



## When Telegrams Were Dreaded The Home Front in Otago during the Second World War

by Dorothy Page

As the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Second World War approached, both the Otago Settlers Association and the Museum have paid tribute in their own ways to Otago at war. The Museum has mounted a major exhibition opening in August on *Dunedin's War: the Wartime Experience of Dunedin People 1939-1945* and the Association devoted its Winter members' evening to the 'Home Front in Otago'. On that occasion some 80 members joined in an interactive session, co-ordinated by *Otago Daily Times* columnist Gordon Parry, well-known for his evocative recollections of times past, Dawn Ibbotson, who spent the war years as a young mother in Dunedin, and Settlers Museum curator Seán Brosnahan, on hand to provide - and glean - comment and information. Members contributed personal stories of the war as it touched their own lives here at home.

Some of the stories were written and sent in beforehand, others were related on the spot. It was a spontaneous sharing of memories, often poignant ones, among friends and it made for a quite special occasion. There were visual mementoes too. Paul Aubin set up a varied display from his collection of wartime memorabilia and other members also brought items to show. Here are some of our members' stories.

Dawn, who married in 1938, and whose husband was in the air force, was one of many New Zealand women who found themselves bringing up small children alone. She remembered the shortages of food items, but also how generously people shared and came together as a community, and how women had the opportunity to move into employment fields hitherto closed to them.

Wrapping gift parcels at Patriotic Committee headquarters in the Dunedin Town Hall for local men serving overseas - courtesy Allied Press

Several people talked about manpowering. Even students were directed into essential occupations over the long vacation. One teacher trainee laboured on Dunedin tramlines as part of a gang who lifted the tracks with crowbars, packed ballast underneath, then replaced them. Because he was slight in build, he was selected to help mend the frayed cable of the Maryhill cable car. He had to get down into the narrow slot where the cable ran, and lift it up for someone to splice. Young women dreaded being manpowered to the Seacliff mental hospital. For some, though, manpowering had its advantages. One farmer's daughter recounted how her father was forced to pay her wages for the farm work she had been doing without pay. A school leaver was manpowered from her first poorly paid job to sole charge of an office dealing with permissions for the state house building industry - at twice the pay.

Schooldays in wartime left vivid memories, especially of the air raid trenches dug in the school grounds. Those at one Invercargill school were so regularly filled with water that a former pupil surmised they probably posed more of a risk to the children from drowning or hypothermia than protection from a stray bomb. Children were issued with leather identity discs, and sometimes with a little emergency bag containing a cork to put in their mouth and cotton wool for their ears. Air raid practices were usually held in the lunch hour, and convinced that this must be the time that an enemy attack would come, one small boy always ate the cake in his lunch-box before the sandwiches so that, come what may, he would not miss out on the best part of his lunch. People remembered school cadets, and their fathers' activities in the Home Guard. Melville Carr's father and uncle were cooks for weekend Home Guard camps at Ranfurly, preparing much of the food in large coppers that were normally used for boiling the linen or making soap. There were sometimes complaints about burnt food, but since the commanding officer's food was cooked separately, these complaints were never verified. Everyone went to district farewells, with dancing, food and gifts for men going overseas.

Then there were the blackouts and shortages. Rationing was a challenge. The amount allocated per week was twelve ounces of sugar, eight ounces of butter, six eggs and two and a half pounds of meat. (Children under five and pregnant and nursing women received more.) Even with these restrictions, women would save up ingredients to send parcels of home baking overseas, often working through patriotic organisations. One boy who spent four years of the war at a school hostel, said that for each dining table the butter was cut into eight cubes, one for each boy - but because it was almost impossible to make the cubes equal and a pecking order prevailed, some always got less than others. All sorts of non-rationed items were also scarce, from fish and potatoes to cigarettes and silk stockings.

Petrol was in short supply, making every journey by car something of an adventure. Farmers were given an extra ration for their tractors and farm vehicles. It was coloured orange, and 'woe betide anyone caught using that petrol for other than farm purposes', wrote Melville Carr, who grew up in the Moniototo. Public transport was crowded and longer-distance travel by train and ferry problematic. A mother who had sent her children to the North Island when she had an operation had great trouble getting them back home.

Communication with family and friends serving overseas was of the utmost importance and many women spent long hours writing letters and looked forward to receiving letters in return, even if they were heavily blacked out by the censor. Vera Crozier, whose wartime job at the Mosgiel Post Office included the North Taieri postal run, would 'bike extra quickly' if she was delivering a letter marked 'Prisoner of War'. Telegrams were dreaded. Vera described how Next of Kin messages were notified on the Morse Key: UGM (Urgent Government Message) meant a death; GM (Government Message) meant missing or wounded. On receiving the Morse Key information on a telegram form, the postmaster would go to his house (at the back of the Post Office), change into his best suit, and walk to the person's home to deliver the official telegram himself. When a young woman, who had received news of her husband's death ten days before, received news that her brother too had been killed, staff at the North East Valley Post Office made sure that the minister from her church was with her as soon as the telegram. In a larger community, it was usually the telegraph boy who brought the news. Researching for the Museum exhibition, Seán has found 935 war deaths from the Dunedin area. The worst day was 19 December 1941, when the *Neptune* was sunk off the coast of Tripoli. There were 29 local men among the 150 New Zealanders who lost their lives. The extent of the loss was not known at once because the news was embargoed.

Peace brought relief and excitement. When the war ended, in May 1945 in Europe and in August against Japan, schools were dismissed early, there were street celebrations, processions and in country districts bonfires. Returning soldiers were welcomed with dances and parties. It was the end of six years that made an indelible impression on those who lived through them, whether actively engaged in the armed services or as part of the home front.



Palisaded trenches under construction in the Octagon, 15 December 1941 - courtesy Allied Press

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## Exhibition

# Dunedin's War

The Wartime Experience of Dunedin People  
1939-1945

This exhibition opens to the public on 16 August and runs until 17 February 2006. Its focus is on the Dunedin experience of the war, both at home and overseas. It covers the major campaigns of the 2NZEF - Greece and Crete, the North African and Italian campaigns - the Pacific war, the war at sea and in the air. It looks at covert operatives, prisoners of war, the medical contribution of Dunedin's doctors, nurses and medics, some of the fun aspects of overseas service and the romances that brought 'war brides' home at the war's end. A major section of the display is a roll of honour with the names of nearly 950 people who died and who we have established had Dunedin links. The Home Front part of the display looks at the transformation of Dunedin life around a 'total war' effort: war manufacturing, women in uniform, patriotic activity, home defence. It also looks at how some minority groups were drawn into communal life by war service - Maori, Chinese, Lebanese - and how others stood apart - conscientious objectors - and were spurned. We also look at the children's war and the celebration of peace on VE and VJ days.

Seán Brosnahan



Patriotic fundraising from the 'Dug-out' in the Octagon, circa 1940 - courtesy Allied Press

## From the Collection

# Otago Craftsmen

Furniture Makers, Amateur and Professional

Many of you will no doubt be aware that the oldest locally-made piece of furniture in the museum is a bench made by Garrett Clearwater about 1840 for church services in the Weller Brothers' store at Otakou. But how many of you can name our second oldest locally-made piece of furniture?

It is a small table made by John Buchanan, fashioned from part of the bunk that he slept on during the voyage of the *Philip Laing* and legs of manuka cut from the bush in Maclaggan Street. This rudimentary piece sums up how semi-skilled settlers cobbled together what they could, in lieu of professionally-made furniture which was initially both hard to come by and wildly expensive.

That is not to say that professional cabinetmakers were not to be found in the fledgling settlement. Edinburgh-trained furniture maker John Hill arrived on the ship *Blundell* in September 1848 and opened a furniture workshop in Rattray Street. As the century wore on, other Scottish cabinetmakers continued to arrive and were joined by craftsmen of other nationalities including a number of German and Chinese woodworkers. Factories sprang up, with names that may be familiar to you - William Nees & Sons, Scoullar and Chisholm, Haywards and Butterfields.

Peter Read





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# Annual Report

to the Otago Settlers Association Annual General Meeting, 15 September 2005



## Museum Development

Without a doubt, the most important event this year was the inclusion of a \$27 million development of the museum in the Dunedin City Council's long-term community plan, along with funding in the 2005/2006 annual plan to advance concept planning and fundraising for the project.

Getting to this point has involved a great deal of thought, planning and hard work from Graeme Hall, General Manager Community Life, City Architect Robert Tongue, William Cockerill and Kevin Taylor of Octa Associates and, of course, museum staff. Seddon Bennington, CEO of Te Papa, offered invaluable advice and a supportive peer review of the Issues and Options report developed by Octa Associates. Positive annual plan submissions from the Otago Settlers Association and other organizations and individuals in the community also supported the project. I am very grateful to all who have contributed to progress to date.

## Exhibitions

*Across the Ocean Waves: Otago Immigration in the Age of Sail*, one of the most significant exhibition projects in the museum's history, opened in September 2004. This multi-faceted and deservedly popular exhibition experience was supported by, among others, the Otago Settlers Association, the Rotary Club of Dunedin North and The Community Trust of Otago.

Another important exhibition initiative was the development of a community focus space, the Ka Hau e Wha: People of the Four Winds Gallery, within the Hall of History. This opened in May, with its first exhibition being *Vikings in our Midst: Nordic Connections in Southern New Zealand*.

Seven other temporary exhibitions were presented in the year July 2004 to June 2005. They were *Living Memories; Dovetails and Davenports - Colonial Furniture and Furniture Makers in Otago; Deeds, Delinquents and Death - The Legal Profession in Otago 1879-2004; Poland to Pahiataua - Remembering the Refugee Children of 1944; Arcadian Dreams - The Imaginings of R A Lawson and George O'Brien in 19th Century Dunedin; Family Silver - Collections and Connections* and *Hiroshima Nagasaki A-Bomb*.

Some building work, including steps down to a second viewing platform, was undertaken to improve access to *Josephine*. Consultation with Ngai Tahu representatives on the updating, expansion and redesign of the Kai Tahu Whanui display continued during the year.

## Visitor Programmes

The long-awaited showcasing of Pixietown in a 'Santa's Grotto' created in the museum classroom was a great success. 10,700 people visited Pixietown during the three weeks before Christmas. The event was supported by the Otago Settlers Association, which funded the restoration work on several sections of Pixietown. We plan to make this an annual event and restoration of more Pixietown features is ongoing.



A family day of festivities was held on *Josephine's* Birthday to help celebrate Dunedin's Live Steam Weekend in October and attracted over 2,700 visitors to the museum. The third annual Corporate Jigger Racing competition in April saw an even larger number of entries than in previous years. The number of walking tours in the museum's regular programme has been doubled and June 2005 saw the inauguration of the Walk Dunedin tours, which run every weekday from 11.00 am to 12.30 pm. These tours are conducted by former visitor programmes officer Val-mai Shaw with back-up from John Ingram.

## Collection Management

Air conditioning plant in the Art Store and Archives has been replaced, and the Art Store was painted and given a new ceiling. New storage racks have been installed in the Costume Store and a number of collection items have been rehoused in custom-designed archival boxes.

The collection cataloguing project is proceeding very well. The cataloguing team is making excellent progress in locating objects, photographing them and matching them with catalogue data.

## Visitation

Visitors for the 2004/2005 financial year totalled 56,000 compared with 47,350 for the previous year, another good increase and 6,000 ahead of our annual target. In-house surveys showed that 98.08% of visitors were either satisfied or very satisfied with their experience at the Museum, up from 96.68% the previous year.

## Staff

The year has seen several staff changes. Receptionist Diane McKellar, collection manager John Timmins and visitor programmes officer Val-mai Shaw left during the year and collection cataloguer Barbara Huband is on parental leave. She has been replaced by Richard Dingwall, while new permanent appointments include Anne Harmssen to the position of Dunedin City Museums painting conservator and François Leurquin as collection manager.

A team of sixteen visitor hosts has replaced the former arrangement of staff receptionists and contract security guards. Some of the visitor hosts have also conducted guided tours of the museum during busy periods.

The museum hosted yet another Canadian intern, Rob McCullough, who spent several months developing a history of Dunedin on CD-ROM.

## Conclusion

This has been another very positive year for the Museum. As well as real progress on the proposed development, there have been some significant new initiatives in the areas of exhibitions and visitor programmes. The value of the collection cataloguing project is becoming increasingly apparent.

Once again, I would like to warmly thank the Otago Settlers Association and, in particular, the Association committee for their involvement with and enthusiasm for the museum's activities and for their crucial support for the development project. There are demanding but very exciting times ahead and I look forward to working with the Association to achieve the ambitious and very worthwhile objectives we have set for the museum.

**Priscilla Pitts**  
Director



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# Seeking a Monument to Lawson

by Jonathan Mane-Wheoki



The grave of the architect Robert Lawson in the Northern Cemetery, Dunedin, remained without a monument for more than a century until a green granite obelisk was erected recently. Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, Director Art and Visual Culture at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, gave the following speech before the unveiling of the monument on 3 April 2005:

When R A Lawson died in December 1902, an extended obituary in the *Otago Witness* paid tribute to his contribution to the colonial settlement. But the fact that no memorial was erected over his resting place indicates, perhaps, that he was no longer sufficiently present in either public affection or memory for a subscription to be raised to memorialize him in stone, and that he had fallen into reduced circumstances such that his own family was unable to afford a grave marker.

Perhaps he was one of those people who leave instructions that no memorial is to be erected over their mortal remains. Some Scots may be that parsimonious!

Whatever the reason it has taken 103 years to rectify the omission, and we owe a huge debt to the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand for their initiative and fund-raising effort which brings us to this point on a beautiful Autumn day in this Northern Cemetery.

Of course there are many great architects who have eschewed the very idea of monuments and memorials to themselves. Sir Christopher Wren's grave slab at St. Paul's Cathedral, in London, is worded with only his name and the dates of birth and death. But in the vicinity of his grave is another memorial which reads, '*Lector, si monumentum requiris circumspice*': Reader, if you seek a monument, look around you. These same words could be aptly applied to Lawson.

Dunedin presents a wonderful architectural face to the world and it is the creation of generations of fine architects from the earliest period of European settlement: William Mason, then the clutch of architects who were enticed to Otago from Australia by the prospect of opportunities following the gold-rush here. They include David Ross, William Henry Clayton, William Barnett Armson, and Edward Rumsey. But the stand-out architect in this company is Lawson, whose success in the 1862 competition for the design of First Church drew him across from Melbourne and here he stayed until 1890, when he returned to Melbourne following a damaging report on the structural failure of his Seacliff Lunatic Asylum. When he came back to Dunedin in 1900 he had been out of sight and out of mind for 10 years - not quite a forgotten figure but representing a phase of architecture that had been superseded by more modern tendencies.

When he died two years later, Dunedin possessed a rich architectural history and heritage, and he was the most important contributor to that heritage, by far. *Si monumentum requiris circumspice* - beginning with the heart of the City - First Church, Otago Boys' High School, Dunedin Municipal Chambers, ANZ (formerly Union) Bank, Knox Church, churches all over the province, Scottish baronial houses, substantial bank buildings in Oamaru and Timaru.

The architectural history on which Lawson was drawing was his own Scottish heritage. Although the Reverend J Gibb observed at the time of Lawson's death that 'he lacked the necessary environment for the full fruition of his powers' the fact remains that he found in Dunedin an environment in which he could flourish - at least up to 1887 and the Seacliff fiasco - and it is doubtful that he could ever have been more than a footnote in Australian or Scottish architectural history had he remained in Melbourne or Edinburgh. What he transplanted to Dunedin and Otago was the Scottish architectural tradition.

Born January 1833 at Grange of Lindoves, in the Parish of Abdie, Newburgh, Fife, he was baptized Robert Arthur - Arthur was his mother's maiden name. He trained as an architect in Perth and then Edinburgh during a period in which that city was undergoing a rapid architectural transformation. Gillespie Graham, the architect under whom he completed his training in Edinburgh, was one of the practitioners of the Gothic Revival in Scotland. He had collaborated with the brilliant English Gothic Revivalist A W N Pugin on competitive designs for the Houses of Parliament at Westminster.

A connection in Melbourne, capital of the gold rush colony of Victoria seems to have encouraged the young Lawson to try his luck as an architect there, but a lot of young architects had the same idea. Lawson's success in 1862 in the First Church competition opened up a range of possibilities for him in Dunedin that he is unlikely to have encountered had he remained in Melbourne.

Since the reinstatement of the Scottish Assembly in 2000, Scottish culture and heritage are emerging from under the imperializing agenda of British culture and heritage. The Scottish diaspora has claimed the attention of colonial and imperial historians in Australia, Canada and New Zealand. The Scottish element in the construction of Pakeha history, culture and identity has been the subject of collaborative research efforts by scholars in the University of Otago and elsewhere. Books and exhibitions on our Scottish connections are in the offing. Now is the time to identify and acknowledge the key shapers of our Pakeha and New Zealand identity.

Robert Arthur Lawson is one of those pioneers who, when you think about him and ponder the contribution he has made to our culture and heritage, makes your heart burst with pride to be a New Zealander. We express gratitude to all who have brought us to this moment. May we all be worthy of the treasures, the *taonga*, he has bequeathed us.



## For Your Diary

### Annual General Meeting

The 107th AGM of the Otago Settlers Association will be held in the Otago Settlers Museum concourse on Thursday 15 September 2005 at 7.30pm. Guest speaker Ron Askin from Fisher and Paykel has titled his talk 'Unshrouding Shacklocks'. See the separate sheet for AGM details.

### Canterbury Members

The Association's function for its Canterbury members will be held on Sunday 2 October 2005 at 2.00pm in the Balmoral Room, Canterbury Caledonian Society Hall, Kilmore Street, Christchurch. The President Melville Carr will attend, and there will be a guest speaker. The full programme for the afternoon will be forwarded to Canterbury members in September.

### Museum Walking Tours

We remind members of the variety of walking tours organized by the Museum: 'Walk the Inner City,' 'Hardy of High Street,' 'Whalers, Jailers, Poets and More,' 'Walk the High Street,' 'Dunedin's Historic Hotels,' and 'Women of Dunedin.' These tours leave from the Museum and cost \$8.00. Dates and other details are listed in the *Pastport*. The Museum is now offering members of the Association a 10% discount on the cost of these tours so do advise of your membership when booking or paying.

We also advise members of a new tour, 'Walk Dunedin'. Leaving the Visitors' Centre in the Octagon every weekday at 11.00am, this tour involves other organizations so the Museum is unable to offer any discount to OSA members on the set cost of \$15.00

### John Perry

**Otago Settlers Association Treasurer 1980-81; Secretary/Treasurer 1987-1995**

We note with pleasure and congratulations the QSM for public service awarded to John Perry in the Queen's Birthday Honours List of June 2005.



# From the Otago Settlers Museum Shop

## Books

*Sites of Gender: Women, Men and Modernity in Southern Dunedin 1890-1939*, edited by Barbara Brookes, Annabel Cooper and Robin Law. Published by Auckland University Press, 2003. Remember the popular exhibition, and associated lecture series, on the *Birth of Modern Times* in Southern Dunedin? With the collaboration of museum staff, the members of the University of Otago's Caversham project were able to display their research to the people of Dunedin in a fascinating demonstration of the significance of local history.

This collection of articles by the Caversham team is the long-developed outcome of the project. Based on numerous interviews as well as documents, it traces the differing experiences of men and women in Dunedin's southern suburbs over a fifty-year period in such varied areas as work, education, consumption, poverty, mobility and transport, health, and religion. Carefully researched, easy to read and attractively illustrated. Price to members \$36.00 (Postage and packing \$3.50)

## Full Colour Prints

From the originals in the museum collection on display in the *Arcadian Dreams* exhibition - on light/medium weight card.

George O'Brien's *Designs of R A Lawson, 1869*: 320(h) x 450(w)mm

George O'Brien's *First Presbyterian Church, Dunedin 1868*: 450(h) x 320(w)mm

Price to members: \$14.35 each (Postage and tube \$3.50)

## Badges

Locomotive NZR E 175 *Josephine* and Dunedin icons the Maryhill Cable Car and Robbie Burns statue. Price to members \$7.20 each (Postage and packing 80c for three).

*Josephine* is also available as a bronze colour magnet - price as above.

Please make your cheque payable to DUNEDIN CITY COUNCIL and post orders to:

Otago Settlers Museum, PO Box 566, Dunedin.

## General Information

In addition to books, the shop holds a wide selection of Dunedin- and New Zealand-made cards and gifts. Including teatowels and prints from the *Across the Ocean Waves* exhibition. You are welcome to browse.

A complete list of items for sale in the museum shop will soon be available. If you would like a copy, please contact OSA Secretary, PO Box 74, Dunedin.



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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)

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