

## Ruth Miriam Ross, 1920–1982

The death on 31 August last of Mrs Ruth Ross at her home in Weymouth, Manurewa, after a long struggle against cancer ended all too soon the contribution to New Zealand history of one of its most brilliantly individual devotees. As Ruth Miriam Guscott, the daughter of Wanganui parents of farming background, she first attended a private school, Clifton House, at the top of the Avenue close to the family home, in part still standing as the office of the Waitotara County Council. At Wanganui Girls College she was head prefect and proxime accessit to the dux, before going to Victoria University College in 1939. Although she did not complete a degree during her three years' attendance she majored in history, interest doubtless aroused by the calibre of her teachers, despite the lack of New Zealand content in the course. Her ability, power of concentration and lively open personality certainly impressed Professor F. L. W. Wood, a staunch friend, and Dr J. C. Beaglehole on whose recommendation she took up a position in the Centennial Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs.

As part of the centennial celebrations J. W. Heenan, Under-Secretary for Internal Affairs, had seen the possibility of commemorating the event by a series of substantial historical publications. Beaglehole, the influential adviser throughout this formative period, has said that the translation of the Branch into a 'sort of editorial-historical-typographical-literary-public relations office' was a Heenan inspiration. This wider responsibility certainly helped it to survive the war years as the Historical Branch although to a regrettable demise at the end of the decade. The appointment of E. H. McCormick under the bland title of Secretary to the National Historical Committee set the standard and tone for much of the programme with its precariously mobile team of youthful university trained 'historians' which included J. W. Davidson, R. I. M. Burnett, Ruth Fletcher, Mary Boyd, Nancy Taylor, R. R. Cunninghame, O. S. Meads, F. Lingard and others.

The dilemma of the programme's most ambitious project, the historical atlas, was that to enable the basic facts to be established before mapping, fundamental research had still to be undertaken. Hence the recruitment of so many keen gladiators behind whom were soon looming draughtsmen—at least one—poised to sketch the outlines and inscribe legends for events still locked in unexamined source material.

When Ruth Guscott joined in January 1942, coincidentally on the