



Reed, Alfred Hamish 1875 - 1975
Bookseller, publisher, writer, philanthropist

Alfred Hamish Reed, the founder of one of New Zealand's first large publishing firms, was born on 30 December 1875 at Hayes, Middlesex, England, the second of four children of Elisabeth Wild and her husband, James William Reed, a foreman in a brick-field. In 1881 James Reed bought his own brick-field, but the business failed and in 1887 the family emigrated to New Zealand. They arrived at Wellington in April on the *Arawa*, then proceeded to Auckland with about £30 to live on until finding work.

There was little work in Auckland so the family moved north to the kauri gumfields. They settled at Parahaki, near Whangarei, where they bought a few acres of unimproved Crown land. Life was difficult but they were a close-knit family with a faith in God and the future. Alfred attended Whangarei School until a leg injury incapacitated him for two years. He then worked in the gumfields and on the family land with his father. In his spare time he read and also taught himself shorthand, seeing it as a means of escape from the gumfields. In October 1895, aged 19, he went to Auckland to find work.

In Auckland Reed lodged with Samuel and Mary Fisher. He learned to type and on his 20th birthday began working for the New Zealand Typewriter Company as a shorthand typist at 20 shillings a week. In 1897 he was sent south to start a branch of the company in Dunedin. By this

stage he had become engaged to the Fishers' daughter Harriet Isabel (always known as Isabel). The couple were married in Auckland on 28 January 1899; there were no children of the marriage. In 1902 Reed bought the New Zealand Typewriter Company, which had shrunk to the Dunedin office.

Both Alfred and Isabel were committed Christians and members of the Wesleyan Methodist church. Reed had taught Sunday school and been a lay preacher in Auckland, and soon after arriving in Dunedin began teaching classes at Trinity Wesleyan Church. In 1900 he became superintendent of the Sunday school, a position he held until 1914 and again from 1920 for some years.

This involvement led to his importing printed material for the Sunday school, followed by the securing of wholesale agencies. Before long he was running a mail-order business dealing in religious literature. In 1907 he established the Sunday School Supply Stores and in 1911 he sold the typewriter business to work full time as a supplier of religious material. This business was also sold when he joined the 21st Reinforcements in 1916. Reed spent the rest of the war in Trentham and Featherston military camps where his shorthand skills gained him a position on headquarters staff.

After the war he was able to buy back his religious supplies business. Within 20 years he had developed it into a major New Zealand publishing house. In 1922 the firm started publishing its own religious booklets. Reed's nephew, Alexander Wyclif Reed (known as Clif) joined him in 1925 and in 1932 went to Wellington to start a new branch of the business. That year the firm first ventured into book publishing with its involvement in the production of *The letters and journals of Samuel Marsden*. The following year Reed wrote and published *First New Zealand Christmases*, in conjunction with Clif.

Although the firm continued publishing religious literature, its list gradually expanded into other areas, notably New Zealand history, travel and sport. Alfred and Clif Reed both became prolific writers. They also published and encouraged the work of other authors. By concentrating on New Zealand themes and topics the Reed publishing house helped bring the beauty and history of the country to the consciousness of many New Zealanders; however, much of the historical publishing appealed more to book buyers than to scholars.

In 1938 Alfred and Isabel Reed set up a charitable trust for promoting the Christian religion, education and literature, and for philanthropic and other benefits for the people of New Zealand. It was later joined by Reed's sister Marian and became known as the Alfred, Isabel and Marian Reed Trust. Reed contributed handsomely to the trust for the rest of his life.

Isabel Reed died in 1938. The marriage had been a close and happy one and in the long years following her death, Reed never lost faith in eventual reunion with her. After her death he progressively handed the running of the business over to Clif. In 1940 he retired and the Dunedin branch was closed. The firm was registered as A. H. Reed Limited but continued to issue its publications under the imprint A. H. & A. W. Reed and a raupo (New Zealand reed) symbol.

For the next 35 years Reed lived a relatively frugal but busy life. He was chairman of the board of A. H. Reed until 1960 and continued to write, publishing some 44 books and numerous pamphlets and papers between 1943 and 1974. Many of the books were based on a series of walking expeditions for which he is best known by many people. He walked from Cape Reinga to Bluff at 85 and from East Cape to Cape Egmont at 86. When he was 88 he walked from Dunedin to Christchurch, over Arthur's Pass, down the West Coast and back to Dunedin over Haast Pass. In his 90th year he walked from Sydney to Melbourne. He also climbed Mt Ngauruhoe at 85 and Mt Egmont at 86. On all these expeditions he made many friends and visited schools. His 99th

birthday coincided with the publication of his last book, *The happy wanderer* .

As well as walking and writing, Reed was involved in lecturing, broadcasting, research, hospital visiting and committee work. Moreover, since 1907 he had collected books, autographs, and medieval manuscripts. The main collections were of the Bible and Charles Dickens, but there was also a Samuel Johnson collection and one of material relating to the history of the book. In 1948 he gave these to the Dunedin Public Library, along with property to supply a continuing fund for further acquisitions. These and other donated collections are housed in the Reed Room at the library.

In 1948 Reed was made an MBE and in 1962 a CBE. In November 1974, aged 98, he was knighted by the governor general, Sir Denis Blundell, who made the trip to Dunedin especially for the occasion. In 1957 the scenic reserve adjoining his old home at Parahaki was named the A. H. Reed Memorial Kauri Park, and in 1974 a walking track on Mt Cargill was named after him.

Alfred Reed died at his home on 15 January 1975, having consistently lived by his personal creed, which began, 'I believe in the Gospel of work, of laughter, and of goodwill to men; in the power of choice between good and evil'.

Alfred Hamish Reed was 99 when he died. He is buried in Dunedin's Northern Cemetery beside his wife Isabel, and Isabel's father Samuel. The grave, as can be seen from the photograph, is marked only by the word REED set into the foundation wall of the grave behind.