



# DUNN

# & DUNEDIN



## Champion Wrestler of the World

You won't find him the New Zealand Sports Hall of Fame. Indeed, few of today's sports enthusiasts would have ever heard of him, yet Harry Dunn, a Dunedin resident in the late nineteenth century, was Champion Wrestler of the World.

Harry specialised in the Cumberland style of wrestling and was proud of the fact that he was born in the northern English county of Cumberland (in the hamlet of Bullgill, parish of Gilcrux on 6 January 1862). He was the youngest of six brothers, the household also including their parents, three boarders and a servant girl. A few months after Harry's birth, his father died, aged 41. Gilcrux was in a coalfield and all the adult and teenage males in the Dunn household worked as miners. Harry became a miner too.

In mining communities in several parts of the British Isles the popular sport was wrestling, with different styles evolving in different regions. In the Cumberland style a bout began with the wrestlers standing chest-to-chest, each grasping the other with hands locked round the torso. The man who first touched the ground with any part of his body other than his feet was the loser. There were some spectacular throws including the 'buttock,' in which a man threw his opponent right over his back, and the 'swinging hype,' which involved lifting the opponent and swinging him round before dashing him to the ground. Apart from direct kicking, there were no fouls.

Harry Dunn, champion wrestler – Allied Press

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Other styles included Cornish (in which the participants wore jackets), Lancashire side-hold, Irish collar-and-elbow and the more universal catch-as-catch-can and Græco-Roman. Many contests consisted of five bouts between the same two wrestlers, each bout in a different style.

Dunn first came to prominence in 1881 when, aged only 19, he finished second in a field of 200 in a tournament at Newcastle upon Tyne. During the next three years, he took part in tournaments all over England, often winning and nearly always finishing in the top three. He had started as a lightweight (under 11 stone) but eventually developed into a 'fine stamp of a man' weighing over 13 stone and was acknowledged as Champion of England in the Cumberland style and a force to be reckoned with in five-style matches. As well as cash and trophies, his prizes included a silk wrestling costume presented to him at Grasmere by the local grande dame Lady Bective.

But more lucrative was wrestling in the United States. In 1884 he crossed the Atlantic and, in San Francisco, beat HE Stade in the Cumberland style, winning a purse of \$2,000.\* Often stake money was put up by the wrestlers themselves, with the winner taking all, plus a share of the gate takings. Dunn won or drew nearly all his matches in America. One of his victims was the formidable 'California Giant'. A wrestling sensation at the time was Sorakichi Matsuda, the formidable 'Japanese Whirlwind' who terrified opponents with unsportsmanlike tactics that included scratching and biting. Dunn wasn't afraid of him, and challenged him to a match, but the challenge was not accepted.

After about two years in America, Dunn came to New Zealand, joining his older James, who was eleven years older and probably something of a father figure to Harry. James was working as a miner on the West Coast but was also a successful lightweight wrestler. The brothers took part in Caledonian Games in Otahuhu, Christchurch and Dunedin as well as sports meetings in smaller centres including Clinton, Wyndham and Woodlands. Their opponents often included the best wrestlers in the colony.

In February 1887 Harry sailed for Melbourne where he was proclaimed Champion of America and New Zealand in the Cumberland style. Soon after his arrival he was chosen to referee a match between world champion Tom Cannon and legendary Scottish strong man Donald Dinnie who, as well as wrestling, excelled at weightlifting, running, jumping and throwing, and has been described as the 'nineteenth century's greatest athlete.' As the referee of that match, Dunn was reported to have 'proved a capital one.'

As a wrestler himself, he had few equals. One of his first opponents in Melbourne was the redoubtable 'Professor' William Miller, who was heavyweight champion of Australia in both boxing and Græco-Roman wrestling. Dunn fought him in two exhibition bouts.

In March 1887 Dunn wagered he would gain the best of nine falls against two top wrestlers whom he would take on in alternate rounds. He won by five falls to three and, 'on coming

to the front of the stage, was loudly cheered. He said he was open to wrestle any man in the world in the Cumberland style and any man in Australia in 5-styles.'

Four months later he came up against the mighty Cannon (a much heavier man) in a match for the five-styles championship of the world. Dunn won the Cumberland section but the Græco-Roman that followed 'resulted in a display of brutality such as never before seen in Melbourne. Cannon lifted Dunn as high as he could and dashed him down with fearful violence, then started in the most cold-blooded manner to strangle him.' Dunn's face was 'distorted and purple, and blood issued from his mouth, while horrible guttural sounds as he tried to draw breath showed that he was badly injured. A doctor found that his larynx had been flattened and lacerated. Cannon was received by the spectators with hoots and cries of "You deserve to be pole-axed".'

By September Dunn was sufficiently recovered from this mauling to take part in a 'revenge' match against Cannon, again for the five-styles championship of the world. Donald Dinnie was the referee. In the Cumberland style Dunn won the fall. Dinnie advised him to forfeit the Græco-Roman but Cannon refused to accept. 'An altercation took place, only terminated by Dunn throwing off his coat and inviting Cannon to "come on." The bout recommenced by the men grabbing each other's necks with savage determination.' Eventually Dunn floored his opponent. Cannon refused to take part in the side-hold, so the match was awarded to Dunn, who was duly proclaimed Champion of the World.

Just three days later (on 20 September, in Melbourne) he married Elizabeth Murtagh, New Zealand-born daughter of Patrick Murtagh, a Green Island farmer. Elizabeth was described as an 'assistant' while Harry stretched the truth somewhat in giving both his own occupation, and that of his coal-miner father, as 'gentleman.' The wedding was conducted 'according to the rites of the Church of England.'

The following month, Harry, presumably accompanied by Elizabeth, returned to New Zealand, settling for a time in the West Coast coal-mining township of Brunner where many of the miners were 'Cousin Jacks' from Cornwall, and Cornish wrestling had an enthusiastic following.

For the next few years, Dunn wandered all over New Zealand, taking part in wrestling matches at every opportunity. Some of his opponents, such as George Robertson, a big Maori, provided stiff opposition. Slightly easier to beat was John Tiffin. When Dunn fought this man in 1888, he allowed Tiffin to choose the style, saying 'I'll give thee chance, John.'

From time to time Dunn took jobs as a miner or farm hand. In November 1889 he was in the Manawatu, from where he issued the following:

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\* Today worth approximately NZ \$80,000.

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### CHALLENGE.

**I HARRY DUNN**, am prepared to Wrestle any man in the world, Three or Five Styles, for from £100 to £200 a side. Communications addressed to Ashurst, Manawatu, will meet with a prompt response.

Three Styles.—Cumberland, Græco-Roman, and Collar-and-Elbow.

Five Styles.—Cumberland, Græco-Roman, Collar-and-Elbow, Catch-as-catch-can, and American Side Holds. 14a

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*Otago Witness 14 November 1889*

In 1890 Dunn moved to Dunedin where there was a strong wrestling community, with several enthusiasts being directors of the Otago Caledonian Society. By then Dunn's world five-styles title was in dispute. Despite his loss to Dunn, Tom Cannon had continued to advertise himself as Champion of the World until losing to the American Duncan C Ross. Dunn and Ross, therefore, both claimed the title. To put an end to the dispute, the Caledonian Society promoted a World Championship match which took place in the Princess Theatre, High Street, Dunedin, on 28 October 1890. The referee was well-known South Dunedin athlete John Ogg. Ross, at 15st 2lb, outweighed Dunn by nearly two stone, and his 'splendid physique greatly impressed those who saw him stripped for the first time.' Another disadvantage to Dunn was that his speciality, the Cumberland style, was barred. Nevertheless, it was Dunn who won the match, thereby becoming undisputed Champion of the World. A return match three weeks later, in the Olympic Hall, Moray Place, resulted in a draw, with only two falls (one each) being registered after three hours of wrestling. For a third contest, the two men returned to the Princess Theatre the following week, when they again failed to reach a result, and thus Dunn retained the title.

Several of Dunedin's wrestling fraternity were involved in the liquor industry. Charles Greenslade was co-founder of Speight's Brewery; Mick Powley (New Zealand lightweight champion)



The Apollo Hotel building today, situated on the corner of Carroll and Maitland Streets

was a brewery cooper; his brother Richard was a barman; and John Ogg a prominent publican. In 1891 Harry Dunn became a publican too when he took over the Apollo Hotel, which stood on the corner of Walker (now Carroll) and Maitland Streets. An unfortunate misprint in his advertisement transformed his friends into 'fiends'!

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**A P O L L O H O T E L,**  
(Late the Maitland),

**TOP OF WALKER STREET.**  
Dunedin.

—  
**HARRY DUNN**

**(Champion Wrestler of the World),**

Having taken the above, respectfully solicits  
the patronage of his Fiends and  
the Public.

—  
Wines and Spirits of the Best Quality  
obtainable.

—  
**SPEIGHT & CO'S PRIZE ALES**

**Always on draught.**

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*Otago Daily Times 29 August 1891*

Hotel-keeping was not a suitable occupation for Dunn, who was given to spells of heavy drinking. After about a year he sold the Apollo to Richard Powley. (In 1893 the hotel lost its licence when the electorate voted for Reduction. Powley and a partner, Charles Keast, then turned the building into a bottling house for Speight's beer and became sole bottlers of Speight's for the 'Middle and South Islands' [i.e. the South Island and Stewart Island]. The Apollo building is still standing.)

To be continued

**Donald Gordon**

# Frock Revelations



Last issue's appeal for further information on dresses in *Fabulous Frocks II* produced a marvellous response. Two of the four dresses we showcased have now been properly identified and the stories of their wearers recovered.

Many thanks to the readers who passed on our enquiry to the daughters of Betty Webster. Betty was the owner of the blue silk taffeta dress that appeared on the cover of the *Settlers News*. Her daughters, Pauline Cartwright and Ainslie Mitchell, have since made contact and supplied wonderful biographical details and photographs of their mother from the time when she would have worn the ball gown.

Her dress is believed to have been worn for a ball to mark the coronation of King George VI in May 1937. Betty was born in Lawrence in 1914, as Muriel Elizabeth (Betty) Gray, the youngest in a family of five. She was Dux of the Lawrence Area School in 1930 and went on to teachers' Training College in Dunedin at the age of sixteen. As a young teacher in the 1930s she was a smart dresser, following fashions as well as her budget would allow.

After posts at the Tuapeka Creek, Taieri and Maheno schools, Betty became the last teacher at Waitahuna West. There she met her husband, Jack Webster, a farmer 24 years her senior. They married in 1940 and had four children, settling at Weston in North Otago. Betty was always a voracious reader and an independent thinker with a strong sense of social justice. Her grandchildren thought she was 'cool' for displaying a Greenpeace sticker on her car. She died in 1994 aged 79.

The second dress to be identified is the beige lace wedding dress that was donated to the Museum by the late Anthea Wooding in 1988. A reader pointed out that Mrs Wooding's husband was the noted economist, Paul Wooding, who taught at the University of Otago for many years. We tracked him down to his retirement home in Tauranga and he confirmed that the dress had been worn by Anthea's mother, Dorothy Palmer, when she married Laurence Rickard in Christchurch in 1937. Further particulars, and hopefully some photographs, are to come.

These biographical details add much-needed context to our understanding of the 'fabulous frocks' concerned. They also provide gratifying support for our independent assessment of where the dresses might fit into a fashion chronology of the twentieth century. We had picked 1935 as the likely date for the wedding dress and 1938 for the ball gown. A couple of years either side seems a reasonable margin of error. In any case, the dresses are now properly dated and provenanced and all due to the readers of this publication. Much appreciated.

**Seán Brosnahan**



Betty Gray (later Webster), 1930s  
Betty Gray circa 1938 - Photos supplied by her daughter, Ainslie Mitchell.

# The Monster Mail-Out



What do you do when 800 kilos of books suddenly land on your doorstep? That was the problem Settlers Museum staff member Steve Munro faced at the end of last year, when 1,400 copies of the Association's history, *To Fame Undying*, arrived from Otago Daily Times Print in Alexandra. The books were in two huge plastic-wrapped piles, on wooden pallets. They were much too big to get into our rooms – which was just as well, because we would have been climbing over them and manoeuvring round them for weeks before we could send them out to members. Steve had them stored for us in the Museum work-space that used to be the bus station garage.

We were delighted that, as part of the Museum's centenary celebrations, curator Seán Brosnahan had agreed to add the story of the last decade to his earlier history of the OSA and that Karina McLeod, who had designed that publication, was also willing to use her skills for this new edition. We wanted it to be a gift from the Association to our members and a lasting memento of the centenary.

But that was only the beginning: we had to get the books to the members. So fast-forward to February 2008.

The big mail-out owed a lot to OSA committee member John Martin, who brokered a good deal on plastic-lined envelopes to protect the books in the post and made the necessary practical arrangements with New Zealand Post. Secretary Sue Gow called in her newsletter volunteers for extra service. We were saving postage by including with the book various other items, the newsletter, *Pastport*, the annual subscription notice and an invitation, for local members, to the Winter Members' Evening, so it was quite a big operation. It was very efficiently and enjoyably carried out in several sessions in the committee room while other volunteers, in the vestibule, under John's guidance, sorted the packages by post code and put them in trays ready for posting. Then the OSM came to our assistance yet again. It took Steve and his two helpers four trips in the Museum van to take all the trays to the mail centre.

We've received lots of appreciative notes and calls from OSA members, praising the quality of the book itself (we agree) and that it came as an unexpected centenary gift. Thank you. It's been a hugely rewarding exercise – but not one for every year.



Top: Left to right, Peter Gow, Sue Gow and John Martin.

Round the table from bottom left: Kay Thompson, Carol Meikle, Eleanor Leckie, Ethne Burns, Jan Lawrence, Virginia Perry and Yvonne Sharp.

## Recipients of the Association's Outstanding Service Award



**William S. Armitage** is our long-serving Honorary Solicitor at Downie Stewart. He took over from his father, who was President in 1972-1975, at the end of Miss Pryde's long term as Director/Secretary.

**Ray Beardsmore** was elected as young committee member in 1978 and served till 1991, through many changes and some upheavals, and is still an active member. His passion for the restoration of buildings that form part of our Otago heritage now finds an outlet mainly through his great work with the Taieri Historical Society.

If **Barry Clarke** were asked to describe himself, he would say he was a bean-counter. We all have great reason to be grateful for his financial skills and prudent advice in looking after the Association's beans, with which we can provide the help to the Museum that is a principal purpose of OSA. Barry joined the committee in 1991 and can't get away. He was President from 1999 to 2001, served as Chair of the Museum Board, and is currently Chair of the Redevelopment Fundraising Committee. At the centenary he demonstrated the potential for a new career as public event 'MC' and fashion commentator.

**Margery Blackman** has used her expertise in textiles to help the Museum in many ways, notably in the conservation work necessary to bring the Victorian fashions of the first Fabulous Frocks exhibition to display standard. More recently she has helped with the production of the Marion Sandilands sampler package which enables embroiderers to recreate one of the most charming samplers in the Museum's collection.

**Melville Carr** has been a committee member since 1996, and was President from 2002 to 2006. He is currently Chair of the Museum Board. As Vice-president, Melville oversaw the completion (by Dr Helen Watson White) of Charles Croot's fine book on Otago churches after Charles' untimely death.

**Phil Dowsett** has served on the committee since 1997 and is currently Vice-President. He has been a fine committee member and one of his outstanding contributions has been drawing up the Association's submissions to the DCC's Annual Plan.

**Iain Galloway** is one of our most senior and loyal members. He joined, on his mother's insistence, as soon as he returned from the Second World War. A distinguished lawyer, now retired, he plays a key role in fundraising for the Museum Redevelopment.

**Donald Gordon** has used his investigative talents and accessible writing style to provide us with many fascinating articles on local history for this newsletter, this issue included. These articles attracted the attention of the *Otago Daily Times*, which last summer asked our permission to reprint a number of them in the paper.

**John Martin** has been an immensely valuable Committee member from 1994 to present. John is one of those people who are prepared to do the running around to make sure things go smoothly. It is always John, for example, who does most of the setting-up for members' evenings and picks up any items we have to hire for the occasion. He has just finished doing a splendid job in the practical arrangements for the huge mail-out of Seán Brosnahan's book to you all – and he is an expert on motor-bikes.

**Jane Malthus** was a committee member from 1989 to 1998, including the role of Vice-President. Jane's expertise in fashions and fabrics of the past has regularly been called on by the Otago Settlers Museum and also the Otago Museum. Many of you will have enjoyed her talks on this area of her expertise.

**Grant Sherriff's** continuous association as a member and committee member from 1977 to 1995 stemmed from a long-standing interest in militaria and an enthusiasm for the museum to display such items that are held in the collection.

**Ian Tunnage** is another long-serving and invaluable committee member who can't quite get away – in this case because we keep calling on his accounting skills. Ian joined the Committee in 1987, and was Treasurer from 1997 to 2007, including a period as Acting Treasurer from 2001 to 2004 and again from 2006 to the present. His expertise, loyalty and sound judgment have been a boon to the Association for more than a decade.

**Niel Wales** served on the Committee from 1966 to 1990. He took over the presidency from Jack Somerville at the time negotiations with the City Council to take the museum under its wing were in progress, from 1991 to 1993, and resumed committee service for another four years after his term ended (1994-1998). Niel served on the Museum Board from 1991 to 2001, and is still an active member of the Association.

The octagonal dark blue and silver badge given to each recipient, shown here larger than actual size, was designed and produced by John Swan and Co.



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## The Association's Winter Meeting

The Winter Meeting on Friday 27 June provided the opportunity to thank some of the Association's long-standing members who have made significant contributions over the years. Each received a certificate of outstanding service and a specially-designed enamel badge, illustrated opposite. The President, Dorothy Page, introduced the recipients, but first expressed regret that the late John Salmond could not be among them. He was a committee member from 1979 to 1996, President of the Association and then Chairman of the Museum Board before returning to the committee. He was still an active committee member up to a few weeks before his death.

Eight of the thirteen recipients were able to be present, Dorothy Page and Hilary Allison taking it in turns to make the presentations. The recipients of the Outstanding Service Award are listed opposite, in alphabetical order. Three of those unable to attend the Winter Meeting received their awards at a brief ceremony at the start of the committee meeting on Thursday 17 July. A few bottles of wine, courtesy of Barry Clarke, and some grapes, crackers and cheese helped things along.

After the awards were presented at the Winter Meeting, a ten-minute film of highlights of the events during the Museum centennial celebrations at Easter, compiled by Maurice Hayward, was shown. Many familiar faces appeared with unfamiliar bass voices. (We ran it at slightly the wrong speed.) Vice-President Phil Dowsett was even to be seen in a kilt.

Rosemary Kelpie then gave an informative and entertaining talk on Victorian and Edwardian women's clothing with the assistance of the ladies of 'Images of the Past.' The group was formed two and a half years ago and gives period fashion shows for societies, clubs, rest homes and other institutions. Their first public outing in Dunedin was at the railway station centenary celebrations at Labour Weekend, 2006. Representative outfits from several decades of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were modelled. If some of the male members of the audience allowed their attention to wander, it was undivided when the last model revealed a display of corsetry and other period unmentionables.

The clothing was all either made by members of the group or adapted from Op Shop finds, with a few actual antique items. Simplicity or Butterick patterns had been adapted or reproduction patterns used, and a wide variety of fabrics, including some intended for furnishing or curtains. The hats had been made using a variety of techniques: in some cases by shaping buckram over a mixing bowl, in another case, by removing the handle from a wicker basket.

The evening, which had begun with seasonally-appropriate mulled wine, was rounded off with tea, coffee, cakes and sandwiches.

## The Phonographic Mystery Revealed

In the last issue of the *Otago Settlers News* Donald Gordon's article on Rossbotham's College was accompanied by a page from the *Phonographic Magazine*. One of our members, Mrs Marie Fleury, who studied and later taught at the college, has kindly provided this transliteration of the shorthand:

You can scarcely realise what an expenditure of time and patience is necessary to execute one of these curious drawings. The paper has, of course, to be turned and twisted in a thousand different directions and each character and letter struck in precisely the right place. Often just short of completion a trifling accidental depression of a wrong key will totally ruin it and the whole thing has to be begun over again. The outcome is, as you may well imagine, very much enhanced in the case of specially intricate or unusually elaborate drawings – such as, for instance, 'Peacock.' This latter is believed to be one of the most beautiful machine-made sketches ever produced. It took three whole days to complete. As a contrast to these elaborate and intricate pieces of work, the accompanying picture-tower will be of interest. It represents one of the earliest specimens of typewritten drawings extant.

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## Brothers in Law

In the last issue, the short article on JAD Adams repeated the *Otago Daily Times* obituarist's mistaken claim that he retired in 1910 and his legal firm was continued by his sons. Mr Adam's great-granddaughter, Mrs Diana Schmelz, has kindly provided the following correction: he had one daughter only, Archinia. She married and settled in Dunedin. JAD Adams took his younger brother Alexander Samuel into partnership in 1884, and retired from active practice in 1910. The following year AS Adams was joined by his two sons, Frances Boyd and Herbert Stanley. The name Adams Bros was used by the practice until 1975, when it joined with Tonkinson Ward.

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## For Your Diary

### Annual General Meeting

The Association's Annual General Meeting will take place on Thursday, 25 September at 7.30pm in the Museum's concourse. The Acting Director, Grant McDonald, will present his annual report to the Association, which will be published in the next issue of *Settlers News*. The guest speaker will be John Ingram, who will talk on Dunedin fire brigades.

# The Otago Settlers Museum Shop

## Books



**Women of Substance:**  
**The Otago Women who Wore 'Fabulous Frocks'**  
Seán Brosnahan  
Published by the Otago Settlers Museum

This beautiful publication was produced recently as a companion to the exhibition *Fabulous Frocks*, an exhibition held at the Otago Settlers Museum in 2003. The exhibition presented 39 dresses from the museum's costume collection, selected to showcase the type of costume worn by nineteenth-century Otago women when they wanted to look their most refined.

60 pages, with 90 colour and black-and-white photographs and an essay by the exhibition's curator. Paperback.

Price to members \$22.50 (Postage and packing \$2.50)

## Gifts



### **Fabulous Frocks II: a souvenir postcard set**

A set of seven souvenir postcards of dresses from the Otago Settlers Museum costume collection currently on show in the exhibition *Fabulous Frocks II*.

Price to members \$4.50 (Postage and packing \$1.00)

### **Fabulous Frocks II: greeting cards**

A pair of larger souvenir greeting cards featuring two of the dresses is also available.

Price to members \$4.50 each (Postage and packing \$1.00)



## General Information

Orders should be posted to the Otago Settlers Museum, PO Box 566, Dunedin, and cheques should be made out to the Dunedin City Council.

The shop holds a wide selection of Dunedin- and New Zealand-made books, cards and gifts. You are always welcome to browse.



Editor: Austin Gee; Designer: Tim Cornelius; Publisher: Otago Settlers Association.

This newsletter was produced by the Otago Settlers Association, founder and supporter of the Otago Settlers Museum. Membership of the Association is open to everyone interested in the heritage of this region. Details of membership are available from the Museum Reception desk or Otago Settlers Association Secretary, Box 74, Dunedin. Phone/fax 03 477 8677, email [otago.settlers.assn@xtra.co.nz](mailto:otago.settlers.assn@xtra.co.nz)

 **Otago Daily Times**

*The Otago Daily Times supports Otago Settlers Museum*

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