



by Donald Gordon

I live in Avon Street which has a total population of three. No-one in the street has ever been honoured with a knighthood but within a stone's throw of my home have lived no fewer than seven men who have been given that accolade. No fewer than three of them were connected with the wool business, and with the now-vanished Littlebourne House.*

The first was John Roberts. He stood out in a crowd, for in an era when almost every grown man sported facial hair, he was clean-shaven.

Son of George Roberts, a tweed manufacturer in Selkirk, Scotland, John was born in 1845 and educated at Cheltenham Grammar (a famous school in Gloucestershire, though not as well-known as Cheltenham College, the public school) and the Edinburgh Academy. In 1864 he was sent to Victoria to gain experience under a relative, John Sanderson, in various aspects of the wool trade including sheep station management. Sanderson was a partner in the firm Sanderson, Murray & Co

whose operations included a fellmongery in Otago. In 1868 Roberts came to Otago to manage the fellmongery and almost immediately established an offshoot company, Murray, Roberts & Co which he developed into a fabulously lucrative business empire with branches throughout New Zealand. Most of Murray, Roberts' money was made as stock and station agents, wool merchants, general importers and runholders. Roberts himself acquired Gladbrook Station from the firm.

In 1870 he married Louisa, daughter of Charles Kettle, Otago's first resident surveyor who had died in 1862. Kettle's Dunedin home, Littlebourne, stood on the property on which, in 1890, Roberts built the palatial Littlebourne House. This was the scene of countless social events that were reported at length in society news columns. On one occasion Roberts' daughters gave a very large afternoon tea at their residence, Littlebourne, to all their girl friends. There must have been about 150 present, but with their spacious rooms at Littlebourne there was no crowding at all!

* The others were George Fenwick, Charles Hercus, Robert Kennedy and AH Reed; they will be the subject of a future article.

Littlebourne House (centre right), home of the Roberts Family, and Whitelee (lower right), home of Sir Robert Kennedy – Otago Settlers Museum



Roberts himself was not much concerned with the social whirl but was deeply involved in many aspects of industry and public life. He was one of the founders of both the Mosgiel Woollen Mill and NZ Refrigeration Company, and a director of many other companies. He was a member of the Otago Provincial Council, Otago Harbour Board and Dunedin City Corporation. For his presidency of the highly successful NZ & South Seas Exhibition held in Dunedin in 1889-90 he was made a CMG. In 1890 he was elected mayor of Dunedin. Later he was Vice-Chancellor of Otago University for many years. He was knighted in 1920.

Sir John died in 1934, leaving Littlebourne House to the City of Dunedin which in 1950, to the horror of many, demolished it to facilitate construction of the Stuart Street Extension. Roberts Park now occupies the site.

Just six years after John Roberts was knighted his son Alexander Fowler Roberts was dubbed KBE. Alex was born in Dunedin in 1882 but, at an early age, was bundled off to Britain for education at Merchiston Castle School, Edinburgh, and Cambridge University. Tall and strong, he was awarded a rugby Blue.

Returning to Dunedin in 1903, he was employed as a clerk for Murray, Roberts. He joined the Carisbrook Cricket Club, earning a reputation as a fast-scoring batsman. 'Roberts at the wicket is a delight to the spectators for he goes at the bowling from the jump ... that hefty batsman Roberts is usually responsible for something sensational!' He was a member of the club committee under the presidency of his Littlebourne Road neighbour and business rival Crosby Morris of the stock and station company Stronach Morris.

In 1907 Alex Roberts married Hannah, daughter of Grant Farquhar, one of the founders of the Glendernid tannery. In 1911 he was transferred to the Napier branch of Murray, Roberts, and a year later to Wellington where he became branch manager in 1914.

On the outbreak of war he joined the NZ Field Artillery with the rank of major, and soon afterwards, promoted to lieutenant colonel, became staff embarkation officer for the NZEF. For this work he was made a CBE in 1918.

He was NZ Commissioner to the Wembley Exhibition (1924-25) and received his knighthood in 1926, the KBE (a somewhat more exclusive accolade than his father's Knight Bachelor) recognising his military service.

Sir Alexander also distinguished himself in local government and was Mayor of Lower Hutt 1927-29. An oak on the Hutt Recreation Ground commemorates his mayoralty.

In 1929 he became managing director of Murray, Roberts. He was also a director of several other companies including the Union Steam Ship Company and AMP Society. He was chairman of directors of NZ Woolpack and Textiles Ltd which, in 1934, opened a modern factory in Foxton for the manufacture of woolpacks made from New Zealand flax. He predicted 'the new woolpacks will prove stronger, lighter, cleaner and cheaper than jute packs'. They were not popular with the men who handled them, however, being very rough on their hands. The industry was kept alive by government subsidies for many years but fizzled out in the 1980s.

Sir Alexander was prominent in the administration of charitable organisations, especially the NZ Crippled Children Society and JR MacKenzie Trust which assisted the Plunket society, disabled war veterans and 'delicate, ailing or backward children'. He was the first president of the Wellington Rotary Club and a councillor of the Chambers of Commerce.

In the Second World War, he returned to military service in his former role of embarkation staff officer and was also the New Zealand representative of the British Ministry of Transport. A keen golfer, he was president of the NZ Golf Association for many years. He died in 1961.

As if two knights in the Roberts family were not enough, the accolade was also given to Sir John Roberts' eldest son John junior, who was born in Dunedin in 1876. Whereas his brother Alex was educated in Britain but spent most of the rest of his days in New Zealand, John junior's life history was almost the reverse. Most of his working life was spent in Scotland but he was educated in Dunedin – at the Union Street School and Otago Boys High School (just across the cable car tracks from Littlebourne House). His schooling was completed in Edinburgh, however.

Returning home, he gained hands-on experience of the woollen industry by working in every department of the Mosgiel mill.



In April 1896 he left to join his grandfather's firm in Selkirk, Scotland, but, before leaving, hosted a dinner party in Littlebourne House for the Mosgiel foremen and warehousemen. He said 'I never hope to find a finer lot of men. All are thoroughly well up in their departments, and courteous withal!'

He stayed in Selkirk for the rest of his life, becoming a director of George Roberts & Co in his twenties and eventually chairman, a position he held from 1922 to 1955. He came to be recognised as one of the leading figures in the Scottish wool industry.

Like his father and brother Alex, he was elected mayor of his town. (The title is 'Provost' in Scotland.) John Roberts Junior was Provost of Selkirk not once but on three occasions: 1908, 1915-20 and 1935-41.

He was a strong supporter of the district's heritage. An excellent horseman, he was a member of the Buccleugh Hunt and prominent in the annual Riding of the Marches ceremony in which a group of dignitaries rode around the boundaries of ancient common land surrounding the town. In 1935 he took a leading part in a movement to commemorate the centenary of the death of the poet James Hogg, the 'Ettrick Shepherd,' who had been born near Selkirk.

The Selkirk coat of arms
Sir John Roberts junior in later life

As a wealthy man, Roberts patronised the arts and acquired a large collection of paintings, especially the works of SJ 'Lamorna' Birch. This may have resulted from a feeling of shame over the way Birch had been treated on a visit to New Zealand in 1936-37 when nationalistic local artists strongly opposed his presence.

In 1953 Roberts was knighted 'for services to the community and politics'. In the same year he was given the Freedom of the Borough of Selkirk. This involved a quaint ceremony evoking the Souters (cobblers) of Selkirk, a troop of 80 men from the town who had distinguished themselves at the Battle of Flodden (1513). Most of them were slain in the battle. The few survivors, on their way home, found the corpse of a woman with a suckling child. A representation of the woman, her baby and coffin appear to this day on the arms and seal of Selkirk. In the Freedom ceremony a few bristles of the type used by shoemakers were attached to the seal of the Burgess ticket Sir John was given and these he had to dip into his wine as a mark of respect for the Souters. Sir John's father and grandfather had also been given the Freedom of the Borough.

In 1954 Sir John visited Dunedin and astonished an ODT reporter with his youthful appearance. 'No-one would suppose he is 78 years old. He looks 20 years younger. He still goes to his business every day.'

He lived another twelve years before dying in Selkirk in 1966. He was survived by two sons and two daughters. His wife had died in 1947.



In the Pipeline

Engineering Feats Beneath Our Feet



When we look at our city and province there is no doubt our forebears really did build to last. A few examples from Dunedin's engineering works of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries illustrate this well. The first is the sewerage system that was built in the 1870s and 1880s under the direction of SH Mirams, the City Surveyor. Five principal sewers captured the numerous creeks that flowed down from the Town Belt and conveyed them to the harbour under the cross streets from St David Street in the north to Manor Street in the south. They also collected the sanitary waste and took that to the harbour as well, as they were designed to be combined sewers. These sewers were egg-shaped 4½ ft high by 3½ft wide, and were made of bricks. These sewers and many smaller ones built at the time are still in service and are in excellent condition some 130 years later. They certainly were built to last. Note too that Mirams reported their cost in 1877 to be £130,000 which in present-day values is \$17.4 million.

My second example is the Ross Creek Water supply built between 1865 and 1867 by a Waterworks Company formed by private interests in the city. The Company built the Ross Creek Dam and water trunk mains along Duke, George & Princes Streets. This dam is the oldest large dam still in service in New Zealand. The trunk main was made of cast iron 12" in diameter and is still in service supplying water into the city. Truly built to last. The City Council bought the system, comprising some 27 miles of pipes, from the Company in 1875 and had to pay £116,800 for it (equivalent to \$13.8 million today).

The 1870s sewerage system, as mentioned above, was a combined one, which resulted in sanitary sewage discharging to the harbour. By the 1890s this was causing intolerable conditions in the harbour and the Dunedin Drainage & Sewerage Board, newly formed in late 1900, set about dealing with it. (The board's formation followed considerable agitation by the Otago Harbour Board and the medical authorities in the 1890s.) In 1903 construction of a new Main Intercepting Sewer commenced. This sewer was laid around the upper harbour from



near the Water of Leith under all of Mirams' sewers, to intercept their flow, and finished at Musselburgh, the lowest point in the city. Here a pumping station powered by diesel engines lifted the sewage to discharge into the ocean at Lawyers Head. This was completed in 1908 and it is still in service after more than a century. The diesel engines at Musselburgh pumping station were very early ones for New Zealand and remained in service till the early 1950s. The cost of this system was approximately £450,000 (\$66 million today).

The final example of an engineering achievement worthy of the title 'built to last' comes from the 1970s, the Deep Stream Water Supply. Water supply has been a major problem to successive City Corporations and Councils for most of the city's life. We have a modest rainfall with lengthy dry periods every few years, and very limited space to store water to cover such dry periods. Run-of-river sources are a long way from the city so are very expensive to use. The City lived a hand-to-mouth existence for its water until well after the Second World War. In 1956 the City tapped the river gravels beside the Taieri River at Outram, and this gave us adequate water for the next twenty years. However by the late 1960s it was clear that another major supply would be needed to cope with the ever increasing demand for water. The search was on again for more water.

In the early 1970s the options had been narrowed to two. More pumped water from the Taieri River, or a gravity supply from Deep Stream in the Lammermoor Range. The Deep Stream scheme had been proposed by City Engineer JG Alexander in 1930, but it was rejected by the Corporation at that time as too costly. The more modest 1936 Deep Creek scheme was built instead. However, detailed survey plans of the 1930 Deep Stream scheme were held in the City's records, and an Act of Parliament in 1930 authorised the taking of water from the Deep Stream. It comprised some 58km (36 miles) of pipeline falling from an intake at 425m (1394 ft) above sea level to Mt Grand at 300m (984 ft) above sea level. A treatment plant at Mt Grand would be able to supply water to almost the entire city.

Laying of the main intercepting sewer in Queen's Gardens – *Otago Witness* 28 March 1906

The choice between the two options was made on the economics. Deep Stream was very high capital cost but low operating cost (no pumping needed). Taieri was relatively low capital cost but very high operating cost (requiring electricity for pumping). In the event the Deep Stream option was approved by the Council in 1972 and it was completed in 1977. Just after the decision was made, the first oil shock of 1973 occurred and huge increases in energy costs resulted. This markedly increased the advantage of the low-energy Deep Stream option, and is reflected today in our relatively cheap water charges.

The Deep Stream Scheme was forecast to meet the City's water needs till the early 1990s. In the event the Burnside Freezing Works, a heavy consumer of water, closed and population did not increase as much as expected so the water supply system, including the Deep Stream Supply, is still meeting the demand, and indeed is supplying areas of the post-1989 amalgamated city not envisaged over 40 years ago in 1968 when the demand forecast was made. Deep Stream was certainly built to last! It cost some \$6.2 million (\$55.1 million today).

Throughout its history, the City Corporation and later Council and its engineering advisors have nearly always taken the long view in decision-making and been ready to accept new and innovative ways of doing things. Recent examples to improve the quality of our drinking water are the Dissolved Air Flotation process at Mt Grand Treatment Station and the Membrane Filtration at Southern Reservoir. I believe this has greatly advantaged the citizens who have enjoyed the benefits of up-to-date and economical infrastructure.

Trevor J Williams BE FIPENZ MICE MNZIS NZIM

Excerpted from a speech given at the opening the exhibition ***Built to Last: Engineering in Otago***. Trevor is the former Dunedin City and Drainage Engineer, and a member and former Chair of the IPENZ Engineering Heritage Otago/Southland Chapter.



Betty [detail] by Bev Tosh, a painting of an Otago war bride featured in the exhibition *War Brides: Leap of Faith*.

* Dr Gabrielle Fortune, PhD (history) University of Auckland; this estimate includes two of three subsequent generations, children and grandchildren.

War Brides: Leap of Faith

In 2005 the Museum staged a very popular exhibition to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the end of World War Two. *Dunedin's War* took an unashamedly parochial look at the greatest conflict in world history, examining how the war had an impact on Dunedin, and conversely how Dunedin made an impact on the war. This wove together stories from the home front with those from theatres of conflict overseas, as well as the varying perspectives of men, women and children. Since then, the Museum has taken its war commemorations further with the annual unveiling of the Dunedin 'Roll of Honour' on Anzac Day, supplemented in 2009 by community contributions to a 'Wall of Memories'.

This year we will mark Anzac Day with a triple set of commemorative displays. Complementing the Roll of Honour and Wall of Memories – moved this year to the Hudson Gallery – will be a touring show from Canada, *War Brides: Leap of Faith*. This examines more closely the experiences of an extraordinary group of women – the war brides. 'Between 1942 and 1950 and in spite of the Defence Department's prohibition against marriage, servicemen returning from theatres of war in Europe, the Middle East, the Pacific, and Canada, brought over 3000 wives, 700 fiancées, and 1000 children to New Zealand.' This influx was countered by an exodus in similar proportion of New Zealand-born brides of British and American servicemen. Today, approximately 50,000 New Zealanders are direct descendants of war brides.*

Coming of age during the rupture and tumult of war, war brides represent one of the strangest migrations in modern history, cargoes of women and children who emigrated alone to no established community of support. Most were British or Europeans who departed in 1946 on troop and hospital ships on government-sponsored one-way passages. Bev Tosh's mother was one of those women. She came to New Zealand after the war with her RNZAF pilot husband and settled in Taranaki. When the marriage ended, nine-year-old Bev moved to Canada with her mother. In 2001 she painted *One-Way Passage*, a large-scale portrait of her mother on her wedding day. That painting, which included the name of her mother's ship and other 'bride ships' to New Zealand, generated an enduring fascination with war brides.

Since then Bev has met hundreds of war brides and corresponded with others in New Zealand, Canada and the United States, Australia, England and Holland. Each war bride has recounted her story to the artist — stories of finding and sometimes losing love, personal stories about love and family, adaptation, endurance and identity. *War Brides* incorporates paintings and multimedia installations combining image projections, parachutes, shoes and handkerchiefs. The works portray the women as they took a 'leap of faith' in beginning their journey to their husbands' homelands. The exhibition has been shown to acclaim across Canada. The Otago Settlers Museum will be the venue for its first showing in New Zealand.

War Brides: Leap of Faith, 24 April – 29 August 2010.

Progress of the Reconstruction Programme



The new purpose-built storage building is at last complete and large numbers of people took advantage of an open day last November to see inside, assisted by eight volunteers from the Association. The bulk of the grey wedge-shaped building is only clearly visible from across the railway lines. Like the Tardis, though, it has a surprisingly large and complex interior, with a range of dedicated rooms for, among others, the textile and art collections, and a conservation workshop, all linked by unusually wide corridors. The collection of old kitchen equipment and a set of professional hairdryers were particular favourites with the visitors.

The large task of moving the collections from the existing buildings into the new store or to locations off-site has been split into two main phases to reflect the construction programme. Phase one covers the bulk of the move, and consists of relocating staff and moving all items from the former NZR Road Services buildings (Garage, Transport Gallery, tower and foyer) as well as the main stores in the Burnside building. Construction work on the NZR garage started in February, and begins in April for all remaining areas of the NZR buildings including the Bus Station, Archive and foyer.

Phase two comprises the final move of the collection that is on display in the Burnside building and vacating the old off-site store at Green Island. This will involve the dismantling of the Smith Gallery, moving all collections in the Hall of History and a couple of small specialist storage areas not covered in the previous phase. This phase needs to be completed by December 2010 in order for the Burnside buildings to be ready to be handed over for stage three of the construction programme.

For the first and major phase of relocation staff resources were divided into two teams. François Leurquin led the team focused on preparation of objects for moving, and Bronwyn Simes led the team for moving the collections, existing shelving, staff and the final cleaning-up and handing-over of the vacated space to the contractor.

Preparation of objects for moving entailed François and contract staff members Lawrence Le Ber and John McGann making specialist boxes for fragile items and mounts or stillages for large, heavy objects such as bullock wagons and printing presses. In addition, all wooden objects were fumigated either by freezing or using an anoxia system of oxygen starvation.

For the main move the Museum employed the assistance of two contract staff members, Jay Hutchinson and Naomi Boulton, and the services of a professional moving company. The move started in September 2009 and will be completed in April 2010. Over that period the team will have moved all large heavy items to the off-site store, the entire art and textiles collection to the new storage spaces, and a wide and varied array of items to fill the ground floor of the new store and a portion of the upstairs store. In addition the location of all objects has been tracked and records updated to record their new locations.

Jill Haley has now closed the Archive to the public and has started the task of packing. Along with the archive, all staff in the NZR building need to move for stage two of the construction to take place, and will take up temporary accommodation in the vacated stores in the Burnside building.

The move has been one long logistic exercise which is now in its final stages. To date the reconstruction programme has not impinged to any extent on the visitor experience. This year will be different: the Museum and its Archive will have to close for a time so that the bus station and the Burnside building can be altered and upgraded to meet 21st century standards. It will reopen with a hugely increased public area, a fitting home for the Museum's irreplaceable collection.

Bronwyn Simes

Project Development Manager

Summer Internship

The OSA summer internship for the best second-year student in the History Department of the University has been awarded to Nicola Lomax. Now a third-year honours student, she worked under the supervision of Seán Brosnahan on a project creating a comprehensive database of first-person shipping accounts in the Museum archives, which include about 180 shipboard diaries.

Staff in the process of shifting one of the more cumbersome pieces of the Museum's collection from the NZR Bus Station garage in 2009.

OSA Christmas Meeting

At a very well-attended Christmas Meeting of the Association on 11 December, members were shown the gold filigree snuff box owned by Robert Burns recently acquired by the museum, as reported in our last issue. Seán Brosnahan described its significance and the fascinating background to its purchase. Members were also entertained with rarely-performed music written by David A De Maus (1847-1925). Chris Pike gave an introduction to De Maus, a professional photographer who worked in Port Chalmers in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. He is best known for his photographs of shipping, but a special display showed the wider range of his interests. De Maus was mayor of Port Chalmers four times, and was also a prolific composer of songs, several of which were sung by Bruce McMillan, accompanied on the piano by Vivienne McLean. Vivienne also played two piano solos, and Bruce accompanied her with songs from the Great War, the fruits of a great deal of research into sheet music held in the archives.

The Port Chalmers Regional Maritime Museum has recently published *Capturing Port – D.A. De Maus: Photography, Music and Community Spirit in Nineteenth-Century Port Chalmers*, which includes a CD of De Maus' songs.

National Hymn of New Zealand



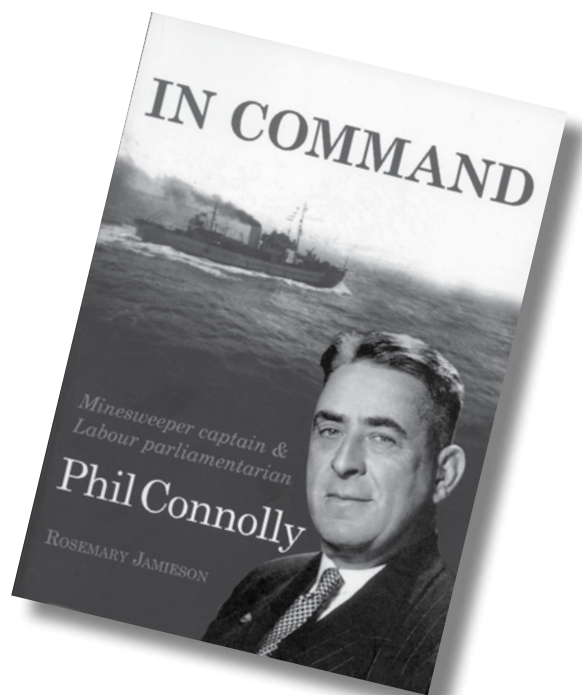
For Your Diary

The Anniversary Day Dinner will be held on 23 March at Carisbrook. Life Member Iain Gallaway will be the speaker. Other members' events this year will be held away from the Museum due to the reconstruction programme. Keep an eye out for future announcements.

David A De Maus' little-known entry for the competition to write music for what became New Zealand's national anthem.

The Otago Settlers Museum Shop

Books

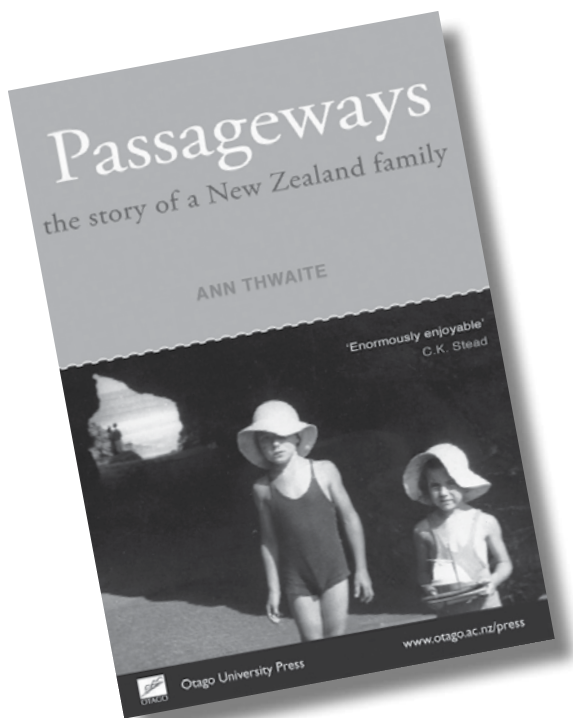


In Command: Minesweeper captain & Labour parliamentarian, the Hon Phil Connolly, DSC, VRD, MP
by Rosemary Jamieson

Rosemary Jamieson's biography of her father covers his career as a marine engineer, naval officer and then minister of the crown. Phil Connolly was born in South Dunedin in 1899 and worked as an engine fitter at the Hillside Railway Workshops until the outbreak of the Second World War. He was already one of the most prominent members of the local Labour Party. Connolly commanded minesweepers, *HMS Deodar* in the English Channel and *HMNZS Moa* on anti-submarine duties in the Atlantic and Pacific. In 1943 he was elected to Parliament for Dunedin West (later renamed Dunedin Central), and served for twenty years; he was also a Dunedin city councillor and a member of the Otago Harbour and Hospital boards.

Phil Connolly was Minister of Defence and Minister of Police in 1957-60. He was described as a man whose 'forthright honesty and unquestioned integrity, together with his wide experience of life, both in peace and war, had combined to make him an outstanding Minister.'

Steele Roberts, 2009. 323 pages, paperback. \$40



Passageways: the story of a New Zealand family
by Ann Thwaite

Whitbread Prize-winning biographer Ann Thwaite explores her remarkable Anglo-New Zealand family. Her eight great-grandparents all arrived in New Zealand between 1858 and 1868. Thwaite discovers why these eight — Harrop, Sales, Campbell, Brown, Valentine, Maxwell, Jefcoate and Oliver — chose to emigrate to New Zealand, and what they did when they got here. One, a railway guard in England, became a prosperous farmer; another, born in a Scottish castle, died in a miners' hotel in Reefton. Drawing on previously unexamined family archives, the book is illustrated with more than 300 images.

Otago University Press, 2009. 358 pages, paperback. \$45

Big Ideas: 100 Wonders of New Zealand Engineering
by Matthew Wright

This lavishly illustrated history of more than 150 years of engineering achievements includes some of the country's greatest buildings, bridges, viaducts, tunnels, dams and inventions, from the Manapouri underground power station to Burt Munro's famous Indian motorcycle.

Random House, 2009. 240 pages, paperback. \$45



General Information

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



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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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OTAGO SETTLERS ASSOCIATION

31 Queens Gardens
PO Box 74 Dunedin
Ph / Fax 03 477 8677
email otago.settlers.assn@xtra.co.nz

OTAGO SETTLERS MUSEUM

31 Queens Gardens
PO Box 566 Dunedin
Ph 03 477 5052 Fax 03 474 2727
email osmmail@dcc.govt.nz