THE ACCIDENTAL MISSIONARY:
TALES OF ELEKANA
by Michael Goldsmith and Doug Munro

Christchurch: Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies,
University of Canterbury, 2002. 142 pp, $25. ISBN 1-877175-33-1.

Reviewed by
Peter Lineham

The notion that mission is a western construct and is a process of westernisation dies hard, and descriptions of this as a process in the Pacific, where forms of Christianity became so dominant, are exceedingly common. Yet the missions in the Pacific were distinctive within the legacy of Christianity, as Munro and Goldsmith point out, in their employment of native catechists. The story of these missionaries has now become well known in the literature, beginning with Ron and Marjorie Crocombe's 1982 work, *Polynesian Missions in Melanesia from Samoa, Cook Islands and Tonga to Papua New Guinea and New Caledonia* (Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific). One of the present authors, Doug Munro, has addressed the issue in a book he co-edited with Andrew Thornley in 1996 titled *The Covenant Makers: Islander Missionaries in the Pacific* (Suva, Fiji: Pacific Theological College and The Institute of Pacific Studies at the University of the South Pacific). David Wetherell has recently addressed the issues in 'Teachers all: Samoan, Fijian, and Queensland Melanesian Missionaries in Papua, 1884–1914' in the *J. Religious Hist.*, 26 in 2002.

This short book adds a rich complexity to the issue of the 'native missionary' by examining perspectives on the life of a Cook Islander, Elekana, who was the pioneer evangelist in Tuvalu in 1861, and after further training in Samoa, returned to another island group in Tuvalu in 1865. In this sensitive account, Munro and Goldsmith look at a variety of accounts on the work of Elekana as told in western missionary accounts, in Tuvalu accounts, and in various versions of the story told by Elekana himself. They show how each 'reading' of the story reveals different perspectives of the mission. The original journey by

Elekana and his companions was not deliberate; the boat was swept off course by a storm. The welcome the group received from the people of the visiting island group is capable of different interpretations, and different explanations can be given to the emphases reported by Elekana and by the descendents of his hearers in Tuvalu. Certainly he was not sent back to the same island by the western mission once he had completed his training in Samoa, and he was subsequently dismissed from the mission although he retained his commitment to mission.

The essay is a sensitive account of the ways in which Christian mission came to be adopted by Pacific Islanders, although it begs the larger question of the translation of the forms of faith and spirituality into the forms that became distinctive to the Pacific.

SITES OF GENDER:
WOMEN, MEN & MODERNITY IN SOUTHERN DUNEDIN, 1890–1939,
by Barbara Brookes, Annabel Cooper and Robin Law, eds.

Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2003. 434 pp, $49.95.
ISBN 1-86940-3301-0.

Reviewed by:
Bronwyn Labrum

The product of a five-year, nationally-funded interdisciplinary research project, *Sites of Gender* has been eagerly awaited by historians. It is part of the renowned 'Caversham project', a thirty year quantitative and statistical study of social and geographical mobility in the Dunedin borough of Caversham, which constructed the largest social history database in Australasia.[1] It should not be surprising that project members came up against the 'persistent and specific gendering' of the database, given the sources that they were using. A new phase of research began to rectify silences and gaps. It extended the time frame of study, included two more boroughs, and more and different types of records. Reflecting general changes in scholarship, a team of interdisciplinary scholars was assembled. The collaborative nature of the project is distinctive in terms of most scholarly historical research in New Zealand; the sixteen authors met regularly for seminars, and wrote and discussed draft chapters collaboratively. This provides a high degree of coherence overall, but it also makes for repetition between chapters in discussion of key theories, sources,

and significant people and places, if the book is read straight through.

By 'setting gender deep' in one place the team aimed to reveal the complex character of gender relations. The study is framed by the 1890s Long Depression and the Second World War, a period that witnessed New Zealand's 'modernisation', not just in technologies and workforces, but also in private lives. The construction of new family forms with the rapid reduction in family size, the increasing numbers of children attending school and the new values placed on family life are all part of this story. So too are the increasing number of younger women working outside the home, the campaign for women's suffrage and the 'new woman'. The 'new man', who strengthened his ties to the home while women were moving outside it, also appears. The book argues that normative styles of masculinity and femininity were reshaped over this period of rapid change, with the latter redefined more dramatically than the former, especially when age is also taken into account. Younger women were the beneficiaries of more opportunities, particularly before marriage, but difference and inequality were nonetheless reaffirmed. Gender was both 'crucial yet contested'.

It is difficult, in a short review, to do justice to such a rich, detailed and thought-provoking collection, which takes seriously in a 'general' study issues that gender historians have been investigating for many years. Contributors used 'a multi-faceted definition of gender that directs attention to social relationships, symbolic representations and subjective identity'. Consistent attempts are made to include men and masculinity throughout, using gender as a relational category, although sometimes 'separate spheres' dominate in reality as well as ideal. Contributors explore 'the ways in which the practices and meanings of gender relations, and the performance of gender identities, were played out in a variety of social sites in one urban setting'. The concept of 'site' is deployed in two ways: 'physical entities in socially and culturally mapped space' or the contexts of gendered behaviours, and also as 'a domain or a cluster of social practices and ideas that are expressed in a variety of physical spaces', such as work, education, consumption, leisure, poverty, mobility, transport, health, and religion. The second definition of site constitutes the structure of the book as contributors discuss each domain in turn. As the editors acknowledge, portions of the book are as much historical geography as social history.

We encounter the Grimmett family home 'Faringdon Villa', the Hillside railway workshops, the Otago Benevolent Institution, churches, schools, parks, pubs, streets, homes, factories, offices and shops all over Southern Dunedin. The at-

tention to individual lived experience, as well as group or aggregate fortunes is impressive, whether it is the 'yahooing' of the 'matchy tarts' from the Wax Vesta match factory on Friday nights, the recollections of sociable church-going young men, or widowed Susan Westfold, who struggled to care for five of her nine children still at home in one of the poorest households in the area. The exhaustive and enterprising research in electoral rolls, life records, school, employment and other institutional records, local directories, telephone lists, and the large collection of oral histories is analysed in an invaluable appendix on the construction and use of the computerised database. A series of very necessary maps and diagrams and a large number of wonderful photographs, cartoons and advertisements, are woven into each chapter.

Those familiar with this period of New Zealand history and its literature will know the general story, if not the South Dunedin variations. The editors argue for the particularity of Dunedin, based on two key events: the size and vigour of the working men's mobilisations of the 1880s and 1890s which defended traditional gender relations, and the area's relative predisposition towards gender change based on the large numbers of women who signed the 1893 petition for women's suffrage. The southern suburbs' distinctive mix of artisan radicalism, evangelicanism, Scottish commitment to education and high levels of work opportunities for women 'disposed them to be something of a vanguard'. The authors had the unenviable task of asserting the uniqueness of a project with a long gestation period, during which works in New Zealand history were published dealing with similar concerns.[2] Yet much of this story echoes the findings of Caroline Daley's study of Taradale in the same period.[3] Some chapters address the work of Daley and others directly, but I was often left wondering what was really different about urban Dunedin if it so closely replicated 'semi-rural' Taradale.

The project was conceived in a period when social science was dominant in historical studies, the key questions were social mobility and opportunity, and quantitative methods were influential. The book was written during 'the cultural turn'. Attention has turned to gender as a 'symbolic construct', a 'framework of meaning by which value and difference are ascribed', to questions of 'identity, subjectivity, meaning and experience', as 'issues of language and discourse have come to the fore'. This leads to some unevenness and a sense that the later issues have been welded, not always seamlessly, onto earlier concerns.

The best chapters offer sophisticated and challenging insights into topics such as geographical mobility between areas and in individual families; transport

practices and meanings on the streets; schooling opportunities and patterns; and religious beliefs and practices (a tour de force which energetically demonstrates the need for historians to take religion as seriously as war, politics, class, race, health, sex and gender). Other pieces, while still fascinating and revealing, are more conventional and descriptive. They focus on what sources tell, rather than utilising the constructed nature of them to tease out the frameworks of meaning employed. Oral histories are a case in point, used at times as transparent bearers of experience and at others as explicitly epitomising 'cultural norms'. Questions of data, structure and figures dominate in a number of chapters when answers are sought to questions that focus on why rather than how or when. Similarly, the links to, and interrogation of, place are at times asserted rather than demonstrated. The volume offers fascinating insights into the symbolic importance as well as the daily activities of the area's two tiny non-British groups: the Chinese and the Lebanese. Yet because Maori did not live in the study area, a more intensive examination of 'race' as a category is neglected. This might have been supported by recent cultural work on whiteness and the complex importance of 'the other' in settler contexts.

Sites of Gender is essential for all those interested in questions of gender, class and location in New Zealand history. The nuanced discussion of theory and method will be especially useful for teaching at upper levels. It would be very instructive to see what happens to gender relations in post-war Dunedin, a time which is being vigorously re-interpreted by historians. Are Dunedin women still in the vanguard in a period which is usually seen as one of stifling conformity and gender norms?

NOTES

1 More details are at the project website: http://caversham.otago.ac.nz/index.php.

2 Among others see Bronwyn Dalley, *Family Matters: Child Welfare in Twentieth Century New Zealand* (1998) and *Living in the Twentieth Century* (2000); Melanie Nolan, *Breadwinning: New Zealand Women and the State* (2000) Caroline Daley, *Leisure and Pleasure: Reshaping and Revealing the New Zealand Body 1900–1960* (2003) and edited collections such as *The Gendered Kiwi* (1999) and *Fragments: New Zealand Social and Cultural History* (2000).

3 Caroline Daley, *Girls & Women, Men & Boys: Gender in Taradale 1886–1930* (1999).

A VOICE FOR MOTHERS:
THE PLUNKET SOCIETY AND INFANT WELFARE 1907–2000,
by Linda Bryder

Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2003. 352 pages, $49.99.
ISBN 1869402901

Reviewed by
Annette Huntington

The history of the Royal New Zealand Plunket Society (Plunket) as presented by Linda Bryder in *A Voice for Mothers: The Plunket Society and Infant Welfare 1907–2000* is characterised by tension and a constant need to work to ensure Plunket's survival as the leading provider of well child health services in New Zealand. This text provides a thorough and fascinating account of the politics and processes by which the Plunket Society maintained its position throughout the last century and became an icon in New Zealand society. Bryder takes a comprehensive approach, setting the history of Plunket within the wider historical context of developments in child welfare and paediatric services from the beginning of the 20th century. The book is structured around three stated themes: the relationship between the voluntary sector and the state in the provision of welfare, the development of paediatrics as a specialty and changing trends in infant health, and the relationship between health providers and their clients, the mothers.

Although there already exists a considerable body of literature tracing the history of the Plunket Society, this text provides a fresh approach by positioning the Society's evolution within a broader social context. This provides the reader with a much more comprehensive social history related to child health service provision, and gives the work significant value for a wide range of readers and scholars. *A Voice for Mothers* makes a significant contribution to the history of women, volunteer groups, nurses and nursing, medical service development and the interplay of all these groups in the changing New Zealand society. In particular, Bryder provides the reader with much thoroughly researched material relevant to those interested in women's history generally, the development of medical specialty practice, and, to a lesser extent, nurses in primary care.

The work also provides a history of one of the most enduring primary health care initiatives in New Zealand. From Bryder's account Plunket had, and still does possess, several of the characteristics of what is considered a desirable

primary health care service: it was initiated by the community itself, collaboration with the health service through the medical profession was part of the process, and a professional arm was developed in the form of the nursing service, to meet needs identified by the community. A consistent theme throughout the text is the at times tense relationship between Plunket and the medical profession, particularly those involved in both the developing specialty of paediatrics and the provision of child health services in the Department of Health.

The early chapters of the work, focussing on the initial development of Plunket, highlight the position of a powerful group of women determined to establish and maintain a service that not only supported motherhood, but also reflected the interests of mothers and was clearly aimed at meeting the needs of this group. Indeed, one of the most fascinating issues threaded throughout the book is the manner in which women have maintained control over the Plunket Society. What emerges from the text is a picture of a strong group of mainly female Plunket 'volunteers' who have maintained control of the society throughout its history. Bryder's work reveals the ongoing tensions in this relationship between a powerful volunteer movement, the medical profession, and an increasingly independent nursing workforce. There clearly existed, and perhaps continues to exist, considerable ambivalence on the part of paediatricians and the Department/Ministry of Health toward a volunteer group shaping provision of a health service, and a nursing workforce outside direct medical control. These tensions are thoroughly documented by Bryder, demonstrating the strategic and delicate manoeuvring of the women involved in Plunket as volunteers, along with those doctors who supported the Society to ensure that it maintained an effective relationship with an often hostile medical profession and the Department or Ministry of Health, while retaining its independence.

It is also interesting to note the Society's discourse in respect of the nursing service revealed by Bryder. Plunket nurses saw their work as supporting families and thus involved them in a wide range of activities not usually associated with nursing. The service itself was far from the rigid nursing in place in many hospital settings during the period of Plunket's development. Certainly the Plunket nurse could never be labelled the 'handmaiden' of the doctor, a term used to often describe the model of nursing in hospitals up to the 1970s. This independence continued into the 1990s when Plunket nurses signed a petition protesting at a particular medical director's involvement in their work and passed a vote of no confidence in the doctor.

An area that could have been expanded in the book is the relationship between the nurses and the volunteers. This relationship is often constructed as unproblematic, and the lack of discussion may reflect an absence of usable evidence. An exploration of how the increasingly advanced nature of nursing practice and nurses' heightened awareness of their role as fundamental to the provision of child health services at times affected the relationship between these two areas in Plunket and any possible tensions would be a valuable path of inquiry.

Bryder's work also explores the way in which the prominence of the Plunket Society has led to considerable scrutiny and criticism over the years. It is clear that at times the Society's conservative stance in relation to social issues made it vulnerable to accusations of being captured by traditionalists and 'maternalists'. This is particularly evident from the 1960s onward, when the changing social environment challenged the Society and forced it to confront such issues as contraceptive education, abortion and shifting notions of what constitutes a 'family'.

On a practical note, the presentation is excellent with meticulous footnoting, and a comprehensive bibliography and index, which will enhance its value to scholars and students. Overall, this book will appeal to a diverse audience. Scholars of New Zealand history – particularly women's, medical and social welfare history – will find it adds a further dimension to the literature in these areas. The book's accessible style means it will also be enjoyed by those with a general interest in the work of Plunket and the women who have maintained the service over the years.