

Honours List: Getting her

By Phoebe Falconer

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By the standards of non-rugby-related New Zealand history, Dr Claudia Orange's book *The Treaty of Waitangi* was a runaway success.

Twenty years on, the book still rolls off the shelves at the rate of one a day.

For her books on the Treaty, and related work on Pacific and New Zealand history and biography, Dr Orange has been made a Distinguished Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit.

The triumph of *The Treaty of Waitangi* was in part led by the growing importance of the Waitangi Tribunal and increasing disruption at Waitangi Day celebrations.

Born out of Dr Orange's PhD thesis, the book made the Treaty accessible to the public. More recent shorter and illustrated editions have ensured its continuing success.

Dr Orange is well known in academic circles for her work on the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, editing five volumes. She has been a senior historian for the Ministry of Culture and Heritage, and worked on *Te Ara: The Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*, the ministry's online encyclopaedia launched in 2005.

She chaired a series of debates at Te Papa in 2005 and 2006 on issues relating to the Treaty as New Zealand's founding document, and produced a nationwide touring exhibition, *Treaty 2 U*, which did two circuits of the country.

Not bad for an Auckland girl who began her working life as a dental nurse. That palled after 15 years, so Dr Orange went to training college, moving from there to Auckland University and gaining her doctorate in 1984.

She told the *Herald* last year that she was bequeathed a passion for the Treaty by her university role model, Ruth Ross, a historian from North Auckland. Ross had done a lot of research but was unable to continue because of illness.

"She handed the baton over to me," said Dr Orange, who is director of history and Pacific culture at Te Papa and has organised exhibitions on Pacific Islanders and Scottish immigrants in New Zealand in the 20th century.

"It takes years of planning to get these exhibitions organised. We have 10,500 items on display, but another 100,000 in storage."

Dr Orange has been the acting chief historian at the Department of Internal Affairs and is the foundation chairwoman of the National Oral History Association.

For her work in historical research, Dr Orange has been recognised widely. She received the Goodman Fielder Wattie Award twice, the New Zealand 1990 Commemoration Medal, and in 1993 was made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire.

Pretty good for a dental nurse.

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