



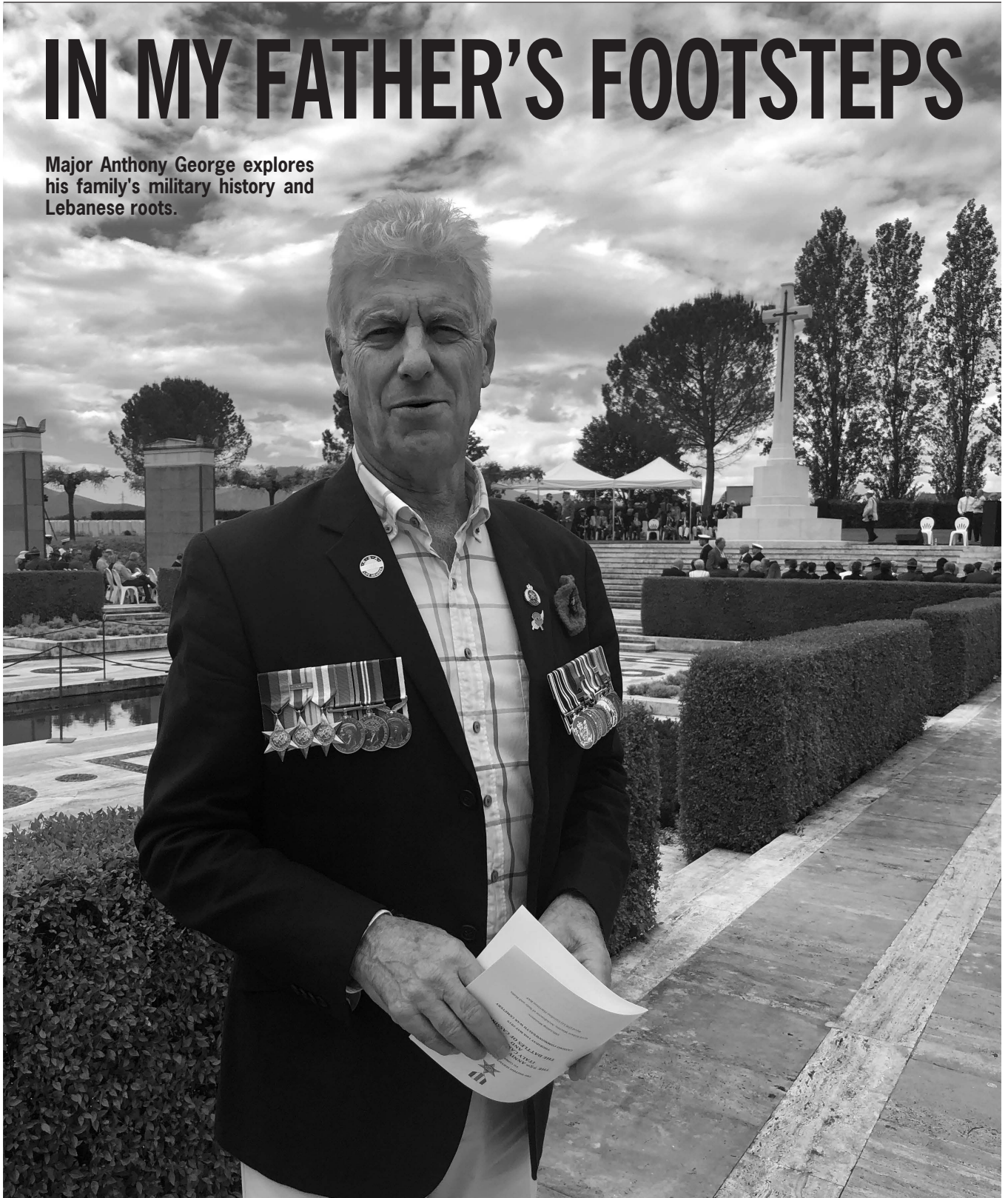
OTAGO SETTLERS NEWS

OTAGO SETTLERS ASSOCIATION *proud to be friends of* **toitū** OTAGO SETTLERS MUSEUM

WINTER 2021 ISSUE 149

IN MY FATHER'S FOOTSTEPS

Major Anthony George explores his family's military history and Lebanese roots.



Tony George at the Cassino War Cemetery, 2019.

John Edward George — Dad to me; Johnny to his family; Jack to his Army mates; 46499 Driver JE George to the army authorities — was born in Dunedin on 23 June 1910 to Lebanese immigrant parents, Michael and Josephine George. The surname 'George' was bestowed on the family by the immigration authorities, who struggled with foreign names and spelling. My grandfather's surname was originally Zirius, and my grandmother's Luddis. As Maronite Christians, they were part of the diaspora that fled prosecution in Lebanon. Some of my grandmother's family however still farm land in Becharre, about 60km north-east of Beirut. My father came from a large family born in New Zealand: five sisters and eight brothers, five of whom served in the Second World War, a significant contribution to the war effort. The strain of having so many sons away at war at the same time — and with one of his sons, Tom, at one point posted missing in action, believed dead — contributed to the premature death of my grandfather. All the men served in the army in the Middle East, except for Eric, who served with the RNZAF in the Pacific. All the brothers survived the war and all but two lived out their lives back in Dunedin.

My father was attested at Dunedin on 21 November 1940 and discharged on 11 December 1945, an incredibly long period of service without a furlough back home. Thanks, however, to New Zealand's military supply chain, my father was able on more than one occasion to take leave, often in the company of his brother Tom and several cousins, and spend time in Becharre, his family's home village in the northern Lebanese mountains, just below the famous Cedars of Lebanon. Family ties to the 'old country' remain to this day. Except for a period during the civil war of 1975–90, members of the family have frequently visited on one form of pilgrimage or another.

Units my father served in included 2 Battalion NZ Scottish Infantry, 2 NZ Expeditionary Force, NZ Army Service Corps and 1 Supply Company. The NZ Scottish was based in Dunedin and was originally a Territorial Force Infantry Battalion — you didn't have to be a Scot to join. Driver George was awarded the following medals for his service: 1939–45 Star; Africa Star with Eighth Army Clasp; Italy Star; Defence Medal; War Medal 1939–45; NZ War Medal.



My father, his brother Tom and their cousins grew up speaking Arabic and this proved to be especially useful to commanders when training in base camps in Egypt, namely Maadi and Helwan Camps near Cairo. Local traders were often caught off-guard by this unexpected knowledge of their language and customs, the New Zealanders having established a reputation for being at times 'difficult' to manage, and initially assessed as being a soft touch when it came to commercial transactions. This situation was quickly terminated, with the locals being particularly fearful of my cousin Albert (Farr), who was a skilful negotiator when it came to bargaining for transport and supplies.

I have had the privilege of working with or reading about my father and his cousins in campaign military histories. Joseph Bacos' wartime history is recorded in Megan Hutching's *A Fair Sort of Battering: New Zealanders Remember the Italian Campaign*, published in 2004. Joe fought in Africa and Italy with Divisional Ordnance and 20 Armoured Regiment as a tank gunner. I grew up with Albert Farr in Dunedin and worked briefly with him for Arthur Barnett whilst waiting for enlistment in the late 1960s. Wilfred Mansoor lived in Auckland in his later years. He was a medic in 2 NZ Expeditionary Force. In 2012, Wilfred, then well into his late eighties, was selected to attend the seventieth anniversary of El Alamein in Egypt representing New Zealand veterans. I was still serving at the time and volunteered to accompany him, but this request was declined, an arrangement much changed in the modern era.

Two of my cousins, Albert Farr and his brother Victor, who served in the Pacific with the RNZAF, were the eldest grandsons of Michael George, exemplifying how close family ties were then, as they remain to this day. I often wondered as I walked the streets of Israel's towns and cities, and especially when in Egypt, where I visited the pyramids near Cairo and attended commemorative events at El Alamein and in Italy at Cassino, and in Lebanon when I visited Beirut and Becharre, what my father and his family got up to: where they went, what they did and who they enjoyed time with. For security reasons, during the war diaries and photographs were forbidden, though most ignored the orders. Dad however did not keep a diary and was a poor letter writer. Sadly, I will never know the detail of



Left: Josephine and Michael George.
Right: John Edward George (back row, centre) and his cousins.

where he went and what he saw, but I can honestly say that I have walked in my father's footsteps throughout both Italy and Lebanon, and elsewhere in the Middle East.

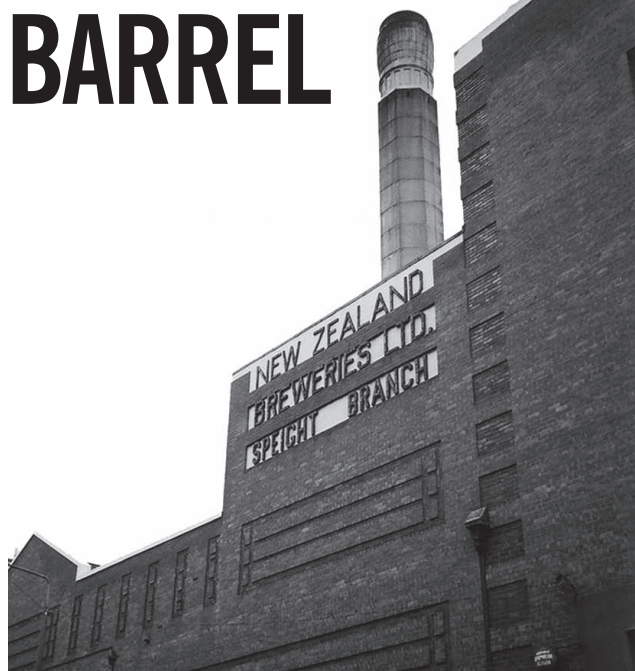
My father passed away in 1972, just on three years after I enlisted in the NZ Defence Force. I am proud of his heritage, the values practised by his large family and the Lebanese community, and remain a loyal custodian of his service medals, proudly worn every Anzac Day alongside my own.

Anthony John George



Major George is a retired professional army officer. He served in the NZ Defence Force for 33 years, living in and serving in many countries overseas. He was deployed widely in the Pacific on humanitarian tasks, and on operations three times: the Middle East (1990–91), Afghanistan (2009–10) and South Sudan (2012).

A SMOKING BARREL



In the Autumn issue our President Pete Smith's father described his part in bringing down the original Speights Brewery chimney — here he describes how its concrete replacement was constructed in 1937–38 (with the occasional builder's Anglo-Saxon expletive): The site of the new concrete chimney first had to be excavated, and this was deep, in the deepest corner of the whole job. We finally dug our way across the section until we came to the position where the present chimney now stands. In among the pile of plans I had to work to, there was a set of separate details for this, and I could see at a glance the principle of the design. Although the plan showed a tremendous mass of concrete, riddled with steel, it also showed this: the whole design seemed to be based on the principle of the pencil with the weighted bottom that you can't knock over. There was a big, deep reinforced concrete base pad, and on top of this, to boiler house floor level — I forget now exactly — but about 35 feet high, about 12 feet square, walls 12 inches thick, a hollow square filled with beach sand that had to be compacted with water until it settled, and settled until it would take no more.

Building the fire box and the structure to the roof line was easy, but above this, the eight-sided stack was not easy to handle until I learnt how to control the shuttering, preventing it from pushing out of shape as we poured in the concrete. The shutters were lined with galvanised iron to give a smooth finish, but the joints would bust on me even though bolted on — the damn thing would screw out of true shape. I found a cure for this by having steel bands made to go around the shutters, with a section where they joined that could be screwed up or loosened, as necessary. After this, the stack was built at the rate of four feet a day, the steel gang up the scaffold ahead of us, and the scaffolding going up ahead of all.

Right: Speights Brewery's distinctive barrel-topped chimney.

The scaffolding was all 4 x 4 inch Oregon poles, 6 x 2 inch ledgers, planks and putlogs. The head scaffolder was Arthur Moodie. Arthur was a staunch and noble man, a terrific worker, with a heavy moustache and one eye. He and his mates did a terrific job. I can see him now balancing the large poles above him while the others camped on the steel brackets. He couldn't keep this latticework of timber exactly plumb, so we plumbed off the concrete as we came up after him. He was a constant source of annoyance to me, always grizzling that he didn't have enough clips or poles, or planks, or putlogs. Every day he complained he was short of something, when more often than not he wasn't. I remember saying to him, when all the scaffold was dismantled, lying in a great stack ready to go back to the yard, 'Arthur, there's all your stuff, now get stuck in, and build it again, and don't you dare to tell me you're even a bracket short.'

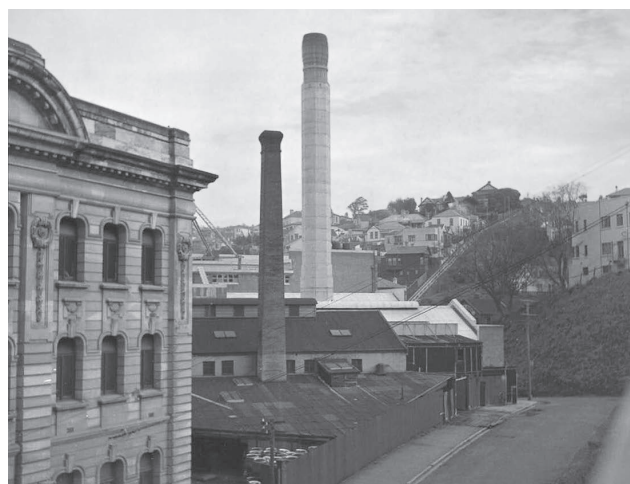
One of his helpers, by strange coincidence, to me anyway, was Arthur Goodyer, who looked after the horses and stables in Otira, when Hall & Coy ran coaches over the Gorge. He used to chase me out of the stables when I was a kid in short pants. My people had the hotel in Otira and I went to school there. Arthur Goodyer, a good man. Even his name recalls pleasant memories.

We had finally reached the position high up, to the base of the barrel. I used to climb the sloping ladders at least twice a day. It was some climb, and some days when it was blowing like hell, working on that chimney was no fun. Everything used to sway some inches and I was always scared stiff that the wind would do some structural damage, but this didn't happen — there was so much steel in it that not even a hurricane could bend it.

When I think back, I think it's fair to say this chimney was one of the first 'fair-face' concrete jobs done in Dunedin. There was made a conference in the office on how the boxing was to be made to form this barrel. It was finally made in the joinery factory, half size in height. The bottom half was placed and poured, then removed and turned upside down to form the top half. The joint can still be seen today. It stripped cleanly, but some slight patching had to be done by a plasterer. A young plasterer climbed his way to the top, looking up as he went. He got to the top, no trouble at all, stood up, stretched his arms for a breather, and looked over the side. He immediately collapsed flat on his belly on the planks, grasping the edge of them in a vice-like grip, frozen stiff. He wouldn't get up, wouldn't move, and we had an awful job to pry him loose; it almost got to the point where his boss was going to knock him out. We got him loose eventually, tied ropes around him, and three of us lowered and pushed him down the ladders, stage by stage, until we got him to the ground. It took a full strenuous two hours and we were all done, our plasterer boy a complete nervous wreck for the next two days.

It's one thing to work up to heights like this as the job grows, and you grow with it, but it's quite another kettle of fish to just walk off the street, climb, and then look down. We all understood this. The touching up was finally done by his boss, a hard-working man in his own business, who didn't care what he had to do or where, as long as he could make a living. He later became a very successful publican in Southland.

This chimney was built plumb by hanging a very heavy plumb bob on a thin wire down the centre of the flue, and the last checking



of the boxing before the pouring of concrete sometimes took some time if there was a wind. The chimney would sway and of course the amount of sway was shown on the mark at the bottom of the flue. It was only inches as the 'bob' and wire were protected from the wind and by being inside the flue, and some time when this sway on the 'bob' would not stop, but when I could see from the mark and the 'bob' that the sway was even across the mark, much like a pendulum, I would decide to pour, and sure enough checking again on a calm day this proved to be accurate.

An interesting feature of the structure was the fire brick lining, from the fire box point to about half way up the flue. The bricks used were of special high quality imported from England and the first course in the full circumference of the circle were tapered from nothing to three inches thick. They were carefully laid first, and the remainder of the fire bricks laid on top of this in a continuous bonded spiral, the bricks curved to the shape of the flue. Above these bricks the rest of the lining was laid in the hardest blue clinkers our local works could produce. The brickies worked on a circular platform that was winched up and down inside the flu, the materials hauled up from the bottom and through a trap door in the centre of the platform. This worked well and efficiently, but I was always scared that some dope, after loading up, would leave the trap door open, step back and fall through. A fall like that could really hurt someone.

The radio announcer Lionel Sceats called and made arrangements to do a live broadcast from the top of the barrel. The station 4ZB had not long started at this time, and this was to be quite a feature on the air. We ran his recording wire up through the scaffold, and Lionel and I climbed the ladders to the top. The broadcast was made at dusk on a warm, balmy night, but I cannot remember just what month of the year it was. Lionel had his microphone in his pocket and a Very pistol from which he was to fire a flare at the end of our talk. I climbed behind him: I told him to look up and nowhere else. He was dressed appropriately to stand the cool breeze at the top, in old sports clothes, pullover, scarf and peaked cap. On reaching the top I am afraid that Lionel was much like our plasterer boy, but nothing like as bad, thank goodness. He stood on the top planking and looked over the side, he didn't panic or get dizzy, but turned his back on the downward view and wrapped his arms around the guard rail on the outside of

the scaffolding. I plugged in the microphone and we talked of the building of the chimney, the time it took, its design, etc.

He wanted to yell down the flue and let the listeners hear the echo bouncing back, but he just couldn't take those two steps across the planking. Finally, with time running out he said to me 'There, you do it, and hurry.' I grabbed the microphone from him, but so quickly that it came away from the cord. We lost precious minutes getting it fitted again and I walked to the edge of the concrete barrel and yelled down several times, and sure enough back came the resounding echoes. Time over for broadcasting, Lionel fired the pistol and the flare rose into the black sky and burst into a bright floating star of colour and light. I thought we might have some trouble getting down, but no, Lionel had calmed down considerably. I went first slowly down the ladders, stage by stage, me with a torch, and though it did take some time we got safely back to solid ground. When I look back I think the darkness helped, as little could be seen except the rungs of the ladders in the beam of my torch. I felt that Lionel Sceats got quite a thrill out of doing this broadcast; I did anyway, as the remarks passed next day were all complementary.

Having written this I decided I had better go back and have a look at this mighty 'grandson.' I have just come back. I have just been standing on the top of Tennyson Street, on the hill, but still below the top of the barrel. I hadn't looked at him like this in the 30 years since he was born, and my feelings were something of a shock to see him again, the moulding of the barrel, the shape of the flue, the carefully designed detail in reductions of sizes, the seating of the barrel, the recessed design, and the pleasure it was just to look back on a job well done. The greatest shock of course was that this 'grandson' was born 30 years ago. To me it seems just yesterday.

Terry Smith

Despite having no head for heights, Lionel Sceats eventually rose to the top of his profession, becoming Director-General of the NZBC in 1970.

The story goes that the sketch of the barrel was added to the plans at the last minute as a joke, but the company's directors approved this *jeu d'esprit* — see Paul Hayward's *More Intriguing Street Walks*, Book 2 (1998). Not everyone thought it was such a good wheeze. 'Disgusted' wrote to the editor of the *Otago Daily Times* in July 1938: 'When coming down Rattray street this morning I was amazed to see that behind the scaffolding at the top of the new chimney now being constructed for Speight's Brewery the top of the chimney is being finished off in the form of a beer barrel. This chimney is directly in front of the Girls' High School and close to St Joseph's Cathedral, and I consider that, when the scaffolding is taken down, this structure will be a permanent disfigurement to our city. A visitor coming to Dunedin will be impressed by the fact that one of the most conspicuous landmarks of the city is in the form of a beer barrel. I trust that the authorities concerned, principally the city architect's department and the Amenities Society will immediately take the matter up and endeavour to get the directors of New Zealand Breweries, Ltd, to alter this undignified exhibit.'



WAY OUT WEST

The Good Company bus took us on the OSA Summer Outing inland into the Strath Taieri and to Middlemarch, where we stopped for a fabulous morning tea, laid on for us by volunteers of the Middlemarch Museum at the community centre nearby. On show outside the museum were the remains, stranded high and dry far inland, of 'Platypus', one of the world's earliest surviving submarines. It was designed in France and built in Dunedin in 1873 to mine for gold on the bed of the Clutha. Like most early submersibles, however, it was much better at submerging than resurfacing. The museum has a fascinating timeline around the inside of a railway wagon depicting, among other things, the progressive completion of the Otago Central Railway line from Dunedin to Cromwell, begun in 1877, finished in 1921 and then progressively shortened in 1980 and 1990.

Tangiwai on Christmas Eve 1953 is fixed in the national memory as the worst-ever railway disaster, but a decade earlier another terrible accident had taken place near Hyde. On the afternoon before King's Birthday weekend, 1943, the Cromwell–Dunedin Express took a bend much too quickly — our tour handout included newspaper photographs of the aftermath. We visited the memorial cairn erected in 1991 to the 21 victims. One of our members, Hugh Kidd, described for us the circumstances leading up to the crash. The train driver was convicted of having been drunk at the controls, having spent his lunch break in the Ranfurly Hotel.

With a more sober lunch in Ranfurly in mind, we headed there via Hyde (where we viewed Foulden Maar) and Kyburn, where Mōa footprints were found recently. The results of Mr Surveyor John Turnbull Thomson's wrath at the Provincial Council were discussed as we passed the Hog Burn and Sow Burn, and several other similarly themed place names were mentioned such as Ewe Burn. Lunch in Ranfurly was left to each diner's discretion.

At Naseby, our tour guide President Pete gave a rundown of the recent past. During his personal association with the town there had been a primary school, two dairies, a supermarket, motels, a butcher's shop, a post office, a police station and

Top right: The OSA Summer Outing stops over in Naseby.



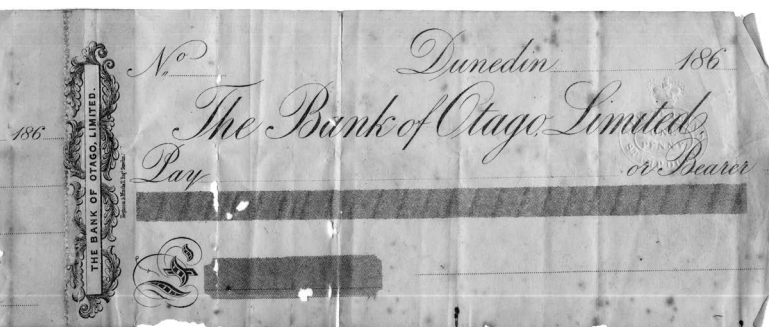
two hotels. Now there is only a small dairy and one hotel, but on the other hand there is an international indoor curling rink. However, the town retains several atmospheric old buildings, among them the former Post Office of 1900, the 'tin chapel' Athenæum of 1865, the *Mount Ida Chronicle* newspaper office, the Royal Hotel of 1879, Hjorring's draper's shop and, next door, the tiny Strong's watchmaker's shop with a large clock atop its facade. The Strongs, father and son, ran the business for nearly a century, from 1868 to 1967. The main part of the Maniototo Early Settlers Museum, with its interesting and varied collection, is across the street in the former county offices, which date from 1878. The Jubilee Museum, built more than a century later, has a good selection of horse-drawn vehicles, among them a rare and well-preserved hearse. The rather faster and more comfortable bus returned to Dunedin via Palmerston, completing a very enjoyable day for all 48 participants. Thanks are due to the organisers and everyone who helped to make the outing a success.



Anzac Day

After the virus-induced hiatus last year, the Anzac Day commemoration at the Cenotaph in Queens Gardens returned to normal this April. Director Cam McCracken represented the Museum at the dawn service, and afterwards many of the crowd were served an early morning tea with Anzac biscuits. Cam, Museum staff, OSA members and two city councillors ensured that the hot water and biscuits kept coming. President Pete Smith reckons he served more than 140 cups of tea at his table, one of four refreshment sites. He and the Committee send their thanks to everybody who helped.

Left, top to bottom: Visiting Middlemarch Museum including a fine local example of a wartime 'signature' quilt and the remains of 'Platypus', one of the world's earliest surviving submarines. Thanks to Eileen Binns. **Top right:** The memorial cairn to the railway disaster near Hyde.



Eine Verschlimmbesserung

Cheques have been a convenient, efficient and safe way of making payments for centuries, but the banks have recently decided they can no longer be bothered to process them. In consequence the OSA is now unable to accept cheques for subscriptions, and the DCC likewise for books ordered from the Museum shop. The Association's office does not have the facilities to handle debit or credit cards, so it will have to be good old-fashioned cash, at least until that is abolished as well. We do not hold cash on the premises so unfortunately are unable to give change.

In the form of handwritten instructions to bankers, cheques emerged in Venice in the thirteenth century, some time before any humans had reached New Zealand. Recognisably modern cheques developed in the Netherlands in the early 1500s, and two centuries later the still familiar ready-printed forms appeared. As a security measure, the printed cheque was joined to its stub by a complex engraved pattern so once separated the two parts could be matched up to check (or cheque) that the form had not been counterfeited.

Do not be tempted to cut out the Bank of Otago cheque reproduced here and cash it in — the business is long defunct. It was established at the height of the gold rush in 1863 and swallowed up by the new National Bank ten years later. The Bank of Otago's first manager was William Bathgate, who made some bad investments and was obliged to resign. William Larnach took over in 1867. The bank's physical legacy includes attractive neoclassical buildings in Outram and Oamaru, both designed by RA Lawson. The latter is now a branch of the ANZ, which took over the National Bank in 2003. The Port Chalmers branch, designed by David Ross in 1864 and enlarged by Lawson three years later, is now a crafts shop, The Crafty Banker.

For Your Diary



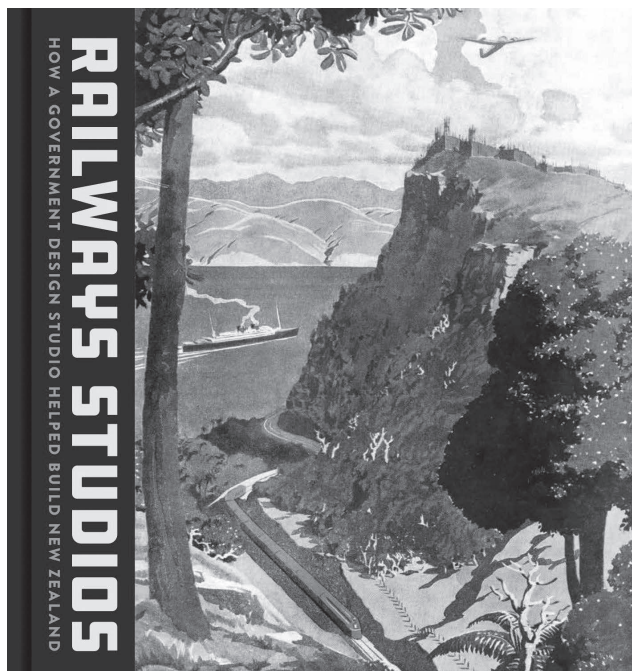
Midwinter Function

The OSA will mark the 245th anniversary of the unilateral declaration of independence by the rebel American colonies on Sunday, 4 July, with its midwinter meeting, starting at 2 pm in the Museum auditorium. Our guest speaker Glen Hazelton will talk on 'How Dunedin's heritage can contribute to the Central City Plan and a vibrant CBD.' Dr Hazelton is an expert both in the foreign policy of post-Soviet Russia — he is an Otago PhD in Politics — and in Dunedin's heritage. After more than seven years as an imaginative and hands-on heritage planner with the DCC, Glen went west in 2016 to work on heritage projects for the Perth City Council. He was soon lured back to Wellington by Heritage NZ (the former Historic Places Trust) and this February came full circle, working for the DCC as project director of their Central City Plan.

Life in Mining Towns

Simon Nathan will give an illustrated public lecture on 'Two Geophotographers — Joseph Divis and Lloyd Homer' on Tuesday, 18 May from 5.30 to 7 pm in the McGavin Room of the Leisure Lodge, 30 Duke Street, North Dunedin. Divis photographed mining town life in Waiuta and Waihi, and the occasion is sponsored by the NZ branch of the Australasian Institute of Mining & Metallurgy. There is no charge, but RSVP to dean@rarl.co.nz so that the organisers know how many are likely to attend. For more information, see www.ausimm.com/communities/branches/new-zealand

Shop News



Railways Studios: How a Government Design Studio Helped Build New Zealand by Peter Alsop, Neill Atkinson, Katherine Milburn and Richard Wolfe (Te Papa Press, 2020) 376 pages, hardback. Price: \$70 (With OSA members' 20% discount, \$56 plus \$5 packing and postage.)

This beautifully designed and profusely illustrated book tells the story of the government agency that dominated outdoor advertising for more than 65 years. Set up a century ago, the studio produced posters and brochures for all manner of commercial clients, not just the railways. Its graphic artists created promotional material to encourage tourism and travel, promote enlistment in the armed forces, sell clothing, push safety campaigns, and exhort people to look after their health, among many other things. The Railways Studio survived until 1987, by which time technology had dramatically changed how advertising was produced — in the early years, the large hoardings had been hand-painted. Those who worked there over

the decades are not neglected, several of them being given short biographies. The studio's work is a sort of time capsule of twentieth-century life, and the authors argue that its designs influenced public attitudes, shaping how New Zealanders saw themselves. Research for the book has even identified the designer of the leadlight windows in the Dunedin Railway Station, which has remained a mystery for more than a century. There is another local connection: one of the authors is Katherine Milburn, the ephemera collection curator at the Hocken.



Räder of Bochum in Westphalia produce a range of stylised Mitteleuropean model houses, reminiscent of sets from 'The Cabinet of Dr Caligari.' They are made from unglazed biscuit porcelain, the translucency of which means that when a tea light is placed inside them the houses come alive, especially in the evening. A 1920s-style bungalow has been added to their small range of New Zealand houses, filling the chronological gap between their late-Victorian bay villa and their two-storey state house. Its complex moulding includes a bow window and a characteristic entrance porch; like the others, the shell of the house lifts off a base plate, which takes a small candle or battery-powered light. Height (to the top of the chimney) 11cm; width 14cm; depth 10 cm (about 4½ x 5 x 4 inches). Price: \$89.95 (With OSA members' 20% discount, \$71.96 plus \$5 packing and postage.)



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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, Box 74, Dunedin. Phone/fax 03 477 8677, email admin@otagosettlers.org.nz ISSN 2744-3302 (Print); ISSN 2744-3310 (Online)

Otago Daily Times

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