

George Hamish Ormond Wilson 1907-1988

In a review of Ormond's *From Hongi Hika to Hone Heke* a schoolman likened the author to a 'detached patrician'. Nothing could have been further from the mark. If good manners and an expectation that research enquiries would be treated responsibly indicate the patrician then Ormond shared this behaviour with many other and quite plebeian Library readers. This assessment cannot otherwise be supported. His robust voice as it echoed round the reading room and then down through the stacks and perhaps out onto the street was not that of a patrician. It had more in common with a high country shepherd working the top beat in a fall muster. The staff and other readers immediately knew from this voice who had arrived and with this recognition there would come a buzz of excitement. It just somehow felt good to have him around.

One knew that, unlike some, he was only too willing to discuss his research bothers with anyone who had similar enthusiasms and that he would not allow the staff's intuitive recognition of his needs to earn any sort of most favoured nation treatment. He even observed most of the Library's restrictions on the use of tobacco—a sore trial for someone with his level of addiction.

Nor was he a 'detached' worker. Throughout all his studies he continued to feel every insult offered a Maori chief as if this had occurred yesterday and he still felt repelled by the many examples of greed and arrogance that dot our history of that period. His sensitivity survived a long apprenticeship in the study of cruelty between one man and another. He perhaps felt detached only when the behaviour of his characters had moved from the use of violence against other men to less reprehensible offences, or to secular challenges such as bartering, where he could admire a rapidly acquired skill, or the preparations for a feast planned for visitors where he could recognise the generosity and sacrifice of the host.

His uncomplaining acceptance of all the pains and disappointments of historical research was one of his hallmarks and this, along with his capacity for work, explains why Library staff and friends found it easy to respond to him. He had plenty of what Dr Johnson calls 'useful diligence' and his working notes, even more than his publications, bear testimony to his industry when trying to ferret out such elusive items as passenger lists, sailing dates of vessels, reasons for misunderstandings

Photograph by Kenneth Quinn, 1984