

# New Zealand Studies

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## The legacy of our national portraits

MANY LONDON VISITORS will recall the faded reverential atmosphere of the old National Portrait Gallery in the years before it discovered its own potential. Today, through a longstanding series of impressive exhibitions, the re-hanging and refurbishing of many of the accessions, an extension into contemporary fields such as photography, plus the initiating of its own annual portrait competition, it has established itself as a lively, erudite and stimulating place to visit.

The New Zealand Portrait Gallery, which has presented several outstanding exhibitions over the past decade, is a development of the aims and ideals of the London institution, imbued with its own individuality, character and charm - a notable achievement, which now, as Hugh Templeton so forcefully advocates, needs to be raised to another level. To do this it must be able to find the financial support which will make it a vital adjunct to other national collections such as the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa, the National Library and the Alexander Turnbull Library, to name only a few, with its own dwelling-space, recognition and funding.

'Good portraits are like maps, essential to life', writes Hugh Templeton in a passionate plea for a properly-resourced Gallery. 'Might the government consider adding such a New Zealand Portrait Gallery to the Parliamentary precinct ... Why not add the old Supreme Court to that circle as a New Zealand Portrait Gallery? Wouldn't that be a fine politician's gift to the millennium'.

There are many arguments in favour of this imaginative proposal, apart from the need to protect and preserve existing artefacts. The skills of the Gallery, as it exists, is proof enough of the resources behind such a project. With the brilliant restoration of the wooden government building and the prizewinning refurbishing of the old Parliament Buildings and Library, the addition of a New Zealand Portrait Gallery could add a scintillating jewel to the crown.

The exhibition on Wellington street names, organised by the New Zealand Portrait Gallery, curated by the devoted Secretary of the organisation, Judy Williams, with researchers John Cooper and Ross Powell, is part of a larger process of bestowing names and absorbing existing ones which has accompanied exploration and settlement throughout history. Giselle Byrnes surveys the whole of New Zealand in her article 'Affixing Names to Places'. The stolid implantation of English names also permeated Irish history, for instance, as poetic Gaelic nomenclature succumbed to that of the new occupying power, in this instance, of England. An evocative play on this aspect of culture-clash and conflict was presented with great success at the National Theatre in London several years ago at the height of the IRA confrontation.

Readers will notice a change to a more elegant format and style in this issue of the journal, the creation of Roger Joyce, our founding designer. *New Zealand Studies* (formerly the *Stout Centre Review*) has survived many assaults since Jim Collinge, then Director of the Stout Centre, launched it. The miracle was, that without any special funding whatsoever, it could have come into existence. A key factor of the international influence of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington is its flagship journal and the same applies to the British Library and innumerable other institutions. Such publications keep enterprising scholarship alive and establish the identity of the sponsoring body, not least the Stout Centre.

Now a fresh phase in our development is beginning. This issue also includes details of a new journal, *Kotare, New Zealand Notes & Queries*, to be sponsored by the Stout Centre in association with Victoria's English Department. In *New Zealand Studies* itself we hope to present not only a selection of the myriad activities associated with the Centre, notably the weekly seminars and annual conferences, but also to commission articles which will keep the publication alert and responsive to important current issues.