁸

needed elsewhere. Gerald Hensley, *Beyond the Battlefield: New Zealand and its Allies, 1939–45* (Auckland, 2009), pp. 178–9; see also F. L. W. Wood, *The New Zealand People at War: Political and external affairs* (Wellington, 1958), pp. 244–5.

5 Robin Williams, Telephone interview, 31 May 2010 (Wellington, NZ). Williams embarked on postgraduate research at Cambridge after the war, was successively Vice-Chancellor of Otago University and The Australian National University. Now in retirement, Williams ended his career as Chairman of the New Zealand Public Service Commission. See also Owen Wilkes, ‘New Zealand and the Atomic Bomb’, in Crawford, *Kia Kaha*, pp. 264–75.

6 Quoted in Paul Millar, *No Fretful Sleeper: A life of Bill Pearson* (Auckland, 2010), p. 200.

7 See Patrick Evans, *The Penguin History of New Zealand Literature* (Auckland, 1990), *passim*.

8 Quoted in Vincent O’Sullivan, *Long Journey to the Border: A life of John Mulgan* (Auckland, 2003), p. 207.

With the approach of war, and correctly foreseeing what the rise of fascism would entail, he joined the territorials in 1938 and thence to postings in Northern Ireland, the Middle East and Greece.

Derek Freeman's war service was different again. He had gone to Western Samoa in 1940 as a schoolteacher, ostensibly to earn a living but really as a means to conduct fieldwork on the side. He shared Davidson's distaste for war and got himself offside with both the administration and the expatriate community as 'a man of peculiar ideas (and undoubtedly a pacifist)'. But the attack on Pearl Harbor (in December 1941) made such a stance untenable; eventually returning to New Zealand, Freeman enlisted in the Navy's Scheme B for an officers' training course in Britain. Arriving in England in 1944, he pursued what anthropological study he could, built up a network of associates in the discipline, and set himself up for postgraduate work in immediate postwar Britain. He made the most of his limited opportunities.

With the end of the war, our scholars had to decide whether or not to return to New Zealand—and from this consideration emerges the nebulous question of identity. Was one still an expatriate, who feels positively about New Zealand from afar, or had one become an exile, nurturing a sense of alienation or even betrayal?⁹ It is not difficult to see why some scholars were reluctant to return to New Zealand. As well as being a conformist and generally philistine environment, and inimical to a life of the mind, there was not much on offer by way of suitable employment. New Zealand was simply unable to absorb all the talent it produced—what James Belich has described as 'cultural overproduction'.¹⁰

Davin noted the double bind: 'the staffs of the New Zealand universities were so small that there were no jobs for the expatriate scholars to return to... And where, in New Zealand in 1945, could I have found a job at all equivalent in interest or emolument to my job at the Clarendon Press?'¹¹ Davin exaggerates in saying that there were *no* academic openings in New Zealand, but they were certainly scarce. Moreover, there were few other employment outlets for returning scholars, unless they could be absorbed into the public service or schoolteaching. During the 1930s and 1940s, the University of New Zealand had four constituent colleges. The individual departments were small: typically a male professor, usually from overseas, and a sole lecturer or tutor, often a female. In the late 1940s, there was some expansion to cater for an influx of

9 The distinction is that of Richard Ellmann, 'Becoming Exiles', in *A Long the Riverrun: Selected essays* (London, 1988), p. 33.

10 James Belich, *Paradise Reforged: A history of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the year 2000* (Auckland, 2001), pp. 341–5.

11 Dan Davin, 'Correspondence', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 13:1 (1979), p. 105.

returned servicemen on rehabilitation scholarships, but the numbers of social scientists, particularly historians, in each university department could still be counted on the fingers of one hand.

At the very time that more university places were becoming available for historians, however, their employment opportunities were contracting on other fronts. The government-sponsored centennial celebrations had created openings in the late 1930s and early 1940s with the commissioning of a number of Historical Surveys, a separate series of Pictorial Surveys and an Historical Atlas.¹² Davidson was employed on the last while he anxiously scanned the horizon for the scholarship that would take him to England. Following the Centennial celebrations in 1940, the Surveys and Atlas were reconstituted as separate branches within the Department of Internal Affairs. Even that was a chimera; both were put to the sword after the 1949 election with the advent of a new government, for whom scholarship and the arts meant nothing. The War History Branch, for which Davin and Phillips wrote volumes on Crete and Italy respectively, did manage to survive but with diminished funding.¹³

Phillips was the only one of the quartet of New Zealanders who returned to New Zealand, and only because he had to. Ironically, Phillips was the one least suited to go back. He embraced all that England had to offer—what his son Jock Phillips (in this volume) refers to as ‘the excitement and stimulus of living in a place with real culture, tradition and history’. But in 1946 he had a family to support, so he wrote to J. H. E. Schroder, his former boss at the Christchurch *Press*, asking for a job. Schroder, who was on the Council of Canterbury University College, mentioned his name to the History Professor, James Hight, and Phillips was offered a lectureship. He slid in with a deceptive ease when, in fact, he was very lucky indeed. He was luckier still in succeeding Hight as professor three years later, being placed ahead of a more experienced and better published candidate.¹⁴ Phillips eventually became Vice-Chancellor, so his interrupted war years did not retard his career. What, at the time, appeared to be a lost opportunity did not turn out so bad in terms of its lasting consequences. But his heart lay in England, and upon retirement he resettled in his country of choice. Davin presents the obvious contrast. For all his self-conscious New Zealandness,

12 William Renwick (ed.), *Creating a National Spirit: Celebrating New Zealand's Centennial* (Wellington, 2004). The Centennial Branch was the watershed in New Zealand historiography between the old style of ‘amateur’ historians and the hard-nosed ‘professionals’. See Rachel Barrowman, ‘“Culture-organising”: Joe Heenan and the beginnings of state patronage of the arts’, *New Zealand Studies*, 6:2 (1996), pp. 3–10; Chris Hilliard, *The Bookmen's Dominion: Cultural life in New Zealand, 1920–1950* (Auckland, 2006), pp. 84, 106.

13 Michael Bassett, *The Mother of All Departments: The history of the Department of Internal Affairs* (Auckland, 1997), pp. 158–60; Ian McGibbon, ‘“Something of them is here recorded”: Official history in New Zealand’, in Jeffrey Grey (ed.), *The Last Word? Essays on official history in the United States and British Commonwealth* (New York, 2003), pp. 53–68; Dan Davin, *Crete* (Wellington, 1953); N. C. Phillips, *Italy. Volume 1: The Sangro to Cassino* (Wellington, 1957).

14 See Edmund Bohan, ‘McIntock, Alexander Hare, 1903–1968’, *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007, <<http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>>

Davin lived in Oxford by preference, although he had to make adjustments in order to come to grips with the peculiarities of the English. Of the other two, Davidson completed his degree and was able to contribute to the war effort by continuing with historical research whilst Freeman used his scaled-down opportunities as the springboard to a future career in anthropology.

The New Zealand scholars who were in Britain at the outbreak of World War II had very different experiences to those who remained behind—unsurprisingly, because the country did not have to defend its shores or endure bombing attacks. Davidson’s mentor, J. C. Beaglehole, almost had a non-war. Too young to have been involved in the First World War and just too old to be liable for call-up in the Second, he sat it out for the duration. Only two of his relatives, whom he did not know very well, were killed on active service. There was the inconvenience of petrol rationing, the relative austerity and the uncertainty of it all. He chafed under the restrictions of wartime censorship and made unsuccessful representations to have it moderated. Otherwise, he was largely unaffected.¹⁵

Our four New Zealand scholars, in contrast, were closer to the fray and in no way can they be said to have had non-wars. But their experience of war was not entirely negative, unpleasant though it was at the time. Davidson’s work for the Naval Intelligence Division was the springboard to a future academic career at Cambridge and The Australian National University. Freeman’s naval service took him to England where he made the necessary contacts and arrangements for postgraduate work. Davin’s and Phillips’ lengthy army service did not impede their careers, and might even have provided impetus in the sense that their combat experiences resulted in publications they would not otherwise have written. War is not usually thought of as an enabler, but in these cases it was.

15 Tim Beaglehole, *A Life of J. C. Beaglehole: New Zealand scholar* (Wellington, 2006), pp. 239, 245, 310–11.