



Hocken Pictures

‘Whilst New Zealand scenery has been depicted by two or three artists with . . . force and spirit . . . yet the superior height of genre and historical painting has been but little attempted, despite the wealth of available material.’

T.M. Hocken, *A Bibliography of the Literature Relating to New Zealand*. Wellington, 1909, page v.

THUS, in the year prior to his death, Dr Hocken firmly indicates the essence of his interest in collecting pictures — some 450 of them when the Library opened its doors to the public in 1910. They are primarily illustrative material for the historian and, as demonstrated by other parts of his library, for the geographer, the ethnologist and the natural scientist.

W.H. Trimble in his *Catalogue of the Hocken Library* (1912) apparently did not see even this merit in original art works for he lists none, not even among the Portraits, where likenesses of the founder at least would seem fitting. (Was it that Dr Hocken himself, being only two years dead, was not sufficiently ‘historical’?). The list of Portraits, and it is extensive, is confined to reproductions in published works. Photographs, too, were beyond the pale.

Typical of the grander of those 450 pictures is James Smetham’s ‘The New Zealand Chiefs in Wesley’s House’, 1863 (990mm × 1790mm), which memorialises a visit to England by the Rev. William Jenkins and his thirteen-strong party. Typical also of Dr Hocken’s essentially didactic nature is his sizeable pen-and-ink drawing of a key to the identity of those depicted. More spontaneous are William Fox’s watercolours, ‘Native wata or storehouse (Petone)’, 1850, and

Gordon Walters, ‘Drawing No.1’, 1969

‘Auckland from St George’s Bay above Mr Blackett’s house’, 1856.

Despite the restricted scope of the original collection and later additions which, by 1948, had brought the number of works up to about 800 oils, watercolours, drawings and prints, staff members Jean McGill and Linda Rodda recognised the pictures as ‘a fine collection of representative early New Zealand art’. Their published *Catalogue of Pictures* (1948),

Dr Hocken annotates one of James Brown's vigorous cartoons of early Dunedin.

however, eschewed the word 'art' in its title and that convention has been maintained. The Collection remains one of Pictures, and its Curators are similarly named.

The scope widens

A major step in widening the scope of the collection occurred in 1961 when J.D. Charlton Edgar presented the substantial *Mona Margarite Edgar Collection* in memory of his wife. He, Canadian by birth and upbringing, she similarly from Scotland, had come to New Zealand in 1931. As a practising artist and teacher he was associated with both the Dunedin School of Art and the Auckland Teachers College.

His gift initially numbered 347 pictures and three portfolios of children's work. Quite quickly thereafter he added a further 46 paintings and three pieces of sculpture. 'Inevitably,' he said at the time, selection was made 'on the basis of personal taste in conformity with what work has been available'. Recognising that the collection was 'one of historical importance' he 'approached the task of selection by attempting to acquire the

best representative works by New Zealand artists who are serious and thoughtful practitioners irrespective of their approach. The bias of course must be towards the contemporary.' (*The Mona Margarite Edgar Collection. A Preliminary Catalogue*. 1962, p.3).

Mr Edgar said he was often asked why he did not give the collection to the Dunedin Public Art Gallery where, ironically, he later became Director. It was, he explained, because Dr H.D. Skinner, who had a keen interest in paintings and, as Director of the Otago Museum, was ever solicitous of the Hocken Library's collection then housed in the Museum building, had first planted the idea in his and Mrs Edgar's minds (*op cit*, p.3).

This one gift, its coverage being from the early 1920s to the late 1950s and embracing all the 'isms, particularly expressionism in its various manifestations' as Edgar put it, brought this side of the Library's collecting into line with other sections — books, manuscripts, periodicals and so on — where contemporary works are pursued no less vigorously than overtly historical ones.

The quality of pictures in the Mona Edgar

Collection is variable, and the full import of Mr Edgar's remark that selection was 'in conformity with what work has been available' is apparent. It is a measure, too, of the haste with which the collection was apparently filled out in the less than twelve months after Mrs Edgar's death. Nevertheless the gift was a seminal one in the way in which the Library's whole collection of pictures has since been developed. No less seminal in this respect, perhaps, has been the continued presence in the University since 1967 of the Frances Hodgkins Fellows, their close if relatively informal association with the Hocken Library, and the generosity of so many of them in donating pictures.

Remarkable growth

The collection has now grown to about 10,000 items ranging from large, finished gallery pieces to sketchbooks and working drawings, and including watercolours and prints (though mere reproductions do not figure largely) as well as the now common mixed media works. Also present, and deserving of greater recog-

nition as an 'art' form, are cartoons, political and social, dating from the 1850s to the present day.

Acquisitions come from the Library's own financial resources, modest indeed by most gallery standards, and from gifts. From quite early on, Dr Hocken's original munificence has been augmented by benefactors: in recent years, for example, by Charles Brasch (448 paintings and drawings), Rodney Kennedy (177 works; see T.P. Garrity, *The Kennedy Gift*, 1990), Colin McCahon and family (99), the de Beer family (paintings by Hoyte), the Hall-Jones family (203 early colonial works of J.T. Thomson), and R. Bruce Godward, also of Invercargill (1140 18th and 19th century prints relating to the Pacific).

Traditional works continue to be acquired both to fill gaps and to augment the ubiquitous photograph. The whole Collection is now something like half traditional and half contemporary. The latter are subject to a rigorous aesthetic scrutiny and, on the whole, are of established artists chosen either wholly in their own right, or as being representative of a

James Smetham, 'The New Zealand Chiefs in Wesley's House', 1863.

school or movement. The Library does not seek to compete with other institutions, but rather to strengthen what it itself is doing in relation to the national patrimony.

So, with works ranging in date from those of the 18th century voyagers to the 1990s, the Pictures Collection forms an integral whole with the Hocken Library's other holdings, providing material for research into the history and culture of New Zealand in its Pacific setting. Specifically, it is also a magnificent resource for the study of New Zealand art history.

Supporting the Pictures Collection for research are such conventional library materials as books and periodicals, a comprehensive collection of public and dealer galleries' and art societies' catalogues and announcements, a significant amount of material among manuscripts, and, for a decade during the 1970s and 80s, clippings from every newspaper in the country, an activity now lapsed, alas, because of cost and demands on time.

The Collection is fully catalogued and is in the process of being serviced by a computerised database. There is ready public access to the Collection and individual visitors may

make arrangements to work under supervision in a study area in the pictures stack. Seminars for university and polytechnic students are frequently held in the Hocken Gallery, where a regular programme of exhibitions (six or seven a year) also places material on public view. A measure of the quality of the collection and its well-organised state is the fact that at any one time upwards of fifty works are on loan to properly constituted public galleries for formally arranged exhibitions. Some hundreds of photographic and laser-print reproductions of works are supplied annually to inquirers.

Besides these various ways in which the Hocken seeks to bring its Pictures Collection and its commitment to art to the broader awareness of New Zealanders, it has since 1989 revived and published the *Bulletin of New Zealand Art History*, an annual formerly issued until 1985 from Auckland and devoted, like the Collection itself, to both traditional and contemporary issues.

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