

WOWSER WOMEN AND PURITAN PARSONS

Religion and Social Reform in Victorian Dunedin, 1880-1900



Religion played an important role in social reform in late Victorian Dunedin, and in three great controversies in particular: over sweated labour, alcohol and the female franchise. Historians have often preferred to down-play the religious aspect and concentrate on the homogenizing effect of nationalism, neglecting the regional and religious diversity of the past. Southern church people were key builders of 'God's Own Country,' but historians have tended to write southern Presbyterians, and women especially, out of New Zealand's history. Perhaps this is a sort of back-handed compliment.

A central figure in social reform in Dunedin during this period was the Rev Rutherford Waddell (1850 or 1852-1932). He was born in Ballyroney, County Down, in the north of Ireland, to a Presbyterian family. Named after Samuel Rutherford, the seventeenth-century Scottish theologian, he had a traumatic time at school and was apprenticed at the age of 14 to a draper in Banbridge, nine miles away. Leaving at 18, he underwent a religious crisis. Waddell went on in 1875 to complete an MA in English literature at Queen's University, Belfast, and to study for the ministry. Far from being a stereotypical narrow Presbyterian, he came to admire George Eliot, despite her unconventional personal life. At theological college, Waddell was a passionate defender of Robbie Burns, whose morals fell somewhat short of the Presbyterian ideal.

Rutherford Waddell on his 38th anniversary at St Andrew's, April 1917, photographed by 'Esquilant.' Presbyterian Archives P-S6-35.



THE SWEATING CRUSADE.

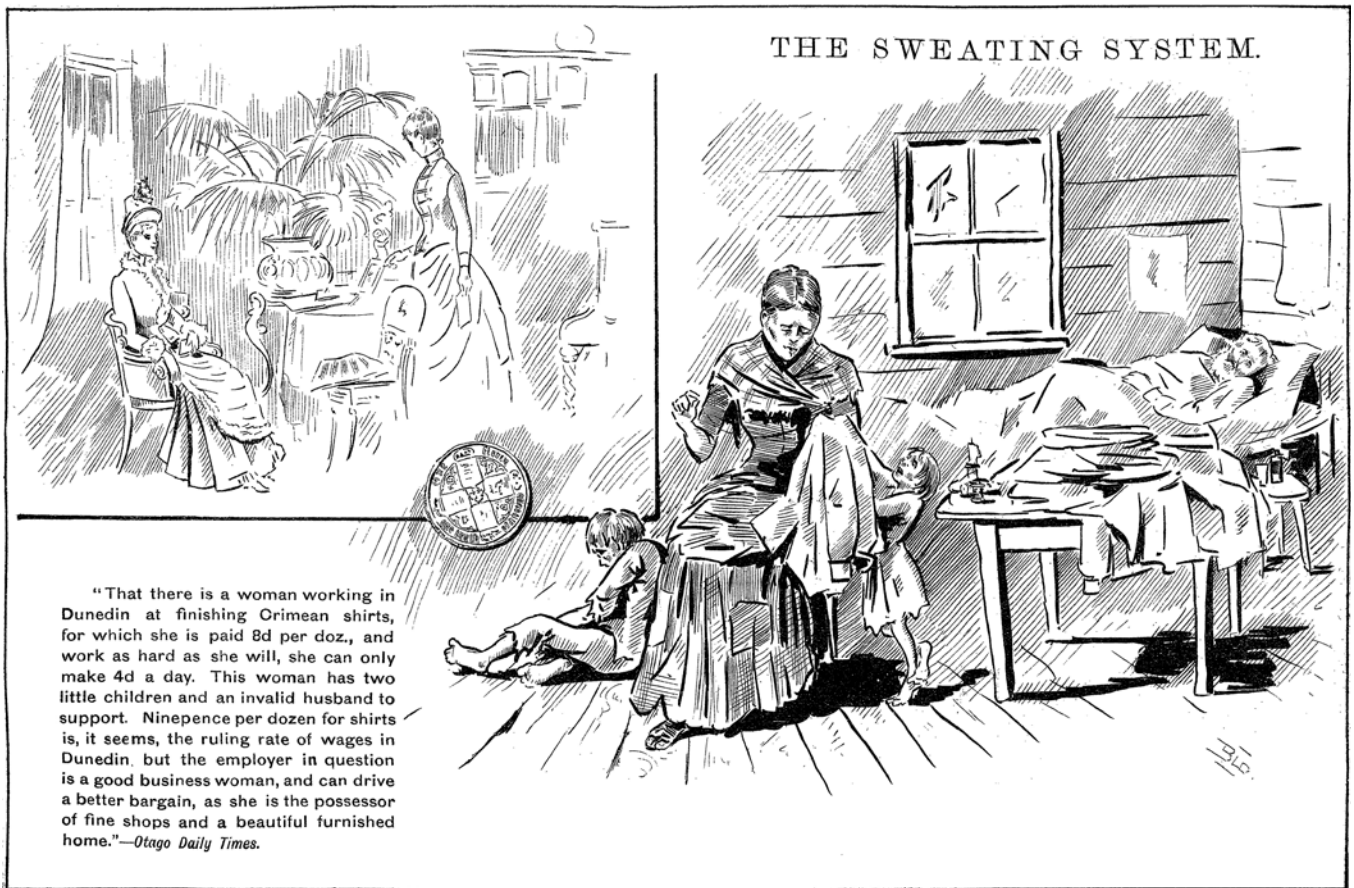
Waddell was licensed and ordained in 1876 but found it difficult to get a congregation to take him on. He was rejected for missionary service in Syria and also by a prospective Irish congregation, because his trial sermon seemed too good to be true. He married Kathleen Newman in Dublin in 1877 and the newly-weds soon after sailed for New Zealand. The young Rev Mr Waddell became relief minister of St Paul's in Christchurch, later moving to Lincoln and Prebbleton. On the strength of a brilliant trial sermon, St Andrew's in Dunedin invited him to become their minister in 1879. Once here, Waddell quickly developed strong friendships with the social reformers Rachel and William Hunter Reynolds. He invited Rachel to speak at St Andrew's, to the delight of the parish, especially its women members. The parish had its fair share of social problems. Within its boundaries was the 'Devil's Half-Acre,' bounded by Maitland, Maclaggan and Princes Streets. Its non-Presbyterian residents included poor Chinese men, Irish Catholics, and Catholic and Orthodox Lebanese — Waddell had missed the chance to go to the Levant, so the Levant came to him.

This was the period of the Long Depression of 1873–96, and Dunedin was then the country's foremost industrial centre. The hugely influential study of the poverty-stricken districts of the imperial capital, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, was published in 1883. It sent a wave of concern for urban reform round the British world. Here, it prompted the *Otago Daily Times* to

publish an investigation into 'Outcast Dunedin' in 1884, possibly written by Silas Spragg. He informed shocked readers that in the Devil's Half-Acre the 'criminal and degraded' classes subsisted in 'small and squalid huts' for which landlords charged 'preposterously high rents.' Things were getting worse, too. Employers in the clothing industry cut wages twice in 1887–88 and replaced skilled male workers with women and boys.

In response to these problems, social reform organisations burgeoned. Mary Clement Leavitt, an American missionary of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, toured the country in 1885. Many branches of the WCTU and its junior wing the YWCTU were founded in Dunedin and elsewhere in Otago, supported by the Revs Rutherford Waddell, DM Stuart and James Gibb. The Dunedin branch of the WCTU attracted evangelical women such as Rachel Reynolds, Catherine Fulton, Mary Downie Stewart, Harriet Morison, Helen Nichol and Marion Hatton. They campaigned for votes for women, prohibition, Bibles in schools, Sabbath observance, raising the age of consent, opposition to the Contagious Diseases Act (which exposed women to compulsory and invasive medical inspection), and evangelism. They saw alcohol abuse as a major social scourge, affecting the wives and families of heavy drinkers, not just the men themselves. The New Zealand Alliance for the Abolition of the Liquor Traffic was formed in 1886.

Above: Harriet Morison as St George: 'The Sweating Crusade' by William Blomfield, from *Observer* 25 June 1892



Rutherford Waddell began to expound his Christian Socialist principles in a series of sermons at St Andrew's. Speaking on 'Socialism' in the parish hall in February 1888, he argued that the 'present system' was founded on 'systematic injustice' to the 'working classes.' In October 1888 he delivered his famous sermon on the 'Sin of Cheapness': the 'enormous rage' for 'cheap things,' he argued, drove 'excessive competition' between manufacturers to cut costs, and this drove wages down below subsistence level. The workers were exploited and were suffering; all had to take some responsibility. In November Waddell urged the Synod to oppose 'social injustice' by condemning the 'sin of covetousness.' Christ's 'laws,' he said, apply to 'commercial and social as well as religious life.' Good Christians must 'sacrifice' to make them 'real' on 'every day of the week and in all places of business.' The Synod voted by twenty to six to deplore the 'sweating' system of labour. ('Sweated' labour was that employed in very hard or excessive work at very low wages, overworked and underpaid.)

The *ODT's* campaigning journalist Silas Spragg confirmed Waddell's charge in January 1889: it was a 'cruel wrong' to give 'helpless and voiceless' seamstresses 'shamefully inadequate' wages. The community's response was swift. The Anglo-German Jewish businessman Bendix Hallenstein agreed the current system was 'inexcusable and impolitic.' The Wesleyan National Conference condemned sweating as a 'great injustice' to the 'working classes,' and women especially. Waddell's fellow-Irishman, the Catholic Bishop Patrick Moran, declared sweating

'deplorable beyond description,' and reminded his flock that it was a sin to 'defraud labourers' of fair pay. (It was one of the four 'Sins Crying to Heaven for Vengeance,' together with oppression of the poor, wilful murder, and the 'sin of Sodom.')

The Presbyterian lawyer-politician William Downie Stewart also campaigned against sweated labour, calling it 'white slavery,' a term usually applied to prostitution. A public meeting called in February 1889 appointed a Presbyterian-dominated committee to negotiate with employers. It comprised Waddell, Downie Stewart, Spragg, Rachel Reynolds and Winifred Bathgate. This committee proposed that employers pay their workers a minimum wage. Four warehousing firms — Ross & Glendining, Butterworth Bros, Sargood, Son & Ewen, and Bing, Harris & Co. — politely rejected the suggestion as they believed it would give an advantage to their competitors. At a public meeting in the Choral Hall on 7 June there was strong public criticism of these warehousing businesses.

Among the consequences of this campaign was the formation of the Tailoresses' Union in 1889. Rutherford Waddell became its first president, and Harriet Morison was his vice-president. From its Dunedin beginnings, anti-sweating had become a national issue. The following year, the government set up the Sweating Commission under James Fulton. After extensive investigation, it reported that there was no London-style sweating here in New Zealand. Waddell's minority report however pointed out that on the contrary there was 'abundant evidence' of it. Many people shared his view: the Liberal Party was helped to victory in the

Above: 'The Sweating System' by William Blomfield, from *Observer* 3 November 1888



WOULD-BE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT AND THE TAILORESSES.

Why don't the tailoresses rise up and make a clean sweep of the vote-toters who are making so much political capital at their expense? The tailoresses are not social outcasts nor are they homeless girls. They neither seek nor require charity.

1890 general election by the anti-sweating campaign. The new Minister of Labour, William Pember Reeves, introduced worker-friendly labour and industrial legislation in 1892–94.

The Dunedin reform coalition that was so effective over sweating did not last long, however. It splintered in 1892–94 over the questions of prohibition and female suffrage. Several leading male prohibitionists also supported votes for women, including Rutherford Waddell, the Congregationalist John Wesley Jago, the freethinker Robert Stout and the popular Methodist the Rev William Ready. Waddell preached against drink and for Sabbath observance, and the WCTU campaigned for suffrage and prohibition. The Women's Franchise League, led by Helen Nicol, Harriet Morison and Marion Hatton, focused on suffrage. Nichol and Morison campaigned to swing the working classes behind female suffrage.

The 'Moderate' party on the other hand campaigned against both prohibition and female suffrage in 1892–93 — 'moderate' was perhaps a misnomer. They feared that if allowed to vote, women would favour prohibition in order to restrict men's pleasures and freedoms. In Dunedin the Moderates included the prominent Anglicans Henry Fish, Charles Greenslade, James Speight, William Dawson and RL Stanford; the first Catholic mayor of the city, John Carroll; and the Jewish businessman Maurice Joel. Many had strong links with Speights Brewery, the Licensed Victuallers Association, the City Council and St Paul's Anglican Cathedral. It was as if the Old Identity's 'Little Enemy' had flourished after all. In Wellington, Henry Fish also furthered the Moderate cause in

association with his fellow Anglicans Richard Seddon and William Pember Reeves.

They were opposed by the 'Temperance' party — another misnomer as they wanted prohibition, not simply moderation in alcohol consumption. They included the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the Presbyterians Rutherford Waddell, AC Begg and AC Broad; the Methodists William Hatton and the Rev William Ready; the Congregationalists John Wesley Jago and the Rev AH Wallace; and the Baptist AS Adams. The main divide in opinion over these issues, both in Dunedin and throughout the country, was not between religious and secular, but rather between evangelicals and episcopalians.

The great war on wowser women and puritan parsons was pursued by journalists such as Sam Lister. He used his *Otago Workman and Forbury News* to attack 'male women' and 'female men' who threatened the liberties of the working man. The paper championed the white working man, the labour movement, trades unions and secular schools. It attacked the clergy, churchgoers, Bibles in schools, prohibitionists, Sabbatarians, the WCTU, suffragists and the Chinese. Lister called the prohibitionists 'a lot of dashed parsons and old women' trying to 'run the coercion business.' They were 'loathsome moral lepers' and 'whited sepulchres.' Wowser women or 'Tabbies' had, Lister claimed, forged an unholy alliance with their 'favourite parson' to secure prohibition, female suffrage and to get the Bible into schools. On the other hand, in defiance of her husband, Jane Lister supported suffrage, Bibles in schools and prohibition.

Above: 'Would-be Members of Parliament and the Tailoresses' by William Blomfield, from *Observer* 27 June 1896



WHEN WILL HIS STRIKING OUT FINISH P

If we are to have prohibition and sabbatar laws, when half the Dominion's time will be taken up staying on his neighbour, how shall we keep Britain's flag of greatness and supremacy flying?—bringing freedom and justice to all.

Henry Fish did his bit for the cause by paying for an anti-suffrage petition, which backfired on him when the story of his involvement got out. It infuriated Dunedin suffragists and helped induce 57% of southern Dunedin women to sign the suffrage petition of 1892. Quite unintentionally, Lister, Fish & Co helped turn Dunedin into a world-leading first-wave feminist community!

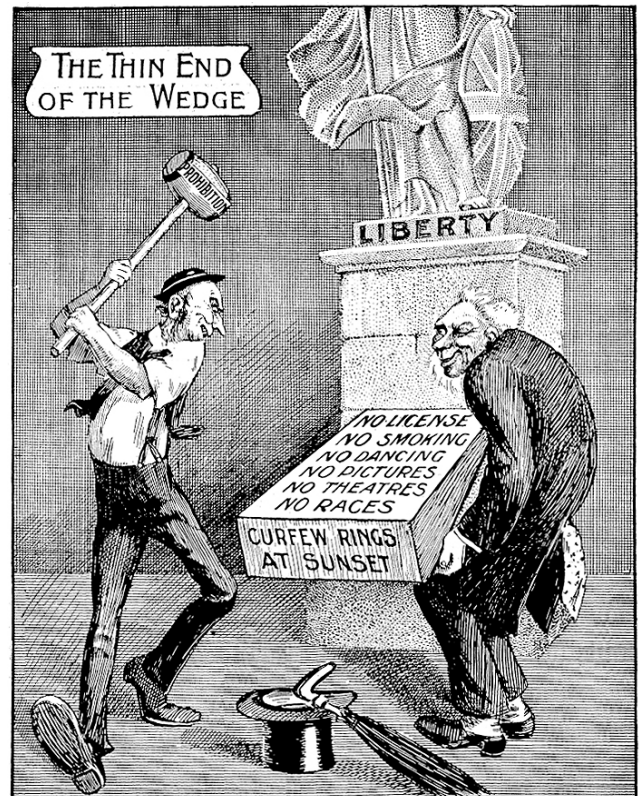
Why were these evangelical-episcopal tensions so strong between the 1880s and the 1920s? Evangelical activists had long been considered second-class citizens at Home in Britain, and saw themselves as fighting for freedom, fairness and equality here in New Zealand. They tended to view their Anglican and Catholic opponents as members of a self-interested, unholy alliance trying to run the show. For their part, the Anglicans, Catholics and secular folk saw the evangelical activists as representatives of an unholy wowser-puritan alliance that was trying to take over. Each side tended to see the other as selfish, loveless, sub-Christian, bossy and domineering.

Historians have not helped matters either. Starting with William Pember Reeves in the 1890s, they have tended to sympathise with the secular and progressive aspects of this period, and to write southern Presbyterianism out of its history. Reeves produced an English Canterbury, Anglican view of the history of New Zealand. For him, there were three great men: 'Good

Governor Grey,' Bishop Selwyn and Edward Gibbon Wakefield, Anglicans all. In his lengthy discussion of the anti-sweating controversy, he never once mentioned Rutherford Waddell, but instead gave most of the credit to George Fenwick of the *ODT*, an Englishman. Reeves praised the 'cheery adaptiveness' of the 'Canterbury pilgrims' of the 'English church' who 'bade farewell to old England by dancing at a ball.' In contrast, Otago was settled by a 'plodding, brave, cantankerous, little community' of 'stiff-backed Free Churchmen.' Reeves' portrayal of evangelical female suffragists was, if anything, even more of a parody: they 'could at best mount the platform and make fluttering, half-audible little speeches,' which audiences greeted with 'the kindly curiosity and amused suspension of the critical faculties which are bestowed on clever children nervously reciting speeches at school gatherings.'

Reeves' partisan history was influential long after his death in 1932. In the 1950s, it became open season on 'puritans' and 'wowsers.' RM Chapman laid into them in *Landfall* in 1953, followed by Keith Sinclair in his bestselling *Penguin History of New Zealand* of 1959. Translating literary anti-puritanism into history, Sinclair called the Rev Thomas Burns 'a censorious old bigot' and alleged that missionary ideas were 'as destructive' of Maori society 'as bullets.' This anti-puritan outlook continued in the widely read works of James Belich and Michael King. Perhaps it is time to rescue Victorian social reformers from 'the enormous condescension of posterity.'

John Stenhouse



Left: 'The Wowsers: When Will His Striking Out Finish?' by Blomfield from *Observer* 2 December 1911: The Wowsers with blackboard listing Thou Shalt Nots. Right: 'The Thin End of the Wedge' from *Observer* 9 December 1911.



The Winter Meeting

The snow and ice on Wednesday, 8 July were not enough to deter more than 50 members from attending the evening's winter meeting. At least it did not rain: the only cats and dogs were to be seen in the Museum's temporary exhibition. Mulled wine welcomed us, made by Susan Schweigman to Ann Barsby's celebrated recipe.

Our speaker was Dr John Stenhouse, an Associate Professor in the History Department at the University and co-editor (with Jane Thomson) of *Building God's Own Country: Historical Essays on Religion in New Zealand* (2004). Introducing John, Susan commented that his title 'Religion and Social Reform in Victorian Dunedin' was 'rather dreary and Victorian,' to which John replied his talk might be 'even duller and more dreadful' than it sounded. There was no chance of that: on taking the pulpit, John proved a very lively and entertaining speaker, and his talk was full of interesting facts, asides and biographical details of a wide range of Dunedin personalities. He argued that though the topic may be 'slightly cringe-making,' it is nonetheless important: the connections between religion and the major reform movements in the later nineteenth century, those for women's suffrage, and against sweated labour and the demon drink. The imbibers of Susan's mulled wine and wearers of cheap shirts looked suitably chastened. An adapted version of John's talk appears above. Hilary Allison gave a vote of thanks and the evening was rounded off with refreshments and conversation.



Mentioned in Dispatches

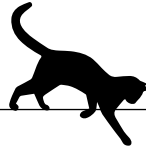
'The Journey of the Otagos' project was joint winner of the Best Museum Project category at the recent Museums Aotearoa conference held here at the Museum. The award was shared with 'Reinventing the Maitai Museum,' while the temporary exhibition 'Dunedin's Great War' was Highly Commended in the Best Exhibition over \$20,000 category (won by Te Papa for an exhibition marking the 75th anniversary of TEAL / Air New Zealand).

'The Journey of the Otagos' (aka JOTO) documentary films, starring Curator Seán Brosnahan on the battlefields of Turkey and France, were funded in part by the OSA. His colleague Will McKee writes: 'The Museum was thoroughly grateful for this support – we would not have been able to complete the documentary without the eleventh-hour decision to provide funds towards Seán's travel.' The films are now showing in the small side room off the military display in what was formerly the museum entrance.



Above left: Dr John Stenhouse giving his talk to the OSA Winter Meeting in July.

Top right: Seán Brosnahan and Will McKee at the 2015 NZ Museums Awards. **Above:** JOTO cameraman Joseph Brosnahan filming at Gallipoli.



Sic Transit Gloria Mundy

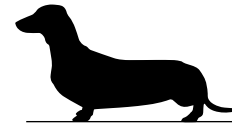
The Princes Street Panorama 150 Years On

Daniel Mundy's famous photographs show Princes Street as it was in the early gold rush years. A large touch-screen in the Museum allows visitors to enlarge them greatly, revealing fascinating details. A century and a half later, second-year students from the Photography and Electronic Arts Department of the Dunedin School of Art at Otago Polytechnic followed in Mundy's footsteps, or rather tripod-prints. In collaboration with Toitū, Rory Allardice, Caitlin Bray, Maxwell Cole, Lara Colyer, Sophie Reynolds and Jade Sheppard took a series of photographs from the same positions as in 1864. The two sets of images have been matched exactly, so that the original photographs can be swept aside like a curtain to reveal the present-day scene.

The contrast reveals how much of Gold Rush Dunedin is still here. The apparently modern Tax Link accountants building on the corner of Hope Street is revealed as McGuire's Imperial Hotel in disguise. Between Walker and Stafford Streets, 'Rekindle' and the three-storey brick building to its left are very obviously the same buildings once occupied by the general merchant John Griffin and the Dunedin Public Warehouse. Kirsty Glengarry, the Museum's Visitor Experience Manager, extends a 'huge thank you to the Otago Settlers Association who funded the update of the interactive device so these new images could be enjoyed by our visitors.'

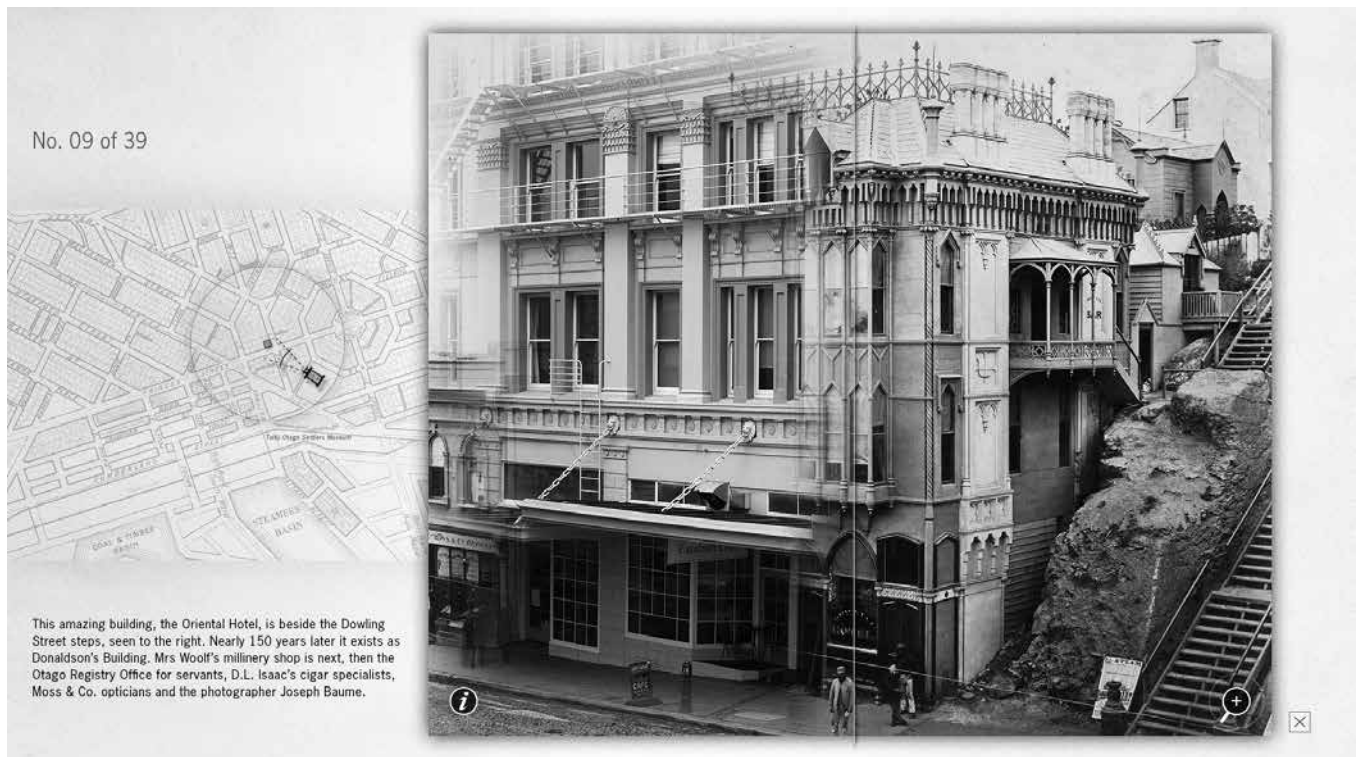
Cats 'n Dogs - An Illustrated History

Nearly 20,000 visitors had declared themselves either cat- or dog-lovers in the touch-screen survey by 23 July, and the numbers were neck-and-neck (or scruff-and-scruff): 50.15% had voted for dogs (9966 votes) and 49.85% had plumped for cats (9908 votes). The figures are considered reliable as no paw-prints have been detected that might indicate that dogs had been trained to vote repeatedly. No cat was under suspicion either, as they were all comfortably curled up in warm places and disinclined to exert themselves.



For Your Diary Annual General Meeting

The 116th Annual General Meeting of the Otago Settlers Association Inc will be held at 7.30 pm on Wednesday, 16 September 2015 at Toitū Otago Settlers Museum, Dunedin. Business to arise will comprise the presentation of the Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 30 June 2015; the election of officers; and the Report from the Director of Toitū Otago Settlers Museum, Jennifer Evans. Dress code: medals will be worn — the guest speaker will be Brian Connor OStJ, honorary curator of the Otago Museum's collection of medals.



An example of the new 'past-present' interactive feature of the Mundy album audiovisual component in the Museum's *First Great City* gallery.

Book News



John Joe's Tune by Tania Atkinson and Christine Ross (Auckland: Duck Creek Press, 2015) 32 pages, hardback \$29.99; paperback \$19.99 (with OSA members' 15% discount: \$25.49 or \$16.99 + \$5 postage & packing).

Have you ever wondered where the music for our National Anthem came from? One wintry Otago night in Lawrence, school principal John Joseph Woods read about a competition to compose an anthem. He won, and his tune became the music for *God Defend New Zealand*. In this delightfully imaginative story, intended for ages four and above, it is not only people who like John Joe's tune, his animal friends also think it a big success!

Many people will know Tania Atkinson as Tania Connolly from her time here at the Otago Settlers Museum. She has published books both here and in the United Kingdom, including several with a New Zealand historical theme. She has been a teacher and a research librarian both here and at the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington.

Christine Ross has worked as an illustrator and as an art editor for School Publications. She has received the Unesco Noma Concours Award, the Russell Clark Award and the Aim Children's Book Award. For Duck Creek Press she has also illustrated *Daniel's Matariki Feast*, by Rebecca Beyer and Linley Wellington (2014), also available in a Māori edition *Tā Daniel Hākari Matariki* (2015).

Yours faithfully, Henry Tewsley: from his personal letterbook of the colonial years 1854-78, edited by Ally McBride (Wellington: The author, 2015) 227 pages, paperback. \$40 (with OSA members' 15% discount: \$34 + \$5 postage & packing).

Ally McBride has edited her ancestor Henry Tewsley's personal letterbook, which contains his correspondence with family members, friends and business colleagues. He was a prominent Dunedin businessman, financial manager of and a partner in Sargood, Son & Ewen from 1863 to 1879. Tewsley was also on the board of the Union Steam Ship Company, a prominent member of the Chamber of Commerce, an active member of the Congregational Church in Moray Place and a founding parishioner of St John's Anglican Church, Roslyn. His membership of the Otago Harbour Board is commemorated by the eponymous street on the waterfront.

Born in Clapham, south London, Tewsley decided in 1852 at the age of 28 to get off the omnibus and sail for Melbourne. He set up a warehousing business in Collingwood with capital from Sir Fredrick Sargood, and later moved to Geelong. Acquiring a wife and seven children, Henry decided to follow many of his fellow Victorians to Dunedin. Perhaps his choice of Otago was influenced by the republican names of two of his sons: Milton and Cromwell. In late 1863 Tewsley arrived to manage the New Zealand operations of the Melbourne merchants Sargood, Son & Ewen.

He found Dunedin a disappointment after Geelong: it was 'a hot bed of disease,' not least because 'many of the inhabitants are very filthy in their habits, casting out offal and refuse, chiefly of fish of which we have a great abundance, on the public ways and unoccupied lands, polluting the atmosphere, and what is worse, the water supply.' The growing Tewsley family retreated uphill and built Sheen House on the corner of Highgate (then High Street) and Leven Street. There were by now 15 children, so luckily the garden was a large one. Tewsley was devoted to his garden, which won a prize in 1872 from the Royal Horticultural Society of Otago.

Members of the Association are entitled to a handy discount of 15% on the cost of books and other items from the Museum shop. They also have free access to the archives, and for those living outside Dunedin an hour's free research each year by the Archivist, Emma Knowles.



Editor: Austin Gee; **Designer:** Tim Cornelius; **Publisher:** Otago Settlers Association.

This newsletter was produced by the Otago Settlers Association, founder and supporter of the Toitū 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 Otago Settlers Association Secretary, Box 74, Dunedin. Phone/fax 03 477 8677, email otago.settlers.assn@xtra.co.nz

 **Otago Daily Times**

The Otago Daily Times supports Toitū Otago Settlers Museum

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