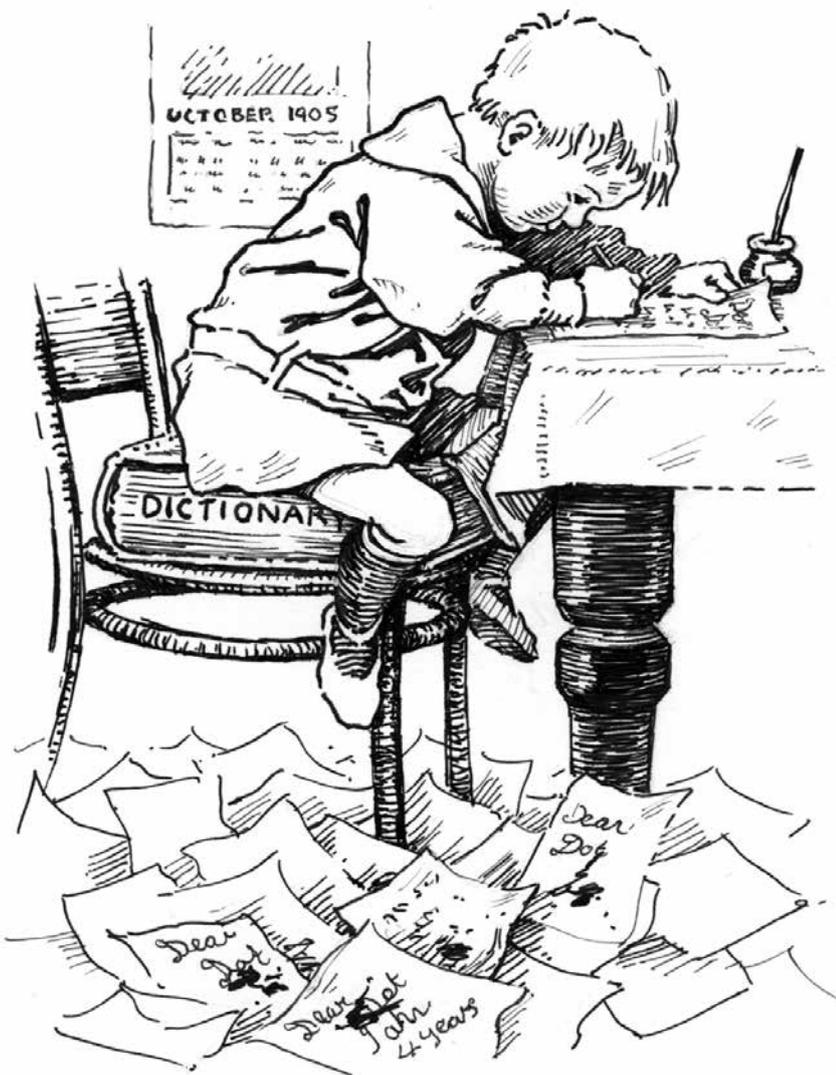




# Dear Dot - I Must Tell You...



*Shall I ever forget my first letter? The very first – really ‘all for myself’. My own name on the envelope, a real stamp, a real post-mark! Ah never! How excited I was. How often I read the inscription on the envelope and the various post-marks before venturing to tear it open. How fearfully I drew out the neatly folded contents. I read it, and re-read it, exactly how many times I don’t now remember, but I was the happiest, dirty faced little boy in all the countryside that night. There is something mysterious, something uncertain about letters. We drop the letter into the post – a little ‘swish’ as it passes over the lip of the box. It is gone, we cannot recall it. It is ours no longer, but the friend’s to whom we have sent it. Then back out of the silence comes the answer. The spirit of our friend is before us. We have spoken. Miles of distance have become nothing. ‘What is it? Oh, only a letter.’ Yes, only that ... Such a little thing – but remember, the sweetness of life is just such, ‘little things.’*

This letter, from Jim White of Lake Hayes, is just one of the many children and teenagers wrote to ‘Dot’ in the *Otago Witness* and later the *Otago Daily Times* over the period 1886 to 1936. The column was immediately and immensely popular and it became the largest, longest-lasting and possibly most influential feature in any New Zealand newspaper, ever. These letters have led to the uncovering of many extraordinary and intimate stories of lives one hundred and more years ago.

But the story goes far beyond that. These young people, as ‘Dot’s Little Folk,’ created a youth movement and culture based on literature, the like of which has never been seen since in this country. They formed literary and debating clubs in the main centres, and held annual picnics, socials and dances. They had a badge and a motto: ‘We write for the benefit of others, not for ourselves.’ At its height in the early 1900s, Dot’s Little Folk produced their own literary magazine, quite independent of the paper, and they had display booths at both the Dunedin and Invercargill winter shows.

A 1905 *Otago Witness* ‘Dot’s Little Folk’ illustration featured on the cover of Keith Scott’s *Dear Dot, I Must Tell You ...*



The correspondence, combined with the culture it created, provides a story that is intimate yet enormously complex. As children they wrote about their ordinary lives, their families, schools, pets, holidays and entertainment. As teenagers they had other agendas. They were growing up and they, especially the girls, turned to Dot for advice and guidance that they felt they could not get at home. They worried about becoming women, the propriety of getting a job, and the perceived drudgery of being a wife and mother. The teenage boys, typically, were too embarrassed to write about such intimate things. They filled their letters with the fun they had in camping, hunting and fishing adventures.

But it would not be long before the boys had to face a very different challenge. They had to go to war. Sixty-four letters were written to back to their Dot by soldiers at Gallipoli and on the Western Front. Not all of those who wrote came home. The war letters to Dot of those left behind are equally extraordinary. Together they form a collection of material important to historians that shows how this country was affected emotionally by this war. Letters came from the anxious and the afraid, and from the bereaved. They are heart-wrenching to read:

*Dear Dot - He wrote to us and also sent us a photo of himself in khaki. It is the only photo we have of him, besides one when he was a wee lad. It was nearly twelve months from the time we got word he was wounded to the time that death claimed him. At the very minute we were hoping for the best news, he was being buried. He is now lying in a strange grave in a foreign country and we will never ever see it. He will never sing again in the forested valley of his home. The morepork will call and screech, but no answering reply will be heard. Only the mountains, and the droning waterfalls will echo the bird call back, again.*

[October 1917]

A very important part of the story is its longevity. Many Little Folk never stopped writing to Dot. Each year certain weeks were set aside for older writers. Some wrote in year after year. So we see whole lives being lived in these pages. We first meet children of the 1880s and 1890s and in many cases we are still hearing from them when they are adults, and even when they reach old age. These writers become like old and close old friends to us. For instance, Jim White, quoted above, wrote from 1898 when he was 15 right up to his death in 1935.

### Keith Scott

A Dunedin-based historian, Keith has recently published *Dear Dot, I Must Tell You*, the culmination of three years of study of these letters, which make a special contribution to our culture and heritage. The Association joined with the Settlers' Museum and the Globe Theatre to launch Keith's book, which is available from bookshops or on-line for \$59.99.



Photographs of a 'Dot's Little Folk' picnic party in the Kamahi Bush, *Otago Witness*, 4 February 1903

# Director's Annual Report



## 1 July 2010 to 30 June 2011

**Again we have had an extremely busy year – especially with the building construction taking place all around us – and the cranes are still here – just! Both Museum staff and the Association Committee have been ‘camping’ for long periods of time, the staff in the new collections store and the Association in the meeting room and new offices. This has been quite disruptive, but also a good team-building exercise. We are pleased that we are now all back in our newly renovated and decorated offices.**

The Museum has gradually closed down its exhibitions during this period, starting with the dismantling of the Transport Gallery at Easter last year, followed by the Burnside displays in November. We had a brief closed spell for a few months before re-opening in December with Pixie Town and the NZR Bus Station Booking Hall displays. We finally closed at the end of April this year. I know many were concerned about us closing our exhibitions in their entirety but this has proved a positive step, allowing the In-House Project Team to concentrate on the mammoth job in hand – the redevelopment project.

Despite gradual closure, our visitor figures for the year remained high at 50,700, only slightly lower than the previous twelve months’ figure of 65,000. We also achieved 85% of our target for schools, despite the lack of exhibitions! I put this down to our staff, who have certainly been thinking ‘outside the box’ and working hard to ensure a very successful Pixie Town, exciting new educational outreach programmes, a new and dynamic website and also trialling innovative public programmes and holiday events. Enquiries from the public have also remained high and this year we received a total of 770 enquiries relating to our collections, archives, family histories and requests for general historical information. We have received some excellent local press and television coverage, letting our public know things are still ‘rocking’ here at the Museum.

So what have been the key highlights this year?  
Here are my top four:

1. The research and development which was undertaken with the financial support of the Association. Being quite an isolated country it has been beneficial for us to see and experience best practice in our field in other countries. Project staff conducted in-depth study visits looking at exhibitions and interpretation

A construction crane looms over the Burnside building as work progresses on Stage Three of the Museum redevelopment project.



methods in Australia, China, the USA, the UK and elsewhere in New Zealand. In addition Sara Sinclair, the Museum's Educator, undertook a six-week Asia Foundation 2000 Internship hosted by the Asia Civilisations Museum in Singapore and came back with some great ideas for developing her programmes here at the museum.

2. Our 'Doing Things Differently' plans led to some innovative use of resources, especially in the area of education and public programmes. We were awarded an additional \$7,500 Ministry of Education Research Contract to evaluate this.

3. The successful launch of the Museum's brand-new web-site in June: <http://www.otago.settlers.museum/> This focuses on the redevelopment project, features, Facebook and Twitter and has an image gallery on Flickr. Other features include a 'did you know?' section on some of the museum objects, event listings and education programmes and an OSA membership page. Importantly, it is very easy to use, and is kept up to date daily.

4. A special highlight has been a move towards the creative side of the project: we started work with our newly appointed designers Workshop 'e' from Wellington and completed the Exhibition Concept Design stage.

### Redevelopment

The Project Team has produced detailed research packs, label briefs and interpretation schedules on the topics explored in the proposed exhibitions. *Across the Ocean Waves* received a minor refurbishment and a new immersive environment, the early settler cottage, will be created. To ensure we were on track and not completely 'off the wall', we brought in a national panel of experts, including former President Dorothy Page, to peer review our work and test our direction, ideas and assumptions.

Stage Two of the redevelopment project, the NZR Road Services Building, was completed at the end of November 2010, on time and to budget. The Archive returned to its newly fitted out and enlarged space. Construction work on Stage Three, the Burnside Building, began on 1 December 2010. All exhibits and furniture had been removed by the end of October; *Josephine*, the largest and heaviest item, was moved over a four-day period. The \$10m fund raising target is firmly on track [no pun intended], having reached the \$9m mark in July 2011.

### Staff

Our new Collections Team Leader is Claire Nodder. She was previously Collections Manager and Acting Director at the

Whangarei Museum and Heritage Park. Laurence Le Ber has joined the Collections Team as Assistant Conservator with the major task of cleaning over 2,000 items for display in the new exhibitions. He was previously a conservator at the Otago Museum and also worked freelance. We said good-bye to Sara Guthrie, our Registrar, and François Leurquin, our Senior Conservator. Our new Registrar is Claire Orbell, who is moving back to her roots, from Te Awamutu Museum where she has been Registrar for four years. Fiona McLachlan, our new Conservator, will arrive soon from the UK. She most recently established the new conservation laboratory at the Scott Polar Museum & Institute at Cambridge University. Lynda McLea is our new Webmaster: she has been project manager of the Auckland Art Gallery's new website. This provides online access to the majority of works in the gallery's collections, something we are also considering. Other recent new staff include Rebecca Crawford, Communications & Business Team Leader; William McKee, Interpreter; Naomi Boulton, Collections Assistant; Cora Woodhouse and Tracey White, Visitor Hosts; Ian Wards, Research Curator; Jim Wylie, Exhibitions Technician.

### Interns & Volunteers

We have been greatly helped this year by a couple of interns and volunteers: David Luoni, a post-graduate Museum Studies student at Massey University, joined us and researched and produced the brief for the new Scottish Story displays in the NZR Bus Station Foyer. This year the OSA / University of Otago History Prize recipient was Siobhan Downes who researched the NZR Road Services building and produced a report entitled *Passengers of the Past: The NZR Road Services Bus Station in Dunedin*. These Association-funded internships are an asset for the Museum and Siobhan's in particular will feed into the redevelopment plans and the interpretation of the bus station. Also our regular volunteer Peter Holland has done sterling work behind the scenes helping the collections team and keeping the galleries and behind the scenes tidy.

### Collections

The main priority has been managing the high volume of object movements and tracking them using the collections management database. This has resulted from the de-installation of exhibitions, the ongoing conservation schedule of objects in preparation for new exhibitions, and the need to reorganise storage areas to accommodate almost all the collections. The planning and preparation for new exhibitions has also provided an opportunity for registration policies and procedures to be reviewed, particularly with regard to the management of loaned objects and collection documentation. We aim to streamline both our internal processes and those where we engage with the public about collections.



In the Archives, a project to digitise the subject photo collection has so far processed 2,310 items. The collections were shifted back into the permanent Archives area in October–November 2010. Early 2011 was spent unpacking and reorganising the archival collections. Thanks to funding from the OSA, Rainy McMaster has been scanning the Rockliff Collection of railway and transport photographs. The Information Technology Heritage Society is working with us on preparing our highly specialist computer collections for display.

### New Acquisitions

With the moratorium on donations, the number of potential donations has been reduced; many members of the public have agreed to delay their offers of items until the redevelopment project is completed. There has been some flexibility in this policy, and 68 potential donations are under consideration. The assessment and physical processing of this material will be undertaken once reopened.

Two new acquisitions in particular should be highlighted: due to the generosity of a grant from the Association, we were able to purchase three historic chairs from furniture expert and collector William Cottrell. They have a strong Dunedin connection and add to the Museum's significant collection of early settler furniture. The other is a donation, a silver pocket watch that was given by William Larnach to a Peninsula settler, Robert Landreth, for his work at The Camp (Larnach's Castle) in the 1870s.

The Collections Team has been involved with a number of other key projects, including organising an important loan of historic furniture from our collection to the Southland Museum for their Australasian furniture exhibition and symposium.

An event we haven't publicised to a great extent was the flood in our new collections store. It caused very little damage considering the volume of water involved. Damage was diminished due to the swift reaction of staff who had undertaken disaster preparedness training. Despite the volume and extent of the flooding, damage was minimal and negative publicity was avoided.

### Exhibitions

The Exhibitions Team have been fully immersed in the redevelopment yet managed to find time to stage a number of special exhibitions. These include *Just Passing Through*, on celebrity visitors who have visited Dunedin, and *My Invented History – Accessing Ancestry*, an installation by artist / jeweller Victoria McIntosh. The Museum exhibition spaces were progressively closed to make way for building construction.

Before the *Kai Tahu* display was dismantled a hui was held and the *taonga* [artefacts] laid to rest in our new collection store in conformance with protocol.

Redundant display cases have been offered to other museums, and panels from the *Kai Tahu* exhibition were passed on to our Maori Advisory group for display at the Ngai Tahu annual tribal *hui*, at Puke-te-raki marae for the use by the Moeraki and Puke-te-raki ruu-naka.

Despite being a building site we continued to produce a number of new exhibitions, which has also allowed us to experiment with some new and innovative interpretation methods. A new partnership was forged between the Museum and the Polytech's Applied Design Research Centre which resulted in a completely new display in the NZR Bus Station Foyer. The design team's brief was to interpret the space without using copious amounts of text, which they achieved using touch screens and interactive talking life-size cut-out figures of a 1940's stationmaster and tobacconist, together with talking passengers and their luggage. Alongside this was a new display, *The Scottish Story*, about the first settlers in Dunedin.

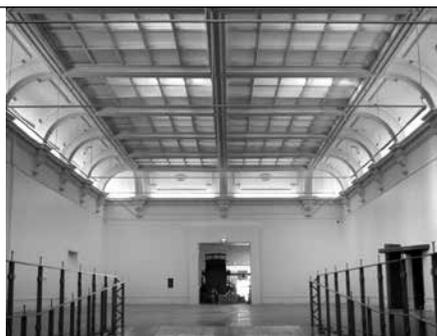
The Fringe Festival 'Chindogu' inventions exhibition *Fringe Inventions* was again hosted by the Museum. A small exhibition on the theme of gold was staged in the BNZ Building for Anniversary Weekend, and a small exhibit provided for Lawrence's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. For Anzac Day, we displayed the Roll of Honour in the newly renovated bus station 'horse shoe'.

### Education

Despite the disruptions associated with the redevelopment, school numbers have remained steady throughout this period due to Sara Sinclair's innovative outreach programmes which combine hands-on activities and drama. These are put on at the museum and at other sites around the city, including the Gasworks Museum, Port Chalmers Museum, Chinese Garden, Botanic Garden and the Mapoutahi Pa site. Themed walks have also proved popular with schools. The most popular activity to date has been the 'Chinese Otago' programme involving both the Museum and Chinese Garden. Another initiative has been the mobile drama presentation for schools with actor Danny Still and storyteller Kaitrin McMullan, *1848 – Remember the Date*, based on some of the characters portrayed in the Museum's Smith Gallery.

### Public Programmes

Ideas to retain public engagement with the Museum included twelve floor talks and lectures, six film screenings, 31 specialised



tours, eight drama and musical events, eleven workshops and 32 holiday programmes. Walk Dunedin, which operates daily, attracted 582 walkers this year, thanks to a loyal and passionate group of tour guides. Our association with Dance Otakou and the University's Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies continues and we co-hosted several very successful events including a book reading by internationally renowned author Val McDermid and a debate between Professors Edward J Cowan and Alan Riach of Glasgow University. The International Science Festival's events at the museum were fully booked, while the Otago Festival of the Arts transformed the Hudson Gallery into a theatre for two of their productions.

### **Saturday Club**

The Museum experimented with the concept of a Saturday Club for young people – this is how I became interested in museums myself. Working with Creatability, an organisation for gifted children, we launched Creatability@OSM. This not only encourages young people to use and become comfortable with the museum but is also a testing ground for some of the ideas we may introduce into the new displays. One session, on electronics, saw sweetbix jumping off Van der Graaf machines!

### **Community Liaison & Outreach**

What have we been doing out there in the community? Early in the year I was invited to meet the OSA's North Island Group in Auckland and updated members on the redevelopment project. Several of us have given numerous talks to University and Polytechnic students, community groups and service clubs throughout the year. The topics included the Museum's redevelopment, its collections, Dunedin businesses, genealogy, and Irish and Scottish migration and settlement.

It is very encouraging to receive such positive feedback on what is going on 'behind closed doors' and we continue to encourage students to use the collections by special appointment. Regulars include students on the University's Textile Science and the Polytech's Communication Design courses.

### **Professional Development & Training**

Staff are encouraged to join professional groups and seek out current best practice in their specialist fields. This helps raise the profile of the Museum within the museums and heritage sector and with the University and Polytechnic. This year staff attended museum conferences and workshops in Shanghai, Manchester, Melbourne, Wellington and Nelson, and historical workshops and conferences at Otago and Massey Universities.

### **Promotion & Profile**

The Museum has continued to receive excellent media coverage. We have also widely promoted our activities in the media and on an updated scrolling banner at Dunedin airport. Initially when we closed completely I was inundated with calls from people asking if they could borrow my staff as they thought they wouldn't have anything to do – as you can see everyone has been extremely busy and we certainly haven't been sitting around drinking coffee all day.

### **Otago Settlers Association**

I would particularly like to thank the President, Committee and members who have offered support, both in kind and financial, to the Museum, its wider team and me personally over the past year. The Association is a solid 'Friends of the Museum' body which shows its commitment to the Museum in every way possible. It has an on-going commitment to the Museum's redevelopment project, and has provided additional sponsorship for the Settler Cottage and other areas of the displays, the Otago University History and Rockliff Collection Internships and financial support for both Pixie Town and Walk Dunedin.

As you know we have limited funds for acquiring new collection items: \$2,000, which doesn't go very far! This is another area where the Association has stepped into the breach and purchased key items for the collection. Collecting is a core business for the Museum and we are doing ourselves a disservice if we do not collect now for the future. This is an area close to your hearts and one which I seek to address in the current DCC budget rounds, especially as we are looking to develop our collections and not remain static.

OSA members also provide willing hands, volunteer at our major events, ANZAC Day and Pixie Town, and we are very grateful for this. You support me and do some great lobbying on our behalf especially through the annual plan submission process, the Museum Board and also within the community at large. Wherever I give a presentation there always seem to be OSA members in the audience who are a great encouragement and support to me. We are going through major and exciting changes at the Museum, as you are aware, and on reopening will be a new beast built on very solid foundations.

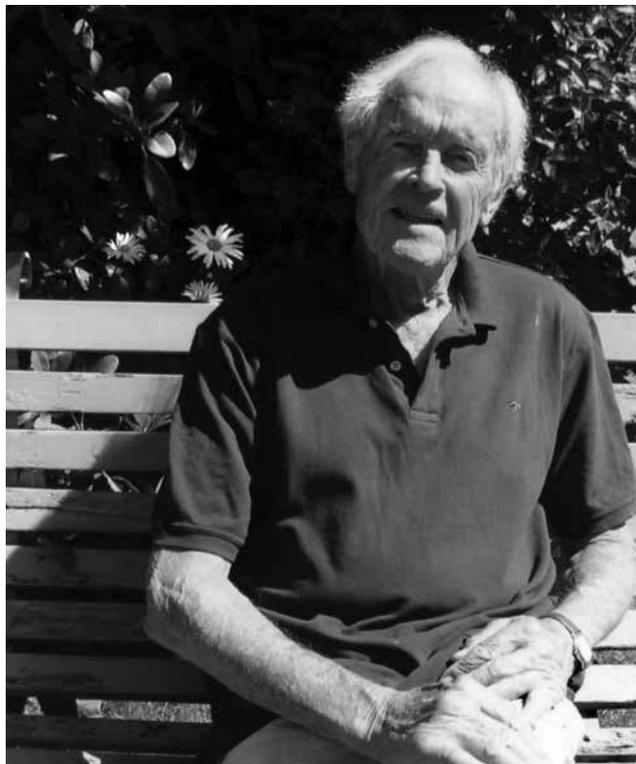
### **Linda Wigley**

Director

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## In Memoriam

# Niel Wales (1927-2011)



The Otago Settlers Association lost a loyal friend with the recent death of Niel Wales. A fourth-generation architect in New Zealand's oldest architectural firm, Niel was deeply committed to Dunedin, its people and its heritage. The firm was founded in 1863 by his great-grandfather and namesake Nathaniel Young Armstrong Wales in partnership with William Mason. Niel was a partner in Mason and Wales from 1956 until he retired from full-time employment in 1991. Over this period his contribution to Dunedin's built environment was considerable, including, for example, the Wellcome Research Institute, the Golden Centre mall and Wakari Hospital.

Niel had an immense knowledge and appreciation of Dunedin's historic buildings. The compact little book he wrote in collaboration with the late Hardwicke Knight, *Buildings of Dunedin: An Illustrated Architectural Guide to New Zealand's Victorian City* (John McIndoe Ltd, 1988) is an invaluable resource, an essential handbook for anyone interested in our built heritage.

Niel's contribution to the Otago Settlers Association has been immense. We have gained from access to his professional expertise, but even more from his good judgment and sheer hard work. He served as an OSA committee member or office-bearer continuously from 1966 to 2002. When he first joined the committee the cash-strapped OSA was running the Museum through a paid secretary (the formidable Miss Pryde, already more than 20 years into her

32-year tenure), an office junior and a caretaker. The excitement of the 1948 centennial had dissipated, membership was waning and even keeping the galleries open – let alone warm – was a challenge. Niel was actively involved in all the tense committee discussions that led to dramatic changes from the 1970s: the appointment of the first museum director, Seddon Bennington in 1978, and the dazzling period of Elizabeth Hinds' leadership from 1983. Grander visions, expansion of staff, premises and activities – none of these could be achieved without a source of income beyond members' subscriptions and the occasional bequest, but it was only after long negotiations that the Dunedin City Council agreed to take responsibility.

As President of OSA in the crucial period from 1991 to 1993, Niel oversaw the transition to Council ownership. Diplomacy was required as the Association adjusted to its changed and necessarily reduced role. He was the foundation Chair of the Otago Settlers Museum Board, established in 1991 to bring together representatives of the Council, the Settlers Museum and the Association. He continued to serve on the Board until 2002. Niel also resumed his role on the committee when his term as President ended, serving until 1998.

We are grateful that, among all his other interests, Niel Wales chose to give such loyal and effective service to the Otago Settlers Association.

We extend our sympathy to Diane and the family.

(For other tributes, see:  
[www.tributes.co.nz/TributeBook.aspx?id=6814](http://www.tributes.co.nz/TributeBook.aspx?id=6814))

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## The Annual General Meeting

Fifty-one members of the Association were present at its 112<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting on Thursday 15 September. For many members this was their first chance to see the newly renovated NZR Social Hall, brought back into use after many years. It should prove to be an excellent venue for future OSA functions. Vice-President Hilary Allison presided in the absence of President Phil Dowsett. All the executive officers were re-elected unopposed, and a new committee member was introduced, Mrs Susan Schweigman. Mr Paul Buckner of Downie Stewart was re-elected Honorary Solicitor to the Association. Members had already received a summary of the Financial Statements for the year ending 30 June 2011. Because the auditing of the Financial Statements was still in process, they were accepted 'subject to audit', to be sent out to members when they became available. The Museum's Director Linda Wigley then gave her annual report to the association, a lightly edited version of which appears on pages 3-6 of this issue. To round off the evening, Vice-President Norman Ledgerwood gave an informative and entertaining illustrated talk on the Otago Harbour torpedo boat corps of the 1880s and 1890s, which was based at Deborah Bay.

## For Your Diary

# Christmas Party: At Last the 1848 Show

Members and friends are invited to celebrate the Christmas season with a story-theatre experience: *1848 – Remember the Date*. See Kaitrin McMullan and Danny Still bring to life some of the stories behind the portraits in the Otago Settlers Museum gallery. It will be held in the Social Hall at the Otago Settlers Museum on Friday, 9 December 2011 at 7.30 pm. The entrance to the hall is through the green door adjacent to the traffic lights (just to the right of the main bus station entrance), and up the staircase or lift to the second floor. Our traditional festive supper will be available. If you wish to attend, please contact the OSA Secretary by Wednesday, 7 December 2011 by telephone or fax on (03) 477-8677, by post at PO Box 74, Dunedin 9054, or by electronic mail at [otago.settlers.assn@xtra.co.nz](mailto:otago.settlers.assn@xtra.co.nz)



Next year's Anniversary Day dinner will be held in the splendid dining hall of Knox College. Note Friday, 23 March 2012 in your diary!



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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Danny Still and Kaitrin McMullan will present their entertaining story-theatre experience: *1848 – Remember the Date* at the OSA Christmas Party.