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## Printing in Wellington: the pioneer period

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In his 1958 book *Newspapers in New Zealand* G. H. Scholefield captioned his photograph of Samuel Revans 'the father of the New Zealand press', following the 1890 example of John Howard Wallace.<sup>1</sup> Both writers used 'the press' to refer to the newspaper industry generally, and rather more specifically to journalism. In that sense the caption is correct, but it is true also in the older usage meaning the printing industry as a whole. Although the missionary printers such as Colenso and his Wesleyan colleagues had been at work for several years before 1840 they were not concerned with supplying a secular and commercial market. It is the industry satisfying that market that Revans initiated, and it is that industry, only incidentally concerned with newspapers, that this account deals with.

Scholefield's book is typical of most work on the history of printing in New Zealand. It is a history of journalism, even more than of newspapers, and the printing presses and the printers are given little or no attention. This is understandable, as the materials for an account of the printers barely survive. Apart from the loss of outmoded equipment — the presses to the scrap-metal merchants, the types into the galley pots of the (now rare) linotype machines and monotype casters — the products of the press are not easy to trace. The early newspapers are scattered between libraries and newspaper offices, often preserved only because no other historical resources exist. Bibliographical control has been of shaky quality. The books and substantial serials, such as Provincial Council gazettes, have survived better — they are, after all, the standard material of library holdings — but even these

holdings are scattered, and only recently, with the publication of volume one of the *New Zealand National Bibliography*, has it been possible to survey and locate the products of the early printing industry. But serials are not so well served. Early magazines tended to survive for only a few issues, and copies are few and far between. At least two religious magazines were published in Wellington in the 1850s of which no trace has been found in the *Finding List*, or in its predecessor the *Union List of Serials*.<sup>2</sup> The almanacs have been preserved more carefully, but two or three were advertised in the Wellington papers which are not held in any Wellington library.

For Maori material the situation is notoriously difficult. Williams's bibliography is an admirable guide, though in need of revision, but several items in its pages were described from other sources than actual copies, and it has not been possible to locate any copy. This is made more difficult by the habit many libraries fell into in the past of leaving Maori material uncatalogued, or under some generic and nearly useless heading such as 'pamphlets'.

If the material covered by bibliographies is difficult to locate, that is nothing in comparison with the other material, the material not listed by any bibliography. One of the virtues of Williams is that he endeavoured to list everything, including handbills and single-sheet proclamations. Bagnall includes a few broadsides, handbills and sale catalogues, but only a few. At least half of the output of any printing press in colonial New Zealand was job-printing, what is now called 'ephemera'. And it is ephemeral. In April 1841 Samuel Revans sent his friend and former partner H. S. Chap-

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man a book 'with a copy of nearly every job of printing' he had completed.<sup>3</sup> This volume (probably no longer in existence) did not contain books or magazine issues. The newspaper issues were despatched by mail as the ships departed from the new colony. The pamphlets had probably not been published at that time — Revans's reprint dated 1841 of the Paihia compilation *He pukapuka o nga inoinga*<sup>4</sup> is the only likely candidate for inclusion. The actual contents of Revans's volume are represented in Bagnall only by one broadside, a *Public Notice* of 25 May 1840, calling the militia for drill. Most of the material would be advertising handbills and posters, some printed on the 'toy of a press' of which Revans wrote to Chapman in May 1840, others (the larger sheets) on the full Columbian press which was installed in the 'portable house' in a day and a half in April 1840 and, in September, was transferred from Petone beach to Te Aro, to a site just beside the Pa, at the foot of Taranaki Street. The old house of lath and plaster was finally demolished in 1892<sup>5</sup>, having been vacated by the printers in March 1852 for roomier premises and a larger press.

By this time, in 1852, there were two printing firms in Wellington, each publishing its newspaper and bitterly opposed to the other. The two competed for the job-printing, for the Government contracts, and for advertising revenue. Revans's *New Zealand Gazette* no longer existed. It had survived the challenge of a rival, the *New Zealand Colonist*, in the recession of 1842-43, but Revans was dissatisfied with his enterprise and let it terminate on 25 September 1844. It had appeared as a regular weekly (bi-weekly from October 1841) with only a single issue omitted, since 18 April 1840. Issue number one had been published in London, from the same address as the *New Zealand Company*, its part-backers. Revans always denied in public that the Company owned his press, but there seems little doubt that the financiers of the Company had also financed Revans in the purchase of his equipment. When he relinquished the printing press in August 1845 it was his partner William Mein Smith who actually owned the equipment, Revans having transferred ownership to him some time before. The printing business had made no profit for its owner since at least 1842, although the workmen made a partial living from their trade. Its temporary rival, the *New Zealand Colonist*, had survived one year and cost its fifty shareholders some £6 each; the workmen of the *Gazette* had divided their time between the printing shop and their own small-holdings, in a manner not unknown in the trade when business was slack in country towns (as for example in Cambridge in 1703).<sup>6</sup>

### The early workmen

Revans had not been directly involved in running the press after the first months in Wellington. He had brought out a young compositor, Francis Yates, to help him set the business up, and had found a 'couple of wanderers' on the beach in Port Nicholson, and a boy to be apprentice. The two wanderers, probably William Everett and James Muir, both had extensive previous experience, particularly Muir who had trained in Edinburgh with Ballantyne, Sir Walter Scott's printers. Everett did not remain more than a couple of years in the trade, but Muir remained until 1864, dying in November 1865 but fathering several printers, including Allan Ramsay Muir, later owner of the *Gisborne Herald*. The boy was Thomas Wilmor McKenzie, a lad of thirteen who survived to own his own newspaper, to manage the *New Zealand Times* for Vogel, and to be one of Wellington's most honoured senior citizens until his death in 1911.

Yates was drowned in a boating accident in March 1842. His place as shop manager was taken by Edward Roe, an experienced printer and stationer in his forties who later ran a stationery business, then owned Barrett's Hotel from 1850 to 1856. He retired to Christchurch, where his daughter Ellen married Edward Jennings Wakefield in 1863. Working in the shop with Roe were also two young men trained in London, George Fellingham (born 1817) and William Edward Vincent (born 1823). With Vincent, the radical tone of the office deriving from Revans became pronounced. Revans, at a time when 'democrat' was as strong a term as 'socialist' became later, was proud to call himself a democrat and to acknowledge his involvement in the Canadian independence movement of Papineau. Vincent was the younger brother of Henry Vincent, a notorious Chartist journalist, and had trained under John Cleave, an even more notorious radical and Chartist publisher. William Vincent was an inheritor of the new populist newspaper traditions, and his influence was far-reaching. He had willing associates in Muir (an older man, born in 1807, with experience on an American whaler) and McKenzie. Both of these were enthusiastic participants in the Borough elections of 1842, and they preserved an inclination to 'hard-hitting journalism' when newspaper proprietors. There were undoubtedly other men working in the *Gazette* shop; the 1843 census recorded 14 printers, and the *Colonist* office was rather smaller since it did not do job printing. A number of men can be named, some of whom may have been working in other occupations, such as Adrian Lowe, a storekeeper, or William Brewer, a labourer, on the 1842 burgess roll.<sup>7</sup> Some can be identified as de-

finitely working for the *Colonist*, such as Edward Catchpool its official printer, Nathaniel Sutherland, probably its foreman, and a young man David Hargreave.<sup>8</sup> Catchpool was a 'merchant' for most of the 1840s, and later became a Customs official, transferring to Napier in 1856. He imported the equipment for the *Colonist*; he also lectured, quite competently, on 'The origin and art of printing' to the Mechanics' Institute in 1851. Sutherland, who came with a land order and intended to farm, was to return to the printing business in 1845 and remain in it until 1865, after the 1843 demise of the *Colonist*. David Hargreave, about 27 in 1843, disappears from the records in 1844. He probably moved out of Wellington to another part of the Australasian colonies.

### The *Spectator* versus the *Independent*

In 1844 the *Gazette* came to an end, and two weeks later, on 12 October 1844, the *New Zealand Spectator and Cooks Strait Guardian* began, under the direction of a committee, and printed under the supervision of Edward Roe. In March 1845 Revans published a near-defamatory advertisement in its columns, in pursuit of a private quarrel. The *Spectator* committee transferred the paper to the equipment of the *Colonist*, nominally printed by William Lyon (a bookseller and stationer whose involvement, except as customer and agent, ceased in September). The five printers, Roe, Vincent, Fellingham, Muir and McKenzie, established the *Wellington Independent* in defiance of the group represented by the committee. They obviously received a considerable amount of support from the 'radical' but moneyed portion of the community, for they could not have survived without assistance. They fought a price-cutting war for advertisements with the *Spectator*, which had a smaller range of types available. In August 1845, their equipment, nominally owned by Revans, was sold to the *Spectator* and the *Independent* ceased temporarily. Roe withdrew, to establish a stationery business, but the other four, led apparently by Vincent, acquired a printing press from the *Sydney Morning Herald* and types also from Sydney. The *Independent* reappeared on 26 November 1845 from a Lambton Quay address, to continue until 1874, when McKenzie, the sole survivor, merged it into Vogel's newspaper, the *New Zealand Times*. Vincent had set the tone of the paper — quarrelsome, vigorous and 'pushy' — and it did not change significantly over the years. Vincent retired from the partnership in 1850, to try his hand (and fail) at the licensed trade. He returned 'to case' as an employee in 1852 and moved to New South Wales

in 1853, where he worked on the *Sydney Morning Herald* and then set up his own paper in Grafton, where he died in 1862.<sup>9</sup> His typographic taste seems to have been shared by his partners; in 1848 and also in 1856 they bought new display types for the jobbing and advertising work, and it was a good range of the new ornamented styles which were bought, and used. In the 1850s the advertisements of the *Independent* were striking, with two or even three column display advertisements, and a plentiful use of bold headlines and fancy types. The editorial pages remained the customary sober single column small print, unlike the first months of 1845, when the printers had experimented with ornate heading blocks and occasional woodcuts. To the modern reader the *Independent's* advertising columns are eye-catching and attractive; but to the more conservative residents of colonial Wellington the terms would, no doubt, have been 'garish' and 'vulgar'.

The vigour of the *Independent's* typography was matched by the language of its editorial columns. While the *Spectator* did not emulate its rival's typography, it did match its editorial columns. When John Robert Godley wrote in June 1850 to his father, of the papers he found in Wellington, he described them (with the preconceived tastes of the traditionally minded Englishman) in these words: 'nothing . . . can exceed the scurrility, vulgarity, and infamous bad taste with which both these precious periodicals are fraught; I never saw them equalled in these respects by any *English* papers; they bear comparison with the worst of the Yankees'.<sup>10</sup> These were strong words, and the papers only occasionally reached these depths. The general judgement remained correct; both papers, in their different ways, tended to strong language (particularly when describing political opponents) and both were much more akin to the American than the English papers of the time. In the case of the *Independent* this is not surprising, with the influence of Revans still strong and William Fox (also with American experience) writing for it in the 1850s. The *Spectator* did not have that explanation. Its editor and proprietor from late 1845 was Robert Stokes, an architect and surveyor by training, who was given responsibility by the committee in September 1845 and then became proprietor at some time in about 1847. Stokes had aspirations to be a landed gentleman (he and his brother became runholders in Hawke's Bay at the end of the 1850s) and Godley's description: 'a conceited and foolish little pedant . . . who has no opinions whatever, and whose sole object is to curry personal favour with the most influential and powerful people in the place', while harsh and prejudiced has some support, even

THE "WELLINGTON INDEPENDENT," is published every Wednesday and Saturday morning, and has the greatest circulation of any Newspaper yet published in the Colony. It is also extensively circulated in New South Wales, South and Western Australia, Van Diemen's Land, Cape of Good Hope, and in the Mother-country.

PRICE OF PAPER.—Forty Shillings per annum, payable in advance.

The Price Advertisements in the "Wellington Independent" is—Threepence a Line for the First Insertion of all advertisements, and one penny a Line for every subsequent Insertion.

Advertisements to be left at the "Independent" Office, Lambton-quay, before ten o'clock on Tuesday and Friday evenings.

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AND EVERY OTHER DESCRIPTION OF PRINTING,

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AT THE SHORTEST NOTICE,

And on the most reasonable Terms,

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Advertisement in *The Wellington Almanack* 1851

(negatively) from Stokes's political allies.

During the Constitutionalist campaign of the late 1840s and early 1850s the *Independent*, together with most of the politically minded population of Wellington and most of the newspapers of the colony, was an ardent advocate of a constitution, and an opponent of Grey's government. The *Spectator*, particularly after Grey came to live in Wellington, was a supporter of Grey. The *Independent* said that Stokes had his eye on the Government printing contracts; and indeed he did have a larger share of the Government printing in these years than the *Independent*, and he was given the job of printing Grey's own work *Ko nga moteatea*. In the late 1850s, when the Constitutionlists dominated the Provincial Council, and Jerningham Wakefield's Radical Reform Party was becoming organised in opposition, Stokes returned the charge, insistently referring to 'McKenzie the government printer' and 'Lyon the government stationer' (Lyon was a Con-

stitutionalist). The allegations of self-interest in these references are most difficult to assess, and judgement must be suspended.

**Commercial enterprise**

The commercial success of the printing shops is clearer. When the *Independent* became a bi-weekly in May 1846 the *Spectator* had preceded it by a half-week (from one on Wednesday and one on Saturday they changed to both publishing on both days) but that was the last time the *Spectator* led in a change. By the end of 1857 the *Independent* was regularly publishing 22 columns of advertisements and 14 columns of editorial matter, against the *Spectator's* 14 columns of advertisements and 10 of editorial matter. Furthermore, the *Independent* was printing far more local advertisements for short periods (of perhaps a month) against the *Spectator's* high proportion of long-standing notices and advertisements from overseas sources. Plainly,

the business community of Wellington believed the *Independent's* claim of 1854 that it had 'never had such a large advertising connection'.

The distribution of job printing is probably fairly represented by a collection of 44 auction catalogues in the Turnbull Library, for sales between 30 July 1853 and 22 February 1856. These catalogues are a selection from 466 sales advertised in these months (67 omitted from the *Spectator* and 5 from the *Independent*), and they were divided between the *Spectator* (printing 13) and the *Independent* (printing 31). Political affiliations may have explained some of the omissions, and some of the choice of printer, but most auctioneers divided their business between the two firms.

The few surviving posters and similar jobbing work are also, for the most

part, the work of the *Independent*. Since most are political posters from 1853 the selection is biased against the *Spectator*, but they all show an inventive use of the newer display types which appeared in the 1840s. The few posters from the *Spectator* are much more staid, with the display types of the earlier designs used by Revans in 1841 and 1842. Although the *Spectator* re-equipped with new types in the 1850s it seems to have been with text types, not display types, and they seem to have effectively resigned commercial display jobbing to the *Independent*.

### New competitors

Into this community came, at the end of 1855, George Watson who announced the advent of a new commercial printing establishment, to open in


January 1856. Watson did not compete in the newspaper business, but concentrated on jobbing work. An experienced and competent printer, he soon took a share of the Provincial Council work, and provided an alternative printer for pamphlets and similar work. He published an almanac, the *Royal New Zealand Almanack*, for three years and then, in 1859, left Wellington to set up in Lyttelton. He was persuaded to be the first printer of the *Christchurch Press*, in 1861, but his taste was obviously not for the newspaper industry and in 1863 he is found in Dunedin, publishing from a MacLaggan Street address, where he lived until his death in January 1910. His typography is not as flamboyant as the *Independent's*, but he had a good selection of the new ornamented types and made good use of them.

On Watson's departure his equipment was purchased by a new concern, a newspaper this time. The *New Zealand Advertiser* was an experiment, distributed free to business houses and supported by advertising alone. Published by two pairs of brothers, Joseph and Edward Bull and Charles and Edward Roe (sons of Edward Roe of the *Gazette*), it ran as a free paper for some seven months from April 1859, and then was reorganised on a subscription basis of 3d per issue (instead of the 6d charged by the other papers). The Roes did not remain long in the partnership, and Edward Bull's name also disappeared from the imprint by 1861. Typographically and editorially the *Advertiser* was intermediate between the other two papers, and it had as extensive a range of display types available to it as the *Independent*. Joseph Bull published an almanac, competing directly with McKenzie and Muir's *Wellington Almanack* (Fellingham had died in 1855) and his newspaper stimulated the *Independent* into tri-weekly publication in 1862. The Provincial Council work was divided between these two firms, except for a little given to the *Spectator* as a result of a resolution of 6 May 1862 that 'Printing should be done by contract, or fairly divided between the three printing establishments'.

In March 1858 Stokes, now a member of the Provincial Council and hoping for an Executive position, removed his name from the *Spectator's* imprint in favour of Nathaniel Sutherland, who had been his manager since 1845. From then on there are no changes apparent in the *Spectator* except a gradual dwindling into futility. Even in 1857 the *Independent* had printed far more local news than its rival; indeed only political meetings and Church of England activities (Stokes was an active churchman) received much attention from the *Spectator*, and this trend was accentuated when Sutherland was in charge. From that time on the *Spectator* did not

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**FAN OY**  
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CUSTOM HOUSE FORMS AND BILLS OF LADING,  
*Pamphlets, Bookwork, and Job Printing in General.*

Advertisement in *Royal New Zealand Almanack* 1857

tender for the Provincial Council contracts, and Sutherland seems to have been unable to replace the business by any sustained campaign among the business community. The only assured customers that Sutherland had in the 1860s seem to have been the Church of England, and even they began to use Bull or McKenzie and Muir.

### The end of an era

It is not surprising that in May 1865 Sutherland took a position as a government clerk (in the Registry of Deeds) and finally, on 5 August 1865, a brief announcement appeared: 'The present number terminates the issue of the 'New Zealand Spectator', the publication of which will cease after this date.' The equipment was sold to the *Independent*, now owned by McKenzie alone, Muir having retired in December 1864.

Two other major events took place in Wellington printing during 1865. The first of these was the establishment of the Government Printing Office in March. It had been planned since early 1864, and finally took place as a consequence of the transfer of the capital from Auckland. This meant an additional twenty odd printers were employed in Wellington, of whom only James Costall the overseer is known to have been in Wellington previously. At least two new printing firms began in Wellington in the next few years, probably the result of the general increase in trade which had always been expected from the transfer of the capital. Stationery imports had doub-

led by 1867 (from the 1864 figure) and the number of 'mechanics artificers and skilled workers' in the province had nearly doubled in the same time.

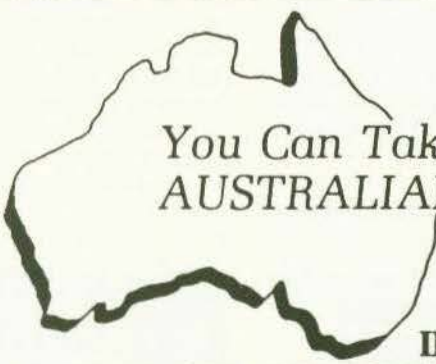
The second event (first in time) was related to this. On 8 February 1865, Henry Blundell published the first number of the *Evening Post*, Wellington's first daily and its first evening paper. The presence of the *Evening Post*, precarious at first, probably drove the *Spectator* out of existence, and threatened the over-committed *Advertiser*, which only lasted to 1867. The *Independent* was unchanged, but it did not grow with the increase in population and the *Evening Post* was not surprised when, in 1874, it came to an end, to be replaced by the *New Zealand Times*, another daily.

Another event, equally significant for the printing industry, was foreshadowed in 1862, but materialised definitely in 1865. A meeting of printing tradesmen was held in July 1862 to form a Typographical Society, and in 1865 this was finally established. It was a long time before it covered a significant proportion of the men working in the industry, but the fact that it should have been formed at all shows a considerable change from the conditions of 1842, when Vincent could write (and believe, however rightly) that 'Mr Revans is a gentleman who would never be guilty of . . . [turning off a man] for expressing sentiments differing from [him]',<sup>11</sup> and from 1845, when the working printers could band together and establish their own newspaper, even if it was with the assistance


of wealthier members of the community. The pioneer days of Wellington printing were well and truly over.

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