

JOHN BEAGLEHOLE

One of my earlier recollections of John Beaglehole concerns a party some time in February 1940 at 6 Messines Road, Karori, when he and Elsie were hosts to John Grierson, Canadian Government Film Commissioner. A more recent memory fastens upon the occasion two weeks before his death when he presided over a small farewell party in the office of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust to the retiring 'office boy' aged 65. These two boundaries hint at the almost Renaissance span of his interests. But, even more, they call attention to the humanity that was so much a part of his personality and which always gave an extra lift to those affairs in which he had had a hand.

A distinguished film producer who had done exciting things with the G.P.O. Film Unit and had something new to say about the propaganda purposes of documentaries was certain to find plenty of kindred spirits at a Beaglehole party. There, especially in the 1930s, were people who still dared to have hopes of a brave new world and where the uncertain could take comfort from being together. The menace of fascism was the only shadow and the statement on the title page of John's poems, published in 1938, that the proceeds were to be used for Spanish medical aid bears witness to this sympathy with its victims. Other evenings in that house were given over to the enjoyment of chamber music and were to lead slowly but directly to the formation of the Wellington Chamber Music Society. Stanley Oliver and the Schola Cantorum were confirming John's love for Bach and introducing others to the Passions and Masses. This was long before L.P. records had reached us.

This first party that I now recall was a jolly one with plenty of good talk and laughter. There was equal laughter at the final party and much of it John himself led. He could so easily have pleaded on that day that Cook demanded his attention (there had been too many interruptions already for his peace of mind), that most of the afternoon might be frittered away, that he did not feel too well, all would have been perfectly honest excuses. But he came to this little gathering because he could not bear to disappoint these admirable but diffident people who valued and loved him and who in fact were using this farewell to one of their members to say thank you to John for the privilege of having known him and for his acceptance of them as colleagues.

John came into the Centennial, later Historical, Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs mainly because of his interest in book production and, to a less extent, because he already had an official position, very much a personal one, and never repeated, as Research Adviser to the Alexander Turnbull Library. Because in those days the Department of Internal Affairs controlled the Library and because the prescription