



Book Review

Peter Bolt and Malcolm Falloon (eds.), *Freedom to Libel? Samuel Marsden v Philo Free: Australia's First Libel Case* (Studies in Australian Colonial History No. 6; Epping, NSW: Bolt Publishing Services, 2017), pp. 414 + illustration and maps. ISBN 9780994634924 (pbk).

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In a pithy summary George Orwell once said 'Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past.' Of course control is a strong word but it certainly sharpens the focus on the interactions between past, present and future. In the contemporary world of politics, social movement and power, the struggle to control the present inevitably brings to bear the meaning and understanding of the past. This is especially so in self-consciously tradition-shaped communities where the narrative is usually central to the continuing understanding of the meaning of the community. Recent and continuing conflicts between Anglicans around the world sharpen the way in which we understand the past. The outburst of writing on Anglicanism in the past two decades points to this dynamic. The Oxford multi-volume history of Anglicanism is just one example of the fruit of this process. This journal is part of that renaissance of scholarly interest. Orwell was somewhat less persuasive in the second half of his aphorism. Not all attempts at historical interpretation of the past are entirely controlled by present perceptions. There is a role for honest engagement with the sources and with competing interpretations. Indeed that kind of engagement between competing interpretations is quite critical to the integrity of the endeavour. This book of essays contributes to this process in obvious and helpful ways.

This is the sixth volume in a remarkable series initiated and carried forward by Peter Bolt and which has advertised two more volumes both dealing in greater details with the most famous chaplain in the early history of the colony of New South Wales. The foremost purpose of this present collection is to defend the reputation of Samuel Marsden specifically in his legal action against the Governor's Secretary, John Thomas Campbell. Campbell had published anonymously in the Government Gazette, for which he was effectively the editor, a highly critical account of the South Seas mission work. Marsden was not named but he was clearly seen as the target. There is an underlying tone of defending the reputation of a prominent evangelical. To succeed in this one particular episode does not in itself protect Marsden's reputation in a wider consideration of the chaplain's long life and service in the colony. To defend a cause by the conduct of one exemplar is of course not in itself compelling in regard to the cause. Every cause as with each of us is made of what Kant called the bent wood of humanity. However, in this particular case it is quite clear that the accounts of Marsden in Australian historiography is more than a

little coloured by an ideological tendency, as David Pettett easily shows in the second essay in this collection. In this respect this book falls into a growing and important movement that seeks to revisit some of the past in Australian and Anglican history.

To correct a particular line of interpretation it is necessary to show from the relevant material a better and more defensible interpretation and that is exactly what we have in this collection. The attention to exactness in details and sources is prodigious. It is visible especially in the essays by Peter Bolt on the Philanthropic Society and in Malcolm Falloon's detailed account of the mission trading of the ship *Active* between 1814 and 1822. More general considerations are brought to bear in the essays by Anderson on the mission context and more fully in Gladwin's perceptive analysis of the significance of the Bigge report on the governorship of Lachlan Macquarie. The essays vary in style and level of argument but together they constitute a very significant and a highly successful contribution to this episode in Australian and Anglican history in the colonial period. The collection is of much wider significance than the particular example to which it is addressed, not least in internal arguments within Anglicanism and colonial history.

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