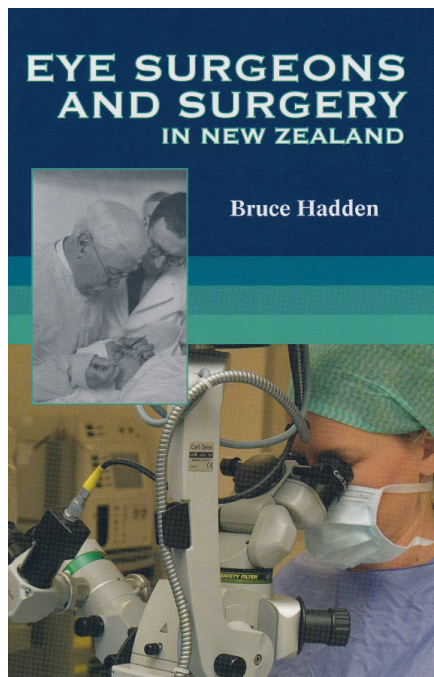


## Eye surgeons and surgery in New Zealand

Bruce Hadden. Published by Wairau Press, [Random House](#), 2012. ISBN 9781927158036.  
Contains 305 pages.

Bruce Hadden's *Eye surgeons and surgery in New Zealand* (Wairau Press, Random House)—a history of eye surgery in New Zealand—was an unexpected pleasure for me to read. (I acquired a copy of the book as Bruce was posting another off at the local Post Office to the current president of the Royal Australia and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists.)



The spectrum of development of the speciality is relevant to all specialities. In 17 chapters and just over 300 pages, acknowledgement is made of the talents and tenacity of those who contributed to ophthalmology. Their careers seem to have a common thread—a clarity of vision, and perspicacity, without obvious perspiration, that we all wish to have more of. Their successes are stunning.

Just like the New Zealand Government was the first to buy a plane from Boeing in 1917, Bruce describes new milestones, technology and techniques in ophthalmology, whose advantages were decreed by common sense, that were assiduously taken on board by New Zealanders. Kiwi ingenuity operated long before the collaboration and clear sightedness of randomised controlled trial data.

It almost seems a breath-taking account of the establishment and exponential development of ophthalmology. As a history of ophthalmology it is interesting, because it shows a variety of personalities and interests from the pioneering to the present, characteristics we most want in New Zealanders. It takes us from the first medical practitioner who arrived in New Zealand in 1833, Dr Hocken in 1862 and Dr Thomas Philson in 1845 whose legacies we have in the form of two libraries. The first medical practitioner recorded to have any interest in eyes was Sir David Monro (1842), of 'impeccable medical lineage' (his great great grandfather was the founder of Edinburgh Medical School and both his great grandfather and grandfather were demonstrators in anatomy there).

Ophthalmology owes its birth to Henry Lindo Ferguson (1858–1948) a foundation member of the Ophthalmological Society of Great Britain, and was involved with the founding of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons.

Sir Randal Elliott (1922–2010), Editor of the *New Zealand Medical Journal* and Chairman of the New Zealand Medical Association, was an ophthalmic surgeon in Wellington, but also 'his influence extended far beyond the eye into the wider fields

of general medical practice, community affairs, road safety, search and rescue, the Order of St John and service in the South Pacific and South East Asia.

Hylton Le Grice returned to New Zealand in 1967 after being senior registrar at Moorfields having ‘worked with Pierse in the design of the first British Keeler operating microscope’ (p 99) gaining large operating experience and assisting with distinguished clients. He served the speciality uniquely with providing lectures to medical students for 14 years single-handed. He served the community as Chairman of Southern Cross, Director of Montana Wines, Director of Metlifecare Ltd, and Chairman of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, awarded the OBE in 1995 and CNZM in 2010.

Travel enabled Dorothy Potter (1922–2009) to admire and be influenced by Professor Ida Mann, the first woman to become a professor of ophthalmology in Britain and to become a professor at Oxford University in any subject. Dr Potter served Masterton as a medical ophthalmologist and became the first woman president of the OSNZ in 1984.

Those provincial were by no means ‘provincial’. Dr Geoffrey Orbell (1909–2007), an ophthalmologist, who served Invercargill and Southland, is perhaps best known for his momentous discovery of the flightless takahe in the Murchison Mountains in November 1948 (they had not been seen since 1898). It was more than ‘good luck,’ (p. 132) since he had been fascinated by it ever since his father showed him a stuffed one in the Otago Museum. They were rewarded by seeing the birds, photographing them on the shores of Lake Despair and seeing the sensational report featured in the *Illustrated London News* and *National Geographic*.

Formalisation procedures dominate the latter half of the book, the formation of RANZCO, of which the author, Bruce Hadden was elected the first New Zealand president in 2002. Included is reference to the ‘*annus horribilis*’ of 1998 for the ophthalmologists—the Commerce Commission’s case against them. The book provides much evidence of what can inspire jealousy. It is apparent that ophthalmologists have high standards. One was prepared to say of a peripheral eye clinic, and quoted on the front page of a newspaper, ‘as undoubtedly the worst facility in the country with no sight (*sic*) of improvement’ p. 134.

The remainder of the book focuses on developments and institutions rather than individuals, which includes an account of New Zealand ophthalmologists in the Pacific and (VOSO) – Volunteer Ophthalmic Services Overseas Charitable Trust. Their work is extensive. Professor Charles McGhee arrived in 1999 to take Ophthalmology into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Academic development occurred exponentially which includes The W. and B. Hadden Chair in Ophthalmology and Translational Vision Research.

This book is an interesting read not least for the talent, flair, laser-like precision, perspicacity some of which is too hyperpixillated, not showing the true perspiration involved of the ophthalmologists. It is a lovely read that no matter what our speciality captivates and inspires. The excellent quality photographs could have been enhanced by an additional photography of Paul Rosser’s ‘brass plaque’—illustrating all these qualities—the number plate of his car reads ‘Eyelid’.

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