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**REVISITING JAMES COWAN:
A REASSESSMENT OF
*THE NEW ZEALAND WARS (1922-23)***

*A thesis presented in fulfilment of
the requirement for the degree of
Master of Philosophy in English
at Massey University, Albany,
Auckland, New Zealand.*

GREGORY WOOD

2010

Abstract

Widely differing perceptions of the early twentieth century New Zealand writer James Cowan have led to confusion over how he should be best remembered – as a journalist, an historian, or a combination of both. Most of the previous scholarly assessments of Cowan have focused on his greatest achievement, *The New Zealand Wars* (1922-23), and not sought further connections with his other works to reveal the existence of a coherent historiography. This thesis fleshes out Cowan's historiography by including and reviewing three other books in his oeuvre, two written immediately before the release of *The New Zealand Wars* (*The Maoris of New Zealand* and *The Adventures of Kimble Bent*), and one shortly afterwards (*The Maoris in the Great War*). All four books contributed in their own unique way to an early goal of Cowan's to write a history of Maori-Pakeha interaction and reconciliation following the turmoil of the New Zealand Wars of the nineteenth century. They also reveal a progressive attempt by Cowan to write history of a suitable standard to ultimately earn him the dual status of firstly, 'oral historian' and secondly, 'public historian', that is, 'an historian writing outside academia'. The terms did not exist in Cowan's era, so his research methods must be considered advanced for the time. My subsequent review of Cowan's major work *The New Zealand Wars* shows that his writing transcended journalism in its creation, and has led to this reassessment of Cowan as a much more significant writer for his era than has been accorded to him so far.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my supervisors for their exemplary input, Dr Jack Ross from the English section of the School of Cultural Studies at Massey University's Albany Campus, and Professor Michael Belgrave from the History section at Albany.

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