

If the number of listings on a web site like Google determines one's popularity and fame, then Frederick George Radcliffe, with over a hundred entries, wins hands down. Coming second in the postcard stakes is Gladys Goodall with nine hits.

The above statistic will of course not disturb or amaze postcard collectors of long standing, but it does give some idea of just how much interest there is out there in postcards from the past and how things are shaping up when it comes to supply and demand.

When I contemplated this piece on FGR, I began by listing all the articles I could lay my hands on. At the back of my mind, I knew most members of the postcard society might well ask the question "Why another piece on FGR"? Well there are a number of reasons why I think it is fitting. The prime one being that with the publication of the long awaited N.Z. Postcard Society FGR catalogue, there will be some who might want to know why this man and his work deserve this treatment. Secondly, as I scanned through the articles that have been written over the last 20 years, there has been new material which extends our knowledge and gives a wider perspective of his accomplishments. So while most of the following story will be known to the bulk of my readers, I will endeavour to emphasise aspects of his work which have not been discussed by any previous author. In other words, I hope what I say will give collectors a better idea of his remarkable contribution to New Zealand postcards.

First, let us dwell momentarily on a rather remarkable occurrence which I think has an important bearing on NZ postcards. In the space of just three years, three men came to New Zealand who were to play an important role in the production of postcards. They were Radcliffe in 1893, Beattie in 1894 and Aldersley in 1895. Only Radcliffe was completely unknown to photography at the time of his arrival in New Zealand, Beattie came from Tasmania where his family had been engaged in photography for some time. Aldersley did not waste time in establishing himself in a photographic business in Wellington. This indicates he may have received his training in England prior to coming to New Zealand. Within ten years of his arrival, Radcliffe had made a decision to sell his farm in Northland and had moved to Auckland where he acquired the skills that were to dominate the rest of his life. All three immigrants made an indelible impression on the postcard trade in New Zealand, a topic which needs more investigation.

The first article of any substance which signalled an interest in FGR's postcards was published in the May 1994 Postcard Pillar. It was written by Alan Jackson who at the time was working as a teacher in Oman. He stated in his opening that he was prompted to write about Frederick George Radcliffe because of the society's move to publish lists of Radcliffe's postcards which were compiled by Stan Goodwin who'd been collecting them for years. Over the next 16 issues of the Postcard Pillar, Stan's lists gained a large following, especially from those who had examples of Radcliffe's cards in their collections. While Alan's article did not contain a lot of information about Radcliffe or the circumstances which led to him becoming involved in photography and postcards, it did pin point his progression from Paparoa to Auckland and Whangarei through trade and telephone directories.

Four years later in April 1998, Brian McClintock (at that time the editor of the Postcard Pillar) wrote an article which contained a considerable amount of information about FGR which really fleshed him out, especially in connection with his working methods and how members of his family chipped in with assistance when it came to print finishing.

Then in 1998, Memories magazine published an illustrated piece on him in issue no.13. Although no author was acknowledged for this piece, it was obviously a result of an interview with Alan Pickmere, who was Radcliffe's grandson. I like many others had written Mr. Pickmere in my capacity as Director of the N.Z. Centre for Photography asking if he had any ledgers or documents listing his grandfather's views. I received a rather crusty and inconclusive reply from him which I attributed to a man who was bedevilled by irritating inquiries from postcard collectors who were hopefully seeking permission to arrive on his doorstep seeking cards from his grandfather's estate.

Also undated as far as its actual date of creation is concerned was a document written by Toni M. Watkins which had its origins with a deposit of Radcliffe negatives which have ended up in the Auckland Public Library. Known as the Tourist Postcard Company - Radcliffe negatives, these were an acquisition which we have been able to access and check against the society's FGR list.

That only leaves the entry which Alan and I prepared for "Wish You Were Here" in 2005. Most of this was extricated from the National Library Dictionary of New Zealand Biography by Mim Ringer updated 2003. As many of our members might not know about this, I print it here in its entirety.

*Frederick George Radcliffe was born at Toxteth Park, Liverpool, Lancashire, England, on 15 November 1863. His parents were Harriet Quilliam and her husband, Frederick Radcliffe, a well-to-do merchant in the West African trade. According to family information, he was educated at Audlem Grammar School, Cheshire, and also attended school in Belgium where he learned the oboe. He then spent some time in Oxford and while there was apparently appointed guardian of a member of a West African royal family. In 1885 he was a lieutenant in a Lancashire volunteer rifle corps.*

*On 28 July 1886 Radcliffe married Kate Litherland in West Derby; they were to have two daughters, Harriette Eva and Olive Isabel. Seeking an equable climate for his health, Radcliffe came to New Zealand in the early 1890s. His wife's brothers had settled near Paparoa, on an inlet of Kaipara Harbour, and here he purchased a farm of some 150 acres. Kate Radcliffe and the two girls arrived in New Zealand in 1894. Eva later went back to England to school, while Olive attended Mount Eden College (later St Cuthbert's College) in Auckland.*

*Utopia, as Radcliffe's farm was called, prospered, but his interest turned to photography. The appearance of stereoscopic cards under the trade name 'Radcliffe and Stewart', the sale of scenic photographs to the Auckland Weekly News and New Zealand Graphic, and the interest of the Tourist and Health Resorts*

Department launched Radcliffe as a scenic photographer. Often accompanied by Kate, he began the country-wide trips that were a feature of his life for 20 years, and which provided the photographs for the later postcard business.

The farm was advertised for sale in 1905 and the family moved to Auckland for two years. During this time Radcliffe is said to have worked with C. J. Ellerbeck, an Auckland photographer. He also spent time in Christchurch taking photographs and playing the oboe in the New Zealand International Exhibition orchestra at Christchurch in 1906-7.

By 1908 the family were in Whangarei. The following year Radcliffe's studio in Cameron Street was taken over by Ernest de Turret. The photographic business was then pursued at Stony Hill, the Radcliffe home in Mill Road, with its established orchard and untouched bush straddling the Hatea River. It was remembered for its walls papered with pages from the *Weekly News* and photographic transparencies over the windows.

Radcliffe recorded pictorial images of rural and urban New Zealand from the far north to Bluff on nearly 8,000 glass-plate negatives. A few were of family and Maori activities; the majority were clear, detailed images of parks, domains and gardens, municipal buildings, churches, streets, bridges, railways and wharves, and panoramic views of mountains, rivers, caves, thermal areas, forest and harbours. People seemed incidental, small, distant and unidentifiable.

Radcliffe's wife, his daughter Olive and a number of young women assistants processed and organised the postcards, each characterised by a neatly printed name, consecutive number and the initials 'FGR'. Many were composed into decorative greeting cards and, along with the other postcards, were sent to retailers nationwide.

Full-plate sepia photographs of magnificent northern trees or spectacular southern scenery, mounted and framed, were in demand throughout the country. Radcliffe's work was hung in the office of the high commissioner for New Zealand in the United Kingdom. In 1910 he published a souvenir album on the Waitomo caves. His photographs appeared in other souvenir albums and regularly in Christmas annuals. Views of the Hatea River were used by his friend and neighbour H. B. Dobbie in the 1921 edition of his book *New Zealand Ferns*. A number of his photographs appear in C. A. Cotton's *Geomorphology of New Zealand*. Many of his quarter-plate glass negatives have survived, and the distinctive postcards and large art photographs are sought by collectors.

Frederick Radcliffe was active in the local community, especially in musical circles. For many concert and light opera performances he organised and conducted the orchestra. He was a member of the Savage Club, a committee member of the Waiata Society, and helped set up the Whangarei Beautifying Society. The family were members of the Whangarei Camera Club.

A slight, moustached, courteous and kindly gentleman, Frederick George Radcliffe died at Onerahi, Whangarei, on 14 January 1923. Kate Radcliffe died in 1963.

If I am asked what are the things that make Radcliffe's postcards desirable apart from their coverage I'm naturally drawn into making comparisons with some of his contemporaries. Radcliffe was consistently good but in my opinion he never reached the level of S.C. Smith's street scenes. Using a step ladder which can be seen sometimes hanging out of his motor cycle side car, Smith's views had a distinct advantage over his competitors because of this elevated lead in to his pictures.

Of Radcliffe's other real photo postcard photographers, I can see certain similarities between Aldersley, Wilson and de

Touret, none of whom could match the phenomenal coverage which FGR achieved. Every small town or hamlet got his attention with shots that were appealing for his customers, whether they lived in Auckland or Akaroa. While it might seem to be going to extremes to find fault with Radcliffe's postcards because of subtleties with things like composition, one must take into account Radcliffe's working methods. When a photographer is confronted with a brief which embraces the whole country, there are certain things which have to be refined to get the job done as quickly as possible and into the hands of the consumer. Therefore, carting a step ladder around does not figure as an essential item of equipment. Besides which, some street scenes in rural areas might not be as crowded as Wellington's, thus making a ladder unnecessary. So in the end, it might be unfair to criticize Radcliffe in this way. A far better option might be to pit his skills against another operator or firm that attempted to meet him on the same level - especially when it came to covering the entire country. There was only one in his time that attempted this! Muir & Moodie.

When taking a broad view of their separate attainments in this direction, I would place Radcliffe well in advance of the Dunedin firm for consistent excellence when it comes to topographical work. Radcliffe seems to have been more adept at getting interesting views from all his locations. Perhaps this tendency might be attributable to the fact that, as a one man band, he knew what he wanted and was better motivated, from commercial necessity to getting it right. Muir & Moodie, on the other hand, were somewhat stymied in their thinking, having inherited a catalogue to which they merely added updated views of certain features in a particular locality. In some respects, I think this restricted the thinking of their operators in the field.

So much for Radcliffe's topographical work. But there is something else which I think requires some consideration when measuring his abilities as a photographer.

Oddly enough, most collectors I know don't seem interested in Radcliffe's Maori studies. This is a great pity because there are some real gems. Viewed against others who made a specialty of the Maori over a similar period like Denton of Wanganui and Iles of Rotorua, Radcliffe measures up very well, avoiding cliché shots. On the other hand, bigger concerns like Tanner Bros. drew heavily on Government Tourism sources to obtain a representative selection of Maori studies, some of which may have been made years before Radcliffe appeared on the scene. So I don't think they qualify to be pitted against him in this instance. Radcliffe's Maori studies are fresh and vital in comparison. What is more, they have a directness and spontaneity, a situation which may be attributed to the fact that he did not have a studio at his disposal, nor any grab-bag of artifacts to enhance their ethnicity. Sadly he only published 50 Maori studies. His only fall from grace in this specialty may be the fact that he included a couple of "Maori Belle" portraits as well as cards from his friend Frank Denton.

A serious attempt at dating Radcliffe postcards has never been ventured. In "Wish you were Here", Alan and I floated a conservative commencement date of 1909. Since then I have kept my eye open for indicators and have found a postally used card which goes back to 1906. This postmark is on one of Radcliffe & Stewart stereograph postcards. When it comes to real photo postcards, I have one of the "Esplanade, St. Clair 500" date stamped March 1908. This card is different in many ways.

First, there is a white 5mm border around the view.

