

Conclusion

Successful local history is a partnership between the historian, the sources and the mediator. It requires insight, patience, judgment and accuracy. One thinks almost nostalgically of the self-conscious lament of the late Douglas Cresswell: 'To hell with accuracy'; one recalls with some remorse critical witch-hunting sessions on the fallibility of the D.N.Z.B.; memory even plays back to a 22-year-old controversy about whether there were too many or too few archives; the opposing protagonists, now professors of history, have both participated in this Seminar. But our chains are inescapable. We are to varying degrees fallible but our standards demand more than lip service. The local historian must pursue all sources, all facts relentlessly. Whether or not he uses what he finds is a matter of scope and judgment but he must show that he knows them and not merely that he knows about them.

The sources are ubiquitous. Although they may be anywhere in the world, there are naturally far more, a growing proportion, in New Zealand than elsewhere and many more in Wellington than in any other centre. Wellington can probably produce source material for almost any part of New Zealand but there are regions, such as the southern half of the North Island and the northern section of the South Island, the history of which simply cannot be attempted without use of the main Wellington repositories.

The mediator is the librarian or archivist. As the resources of the libraries vary so do their staffs. How good the inventories are, how much material there is any sort of an inventory for, will depend upon a number of factors not all obvious. In the last analysis the local historian will have to rely on the mediator who is after all only another human being. Mediators are paid to be helpful, they usually are, but the true historian would like his mediator to go the second mile. (I personally am occasionally petulant and impatient but this is a failing of age.) Whether or not they are practitioners as well as mediators is irrelevant; if they are going to be continuously useful to you over a period of time there must not only be mutual courtesy and respect but they must be made to feel that yours is a worthwhile project and, to be fully effective, the librarians and archivists must have a practitioner's knowledge of sources. With sympathy and understanding, without imposition, an effective partnership can do much to raise the standards of our local histories.

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NOTES

¹ Finberg, H. P. R., *Local history, objective and pursuit* (1967) p. 43.

² Gardner, W. J., *The writing of Local and Regional History*. Paper (unpublished) at Massey University Seminar on local history, January 1972.