OTAGO SETTLERS MUSEUM

OTAGO SETTLERS NEWS

SEPTEMBER 2009 ISSUE 102

OTAGO SETTLERS ASSOCIATION

A SPLENDID PLACE TO LIVE

An American Whaler Deserts: Otago, 1849

Ship deserters, by their very nature, avoid attention and their stories are difficult to come by. The following record is in the Otago Settlers Museum Archives, ms DC-0323, and was originally sent by Donald MacGregor of Wendon Valley (north of Gore) to the editor of the *Otago Witness* on 28 September 1897, and subsequently used in the Jubilee Edition of March 1898. It contains some errors, marginal notes and alternative wordings which have been edited here:

George Wickham Millar [of] Wendon Valley is the oldest son of Captain Josiah Millar who was whaling on this coast in 1830, and visited Port Chalmers [Otago Harbour is meant] the last time in 1850, as captain of the American whaler *Alert* of New Bedford [Massachusetts]. [The only record of the *Alert* at Otago is for 8 January 1847 under Captain Middleton; she was of New London, Connecticut.]

[George Wickham] Millar was born on March 12th 1825 at East Hampton, Boston, [Massachusetts] and he received a fair education. At the age of 13 he was apprenticed to a ships' blacksmith, but not liking the trade, he left after serving two years and joined a vessel trading on the south-east coast of the United States, where on several occasions he saw assistance given to escaping slaves.

In 1847 Millar shipped at Boston in the whaling ship *William Tell*, Captain Taber. [The *William Tell*, 367 tons, of Sag Harbor, New York, owned by Thomas Brown, sailed for the North-West Pacific on 1 September 1848 and arrived at the entrance to Otago Harbour on 29 January 1849.] On their way to New Zealand they caught seven whales, and the chase after two of them would be well worth recording.

Louis Le Breton (1818-1866), *Port Otago, 1840*, watercolour with charcoal on paper, 340 x 479mm [accession: 7,453] – Hocken Collections, University of Otago, Dunedin.

The reason the vessel came to Port Chalmers [the harbour entrance is meant] was that the new casks commenced to leak the oil at a serious rate. This made it necessary to come into still water and take the casks upon the deck to be headed down afresh. Here the crew learned that the vessel was not going back to Boston that year but would winter in the Chinese Seas. This made them home-sick and some resolved to desert. The opportunity came to Millar when he was chosen as one of four to row the captain up to Dunedin. They had heard that there were a few white people living up there and that home-bound whalers called.

At Dunedin they pulled the little boat up on the beach at the mouth of a small creek. The captain gave them some money and some drink. There were a number of tents and warries [Maori whares] at Dunedin then. The white people advised them not to go back in their ship — that this was a splendid place to live in. So they went into the bush near the Water of Leith and from there they saw their captain with two hired men rowing down to the port. This was the last time they saw [one who] they say was the best man that ever lived. The four stayed with the Maoris until their ship left. [She sailed on 10 February and did not return home until the end of March 1851. She was to return, under Taber, in February 1852, when James Casey deserted, and in February 1855, both times to get supplies.]

Millar got employment from the late William Gerry [Geary] at the Heads; his pay was one shilling per day. He stayed with Geary 12 months. Then he got employment from the late Charles Suisted at Goodwood, where he remained 12 years, and then with Mr [John] Jones [who bought Goodwood in November 1856.] Millar's wages to start with were £20, and at the end of 12 years £70 per year. When Millar went to Goodwood they were just building the Goodwood House and Thomas Woods and a man named McGregor sawed the timber and split the shingles for the first house built on the estate. [The Suisted family sailed from Wellington to Waikouaiti in the *Scotia* in mid-February 1850. TB Kennard in *The First White Boy Born in Otago* (1939), page 181, says his father worked for Suisted from December 1850 to January 1853: 'he was a good boss ... a most progressive man and really before his time. Everything had to be of the best. He built a house 66 feet square with upstairs, and its cost cooked him so that he never made a fortune. In fact he went bankrupt and went Home ... ']

Millar saw the first ploughing done at Goodwood. This was with a wood-beamed plough drawn by bullocks; the harrowing being done with wooden harrows with koigh [kowhai] teeth. The wheat grown on the land thus prepared was cut with the sickle, threshed with a three-horse thrashing mill, sold to Mr John Jones at 10/- per bushel and finally shipped from Waikouaiti to Sydney.

In 1850 Mr Millar was sent from Goodwood to cart the scrub for the first woolshed in Shag Valley, which was built for Mr Charles Hopkinson. The walls were made of scrub and roofed with felt, and the house of wattle and daub. [Kennard says on page 116: 'in the fifties Millar was carting timber from the bush at Otepopo to treeless Oamaru and that he also worked for Hopkinson on his run at Dunback ... the [woolshed] standing at Coal Creek in 1859 was noticeable for its uncouthness, its main features being a few round posts, manuka sides and a thatched roof.'] Hopkinson had two shepherds, John Hughes and Jameson. ['Old' Jamieson in Kennard, page 28.] These men were brought from Sydney to Moeraki to whale for John Jones. [Hughes set up the Moeraki station in December 1836 but sold oil and bone to Jones.]

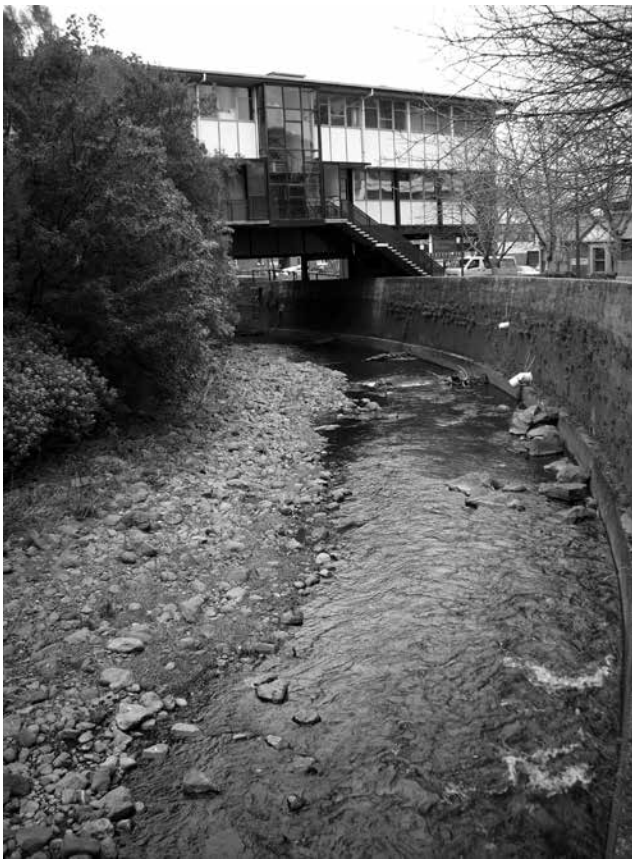
At Goodwood Millar made the acquaintance of a number of old pioneers. The late Alexander McMaster of Tokarahi camped at Goodwood with the first mob of sheep he took from Sydney. He had a donkey carrying his tent but this creature rolled in every creek and caused a deal of trouble. [McMaster came from Melbourne in 1857 and bought a run at Kyeburn.] Rhodes of Timaru stayed on his way to Dunedin. His riding saddle was a sack stuffed with straw. He said it was much the best saddle for a long journey. Millar also worked on Suisted's run at Otepopo. John McCormack was the first manager there. He paid 25/- per hundred for shearing the first sheep and the highest tally was 80 and the wool was shipped from Moeraki.

In 1856 Millar married at Goodwood Susan Dow, daughter of Robert Dow who came out in the ship *Phoebe Dunbar* in 1851. [She arrived 24 October 1850.] About the year 1862 Millar left Goodwood and went to the [Juliuses] at Ragged Ridge up the Waitaki and from there to John McLean's at Kurow. Then he went to stay at Oamaru where he owned the section that the railway station is now built on. This section he sold to Sir Robert Stout for £50. Then he came and stayed some years at the Heads. From there he went to Otama [near Gore] where he owned a farm. In 1885 he came to Wendon Valley where he is farming at the present time [1897]. Millar has three of a family and 22 grandchildren. Although the old gentleman is 72 by the almanac he is very much alive. Mrs Millar, who arrived with her parents in the sailing ship *Phoebe Dunbar* in 1851 [1850] died at her son-in-law's residence, [Hamilton Bay] Lower Harbour, on March 27th 1893 [aged 69] and is buried in the new cemetery at Port Chalmers.

Edited by Ian Church

Gaining a Foothold: Historical Records of Otago's Eastern Coast, 1770-1839, published last year by the Friends of the Hocken Collections, was edited by Ian Church. It includes logs, journals, newspaper reports, paintings, drawings, maps, court cases, land claim documents, archaeological records, Maori sources, and the reminiscences of explorers, sealers, whalers and flax-gatherers.

Varsity Big Blue
Computers Spanning the Leith



The place where today you will probably find the greatest concentration of personal computers in Dunedin was closely involved with the early computerisation of the city. In 1963 the University became interested in acquiring its first computer, principally for scientific research rather than administrative tasks. The first machine was an IBM 421 printing punched-card device, which had to be lifted through a window into the registry building when it was delivered in 1964. An IBM 360/30 was ordered the same year, and was housed in a dedicated computing centre facility in the Science Building which straddles the Water of Leith alongside the now pedestrianised stretch of Leith Street.

Brian Cox, then a lecturer in mathematics, was appointed Director of the new University Computing Centre (now ITS) in 1964. Twenty years later he became head of the newly formed Department of Computer Science, retiring in 2000. Professor Cox helped install several of the early computers around Dunedin. At the university, he oversaw the operation of the IBM 360/30 machine, which could perform 30,000 calculations per second; this may seem fast to the uninitiated, but today's machines can carry out over 100,000,000 calculations per second. The computer was a real breakthrough for scientific research. The Computing Centre provided facilities for statistical calculations for physical education, psychology, anthropology, chemistry and physics, among other disciplines. In one experiment conducted in May 1966 by GF Spears, the computer processed the data of 700 severe cases of a disease recorded from the previous ten years in about three hours, a task that would have previously taken one person over 20 years to carry out.

At the time, programming and numerical analysis were taught as part of applied mathematics, and in 1970 the commerce faculty offered its first course in computing. The Computing Centre was recognised as an independent entity within the university in 1971, and it became a department in its own right in 1984. This year it celebrates its silver jubilee; there have been almost 1,300 graduates over the course of that period.

Not all the computer users were scientists: up to 30-40% of the use of the machine was administrative, for such purposes as registry data processing. Its introduction had only a small impact on administrative staff, however. Most clerical staff were still needed, though there were some changes in job descriptions: for example, some secretaries became programmers as well.

It was not all plain sailing. When the Benmore Dam was completed in 1965, it caused a spike in the power supply which affected the operation of the computer. Later, in 1967-69 when the University College tower blocks were being built, the electrically powered crane used on the site used so much power that the university's computer suffered blackouts.

In the early 1970s the university acquired a Burroughs 6700 machine, with terminals, which were similar in appearance to today's PCs. The Burroughs was equipped with a portable paper tape system that could be used in the field, for surveying, for example. By the 1980s the university had moved on to a DEC VAX-11/780 computer with more than 50 remote terminals in various buildings around the campus. Each of these terminals cost $4000, equivalent to about $17,500 today. Another machine, a Burroughs B5900, was used primarily for processing enrolments.

Life for these machines could still be hazardous: on one occasion, painters cleaning the walls of the men's toilets in the room above the Burroughs communications controller unwittingly put the machine out of commission for several weeks when water and sugar soap they were using seeped into the machine cabinets. On another occasion during enrolment, a tent peg for a marquee ruptured the electricity mains and put the computer out of action; there were no backup power supplies in those days. All this rapidly began to seem archaic when by the end of the 1980s personal computers proliferated – one was even used to write this article.

Tim Hyland
Otago History Department Summer Intern 2008-9

The University of Otago Information Technology Services building straddling the Leith.

Speeding Up ELSIE

ELSIE the Bonus Bonds computer was mentioned briefly in the last issue of *Settlers News*, but there is more to her life story. The original ELSIE, which is preserved in the Museum's collection, was installed around 1969-70. It was manufactured by Plessey Systems in the United Kingdom, but it struggled to meet the demands of the task. The prize draw took a full seven days to generate, and the sorting of the output was all done by hand and took a further two weeks or so. Brian Smellie was called on in 1978 to speed up the operation. Brian, a local lad, had taken up a position with the Post Office following his graduation with a degree in electrical engineering. He travelled to the UK and came back to the Post Office as an electronics engineer with considerable skills in the then evolving computer design field. Brian recalls that he increased the machine's speed to cut the draw time back down to three days. The Bonus Bonds scheme was growing rapidly at the time and he calculated that the system would be out of processing time again within 15 months. This caused some consternation within the Post Office Savings Bank, as the then Prime Minister Robert Muldoon was using the Bonus Bonds scheme as a tool to regulate the money supply. If ELSIE failed to make the draws on time, all the money therein would have disappeared very rapidly. This meant that there was some urgency to fix the problem. Brian therefore was given the job of building a new machine locally, which was commissioned in March 1979, and completed the draw within one hour. The new machine was designed for a life of ten years, but in the event was not replaced until the late 1990s. Brian eventually was transferred to Wellington and later left the Post Office to go into private business, where he still is, being a part owner of a highly successful specialist computer-related design and manufacturing business.

Many thanks to Brian Smellie and Norman Ledgerwood for this information.

Neuseeland Calling

After the British and Irish, who formed the largest group of immigrants in nineteenth-century New Zealand? Australians? The Dutch? No, Germans: at least 10,000 before 1914, mainly from the Protestant northern German states. A new exhibition has opened in the Four Winds Gallery about our German connections, *Wilkommen in Dunedin*.

Today, about 5% of New Zealanders have some German ancestry, and migration from Germany is at a higher level than ever before, even than in the 1870s. Then, under Julius Vogel's assisted immigration scheme, Germans came to work on railway construction and other public works projects. In 1875 for one of these projects Germantown was founded, in the McNab-Whiterigg area north-east of Gore, but this no longer exists.

Though a few German-speaking immigrants reached Otago in the 1850s, many more were attracted by the gold rush, either directly from their homeland or via Britain or Australia. There are known to have been 14 Germans in Invercargill in 1859, for instance. German-speakers assimilated more easily than other non-British immigrants: they were considered good colonists, hardworking and temperate Protestants. They set up a wide range of businesses, which can be traced through advertisements and reports of fires: hotel-keepers, grocers, bakers, hairdressers, and bath-house keepers, among others. In Dunedin, German-speakers were active in setting up social and cultural organisations which attracted large-scale participation.

As there was no Lutheran church in Dunedin, weddings between Germans often took place at Knox Church. Even today, there are only eighteen Lutheran congregations in the country. The first Lutheran missionaries to come to New Zealand had arrived in Otago in January 1843, but they found the Anglican and Wesleyan missionaries already active, so moved on to the Chatham Islands. At least Dunedin was spared the fate of the German Church in Christchurch, which had been presented by

The ESLIE I now in the OSM collection was used for selecting winning Bonus Bond numbers at the Dunedin Post Office Savings Bank in the 1970s.

the imperial German government with a peal of bells in 1874 cast in Berlin supposedly from French guns captured during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. On the outbreak of war in 1914, the church was confiscated by the government and eventually in 1918 the bells were patriotically destroyed.

Two early German settlers reached Dunedin by way of Britain, helped on their way by a resident Coburger, Prince Albert. A family tradition records that Johann Heinrich Scherp and Elizabeth Breuning worked in the royal household, and on their marriage the Prince Consort gave them £100 which they saved for their voyage to Otago. They settled in the Maniototo.*

The exhibition retails the stories of several prominent German settlers. Among them is Georg Ulrich, first Professor of the School of Mines at the University, who came from Zellerfeld, Hanover. He had worked in the Prussian Mines Service, and was offered a post in Bolivia. When this fell through, he left for Melbourne in 1853 where he worked for the Geological Survey of Victoria and as a museum curator and university lecturer. He was invited to Dunedin to head its newly-established School of Mines in 1877. This opened in 1879 and was moved, controversially, to Auckland in 1987.

* Allan Scherp, *Relative Harmony: The Deutsch-Welsh Partnership of Maniototo*: a copy is in the Museum Archives.

Professor Georg Ulrich – *Cyclopaedia of New Zealand*
The Dresden Piano Company, prior to becoming the Bristol Piano Company early in World War I – Otago Settlers Musuem collection

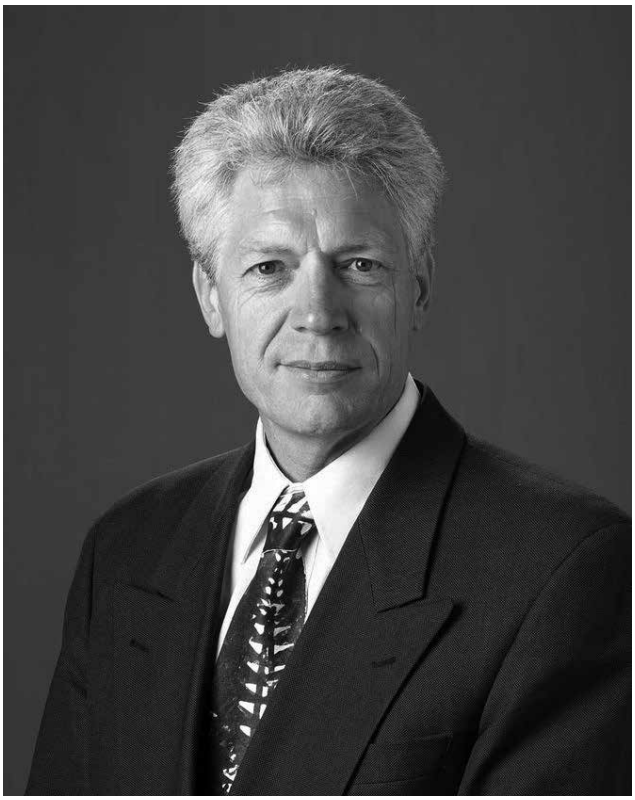
Otago University was the first of the New Zealand university colleges offer German as a subject. Arthur Büchler was the first lecturer, in 1873. When he moved to Timaru in 1881 he was replaced by Dr FA Bülau, a former teacher of German language and literature at the high school in Bern, Switzerland. After about ten years, he returned home and was replaced by William Butler Williams from Otago Boys' High School. On his death in 1895, Dr Wolf Heinemann was appointed, but he resigned four years later over a dispute concerning pay. Another local teacher, GP Howell, was then appointed to the lectureship. His subject became understandably unpopular with the outbreak of war in 1914, and Howell resigned because no students had enrolled in his courses. The lectureship in German was then merged with the one in French; a separate Department of German was finally established in 1969.

One of the most prominent items in the exhibition is Alfred Henry O'Keeffe's portrait of William Nees, on loan from Margaret Nees. Born Heinrich Freidrich Wilhelm Nees in Berlin in 1836, he headed for the goldfields of Victoria before reaching Dunedin in 1863. He was a cabinetmaker and exhibited at the New Zealand Exhibition of 1865. Nees & Sons was the first Dunedin firm to use machinery in furniture-making: Nees' brother in Berlin had obtained some second-hand machinery there and shipped it out. William Nees was an active member of several local German social organisations, and was President of the Deutscher Turn- und Gesang Verein in the mid-1870s. This gymnastics and singing society had been set up in 1863 and met twice a week to practice. By the 1870s they held an annual picnic. One at Woodhaugh on Boxing Day 1873 attracted a crowd of 300-400. They took part in races, a football match, and a lottery in which there were about 200 prizes for the children. One game involved blindfolded women throwing sticks at a flower pot, under which was a fowl which was won by the first to knock over the pot. Such gymnastics societies had played an important part in the German nationalist revival and the movement for national unification.

The Great War put the German community in a difficult position. Some anglicised their surnames or business names: by January 1915 the Dresden Piano Company had become the Bristol Piano Company, after the birthplace of the company's founder, David Theomin. The exhibition includes two editions of the *St Andrew's Cookbook* from 1913 and 1927. Mrs Davidson's German Biscuits in the former became Belgian Biscuits in the latter, with no change to the recipe but perhaps a less bitter taste.

Wilkommen in Dunedin will be in the *Ka Hau E Wha: People of the Four Winds* Gallery until 6 June 2010.

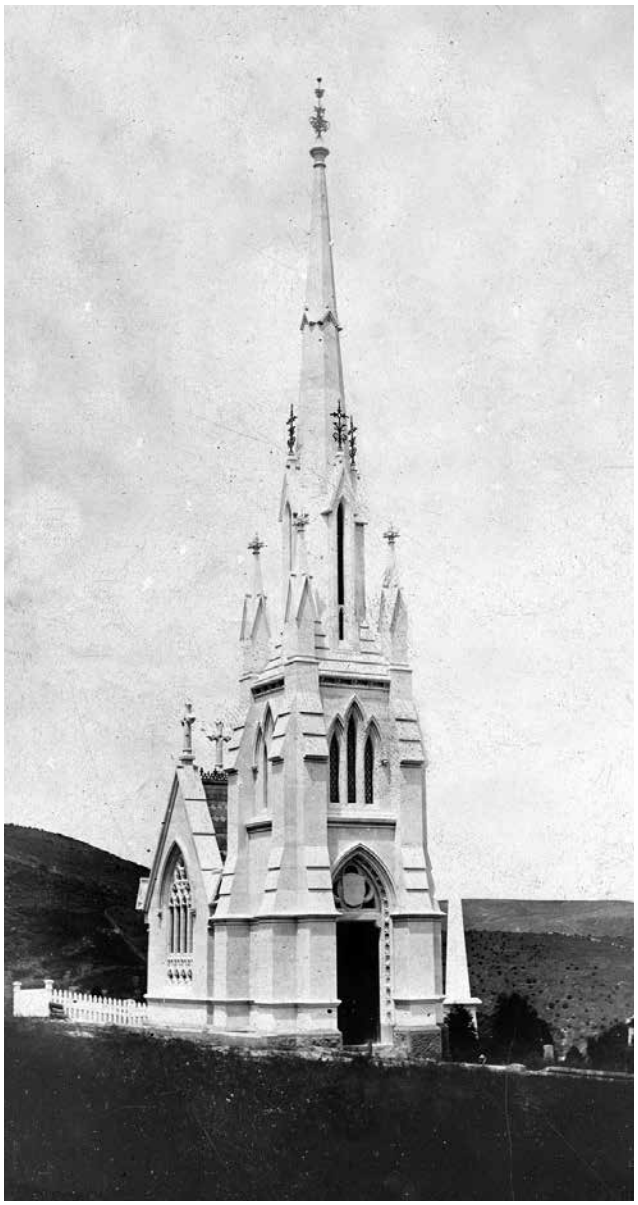
In Memoriam Seddon Bennington



Dr. Seddon Bennington – Te Papa Tongarewa

Dr. Seddon Bennington, the first professional director of the Museum, died on a tramping trip in the Tararua ranges in mid-July. He was appointed in 1977, a time of radical change for the Early Settlers Association and its Museum. The selection committee looked for someone with an academic background, for youth and innovation, and Seddon offered all these and more. Niel Wales, a member of the selection committee, recalls that 'he was young, enthusiastic and had all the right qualifications.' Seddon had a background in teaching, art history and anthropology, and was completing a doctorate in zoology. He was new to the museum world, but the Association's confidence in him paid off. As Niel Wales recalls, 'he was excellent; the best thing we had done.' John Macpherson, President of the Association at the time, said Seddon was a 'great asker of awkward questions'. He brought in travelling exhibitions and lent items from the collection to other museums, and staff were given training in museum skills. Visitor numbers increased significantly and Seddon pushed for the employment of several new permanent staff, including a curator and librarian. He made rapid progress in the museum world, being appointed head of the new Wellington City Art Gallery in 1979, later moving to the Scitech Discovery Centre in Perth, Western Australia, the Carnegie Science Centre in Pittsburgh, and then returning home as chief executive of the Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa, in 2003.

Larnach Tomb Restoration Project



This well-known gothic revival sepulchre in the Northern Cemetery has suffered from vandalism and theft over the course of time. It was designed by RA Lawson for William Larnach in 1880 as a memorial to his first wife Eliza Jane Guise. The Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust is seeking support for the tomb's conservation and restoration from charitable trusts, community groups and other organisations with an interest in preserving Dunedin's heritage.

If you would like further information, please contact the trust's chairman, Stewart Harvey at 65 Every Street, Dunedin 9013; tel. 454 5384; fax 454 5364; e-mail stewarth@orcon.net.nz or via www.cemeteries.org.nz

Larnach's tomb shortly after construction – Otago Settlers Museum collection

For Your Diary

Members can look forward to an interesting programme between now and Christmas. Mark the dates in your diary now!

On 11 September at 5.30 pm at the Museum, the Museum and the Association are combining to celebrate the launch of *Growing Up In Wartime*, a collection of reminiscences based on oral histories by local people.

On Thursday 17 September at 7.30 the Association will hold its 110th Annual General Meeting. There will be a guest speaker, and supper will follow the meeting.

Sometime in November (the date is yet to be finalised) the Association will support the Museum in an Open Day, with a family focus, to mark the completion of the new Storage Building. It will also look forward to Phase 2 of the building project, turning the old Bus Station garage, that huge area to the South of the building, into exhibition space. A major event is planned.

Finally, keep your evening free on Friday 11 December, for our Christmas Party. There will be more details of this later.

A Passion for Textiles

Linda Wigley talks to our Winter Meeting

At the OSA Winter meeting, on 9 July, well over a hundred members and friends listened to the new Director of the Settlers Museum give a lively and generously illustrated talk about her love of museums and textiles. We were pleased to welcome some guests from the Cloth Club, an informal Dunedin group who share an interest in costume and cloth.

Linda's interest in textiles is broadly based and has been reflected in several of her previous museum posts in Britain. It is far from being a theoretical expertise: she is herself a weaver, and the highlight of her talk for many of the audience was her description of the hands-on experience of learning weaving the Guatemalan way, thanks to a Churchill Fellowship. She described the very simple looms which Guatemalan women use to weave their intricate and colourful cotton fabric. The typical back-strap loom is portable, consisting of a set of strong strings, one end attached to the weaver by a strap round her waist and the other set in the ground to provide tension. To speak to us, Linda wore a Guatemalan ensemble, a skirt, waistband and a beautiful broad multi-coloured stole created for her by the wife of the family she stayed with during her time there.

Further Developments

The Association has become a sponsor of the Museum's walking tour programme Walk Dunedin, which organises daily two-hour guided tours of sites of historical and architectural interest in the inner city. If you are interested, further information is available from the Museum. The tours cost $20 and can be booked at the Dunedin Visitor Centre in the Octagon.

John Ingram, Visitor Programme Co-ordinator at the Museum, is the Association's new representative on the Gasworks Museum Trust, which is now chaired by Barry Clarke. A major heritage engineering conference is planned for Dunedin later this year.

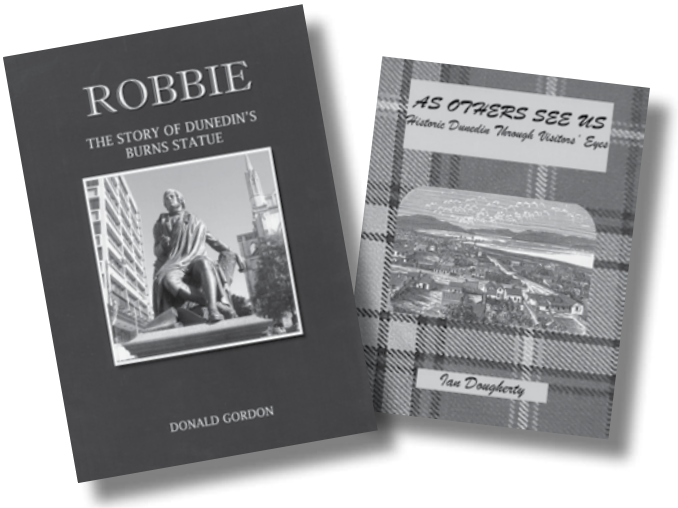
The Otago Settlers Museum Shop

Books

Robbie: The Story of Dunedin's Burns Statue
Donald Gordon
Avon Publishers, 2009

This entertaining and profusely illustrated book contains all you ever wanted to know about Dunedin's best-known monument, a statue of a poet who never actually set foot in the place. It not only reveals much about prominent local personalities of the 1880s, but also describes other monuments to Burns' memory throughout the world.

72 pages, paperback; price $25



As Others See Us: Historic Dunedin Through Visitors' Eyes
Ian Dougherty
Saddle Hill Press, 2009

Ian Dougherty has taken up Burns' well-known lines 'O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us / To see oursels as others see us!' and given us an account of how visitors have seen Dunedin over the years. The book covers a broad span of visitors from the earliest days to modern times, both from elsewhere in New Zealand and further abroad, whether they stayed or were just passing through. All but one of the accounts from 112 visitors are taken from published works of non-fiction, and include well-known authors such as Noël Coward, JB Priestley, Anthony Trollope and Mark Twain.

104 pages, paperback; price $30

General Information

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

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