

Secrets & Treasures:**our stories told through the objects at Archives New Zealand**

RAY WARU

Auckland: Random House, 2012

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Archives New Zealand cares for arguably New Zealand's most significant documentary heritage collection, the archives of Government from before the signing of the Tiriti o Waitangi in 1840 through to the present day. As Chief Archivist Greg Goulding in the book's introduction notes: 'Archives New Zealand's role as the official guardian of the record of the government is to ensure the archives are kept without fear or favour so everyone can interpret them in their own way'. A dramatic image of a singed document (p.20) is testament to the devastating Hope Gibbons fire that in 1952 that destroyed many public records and led to the 1957 Archives Act which created National Archives. The unique feature of archival records is that they are usually original, one-of-a-kind, unedited, authorized but unmediated documents and objects. The Treaty of Waitangi is rightly acknowledged as document one.

Secrets & Treasures is a beautifully produced book, ambitious in its reach and scope. Supported though not commissioned by Archives New Zealand, it was conceived and written by Ray Waru, an acknowledged radio and television director and producer. The stated purpose of the book is to 'delve into the archives to tell a very human story of New Zealand, a story that involves love, death, war, immigration, disaster, protest, defiance, censorship and hokey pokey'. Delve it most certainly does.

With this in mind, the book is divided into five parts: The Constitution Room; Living in Aotearoa; Exploring the Family Tree; The Black Museum; and From the Uttermost Ends of the Earth. The theme of story-telling infuses the book and Waru's text is enhanced by David Sanderson's stunning photography. *Secrets* has one of the most striking covers published in New Zealand in 2012. (I recommend the YouTube clip of the production of the cover: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XL8t42y8BZg>). A number of the chapters are based on Archives New Zealand's physical and online exhibitions, such as 'Goldmining in the Coromandel' and 'Settlers, Squatters and Surveyors: shaping the Canterbury settlement'. Somewhat ironically, there is heavy reliance on online history sites for research, rather than on published work or primary resources, as the chapter bibliographies attest.

Secrets differs from other New Zealand 'treasures' books, in a number of ways. For example, Waru's is the sole voice throughout the text. *Treasures of the University of Canterbury Library* (2011) is organised thematically, but has edited articles contributed by a wide range of subject specialists. Similarly, *Kā Taoka Hākena: treasures from the Hocken Collections* (2007) is edited with a number of specialist contributions and differs in that it is arranged by format, such as Archives and Manuscripts, and Paintings and Drawings. *Real Gold: treasures of Auckland City Libraries* (2007), on the other hand, has one writer and a mix and match approach of sections which are geographic in scope, namely 'Auckland' and 'New Zealand', as well as thematic categories, such as 'Arts', 'Science' and 'Travel.'

Waru describes Archives New Zealand as 'a cornucopia of unexpected objects, curious ephemera and the sometimes slightly bizarre'. The same description might also apply to his text as it weaves its way entertainingly through major events, minor diversions and fascinating by-ways that are part of New Zealand/Aotearoa's history.

I enjoyed dipping in and out of this fascinating book, which acted as a trigger to some half-remembered events and also served to enlighten regarding others completely unknown to me, such as the 'Best Kept Secret of World War Two – Project Seal, the tsunami bomb'. The social history ephemera of times gone-by are fascinating and its visual impact is high – The Treaty of Waitangi in tatters, the huge rolled women's suffrage petition, the less known Register of Chiefs, to name some in just one section, 'The Constitution Room'. The quirky tone and eclectic juxtaposition on the whole works. Within the first few pages, the image of Sir Julius Vogel's insignia is followed by Kashin, the elephant money-boxes.

Secrets is at times a curious mixture of fact and apparent conjecture. The auction of the official gift of an Arabian sword by David Lange takes place we are told, because 'the truth is, Lange's new partner Margaret Pope got rid of the blade because it gave her a bad feeling'. How Waru knows this is unclear.

As Waru says, there's the raw material for a series of books based on the content in the more than seventy kilometres of records held in the Wellington office alone. Perhaps a less glamorous book which tells fewer stories and covers certain collections in more depth might be a future project for Archives New Zealand to consider. If so, then major treasures which an experienced historian or archivist might relish, such as the provincial government records, the Old Land Claims Commission papers, Immigration Lists, Maori Land Court records and Intentions to

Marry registers, come to mind.

The great achievement of this book is, in my view, its high visual impact, its wide historical sweep and in Waru's gift for story telling.

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