James Dakin Born 1908

Adult educator, administrator, writer, humanist

Jim Dakin did not think much of his chances when he was interviewed for a Rhodes scholarship in 1929. His subjects were French and Latin, unusual choices for a Rhodes applicant.

So he relaxed after his interview and was playing billiards in the drawing room of Government House when the announcement was made that he and Percy Minns, a student from Auckland, were going to Oxford.
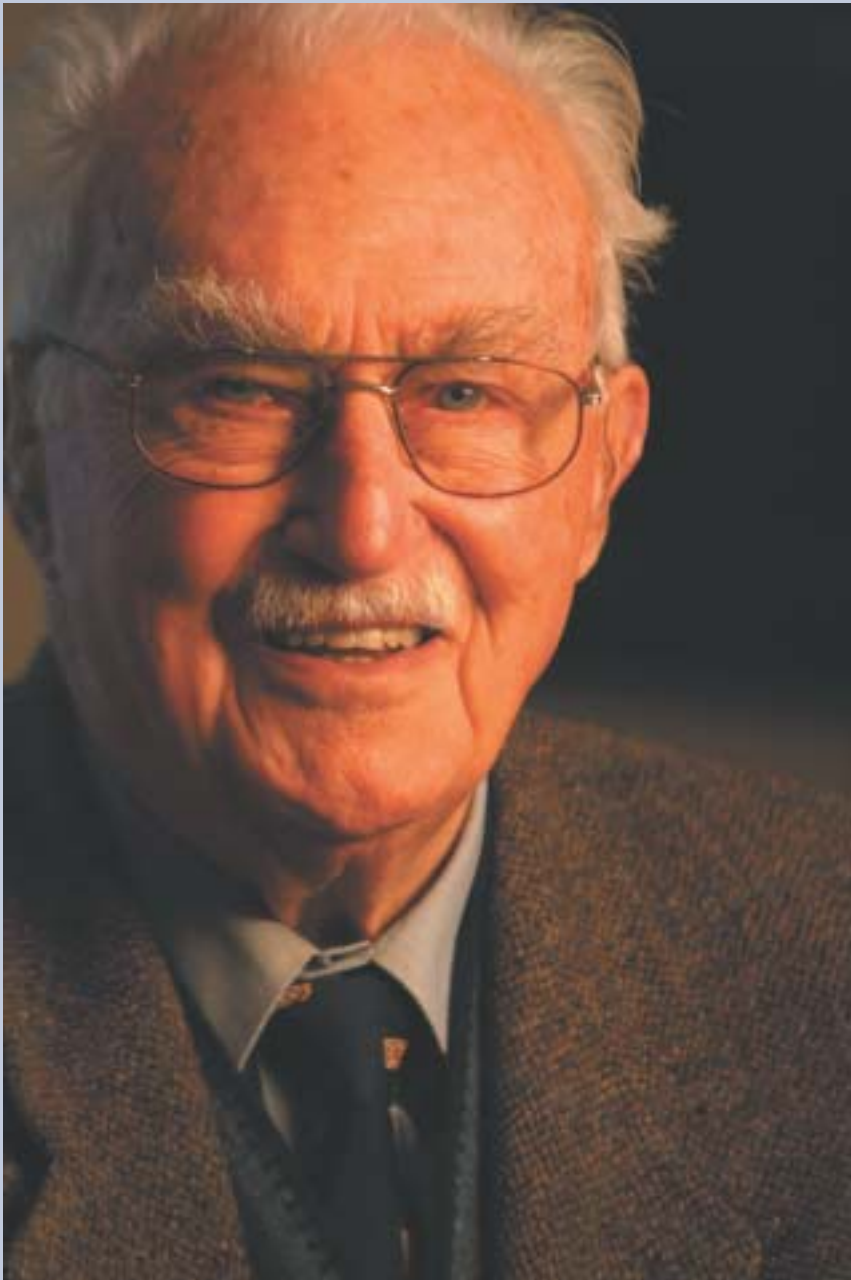

Dakin chose Trinity, the most English of the colleges, where New Zealander Ronald Syme tutored Classics.

One of his memories of Oxford is attending a lecture by Albert Einstein, whom he describes as 'quiet, genial and gentle', even though he did not understand most of the lecture because it was in German.

At his Rhodes interview the Governor-General Sir Charles Fergusson had suggested Dakin join the British Colonial Service. After two years of study, he wanted to 'get out into the world' and took Sir Charles's advice. He worked in Uganda for 20 years for the British Colonial Service and served with the Kings African Rifles during the war. The same suggestion had obviously been made to Percy Minns, who applied for a post in Nigeria with the British Colonial Service, but was posted to Uganda!

In 1953 Dakin took early retirement and returned to New Zealand with his family, as he had always hoped to do. He worked as a tutor in adult education at the universities of Otago and Auckland until appointed Director of University Extension at Victoria University, Wellington, in 1959, and then Associate Professor in 1969.

Since retiring Dakin has published articles on education and the trend towards secularisation in New Zealand. A member of the Wellington Humanist Society, he is currently working on a history of free thought in New Zealand.

Jim Dakin, New Zealand's oldest living Rhodes scholar. (Photographer: Nick Servian, *University of Otago Magazine*)

'[I was] carefree about it, didn't think I had a chance ...'