

REVIEWS

Donald Jackson Kerr, *Hocken: Prince of Collectors*. Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2015. 424 pp. ISBN 978 1 877578 66 3. NZ\$60.

Reviewed by Paul Brunton

Book collectors underpin research collections. Without them, our great libraries would be diminished and research itself frustrated. Yet, among the voluminous acknowledgments preceding a work of scholarship, there is rarely a mention of the collector who made the research possible in the first place. The author of this book is almost a one-man band working to reverse this lack of appreciation. Dr Kerr gave us, in 2006, *Amassing Treasures for All Times*, his illuminating study of Sir George Grey as bookman and collector. He has now turned his investigative gaze on Thomas Morland Hocken and promises further work on New Zealand collectors.

Hocken was born in England on 14 January 1836 and was admitted to the Royal College of Surgeons in 1859. He spent a few years as a ship's surgeon on the Melbourne run before settling in Dunedin in February 1862. He would live there for the rest of his life, becoming a revered coroner and a civic figure thoroughly engaged in community affairs.

Hocken was gregarious, witty, with a sharp tongue, at least behind his subjects' backs. Of John Howard Wallace, an early settler, he wrote that he was a "hale old man, bow legged, talkative, uneducated, & preparing a publication of his reminiscences which will have little interest beyond that afforded by the subject itself." Johnny Martin was "a wealthy, healthy vulgar purse prune old man, but energetic." Hocken was a short man, perhaps only 142 cm (4 ft 8 in), but did not take offence at the inevitable caricatures. Kerr, with a Hockenesque wit himself, calls him "pocket-bantam." The male bantam is a spirited fighter, so this description seems apt.

This biography focuses on Hocken's work as a student of history, lecturer and writer and, of course, book collector. These passions intermeshed. Each was dependent on the other.

Hocken wrote to George Grey—who, incidentally, he treated, seemingly successfully, for piles and constipation—in January 1881: "The labour is with me one of love—the early history of this interesting country has ever had a singular charm & I entertain the purpose of publishing some contributions to it."

Hocken arrived in New Zealand a mere twenty-two years after the Treaty of Waitangi. History was all around, it was palpable or, at least, to Hocken it was. The documentary record was ripe for the picking. There was not much in the way of research collections and certainly not in Dunedin. Fascinated by this history,

Hocken wanted to learn more, he needed to collect the sources so he could study them. He wanted to spread the word. Kerr's Hocken is not so much a book collector as a whole research institute.

He made his first acquisition less than three years after his arrival: in November 1864 he acquired a manuscript by the German missionary Johann Freidrich Riemenschneider titled "Maori habits of life." This was as a result of a direct approach to Riemenschneider and indicative of what would become his life-long interest in Maori culture. He started as he would continue: actively seeking out material from those who were participants in historical events or their descendants. Kerr terms these "foraging expeditions," during which Hocken went soliciting regularly around New Zealand and sometimes Australia and, on two occasions, the UK. His only child, Gladys, inheriting her father's turn of phrase, characterised these collecting trips as visiting "rapidly dying identities awaiting his coming."

And like the fighting bantam, he never gave up. George French Angas's *New Zealand Illustrated*, published in 1846, was a notable lacuna in his collection. While in London in 1882 he visited the publisher's premises and found that the publisher's son, Thomas McLean, had one copy only—his father's—and was loath to part with it. It got better. The copy was in its original ten parts. Hocken finally extracted it but not before beating Thomas McLean down from £22 10s. to £21.

And it was not only private individuals who were at risk. Also in London, this time in 1903, Hocken successfully extracted a significant collection of Samuel Marsden's papers and those of other missionaries from the Church Missionary Society for £250 and tried to make a raid on New Zealand Company records held by the Colonial Office but was baulked by officialdom. However, six years later the Colonial Office presented duplicate copies of these to New Zealand and Hocken may very well have paved the way.

In the end, Hocken had amassed 5,200 printed books; 2,800 pamphlets; hundreds of manuscripts, pictures, maps and, mostly Maori, artefacts. He was a charismatic lecturer on New Zealand history whose words were afterwards published in the newspapers. This, of course, brought more offers of material and raised his profile. And, as he adumbrated to Grey, he did make significant published contributions. In the last year of his life, in July 1909, *A Bibliography of the Literature Relating to New Zealand* appeared. It would remain the standard work for sixty years. Kerr calls it the "pinnacle" of Hocken's collecting efforts. "In Hocken" or "Not in Hocken" still has cachet.

Fourteen years earlier, in 1895, he had read a paper to the Otago Institute (with which he had been associated since its inception in 1869) entitled "Abel Tasman and his Journal." It was published in the Institute's *Transactions* that year and included the first publication in English of the New Zealand section of Tasman's journal of 1643. Hocken later contributed to Frederik Müller's magisterial edition

of the whole journal published in Amsterdam in 1898. Pity he never admitted publicly that his second wife, Bessie née Buckland, did the translation. He did have a high opinion of himself, much of it deserved. He did not need to subsume his wife's work, but he was a man of his times and Bessie just had to live with it. *Contributions to the Early History of New Zealand* was published in March 1898. It reproduced some of the accessible style of his lectures and was a significant addition to the historical literature.

In March 1897, Hocken announced he would give his collection to the nation if Dunedin would provide a suitable building. It had been a ploy used by Grey and would soon be repeated by David Scott Mitchell in Australia. The customary civic dithering and procrastination took place, the philistines worried that a lot of junk was being foisted on the public and the tactical threat to revoke the gift was made. Sense finally prevailed and a new wing for the Otago University Museum was constructed to house Hocken's library. His artefacts would be housed in the Museum itself. The wing was opened on 31 March 1910. Hocken died two months later.

Dr Kerr has done the pocket-bantam proud—"no more than I deserve," Hocken probably would say. Hocken had a healthy ego. He was not bashful about self-promotion. Most collectors identify their books in some way. Hocken went overboard: bookplate, signature (three times on different pages), stamp, embossed coat-of-arms—all in the one volume. However, his contributions were immense—as collector, writer, lecturer. All this existed side-by-side with a busy professional practice. He deserves this book.

Kerr's research has been meticulous. He has examined every book in Hocken's library. No stone has been left unturned and this volume is a joy to read. There is a comprehensive bibliography, a professional index and a plentiful array of illustrations, some coloured. Otago University Press has done a superb production job. The design was executed by Ralph Lawrence.

Even Homer 'nods for a moment', though, and I must point out that the Australian poet, author of *Waltzing Matilda*, is A. B. Paterson, not Patterson, though many Australians themselves make this mistake. Samuel Marsden is known in Australia as the "flogging parson" not the "whipping parson." We flog in Australia; we do not whip.