

*Hocken: Prince of Collectors*

By Donald Jackson Kerr

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Reviewed by J.E. Traue

Dr Thomas Morland Hocken (1836-1910), born and trained as a medical practitioner in Britain, settled in Dunedin in 1862 and built a very successful medical practice. He soon began researching early New Zealand history and by 1880 was delivering public lectures on the subject. At a time when there were no publicly available collections of primary sources or publications relating to New Zealand in the country, and where the best resources for historical research were in London, Hocken began collecting ephemera, maps, newspapers, pamphlets and books, paintings and drawings, seeking out and copying original documents and saving the reminiscences of old colonists to support his research and publications. Over time his collecting became more comprehensive and he turned his attention to creating a full bibliographical record of New Zealand publications, culminating in the publication of *A Bibliography of the Literature Relating to New Zealand* in 1908. His last act was to gift his collection to the nation to be held in trust by the University of Otago and available for anyone with a definite purpose of study.

Donald Kerr deals with Hocken's medical career as coroner and surgeon only in passing, referring readers to A.G. Hocken's *Dr Hocken of Dunedin: A Life* (2008) for detail. His approach to Hocken is bio-bibliographic, concentrating on his collecting and the development of his library. Kerr first developed this technique in his MA thesis in 1992, "Frank Wild Reed: the Antipodean Alexandrian" and refined it for his *Amassing Treasures for all Times: Sir George Grey, Colonial Bookman and Collector* (2006). The five bio-bibliographic aspects explored in depth in *Hocken* are the categories of material he collected, the collecting process, the relationship of his library to others in New Zealand and Australia, the lectures and publications supported by his collecting, and new material on Hocken's life that give a better understanding of the man (and his wife Bessie) and his collecting.

Hocken's collecting initially concentrated on the period up to 1850; New Zealand's pre-settlement period, especially Tasman, Cook and other Pacific explorers, the early Australian colonies, Marsden, the Church Missionary Society and the early missionaries, the New Zealand Company and Edward Gibbon Wakefield, the settlement of Otago and Southland, to underpin his historical researches and lectures. But collections, once they approach critical mass, have their own momentum, and as his collection grew, its scope widened to encompass the subject of his 1909 bibliography, the literature relating to New Zealand.

Hocken provides a case study of the problems, and solutions, of the historian and the collector in a young colony of settlement in the nineteenth century. For the historian there was a paucity of published histories and no publicly available collections of primary sources in New Zealand. The collector was faced with an immature local publishing industry dominated by newspapers, pamphlets and ephemeral publications, in which there was little interest, and an underdeveloped market for trading such publications. Most of the books relating to New Zealand were issued by London publishers. Manuscripts, archives and the memories of the participants were major sources, and time was weakening memories and destroying paper records.

Kerr documents the intricate relationships between the pioneer historian and the collector, giving appropriate weight to Hocken's contributions as a historian. These include his public lectures, later published in Dunedin newspapers and the *Transactions of the New Zealand Institute*, and his books, *Contributions to the Early History of New Zealand* (1898) and *The Early History of New Zealand* (1914). He emphasizes the importance of the frequent excursions Hocken made throughout New Zealand to build up a network of other collectors, informants, donors and people prepared to lend manuscripts for copying. The names of Hocken's regular contacts read like a who's who of old identities and his leading contemporaries. Hocken the pioneer collector emerges as an energetic hunter on the ground, doggedly foraging through the countryside, both in New Zealand and the United Kingdom, unlike Turnbull and Sir George Grey whose hunting was substantially in the catalogues of the London auction houses and dealers.

Hocken's growing reputation as a historian (an admirer in 1889 labeled him the Herodotus of New Zealand), judiciously fuelled by the gift of copies of his published lectures and his book, *Contributions to the Early History of New Zealand* (1898) to potential informants and donors, helped to attract donations to his library. As his library grew in reputation, it was seen as a suitable home for further donations of books from authors, and letters and diaries from early settlers, government officials, military officers, missionaries, and their families. His library's strength in duplicates also enabled him to trade widely with his fellow collectors to fill gaps in the collection.

The final chapter, "The Hocken Legacy", briefly traces the development of the Hocken Library (later Hocken Collection) up to the present, with an emphasis on the power of a great research collection to generate more publications.

Donald Kerr appears to have left no stone unturned in his documentation of Hocken the collector, historian and bibliographer, with a 19 page bibliography and 53 pages of notes. He is reluctant, as was Hocken, to discard information tangential to his main themes. This amount of information, recoverable through an admirably detailed index, will be of value to future historians of the book and collecting in New Zealand, but may be heavy going for the general reader.

Kerr gives Hocken, the "Prince of Collectors", the royal biographical treatment he so richly deserves as historian, collector and public benefactor.