



# THE RUSSIANS

## Aren't Coming



A Russian ironclad warship, the *Kaskowiski*, steamed unexpectedly into Auckland Harbour in February 1873. Its crew boarded and took control of a British warship then in port, seized gold from the local banks and took the mayor and other prominent citizens hostage, demanding a 500,000-rouble (£250,000) ransom. Or rather, they did not: the whole story was a hoax perpetrated by the *Daily Southern Cross* newspaper in order to draw attention to the country's unpreparedness in the event of a surprise attack. The newspaper was imitating George Chesney's best-selling novel of 1871, *The Battle of Dorking: Reminiscences of a Volunteer*. This told the story of the invasion of Britain by an unnamed foreign power that bore a suspicious resemblance to the newly unified Germany, and set off a whole new genre of invasion-scare novels.

By 1873, rumours of war between the British and Russian empires were made more plausible by recent Russian advances in central Asia towards the Afghan border, which seemed designed to threaten the security of British India. Russia had two years before unilaterally revoked parts of the peace settlement that had ended the Crimean War. In the northern Pacific, the naval outpost of Vladivostock had been founded in 1859 and the construction of an elaborate system of fortifications was begun in the 1870s. A telegraph line from there to Shanghai and Nagasaki was inaugurated in 1871; a year later Australia was linked to the outside world by submarine cable, but New Zealand had to wait until 1876. As was pointed out at the time, there would be no advance warning of a naval attack and the ports would be unable to defend themselves.

The short-lived, manufactured invasion scare of 1873 helped put pressure on the government to improve coastal defence. Twelve years later fortifications were constructed to guard the approaches

Spar torpedo boat, Port Chalmers. DA De Maus, 1847-1925. John Dickie collection of postcards, prints and negatives.  
 Ref: PAColl-3037-1-06. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://beta.natlib.govt.nz/records/22844248>

to the four major harbours. To protect Otago Harbour, gun emplacements were constructed at Taiaroa Head. Gun batteries were also installed at Lawyer's Head, Ocean Beach and on Forbury Hill above Second Beach, St Clair. A minefield was planned off Harrington Point, though in the event it was never laid out. Each of the country's four major harbours was also to receive mobile defence in the form of torpedo-boat squadrons. Not all torpedoes in those days were the long, cylindrical, powered versions familiar today. These were developed in the 1860s and 1870s by Robert Whitehead and ran on compressed air.\* The traditional type of torpedo was an explosive device that had to be placed by a specialised boat next to the hull of an enemy warship, beneath the waterline, by means of a long spar. The sailors would then make a quick getaway at full speed astern, which necessitated a special small, fast boat. These however were not cheap: the government ordered four 'second-class' Thorneycroft boats in 1882 for a price variously reported as between £3,200 and £10,000 each. Even the lower sum would have a 'purchasing power' today of about half a million dollars. These boats were 63 feet (19 metres) long, with a beam of 7 feet 6 inches (2.3 metres); their draft was only three feet (one metre), and they had a displacement of twelve tons. The spar to which the torpedo was attached was 35 feet (10.6 metres) long. The boats were fast, capable of up to seventeen knots. Only the Wellington Harbour boat seems to have been fitted with a gun. 'Second class' did not imply any inferiority, merely that the boats were light enough to be carried in the davits of a large ship. This lightness meant they were comparatively fragile.

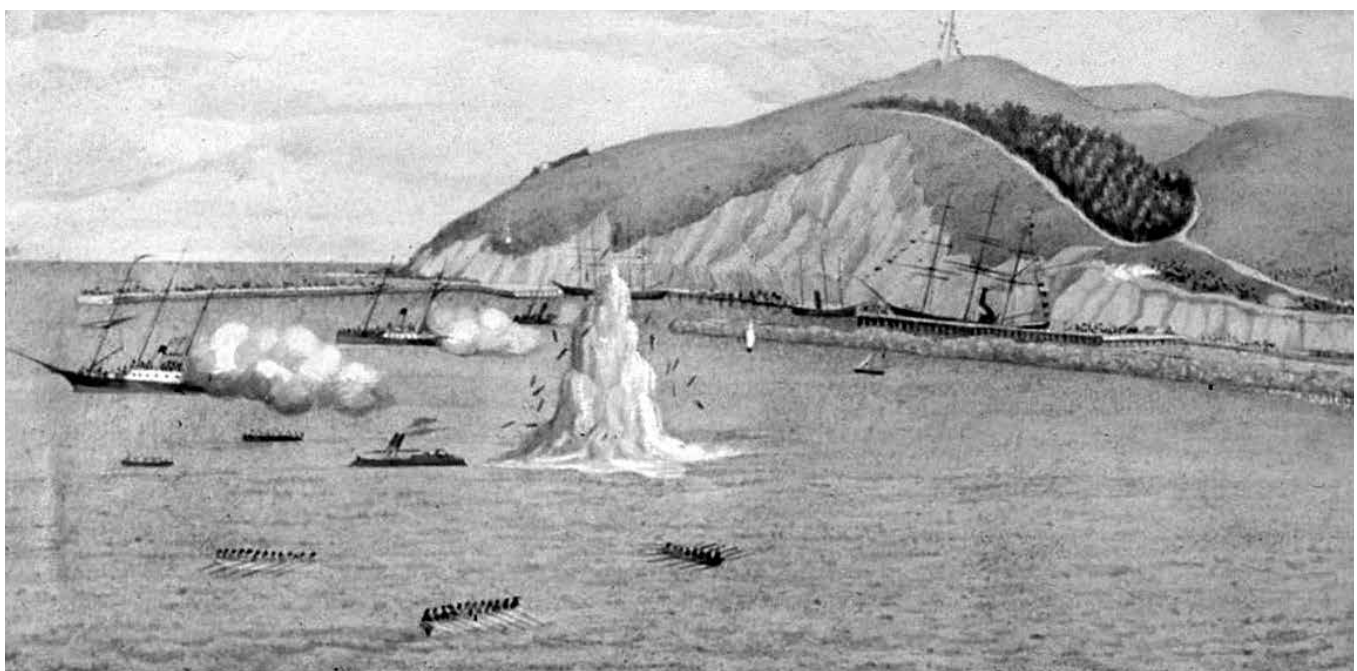
The Otago Harbour torpedo boat, named *Taiaroa*, was stationed from 1887 at what is now called The Green at Deborah Bay, but was then known as the 'Torpedo Mole.' From the reclaimed area, which survives, a wharf originally extended 200 feet out into the bay. It was lengthened in 1895 to allow boats to moor alongside at low tide, and was removed in 1922. The establishment on shore included several storage sheds, workshops, an office and a house, grandly referred to officially as 'the barracks.' This house, too, still exists, having subsequently been home to the Pike, James and Tappin families, among others over the years. One of the storage buildings eventually became the church and community hall, but was demolished in 1990 for a new house.

The 'Torpedo Branch of the Armed Constabulary' was formed in 1884, but in 1887 was renamed the 'Torpedo Corps' of the Permanent Militia. The eight members of the corps were issued with Snider artillery carbines (which were shorter than standard rifles) and sword bayonets, but there was 'no pretension to smartness' about their uniforms. Captain John Densem had been skipper of a Lake Wakatipu paddle steamer but was dismissed for running it aground; he was soon offered the post of skipper of the Torpedo Boat Corps. He served in this capacity until 1888, when Deane Clifton Sharpe took over. He was to remain skipper until the Corps was disbanded 1892, after which he was given command of a series of Defence Department vessels at Port Chalmers. The torpedo boat itself was broken up at Port Chalmers in 1902, though its engine survives at the Torpedo Boat Museum in Lyttelton together with restored sections of the local boat. The engine had initially been stored at the School of Mines at Otago University, and was later moved to the School of Engineering at Canterbury University.

Since the Russian navy never in fact turned up, the Torpedo Boat Corps only saw mock action in exercises. A mock naval attack was staged as part of a military encampment and exercise at Oamaru in 1886. The *Taiaroa* demonstrated its manoeuvrability and ability to reverse at high speed. An old surf boat was fitted with masts in order to appear like a larger vessel and two small mines were used to blow it up to make it look as if the *Taiaroa* had destroyed it with a torpedo.

This is based on Norman Ledgerwood's talk to last year's Annual General Meeting of the Association and on chapter 11 of his book *Deborah Bay: The People and Events of a Lower Otago Harbour Community* (Dunedin, 2006), 'Russians and White Elephants: The Deborah Bay Torpedo Boat Corps.'

\* Robert Whitehead was also commissioned to design a torpedo for the Austro-Hungarian navy. In 1912 his granddaughter and heir Agathe launched an Austrian submarine, fell in love with its captain, Georg von Trapp, and married him. Their children became singers, made famous by 'The Sound of Music' in 1965.



A detail from the 1886 watercolour painting *Easter Encampment of Volunteers at Oamaru* by Christopher Aubrey, depicting a mock naval attack on Oamaru Harbour. The *Taiaroa* can be seen centre left, speeding away from the exploding target vessel. Otago Settlers Museum collection



# An Iceberg and an Adventuress

The loss of the *Titanic* off Newfoundland on its maiden voyage nearly a century ago in April 1912 had a few resonances far away here in New Zealand. In Dunedin, the *Evening Star* newspaper started a subscription fund, and a mammoth benefit concert in aid of the women and children survivors and the families of the victims was held in the Brydone Hall. Nation-wide, the 'open-hearted people of this country' gave a total of £3500; of this, nearly £2000 came from Dunedin alone. Donations came from all levels of society, as was shown by hundreds of pounds raised by shilling subscriptions. Even the Wellington newspapers were prepared to concede that 'in this general tribute to the good-heartedness of the population as a whole Dunedin is entitled to special mention on this occasion. Just after the southern city had handed in about £2000 for the victims of the [British] coal strike came the news of the *Titanic* calamity. At once some energetic Dunedin people started to make arrangements to assist in the relief of families bereft of breadwinners.'

No New Zealanders went down with the *Titanic*. Initially it was feared George Beetham of Wairarapa and R Heald, former

station-master at Carterton, were lost, but it soon transpired that they had not been on board. The country was not untouched however, for Ada Banks, the wife of the First Officer of the *Titanic*, Lieutenant William Murdoch, who went down with his ship, came from Christchurch. He had been on the bridge when the fatal iceberg was sighted and ordered a manoeuvre to avoid hitting it. Later that night while supervising the embarkation of lifeboats, the Fifth Officer was forced to fire his pistol in the air in order to hold back panicking male Italian steerage passengers who threatened to swamp the boats. This was quickly embroidered into a fallacious story that Murdoch himself had actually shot some passengers, then himself.

The sister and widowed mother of Charles Williams, professional squash rackets champion of the world, lived in Wellington. He was initially reported lost, but had in fact jumped from the boat deck into the ocean and was picked up by a lifeboat. One Dunedin resident was able to give a personal perspective on the disaster, as he had been shipwrecked in almost the same place 24 years before. In 1887, FW Raich's steamer *Columbia*

The *Titanic* sits at the dock at Southampton prior to her fateful maiden voyage, April 1912.

Inset: Miss May Hallett sits in the dock on trial for obtaining £50 by alleged false pretences, *NZ Free Lance*, 22 May 1909

had also collided with an iceberg, at twelve knots. About 600 tons of ice piled up on its deck and its bow was sheared off, but a watertight bulkhead prevented the ship sinking. Fortunately no-one died and the steamer was able to reach port safely.

The person possibly least upset by the *Titanic* tragedy was May Hallett, whose estranged husband Donald Campbell went down with the ship. His merry widow was well remembered in New Zealand as the 'adventuress' who had 'caused no little stir in society circles' in 1908-9. May travelled under a variety of aliases, among them the niece of recently deceased British Prime Minister Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman. She was accepted in Wellington society circles as the genuine article, and was given credit at hotels and shops on the expectation that a bank draft from England would arrive presently. May was said to be so charming she would have been able to 'screw money out of a Scotch parson.' The bogus Miss Campbell-Bannerman hired a car and toured several North Island centres with her maid before the money ran out and her story began to unravel. The newspapers reported in August 1908 that a 'young and well-dressed woman of rather fascinating appearance has been having a flutter in society circles in several country towns in Auckland [province], and numerous gay young bachelors who have laid their hearts at her feet are feeling rather pained just now.' One of her not-so-young admirers lent her £50 (the equivalent in 'purchasing power' today of at least \$8000), and when he discovered her true identity, took her to court for obtaining money by false pretences. Walter Lovelace Clifford was a wealthy Wellington farmer and old enough to be her father, and not especially subtle hints in court that he was infatuated with her caused much merriment. The defence successfully argued that the £50 in question had been given voluntarily and so May had not acted fraudulently; she was found not guilty.

At her trial May Hallett wore 'a large black hat of the "Merry Widow" type' and spoke in 'that low, soft voice that is so seductive,' according to the Press Association's reporter. Her lawyer objected to an artist sketching her in court, but this only served to make the newspapers more interested in her physical appearance. *Truth* said that though 'certainly not of ravishing beauty,' May had 'langorous or dreamy eyes ... the sort that have a magnetic effect' on men. Other newspapers ungallantly claimed that 'the most prominent feature of the young lady is her nose, which is represented as being of almost alarming proportions.' After her acquittal, she returned to her former profession of barmaid, at a bar in Cuba Street where 'men flocked to see May as if she were the Niagara Falls.'

May Hallett had form. She was one of the daughters of a 'wealthy invalid gentleman' of Horley in Surrey, just north of where Gatwick Airport is now. Already at the age of seventeen considered 'an unmanageable young lady,' in 1905 she stole £2 10s (equivalent to about \$400 today) from her aunt, who took her to court. She was bound over under the First Offenders Act but escaped from the home to which she had been sent by the magistrates. The following year she was in court again for having stolen £4 17s 6d (worth about \$800 today) from a registered letter addressed to a fellow lodger. She had used the money to buy a smart-looking long cloak and a mauve

picture hat trimmed with ostrich feathers. She rented rooms in a fashionable London neighbourhood and took the name of Miss Coleridge, daughter of a well-known judge. One of his colleagues sentenced her to be committed to a home for an indefinite period, as an alternative to a lengthy prison sentence. It seems she soon escaped from this home and headed for pastures new in the antipodes.

The unfortunate Donald Campbell, victualling clerk of the *Titanic*, had been ensnared by Miss Hallett when he was working in the trans-Tasman liner *Ulimaroo*. She was posing as a wealthy widow, accompanied by a child in arms and a maid. After a shipboard romance, Donald married her at the Dunedin registry office when the ship reached port. They settled in Australia, but he soon discovered his wife's past. She promised to reform, he forgave her, and they left for England. Not long after, she was back in New Zealand. After her acquittal in 1909, May was in and out of prison for the rest of her life for various frauds. She was in prison, serving a sentence of nine months' hard labour, when she died in 1922.



The Wellington Society Sensation: May Hallett in the Dock answering the Charge of False Pretences, *NZ Free Lance*, 6 February 1909.

# Fading Memories of the Twentieth Century



I am currently working furiously developing the Twentieth-Century Dunedin exhibition for the Museum's reopening later this year. The focus of the exhibition will be the rapid changes in domestic technology from the 1920s, which coincided with changing domestic lives of Dunedin families. In connection with this, I am working with Professor Emerita Helen Leach on changes in our culinary traditions, particularly from the 1960s onwards.

This is where you come in: we have very few photographs of domestic Dunedin after 1950. So we are interested in your photographs or slides from the 1950s onwards of things such as: digging spuds in the garden; lawn mowing; Nana's legendary sponge cake or roast; round the barbecue; making a mess in the kitchen while baking; watching telly; the new bike or washing machine.

If you have something to contribute, do get in touch with me. Any photographs we might use will be scanned (you keep the originals), and they will go into a pool of images for the exhibition. I can't promise that everything you contribute will be used initially, as it's a big century in which a lot happened!

**Ian Wards**  
Curator

Ian can be contacted at [iwards@dcc.govt.nz](mailto:iwards@dcc.govt.nz) or on (03) 4742 181



Above: Trudy McDonald (née Boon) aged twelve, during the Winter Show about 1965. She was told to make a poached egg on toast, but had to ask someone what a poached egg was as the Boon family never had their eggs that way. Suffice it to say she did not win the cooking contest. Nonetheless, she received a signed copy of Alison Holst's first cookery book for participating. Courtesy of Cora Woodhouse, Visitor Host at the Museum.

Top: The Boon family outside their home in Caversham in 1959. Courtesy of Cora Woodhouse

# Christmas Meeting

About 140 members attended the Association's Christmas meeting on Friday, 9 December. The freshly refurbished Hudson Gallery was lined with manically flashing Christmas trees for the occasion. After a glass of punch and a welcome from President Phil Dowsett, members were entertained with a dramatisation of some of the stories behind the Museum's collection of portraits. The adjoining Smith Gallery has been repainted in a deep shade of red in readiness for the portraits' reinstatement in time for the Museum's reopening later this year. Children's theatre exponents Kaitrin McMullan and Danny Still acted and sang episodes from the lives of some notable early settlers. Among them were Archibald Macdonald, a teacher who arrived in the *Philip Laing* in 1848; Clementina Burns (née Grant), wife of the Rev Thomas Burns; William Cargill, formerly Captain in the 74th Highlanders and veteran of the Peninsular campaign; John Jones and his wife Sarah (née Sizemore); and Margaret Buchanan (née McCulloch) and her husband John, the weaver whose home-made table is now in the Museum.

Watson Shennan was there, who together with his brother Alexander established the Galloway and Moutere stations in Central Otago and were the first to import stud sheep directly into the province. They imported longwool sheep from Scotland and merinos from Germany. One of the latter was there, though curiously she seemed to have a Russian accent rather than a German one. Job Wain of the eponymous hotel was depicted in his capacity as chief of the volunteer fire brigade, the descendants of which celebrated its sesquicentenary last year. Judge William Henry Valpy and his wife Caroline (née Jeffreys) of The Forbury also made an appearance.

Then came Henry Manning, ship's doctor of the *John Wickliffe* in 1848 who later married his fellow-passenger Eliza Stokes. In 1852 Manning challenged Sidney Stephen, the Supreme Court judge, to a duel over comments he had made on the character of Mary Graham. Instead of rising to the bait Stephen had him bound over to keep the peace. Other well-known figures also portrayed included Richard Hudson, who set up his biscuit factory in 1868, and James Adam, variously boat-builder, precentor, emigration agent and farmer, but best remembered as the author of *Twenty-five Years of Emigrant Life in the South of New Zealand* (1874).

The entertaining evening was rounded off with Christmas cake, truffles and strawberries. Some conversations were prompted by the display of 35 slips filled in by members with the details of the migration of a chosen settler. Three of these were from Continental Europe and the remainder from various parts of the British Isles, so parts of the world map became rather crowded with pins.

Twenty-three different ships were named, together with a Tasman Empire Airways flight in 1964. The only other arrival by aeroplane was unusually early for this mode of transport, in 1958. Exactly 110 years earlier, the *Philip Laing* brought five settlers whose descendants filled in a slip. The *John Wickliffe*, *Bernicia* and *Victory* however had only one each from 1848.

Two years later one more arrived at Lyttelton in the *Randolph*. (This was the second of the Canterbury Association ships to arrive, beaten to the post by only five and a half hours.) In the following years, three ships brought two settlers apiece: the *Nourmahal*, *Wellington* and *Strathfieldsay* (which was named after the Iron Duke's country estate). Only one passenger was named for all the others: *Agra*, *Canterbury*, *Cashmere*, *Electric*, *James Nichol Fleming*, *Glencoe*, *John Hamilton*, *Mary*, *Minerva*, *Mooltan*, *Sir Edward Paget*, *Pladda*, *Sevilla*, *Strathallan*, and the *Three Bells*.

The most popular destination was naturally enough Dunedin itself, with eight settlers. The Otago Peninsula attracted three and the Taieri a further six. Another six settlers headed for other parts of Otago, six to Invercargill and three to other places in Southland. Three others eventually saw the light and headed south: one each went initially to Canterbury, Auckland and the third to a place apparently too embarrassing to be named.



A section of wall in the portrait gallery as it appeared prior to the restoration of the building as part of the Museum redevelopment.

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## News from Up North

A branch meeting of the Association was held on 5 November at Ferndale, Mount Albert for members from the Auckland, Waikato and Bay of Plenty regions. Twelve members were present to hear Linda Wigley's address on the progress of the extensive alterations to the Museum in Dunedin. She illustrated her talk with slides, which were very informative; we could see and understand the progress that has been made. The final stage of the alterations to the entrance is ready to start, and this is all ahead of schedule. Thank you, Linda, for the enthusiasm and dedication you have for the Museum. When this is all completed Dunedin will have a fine asset for all to visit.

Linda brought with her Rebecca Crawford, the new Communications and Business Team Leader. Rebecca informed us that she had come from the United States with her husband who has a New Zealand passport. She discussed a name change for the Museum, for example 'Dunedin,' but it was pointed out that the early settlers settled throughout Otago, not just Dunedin.

I must say that the poor attendance at our meetings is very disappointing, and if more do not attend, I will certainly consider terminating the meetings.

**Annette Paterson**

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## Unfinished Business from the AGM

At our Annual General Meeting on 15 September 2011 some members expressed concern that the audit of our accounts had not been completed in time for their presentation at the meeting. The President and Treasurer subsequently met with the Audit and Assurance Principal of WHK to discuss this issue. He explained that the period of time set in our constitution between the end of the financial year and the AGM was insufficient to complete all the requirements of the modern audit process. Un-audited accounts will therefore continue to be presented at the AGM and any qualifications to the audit will be addressed by the Committee. We are pleased to confirm that WHK will remain our auditors and will continue to support us by charging a substantially reduced fee. The audited accounts for 2011 are now available should any member wish to receive a copy.

**Phil Dowsett**  
President

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## History Intern

The Otago Settlers' Association Summer Internship for 2010–11 has been awarded to Emma Gattey. The internship, offered to the best second-year history student at the university, lasts for six weeks and is intended to help the recipient develop a critical appreciation of the way history is used.

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## For Your Diary Anniversary Day Dinner



This year's Anniversary Day dinner will be held in the formal dining room of Knox College. Popular local crime writer Vanda Symon will be the speaker. She has published four novels featuring Sam (Samantha) Shephard: *Overkill*, *The Ringmaster*, *Containment* and *Bound*. All but the first are set in and around Dunedin, and *Containment* was a finalist in the inaugural Ngaio Marsh Award for the best crime novel in 2010. Vanda's first and second novels have been translated into German as *Ein harmloser Mord* and *Der ungeschminkte Tod*.

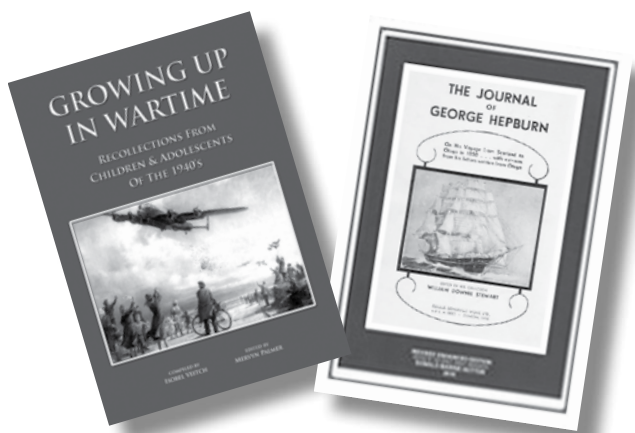
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## Correction

In the obituary for Niel Wales in December's issue it was mistakenly stated that he was the foundation Chair of the Museum Board. In fact, this position was held by the Rev Dr Somerville.

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## Book News



***Growing Up In Wartime: Recollections from Children & Adolescents of the 1940s***, compiled by Isobel Veitch and edited by Mervyn Palmer (Dunedin, 2011)

This is the second edition of a book originally published in 2009 with the support of the Otago Settlers Association. It has been expanded to include six new stories, four of which strengthen the last section with accounts of action at sea and experiences in occupied Europe. The success of the first edition meant that several organisations could be assisted with contributions from its profits. It is intended to help selected charities again with any surplus once all expenses have been met. The recommended retail price is \$23.50, but the book is available to Association members for only \$20, including delivery. Contact Mervyn Palmer at 15 Beaconsfield Road, Portobello, Dunedin, 9014 or by telephone (03) 4780 931 or e-mail: [rpalmer@es.co.nz](mailto:rpalmer@es.co.nz)

### ***The Journal of George Hepburn, Early Settler***

Back in 1934 William Downie Stewart published an edition of his grandfather George Hepburn's shipboard journal of 1850 together with a selection of letters to relations back home in Scotland. Now Hepburn's great-great-grandson Don Hutton has published an updated edition of the journal, together with many more unpublished letters and documents not used in the earlier publication. George Hepburn was born in Kirkcaldy in 1803 and arrived at the new Otago settlement with his wife

and eight children in 1850. He settled at Halfway Bush and was Macandrew's general manager for a time before, with J Paterson, he bought out Macandrew and set up Paterson and Co. Hepburn was a Presbyterian church leader and served on the Provincial Council for several years. His correspondence covers the entire period from his arrival in 1850 to his death in 1883.

This new edition puts the previously unpublished letters in chronological order, and retains as far as possible their characteristic abbreviations and quirky spelling. It is extensively illustrated, partly in colour, and reproduces some of the original letters in Hepburn's beautiful copperplate handwriting. The text is extensively footnoted, identifying individuals, places and events, and explaining obscure terms (some of which are in Hepburn's phonetic spelling).

The voyage out, from the Isle of Wight to New Plymouth, took eighteen weeks. In all, Hepburn's journey to Dunedin took seven months. Hepburn recounts many incidents involving his fellow steerage passengers and the crew, though he disapproved of the 'intemperance and dissipation carried on board.' He provides a lengthy account of the 'crossing the line' festivities, which he thought 'the relic of a barbarous age.'

Among the incidents on the voyage Hepburn recounts is the capture of an albatross by the third mate with a hook and line. It could not fly off from the deck, so after letting it walk about to give the passengers a good look, the sailors killed it for the sake of its feathers, giving the carcass to the dogs, the meat 'being of too strong a nature to eat' – clearly they were not worried by the fate of Coleridge's Ancient Mariner.

Hepburn's first letters home provide detailed descriptions of New Plymouth, Nelson and Wellington in the winter of 1850. At the latter, 'the great earthquake [of 1848] did the town a great deal of good – it set so many to work rebuilding churches, warehouses etc, but now mostly all of wood.' On reaching Dunedin, he wrote: 'Now as to my first impressions of this place. Notwithstanding all we heard by the way to the contrary, it is as good if not the best of all the settlements, and its appearance far exceeds what I had expected after seeing the other settlements. It is amazing what the people have accomplished in little more than two years ... I am also happy to add that Mr Burns preached far better than I expected – indeed it was excellent, and was told he was always as good.'

The book costs \$30, plus \$5 for postage and packaging. Please send a crossed cheque or money order to:  
DB Hutton, 197 Highsted Road, Casebrook, Christchurch 8051.



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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](mailto:otago.settlers.assn@xtra.co.nz)

 **Otago Daily Times**

*The Otago Daily Times supports Otago Settlers Museum*

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