

2016 TALK SERIES

The 25th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the Friends of the Hocken Collections will be held in the Seminar Room, Ground floor, Hocken Library, at 5:30 pm on Wednesday, 20 July 2016

At the conclusion of the Annual Meeting PROFESSOR TOM BROOKING will speak on:

Richard Seddon – Illustrations and Loose Ends

Light refreshments will be served

PROFESSOR TOM BROOKING holds a personal chair in history at the University of Otago, where he has taught courses in New Zealand, Australian and British history, as well as political biography, since 1978. He specialises in environmental and political history, and the connections between Scotland and New Zealand. He served as regional chair for the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* and was president of the New Zealand Historical Association from 2011 to 2013.

His three most recent major books are:

- *Making a New Land: Environmental Histories of New Zealand* (University of Otago Press, 2013) edited with Eric Pawson;
- *Unpacking the Kists: The Scots in New Zealand* (McGill-Queens University Press with Otago University Press, 2013) co-authors Brad Patterson and Jim McAloon;
- *Richard Seddon: King of God's Own* (Penguin, 2014).

2 September: Jim Sullivan reflects on 50 years of digging around in New Zealand's archives, as a writer and broadcaster.

(This talk is associated with the FOHC Annual Dinner – to be held at the Technique Restaurant at Otago Polytechnic.)

16 November: Professor Kevin Clements – "Pacifism in Otago; Exploring Pacifism in the Hocken Collection."

Dr Mike Stevens' talk on **May 18th**, "Bluff 1800-2000 - Bluffing his way through the Hocken and taking Hakena back to Awarua", was simply fascinating. Through his family he was able to bring to life a largely unknown slice of New Zealand history as if it were his own personal experience. Equally the talk underlined Dr Steven's conviction that the Hocken Collection has a significant role to play throughout Otago and Southland.

THE SOMME – FROMELLES – 20th JULY 1916

We might spare a thought for our Australian cousins on this 100th anniversary.

The 5th Australian Division had arrived in France only days before the attack and had no experience of Western Front operations. Poor planning and ineffective artillery support were just some of the factors that contributed to the disastrous failure at Fromelles. The battle was responsible for one of the greatest losses of Australian lives in WW1. In 24 hours the 5th Australian Division lost 5,513 killed and wounded.

COLIN McCAHON FAMILY GIFT

Many of you will have read in the *Otago Daily Times* (May 17th) of the more than 100 letters and a sketch by Colin McCahon given to the Hocken Library by John and Andrew Parsloe, nephews of McCahon. John Parsloe said. "My mother was aware from a very early age that keeping those letters would be important." The letters offer insights into McCahon's total dedication to art, and "Some of the letters reveal a fair amount of passion about choosing painting as a vocation and not being distracted by secondary things, sometimes perhaps even family." Andrew has provided a table of contents for many of the individual groups of letters and cards. This had made the task of this writer in choosing a few of the letters for publication in *F&J* all the easier, and I am grateful to him for the help he has given.

COLIN McCAHON – FAMILY MAN

The treasure-trove of letters and cards and diaries deposited in the Hocken Collection illustrates the close bonds that existed between Colin and his sister, Beatrice (Beata), in particular, and with his parents. From just five of these, selections have been made that fill out our picture of the man.

The first, to Beata in Dunedin, comes from February 1939, when Colin and Rodney Kennedy are fruit-picking at Mapua, Toss Woollaston's territory. Colin is restless, wants to get his career underway, and thinks it would be best to move to Christchurch. He would like a job at the D.I.C. as a window dresser, or work at the Public Gardens. 'As soon as I can save £5 I shall set forth for Chch to seek fame and fortune.'

To prepare for the change he asks his sister to 'go to the trunk in my studio and fish out the roll labelled "posters", open it, obtain a cardboard cylinder of suitable size from Mr Johnstone picture framer Stewart St, and carefully roll the following – "Wanaka Hotel" "By tram to the Gardens" "Icilma_Shampoos" "Sciaparelli [sic] Perfumes", if there, a cover I did for Vogue spring number, "Afghan Cigarettes" a glove poster – most important – and any small commercial work – stage sets etc in the bundle – that you think suitable. There might be a few large posters I haven't mentioned – you must decide what to send. Wrap them up & have them ready to post when I send an address please. I don't know when it will be but I shall set forth as soon as I can. (Put works inside cylinder)

'I can't concentrate on painting here. I have & I am enclosing a bad drawing of Mrs Scott of Ruby Bay – very like her I think but not the least what I meant it to be.

'Please don't keep the drawing unless you especially want it. I am not at all satisfied with it.'

Beata did keep the sketch which, when it becomes accessible, will add to our appreciation of McCahon's developing interest in the human figure. Or is it the human personality? The final note in this letter makes an oblique reference to his 'working out some [?] pocket psychology - some day I shall write it for you.'

It seems logical to make a connection between his dissatisfaction with his pencil sketch and the working out of his own psychological stand-point. Colin was pleased enough with the sketch as a likeness. Had he intended it to be character-study, and failed to capture that more hidden depth.

The move to Christchurch didn't happen. In 1944 he married Ann Hamblett, of Dunedin, herself an artist. His search for seasonal work to support their growing family took him to Pangatotara, and the

would it be wise or unwise to write again.
Miss Bethell says she could almost
certainly get me private gardening jobs
to do but the Public Gardens offered more
and would be more reliable assistance.
I wish you were here to talk
to. My letter writing is so inadequate.
As soon as I can save £5 I
shall set forth for Chch. to seek fame
& fortune. I shall like to walk and
travel very cheaply. I should be able to
manage at least a week in Chch. to do
intensive job hunting. If I'm not successful
there is the Canterbury affle season. If
I am successful and I must be, you
are to come up and by your look too.
Christchurch seems a rather horrible place
to get something.
Would you go to the trunk in

my studio and fish out the roll labelled
"posters" open it, obtain a cardboard
cylinder of suitable size from Mr. Johnstone
picture framer Stewart St., and carefully
roll the following – "Wanaka Hotel"
"By tram to the Gardens" "Icilma Shampoos"
"Sciaparelli Perfumes" if there, a cover I
did for Vogue spring number "Afghan
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what to send. Wrap them up & have
them ready to ~~send~~ post when I send
an address please. I don't know when
it will be but I shall set forth as
soon as I can. (Put work inside cylinder.)
I can't concentrate on my
painting here. I have intended &

Pages 3 & 4 of McCahon's letter to his sister
dated Mapua, February 16th 1939

Botanic Gardens in Wellington and then back to Nelson.

Two letters written in 1958, during his time as keeper and deputy director of the Auckland City Art Gallery, give evidence of a very different and very busy world.

The McCahons were living at Titirangi, and he wrote to Beata, now married and living on the West Coast. On March 11th he notes he has 'sent off a painting to you as promised on the official form. Price 7 gns. The subject is Kauri trees from our sun deck, not that that will mean much in Westport, but I thought bush was a good subject for such a place as the coast.

'We are very rushed both at work and at home, leaving now on April 4. Have just achieved visas & income tax clearances, piled up a mountain of forms of one sort or another. Will be glad when all this is over.

'The gallery is in a state of being rebuilt, confusion & mess everywhere, and this large Soviet Ex. Almost upon us. At the moment have assembled about 40 watercolours of the Waitemata Harbour from 1840-1897. A very attractive bunch.

'There is still so much news but I can't write it, neither the time at the moment nor the ability to write letters any more. Ann involved with a painting & this form of communication is still not compatible with the other.'

Colin, with Ann, toured the U.S. from April till July, primarily to look at how art museums were run. On November 11th he writes briefly to Beata about one of the negative effects of travel - and what he says surely reflects his long struggle for recognition among his own people.

'We are slowly settling down after the US. It's much more difficult to do than I had imagined it would be but one does become numbed to the NZ attitude again - and to the unclean and depressed looking citizen (a thing that has been mentioned to me before & I hadn't of course noticed) - but it is unfortunately so - and so is the rudeness of people in shops etc. And mostly & by far the most difficult thing to tolerate again is the ruthless destructiveness of New Zealanders towards any creative activity unless it is at bowling club or WDFU level.'

McCahon left the Auckland City Art Gallery in 1964, and until 1971 lectured in painting at the Elam School of Fine Arts. Finally he became a full-time painter, working principally from his studio at Muriwai.

He kept in regular touch with his sister throughout all this time - the welfare of their mother was a growing concern, and many of the letters of this period are a sharing of information on their mutual concern. Ethel Beatrice Ferrier McCahon died in 1973.

But there are other things as well, and sisterly help is called for on December 16th 1971. 'Who can find me the beautiful translation of the Brecht poem: "In the courtyard stands a plum tree - it is small, so very small. It has a railing round itetc." Called by Brecht **DER PFLAUMENBAUM** in English 'The Plum Tree'.

'I think it's in an O.U. press edition. It's not available in Auckland bookshops nor the new library: a beautiful building. I have had the poem & I want it again. WHO CAN HELP ME FIND IT FOR CHRISTMAS. I've spent hours and hours on translating but can't get the last lines right. It was written just before the 2. World War & deals with the opposition - the last lines make this clear.

'I wish I had accepted a better education when I had a chance. I couldn't have done it. I had no intelligence: that was.'

This very brief sample concludes with a letter to Beata written in February 1977 when Colin and Ann have just moved to a new home in Grey Lynn. He describes their new surroundings with an artist's eye for colour and character.

'It's all good - kids & grandkids & here comes Tora. Lunch over - we have been talking NZ & other poetry trying to get some understanding of what the hell it is. I've come to the realisation that poetry is on about beauty & few poets tell us truths about how we are. Like Hopkins - my book is all worn out the spine gone & all dirty & still all the splendour of good thinking well written all inside.

'We were talking of M.K. Joseph who Hinges [sic] towards Hopkins & and the very fragile weight of A.R.D. Fairburn. Brasch gets me still - tough but most demanding, references obscure.....'

It's appropriate to bring to a close this brief exploration of the important gift from the Parsloe family at this point. Appropriate because it was as early as 1963 that Charles Brasch donated to Hocken McCahon's ***The Blessed Virgin Compared to a jug of pure water and the infant Jesus to a lamp***, painted in 1948. Brasch had purchased this controversial work and published it in *Landfall* in 1950.

For artist (and poet) Colin McCahon, Charles Brasch, was 'tough but most demanding.....' But the poet and writer was also generous and most discerning. The work of both men is a significant feature of the legacy of Thomas Morland Hocken.

(My thanks to Hocken staff for their assistance in the preparation of this piece.)

WW1 COMMEMORATION ACTIVITIES

We've been talking about the WW1 transcription project for some time. During May and June this got well under way, including an enthusiastic first meeting where our volunteers (about 10 people so far) chose items they wanted to transcribe.

Anna Blackman had selected a range of candidates for transcription - diaries, letters and other materials. Just 3 examples of documents and writers are: "Donald Baxter, conscientious objector, Waikeria Reformatory" - "Beaumont, letter on wood, Gallipoli, France" - "Roberts, Edward Fletcher".

Anna also provided to the group an excellent guidance document about transcribing. It includes, for example, how best to decipher handwriting and ways to ensure that the transcription duplicates, as accurately as possible, the text on a page.

The aim is for transcriptions to be ready during 2017. We will keep you up to date with progress. If you are interested in participating please email Sara Barham at hockenfriends@gmail.com.

MUSIC MONTH – JUNE 2016

Having some personal interest in this subject I was interested in the latest Hocken Blog. It illustrates perfectly the role of the Library as the preserver of the present, as well as the past.

'One of the most fun things we get to do at the Hocken is open new material, so in celebration of Music Month, we thought we would share some of our new popular music acquisitions with an unboxing video. Most of the discs are from Flying Nun artists in the 1990s, though the Chris Knox compilation on cassette (on the Thokei Tones label) is a brand new release and the Ladyhawke discs (released on Modular) date to around 2007-2008. The Flying Nun discs were mostly sourced from overseas vendors, as some of these titles are hard to come by, and finding them locally (or nationally) can often be a challenge. These recordings are a great addition to our vinyl (and other format) holdings, especially as many of them showcase Dunedin musicians.

'You may ask, what are the next steps in the process of putting them in our collections? The discs are placed into inert polyethylene bags to protect the sleeves, metadata about the recording is input into the publications database (Library Search Ketu), and then items are barcoded and labelled before being shelved into our specially made LP cabinets. They are then

available for University of Otago staff, students, and the general public to come and listen to.

'We acquire New Zealand music of all genres, time periods, and (most) formats constantly, and this is only a snapshot of the material that is added to the music collections on a weekly basis. All published music can be searched for via the University of Otago publications database, [Library Search | Ketu](#).'

Amanda Mills, Music and AV Liaison Librarian

And, by the way, the Hocken Blog is a good way to keep up with interesting developments at the Library.

FRIENDS OF THIS AND FRIENDS OF THAT

Inevitably when FOHC has a gathering someone can't come because they have already got something on, like a Symphony Orchestra concert. Dunedin being Dunedin, there are many groups, like our own, supporting important institutions. They have regular programmes that, taken together, fill up the days and the evenings of the weeks. An initiative taken by Hilary Allison has led to FOHC Committee becoming involved, through Sara Barham, in an attempt to achieve a small measure of coordination.

The DCC Creative Dunedin Partnership committee is a useful starting-point. It will help the Council know the extent of the involvement of Dunedin folk in the cultural life of their city, and the range of activities. If it were to help in avoiding those unfortunate double-bookings then that will be even better.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Professor Brooking has described in detail how opinion divided around the person of Richard John Seddon. So how about Athens in 400BC:

"A horrible voice, bad breath and a vulgar manner - the characteristics of a popular politician." -

Aristophanes

Subscriptions: Individual: \$25 per annum; Life Member \$250 Joint: \$30 per annum; Joint Life Member \$300

Cheques to: Friends of the Hocken Collections, PO Box 6336, Dunedin North 9059.

Online payment: Westpac 030903 0393175 000, including "Subscription" in Particulars field, surname/initials in Code and Reference fields.

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