

Hall of Fame: Life stories of New Zealand Women

Olive Baylyn (compiler), Katie Pickles (ed), Clerestory Press, Christchurch, 1998, \$39.95

THERE IS AN OUTSIDE possibility that the title of this book – a celebration of the Anglican Bishop Julius Hall in Christchurch – might be mistaken for a work detailing that thoroughly American of institutions: the sporting hall of fame. Different though they may be, both have a common purpose: putting on public display a 'roll of honour'. For Bishop Julius Hall the roll comprises 68 former residents and staff writing about their lives, or being written about. The contributions are the result of the Hall's 75th Anniversary.

Rather like the opening night of a weekend reunion *Hall of Fame* conveys snatches of a great many conversations in which decades of life are summarised in a few comments and a handful of snap-

shots. Lives are condensed into short exchanges and telescoped back to the point in common – the one or two years spent as students eating mince and cabbage for Saturday lunch and clamouring for one of the three baths allowed each week. In this sense it is necessarily uneven, darting about in glimpses: a kaleidoscope rather than a composition. Setting these recollections alongside Alison Mackinnon's recent study *Love and Freedom. Professional Women and the Reshaping of Personal Life*¹ provides a context beyond the tantalising overview in Katie Pickles' Introduction. Themes which run through many of the pieces include the dominant vocation of teaching, the interweaving of those sometimes antagonistic worlds of love and life of the mind, and the attractions of independence

and community – 'Bish' represented both (not always to the same individuals).

In one of the longer reflective contributions Professor Margaret Dalziel puts the case for the ordered, somewhat austere regime of the old-style single-sex Hall which is now a thing of the past (in 1993 'Bish' became a mixed hall of residence). An 'orderly social environment', she suggests, 'controlled some of the stress of emerging into the adult world where we are faced with becoming fully autonomous.' Such a way of life, 'released much more moral energy for ... studies' and rendered less likely social or psychiatric disturbance amongst young adults.² The contributions in *Hall of Fame* testify to the success of its former residents but they also illustrate how regulated communities were totally eclipsed in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Martha Vicinus's influential *Independent Women*³ provides a fascinating comparative discussion of an earlier experiment in socio-vocational alternatives to domestic



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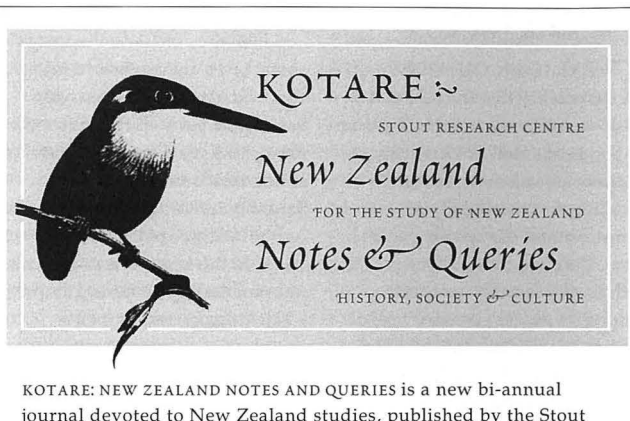
life for single women.

But there are really two revolutionary currents running through the nearly eight decades encompassed in *Hall of Fame*. One lies in the expectations of women. The other is in the Anglican Church. When Bishop Julius vacated Bishops Court in 1917 to make room for young women undertaking higher education he had in mind encouraging a training which would supply quality teachers for schools in the diocese. At a time of heightened sectarian feeling in New Zealand, the move was part of the Bishop's desire to stem the tide of secular education. The vision of a religious teaching order, fervently held by the Hall's first principal, Maria Marchant, failed at the outset (only one student expressed any interest in such a vocation). Marchant left in short order and died in Invercargill the following year (the text does not directly relate the two events). Notwithstanding this less than auspicious beginning the Hall prospered.

Conservative sections of the Anglican Church may well have cause to consider the wisdom of Bishop Julius's philanthropic gesture. Instead of preparing themselves to staff diocesan schools as teachers, a number of the 'Bish' residents have become the central force within their parishes. And not content to serve solely on flower rosters, have, like Greymouth's Ruby Jones, claimed a place in the synod, and, more latterly, taken their places as ordained clergy. Higher education, some always knew, could go a long way. ❧

- 1 Alison Mackinnon, *Love and Freedom. Professional Women and the Reshaping of Personal Life*, Cambridge University Press: Melbourne, 1997
- 2 E. Margaret Dalziel in *Hall of Fame*, p.55
- 3 Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women. Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920*, Virago: London, 1985.

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