



WELCOME TO THE HOCKEN

Friends of the Hocken Collections

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‘Mr G.M.Thomson, who knows his Dunedin like a book...’

So began an *Otago Daily Times* editorial on November 18, 1901, after Thomson had urged the Dunedin City Council to buy out every owner in the Ross Creek watershed to ensure the best possible water catchment for the city.

DUNEDIN leader-writers must have been hard pressed to keep up with George Malcolm Thomson. He has been chosen as the subject for this Bulletin because it coincides with the centenary of the Portobello Marine Aquarium of which he was co-founder and main initiator. But even the briefest perusal of his many clipping books (Hocken Library MS 1090) reveals both the astonishing breadth of his interests and the tremendous vitality he devoted to them. In the following list (which is certainly not complete) the entries in bold type signify that material on these subjects and/or organisations can be consulted via the Hocken Archives computer database:

* The whole field of natural history and science, but in particular fish and fisheries (both theoretical and economic); substantial research into *Crustacea* which remained unpublished; the naturalisation of species; and chemical analysis (in which he gave expert court evidence in cases as diverse as a fatal poisoning and the effectiveness of agricultural lime);

* Organisations devoted to science and natural history: the **Otago Institute** (chairman for its 50th anniversary) and **N. Z. Institute**; the **Dunedin Field Club**, the **Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science** (three times its president; organiser and administrator of the 1904 congress in Dunedin); the **Acclimatisation Society**; and the Dunedin Amenities Society; he also helped establish the first **Dept of Scientific and Industrial Research**.

* Technical education (as one of New Zealand's leading innovators); the **Free Kindergarten Association**; the **High Schools Board**; the introduction of **evening classes** in literary, scientific and manual subjects (he acted as unpaid secretary/superintendent of the fledgling **Dunedin/King Edward Technical College**); the teaching of botany in primary schools; the **Workers' Educational Association**.

* Health and social work — in the **Patients and Prisoners' Aid Society**, the **YMCA** and **YWCA**,

Dunedin City Mission, Social Reform Association, the Cremation Society.

* Having organised the first game of rugby football ever played in Dunedin, he represent Otago in 1876, kept a keen interest in the game throughout his life, and was guest of honour at the 1932 anniversary of the Pirates club (the clippings include an article by his Rhodes Scholar son, J.Allan Thomson, written for an English newspaper — with a description, still useful today, of the workings of the 2-3-2 scrum); he led the 1910 deputation to the council for the establishment of a public swimming baths; as a teacher, he introduced the game of fives to Dunedin.

* Other leisure activities? Volunteers Captain of **B Battery** in 1875 (lamed by a shot in the foot in 1882, and later had the foot amputated); keen member of the **Dunedin Choral Society** from 1871 (and not slow to voice his opinions on musical matters); precentor and long-serving elder of **Knox Church**.

* In politics, elected to Parliament from Dunedin North, 1908–14; subsequently appointed to the Legislative Council.

No matter what he was involved in, Thomson was almost invariably founder, president, chairman, patron or life member. On top of all that, he devoted a considerable amount of time to journalism. His ‘Notes by the Wayside’ began running in the *Otago Daily Times* on November 30, 1898 (becoming ‘Australian Wayside Notes’ when he spent time at the Melbourne meeting of the Australasian Assn for the Advancement of Science); he contributed an interesting series, ‘Students of Nature’, about internationally known naturalists; and a later series on New Zealand naturalists; also the long-running ‘A Naturalist’s Calendar’ (later consolidated into book form), and later renamed simply ‘The Naturalist’ (in 1924 this included a series of 22 articles on ‘Problems of the Sea’). He seems to have used the pseudonym of ‘Esther Crawford’ for a couple of unrelated articles in 1905;

and two Saturday editorials from *The Press* ('March of Science', Sept.29, & 'The Unrest in India', Oct.4, 1906) suggest that he also contributed articles on his favourite themes to other papers.

Born in 1848 in Calcutta, where his father had a tea business, Thomson occasionally gave illustrated fund-raising talks on India (one to aid an Indian famine appeal, another to help pay for improving the cricket ground at Littlebourne), and also on Palestine.

The usefulness of Thomson's clipping-books extends to many other related subjects, for he meticulously entered all kinds of news reports, editorials and readers' letters on matters in which he had a special interest. There is exceptional coverage of the Bowen Falls dispute in the 1920s, when Thomson was among those leading the battle to save this Fiordland site from the introduction of large-scale industry. It is all the more interesting because Thomson himself had already promoted similar industry for Caswell Sound (taking the view that Caswell had none of the charms of Milford).

Among interesting items are to be found with these MS 1090 clipping books are a copy of the Russian-language newspaper *Politika*, of August 7, 1930, with Thomson's portrait prominently on the front page; a prospectus for the Otago Trawling & Distributing Co., March 1899; and a little-known account — published in this Bulletin — of a December 1871 trip in a 'two-horse express' from Dunedin to Oamaru and return.

PUBLICATIONS

THIS Bulletin makes no attempt to cover the 375 articles and papers that Thomson published in scientific journals and more general periodicals. Many are housed in the Hocken Library, and others in the Science Library or at the Portobello Aquarium. But here are most of his monographs:

1882: *The Ferns and Fern Allies of New Zealand; with instructions for their collection and hints on their cultivation*, George Robertson (Melbourne) & Henry Wise (Dunedin), 132p + plates. Written while Thomson was teaching science at both the boys' and girls' high schools, it explains the structure of the plants and the principles of nomenclature and classification, devotes two-thirds of the space to descriptions of specific kinds of ferns, and adds glossaries of technical terms and scientific names, and hints on collecting and cultivating.

1891: *Introductory Class-book of Botany*, Govt. Printer, 162p, mainly on structural classification with line drawings; and...

1906:... a second edition of the *Class-book*, slightly enlarged to 169p, but little altered.

1909: *A New Zealand Naturalist's Calendar and Notes by the Wayside*, R.J.Stark, Dunedin, 224p + photographs. Articles selected from two of Thomson's long-running weekly articles are shaped into 12 chapters, covering his observations from November to October.

POLITICS

A short article on Moeraki follows, concluding with his presidential address to the Otago Institute on 'Rambles round Dunedin'. Interesting for its own sake and for comparisons a century later.

1921: *History of the Portobello Marine Fish-hatchery and Biological Station*, Govt Printer, 131p, including a warm tribute to Thomas Anderton (his co-author), information on local fish types, crustacea, seaweed and rainfall tables.

1921: *Wild Life in New Zealand*, Govt Printer, 112p, Part I being devoted to mammalia.

1922: *The Naturalisation of Animals and Plants in NZ*, Cambridge UP, 607p. His most notable work, for which his incredible energy and persistence in corresponding with scores of amateur and professional naturalists produced an astonishing range of dates and circumstances relating to the arrival into New Zealand of overseas plants, animals, birds and insects. Full bibliography and index.

1926: *Wild Life in New Zealand*, Govt Printer, 110p, Part II covering birds and fish.

1933: *Changes which have taken place in the fauna and flora of Dunedin district...*, ODT, 8p. The text of an address given to the Dunedin Field Club five months before his death.

Mention must also be made of the *NZ Journal of Science*, of which Thomson was the prime mover. The many unopened leaves of the Hocken Library copy of Vol.1, 1882–83 suggest that few users of the library are aware of its existence. It is worth consulting if only for Robert Paulin's 8-page article on 'A trip to Lake Hauroto' with accompanying contemporary map. It ran to November 1885 and resumed in 1891 for a short time.

OBITUARIES & BIOGRAPHIES

In 1933, at the age of 84, G.M.Thomson entered a private hospital to undergo a 'serious operation'. He returned home, but later collapsed after suffering severe pain and died on the morning of August 25, 1933. The *Evening Star* published an obituary that day, the *Otago Daily Times* following next morning with a two-column obituary on p.11. W.B.Benham wrote an informed 8-page account of Thomson's natural history interests for the August 1935 issue of the *Transactions... of the Royal Society of NZ*.

A biographical entry, with photograph, appears on p.267 of Volume 4 of *The Cyclopaedia of New Zealand* (1905); Yvonne Speirs contributed the article in Volume 2 of *The Dictionary of N.Z. Biography* (1993), pp.537–38; and Gordon Parsonson wrote the entry in *Southern People* (1998), p.4.

Scholars & Gentlemen Both, by Ross Galbreath (Royal Society of NZ, 2002), is a well-written joint biography of G.M.Thomson and his eldest son, Allan Thomson, dealing particularly with their work in the fields of science and education.

In 1908, Thomson agreed to oppose the sitting member

A.R. Barclay — lawyer, university lecturer, Fabian & supporter of Seddon — for the Dunedin North seat. In the first ballot, on November 17, Barclay led Thomson by 3284 to 3066, but Isaac Green gained 532 votes, forcing a second ballot. Ironically, Thomson had campaigned against Second Ballot legislation, but it now saved his bacon, allowing him to squeak home on election night by two votes, 3383–3381, with four seamen's votes to come. The final count was 3382 to 3376, with 12 votes informal.

Barclay applied for a magisterial recount, and there was a sensation when H.Y. Widdowson SM announced on December 16 that he could give no decision because some voting papers had gone astray after the first ballot. When Barclay lodged an Electoral Petition, Mr Justice Williams and Mr Justice Denniston decided on January 28, 1909, that though it was not possible to confirm the exact figures, they were satisfied Thomson had gained a proven majority.

Thomson took his place in the House of Representatives as a supporter of William Massey. In 1911 he won another three-sided election against

Douglas and Loudon. But in 1914, he was convincingly beaten 4024–3560 by the Labour candidate, Andrew Walker, who sat until 1919.

THOMSON DIARIES AND PAPERS HELD IN HOCKEN ARCHIVES

Twenty volumes of G.M. Thomson's personal diaries are held in the Hocken Library as follows: 1878, 1882–83, 1886–87, 1912–33 [call number AG926], and 1888–92, 1895–1912 [AG839]. They are available to be consulted without restriction. Minute books of certain societies in which he was involved, 1888–1933, are under 81-087. See also two volumes of pressed flowers, and a number of scientific books from his private library. The diaries of Emma Thomson, his first wife, are available for the years 1887–1891 and 1894 [MS 1312]. Family genealogical material is held under MS 1306; and the text of an address he gave to the Otago Institute in 1901 on Otago's geological watersheds is under MS 0218.

Teacher Thomson and his Headmaster take a trip to Oamaru

G.M. Thomson's handwritten account, Hocken Archives MS 1090

Tuesday, 19th Dec^r 1871

Left Dunedin in H[awthorne]'s new two-horse express at 1 o'clock, in company with Weldon, Com^r of Police, and got out to Blueskin by 3.15. After a spell of 15 min^s we started again, Weldon driving. The first few miles was a climb through wooded gorges after leaving the beach, & then we came out on rolling country, very barren & tussocky, with a singularly serrated range of hills on our left. Descending again we came into the valley of a small str^m which formed a large swamp on our left, then passed G.Duncan's "Cherry Farm" which looked very pretty & into Waikouaiti (27 m^s), a straggl^g little township, where Weldon left us. There is a considerable flat here, which is still forming from the sea, as seems to be the case with all river mouths & shallow bays along this coast. I then took the reins & H. & I drove out 5 miles to Brooklands (32), Ja^s Hepburn's, where we put up for the night. The farm seems a very rich one lying in the flat of the Pleasant river which however occasionally floods the valley doing much damage. The house is a solid stone one & good-sized, but much in want of a good garden to relieve its gaunt appearance — Enjoyed our tea & bed thoroughly — Saw almost no new flowers but f^d the Asphodel (*Asperula Hookerii*) very abundant, as well as Manuka & tussock.

Birds Larks, Grey & Teal Ducks, Swampy Hens.

20th Left Brooklands at 9.30 — Weldon joining

us on the road — Passed through a good deal of cultivation & by some nice houses into Palmerston, 4 m^s — For abt 2 m^s the road lay across Shag Valley, which is very rich and contains a great deal of cultivated land — We then began to go through the Horse Range, a range of bare, and intensely rugged hills, among which the road winded very deviously — On the north side they were extremely rocky, the rocks composed seemingly of a soft conglomerate & contg — some verh large caves — After leaving the hills we again went through undulating country, passing Moeraki on our right & stopped at Hampden (19m^s) at 12.30 — Here we f^d Major Atkinson on offic. business & we all dined together — Moeraki beach is celebrated for its round boulders which we saw in considerable number, of all sizes, they were as round as cherries — Both here & at Waikouaiti, bones of whales are common as arches in the gardens.

Left Hampden at 2.15 with the Major as No.4 in the back seat. Passed Otepopo, & Kakanui — through the N.Z.Co's large farms & past McAulay's handsome stone house & got into Oamaru before 6 o'clock. Miss Hassal [*Haseal?*] passed us in a buggy on the road. Got the horses put up, then f^d T.Hislop & took a short stroll with him — called on Mr Fitzgerald of the Grammar School — Had tea there, and met Andw Fleming of Mabel [*Bush*], also John Morton who is getting educ^d. Walked as far as Holmes', no one at home; — Saw the muster of Volunteers for inspection and then ret^d to the

Northern Hotel and turned in — Found it a crowded sort of house with barebones of bedrooms & not over clean — Some of the buildings here are very handsome, particy the Bk of Otago, and the "Star & Garter Hotel". The latter seemed however dirty inside.

21st Had a stroll in the morning with Weldon, inspected the Gaol. Then H. and I walked to Holmes', a handsome stone house on the hill behind Oamaru, and took a look over the garden. Came across a very communicative old gardener, who seemed much gratified at getting any one to take an interest in his work. Made a vigorous attack on the strawberries, and then left, striking across the fields to the English Parsonage. The situation of the house & gardens was pretty though rather confined, in a glen about a mile and half from the town. Found Mrs and Miss Gifford at home, had lunch there & then walked into town with the ladies — Called on Revd Mr Tod, the Presbyterian clergyman, fd Mrs Brown there. Promised to look back in the evening.

Had a look over the Presbyterian church, one of the most deformed buildings I ever saw. Outside it is all roof, inside all wooden pillars & beams — Returned to the hotel to dinner — Then walked to the Point & looked at the projected harbour works, which in our estimation are among the most humbugging schemes ever started — The breakwater is being constructed of loose boulders, which the first heavy sea will destroy, such at least is my opinion & and that of many with whom we conversed on the subject — On returning from our walk we walked to the English church, where we found the choir at practice, and I joined them. Then said good-bye to Mrs & Miss Gifford. The Church, of which only a portion is erected, will be a very beautiful structure. The porch is particularly elegant. After leaving we went to Mr Tod's, and stayed till near midnight.

22nd Dec. We rose by 5.30 — & left Oamaru by 6 o'clock, taking the beach road to Kakanui. Tom Hislop accompanied us on horseback to show the road. It was a beautiful, mild morning, the road sides thickly bordered with beautiful flowers, Linum, Convolvulus and Mesembryanthemum. The sea was like glass, and shoals of porpoises were playing about, very close to the beach — We reached Kakanui by 7, & were shown

all over the Meat Preservg Works by Mr McClennan, the manager. They are the same size as the Woodlands works, but the buildings are much more isolated to avoid all risk of fire — Had breakfast at his house, where we met Mr Mudie, & then started again at 10.30 — We had to ford the river, but there is a bridge in course of erection close below the works. Drove by a country road into Otepopo & then by main road to Hampden, where we stopped & had dinner. Began to rain as we got there.

While dinner was getting ready, we were advised to walk up to the School & see the examination going on — So we walked up & found parents &c assembled also Revd Mr & Mrs Baird — Mr Hawthorne was asked to adjudge the prize for recitation, which he did after an exam. lasting almost an hour — Then a prize for singing had to be adjudged, and a row of very nervous youngsters displayed the power of their lungs. After this Mr H. made the boys & girls a speech, & we returned to the hotel, eat our dinner & started again. As it rained steadily we wrapped ourselves close in our rugs. Faired as we went through the gorge of the Horse Range. Mr H. and I explored one of the caves here & fd it a very comfortable place for camping. The rocks are composed of very soft conglomerate, which is scooped & hollowed into fantastic forms, evidently by the action of water.

Got into Palmerston by 6 o'clock. Found the hotel dirty & the people anything but nice; drunk ostler, sluttish girls and greasy rooms. Had tea there, but decided not to stay the night, so left Weldon & drove to Brooklands; fd there Jas Hepburn, Mr Lawson, Jas Paterson and Captn Logan of the "James Nicol Fleming" — all staying for the night. Besides these, there were spending the evening, Stewart of the Nth Dun School, his Father and a Mr Shanks, so we made quite a jolly company. The baro fell an inch & a half this afternoon, and at night a hot wind from N.W. came on to blow, which soon freshened into a gale.

23rd Left Brooklands about 10 o'clock, in a gale of wind, which made travelling very disagreeable. Coming over the hills between Waikouaiti and Blueskin, the shingle was driven against us violently. At Blueskin Flax Mill, about £200 worth of prepared flax was destroyed by the wind — Got into Dunedin about 4 o'clock.

*Written and printed out for the Friends of the Hocken, PO Box 6336, Dunedin
by George Griffiths*