Making New Zealand: Celebration and Anti-Myth

Michael Dudding

ABSTRACT: The *Making New Zealand* publications were a New Zealand government-produced series of magazines to celebrate the centenary of the 1840 signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. Each issue of the series (covering topics from infrastructure and defence, to fashion and sport) was to present an objective overview of the history of its subject – within the confines of a publication commemorating New Zealand's history. Joe Heenan, Undersecretary of Internal Affairs, was keen for the centenary celebrations and ephemera to "celebrate 100 years of colonisation," bringing "the bright side of our national progress" before the eyes of the world. While some authors were happy to articulate their topics in support of Heenan's vision, others became interested in producing what they believed to be a more realistic narrative grounded in the social realities of this country, including its negative aspects. Rather than making a case for the maintenance of cultural continuity, these writers sought a national identity arising from cultural adaptation to the specific conditions of New Zealand as a new world. This paper looks at a range of *Making New Zealand* issues to explore the narratives put forward as retrospective accounts of and normative directives for the design of New Zealand's interior and landscape environments.

Up to this point our gaze has been on man as he has beautified and enriched—the homestead of the pioneer as it stands inscribed with successive stories of the past. Here before the primitive hut, shingled or thatched, with its wood-heap like a full stop by the ever-open door, have long-trekked bullock teams dragged the creaking wain. Across the rough, untended house-paddock have the cheerful jinglings of the pack team given place to the crunch of buggy wheels on gravel. Now in still a later phase does the naked avenue sustain the car, its silent advent announced by talk of the wise moderns concerning the bibble babble of machinery.[1]

Herbert Guthrie-Smith's "The Changing Land," the concluding instalment of the *Making New Zealand* series of publications, is a fascinatingly complex work. Its evocative language and symbolic imagery reflect the romantic literary style of the nineteenth century, lending the text a poetic yet anachronistic tone to the 1940 publication. Guthrie-Smith opens "The Changing Land" with musings on New Zealand's flora, imagining a future outcome "if man and beast were removed as by the wave of a magician's wand."[2] This speculation reveals his nostalgic romanticisation for an untamed wilderness and critique of modernity, standing in stark contrast to the forward-looking optimism that characterises the broader *Making New Zealand* series and the New Zealand Centennial celebrations, for which the series was commissioned to support. While "The Changing Land" celebrates the resilience and achievements of early settlers, it also grapples with the environmental consequences of their legacy, offering a nuanced reflection on the transformation of New Zealand's landscape.

Guthrie-Smith's connection to nature and his exploration of humanity's impact on the land gained widespread recognition via the publication of *Tutira: The Story of a New Zealand Sheep Station* almost twenty years prior to the publication of "The Changing Land." As a self-taught naturalist, self-described "not altogether idiotic sheep-farmer," and a pioneering natural history photographer, Guthrie-Smith's *Tutira* chronicled decades of closely observed ecological change on his Hawke's Bay farm. The book's 400 pages detail the geology, geography, climate, and the migration of introduced species during his forty years of attempting to work the remote block of land. Though written with scientific distance, *Tutira* is also a deeply affectionate portrait, evident in the author's meticulous attention to the

---

[1] Guthrie-Smith "The Changing Land" p 30.

[2] Guthrie-Smith "The Changing Land" p 2.

smallest changes in his surroundings. As Vaughan Yarwood aptly describes *Tutira*, it is an "intricately layered biography of the station."[3]

"The Changing Land" offers a stark departure from Guthrie-Smith's earlier work. Instead of taking delight in documenting processes of change in the landscape, as he had at Tutira, it delivers a scathing critique of the environmental degradation wrought since European settlement. In the issue's first half, Guthrie-Smith outlines "the increasing complications of this biological catastrophe,"[4] tracing its origins through milestones such as the arrival of navigators, the coastal exploits of sealers and whalers, the agricultural efforts of missionaries, the activities of the New Zealand Company, the gold rush, and the misguided experiments in acclimatisation.[5] The latter half enumerates the consequences: declining soil quality, severe erosion, deforestation, polluted waterways, invasive pests, and even litter.[6]

Guthrie-Smith's grim assessment serves as an unexpected and sobering conclusion to *Making New Zealand*—unexpected because the event the series supported was conceived as a celebration of the progress made in the century since the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, which itself was positioned as the foundational moment for the nation of New Zealand. Spearheaded by Joe Heenan, Undersecretary of Internal Affairs, the Centennial Exhibition in Rongotai, Wellington provided an opportunity for New Zealanders to reflect on their national identity. It and its associated publications—*The Centennial Surveys* and *Making New Zealand*—were conceived to celebrate "100 years of colonisation" and highlight "the bright side of our national progress."[7] In essence, the entire endeavour sought to present an optimistic narrative of the nation's development, one rooted in the triumphs of pioneering colonisation and modernisation and the exemplary progress of the dominion as a member of the British Commonwealth.[8]

The title, *Making New Zealand*, encapsulates the purpose of these publications with deliberate intent. More than any other centennial project, the pictorial surveys sought to *make* New Zealand by crafting a believable national identity that could be shared by its people and used to outwardly project New Zealand's standing to a wider international audience.[9] The textual and visual strategies employed in *Making New Zealand* were integral to its nation-building project; each issue juxtaposed evocative imagery with accessible narrative prose to romanticise the pioneering spirit and position it as the foundation of a coherent national identity. To this end, the recurring motifs of pastoral landscapes and industrial progress in both text and imagery were designed to evoke a sense of pride and shared heritage, reinforcing what Irish political scientist and historian, Benedict Anderson, describes as "deep horizontal comradeship."[10] Anderson suggests that such imagined bonds form the foundation of national communities, fostering a shared sense of belonging of such power that its members would willingly die for and in the belief of its validity.[11]

Despite its origins in the 1980s, Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* remains a potent framework for exploring the construction of national identity, particularly in contexts like New Zealand's centennial celebrations. In the

---

[3] Yarwood "Guthrie-Smith of Tutira."

[4] Guthrie-Smith "The Changing Land" p 13.

[5] Guthrie-Smith "The Changing Land" pp 2-13.

[6] Guthrie-Smith "The Changing Land" p 29.

[7] Heenan, in Jones *Picking up the Traces* p 277.

[8] Jones *Picking up the Traces* p 279.

[9] Renwick "Making New Zealand" pp 187-188.

[10] Anderson *Imagined Communities* p 6.

[11] Anderson *Imagined Communities* p 7.

introduction, Anderson proposes a workable definition of the nation as an "imagined political community — and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."[12]

While Anderson goes on to define each of the theoretical constructs within that formulation, for the purposes of this study, the first adjective is most salient; "It [a nation] is imagined," Anderson writes,

because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.

Furthermore, quoting from the earlier work of philosopher Ernest Gellner, this imagined "Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist."[13] But where Gellner refers to nationalist invention as "fabrication" and "falsity" in contrast to authentic communities, Anderson is less oppositional. He writes:

In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.[14]

This paper explores selected issues of the New Zealand Centennial *Making New Zealand* pictorial surveys, more specifically, those relating to interiors and landscapes. It builds on previous research conducted as part of the foundational context for this author's 2017 doctoral dissertation, "New Zealand Architects Abroad," which positions the two architecturally-focused *Making New Zealand* issues, "Public Buildings" and "Houses," as the foundational myths from which the narratives of New Zealand architectural history have been constructed.[15] Together, the doctoral research and this paper begin to reveal how a broader vision of New Zealand has been imagined through its design history narratives.

Centennial imaginings

Anderson argues that the three interconnected certainties of the ancient world — the sacred script-language as privileged truth, the divine right of hierarchical monarchies, and the indistinguishability of cosmology and history — were gradually dismantled throughout modern history. With language having been liberated from sacred authority (such as Latin giving way to vernacular regional languages in

widely accessible publications), Anderson posits print-capitalism as chief among the means by which a new way of linking community and power could be achieved. This development enabled an expanding literate population to simultaneously "think about themselves, and relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways."[16]

The shift Anderson describes offers a valuable lens for understanding how national identity emerged in twentieth-century contexts like New Zealand, where historical crises and socio-political changes during the interwar years provided fertile ground for the creation of new shared narratives. Philippa Mein Smith identifies this formative period as a direct outcome of the 1930s Depression, during which "making do" (as those who lived through the Depression had to) aligned with "making a nation." Mein Smith argues that times of "panic, crises, anxiety, or rupture" inspire explanatory narratives that imbue shared traumatic experiences with social meaning. Furthermore, for the period under consideration, Mein Smith contends that the narratives were actively shaped by the

---

[12] Anderson *Imagined Communities* p 6.
[13] Anderson *Imagined Communities* p 6.

[14] Anderson *Imagined Communities* p 6.
[15] Dudding *New Zealand Architects Abroad* pp 19-30.

[16] Anderson *Imagined Communities* p 36.

government of New Zealand.[17] Recognising the nation-building potential of grand exhibitions and, even more significantly, the transformative reach of print-capitalism, the First Labour Government attempted to harness these tools to foster a cohesive sense of identity in their own image.

Paul Moon further develops this perspective, describing the impetus behind the Centennial Exhibition as being the promotion of an inevitable better future rooted in both continuity and change, blending strong cultural stock with progressive societal values fuelled by technological modernity. The implicit message throughout the Centennial celebrations was of the efficient benevolence of the First Labour Government, the rightness of the welfare state that it had built and, inevitably, the better world to come.[18] More explicitly, Moon refers his readers to an excerpt from one of the Centennial publications, *Government in New Zealand*, which described the new model government as being "virtuous, highly competent, [and] characterised by

integrity and contentment."[19]

The Centennial Surveys

Government in New Zealand, authored by Leicester Webb, was one of the eleven volumes that made up the *Centennial Surveys* – the more scholarly counterpart to the *Making New Zealand* periodicals. The historian, Eric McCormick, who served among the *Centennial Surveys'* editorial group, described his intentions for the surveys in a letter to Heenan. McCormick wished for an outcome that would be "a cohesive and comprehensive survey of the important aspects of the nation's history over 100 years: a temperate and objective survey of our achievements and errors."[20]

Rachel Barrowman covers provides an account of the context from which the *Centennial Surveys* arose in her contribution to William Renwick's book: *Creating a National Spirit: Celebrating New Zealand's Centennial.* In that chapter, Barrowman observes that the reality of the published volumes was something quite different to McCormick's original intentions.

First of all, the desired objectivity was unsurprisingly checked by editorial censorship befitting a government-sponsored publication.[21] Secondly, any attempt at coherence in style and vision (McCormick envisaged each volume presenting its survey of adaptation, citing Guthrie-Smith's *Tutira* as an example of such an approach) was made fraught by the broad range and ability of the authors who were commissioned for each volume. As Barrowman explains, the project was set in motion at a pivotal moment in New Zealand's intellectual history, the outcome of which reflected the competing currents of historiography during the interwar years; the surveys became a site of tension, where differing historical discourses, intellectual communities, and interpretations of the Centennial's purpose coexisted and clashed.[22] Nonetheless, the *Centennial Surveys* were something of a success, receiving positive reviews and good sales success. Two of the volumes quickly sold out and four were reprinted – In this regard, Heenan's goal of achieving a balance between popular appeal

---

[17] Mein Smith *A Concise History of New Zealand* p 150.

[18] Moon *New Zealand in the Twentieth Century* p 257.

[19] Webb quoted, Moon *New Zealand in the Twentieth Century* p 257.

[20] Barrowman "History and Romance" p 170.

[21] Excluded content included material relating to the Waikato wars and the WB Sutch authored volume that was supposed to cover the development of social services but was instead, according to AD McIntosh, "a history of the NZ working class movement expressed in

Marxist terms. Webb's volume *Government in New Zealand* was also closely reviewed by the editorial team for appropriateness; see Barrowman "History and Romance" pp 168-170.

[22] Barrowman "History and Romance" pp 162-163.

and academic credibility was largely realised.[23]

Making New Zealand: Pictorial Surveys of a Century

Making New Zealand was planned as a set of thirty pictorial surveys that would supplement the *Centennial Surveys* by covering a more comprehensive range of subjects for an even broader popular audience. Its success is best described by Renwick in *Creating a National Spirit*:

The size of its print runs and its magazine format gave it greater public appeal than any other centennial publication. It proved, as its originators had hoped it would, to be "interesting to the general reader and permanently valuable in the teaching of New Zealand history." Its regular use in schools and its availability in public libraries made it the main source of New Zealanders' knowledge of their history until the early 1970s, when it was replaced by *New Zealand's Heritage: The Making of a Nation*, a magazine-style popular publication which repeated its winning formula.[24]

Renwick places the genesis of the project in an idea that came from CE Beeby in 1937. Beeby, an educational researcher who would soon become the Government's Director of Education in 1939, introduced Heenan to *Building America*, a US publication featuring twenty-four magazine-style issues on American political, economic, social, and cultural life. Inspired by its engaging format and use of the new technique of offset printing, Heenan proposed creating a similar publication to present a popular history of New Zealand's first century, a concept the National Historical Committee enthusiastically supported.[25]

The expansive range of topics addressed in the pictorial surveys ranged from infrastructure and defence to fashion and sport, each number articulating a broad history of a particular component of New Zealand's social and economic life. The first ten issues are more tightly structured, chronologically charting European discovery and colonisation of New Zealand. It opens with geologist RS Allan's pre-history of the land, called simply "The beginning." Ernest and Pearl Beaglehole's second issue "The Maori," follows Allan's in number and approach – presenting its subject, Māori culture, as a static pre-contact setting for the arrival of the civilising European colonists.

This framing of Māori culture as a static pre-contact backdrop, rather than an evolving and integral part of New Zealand's history, aligns with the broader centennial narratives that celebrated colonisation as the beginning of true progress. This is, of course, completely consistent with the character of that era's historiographical understanding, which would persist into the 1970s.

Houses and Public Buildings

The treatment of Māori architecture is similarly handled by Pascoe in the two issues of *Making New Zealand* that had architectural topics as their focus. In Issue 20, "Houses," Pascoe provides an account of Māori building typologies, concluding that these were soon supplanted by the more elaborate structures of the Europeans (after early settlers were able to move beyond the use of modified whare as contingency dwellings: "a brief period [when] New Zealand houses combined the styles of both its peoples").[26] His next issue, "Public buildings," dismisses Māori architecture in the single opening paragraph.[27]

The repercussions of Pascoe's history are not contained by the Centennial, of course. As set

---

[23] Barrowman "History and Romance" p 164.
[24] Renwick "Making New Zealand" p 189.

[25] Renwick "Making New Zealand" p 178.
[26] Pascoe "Houses" pp 2-3.

[27] Pascoe "Public Buildings" p 2.

out in *New Zealand Architects Abroad*, Pascoe's historiographic approach becomes the foundational myth of New Zealand architectural history, establishing a narrative that survived for at least the following half century, and can arguably still be seen in some contemporary discourse.[28] That narrative is consistent with McCormick's directive that the centennial publications should take, as their common theme, the adaptation required of New Zealand's British colonists as they transplanted their cultural ideals and practices into the unique conditions of this land. But, where the Centennial publications were tasked with celebrating the positive aspects of that adaptation, Pascoe takes a more overtly critical stance on the value of New Zealand's past and present architecture, arguing that its development heavily and unfortunately relied on English models. This critique is emphasised in Pascoe's contention that New Zealand's colonial era "coincided with the collapse of the architectural good taste of the Regency period in England."[29]

As with Guthrie-Smith's "The Changing Land" (and they were not the only authors to adopt this particular attitude), the disjunction between Pascoe's tone and Heenan's original vision for the centennial celebrations reflects the mixed points of view across many of the centennial publications. While some authors celebrated New Zealand's exemplary progress as a British colony, others focused on crafting an "anti-myth"—a more grounded narrative that acknowledged the country's social realities, including its challenges.[30] To place this in Anderson's terms, theirs was an attempt to imagine a community rooted within this place, and the specific experiences associated with it, rather than the continuance of an unbroken narrative of the expansion of the British empire and her people. From this, a distinctive national identity might emerge that, instead of buying into notions of the "better Briton," sought to define the unique qualities that made the people of this land properly "New Zealanders."

Pascoe's point of difference rests in the fact that his imagined community is of a future time. His texts, particularly "Houses," elucidates New Zealand architecture as a normative project rather than an achievement that has been realised after a century of progress. This was a standard approach for architectural histories of the period, such as Pevsner's 1936 *Pioneers of Modern Design*, published just prior to Pascoe's *Making New Zealand* efforts.

Pascoe's historical framework laid out in the "Houses" issue identifies four key phases: a pre-contact Māori architecture, characterised by a people in "intimate contact with nature;" the settling and pioneering phases, marked by rudimentary shelters (including Māori whare) constructed from make-shift materials; the prosperous Victorian period of the late nineteenth-century, defined by an eclectic mix of imported styles; and, finally, the diverse responses to the contemporary house, including bungalows, state housing, modernistic designs, and modern houses. Central to Pascoe's narrative is his valorisation of "simplicity and truth"—core modernist values evident in pioneering structures, whether imported kitsets or more rudimentary buildings. These values are presented as both historically rooted and conceptually fitting as a local response to New Zealand's unique context and conditions. In bringing New Zealand architectural history into being, Pascoe, as Justine Clark and Paul Walker observe, inscribes modern architecture into the

---

[28] Dudding *New Zealand Architects Abroad* pp 26-30.

[29] Pascoe "Houses" p 30.

[30] Jones *Picking up the Traces* pp 277-282.

historical discourse as "a kind of national trait" into its very genesis; a regional modernism positioned as yet unrealised but inevitable outcome of adhering to this proper mode of building.[31]

In the land

The Pascoe-authored issues frame historical narratives in conventional architectural historical terms: adaptation of typologies for different construction materials and capabilities in the colony, followed by similar attempts to follow fashionable directions emanating from elsewhere in the world. Similarly, his pitch for a possible architecture that is able to express the national character of New Zealand, is grounded in the simple living requirements, constructional realities, and climatic conditions of this country.[32] In this Pascoe is departing from a key organising theme for many of the historical narratives within individual *Making New Zealand* issues, as well as the broader series-level organisation: *land.*

William Renwick points out that *Making New Zealand* is bracket by related issues: firstly, by land and secondly, by people.[33] The innermost of these sets of brackets sees the second issue, "The Maori," symmetrically paired with the second to last issue "Polynesians." The latter number is mostly focused on the present-day Pacific peoples then under New Zealand jurisdiction, but also provides a chance to complete the Māori narrative established in the second issue. Whereas the second issue describes the Māori of the past, Issue 29 explores contemporary Māori in New Zealand and concludes, inevitably, with the integration of "two races living together."[34]

But it is the outer bracket that most concerns this paper. RA Hall's geological account of New Zealand land, "In the beginning" is conceptually paired with Guthrie-Smith's concluding issue, "The Changing Land." Renwick suggests that this is the first such framing that places New Zealand history "firmly in the land."[35] It achieves this quite literally: the outer issues bracket the indigenous peoples, Māori in Issue 2 and contemporary Polynesian peoples (including Māori) in the penultimate Issue 29. In between this double bracketing are the pursuits and achievements of the Pākehā New Zealander since settlement. A considerable emphasis is placed on the pioneers and early settlers in the first third of the series and, even after that, the remaining issues generally each look back to the pioneering period within their own historical narratives.

Given that general context, it is somewhat surprising that there is so little attention given to intentionally-designed landscapes. Issues dealing with land either detail the pragmatic conversion of land to productive use ("Pasture land" being the most prominent), while others extend that to examine the negative impacts brought about by those very same processes. "The Forest" issue, for example, looks at deforestation for both milling and to release land for pasture as a cost of settlement and, in doing so, preconfigures much of Guthrie-Smith's concluding argument. "The Mountains" establishes yet another approach: the land as a site of recreation – first by conquering adventurers and secondly by organised tramping societies.

Pascoe's "Houses" contains some quite general

---

[31] Clark and Walker *Looking for the Local* p 28.
[32] Pascoe "Houses" p 30.
[33] Renwick "Making New Zealand" p 181.
[34] Beaglehole and Beaglehole "Polynesians" p 30.
[35] Renwick "Making New Zealand" p 181.

discussion of town planning. This is mostly limited to the development of "flats" and the need to ensure that towns are well planned. Town planning is presented by Pascoe as a growing contemporary concern that would contribute to a future high standard of living.[36] It is clearly a forward looking rather than historical piece, with no attempt to draw connections to our place in the land, as such. Instead, Pascoe casts these developments, as he does with the other topics covered in "Houses" and in "Public Buildings," in a specifically progressive light, in keeping with his own modernist leanings. That is, of course, also consistent with notions of New Zealanders as a particular modern and progressive society and, in this case, enabled by staring afresh in a new world:

badly planned towns are not so common in New Zealand as overseas where the past has left obstacles too heavy to remove quickly. The early colonists had steadfastly in mind the industrial disorder of Britain, and their reaction to this is shown in the elaborate town plans drawn up by the New Zealand Company's surveyors.[37]

More directly aesthetic appreciation of landscape, outside of moral attitudes related to natural conservation and heritage, are limited

to issue 25: Hugh (known as Crawford) Somerset's survey of "Recreation." Along with conversation, reading, music, tea and cards, theatre, and more formal school, church, activities and family events, Somerset situates two recreational activities in the land: picnics and gardening.

A land of picnics

"New Zealand," writes Somerset, "has been a land of picnics" since the beginning of its settlement.[38] Somerset's justifications for this are varied: the temperate summer climate, the closeness of unspoilt nature, and the lack of dangerous wildlife. What he fails to acknowledge is that the picnic, as a family or neighbourhood outing, was a celebrated aspect of nineteenth-century British culture that was exported to New Zealand with the early settlers. There is conceptually little to distinguish Somerset's description of the New Zealand social picnic from their British counterparts. In practice, the easy accessibility of New Zealand's native bush mattered little since travel to picnic locations was integral to the ritual, offering the necessary change of scenery that was valued in both hemispheres.

Likewise, the mode of travel evolved here, as it did in Britain, from carts and wagons to bicycles and automobiles.[39] Train travel was also popular, and in New Zealand, the expanding railway networks even made it possible to ride to "the end of the line" for a picnic setting in newly accessible landscapes.[40] This provided extra drama and mystery to the picnic experience, fulfilling the essential requirement of removing participants from familiar environments to evoke a sense of wonder and better appreciate the sublime beauty of nature.

As Graham Harding notes, the shift from urban to pastoral was not simply a physical necessity for the nineteenth-century picnic, but also a symbolic one grounded in romantic notions of the restorative power of nature to counter to the ills of urban life. Somerset illustrates this with a quote from Edwin Hodder's *Memories of a New Zealand Life*, written in 1862 at the conclusion of the celebrated British historian's five-year stay in New Zealand, in which Hodder credits picnics for their ability to "materially assist in giving that beautiful healthful ruddiness to the

---

[36] Pascoe "Houses" p 28.
[37] Pascoe "Houses" p 28.

[38] Somerset "Recreation" p 18.
[39] Harding "The Food and Drink of the Nineteenth-

Century British Picnic" pp 18-19.
[40] Somerset "Recreation" p 19.

complexion which characterises the colonial young ladies."[41] Harding points to the middle-class British outings as providing an opportunity to expose their children to "healthy dirt" – as long as it was quickly removed with a damp flannel.[42]

Harding also highlights the social freedoms associated with the British picnic, which allowed behaviours that would have been unacceptable in the Victorian drawing rooms of the city.[43] This shift reflects nineteenth-century Romantic values that emphasised a transition from mannered, civilised intellectualism to essentialised, natural emotional expression. Whether this was similarly true in Victorian New Zealand, however, is not addressed by Somerset.

The omission of the British origins of picnicking might be attributed to Somerset's limited awareness of broader cultural influences; the sources listed for further study in the final pages of the "Recreation" publication are heavily biased toward descriptive accounts of life in New Zealand during the latter half of the nineteenth-century. As a New Zealand-born educationalist, Somerset likely had neither the incentive nor the opportunity to explore this aspect of his subject in greater depth. However, it is also tempting to read more into this omission. For example, Somerset is otherwise quick to highlight the British origins of many local pastimes: in the introduction to "Recreation," he explicitly states that early pioneers "sought recreation in ways already usual in Britain."[44] Somerset contrasts these pursuits with recreational habits that he identifies as distinctly New Zealand in character, all of which are rooted in the land: the agricultural and pastoral show, sheep sales and sheepdog trials, and the uniquely local adaptations that have made tramping a distinctive activity in the country.[45]

A universal form of recreation for New Zealanders

Somerset wraps up "Recreation" with three concluding paragraphs under the curious title "Artists in Life." At only a brief four-hundred or so words, the conclusion introduces a number of intriguing claims. The opening paragraph once again situates New Zealand recreation, in this instance gardening, within the context of both the land and of pioneering narratives. According to Somerset, gardening is the "universal form of recreation for the average New Zealander."[46] Somerset also observes that most New Zealand households have a workshop, where making things for and repairing the home are a significant form of recreation; "New Zealanders are essentially homemakers," suggests Somerset.[47]

Featuring "colourful flower gardens out front and well-stocked vegetable gardens in the rear," the home garden and its workshop are therefore framed within a suburban ideal, enabled in New Zealand by the abundant availability of land where, in Somerset's words, "there was no need for houses to huddle together."[48] While this portrayal is not necessarily inappropriate, it establishes a tension between the suburban attachment to

---

[41] Cited in Somerset "Recreation" p 19.

[42] Harding "The Food and Drink of the Nineteenth-Century British Picnic" pp 129, 133.

[43] Harding "The Food and Drink of the Nineteenth-Century British Picnic" pp 130-131.

[44] Among these activities, he includes public dinners, the male-centric pleasures of public houses and billiard saloons, and public ceremonies, such as celebrations of royal visits or the openings of public buildings, bridges, and railways (Somerset "Recreation" p 2).

[45] Somerset "Recreation" p 2.

[46] Somerset "Recreation" p 30.

[47] Somerset "Recreation" p 30.

[48] Somerset "Recreation" p 30.

cultivated land and the contrasting impulse to escape into untamed nature described in Somerset's depiction of New Zealand as a land of picnics. It is not a terribly deep tension, however, as both attachments to land are easily explained as ideals that arose in the nineteenth-century as particularly English Victorian phenomena that coincided with the colonisation of New Zealand.[49]

That this particularly English affiliation with the land should travel to and take root in the colony deemed most like Britain (non-continental pastorally cultivated landscapes in a temperate climatic zone) should not come as a surprise, then. Gael Ferguson raises this in terms of the "New Zealand dream," observing that the suburban vision of the English middle classes, despite being irrelevant to early pioneers, nonetheless informed the promise of an ordered rural utopia:

The new settlers would carve the family home and the garden, those symbols of order and contentment, from the bush… The settler would transform wild nature into a new rural order.[50]

The nod to the suburban dream in the concluding paragraphs of Somerset's "Recreation" is, in essence, that colonial promise fulfilled. Yet, the New Zealand Pākehā attachment to the land is rarely discussed as a local manifestation of British Victorian ideals in this light and certainly not in the context of the myths being crafted for the Centennial.

Safe and uninspired

The main venue for discussion of New Zealand interiors occurs in Pascoe's "Houses" (there is scant mention of interiors in Pascoe's other contribution, "Public Buildings") and in a separate issue devoted to furniture, written by educational researcher, George Gabites. If, as Somerset asserts in "Recreation," New Zealand is a nation of homemakers, there is no such recognition in Pascoes' and Gabites' assessments – it appears that the homemaking efforts do not cross the threshold to the inside of the home.

Both Pascoe and Gabites are temperately (as befits the nature of the publications) scathing of the New Zealand interior. Pascoe's is a relatively architecturally-inflected assessment, describing the increasing complexity in the number and nature of rooms of typical New Zealand houses throughout the past one-hundred years.[51] Recalling the central thesis that underlies Pascoe's "Houses" issue, that both Māori and pioneering architecture were virtuous in their simplicity and honesty and that, after a period of unfortunate excess from Victorian eclecticism, modern architecture was beginning to return to that earlier sincerity, we can see the same argument repeated in his brief focus on the interior. He gives the example of the fireplace, which could be "over-designed even in small houses," becoming a "fearful structure."[52] The "restrained interiors" of traditional Georgian houses, on the other hand, "was ably developed by some skilful designers."[53]

Pascoe ends his review of interiors with modern interiors that, according to him, are at the beginning of the modernisation of the New Zealand house – incorporating asymmetrical planning, built-in furniture, and a reduction in "the number of ledges that can harbour dust."[54] Pascoe's final lines are a muted celebration of the bathroom and kitchens that have been

---

[49] See, for example: Helmreich *The English Garden and National Identity*, Keith "The Land in Victorian Literature," and Mischi "Englishness and the

Countryside."
[50] Ferguson *Building the New Zealand Dream* p 27.
[51] Pascoe "Houses" pp 26-27.

[52] Pascoe "Houses" p 27.
[53] Pascoe "Houses" p 27.
[54] Pascoe "Houses" p 27.

brought up to date with contemporary fittings in older homes and which will positively influence the other rooms.[55]

Gabites' exploration of the interior takes place in Issue 22, titled "Furniture." The issue delves into the domestic interior far beyond what the title implies, however, and might better have been titled "Interiors."[56] Besides furniture, Gabites covers traditional Māori whare and whare whakairo, houseware, wall and floor linings, drapery, and even "pictures." In general, Gabites' general historical narrative conforms with that set in place by Pascoe in "Houses," while also retaining the mildly dismissive tone. His final summation acknowledges the noticeable movement towards simplification since the 1920s, although Gabites is somewhat less inspired by the outcome:

While there is a commendable reaction away from the over-crowded display of pre-war rooms, it has been apt to lead to a way of furnishing that has been reduced to a formula … Safe and uninspired though this scheme may be, it is a suitable style for New Zealand conditions and

possibly it may lead to "the new and better era of rational and beautiful twentieth-century design" which Anthony Bertram declares he sees beginning in England.[57]

Throughout the historical narrative presented in "Furniture," Gabites draws attention to the artefacts and belongings that settlers brough from "home" when they arrived in New Zealand. It is here that his narrative begins to offer something beyond that delivered by Pascoe in "Houses." Beginning with the whalers' sea chests, which doubled as furniture in their rudimentary on-shore dwellings, and the miscellany of maritime paraphernalia, Gabites, like Pascoe, draws attention to the hybridity of the first European dwellings – part whare (being frequently constructed by local Māori) and part ship's cabin.[58] The first proper furniture arrives with the earliest settlers, ships' passengers being allocated "twenty cubic feet of space" for this purpose (except steerage passengers, who arrived with few items of furniture).[59] While some notable items of Regency furniture arrived with earlier settlers, an ideal choice for its relative lightness and with the benefit of being "fine to look at,"[60] the

transition to the "cumbrous" Victorian styles and manufacturing during the second half of the nineteenth-century had a negative impact on the quality and taste of the furniture that arrived here.[61]

Aside from whalers' use of whale vertebrae as stools and steerage passengers making do with improvised furniture, local furniture production did not get properly underway until the second half of the nineteenth-century.[62] By the 1870s, importing furniture from England was no longer deemed worthwhile, primarily due to the challenges of transporting it to its final destinations, often via rudimentary tracks (or even less).[63] But that did not mean that goods from home were not valued. Gabites draws attention to settler' homesickness for the familiar surroundings they had left behind, often recreating the very arrangements of their former interiors with the same "little elegancies of life."[64] This might include items of furniture and other household wares such as cutlery and crockery, rugs, linen and a "small selection of books, prints, chimney

---

[55] Pascoe "Houses" p 27.
[56] Although it is not declared, the scope of Gabites' survey is limited to domestic interiors. Gabites does note, however, that the coverage of the whare whakairo that he includes is not properly within the survey's

scope. Gabites "Furniture" p 2.
[57] Gabites "Furniture" p 30.
[58] Gabites "Furniture" p 4.
[59] Gabites "Furniture" p 7.
[60] Gabites "Furniture" p 7.

[61] Gabites "Furniture" pp 7-9.
[62] Gabites "Furniture" pp 4-17.
[63] Gabites "Furniture" p 17.
[64] Gabites "Furniture" p 14.

ornaments, and nick-nacks" – items that immigrants were advised to bring with them.[65]

The remainder of Gabites' narrative, with few exceptions, explores the importation of chiefly British interior items, many of which persisted within local interiors long after their fashionable lifespan had expired. In doing so, Gabites—perhaps more clearly than Pascoe—highlights New Zealanders' reliance on Britain's cultural authority. This "looking homeward" for validation is a manifestation of the "colonial cringe" and, as such, differs from the sentiment discussed in the previous paragraph, where the arrangement of interiors provided psychological comfort to counter the physical and cultural displacement experienced by settlers. Nonetheless, both authors are critical of this relationship, advocating for New Zealanders to move beyond it through the agency of modern design. In fact, that New Zealanders should even find an authentic local voice is only a soft aspiration in their texts, which both seek a refined functionalism more than an expressive regionalism.

Making New Zealanders
Making New Zealand, in its various issues, constructs imagined communities through the assumptions that underpin its historical narratives. These publications do not merely recount the past; they curate it; each issue framing the nation as a cohesive whole emerging from the interplay of land, people, and colonial endeavour. In doing so, *Making New Zealand* fosters a sense of national identity by situating Pākehā settlers as the inheritors of the land's transformative potential, shaping the narrative arc from pioneering struggle to modern progress. Yet, this constructed identity is neither neutral nor inclusive, as it prioritises European settler achievements while often marginalising or subsuming Māori contributions into a broader colonial mythos. In doing so, the series establishes a framework of shared values, struggles, and aspirations that defines what it means to be a Pākehā "New Zealander," while implicitly leaving questions of divergence or alternative histories on the periphery.

Integral to this construction is the Centennial myth, grounded in the pervasive ideal of the "better Briton," which ties New Zealand's colonial identity to both its Britishness and to the notion of improving upon Britain's social and cultural foundations. This concept, originally rooted in Victorian and Edwardian visions of empire, imagines the colonies not as mere extensions of Britain but inevitably "better Britains" populated by "better Britons." James Belich provides a compelling account of the Better British rhetoric of this period in *Paradise Reforged*, observing that the notion was based on wide variety of claims, including physical determinism borne of the land and its conducive weather, the benevolently progressive government and its "exemplary legislation," and the settlers themselves who were the best of British stock.[66]

In *Making New Zealand*, this ideal manifests in narratives of moral and physical renewal—emphasising pioneering resilience, industriousness, and a deep connection to the land as the basis for a superior national character. The anti-myth, on the other hand, does not present itself as an unbroken continuum of transported and evolving better Britishness. Evident in each of the *Making New Zealand* issues surveyed in this paper, are slightly different takes on this approach.

---

[65] Gabites "Furniture" p 15.

[66] Belich *Paradise Reforged* p 79.

Somerset's "Recreation" remains truest to the better Briton myth but it is tempered by colonial cringe. Physically, the New Zealander is stronger and fitter, more resourceful and closer to the land. This casual acceptance of the pioneer as "superhuman"[67] is juxtaposed against the implicit intellectual elitism of his concluding paragraph in which he suggests that the descendants of those pioneers should seek to create a unified personality by careful selection of their leisure activities in order "to learn to become artists of life."[68] In contrast, Pascoe asserts an almost anti-English stance. He deplores British architectural fashions and is more inclined to look to the United States or Europe—through figures like Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier—for superior inspiration. His vision of the New Zealander shares similarities with Somerset's but stands at a crossroads, poised to become something distinct. Pascoe suggests a return to pioneering roots, rediscovering the qualities that defined those early "superhumans" and carrying them forward. This identity breaks from Britishness rather than evolving it; the rugged resourcefulness and no-nonsense pragmatism he champions are shaped more by physical environment and its contingencies than by genetic heritage, aligning seamlessly with the functionalist principles of modern architecture. Gabites, meanwhile, appears to lean into Pascoe's vilification of borrowed English tastes and hopes for a better future - his is the least clear conception of national identity. Finally, Guthrie-Smith simply wants to return to the pioneer's idyll – the only scene that he will admit is not blemished and destroyed. Guthrie-Smith is not suggesting a New Zealander brought forth from pioneering traits and values, but simply wistfully wishing New Zealand back to that state of development.[69]

Conclusion: Myth, Anti-Myth, and the Imagined Community in *Making New Zealand*

While London was bombed we celebrated our Centennial (1940) with ponderous gaiety and published surveys of national development that became landmarks of our culture.[70]

This retrospective and somewhat disdainful account of the 1940 centennial celebrations is drawn from the "Architecture" entry in the 1966 *Encyclopaedia of New Zealand.* Penned by James Garrett, the structure and positions put forward in the article draw heavily from the basic narratives of Pascoe's *Making New Zealand* issues. Garrett's observation reflects not only his acknowledgment of Pascoe's influence but also a broader commentary on the ongoing role those centennial narratives played in nation-building.

In this context, *Making New Zealand* becomes pivotal in illustrating the delicate interplay between myth and anti-myth in the formation of New Zealand's national identity. This dynamic, which mirrors Anderson's concept of imagined communities, brings together celebratory and critical narratives to construct a public history to be put forward as collective memory. It weaves positions that both celebrates colonial myths of progress and ingenuity as exemplary British subjects, while also challenging and complicating these stories through anti-myths that question their underlying assumptions and instead present New Zealand as a new people arisen from the land and its contingencies.

This tension is particularly evident in the

---

[67] Somerset "Recreation" p 2.
[68] Somerset "Recreation" p 30.
[69] Guthrie-Smith "The Changing Land" p 30.
[70] Garrett "Architecture" p 64.

treatment of designed environments. Pascoe's writings simultaneously affirm and undermine the mythic narrative of exemplary progress. His and Gabites' framing of New Zealand's built environment as a linear evolution from simplicity to Victorian excess and then to modernist renewal embodies an anti-mythical critique that questions the architectural values of the British past. Yet, their emphasis on modernist ideals situates the imagined community not in its colonial origins (although it intentionally evokes those values) but in a potential future—a move that destabilises the coherence of the settler mythos or, conversely, extends selected aspects of it into perpetuity.

The land, however, emerges as a more enduring and contested foundation for national identity. The series celebrates the transformative relationship between settlers and the land, reflecting a myth of pastoral conquest and rural utopia. At the same time, narratives such as Guthrie-Smith's ecological reflections offer a counterpoint, exposing the environmental consequences of these colonial practices. His concluding essay, *The Changing Land*, recasts New Zealand's story not as one of unbroken progress but as an ongoing negotiation with the natural world—a dialogue marked by both creative adaptation

and destructive impact. Guthrie-Smith's perspective serves as an anti-myth that resists the narrative of exemplary progress, urging a more appreciation of the land as a witness to human folly.

Even within the domestic sphere, the tension between myth and anti-myth persists. Somerset's celebration of gardening and homemaking affirms the suburban ideal of self-sufficiency and connection to the land, reinforcing the colonial myth of settlers as resourceful and industrious, while overlooking similar Victorian English claims to the "landedness" of their national identity. Yet, the critiques of interiors by Pascoe and Gabites expose the limitations of these ideals, questioning their aesthetic and functional shortcomings. Here, too, the imagined community must grapple with the tension between its inherited past and its aspirations for a modern, authentic identity.

Ultimately, it is Guthrie-Smith's meditative approach to the land that offers the most profound resolution to the myth-anti-myth dichotomy. By situating New Zealand's identity within the changing relationship between people and place, his work reframes the imagined community as one defined not by

mastery over nature but by its ongoing entanglement with it. Even if it slumps into romantic nostalgia, his perspective resists the triumphalist colonial narrative, instead imagining a community capable of reflecting on its impact and finding harmony within the environment it inhabits.

In drawing together myth and anti-myth, *Making New Zealand* reflects the complexities of Anderson's imagined communities—nations not as static constructs defined by an orthodox public history but as fluid, contested, and evolving entities in ways that Heenan could not have foreseen. While Pascoe's forward-looking modernist vision offers one path for reimagining New Zealand, Guthrie-Smith's ecological sensitivity provides a more grounded and perhaps enduring foundation. Together, these perspectives encourage a national identity that is as attentive to its roots in the land as it is to its aspirations for the future—an identity defined not by uncritical celebration but by thoughtful negotiation of the myths that shape it.

REFERENCES

Anderson, Benedict *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* London: Verso, 2016.

Barrowman, Rachel "History and Romance: The Making of the Centennial Historical Surveys" *Creating a National Spirit: Celebrating New Zealand's Centennial* ed William Renwick, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2004: 161-175 http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-RenCrea-t1-body-d3-d6.html

Beaglehole, Ernest and Pearl Beaglehole "The Maori" *Making New Zealand: Pictorial Surveys of a Century* (1939) 2(2).

Beaglehole, Ernest and Pearl Beaglehole "Polynesians" *Making New Zealand: Pictorial Surveys of a Century* (1940) 2(29).

Belich, James *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000* Auckland: Allen Lane, Penguin Press, 2001.

Clark, Justine and Paul Walker *Looking for the Local: Architecture and the New Zealand Modern* Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2000.

Dudding, Michael "New Zealand Architects Abroad: An Oral History Study of the Experiences and Motivations of New Zealand Architects Who Undertook Postgraduate Studies in the United States During the Immediate Postwar period" Wellington: Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington PhD thesis, 2017 https://doi.org/10.26686/wgtn.17064347.v1.

Ferguson, Gael *Building the New Zealand Dream* Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1994.

Gabites, George "Furniture" *Making New Zealand: Pictorial Surveys of a Century* (1940) 2(22).

Garrett, James "Architecture" *The Encyclopaedia of New Zealand* ed A H McLintock, Wellington: RE Owen, Government Printer, 1966.

Guthrie-Smith, Herbert "The Changing Land" *Making New Zealand: Pictorial Surveys of a Century* (1940) 2(30).

Guthrie-Smith, Herbert *Tutira: The Story of a New Zealand Sheep Station* Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1926.

Harding, Graham "The Food and Drink of the Nineteenth-Century British Picnic" *Dublin Gastronomy Symposium 2022* (31 May-1 June 2022) Dublin: Technological University, Dublin https://doi.org/10.21427/7043-9t92

Helmreich, Anne *The English Garden and National Identity: The Competing Styles of Garden Design, 1870–1914* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Jones, Lawrence *Picking up the Traces: The Making of a New Zealand Literary Culture, 1932-1945* Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2003.

Keith, W.J. "The land in Victorian literature" *The Rural Idyll* ed Gordon Mingay, London: Routledge, 1989: 136-149.

Mein Smith, Philippa *A Concise History of New Zealand*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Mischi, Julian "Englishness and the Countryside: How British Rural Studies Address the Issue of National Identity" *Englishness Revisited* ed. Floriane Reviron-Piegay Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009: 109-125.

Moon, Paul *New Zealand in the Twentieth Century: The Nation, the People*. Auckland: Harper Collins, 2011.

Pascoe, Paul "Houses" *Making New Zealand: Pictorial Surveys of a Century* (1940) 2(20).

Pascoe, Paul "Public Buildings" *Making New Zealand: Pictorial Surveys of a Century* (1940) 2(21).

Renwick, William "Making New Zealand: Pictorial Surveys of a Century" *Creating a National Spirit: Celebrating New Zealand's Centennial* ed. William Renwick Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2004: 178-190 http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-RenCrea-t1-body-d3-d7.html

Somerset Hugh (Crawford) "Recreation" *Making New Zealand: Pictorial Surveys of a Century* (1940) 2(25).

Webb, Leicester *Government in New Zealand*. Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs, 1940.

Yarwood, Vaughan "Guthrie-Smith of Tutira" *New Zealand Geographic* (July-September 1995) 27 https://www.nzgeo.com/issue/027/