OTAGO SETTLERS NEWS

OTAGO SETTLERS ASSOCIATION *proud to be friends of* toitū OTAGO SETTLERS MUSEUM **SPRING 2020** ISSUE 146

IN TRANSIT

'We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars' says the lovelorn Lord Darlington in Wilde's play 'Lady Windermere's Fan.' Many of his real-life Otago contemporaries too were keen observers of heavenly bodies. The first telescopes appeared in New Zealand a quarter of a millennium ago when the astronomer Charles Green observed the transit of Mercury across the sun in November 1769 at, appropriately enough, Mercury Bay in the Coromandel. He was ten years too late for the visit of Halley's Comet, but its return in 1910 helped prompt the foundation of the Otago Astronomical Society. Its members soon set about acquiring telescopes and looking for a site for an observatory to house them. The society's President, the lawyer Robert Gilkison, convinced the University Council to agree to let the Society use the 'summit' of Tanna Hill free of charge as the site of a temporary observatory, and to lend them the three-inch refractor telescope that had been made by and bequeathed to them by the watchmaker and amateur astronomer Arthur Beverly. The Otago Harbour Board offered an astronomical clock and its engineer J Blair Mason lent an 'excellent' transit telescope, used to determine longitude. He had cleaned and overhauled the instrument, which had been found in silt dredged from the bottom of Otago Harbour. Henry Skey allowed the Society to use his nine-inch (some accounts say ten-inch) reflector telescope on condition they 'took good care of it' and insured it for £125 (more than $20,000 today). Skey had been an assistant to the surveyor John Turnbull Thomson, and served as meteorologist and provincial astronomer at the observatory at the lower end of City Road in the Town Belt in the 1880s. He was a technical pioneer, having constructed the world's first working liquid-mirror telescope, using mercury.

The Society soon had nearly £100 in the bank, helped along by those who paid five guineas for life membership, among them the lawyer Alfred C Hanlon and the farmer Alfred Dillon Bell. (An amateur scientist, the latter appropriately enough, given his surname, had constructed probably the country's first telephone line.) In 1912 the Society merged with the Otago Institute, becoming its Astronomical Branch. One of its more active members was James Park, Professor of Geology and Dean of the School of Mines, who was a great populariser of science in general. His son Keith was keen on aeroplanes and grew up to command the air defence of London during the Battle of Britain. Other members included the cartographer William T Neill and the lawyer Hyam Brasch, father of the literally more famous Charles. Robert Jack, the Professor of Physics who became the pioneer of New Zealand radio, was also prominent. Of course Otago had a much

North Dunedin showing the observatory, *circa* 1914–17.

longer history of amateur astronomers, not least among them Robert Gillies, father of the pioneer plastic surgeon Harold. He was a close associate of Skey and Beverly, and named his home in Queen Street Transit House as it was from his rooftop private observatory there he had observed the transit of Venus in 1882.

Tanna Hill got its name from its proximity to the original botanic gardens beside the Leith, sited roughly where the Burns or Arts Building of the University now stands. The gardens moved away in 1869, and over time much of the hill itself was moved away as well, to create flat sites for the university's buildings. By 1912 only a small hillock was left across Union Street from the Archway building, where the lecture theatres and Home Science building now are. The University Council 'warned that this hill may be removed at any time.' The observatory built on this scrap of land cost £125 1s 1d, a third of which went on the fence alone. The iron building to house the two telescopes 'had been made to revolve by an ingenious contrivance.' It was designed by Francis W Payne, a consulting engineer who worked on gold dredges.

Yet the observatory was barely finished when in August 1912 the neighbours began to cause trouble. They were more concerned about daylight than starlight: 'They urge that Tanna Hill is already the resort of evilly-disposed persons, and that the hill blocks the sunlight and ought to be removed.' (In the event, the only major act of vandalism was to take place in leafy Roslyn in 1943, when the present observatory building was the victim of an arson attempt.) The astronomers' answer to the Nimbies was 'to the effect that the erecting of an observatory is likely to discourage rather than encourage wrong-minded prowlers, because some extra light will come from the building; and as to the other objection, it is pointed out that if Tanna Hill is ever dug away it will probably be to make room for a tall building that will be more of a block to the sunlight than the mound is.'

Undaunted, the Otago Institute formally opened its new 'telescope-house' in October 1912 with an address by the former President of the New South Wales branch of the British Astronomical Association. The Revd Thomas Roseby was a prominent Sydney minister who had earlier been the pastor of the Moray Place Congregational church. The observatory was opened to the public for events of interest such as the total eclipse of the moon in March 1913. Scientific papers were presented to meetings of the Astronomical Branch, among them one by the Caversham Presbyterian minister Daniel Dutton on 'the assumption that a highly intelligent race of beings inhabit the planet Mars.' The famous American astronomer Percival Lowell had argued that the Martian canals showed there must have been intelligent life there, even if the men were not necessarily little or green. Disappointingly, the Revd Mr Dutton concluded that whether 'life, as we know it, exist[s] on Mars appears to be still awaiting a satisfactory solution.'

The astronomers had barely time to settle in to their revolving iron telescope house on Tanna Hill than it was time to look for a new home. In late December 1914 the 'pick-and-shovel men' began to cut down the hill. The university wanted a level site for its new Home Science building, while the city corporation was eyeing the spoil for the Leith reclamation works and crushed stone for roading. Gilkison said 'the powers that [be] thought that domestic science was of far more importance than astronomy.' Yet the astronomers clung to their shrinking eyrie. The following August the observatory opened to the public to raise funds for the Queen of the Seas, Miss Sargood (either Gulie or her younger sister Huia), one of the competitors in the Otago Queen Carnival to raise funds for patriotic causes. (She came ninth out of the twelve queens, and, to make things worse, news arrived on the morning of the closing ceremony that her brother Cedric had died in Egypt of wounds sustained at Gallipoli.) Wartime manpower shortages meant 'The work of removing Tanna Hill was proceeding very slowly' in October 1917 'and the time was still remote when the telescope house would be likely to be available for use on the new site.' It was to be about five years before the telescopes could be brought out of storage again.

The astronomers hoped they would not need to move far, and were keen on a convenient site opposite 'Woodside,' the prominent concrete house with distinctive crow-stepped gables built in 1876 near the corner of Clyde Street and Lovelock Avenue, later renamed 'Castlamore.' The house was leased by the Red Cross in 1919 as a 'Jaw Hospital' for soldiers with facial injuries. In the long run the Astronomical Branch expected a permanent observatory would be built somewhere in the Town Belt, though Prof Park thought Opoho would provide a better view. The city council gave permission for the observatory to be moved to the botanic gardens hill on condition that it be painted green and there be no fence around it. Once they had seen the site, however, the astronomers were not so keen: 'For one thing, the track was an unpleasant one to go up on a dark night.' Some members proposed a site in the Northern Cemetery, clearly not put off by the prospect of that place on a dark night.

Eventually in August 1920 a 'most excellent site on the Town Belt at Roslyn' was agreed on unanimously. A new brick observatory with a 12-foot dome mounted on ball bearings, designed by the architect Henry Mandeno, was finally ready in June 1922: 'Built well above the smoke and fog of the city [it] commands a complete range of the heavens.' Even more practically, the site above the old Robin Hood quarry was conveniently located 'near the junction of the Dunedin and Maori Hill tram.' The dome housed a 12-inch Newtonian reflector telescope donated by a founding member of the Astronomical Society, John C Begg. It was constructed by Joseph T Ward of Wanganui, New Zealand's pioneer telescope maker, examples of whose work can be found throughout the country. (In June 2020 it was returned to the observatory after nearly half a century's exile in Oamaru.) The reflector was joined by the three-inch refracting telescope constructed by Arthur Beverly, and the observatory's present name now acknowledges these two benefactors. Henry Skey is not forgotten, either, since the present building is just across the road from the site of his original provincial observatory of the 1880s.

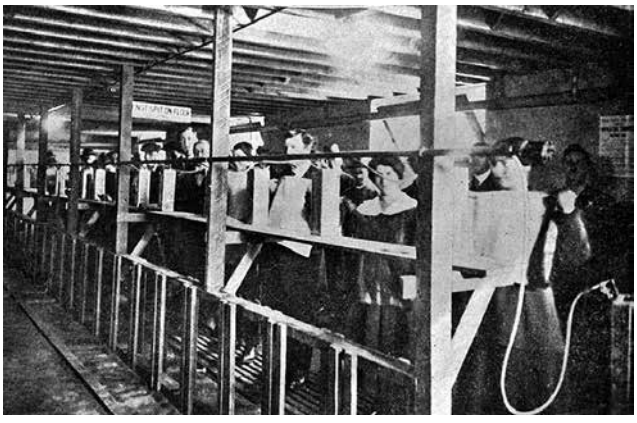
UNDER THE INFLUENCE

A large and conspicuously healthy audience gathered for the midwinter meeting of the Association on Sunday, 12 July to hear Dr Roz McKechnie describe how Otago faced the influenza pandemic of 1918. Those who went on the OSA Summer Outing before the 2020 pandemic struck had met Roz already, as she is the Director of the South Otago Museum in Balclutha. She is a medical anthropologist with a doctorate from Otago in palliative care. Her Honours thesis back in 2002 examined the local impact of the 1918 epidemic, and she has followed developments since then with interest. It was not until 2005 that the genome of the 1918 influenza A strain H1N1 was finally sequenced and shown to be a mutation of bird flu. It returns from time to time, most recently in 2009 in the form of swine flu. Other nasty strains have caused pandemics, notably the Asian flu of 1957 and the Hong Kong flu of 1968. The 1918 pandemic was the deadliest since the Black Death in the mid-1300s, infecting about a third of the world's population and leaving about fifty million people dead, roughly a tenth of those who had caught it. The Spanish flu appeared towards the end of the bloodiest war in human history that had killed less than half the number. New Zealand, with a population of a million, lost almost 17,000 in the four years of warfare and a further 9,000 from flu in just two months in late 1918. Western Samoa, which New Zealand forces had liberated from the Germans in 1914, lost more than a fifth of its population.

Unlike diseases that go for the young, the old and the infirm, the flu was worst for the healthy who were in their twenties and thirties, and for males more than for females, though pregnant women were particularly vulnerable. Anyone who caught it was infectious before any symptoms showed, and some victims' immune systems set off a massive inflammatory response in their lungs that killed them within 24 hours. The flu was assumed to be bacterial, though no one knew exactly how it was transmitted. Many people naturally enough assumed it was passed on by saliva, and in the United States experiments were carried out on prisoners. They were taken into hospitals to be coughed at and sneezed on by influenza patients. Only one prisoner however caught the virus, and that was from his own family.

The Spanish flu was unusual in that it broke out in many places simultaneously throughout the world and did not necessarily follow trade routes. The blame fell on neutral Spain because it was kept quiet elsewhere by wartime censorship, and King Alfonso XIII became seriously ill. Our own King George V had a less virulent case, as did David Lloyd George, Franklin Roosevelt, Franz Kafka and Walt Disney. The composer Sir Hubert Parry, General Botha, Guillaume Apollinaire and the young artist Egon Schiele were among those not so lucky. It is now thought the pandemic began in an army camp in Texas, possibly the result of an earlier outbreak in Shanxi Province in northern China. Compared to this latest virus, it was all over relatively quickly, within about 10 weeks.

The end of the Great War at 11 o'clock on 11 November brought unprecedented numbers of people travelling round the world, providing plenty of opportunities for the disease to spread. At the time the infestation was thought to have arrived in New Zealand in the Union Steam Ship Co liner *Niagara*, along with the political pestilence in the form of the Prime Minister William Massey and his deputy Joseph Ward. The Otago MP and Minister of Defence James Allen, '*L'Organisateur de la Victoire*,' was also on board but of course bore none of the blame. It is now known that a less readily apparent version of the flu had arrived earlier with the troopship *Tahiti*. The disease hit the north of the country first in early November and spread southward. It was not long before the infestation reached Christchurch in Show Week, starting on 8 November. Many visitors took the virus back home with them after the races and the Armistice celebrations helped spread it even further.



Top left: The public waiting their turn at the inhalation chamber, Health Department buildings, Auckland - *Auckland Weekly News* 14 November 1918
Bottom right: Inhalation chambers in use at the Government Buildings in Christchurch.

THE ENEMY IN OUR HOMES.

Influenza and Its Doings.

Precautions were ordered in Otago and Southland on 13 November by the District Health Officer, Dr Irving Faris. Public places were closed, library books were disinfected and formalin was sprayed liberally as a countermeasure. Inhalation chambers were set up in the old Post Office in Water Street, in Port Chalmers and in several rural towns. Those infected were kept isolated for two to three weeks. Roz recounted her grandmother's keeping a sulphur fire burning so her grandfather could fumigate himself when he arrived home from his work as a railway guard. Yet there was no effective treatment for the Spanish flu: no vaccines, antibiotics or antiviral drugs. Dunedin Hospital had only 246 beds and the wards had a maximum occupancy of 270; 157 patients died in all. Within the first week, 33 of the staff had fallen sick and junior medical students were drafted in to help. The Red Cross and the local Patriotic Association set up another 140 beds. The many volunteers who did their bit included the Boy Scouts, the Education Board, telephone exchange operators and the women Voluntary Aid Detachments (or 'VADs').

Yet every cloud has a silver lining. The government raked in much more than it expected from death duties. Alcohol was prohibited from sale except on a doctor's prescription. Many people turned to whisky in the hope it would ward off infection. One Oamaru sufferer attributed his survival to his wife having put an over-generous quantity of whisky in his invalid's gruel; he sweated it out. Whether alcohol really worked or not, it was clearly a risk worth taking, and people continued to drink for 'medicinal purposes.' Well into the 1920s, defendants in drunken driving cases would tell the magistrate that the whisky bottle found in their car was there to ward off the flu. Other favourite treatments were to take a dose of Irish Moss, Beecham's Pills, Dewitt's Kidney & Bladder Pills, or Dr Williams' Pink Pills (for Pale People), or to gargle with the disinfectant Condy's Fluid.

In rural towns where no doctor was available, a senior medical student would often take over. Some doctors themselves succumbed, most famously the second woman to graduate from the Otago Medical School, Margaret Cruickshank, whose statue at Waimate is one of the very few memorials relating to the epidemic. At Seacliff Hospital, 22 inmates died; they are thought to have been buried in a mass grave at Warrington Cemetery. Together with Owaka, Warrington had the highest death rate in the province, whereas Tuapeka and Bruce Counties got off comparatively lightly. The death columns in the newspapers were full of names, and the burials at Anderson's Bay Cemetery in December 1918 were at five times the normal rate. The mass grave there was nicknamed the 'Epidemic Hollow.' The funeral directors Hope & Kinaston buried 125 in November 1918, compared to 30 the previous November. Though the bodies had to be

GAGGED ENTHUSIASM.
Auckland Citizen: Who says I am not Patriotic? Just wait untill I get these bonds off.

William Blomfield cartoons addressing the influenza epidemic from the *Observer*, 1918.

PEACE AND THE "FLU."

The Patient: Peace be BLO'D—people sucking beer in town while I suck the thermometer in bed!

THE PLEASURE OF IT.

First Kid: Do you think this influenza is German?
Second Kid: Garn, how can it be? Do yer think we'd be havin' a holiday to celebrate it if it was?

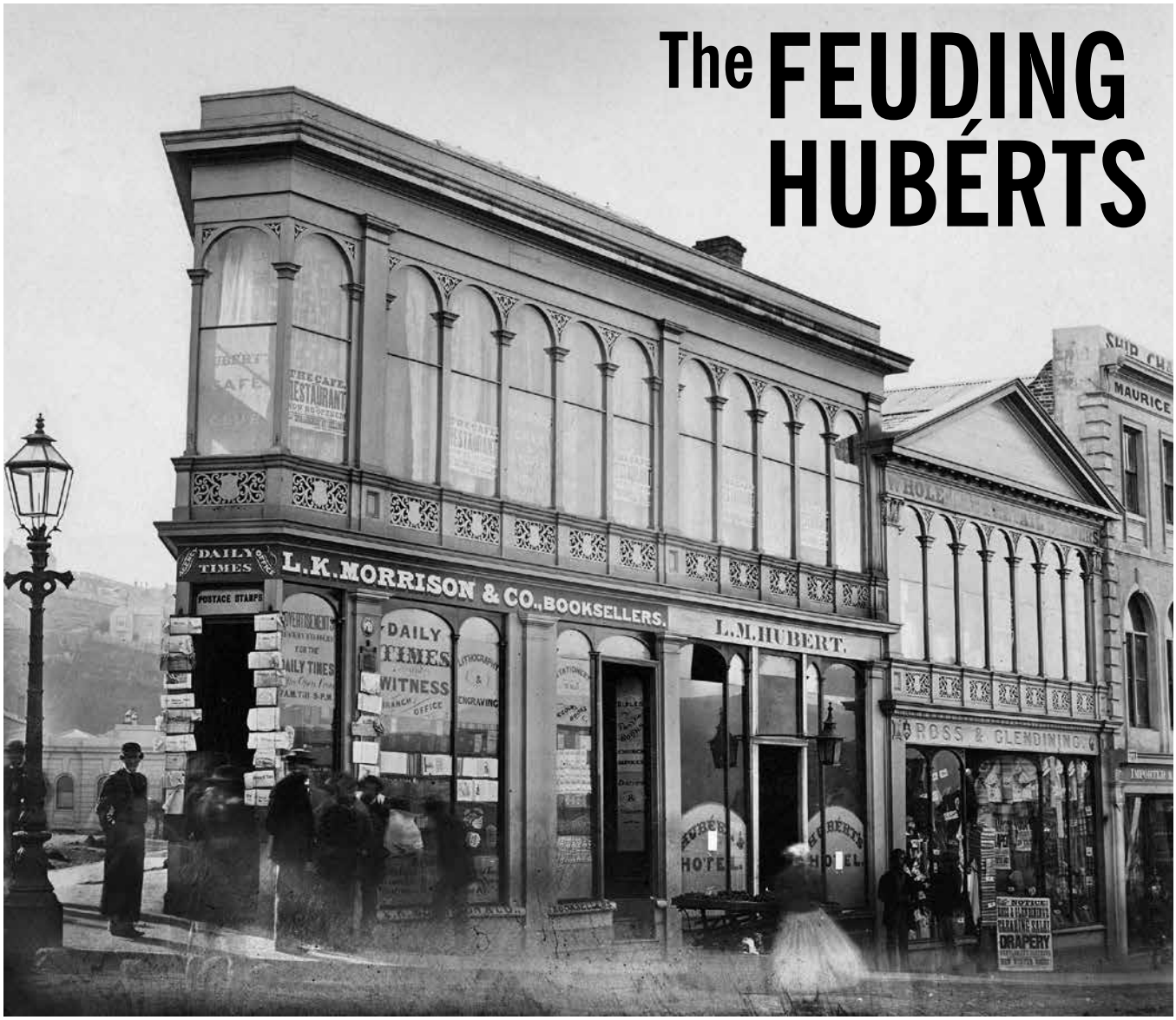
wrapped in disinfectant-soaked muslin and buried within 24 hours, the ceremonies remained dignified and respectful. This number of burials was not exceeded for half a century, when the Hong Kong flu struck in 1968. The 1918 epidemic began to wane in early December and was officially declared over by the middle of the month.

A commission of inquiry the following year found the epidemic had been exacerbated by the widespread disregard of early precautions, a lack of knowledge of the disease, and by a lack of appreciation of the gravity of the situation. Determined never to let it happen again, the government passed legislation to improve poor housing conditions, home economics teaching was expanded, and children's Health Camps were founded, starting in 1919. Another consequence of the epidemic was that chemist's shops began to appear all over the suburbs.

In the question session that followed, Stan Rodger and the Revd David Crooke both paid tribute to the organisational work of the indefatigable Revd Vincent Bryan King. Son of the vicar of St Peter's, Caversham, he was a pioneering social worker and an exponent of ju-jitsu. Bryan King was the President of the local branches of both the Red Cross and the St John Ambulance Association.

Bottom: This inhalation sprayer made by A & T Burt, Dunedin in the early 1900s can be seen on display along with assorted cold remedies in the Museum's Twentieth Century gallery.

The FEUDING HUBÉRTS



During the early 1860s, dozens of eating houses were set up in Dunedin: dining rooms, luncheon rooms, chop houses, oyster saloons, cafés. If you thought the gold rush was a licence to print money for hoteliers and café owners, one case shows it was not always plain sailing. For a few years in the early 1860s Hubért's Café and Club was to be found at the intersection of Princes and Manse Streets. Next door to Ross and Glendining, its wedge-shaped upper floor was, like Hardwick Hall, more glass than wall. The establishment was opened in the middle of 1862 by Ludovica Matilda Hubért — that should really be pronounced 'Oobear,' for English was probably not her husband's native tongue. Matilda May had married John Hubért in Melbourne in 1854, and by 1862 their two children were aged four and six.

Madame Hubért's ambitions were not modest, and her new café was in a prime spot opposite the provincial Treasury, where so much of the gold from the diggings inland made its way. In the hyperbole characteristic of the time, she notified 'members of the professions, merchants and the *elite* of Dunedin that she has opened [a] palatial establishment in Princes-street … [she] has set aside all pecuniary considerations, and fully trusts that her arrangements will be found on a scale of elegance never before attempted. The Saloon … may vie with those of Continental Europe, and the establishment will be conducted on principles strictly in conformity with the most refined English taste.' It was to be 'A fashionable resort; a Cafe and Club, where every convenience and comfort will be found to unite with all that is elegant and *recherche*; where the wants of patrons will, as far as possible, be anticipated; where every delicacy on the *carte* can be immediately supplied, at a moderate tariff — this establishment must be pronounced unique. An excellent and very varied Counter-lunch will always be provided', and to cook it Madame H had lured over from Melbourne the chef from the Criterion Hotel.

Matilda's husband John came over from Melbourne too once he had sold their old business, but the marriage was an unhappy

Hubért's Hotel seen here in Princes Street between L K Morrison & Co booksellers and Ross & Glendining, drapers, 1864.

one and the café soon became a war zone. Matilda supposedly informed John on his arrival that she was done with him and wanted to separate, and in November 1862 a very public battle for the ownership of the café began to be played out. John allegedly threatened Matilda with a knife and placed a newspaper advertisement saying that he had taken over the running of the café. Then a joint statement was published retracting this announcement; a few days later there was apparently another flip-flop and John advertised that the café was up for sale. A few weeks later, John allegedly assaulted Matilda again following an argument about her working behind the bar. He then published a statement that he had again taken over the running of the café. A third assault allegedly followed. Matilda placed a public notice in the newspaper that John had taken the café from her but she was taking him to court.

Barbs flew left and right at the hearings for the ensuing case, described by Matilda's lawyer as 'perhaps the most painful one ever brought into court.' Matilda alleged three counts of assault and the defence countered by implying that John had been provoked by his wife's desire to end the marriage and by her cavorting with another man following a visit to the theatre — she was discovered 'in his arms,' a story corroborated by her own father — and by her refusal to accede to her husband's demands. Only one of the assault charges stuck, and the penalty was light. John then sold the café to Matilda's uncle James Fisher and disappeared, leaving her to claim that her husband, uncle and her father John May had all been in cahoots and conspiring against her all along. When Matilda questioned how the café's liquor licence could be transferred to her uncle by her husband when it was in her name, she discovered that as a married woman her husband had all legal rights and she had none.

Madame Hubért resorted to running the Abbeyleix Hotel in Maclaggan Street until about August 1863 when, with James Fisher having gone broke, she was able to buy the café back. She set about refitting and redecorating the premises and it appears to have become more of a hotel. She took in boarders for two guineas a week, which in relation to average earnings is equivalent to about $2,500 today. No longer content with a mere Melbourne cook, she now hoped to entice patrons with 'the aid of Parisian Artistes in the Cuisine.' This probably referred to the Genoese former ship's steward Andrea Agorio. Sir Julius Vogel was a regular patron, 'and many a chat he and Agorio had over a bottle of wine in the supper room.'

Together with John Melossi (or Melozzi), Agorio attempted in early 1864 to reopen the 'Cheap and Comfortable' yet 'first-class' café and luncheon rooms, hoping to cater for suppers, balls, weddings and private entertainments 'on the lowest possible terms.' Their debts caught up with them however, and later that year the business was sold to Samuel Blake Colls (formerly of the Paragon Restaurant in Princes Street and the London Tavern in Walker [Carroll] Street), and the sorry saga of Matilda Hubért and her Dunedin eatery was over.

Based on part of Peter Read's video 'Goldrush Cafes,' episode 7 of the 'Talking Pictures' series. The full video (and many more) can be seen on YouTube: youtube.com/watch?v=A9ubeZipDW0

For Your Diary

The 121st Annual General Meeting of the Otago Settlers Association Inc will be held on Thursday, 10 September 2020 in the auditorium of Toitū Otago Settlers Museum. Doors open from 6.30 pm for a 7 pm start, and the guest speaker will be Professor James Beattie of Victoria University. He is a specialist in the history of gardens, the environment, science and health, and his research focuses on the cross-cultural dimensions of exchanges of environmental knowledge, plants, climate change and conservation ideas. James is an Otago graduate, and was 'Asia New Zealand' post-doctoral fellow here in 2005–7. He is an Honorary Curator of the Dunedin Chinese Gardens, and is also interested in museums and collecting, particularly of Chinese art.

There should still be time to sign up for Seán Brosnahan's guided tour of the Museum's archives at 2 pm on Tuesday, 25 August. Find out what lies on those rolling shelves glimpsed tantalisingly through the double doors of the reading room. Hear about some of the important people and places in Dunedin's built history. Numbers are limited so bookings are essential: (03) 4775 052 or toituevents@dcc.govt.nz

A detail from the plans for Littlebourne House, designed for John Roberts Esq in 1885 – an example of the fascinating material relating to the city's built heritage which will be covered in Seán Brosnahan's Archives Tour in August.

Shop News

OSA members now qualify for a generous 20% discount on items from the Museum shop.

Toitū Otago Settlers Museum: Our place, our people, our stories by Peter Read and Seán Brosnahan (Dunedin, 2019) Paperback, 35 pages. $15 (With OSA members' 20% discount, $12 plus $5 packing and postage. Please make out cheques to the DCC.)

If you know someone who would like a reminder of their visit to the Museum, or someone overseas who has been kept away by the virus, this lavishly illustrated selection of aspects of the Museum is an ideal gift. You might even find something inside you haven't noticed yourself before. Elegantly designed and containing many excellent colour photographs by Graham Warman, it contains a brief history of the Museum itself. It summarises the story of the first people of Otago and their early encounters with whalers, sealers and settlers. Then the Scottish settlement of New Edinburgh is illuminated, along with how the settlers got here, showing shipboard life in the age of sail. Faces of those early settlers in the Smith Gallery appear, then an account of what they did once they got here: the gold rush and Dunedin's Victorian heyday as New Zealand's first great city. The Museum's collection of material culture is also sampled, focusing on costume and textiles. The different galleries are all covered: the province's military heritage; daily life in the twentieth century; radio and television broadcasting; transport and motoring; electronics and computers; and the arts, music and culture of creative Dunedin. To round things off, a glimpse is offered of Lan Yuan – The Dunedin Chinese Garden.

NZR Cup and Saucer. $18 (With OSA members' 20% discount, $14.40 plus $5 packing and postage. Please make out cheques to the DCC.)

The once-ubiquitous railway cup is now a collector's item. If you resisted the temptation to purloin government property during the unseemly scramble for the tea rooms during the brief stop at the station, there is now a leisurely and entirely legal method to satisfy your desire. These reproduction NZR cups and saucers are made by Orion Tableware to British Standard 4034:1990 for vitrified china. Whether they can be bounced off station platforms unharmed has not been tested, but they are much less likely than the originals to lose their handles, and they are proof against even industrial-strength tea.

OTAGO SETTLERS ASSOCIATION

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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.

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