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EDITORIAL

YOU HAVE a right to expect a few profound words – a millenial utterance. So, let's see.

For New Zealanders it comes easier to talk about centennials than about millenials. Mind you, Leslie Adkin for one had no doubts that there were citizens on this coast much earlier than 1000 AD, those whom he labelled 'Waitaha', makers of hog-backed, tanged adzes, of chevronned ornamentation, scourge of the moa, destined to drift ever southwards.

This millenium is a curious concept. Those with the longest recorded history, living in Iraq, Egypt or China, don't generally measure themselves against the Christian era, nor, indeed should they be impressed with its duration, since their regions have been settled for about 5000 years. My own turangawaewae is in the Orkney Islands, where the earliest carbon-dates indicate settled communities by the middle of the fourth millenium BC. More recently, we Orcadians have contributed to six generations of New Zealanders. So what's a thousand years here or there?

For Otaki, it's easier to think about 100 years than a thousand. How has the place changed? A nice way to judge that is to be found in Margaret Long's article about the centenary of the Otaki Cottage Hospital. She contrasts two celebrations: the official opening in 1899, and the celebration of its centenary by Otaki Community Health Trust in 1999. As I turned from her summary of the late Victorian journalist's story to her own account of this year's event I was struck by several contrasts. In the 1899 story, 15 people are mentioned by name. The only woman mentioned was the Queen. In 1999, 7 of the 8 named people are women (although a number of men who were present have been key supporters and workers with the OCHT). The only Maori named in 1899 was Wi Parata, formerly a member of parliament. In 1999, half of those named were Maori, including the two presiding ministers – both women, into the bargain (in 1899 they had a bishop on hand).

The presence of Premier and Governor ensured a solid turnout of local body gentry in 1899; Ann Chapman and Anne Aitcheson took this slot in 1999. The core ceremony in 1899 was a succession of toasts at the pub, in the full English protocol, and the efforts of a Maori band to conform to expectations drew a sarcastic commnent; in 1999 the procedural framework was Maori – calling on, blessing and waiata. The cottage hospital has served the people of Otaki for a hundred years. These proceedings honoured the Maori donors of the land, and all the mothers, midwives, nursing staff, aides and cooks who have been part of its story. We should not honour old buildings or institutions for their age alone, but for how they remind us of service given by and for generations of men, women and children from all cultures.

People often bemoan the present age. We've lost some of that grand style, but gained in intimacy; lost our deference to authority, but gained respect for more social groups; lost some of the British way, and gained some of the Maori. Become more like New Zealanders, I suppose.