

NZHA Award for Contribution to New Zealand History 2023

Awarded to Charlotte Macdonald at the Biennial NZHA Conference, Christchurch, Thursday 23 November 2023

Presented by Barbara Brookes

Charlotte Macdonald

If I were to give this talk a title it would plagiarize one that Charlotte herself has used: *A Woman of Good Character*. A ‘character’ of course, was a nineteenth century term for a reference. In Annie Frost’s 1867 guide to writing letters ‘upon every imaginable subject’, there is a line supplied for writing a character for a good governess which is that she ‘possesses in an extraordinary degree, the power of imparting information’. All of those who have heard her speak know, along with Charlotte’s students, that she is a wonderful teacher. Full of enthusiasm, buzzing with ideas, generous in sharing them and always acknowledging the work of others.

But I am here to speak to her contribution to our historical knowledge and to her unstinting service to the historical profession which we honour now with the presentation of the NZHA Award for Contribution to New Zealand History.

Charlotte is a Council Member of the Archives and Records Association. She has twice served as President of the New Zealand Historical Association and as the current committee knows, acting for the interests of the profession and organising the national conference are time-consuming and take vision and commitment. We, the members of this organization, have benefitted greatly from Charlotte’s zeal in defense of our subject as a Council and Executive member as well as her work as President. Whatever her role, Charlotte has carried it out with great diligence and integrity. She has been proactive nationally on behalf of our discipline in a myriad of ways, most recently convening a national conversation on the Future of History in the Universities and before that acting as co-convenor of the Royal Society of New Zealand Te Apārangi Reference Group on Aotearoa New Zealand Histories in Schools Curriculum, 2020-2022, and the Gender History Seminars. She cares deeply about the historical enterprise.

Charlotte’s reputation as a scholar of distinction stretches far beyond these shores. She has delivered keynote addresses in Scotland, Finland, Sydney, California, and London. It was in the latter city that I first met her, both eager and committed members of the London Feminist History group, which put together a volume, *The Sexual Dynamics of History*, in which our first book chapters appeared. Later we nervously practiced together our first papers to be given at – what seemed to be a very intimidating venue – the NZHA. Since that time Charlotte has gone on to be honoured by invitations to present the Beaglehole and the Sir Keith Sinclair lectures.

Her body of work is substantial and of two different types. First there are the collections that are indispensable: the 1992 best-selling *The Book of New Zealand Women: Ko Kūi Me Te Kaupapa* with Merimeri Penfold and Bridget Williams; followed closely by the 1993 *The Vote, the Pill and the Demon Drink*; and then the 1996 collection, with Frances Porter, *My Hand will Write What My Heart Dictates*. The first and third of these were deeply collaborative enterprises, as were the two volumes of essays on New Zealand women’s history we did together with Margaret Tennant. Collaboration with Charlotte is always a joy. Charlotte authored the New Zealand volume of *Women Writing Home, 1700-1920. Female Correspondence across the British Empire*. She has an intense interest in the ways in which the personal and the political intersect as demonstrated through her

2008 prize-winning article in the *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* on Sarah Selwyn and more recently her 2018 *Itinerario* article, 'Power that hurts: Harriet Gore Browne and the perplexities of living inside empire'.

Diaries and correspondence have been very important in Charlotte's work and she is a wonderful correspondent herself. Since we lived, until quite recently, in different cities, I have a precious series of letters from Charlotte which I have threatened to commit to the archives. One from December 1996 when I was on leave in the UK came with an enclosure from the *Dominion* that speaks the personal and the political. Entitled 'Shipley under attack' the article began 'Feminist politicians are being blamed by a Christian Coalition candidate for turning New Zealand into a 'vast fornicatorium'.

This was Wanganui candidate Gael Donoghue attacking Shipley's praise of the Family Planning Association, which, Donoghue believed, was leading New Zealanders into fornication at the taxpayer's expense. It is just the kind of thing feminist historians need in their files.

But to return to her second type of scholarly work. Charlotte has written ground-breaking articles and monographs. *A Woman of Good Character: single women as immigrant settlers in nineteenth century New Zealand* (1990) – a work of painstaking research to restore to history the unknown lives of 4,028 single women who traveled to New Zealand in search of opportunity. Her second monograph, *Strong Beautiful and Modern. National fitness in Britain, New Zealand, Australia and Canada, 1935-1960* investigated the twentieth century and the impact of state-sponsored fitness schemes in different national contexts. Drawing material together over a vast scope, Charlotte produced a conceptually rich book, important to historians in each of the nations she discusses. Currently she is hard at work on her third monograph, deriving from the Marden-funded Soldiers of Empire project. That project, in Charlotte's typical collaborative fashion, was designed to include students in research. Twelve students participated as summer scholars over successive years and three more completed MA theses. One outcome of the project is Charlotte's 2019 prize-winning NZJH Paper 'Woolwich to Wellington. From Settler Colony to Garrisoned Sovereignty'.

It has been a great pleasure revisiting Charlotte's publications, and thinking over our years of our friendship. The latter is one of Charlotte's great gifts and I know many of you here have been beneficiaries of it. We thank you Charlotte for your many services to the historical profession; for your pioneering approach to those lives often lost from the historical record, be they servants or soldiers; to your exquisite attention to language, and for the power of your historical imagination which has touched us all. You have enriched our field in many and enduring ways.