

2019 TALK SERIES PROGRAMME

Wednesday 31st July – We will meet at midday for a tour of the Hocken Exhibition: A Garden of Earthly Delights. After this we will gather at Emerson's Brewery across the road for lunch at about 1.00pm. (You will need to make your own bookings for the latter.)

Monday 2nd September - being the 112th anniversary of the signing of the Deed of Trust - there will be a celebratory event, including an engaging speaker at the lunch. This will be held in the Regent Theatre's own facility and will be preceded by a conducted tour of the Theatre.

In October – date to be finalised – Friends will mark the 250th anniversary of Captain Cook's arrival on these shores. Professor Tony Ballantyne, Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Humanities, will be the speaker on this highly significant subject.

Finally, **on 20th November** the Friends' AGM will be held. When the business is done, we will celebrate Dunedin chocolate making – past, present & future. A group of speakers will address us under the title 'Spilling the beans'.

On 19 June about 40 gathered in the Seminar Room to hear Dr Warwick Brunton, Honorary Senior Lecturer, Department of Preventive and Social Medicine, talk on the Scottish psychiatrist and scientific polymath, Dr Lauder Lindsay who spent three months in Otago in the early 1860s investigating Otago's botany, geology, mental health services, natural resources, science and education, forest conservation, acclimatisation, a museum, and environmental sanitation in Dunedin.

He also helped the fledgling University of Otago. Lindsay's meteoric life still fascinates scholars, and aspects of his practical professional and scientific

agenda helped develop natural resources, institutions and policies in Otago and New Zealand.

FRIENDS OF THE HOCKEN COLLECTIONS RESEARCH PROJECT 2020

To mark the occasion of its 25th anniversary in 2016, the Friends offered an award of NZ\$10,000 to support a research project on some aspect of the historical development of culture and society in Aotearoa/New Zealand, primarily using the resources of the Hocken Collections. Joint winners of the Anniversary Award (for work carried out in 2017) were Laurence Fearnley and Paul Hersey, and their book, *To the Mountains: A Collection of NZ Alpine Writing*, was the very pleasing result.

The Friends' executive committee resolved to continue to offer The Friends of the Hocken Collections Award as funding permits. A flyer has been distributed in Dunedin and also to other cultural institutions around New Zealand. The 2020 Award details are being shared online. The flyer also encourages donations towards the funding of the award – something individual Friends may want to consider.

The intended outcomes of the 2020 Award are creatively open for project applicants to develop and propose. Both collaborative and singular applications are welcome, and salient aspects such as medium, genre, scope, and purpose are prescription and proscriptive-free.

The application Closing Date for an award to be held in the calendar year 2020 is 18 October 2019. Application documentation is available on the Friends of the Hocken Collections website <https://hockenfriends.org.nz/>.

Applicants will be advised of the competition result by 29 November 2019

EXTREME WEATHER EVENT 1939

THE RADIO MUST GO ON

Among the Hocken Archives are a couple of boxes of Antarctic records - clippings, two sketch-books, correspondence, and the like, belonging originally to (Aubrey) Howard Ninnis. Born in London on June 3rd 1883, he belonged to a family with a long association with polar exploration – his grandfather, Dr Belgrave Ninnis, was a member of the British Arctic Expedition of 1875-76.

Howard's association with this country began through his involvement in the 1914-1916 Relief Expedition led by Ernest Shackleton in the aftermath to the heroic failure of Scott and his friends in 1912, and then to find his own men left behind when the *Endurance* was caught in the ice. Ninnis had signed on as a motor tractor specialist for this first voyage of the *Aurora* but when the Shackleton Relief set sail in 1916 he was on board again but this time as purser.

After it was all over he lived for a time in Dunedin where he joined the Naval Reserve. Howard had been associated with the Radio Society in Britain prior to WW1 and when he settled here in the 1920's he became involved in broadcasting - firstly at 1YA in Auckland, then as Chief Announcer at Head Office in Wellington, and finally as Station Manager at 4YA in late 1932. He retired from this position in 1948.

For many years he was well-known throughout the country for his contribution to our understanding of the importance, as well as the so-called romance of Antarctic exploration. He had a hand, for example, in the erection of the memorial plaque at the corner of Falcon and Oates Streets in Kaikorai Valley, recording the deaths of Scott and Oates.

And then in 1939 he was at the centre of an Antarctic blizzard in Dunedin.

On July 31, 1939, the lighthouse keeper at Cape Maria van Diemen - in the "winterless" Far North - reported snow falling at the lighthouse. In Auckland, snow fell in many suburbs just before dawn on July 27 - five centimetres lay on the summit of Mt Eden. Snow cut off Banks Peninsula from Christchurch for a time, lying 30 cm deep in Akaroa. Sixty men in a public works camp near Duvauchelle were without food for two days until a launch arrived with supplies.

In Dunedin, conditions were much worse. Snow and thunderstorms began during the evening rush hour on

Monday, July 24. Next morning it lay 15 cm deep over the city. Only one bus made it out north over Mount Cargill, assisted by men with shovels. The trams ran after the middle of the morning, and then only on certain lines on the flat. Cars needed chains, the road to the south was closed, as was the airport. Some trains got through, running silently over the snow-covered rails. Schools were closed, and no work was possible on the waterfront. Snow continued to fall through Tuesday, and by Wednesday morning was 35 cm deep at St Kilda and up to a metre at Roslyn and Maori Hill. Icicles 30 cm long were reported on some houses, and the weight of snow caused roofs and skylights to cave in.

Supplies were also running short as no fresh meat, vegetables, milk or coal was coming into the city. Nor could they be easily transported within the town. On Thursday, 10 men left Brighton for Green Island at 9.15am dragging a sled to fetch mail and supplies. They arrived just before midday, but didn't complete the return journey until 3.30pm. The only fatality was when a man clearing snow from a skylight at Penrose's premises in George Street fell 10m to the floor. Most businesses - apart from places selling gumboots, galoshes, motorcar chains and photographic film - had three days of little or no trade.

An article in the *New Zealand Geographic* in 2000 stated that although the statistic had not been calculated, it was thought that this snow episode was of the order of a once-in-100-years event. MetService recently referred to it as the country's "most extensive snow storm of the 20th century". Given the warming trend globally since 1939 we may never see the like again – except, what about those things we now call extreme weather events.

The radio masts at Highcliff, on Otago Peninsula – there was also the transmitting station for the Commercial Service, Station 4YO - had been struck by lightning, and the staff members were isolated without adequate supplies of food. A rescue mission was launched under the command of the 4YA Station Manager, Howard Ninnis. To transport the supplies H.D. Skinner, Director of the Otago Museum (and Hocken Librarian) loaned them one of Captain Scott's sleds. It had been brought to Dunedin at the conclusion of the 1914-1916 Relief Expedition. So Ninnis was reunited in an extraordinary way with an old acquaintance.

Those who went with the sledge were a Mr Steinboich of Vienna, and three members of the Otago Skiing Club, Messrs Newall, Holland and Divers. The sledge

was ideally designed for these sorts of conditions but they first had to get it across town on a P & T Lorry fitted with heavy chains, which could only go as far as the Anderson's Bay Terminus. There the sledge was packed, and they all set out for Highcliff, over 6kms distant.

Ninnis, however, hadn't been able get hold of skis immediately, so he set out on foot rather than hold things up. It was hard enough for the ski team with the snow still falling in blizzard strength. They were travelling, of course, on the surface of the snow up the steady incline, and over drifts - exceptionally heavy going, with only a few halts en route. Ninnis, on the other hand was heavily bogged down in these snow drifts from time to time.

It took 2½ hours to cover the distance to the transmitters. When they reached the Highcliff School corner, which was as far as they could go under the exceptional conditions, it seems they were met there by the two radio technicians - not named in the newspaper reports but likely to have been H.J. Chapman and J.F. Stenhouse. One of these two, when first going outside to receive the supplies, had sunk up to his neck in snow.



HOWARD NINNIS 1883 - 1956

The stores were immediately divided up. The skiing party had to make a hurried return to the Anderson's Bay terminal before nightfall. Everything was 'safely cached' in the schoolroom, and the technicians were told they were there, just a few hundred yards away.

Howard Ninnis tended to play down his own role in all this, but it is worth reading the account he made of that day which was published the following week in the August edition of the recently inaugurated *New Zealand Listener*:

'From the point where the skiers left us, on to the NBS transmitter, was undoubtedly the severest part of the

whole journey. The two officers from the transmitter and myself had to advance straight into the gale which was then blowing and a heavy hail storm was falling. It was impossible to advance more than 20 yards at a time, but the stores were safely delivered at the transmitter by the assistance of all stationed there, and the immediate shortage was overcome.'

'It is doubtful whether the public who received radio reception throughout the whole of this exceptionally severe weather can really appreciate the conditions under which their service has been brought to them. The transmitter house has residential quarters, and these were completely cut off, and they were entirely dependent upon melted snow for cooking, washing, and so on. The lightning which occurred on Monday last appeared to register a direct hit upon our transmitting line, and temporarily put both services out of action.'

The emergency measures undertaken by the Engineer and his assistants had maintained a partial service at reduced power on the NBS. An inspection of the damage caused by the lightning compels one to marvel that these officers were able to maintain any service at all, particularly as the weather conditions outside and in all the buildings were quite literally of Antarctic character. However the service was carried on.' All this had been at least partly achieved by the use of the 4YO equipment.

Howard Ninnis had to make the journey back to town alone. 'It was perhaps not a wise thing to do, because one might have got lost. I telephoned at every available point. It couldn't probably have been done without the past experience I had had, which enabled me to distinguish between soft and hard snow.'

The *Listener's* editorial comment on this was to remark that this was the story 'of an adventure that few men would care to undertake alone - an adventure that must have been a strenuous undertaking even for a man who was with Shackleton.' Of himself Ninnis simply said 'What I did myself wasn't really so much. It was really just luck that I had had the necessary experience and was on the sport at the time.'

Howard Ninnis died on 1st August 1956 age 73. His ashes are at Dunedin's Anderson's Bay Cemetery in the Soldiers Graves area, commemorated with a bronze plaque. In his retirement he had settled for a time in Central Otago working a small gold claim, and he was well-known for his abilities as a metal worker.

At the time of his death he was recorded as an engineer.

HOUSEKEEPING

We go into the Hocken Library, and if we have a request we go to the counter where there will be a helpful reception, our request will be recorded, and we know that somewhere behind the doors another person will retrieve what we have asked for. That is, if we have asked for the right thing in the first place, or even if we didn't know quite enough to be totally convincing in the second place.

We assume, possibly, it's just a matter of getting to the correct shelf and finding this item or that. But archival repositories are, like their contents, ageing. What constituted the latest in retrieval methods and machinery a few decades ago are often quickly superseded by something more effective. But Hocken Library works, as they say, within tight financial parameters.

At the latest FOHC meeting Sharon Dell, the Librarian, reported that the Library had been the subject of further attention recently, with the installation of two more overhead rails, and four additional picture racks. In addition 228 steel wheels and bearings now replaced the 20 year old cast iron wheels which had been complaining and slowly disintegrating under the increasing weight of the newspapers, books, and periodicals on the present mobile chassis.

And – the Reprographics Room has been repainted in neutral grey, along with the installation of new curtain rails and curtains in a similar shade. All this is good enough, in its way, but improvements of this sort are at best piecemeal.

What the Library needs is an opportunity to present a much larger view of the future. It is, therefore a sign of hope that, as is now the case, the University Council has requested the Library to prepare a report, covering the obligations and responsibilities of the University Council, in respect to the Deed of Trust of this exceptionally valuable collection. This report is to be presented at the next Council meeting.

The Friends will not hold their breath, but many of them will see the Council as their University Council, and have an expectation that that phrase, 'a duty of care' will find practical expression.

A NEW HEAVEN

A century ago, 1919, saw the publication of two books by the politician George Warren Russell. The first, with the above title - a rather unconventional novel about the ideal ethical life - was written many years earlier when the author was a newspaperman in the Rangitikei region. It wasn't after all, too long since Thomas Bracken had called Aotearoa "God's own country". Lawrence Jones has rather ironically described this book as 'presenting a cabinet minister's version of heaven as a more highly evolved New Zealand.' In the same year Russell published "New Zealand Today: A Priceless Gem in the Imperial Crown." The title speaks for itself.

Born in London in 1854, Russell came to this country as a boy. He spent his early working life here in newspapers - Southland, Wellington, Cambridge and Palmerston North. He had a brief stint in the Wesleyan ministry, and finally edited (until 1929) the *Spectator*, an illustrated weekly with a strong political character.

In and out of politics from the 1890s, and something of a thorn in Richard John Seddon's side, he was chosen for the 1915 National government cabinet. It was said he carried the largest single load of administrative responsibilities during the First World War.

1919 was also the year of the aftermath of the Spanish Influenza epidemic, and Russell was the Minister of Health. He was as much blamed (maybe unfairly) as anyone for the disaster. When, for example, senior health department officials went down with influenza, Russell took charge himself. Russell was a reformist health minister, and was planning a major departmental reorganisation which was deferred for lack of finance until after the war. But he made a name for himself as a politician - as an incisive speaker with independent views.

FOHC MEMBERSHIP

*Subscriptions: Individual: \$30 per annum; Life Member \$250
Joint: \$30 per annum; Joint Life Member \$300
Cheques to: Friends of the Hocken Collections. Online payment: Westpac 030903 0393175 000 - "Subscription" in Particulars field, surname/initials in Code/ Reference fields.*

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