

Anglican Archives - William Cotton's Journals

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William Cotton wrote up a very detailed daily description of his life between 1841 and 1848. The first volume begins in December 1841 with the departure of the *Tomatin* which brought Bishop Selwyn and his party to Australia. Cotton provides personal and lively insights into the voyage and the subsequent attempts at Te Waimate to establish the College of Saint John the Evangelist. His pages are full of the people and personalities that crowd the canvas of the early Selwyn years in New Zealand. Cotton's own travels, the transfer of the College to Auckland and the multi-natured enterprise which Selwyn tried to create are all recounted.

Cotton is a rather paradoxical character. He was extremely able academically. He also had a range of practical skills which fitted him for a pioneering environment. At Te Waimate he operated a lathe for wood turning and a small printing press. He was at home in small boats. As 'Bee Cotton' he has been remembered as a pioneer apiarist writing a practical guide to beekeeping in New Zealand.

While described as genial, friendly and full of fun by his students, he was considered by Selwyn and others to be emotionally unpredictable and a poor manager of the College's affairs. He was tinged by Tractarian sympathies which made the CMS missionaries deeply suspicious about his churchmanship. They did not doubt, however, his care for those who were sick.

In New Zealand, Cotton's Journals are only available on microfilm. The quality of the reproduction and the difficulty of reading some of Cotton's handwriting are hard on the eyes and one's patience! The originals are held in the Dixon Library which is part of the State Library of

New South Wales.

When I was working in 1994 at the *Mitchell Library*, which is part of the same complex, I requested to see the original journals. Normally only the microfilms are made available to researchers. Eventually I was taken into a special workroom where I was presented with eleven bound-volumes with metal clasps that could be padlocked. Sadly, volume two is missing from the collection and does not seem to have survived.

There are over 2000 pages in the eleven volumes. Cotton's diary tends to run through on the right-hand page from front to back and then on the left-hand page from back to front. Other entries such as the account of Renata's journey have been included along with all manner of printed inserts and cuttings. Among the enclosures are strands of the hair from the Selwyn's sons, William and John!

Great use has been made in a number of publications of some of the magnificent illustrations which Cotton included in his journals. Most of these were drawn or painted by William Bambridge (his diaries are in the Turnbull Library) or T. B. Hutton. What was a revelation for me in seeing the original journals was to find that a number of these are illustrated in colour.

Helen Hogan in '*Renata's Journey*' notes that Cotton's 'journals are of incalculable value to historians of the 1840's in New Zealand, and it is to be hoped that someday they will be transcribed and published.' (p.34)

Having used Cotton's material for Selwyn's Legacy I can only endorse her recommendation. They provide very important insights into Anglican history in the 1840's.