Soldiers and School Children
Military performances and national identity during the Prince of Wales’ 1920 visit to Wellington

Christopher McDonald
Victoria University of Wellington/University of New South Wales
chris.mcdonald@vuw.ac.nz

Early royal visits to New Zealand were episodes of intense symbolic activity played out on an urban scale. These events are generally understood as affirmations of British identity. However, this paper shows how the Prince of Wales’ 1920 tour of New Zealand was also used to promote the distinct character of the young dominion. The research examines two military performances in Wellington: a review at Newtown Park and a quasi-military parade of school children in parliament grounds. Analysis of these events reveals dual narratives in which New Zealanders both reaffirm their links with the Motherland and acknowledge their own difference. The two sources of identity are found to be compatible but dependent on malleable images. The paper argues that military images and narratives were flexible enough to convey New Zealanders’ “imperial” and “national” allegiances. However, while a dual narrative operated successfully during the “Children’s Day” display, the more conventional military review at Newtown Park failed because it was unable to reconcile the antipodean traits of discipline and vigour. Both performances required a degree of improvisation because Wellington lacked dedicated sites for military ceremonial. The choice of venues contributed to the disparate outcomes of the two events. In parliament grounds, school groups exhibited the health and dynamism of New Zealand’s youth but also reinforced the latent order and unity of New Zealand’s pre-eminent “national” space. At Newtown Park, the measured performance of troops and returned soldiers failed to bring to life claims about the battlefield prowess and down-to-earth resilience of the “digger”.

Military Narratives within Royal Visit Discourse on Identity

In 1920, the Prince of Wales travelled to Australia and New Zealand as the emissary of monarch and Motherland. His mission conveyed Britain’s gratitude for the terrible sacrifices made by its dominions during the Great War. The visit also conveyed a positive message about imperial solidarity and the strategic value of Britain’s possessions.¹ Speaking at the government’s lunch for

¹In UHPH 14: Landscapes and ecologies of urban and planning history, Proceedings of the 12th conference of the Australasian Urban History / Planning History Group, edited by Morten Gjerde and Emina Petrović (Wellington: Australasian Urban History / Planning History Group and Victoria University of Wellington, 2014).
the Prince of Wales in Wellington, Prime Minister Massey observed that, despite its “dreadful scourge,” the war had produced a “more solidly united” empire.\(^2\) The prince’s tour was presented as a continuation of this wartime project. As one souvenir publication claimed: “The Royal visit...serves more strongly to cement those ties of Empire which the common sacrifice from every corner of the World welded so strongly during the years of War.”\(^3\)

At the same time, the 1920 royal tour appeared to herald a new post-war era for imperial relations. London’s *Daily Telegraph* observed: “A new volume in the history of the British peoples is about to be written, and there is none better fitted to pen what we may describe as a preface than the Heir-Apparent”. On his return from an earlier visit to Canada, the prince used the newly coined term “British Commonwealth” to describe “a partnership of free nations” based on “national patriotism”:

> ...the people in the Old Country must realise that the patriotism of the Dominions is national patriotism, and not merely loyalty to Great Britain. It is loyalty to their own institutions, loyalty to their life, and loyalty to their Government and to the British Empire, of which Great Britain, like the Dominions, is only one part.\(^4\)

Like other British dominions, New Zealand was said to have been transformed by the war. As it entered the “new epoch,” the country acquired its own voice in international affairs and a greater role on the world stage.\(^5\) Independent participation at the League of Nations and the Peace Conference at Versailles were emblematic of this new status (Aronson 86). Drawing attention to these events, the Prince of Wales concluded: “‘[The British Empire’s] young nations are now universally recognised as nations, as they are signatories to the Peace Treaties which they fought so magnificently to secure.’”\(^6\) The prince repeated this observation on arrival in Auckland when he offered New Zealand’s presence at Versailles as a sign that “this young nation has nobly won its spurs”. This metaphor interpreted wartime sacrifices as a right-of-passage. Suggesting battle honours and an ancient chivalric code, the figure of speech provided the dominant theme in the prince’s reply to the Government Address. As such, it set the tone for the 1920 royal visit by depicting New Zealand’s coming-of-age as a military image.\(^7\)

Depictions of war as a right-of-passage were closely aligned with images of rebirth or rejuvenation, and the interplay between these two ideas helped to shape claims about New Zealand’s identity in the discourse of the 1920 royal visit. Referring to the empire as a “‘body’” which was “exhausted” by war and prone to “‘disintegrating influences’”, the British Prime Minister predicted that the prince’s recent visit to Canada and his forthcoming tour of Australasia would act as a “‘tonic’” and would have a “‘consolidating, bracing, and reinvigorating effect upon the whole Empire.’”\(^8\) Once again, the message emanating from London was echoed at the government lunch in Wellington. Massey observed that New Zealanders often referred to Britain as “‘the old country’” but never spoke of “‘the Old Empire.’” This was because the empire included “young and virile nations.” Significantly, Massey’s prescription for restoring youthfulness and vigour to the British world looked not to the monarchy and the imperial centre but to “‘new countries’” on the periphery.\(^9\) In the aftermath of the Great War, Massey’s implication was clear. As the youngest of Britain’s dominions, New Zealand had an important role to play in maintaining Greater Britain’s vitality.\(^10\) The Prince of Wales responded to Massey’s address with his own optimistic vision of the empire’s future. Interpreting these remarks, Wellington’s *Dominion* newspaper attributed the prince’s confidence to the fact that he had witnessed “the British race prove its undying youth on the battlefields of Europe.”\(^11\)
Provisional Military Spaces and Evolving Commemorative Practices

In the aftermath of the Great War, such rhetoric drew attention to Wellington’s deficiencies as a place for war commemoration and other forms of military ceremony. While the Prince of Wales’ visit was being planned, several initiatives were underway which sought to inscribe the city with new commemorative spaces dedicated to fallen soldiers. None of the projects was instigated by the royal visit, but several attempts were made to co-opt the prince’s support and engage him in foundation rituals.

If the New Zealand Government had been receptive to these efforts, the 1920 royal visit would have left a permanent spatial footprint not just in Wellington but in towns and cities throughout the country. War memorials and returned servicemen’s clubs were under development in many locations and the Prince of Wales was the ideal person to lay foundation stones, unveil monuments or open chapels and clubrooms. However, the Minister for Internal Affairs excluded all but a handful of such ceremonies from the prince’s itinerary. He justified this measure by claiming that too many official functions would tire the prince and prevent him meeting the people of New Zealand. In Wellington, the minister’s proscription meant that the Prince of Wales did not lay the foundation
stone for a new commemorative landscape at the “Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Memorial Cemetery” in Karori. Nor did the prince attach his name to a proposed Anglican cathedral and military chapel, although this ceremony was briefly included in the Wellington itinerary.

Even if time had allowed, Wellington’s other commemorative projects were too undeveloped to attract royal patronage. There was no prospect of the prince dedicating a national war memorial during his visit. A government committee had just begun its deliberations on this subject, and a lively public debate was in progress between the proponents of “utilitarian” schemes and those who favoured a conventional monument. Meanwhile, Wellington City Council had yet to decide whether it would contribute to the national project or build a separate citizen’s memorial honouring the capital’s war dead.

Wellington’s commemorative landscape was not entirely empty. In 1920, the local branch of the Returned Soldiers’ Association (RSA) built a temporary “cenotaph” in a small triangle of open space on the corner of Lambton Quay and Charlotte Street (now Molesworth Street) (Figure 1). This simple white obelisk was modelled on its famous counterpart in Whitehall. The Wellington monument was erected in time for Anzac Day, 1920, and served as the venue for a children’s wreath-laying ceremony on April 24th. On Anzac Day itself, the city’s main commemorative service was held at the Town Hall. However, the RSA invited the relatives and friends of fallen soldiers to place wreaths at the foot of the diminutive cenotaph. Many did so and, by evening, the obelisk was surrounded by floral tributes.

Although permanent spaces for military ceremony were slow to develop in the capital, New Zealand’s post-war commemorative practices were rapidly evolving and acquiring a distinctive character. April 25th was the anniversary of Australian and New Zealand troops landing at Gallipoli. However, by 1920, Anzac Day services had already been recast to honour all New Zealanders who had fallen in war. Prime Minister Massey considered making the day a statutory holiday despite advice from Lord Milner, the Colonial Secretary, that the anniversary of armistice on November 11th was the preferred date for an “Imperial Holiday”. Wellington’s Dominion newspaper promoted Anzac Day in an editorial entitled “War Commemoration.” Published on 24th April, the leader argued that the “Battle of the Landing” remained uppermost in New Zealanders’ experience and recollections of the war. Regardless of the form commemoration took in Britain and in other British dominions, April 25th deserved to be “perpetuated” because it would continue to have “historic meaning” for New Zealanders and Australians.

The two anniversaries indicate how New Zealand’s commemorative practices were diverging from those of Britain. Lord Milner’s “Imperial Holiday” celebrated “victory and peace” whereas remembrance services for the Gallipoli landing emphasised a “great beginning”. As the Dominion’s editorial observed, the original Anzac Day “witnessed the opening of the first chapter in the history of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force”. It offered the “promise” of “glory” and marked the occasion when “our untried soldiers first gave proof of their martial quality.” Anzac Day’s significance – why it “strikes home to the heart of the people of [New Zealand]” was captured in a sermon delivered during a special April 25th service at St. Paul’s Cathedral in London. Here, the congregation was reminded that “the glorious deeds which the youngest nations had performed on the battlefields of the ancients...gave to the Australians and New Zealanders what they needed – historic traditions.”
In February 1920, the President of the NZRSA, Dr E. Boxer, proposed a “general Anzac Day memorial service” which aimed to standardise observance and unite the country in a truly national event. Modelled on a military funeral, Boxer’s ceremony was “solemn”, “sacred” and performed on an urban scale. Troops and returned men paraded through city streets to a town hall or similar place of assembly. The procession was “as fully military as possible”. It was led by a “firing party, marching with reversed arms”, followed by bands and a “gun carriage with wreaths and attendant bearers”. The service itself was designed to produce a dramatic, almost mystical effect as though the RSA’s president was trying to summon the war dead from their distant graves on the battlefields of Europe. According to Boxer’s script, the stage was draped in purple and black, and there was a line of cypress trees along the front of the platform. The ceremony focused on a “reading desk” and a “symbolic bier”. The desk was covered with a Union Jack and a New Zealand Ensign in front of which hung a white floral cross. Two simple white wreaths lay on top of the desk, one on each of the flags. Boxer’s final poignant gesture was a single soldier’s hat placed on top of the bier.

Into this active but provisional commemorative landscape travelled the Prince of Wales. He arrived in Auckland on April 23rd, just days before the fifth anniversary of the Gallipoli landing. The timing was fortuitous, but much significance was read into the fact that the prince joined his former comrades for the first Anzac Day celebration since full repatriation of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force (NZEF). The service in the Auckland Town Hall followed Boxer’s model and the prince’s presence gave authority to the new commemorative practices being trialled (Turley 38).


**Military Review at Newtown Park**

Military displays confronted the Prince of Wales at every turn. From its earliest draft, the royal tour programme contained military reviews in all four of New Zealand’s main cities. Elsewhere, plans were made for ranks of returned men to be drawn up on railway platforms and recreation grounds because no civic reception was complete without an opportunity for local “diggers” to meet the heir to the throne. At the Army’s General Headquarters in Wellington, Colonel James Sleeman was placed in charge of military arrangements for the royal tour and he left “nothing to chance” when he prepared Preliminary Orders for the military ceremonies. He drew up a detailed plan showing the exact formation of the parades at the four big reviews.

The configuration of troops conveyed a clear message about intergenerational succession and the persistent strength of the Empire’s armed forces. As viewed from the saluting base, Sleeman’s “order of sequence” ran from left to right across the ground (Figure 2). The series began with the veterans of earlier military campaigns. These elderly men were followed by
sailors and soldiers who had recently returned from the war in Europe. Next came members of the Army Nursing Service and the various women’s “auxiliaries” (WRAFs, WNRs and WAACs) who had also served overseas. Completing the parade were the “close columns” of New Zealand’s present and future fighting forces: companies of territorials and battalions of senior cadets.30

In case the symbolism of parade order was overlooked, official commentaries assigned meaning to the spatial and temporal relationships among the different military groups. Replying to the Mayor of Wellington’s address of welcome, the Prince of Wales made specific mention of “the great numbers of veterans of three wars who have been good enough to parade for me everywhere.” The prince observed:

The impression made upon me by those three generations, the old, the present, and the new, is very strong. In the older veterans, I recall the early struggles of the colony to spread British civilisation in the wild. In the veterans of the South African and European wars, Pakeha and Maori alike, I saw the great development of the Dominion as one of the bulwarks of British unity, freedom, and peace. In the cadets and the school children I read a splendid future, certain to be yours, if your children live up to the example of their fathers, who won, and made, and fought, to defend this lovely and fertile land.31
Sleeman’s orders also described the correct military protocol for conducting a review. As the prince arrived at the saluting base, the parade stood to attention; returned men removed their hats; the guard of honour presented arms; and a royal salute was fired while King’s and regimental colours were unfurled and lowered in the prince’s honour. After six bars of the National Anthem, the parade shouldered arms and waited for the prince to begin his inspection. At the end of the review, the prince returned to the saluting base to receive three hearty cheers and a second royal salute concluded the proceedings. Efficiently handled, the whole ceremony might take no more than 30 minutes.

When the government announced plans for the Wellington visit, the Minister for Internal Affairs asked the City Council to “consider which of the City parks would be most convenient” for the military review. Brief consideration may have been given to staging the event at the Basin Reserve, however Newtown Park was named in first published. This choice of venue reinforced the park’s status as the capital’s de facto parade ground and confirmed the site’s long-standing association with the military.

The Public Works Department built temporary stands to accommodate nearly 1000 people at Newtown Park. The “Royal Stand” housed the prince and his entourage together with the prime minister, cabinet ministers and leading military figures. Behind this, the less exclusive “Royal Enclosure” provided seating for members of parliament, local councillors and other invited guests. An estimated 40,000 spectators crowded onto the embankments which surrounded three sides of the ground.

Wellington’s review followed Sleeman’s prescription almost to the letter, although the lieutenant-colonel’s parade order was altered to give greater prominence to returned servicemen. Returned soldiers and sailors formed a double line across the full width of the parade ground directly in front of the “Royal Stand”. Territorials and cadets stood in “mass formation” behind the returned men. About fifty veterans from South Africa and the New Zealand Wars were also present. Many of these men were too old to stand for long periods. So, the veterans were allocated prestigious seats on the perimeter of the parade ground, just to the left of the Royal Stand. Returned nurses and members of the women’s auxiliary services were stationed on the embankment immediately to the right of the larger and less exclusive “Royal Enclosure”.

The prince was received at the ground by Major-General Sir E.W.C. Chaytor and introduced to other senior military figures before he took up his position on the reviewing stand (Figure 3). After the royal salute, veterans and returned servicemen filed past the prince and shook his hand “in rapid procession”. Servicewomen followed. Then the prince presented decorations to some 100 men and women who had served with distinction during the war. When this phase of the proceedings was complete, the prince left the reviewing platform to inspect the ranks of territorials and cadets drawn up on the field.

Described in this manner, the Newtown Park review presented a picture of order and discipline. It reproduced a centuries-old ritual which maintained continuity with British military practices and values. The Evening Post reported: “[The] various units flying their colours, made a most imposing sight.” In truth, the review’s expressive power derived from memories and associations rather than spectacle. There were no mass manoeuvres or impressive displays of horsemanship and weaponry. Battle honours from the recent war meant that the men and boys assembled on the parade ground could lay claim to British military traditions without offering further proofs of discipline and capability. So, the ranks of soldiers and cadets stood impassively on the grass and the whole scene was the subject of quiet contemplation. As troops and onlookers waited for the prince to arrive, the mood at the park was a mixture of melancholy and anticipation:

The whole spectacle was one of quiet beauty and impressiveness. The returned soldiers’ mufti and the khaki uniforms of the Territorials and Senior Cadets were thrown up well against the green sward, while the background was formed by the sombre-coloured mass of spectators in winter garb, fringed on the outskirts by tall rows of pine trees in their darkest green.

The physical setting for the review helped to produce the crowd’s sombre and reflective mood. It was not just the backdrop of brooding pines which had this effect. Newtown Park was “historic ground” where, six years earlier, citizens bade farewell to a sizable contingent of the NZEF. Early drafts of reinforcements were mustered and dispatched from the same location. Recalling these occasions “evoked many sad and proud memories”. Depicted as a hallowed military site, Newtown Park was Wellington’s closest approximation to a dedicated military space where the ephemera of a performance could be reinforced by the permanent symbolism of the place itself.

Children’s Demonstration in Parliament Grounds

There was another “military” performance on prince’s second day in Wellington. The “children’s demonstration” in parliament grounds imitated many of the features of the previous day’s review.
Indeed, early plans for the royal visit combined school children and returned soldiers in a single massive parade at Newtown Park. Transport problems caused the children’s gathering to be moved to a more central location.\(^{45}\) But the change in venue did not uncouple the symbolic relationship between the two events. The demonstration continued the inter-generational “human timeline” described in Sleeman’s orders and remarked upon by the prince during his reply to Wellington’s civic address. During the “Children’s Day” display, contingents from the city’s schools modelled characteristics which resembled much-admired traits attributed to New Zealand soldiers. By assembling 10,000 children in the dominion’s pre-eminent “national” space, the demonstration showed that a “rising generation” of New Zealanders possessed traditional martial qualities such as loyalty and discipline. In this way, the parade of young Britons demonstrated New Zealand’s ability to maintain ties with the Motherland and fill the ranks of future imperial armies (N.Z. School Journal 191).


These objectives are evident in the military terminology which describes the demonstration. Children were “marshalled” in the streets around Parliament. Schools were organised in six “columns” and were “fallen in” with “a fair approach to military precision”. They were “armed” with paper flags and marched to Parliament “in formation” led by city bands. Each school was identified by a purpose-made banner. Like regimental colours, these standards featured the schools’ signature colours and mottos (N.Z. School Journal 220-225).\(^{46}\) Bringing the children into Parliament Grounds was a “difficult manoeuvre” which even “skilled troops” would find challenging. The “parade ground” was marked out “in true military fashion” with signed positions for every school.\(^{47}\) When all the groups were in place, children stood in “massed formation” and waited for the prince carry out an “inspection” of the “ranks”. Boys and girls were instructed to “come to attention and salute” when the prince approached. The children were told to “stand at ease” after the prince passed by (Figure 4).\(^{48}\)

No real troops took part in Wellington’s “Children’s Day” celebration however uniformed cadets provided an overt connection with the armed forces. 1500 senior cadets and naval trainees formed a “guard of honour” along both sides of the main driveway through Parliament Grounds. Cadets also
lined the perimeter of the grounds along Molesworth Street. The royal motorcade stopped at the corner of Lambton Quay and Bowen Street and the prince walked up the drive between the lines of boy-soldiers. In effect, the demonstration began with an informal inspection of future recruits (N.Z. School Journal 207).

New Zealand’s military cadet system offered rudimentary military training to schoolboys and these child-soldiers featured prominently during the royal visit. To British observers, the cadet system was a colonial novelty which nonetheless promoted traditional English values. One chronicler of the 1920 royal tour praised the programme for bringing a British “public school” ethos to boys’ education:

...the system of cadet-training now in force in New Zealand...is doing wonders in the matter of infusing the best public-school spirit into previously unkempt national schoolboys and larrikins, teaching them to play the game, giving them a pride in themselves, and interesting them in physical culture, and in the duties of citizenship...(Cotes 61)

The cadets provided an unusually versatile image within royal visit discourse. As well as being the hybridised product of metropolitan and colonial cultures, the boy soldiers could evoke military and civilian worlds and they could bridge between childhood and adult life. The prince recognised some of these possibilities in his speech at the government lunch in Wellington. He linked military training in schools with New Zealand’s distinguish war record, and he described the cadet programme as an effective way to rebuild the country’s defence capability. At the same time, the prince drew attention to the economic benefits of the cadet system. By following “in the footsteps of past generations”, these young New Zealanders would learn how to “serve their country in peace-time” by harnessing its “natural resources and industry”. In this way, the prince reinforced connections between military values and civilian life. Furthermore, he assigned martial attributes not just to troops and cadets but also to school children and the New Zealand population at large.

Martial music added to the military atmosphere in parliament grounds. Before the prince arrived, the band from H.M.S. Renown entertained the children by playing “rousing patriotic airs”. While school groups were being inspected, an 1100-strong children’s choir sang “patriotic” or “national” songs including The British Grenadiers and Hearts of Oak. The first song recognised that the prince was an officer in the Grenadier Guards. The second was a traditional naval anthem which the choir performed as a compliment to the officers and men of H.M.S. Renown.

Wellington’s school children received a “souvenir card” as a memento of the historic event. The card’s central feature is an informal portrait of the Prince of Wales in military uniform. The prince appears “in khaki, with his happy smile, and a cigarette in hand”. Relaxed, casual, and framed by a Maori decorative motif, he is the picture of the “Digger Prince”. The prince’s portrait is flanked by sketches depicting battle scenes, the Straits of Dover, Captain Cook’s Endeavour and the Renown at sea. These images confirm the military and naval themes of the royal visit and also draw attention to geographical similarities between the British Isles and New Zealand. The idea of an “island home” and a sea-borne British diaspora is also conveyed in a short poem composed by the card’s designer. In text and image, the souvenir reminded Wellington’s children of their British origins and linked this heritage to an unbroken tradition of military service. The demonstration did likewise. By performing like little troopers, children signalled their readiness to maintain links with the Motherland and discharge their duty towards the empire.
Alternative Reading of the Review at Newtown Park

An alternative reading of events at Newtown Park shows that the review was compromised from the start by flawed planning, poor training and scarce equipment. Hoping to conceal these weaknesses, Lieutenant-Colonel Sleeman scripted an undemanding static display which assigned fundamentally passive roles to the territorials and cadets. He designed a simplified ceremony without weapons, horses or even a march past. 56 Aside from the prince and the rest of the review party, the only active participants were the returned servicemen and women as they stepped forward for the perfunctory handshake or to receive their medals.

Shoddy construction by the Public Works Department deprived even this measured performance of any dignity. Seats collapsed in the Royal Enclosure displacing official guests onto the field near the saluting platform. To the vast crowds on the embankments this was an invitation to occupy the ground as well. When it came time for the prince to inspect troops and cadets, he was surrounded by a throng of enthusiastic onlookers. 56 The chaotic scenes which ensued underscored the fragility of claims about the martial spirit of New Zealanders.

The review presented the troubling image of troops standing rooted to the spot while spectators marched animatedly onto the parade ground. This alarming role reversal made it difficult to depict the territorials as vigorous self-sufficient types who combined a healthy distaste for authority with a rough-and-ready ability to get the job done. Applied to “rough riders” in South Africa or “diggers” during the recent war in Europe, this appealing caricature had often been employed to excuse a lack of polish during military ceremonies. When the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York visited Wellington, mounted troopers cut dramatic figures as they processed through city streets. Their horsemanship was largely self-taught and their manoeuvres lacked precision. Nevertheless, their appearance elicited admiration and a sense of pride. In the royal visit discourse of 1901, the adventurous untamed spirit of these rugged, supposedly rural men on horseback was superior to the more disciplined yet docile character of the professional British “Tommy”. 57

Nineteen years later, this characterisation was entirely missing in accounts of the unruly Newtown Park review. Sleeman’s precautions stripped the event of panoply and colour, and these omissions distanced Newtown Park from the grand military performances staged for royalty “at Home”. Under more favourable circumstances, the edited ceremony might have confirmed the New Zealanders’ aversion to “tin soldiering”. 58 However, Sleeman’s review also lacked opportunities to depict the resilience of the “digger” or the swagger of mounted volunteers. These absences narrowed the symbolic repertoire of the review and limited the performance’s contribution to royal visit discourse about an emerging national identity.

As a result, the military display bore little relationship to extravagant claims about military prowess circulating in royal visit discourse. Disarmed and immobilised, the formation of men and boys on the parade ground evoked memories of the recent war but could not bring to life the distinctive qualities which had earned New Zealand servicemen their battle honours. Instead of supporting the performance, the venue drew attention to the event’s shortcomings. The immensity of the arena further diminished the display and made it impossible for most spectators to follow the proceedings. A poor turnout by returned servicemen and the motionless ranks of territorials and cadets stationed in the centre of the field meant that much of the parade ground remained unclaimed. 59 The
downsized review combined with the unprecedented crowd meant that conditions were ripe for the unscripted events which disrupted Sleeman’s carefully planned show. First, onlookers became “restive”; then they began “encroaching on the forbidden ground”; finally, they “took complete charge of the parade grounds.” The scene at Newtown Park quickly deteriorated and began to resemble a bizarre parody of the solemn military ceremony described in the tour programme.

Sleeman may have taken consolation from the fact that military personnel performed well. Returned soldiers demonstrated their resourcefulness by holding back the crowd. The territorials’ “steadiness on parade was noteworthy” although, after the inspection, some of the younger cadets broke ranks to join the crush of people around the prince’s car. However, in symbolic terms, servicemen and civilians could not be easily separated. The military narratives in royal visit discourse attempted to generalise attributes like discipline, loyalty, bravery and self-sacrifice; applying these martial qualities to New Zealand’s population at large. This trope was important for the construction of identity because it allowed figures like the colonial “rough rider” and the antipodean “digger” to represent the nation and explain peacetime achievements as well as prowess on the battlefield. The Newtown Park review undermined such claims because the public’s behaviour was so demonstrably different from that being modelled or rewarded on the parade ground. There was no concealing the fact that a large section of the crowd appeared to disregard military values and turned a dignified ceremony into a melee.

**Dual Reading of Children’s Demonstration at Parliament**

![Figure 5: “View of the Gathering.” Published in *N.Z. School Journal*. July 1920. (page 211) Photographer: unknown. Reproduced with the permission of Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, N.Z. File print: S-L 1031 VERSO.](image)
The simulated military review at in parliament grounds combined discipline and vigour in a single convincing performance. Like real military reviews, the children’s demonstrations involved large numbers of participants in a series of coordinated actions. Results were judged in terms of complexity and precision (Figure 5). Successful displays were hailed as triumphs of organisation and discipline. At the same time, the demonstrations contained moments of spontaneity. During these outbursts, the children’s uncontained enthusiasm attested to intense loyalty and a deep affection for the royal family. The youngsters’ exuberance also exhibited the energy and potential of the rising generation. The Prince of Wales’ reported reactions to the demonstrations acknowledged the dual qualities on display. He described the children’s actions as the product of “splendid training and discipline”. He advised his young audience: “I am going to tell my Father & Mother, the King & Queen, what a fine & loyal future generation is growing up in this Dominion” (Prince of Wales 1920). At the same time, the prince recognised that the youngsters formed a “sturdy and promising race” and new “breed” of “young Britons”. With these remarks, he gave tacit support to the claim that New Zealand children were not just loyal British subjects but were also healthier and more robust than their European counterparts.

This contention featured prominently in the discourse on “difference”. New Zealand’s unusually robust children recalled earlier assertions that colonial troops were physically superior to British conscripts and professional soldiers in the Imperial Army. During the 1901 royal visit, the mounted volunteers who escorted the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York through Wellington were depicted as exemplars of strength, fitness and the virtues of outdoor work. In 1920, the picture was somewhat different. After four years of war, New Zealand’s territorial force was sadly depleted and the demeanour of returned soldiers could not be predicted. Consequently, it was more difficult for military personnel to represent the critical mixture of qualities which underpinned the distinctive identity of New Zealander’s. For the Prince of Wales’ tour, mass gatherings of children offered a more reliable way to model not just discipline and order but also the vigorous loyalty and persistent vitality of the young nation.

This substitution helped to conflate idealised depictions of the New Zealand soldier with flattering images of the nation’s school children. The children were “strong”, “well-nourished” and “red cheeked” and they were distinguished by their “fine appearance and bearing”. (Cotes 64) When the prince visited Waitaki Boys’ High School near Oamaru, he was welcomed by a “magnificent assembly of boys, perfect in physique”. This message was transmitted to London where the Times reported that the Waitaki boys were “glowing with lusty physical health” and the Daily Telegraph described the lads as an “assembly of solid, big-framed, well set-up boys” who received the prince with “energy” and “full-throated cheers”. More than 30,000 children toured H.M.S. Renown while it was in New Zealand. To their Royal Navy hosts, these “bright-eyed and efficient” children were “the picture of health and happiness”. The ship’s magazine reported: “Never have such children been seen in Europe. There was not a weed or a degenerate among them...” The children’s countenance was all the more remarkable because they were not a favoured “selection from the various schools” but a representative cross section of society. These flattering portraits of the children supported a broader argument that the British “race” had not just adapted to life in the Antipodes but was thriving “under conditions fresh and far from its source” (Cotes 48; Turley 33).
A similar mix of attributes was on display in parliament grounds. When he briefed organisers of the "Children's Day" demonstration, the chairman of Wellington’s Education Board emphasised the need for a balance between spontaneity and control. W.H.L. Foster stressed that the children’s display of loyalty should be enthusiastic but “always orderly”. Referring to an incident in Auckland when children mobbed the prince’s car, he warned: “There must be no breaking ranks [because] that was bad discipline”. On the day of the performance, few of the capital’s children obeyed Foster’s instructions to the letter. However, the ranks held and, if the conduct of some spectators was overlooked, the demonstration could be judged a success. The Dominion reported: “The children were never at any moment other than extremely orderly and well-behaved.” Despite their high spirits, “they were brought into the grounds in an orderly fashion, led by their teachers on to their markers on the parade ground, and there kept in rows in massed formation to await the arrival of the royal visitor.” The commissioner of police boasted about the “marvellous conduct” of the young people “who seemed to respond so readily to the control of those in authority”. The prince’s chief-of-staff was so impressed he informed the King that New Zealand’s school children were “extraordinarily well disciplined”. Admiral Halsey praised the dominion for its handling of young people, giving credit to the state-run education system and the distinctive Australasian practice of providing military training in schools. Halsey concluded: “This country is undoubtedly head and shoulders above every other country that I have ever been to with regard to the organisation and training of the children...”

At the same time, accounts of the demonstration emphasised the almost uncontainable excitement of the participants. When the prince entered Parliament Grounds: “Cheering and flag-waving erupted” and “thousands of young hearts poured forth their fervent patriotism”. A “storm of cheering broke loose” and the “lusty young voices” delivered a “magnificent and hearty welcome”. The *N.Z. School Journal* reported: “Thousands of flags, waved by sturdy and energetic arms, fluttered merrily in the air” (208). The display of school banners “lent a carnival air to the scene”. As metaphors for the children’s performance, the terms “review” and “carnival” capture how the event fluctuated between solemn military ceremony and festive abandon. Sometimes the two conditions merged to create a single moment. Witnessed from the top of parliament buildings: “the scene presented by the orderly great mass of people was quite without parallel in the history of Wellington”. Simultaneously, the grounds were alive with movement: “Repeatedly waves of cheers like passing rays of sunlight moved across the grounds, and thousands of flags sent coloured ripples eddying about”. At other points in the ceremony, order and vitality followed one another in quick succession. As the proceedings drew to a close, children dutifully sang two verses of the national anthem while the prince stood to attention on the steps of Parliament: “Then came the order, ‘Three Cheers for the Prince of Wales,’ and they were given in such a manner as to leave no room for doubting the loyalty of Wellington’s children” (*N.Z. School Journal* 208).

More frequently, fragments of “carnival” and “review” were interspersed as the spontaneous response of the young participants met with constraints imposed by the organisers’ careful planning. Most school groups were arranged in three long columns which ran from north to south, parallel to the front of parliament buildings. There were no rope barriers, although assembly areas were delineated by wooden planks and sheets of “rubberoid” laid out on the grass. During the ceremony, the columns retained their overall structure but individuals within the ranks became animated and some were almost overcome with excitement. Few children waited quietly for the inspection or stood to attention when the prince approached. Nor did they keep their paper Union Jacks lowered until the designated time for a “flag rally”. Instead, when the prince entered Parliament Grounds there was a “mighty roar of enthusiasm”. During a “perfect deluge of applause”, flags were thrown and one harmlessly grazed the prince’s cheek. As the prince walked among the school groups: “the joy of the children knew no bounds, and they cheered and cheered until they could cheer no more”.

**Conclusion**

At the Newtown Park review, vitality and individual agency were suppressed in a misguided attempt to preserve military order. The unintended outcome was a shameful role reversal when spectators stormed the parade ground while the ranks of soldiers remained impassive and immobilised in the centre of the field. At the children’s demonstration in parliament grounds, the dual attributes of discipline and dynamism were modelled in a single performance which presented New Zealand’s distinctiveness in a positive light. The principal message of the Children’s Day display was continuity. The fervent patriotism of individuals and the disciplined conformity of school groups connected the children with British values and military traditions. To the prince’s hosts, the vigorous displays of affection and the sheer number of participants reinforced New Zealand’s claim to be the most loyal of British dominions. At the same time, the children’s exuberance conveyed the idea that young New Zealanders were healthier and happier than their cousins “at Home”. So, the children’s hearty
welcomes served two purposes. They provided assurances that a new generation of Britons was being raised under the Southern Cross. They also characterised young New Zealand as a robust variant of British stock which would reinvigorate the Empire and secure the future prosperity of their country.

2 Evening Post “Prime Minister Proposes. ‘Our Royal Guest.’” 7 May 1920:7.
9 Evening Post “Prime Minister Proposes. ‘Our Royal Guest.’” 7 May 1920:7.
12 Minister of Internal Affairs. Draft letter to mayors of towns. [undated] In Prince of Wales Visit 1920 – Correspondence with Minister. ANZ. acc. no. IA1 rec. no. 13/362/-.; Bell, Sir Francis. Telegram to W.J. Napier, 6 March 1920. In Prince of Wales Visit 1920 – Public Functions etc. ANZ. acc. no. IA1 rec. no. 13/362/23.
19 Liverpool, Lord. Telegram to Milner, 30 January 1920; Milner, Lord. Telegram to Liverpool, 8 April 1920; In Telegrams to and from the Secretary of State – 31 January – 2 May 1920. ANZ. ACHK series 16561 acc. no. G5 box/item 21.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.


42 Ibid.


44 Ibid.

45 Hislop. Memo to Bell, 15 March 1920. In Prince of Wales’ Visit 1920 – Conferences Regarding Etc. ANZ. acc. no. IA1 rec. no. 13/362/2; Notes of Meeting held in the Mayor’s Room, Town Hall, 12-3-20. In Prince of Wales Visit 1920 – Conferences Regarding Etc. ANZ. acc. no. IA1 rec. no. 13/362/2.


67 Evening Post “At the Wharf Gates.” 18 June 1901:5.
70 Times “Cable and Telegraphic News.” 18 May 1920:3; Daily Telegraph 19 May 1920.
75 Halsey, Admiral. Letter to King George V, 5 May 1920:6-7. RA. GEO V/O/1548 A.
References


*With the “Renown” in Australasia: The Magazine of H.M.S. “Renown”.* December, 1919, to October, 1920. ATL. P 394.4 WITH 1921.

Abbreviations

ANZ Archives New Zealand (Wellington)
ATL Alexander Turnbull Library
NLNZ National Library of New Zealand
RA Royal Archives