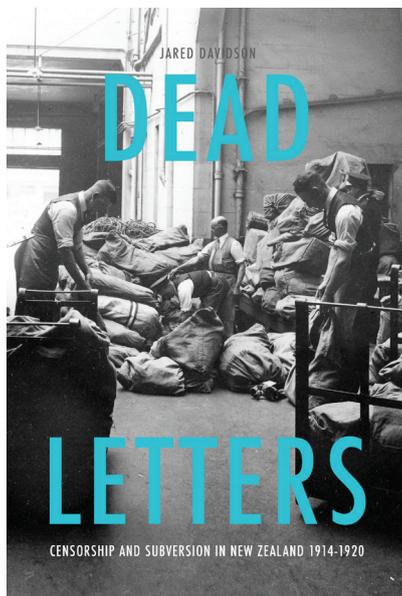


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# Dead Letters

## Censorship and subversion in New Zealand 1914–1920

Jared Davidson

### SELLING POINTS

- Extraordinary stories of everyday people caught up in wartime state surveillance
- Never-before-published personal correspondence
- Reveals 'dark and wonderful corners of New Zealand history'

### PUBLICATION DETAILS

Dead Letters  
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Jared Davidson  
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In 1918, from deep within the West Coast bush, a miner on the run from the military wrote a letter to his sweetheart. Two months later he was in jail. Like millions of others, his letter had been steamed open by a team of censors shrouded in secrecy. Using their confiscated mail as a starting point, *Dead Letters: Censorship and subversion in New Zealand 1914–1920* reveals the remarkable stories of people caught in the web of wartime surveillance.

Among them were a feisty German-born socialist, a Norwegian watersider, an affectionate Irish nationalist, a love-struck miner, an aspiring Maxim Gorky, a cross-dressing doctor, a nameless rural labourer, an avid letter writer with a hatred of war, and two mystical dairy farmers with a poetic bent. Military censorship within New Zealand meant that their letters were stopped, confiscated and filed away, sealed and unread for over 100 years. Until now.

Intimate and engaging, this dramatic narrative weaves together the personal and political, bringing to light the reality of wartime censorship.

In an age of growing state power, new forms of surveillance and control, and fragility of the right to privacy and freedom of opinion, *Dead Letters* is a startling reminder that we have been here before.

*The letters under discussion are anything but dead. Revelling in the texture, the handwriting, the smell, the very tangible form of the surviving correspondence, Dead Letters conveys the thrill of discovery as well as the indignation of injustice. ... In telling the history of the letters' authors and addressees, alongside the context in which correspondence was conducted, the chapters unfold an extraordinary, sometimes tragic, sometimes farcical, often funny insight into who and what it was that challenged police and defence authorities.*

— Charlotte Macdonald, historian

*These intercepted letters reveal dark and wonderful corners of New Zealand history. Davidson has done a superb job of rescuing long-suppressed voices from official oblivion.*

— Mark Derby, author of *The Prophet and the Policeman: The story of Rua Kenana and John Cullen*

### AUTHOR

An archivist by day and labour historian by night, **Jared Davidson** is an award-winning writer based in Wellington, New Zealand. He is the author of *Remains to Be Seen* and *Sewing Freedom*, a curator of the exhibition He Tohu, and an active committee member of the Labour History Project. Through social biography and history from below, Jared explores the lives of people often overlooked by traditional histories – from working-class radicals of the early twentieth century to prison convicts of the nineteenth.

