OTAGO SETTLERS NEWS

OTAGO SETTLERS ASSOCIATION *proud to be friends of* toitū OTAGO SETTLERS MUSEUM **AUTUMN 2021** ISSUE 148

COMING DOWN WITH THE FLUE

Just over half a century ago, President Pete Smith's father recalled one of the highlights of his early career working for the Love Construction Company:

I was foreman of the job building the 125-foot chimney at Speight's Brewery in 1937. Today I would be called a 'project manager' on a job of this size, but in my day the boss wore overalls, just like the blokes who did the actual work. There were three chimneys really. I often think of them like this: the great towering mass of brickwork in the original, as the grandfather; a tall steel tube chimney used temporarily, as the son; and the existing reinforced concrete chimney we see today as the mighty grandson, standing firmly and vindicating the death of his brick grandfather and the death of wiry steel son, used only so that he could be born. Something like this: a grandfather had to be killed, a son used for only as long as was necessary to produce a mighty grandson! This is what happened and how it was done.

The dramatic demolition of the Speights Brewery chimney in 1937.

The excavation for building done, a mighty hole from which we had dug 27,000 yards of clay, rock and haematite, and there stood grandfather, an immense pile of 120,000 bricks 12 feet square at the bottom, towering into the air 90 feet or so, tapering, head about six feet square. I remember looking at him, thinking of the toil it took to create him [in 1898], the making and baking of the bricks, the mixing of the mortar, the hoddies carrying it up ladders so far and then hauling it aloft in buckets on gin wheels and ropes, and up the scaffolding that would have been timber, poles and ledgers and putlogs tied together with short ropes, by experts, no tickets as required today, but with a skill long lost and forgotten.

It seemed a shame to have to kill this giant, but it had to be done, and I, a young man of 24, with no experience of this sort of work, wondered how it was to be done. There was only one experienced steeplejack in Dunedin [Albert Lee Wigg]; his son [Eddie], his assistant and I pleaded with my boss to let this expert drop the chimney for us so that no one would be hurt, and no damage done to surrounding buildings. I got a definite 'No' in reply. I was a cocky young carpenter, I had asked for the responsibility of building of this big job, I had to do it, and anyway he had a quote from the steeplejack, a whole £35, and this was too dear. [This was about nine times the average weekly wage at the time.] Again I sat on the hill and looked at 'grandpa.' I knew the method of dropping him. He virtually had to be cut off at the knees by removing bricks, replacing them with wooden props, then burning out the props. At what height to cut out the bricks, how many, and where, so he would drop in the right place was the problem. I took another look. I imagined him as a tree; then it would have been easy: I would climb to the top, tie a rope around it and take it back in the direction I wanted it to fall, and strain the rope tight.

Right. Now how the hell do I get to top off this big brute? He was becoming a brute, and he wasn't going to beat me. I have seen steeplejacks with their light ladders work their way up a chimney, fixed to dogs driven between the bricks, even tied with binder twine. We didn't have such a set of ladders, nor the man to do this kind of job. Those days there wasn't even a blasted bulldozer in the city. Today it would be a cakewalk with all these mobile cranes crawling about the city. A thought! A fire brigade ladder. I beat it for the fire station, found the Superintendent, asked if it was possible to acquire the big ladder for this purpose: again a definite 'No.'

Back to the job, and walking around 'grandpa' I found the scaffolding inspector from the Labour Department. He asked me when the steeplejack was going to start. I replied he wasn't; my boss said I had to do the job. I thought the top of his head was going to blow off. He said 'You?' and used Elisha's famous reply [2 Kings 5]: 'Like bloody hell you are!' He marched off at a fast pace, leaving me a bit puzzled, but he was back in an hour with my boss and the steeplejack. I was called over: there had apparently been a good deal of argument between all parties but regulations etc. had been read, the 'jack' was to do the job, and I merely to supply labour and gear, and in the meantime the price had gone up by £5. All employed in the firm had a very angry employer for a few days, but good man that he was, he soon got over it. I slept well that night.

Next day we went to work. The steeplejack — wish I could remember his name — and his son, did first of all exactly as I had done. They sat together on the hill for half an hour, looked at 'grandpa' (I'd begun to feel sorry for him again), walked around the section, looked up and down and all around. I left them to it, supervising the rest of the work, but keeping an eye on them. Finally the 'jack' (let's call him 'Bill') stood with his back against the base of 'grandpa,' picked his direction and paced his way across the ground, counting as he went, until he reached the wall of the building in Dowling Street that used to be the Cooper's Shop, and there he drew a four-foot cross in heavy white chalk on the wall of the building. Coming back to me, he said: 'Son — this is where the old man's head will land.'

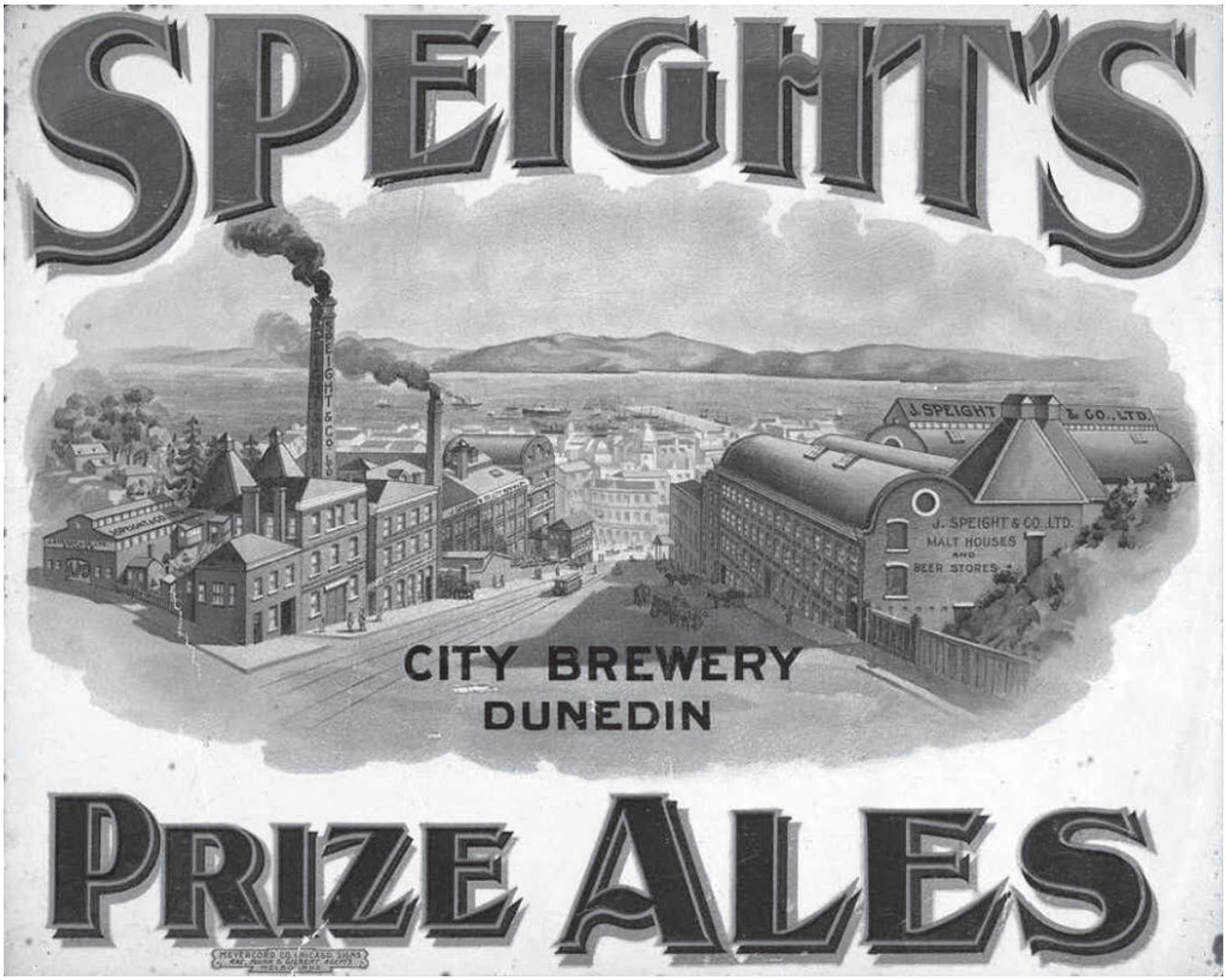
A scaffold was built about 12 feet off the ground, labourers' hammers and gads [wedges] put to work and the knuckles of the old man's knees began to be torn away. The brickwork was thick and as the gap widened to about two feet, the top pile was supported on 4" x 4" props of black pine (matai), each dressed to same size and of equal quality, no knots or cracks or warps. The whole of the front face was cut out first, then two men worked each side taking out the bricks, stepping up the course as they went, one side longer and higher than the other.

As we reached the second afternoon, 'Bill' slowed down the work and selected special levels and positions very carefully. The props started to creak, and the ends of the timber props to squash slightly, 'Bill' carefully watching each one. About 3 o'clock he gave old 'pa' a hard slap with his hand and a faint ring came down the flue. Another brick or two, another slap, and the ring was a little louder. 'Bill' started to smile. 'Ah,' he said, 'he's starting to talk to me.' Two more cuts and more slaps, and the ring was just the right tone for 'Bill'. He told me to send the rest of the men off the scaffold, and we stood together while he slapped 'grandpa' three times. The ring came back with exactly the same tone each time. 'Bill' said, 'Yes son, the old boy he is ready to go, we'll take him down at daylight.'

We climbed to ground level. I was glad to get my feet on the ground. My heart was thumping like hell; had been all afternoon. Perhaps this episode is just another one of others that leaves me today with high blood pressure. I was scared of a high wind, a prop breaking, any little slip that might kill someone, or all of us. 'Bill' told me not to worry, and went off to drink his beer. I would today have gone with him, but in those days I didn't drink. I went home to my wonderful landlady, Mrs Bevis, had a good tea, a wash up, and took myself off to the pictures. What a good boy I was in those days!

Couldn't sleep all night. Was back on the job again before daylight [on 24 November]; 'Bill' and his son were already on the

AL Wigg had "a life-time experience of the art of falling many of the highest stacks in the world" – *Evening Star*, 24 November 1937



scaffold, packing shavings around the props and soaking them in kerosene. I wasn't wanted, so I stood back on the hill. Soon — daylight now — a crowd of people began to gather until there were perhaps 300–400 people standing back to watch, some of our men posted to keep them back.

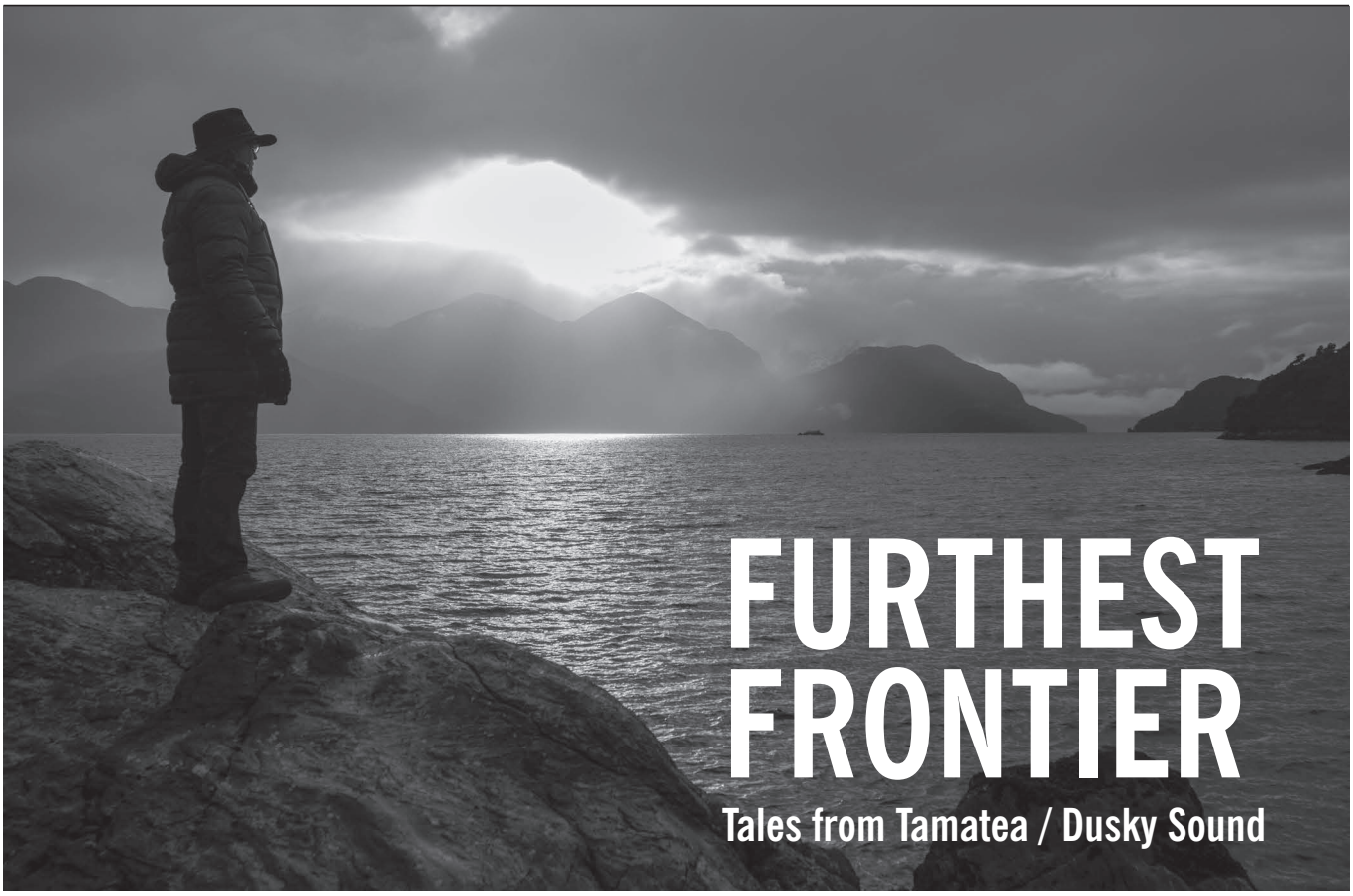
When all was ready, 'Bill', with an audience like Dean Martin today, and his son sat calmly on the planks of the scaffold, their backs to grandpa and smoked a cigarette, not once looking at me or the crowd behind me. Then, rested, they got up and together dipped sticks about four feet long into an open bucket of kerosene, and lit these torches together. They walked together to the centre of the front cut, lit the shavings, one going around each side, keeping even, and finishing together. Throwing away their torches, they climbed down and calmly walked up the street to join me at the corner of Dowling and Rattray Streets. They smoked; I didn't — I just stood and watched the roaring fire.

The shavings quickly burned away and the props were on fire and it could be easily seen why the fire was started in the centre at the front. These props were burning just minutes ahead of the side ones. It seemed an hour's wait, but I would think it was no more than 15 minutes and poor 'grandpa' started to slowly lean forward, and within seconds the front props cracked and jumped out, and the brick pile came thundering down, bricks flying forward; two of them, I'll swear, hit the centre of the white chalk cross, dust rising in thick clouds. This settled quickly and the three of us walked up Dowling Street, and sure enough old 'Pa' had died along the path set out exactly for him, the main mass of his head eight feet short of the wall of the Cooper's Shop.

'Bill' and his son shook hands with me, said, 'He's all yours, Son,' and walked off. There was even a clap from the spectators. I walked back along the broken, piled-up carcass, found no damage anywhere, except a bit of scaffolding. It was a very contented young man of 24 who drove home in an old Chrysler tourer that morning, and very relieved too. That day there were free bricks for whoever liked to come and get them, and they were all gone in a matter of days, including the nose of our poor old brick 'grandpa.' His bones must be spread all over the city in houses, garden walls and fences and suchlike.

Terry Smith

A late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century chromolithograph advertisement: Alexander Turnbull Library, Eph-C-ALCOHOL-Speights-1900s-02.



FURTHEST FRONTIER

Tales from Tamatea / Dusky Sound

Looking back over 2020, there have been lots of deleterious impacts on our personal, community and institutional lives due to Covid-19. But there have also been unexpected bonuses to the constraints, restrictions and delays occasioned by the pandemic response. For some of us here at Toitū, the international travel restrictions meant an indefinite deferral of our planned expedition to Scotland, England, Wales and Ireland to film the *Journey to New Edinburgh* documentary project (the chief sponsor of which is the Otago Settlers' Association). Personally, my whole year had been planned around this epic event so it was a real blow when it all had to be put on hold. There was nonetheless the bonus of being able to dig deeper and search wider in the research component of the project, especially once we were locked down and working from home. I spent much of that time roaming through time and space as I travelled virtually across nineteenth-century Scotland hunting for clues about the origins and motivations of Otago's pioneers.

Meanwhile my colleague Will McKee was doing similar work from his home, alongside caring for three small but highly energetic boys. Somewhere along the way, he also had time to dream up a new film project that we could undertake as soon as the lockdown was lifted and go some way toward being a substitute for *JTNE* in 2020. The core concept was based on our increasing realisation of how important south-west Fiordland, and especially Dusky Sound, was in the earliest European history of southern New Zealand. In normal circumstances, we could never contemplate mounting a filming expedition to this remote part of the country; the costs would be prohibitive. With the sudden collapse of international tourism, however, Will sensed a unique opportunity. Perhaps we could get a discounted price on a boat, offering struggling tourism operators a little bit of work while also making the best of a bad situation. And so, our *Furthest Frontier* project was launched.

While Will began negotiations with tourism operators and organising a host of logistical matters, Toitū's two curators went to work to tease out some key stories from Dusky Sound's rich history. Seven were selected, scripts were drafted and a concrete plan was hatched. We reached out to Heritage New Zealand, who opted in, adding their Otago Heritage Assessment Advisor Sarah Gallagher to our party so she could check on the many significant spots in the Sound on the NZ Heritage List (formerly the Historic Places Trust's Register of Historic Places).

Top: Seán Brosnahan surveys the majestic Dusky Sound landscape.
Bottom: The Fiordland Expeditions vessel *Tutoko II* plying the waters of the Sound.

Will's contacts with the marine archaeologists Matt Carter and Kurt Bennett also saw them added to the project, a clue that shipwreck history was on our agenda. A Māori dimension was also inevitably part of the mix of stories so we sought input from the Ōraka Aparima Rūnaka and James York joined the team to represent manawhenua. Toitū's technical whizz Chris Kwak would look after film and audio requirements, and with that component sorted out, we were all set to go.

With lockdown over and planning completed, our eight-strong party assembled at Te Anau on Monday, 20 July. Next morning, we linked up with Richard Abernethy and Dave Spiers of Fiordland Expeditions and loaded the gear for our week-long journey into Dusky aboard their boat *Tutoko II*. More than that I'm not going to say, not wanting to spoil the anticipation, other than that it was a mighty experience and a real privilege to travel into this storied landscape and follow in the footsteps of one of my greatest heroes, Captain James Cook. So there's another clue as to the storylines we were following … The seven episodes of *Furthest Frontier* have now been edited and produced and are being released in weekly instalments on the Toitū YouTube channel, starting in late January. A preview was offered to OSA members at the Museum on 25 November and the packed audience gave some pretty positive feedback. So even if we didn't quite make it overseas in 2020, Toitū's aspiring film-makers still got to travel, and to New Zealand's furthest frontier. We hope you'll come along for the ride and enjoy the stories we got to tell.

Seán Brosnahan

Furthest Frontier: Tales from Tamatea / Dusky Sound was launched online via Toitū's YouTube channel, 30 January 2021.

Top left: The Fiordland Expeditions vessel *Tutoko II* . **Top right:** Kurt Bennett inspecting an object on the floor of Pickersgill Harbour – Matt Carter
Bottom: Part of the expedition team, left to right: Peter Read, Sarah Gallagher, Seán Brosnahan, Chris Kwak and James York.

Memories of

BOB HOPKINS

Our former Administrator **Kylie Darragh** writes:

When he was OSA Events Chair, Bob and I worked together for over two years in 2016–18. I was fortunate to speak with him a few days before he passed away on 20 September last year. In typical Southland farmer fashion, he phoned me first thing in the morning on a Saturday, already most likely onto his morning tea, and said he had a story to tell me a little later on. When we arrived at that point, he explained briefly that he was to have medical treatment the following week: 'Yep, it is what it is,' and just like that Bob had managed wonderfully to give me a quiet word without me noticing it too much. Just like that, Bob was the type of person who knew how to bow out without fuss.

Bob was very much a regular at the Otago Settlers' Association rooms, and his generosity was truly admirable. Early on, he quietly let me know that he would bring the milk to the first function I was involved in. It turned out that every cup of white tea or coffee over at least the next two years of Association events was thanks to Bob's generosity, probably more than a thousand of them. He referred to it as his small way of helping, but like many of the things he did for the OSA, it was by no means a small gesture.

The Summer Outings were meticulously planned by Bob. He found it vastly amusing that I did not enjoy his 'dummy-run' driving but he insisted on me going on the planning trips, often rearranging the seating plans in the car if the passengers chatted too much about any unrelated historical topics. He would stop for moments of reflection at obscure landmarks, often seemingly nothing more than mounds of rock and earth but which in Bob's eyes would invariably hold flecks of the gold of historical interest which he would later explain in terms of a farmer great uncle who once … I would take notes and remind him that the bus would have to be back in Dunedin by five and that the ice cream stop the passengers *just had to have* would take at least 30 minutes out of the timetable. For the outing to Lawrence in 2019, Bob was soon considering the booking of a second bus, the numbers having grown no doubt due to his ability to include other OSA members and utilise their knowledge. He showed great enthusiasm for these well-designed (and timed) history-loving trips.

Bob's quiz nights were legendary, so much so that when we planned a second, winter quiz, we had to filter the RSVPs for rogue teams trying to take members' places. His questions were timely and often very, very tricky, quite a few leaving the contenders groaning with the challenge and a collective sigh of 'Oh, we knew that!'

I know that many people appreciated Bob's friendship and good humour — an all-round good human being. I wish to send my sincere condolences and respects to his family; he was a wonderful colleague with a warm spirit and a selfless nature. We could always rely on Bob to have a good, keen story to share, a story he would, invariably, get back to, just a little later on. As Denis Glover wrote of Arawata Bill:

RIP where no gold lies
But in your own questing soul
Rich in faith and wild surmise.

Top: Bob Hopkins, master question-setter, at the OSA Quiz Night, 8 December 2016.
Bottom: Bob Hopkins and Danny Knudson in 2018, most likely sharing an amusing story.

Cèilidh Nollaig

The OSA's Christmas function was held in the early evening of Thursday, 10 December at the Museum. President Pete Smith, wearing a tie decorated with a large Christmas tree, opening the festivities with a bit of creative accounting by announcing it was the 122nd such occasion. Members of the Dunedin Scottish Country Dance Cèilidh Club danced for us, and the Dunedin Scottish Fiddle Orchestra played. Since the land of Calvin, oat-cakes and sulphur is associated more with Hogmanay than the Anglo-Saxon Yuletide, the tunes were merry rather than Christmassy.

The four ladies and two laddies danced a jig to 'The Cranberry Tart,' a triangular Strathspey set to 'See You Later,' and then a reel to 'Spring Time in Dunedin' (or possibly Dùn Èideann). Country dancing is more complex than it looks, and experienced dancers can commit a couple of dozen sets to memory and perform them to about five hundred different tunes. An offshoot of the Dunedin Burns Club, at their height the country dancers had as many as 480 members. They are a sociable bunch, and welcome new members.

As an impromptu interlude, Daniel and Grace, two young dancers from the Jacqui Seque Dance School, performed a Highland fling while the 14 fiddlers assembled. Among the strings were a guitarist, an Irish bouzoukist and an accordianist, all accompanied by Mike Moroney with a keyboard continuo and under the direction of Anna Bowen. The fiddle orchestra was formed in 2013 and meets weekly in the North East Valley community rooms. Despite their name, they have a repertoire that extends well beyond Scotland. They played the Strathspey melody 'Lime Hill,' the American rag 'Dill Pickles,' the Gay Gordons, the Russian 'Trioka' (the Slavic equivalent of 'Jingle Bells'), and their own mash-up of 'The Flying Nun' and 'Sally Gunn' named 'Sally Fields,' ending with 'Night in That Land.'

Suitably tartanned, Daniel and Grace then returned to perform a Highland sword dance. As Master of Ceremonies, Pete drew the raffle for four hampers of good things donated by members. The proceeds will help pay for future functions. Melville and Nancy Carr's winning streak, alas, appears to have fizzled out.

The country dancers returned to perform a jig and a Strathspey, then induced about 30 of the audience to join them in a large circular dance to a medley that included the distinctly un-Caledonian 'I've Got a Lovely Bunch of Cocoanuts.' The remaining 40 or so in the audience who sat it out may have had in mind the famous dictum often attributed to Sir Thomas Beecham about activities he would recommend trying at least once.

The fiddle orchestra returned to play the Glengarry March, 'Pig Ankle Rag,' and the Australian composer Sirocha Bruckard's 'Farewell to Fife.' Tongue in cheek, President Pete asked 'Is that it?' and led the demand for an encore: a European piece, 'Snakes and Ladders.' Pete then thanked all the performers and volunteers for a splendid evening's entertainment. A supper of Christmassy treats followed, though without whisky or shortbread. Members then set off for home into the Celtic twilight.

Some of the fiddlers of the Dunedin Scottish Fiddle Orchestra.

For Your Diary

Scenes of Provincial Life

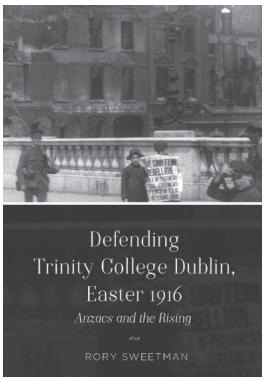
If you get your skates on there is still time to book your place on the OSA's summer outing on Friday, 26 February. We are off to see the sights of the Maniototo, visiting the museum at Middlemarch, on to Ranfurly for lunch, and then exploring the Early Settlers and Jubilee Museums in Naseby. There are several cafes in Ranfurly if you do not wish to bring your own food; the bus will have an on-board WC. Numbers are limited to 48. You can register your interest by contacting our Administrator, Gemma Murphy, at the OSA office.

Maniototo translates as 'plains of blood,' but it would perhaps now be more appropriate to say 'plains of gold,' since the rushes helped shape its early settlements. The oldest in the district, Hogburn, shrugged off its suidian appellation in 1877 to follow the fashion for names associated with the 'Right but Repulsive' Roundheads of the English Civil War: Cromwell decisively defeated Charles I near Naseby in Northamptonshire in 1645. When a new railway township was founded in Eweburn in 1897–98 it was given the title of the Governor, Uchter Knox, fifth Earl of Ranfurly (and thankfully not his Christian name). Middlemarch is often said to have been named by the well-read wife of a local landowner after the fictional market town in George Eliot's novel. More prosaically, the name may have come simply from the site's being near the boundary or March Creek.

Otago Anniversary Day

The Revd Ed Masters of First Church invites all members of the Association to join him in commemorating the 173rd anniversary of the foundation of Otago at 10am on Sunday, 21 March. President Pete Smith will deliver one of the readings at the service, and the OSA will contribute towards the cost of the morning tea.

The Anniversary Day dinner will be held on Tuesday, 23 March at the Dunedin Club, Fernhill, 33 Melville Street. The speaker will be Nicky Page, Director of the City of Literature. The doors will open at 6.30pm for a 7pm start, and there will be a cash bar. Dress: lounge suits. Tickets: $60 from the Otago Settlers Association or Malcolm Wong at Cook North & Wong Ltd in the Savoy Building, 8 Moray Place. Since places are limited, early application is advisable.



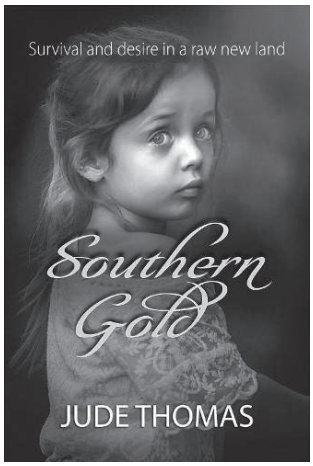
Book News

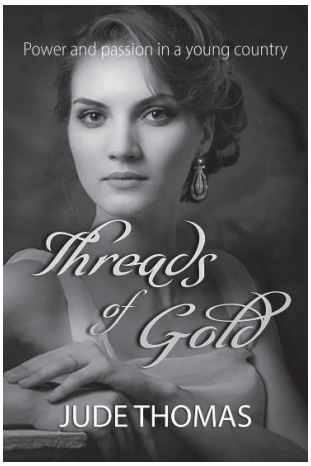
Defending Trinity College Dublin, Easter 1916: Anzacs and the Rising by Rory Sweetman (Dublin: Four Courts, 2019) 172 pages, paperback. 26 illustrations; three maps. $49.99 (With OSA members' 20% discount, $39.99 plus $5 packing and postage. Please make out cheques to the DCC.)

The catalyst for this book was the Museum's exhibition 'Dunedin's Great War' back in 2014. Among the exhibits was a small silver trophy that had been presented to the Dunedin artilleryman Alexander Don, son of the well-known Presbyterian missionary to the goldfields Chinese. Inscribed 'Defence of TCD / Sinn Fein Rebellion Easter 1916,' the little cup's significance was immediately recognised by the noted (and soon to be ex-Otago) historian Rory Sweetman, former lecturer in Irish History at Otago University. Brought up in New Zealand, he had returned to his native land in the 1970s to study history at Trinity College, Dublin. There, the future Dr Sweetman heard rumours of the Anzacs who had defended the university during the Easter Rising and saved it from the destruction that befell other strategic landmarks in the city — its famous library with the Book of Kells survived unburnt.

As Australians tend to overlook the significance of the 'NZ' in Anzac, over the years these rumours grew into a belief that a whole clutch of Australian soldiers had found themselves in the thick of the fighting. Rory deftly skewers this, finding instead that five New Zealanders formed the backbone of the defence of Trinity, assisted by a lone Ocker alongside six South Africans and two Canadians. It might be thought that the subject of the Easter Rising has already been raked over thoroughly, but as a result of extensive research in previously neglected sources he is able to throw new light on the topic. He makes a strong case for the Anzacs having defeated an attack on the college by the rebels in the early stages of the rising, an event previously misinterpreted or at best played down by historians. A small band of hardened antipodeans, some of them Gallipoli veterans, saw off the attackers, and by sniping from the rooftops and raiding nearby buildings helped stymie the rebels until the regular army arrived in force a few days later.

The appendices contain striking first-hand accounts from witnesses, among them the letters sent home by four of the New Zealanders. Though this is a serious historical work, it is very readable, being mercifully free of academic jargon. It includes a useful list of Dramatis Personæ, a range of interesting photographs and an unusually comprehensive index.





Southern Gold and Threads of Gold by Jude Thomas (Auckland: Silvereye, 2017 and 2020) 235 pages and 276 pages respectively, paperback. $32.95 each (With OSA members' 20% discount, $26.36 plus $5 packing and postage. Please make out cheques to the DCC.)

These historical novels, set in Victorian Dunedin, follow the fortunes of a mystery child who rose from the slums to become a force to be reckoned with. *Southern Gold*, a story of 'survival and desire in a raw new land,' traces its heroine's fortunes through the boom years of the 1860s and early 1870s. The sequel, *Threads of Gold*, finds her by the 1890s society's darling, drawn into the exotic presence of the earliest Lebanese settlers. She is 'in the thick of the action' amidst social and political change — the campaigns for women's suffrage, workers' rights and dress reform — but events threaten to push her 'towards the edge of reason.' (Jude Thomas is the nom de plume of the Dunedin-born author Judy Tindill.)

OTAGO SETTLERS ASSOCIATION

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