

**To have a sincere love** for New Zealand culture to appreciate both the depths of the bush and the subcultures of the urban areas. Les Cleveland is best known for his publications such as ‘Dark Laughter’, his work as a journalist for *N.Z. Truth* and his photography. But it is impossible to categorise his knowledge by the work that made it to publication. The purpose of the programme was to catalogue Cleveland’s collection and ultimately to unveil a brilliant mind that has too long been isolated from the canon of New Zealand intellectuals.

**Method**

The process required an archivist’s sense of priority, the ability to see a document in the larger scheme and constant evaluation;

- Jock Phillips\*

- **How would a researcher use this if they were researching the topic of the content?**
- **How would a researcher use this if Cleveland’s use of the material was the topic of interest?**

In the process of creating descriptions, the aim was to find the connecting themes that strung the collection together and highlight its relevance to his work.

**Sources**

- Background Image: Mary Cleveland, ‘Self-Portrait at Lake Tennyson’, c. 1960.
  - Material included below is part of the Les Cleveland Collection, J.C. Beaglehole Room, Victoria University Library, Wellington.
- \* ‘Les Cleveland: a genuinely good bloke, and a historian too’, *Te Ara Signposts*; <http://blog.teara.govt.nz/2014/03/10/les-cleveland-a-genuinely-good-bloke-and-historian-too/>; accessed 24 February 2017.

**Results**

- A substantial amount of Cleveland’s collection is now catalogued and almost ready for public use.
- A finding aid has been created with searchable topics and phrases for accessibility.
- Potentially publishable material is now noted in the system, increasing the chances of a posthumous publication.

**Contextualising the Collection**

Often discussed is how necessary the study of Humanities is to social development. The historical methods of indigenous groups and other civilisations have long been dismissed from the discipline of history for taking ‘mythological liberties’. To continue to assert this is to undermine movements towards a society where everyone’s heritage is validated. Les Cleveland may not have intended to contribute to this conversation, but his ability to spot the transposition of an event into narrative demonstrates that western history too, constantly blurs the line between history and mythology.

# What Lies Behind ‘Dark Laughter’?

Exploring the mind of polymath, Les Cleveland

