

History of the New Zealand Society, 1851-1868

A Wellington Scientific Centenary

By L. BASTINGS.

[*Read before the Wellington Branch, October 24, 1951; received by the Editor October 24, 1951*]

Summary

A SURVEY of the history of the New Zealand Society—a scientific and cultural organisation founded in Wellington in 1851—with an annotated list of the documents in the possession of the Wellington Branch of the Royal Society of N.Z. on which the survey is based

THE Wellington Branch of the Royal Society of New Zealand was known until 1939 as the Wellington Philosophical Society. It was incorporated with the New Zealand Institute, the predecessor of the Royal Society of New Zealand, at a meeting of the Board of Governors of that Institute on June 10, 1868.

But the history of the Wellington Philosophical Society as an organic body goes back beyond 1868. There is a deed-box in the strong room of the Dominion Museum containing early documents and minute books of the Society, and among them are various papers relating to the New Zealand Society, from as far back as 1851.

The inaugural meeting of the New Zealand Society was held in the hall of the Wellington Athenaeum on July 2, 1851 (11). About 50 persons were present, the chair being taken by Mr. J. Raymond. The objects of the Society, as agreed upon at this meeting, were (1), *inter alia*.

- 1 The development of the physical character of the New Zealand group, its natural history, resources and capabilities.
2. The collection and preservation of materials illustrative of the history of the native inhabitants, their language, customs, poetry and traditions.
3. The publication of such papers on these and other subjects as may be deemed by the Council of sufficient importance.
4. The establishment in the sister settlements of corresponding societies in furtherance of the above subject.

The Governor, Sir George Grey, was invited to be the first President; and as Vice-presidents the names were proposed of His Excellency Lieut-Governor Eyre, his Honour Mr Justice Chapman, Lieut.-Colonel McCleverty, and the Venerable Archdeacon Hadfield. Captain Rhodes was appointed Honorary Treasurer and Mr Walter Mantell the Honorary Secretary.

It was decided to hold meetings monthly, for the purpose of "reading such papers as may have been received, and for the discussion of matters connected with physical science, and its advancement in the colony" (1 § 21).

Several lists of the original members appear among the documents (17 and 18), with such familiar Wellington names as Dr. Featherston, Dr. Fitzgerald, J. Johnston, G Hunter, E J Wakefield, A. Domett, A Monteith, Rev. Woodward, W. Fitzherbert, John Dorset, W. Waring Taylor, A. Brandon.

The rules of the Society were printed, and a copy of this document has survived. In the paragraph headed "Rules for the government and regulation of the New Zealand Society," we find the following: "The introduction of politics and polemics being totally inconsistent with the fundamental principles of a scientific Society, any member guilty of introducing any subject of such tendency, shall cease, *ipso facto*, to be a member of the Society." Again: "Ladies may be admitted as members of the Society, without ballot . . . but they will have no share in the management of the Society"

It was the intention of the early Council to publish papers "in the form of Transactions or a periodical journal or otherwise" No such hope appears to have materialised, however; no doubt owing to shortage of funds. But there are, among the manuscripts in the box, copies of at least three of the early papers presented to the Society.

1. A paper on the comparative strength of New Zealand and Australian timbers, signed by C. R. Carter (27).^{*} This is the first paper recorded in the Minutes (11) as having been read before the Society.

2. A paper on Fossil Shells of the Wairarapa, signed by S. E. Grimstone (28).

3. A description of a water-plant called *Nitella* (33). The minute-book (11) credits this paper to the Secretary (Dr. Ralph, who succeeded W. Mantell)

Among the documents, also, are various treasurer's accounts and balance sheets. From these such interesting items may be culled as the following:—"5/- for cleaning floor and glass in the museum, cabinet-maker's wages at 10/- per day; taxidermy. 4/6; 8 chairs at 7/6 each."

Early in the history of the Society, there was a change of secretary, Dr. Thos. S. Ralph taking over from W. Mantell, who apparently removed to Dunedin. A statement of the property received, and signed for, by the new secretary (24) includes the following items:—"The museum, consisting of two sets of fragments of egg shell of the *Dinornis*; . . . the Library—viz, a notice of the remains of the *Dinornis*" Both museum and library seem to have grown under Dr. Ralph's secretaryship, for there is a reference to "about 150 volumes of choice and valuable works" (39) while £50 was spent on the purchase of a mineralogical cabinet. This may have been intended to house a collection of minerals and rocks received from Europe the year before by Mr. Mantell, a list of several hundred such specimens being among the documents (13 and 14) **

There is also a 25-page manuscript of an address delivered by Sir Geo. Grey as President of the Society, in 1851 (25). It appears to be in Sir George's own handwriting [which is not very legible] since it resembles that of the signature in another document accompanying it. This latter (40) is among the most interesting in the collection. It is addressed, from Government House, Wellington, August 2, 1853, to "Your Honour and Gentlemen," and conveys to the New Zealand Society the thanks of the Governor and Lady Grey for expressions of goodwill on the eve of their departure from the colony. The letter is written

^{*} This paper has recently been published in the *N.Z. Journal of Forestry*, 6 (3) pp. 258-260, 1951.

^{**} There is some evidence that this collection may still be substantially intact, and housed in the Office of the Geological Survey, Wellington,

on blue, water-marked paper (like a number of the other documents), and is bound together with silk ribbon. It is obviously the work of an amanuensis, but is signed in a somewhat less copperplate hand. "G. Grey, Govr.-in-Chief".

Other documents of interest dating from about this period of the Society's life are:

1. Copy of a manuscript circular letter, addressed from Downing Street to Sir Geo. Grey (34), signed by John S Pakington, who is probably the Sir John Pakington, Secretary for the Colonies, who later became Lord Hampton. This letter, written at the request of the Council of the Society of Arts (London), recommends the objects of that Society to the consideration of the Governor.

2. A letter from the New Zealand Society, to the Secretary of the Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, Adelphi, London (38). The letter commences: "The Council of the New Zealand Society, having received through their President . . . your circular . . . addressed to His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies, have instructed me to acknowledge the same, and to express their highest appreciation of the objects proposed therein. . . ." And later. "They also gladly avail themselves of this opportunity of expressing their warmest congratulations upon the distinguished honour you have obtained in having originated through your Royal President and fostered by your exertions the great Exhibition of 1851; a Wonder which will never be forgotten, and the immediate successes and results of which are but pledges of what the ultimate results cannot fail to be." Having stated the objects of the New Zealand Society, the letter continues: "The Council have instructed me now to lay before you the particulars of our most abundant and important product (the Phormium Tenax), and to solicit the aid offered by you . . . to afford such information as we may require in regard to Implements, Machinery, or Chemical or other processes necessary for the prosecution of any special branch of Industry. . . . These being facts patent to all persons here who see almost the whole country covered with this valuable plant and scarcely any use made of it, the Council of the New Zealand Society . . . are willing to award a premium of fifty guineas to any person who will furnish them with . . . machinery by which the flax may be dressed." "We can only hope that . . . the time may not be very far distant when the Navy and Mercantile Marine of Great Britain may be supplied with cordage and sails from the hitherto comparatively useless New Zealand Flax."

3. A letter addressed to Sir Geo. Grey by Chas Enderby (36), no doubt one of the Enderby Brothers who were famous at that time for their whaling and explorations in the Antarctic. The letter suggests the formation of a branch of the Geographical Society in connection with the New Zealand Society.

After the departure of Sir Geo. Grey, in 1853, the Society seems to have fallen on lean times. Its history between 1853 and 1861 is summarised in a printed document which was published in 1867 (2). In 1857, an Act of the Provincial Council vested the property of the Society in the Superintendent of the Province; while in the following year "a meeting was held by the late members of the Society for the purpose of reviving the same." A deputation to the Superintendent secured his consent to hand over the property of the old Society to the new one, and at the same time to place at their disposal a commodious room on the upper floor of the Provincial Government Offices

(now the Parliamentary Library) Thenceforward, owing to the exertions of the secretary, Mr. Walter L Buller, the collection belonging to the Society and the room in which it was placed were put into excellent order. A system of exchange of specimens was organised with museums in Australia (46-48), and the public were admitted on certain days of the month. In 1859, the property of the Society was insured for £200; and a meeting is on record at which the Rev. W. Kirton read a paper on "The Usefulness of Science" (8).

In 1860, a general meeting of the Society elected to honorary membership Professor Hochstetter and J. Haast, Esq. The letter conveying the news of this honour to Hochstetter did not reach Vienna for some years, it having suffered shipwreck on the way Hochstetter's reply (54), acknowledging the honour, asks for a fresh copy of the document, owing to its having suffered immersion in sea water. This letter is signed "Prof. Dr. Ferdinand von Hochstetter."

After 1863, interest seems again to have waned; and when in 1865 the seat of government was transferred to Wellington, the property belonging to the Society was transferred to the Colonial Museum established by the central Government.

The 1867 printed document (2) already referred to goes on to point out the desirability of reconstituting the Society, a step which appears to have been taken. There is a printed copy of the "Rules of the New Zealand Society, Reconstituted, November, 1867" (3), with the following objects:—

1. The New Zealand Society is founded for the advancement of Science, Literature and Art, as well as for the development of the resources of the Colony.
2. The collection and preservation of materials illustrative of the history of the inhabitants of the South Pacific Ocean. their languages, customs, poetry and traditions
3. The publication of such papers on these and other subjects as may be deemed by the Council of sufficient importance

There is also another printed copy of Rules, published in 1881 (7). Its title page reads: "Rules of the Wellington Philosophical Society. Founded 1851. Incorporated 1867." This document is almost identical in wording with the 1867 rules of the New Zealand Society.

An outline of the subsequent history of the New Zealand Society can be followed from Volume 1 of the Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute. Here we find that a preliminary meeting of the reconstituted New Zealand Society met on November 11, 1867, under the chairmanship of Sir Geo. Grey, when it was resolved that "All members of the New Zealand Society . . . be placed on the list of original members of the reconstituted society." Two further meetings of the Society, under its old name, are recorded in the Transactions; and finally, at a meeting on April 7, 1868, it was resolved to change the name of the Society to the Wellington Philosophical Society, and to have it incorporated with the New Zealand Institute

These facts—all supported by documents in the possession of the Wellington Branch—make it clear that the Wellington Branch is entitled to regard its foundation as dating from that of the New Zealand Society of 1851. It is thus appropriate that it should celebrate, in 1951, the centenary of the foundation of a Scientific Association in and for Wellington City and Province.

ANNOTATED LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Relating to the New Zealand Society, 1851–1869, in the custody of the Wellington Branch of the Royal Society of New Zealand, stored in a Deed Box housed in the strong room at the Dominion Museum, Wellington, October, 1951.

PRINTED PAMPHLETS.

1. Rules of the New Zealand Society, instituted July, 1851 (Wellington, 1851; 14 pp.).
2. Abstract of the History and Proceedings of the New Zealand Society Since Its Formation (Wellington, September, 1867, 8 pp.)
3. Rules of the New Zealand Society, Reconstituted, November, 1867 (6 pp.)
4. Rules of the Wellington Philosophical Society adopted at the Annual General Meeting, 1873. (Wellington; 5 pp.)
5. Annual Report of the Wellington Philosophical Society for 1876, with list of Office-bearers and Members. (Wellington, 1877; 16 pp.)
6. Annual Report and Statement of Accounts, Wellington Philosophical Society, 1880. (1 p.)
7. Rules of the Wellington Philosophical Society, founded 1851 Incorporated with the New Zealand Institute, 1867. (Wellington, 1881. 8 pp.)

MANUSCRIPT BOOKS

8. New Zealand Society. Council Minute Book July 2, 1851, to April 24, 1860.
9. New Zealand Society. Committees' Minute Book July 3 to 16, 1851.
10. New Zealand Society. Letters, Notices and Advertisements
11. New Zealand Society General Meetings Minute Book. July 2, 1851, to January 25, 1853
12. New Zealand Institute Letter Book June 10, 1868, to November 29, 1869

MANUSCRIPT DOCUMENTS.

13. List of Rocks and Minerals sent to Mr. Walter Mantell, Wellington, New Zealand, February, 1850, from Dr. Mantell (378 items)
14. A second copy of the above list, with some additional items, together with three pages of comments, and a personal note to "My Dear Walter" (No signature)
15. Draft list of "possible members" of the New Zealand Society, subdivided into "Thorndon, Te Aro and Country (Karori, Hutt, and Wairarapa)". 1851? 2 pp.)
16. Chairman's rough notes of Minutes of inaugural meeting of the New Zealand Society, July 2, 1851.
17. A list of 6 Committee Members and 74 other original Members of the New Zealand Society, signed by Wm Mantell, as Acting-Secretary, and dated at Wellington, July 2, 1851. (White lined paper, with red ink rulings 1 p.)
18. A second list of members of the Society, undated, intitled "W M, Hon. Sec." (on blue, unlined paper. 2 pp.)
19. Book of donations to the Library and to the Museum of the NZ Society; July 2 to November 27, 1851. (5 pp.)
20. Chairman's rough notes of minutes of meeting of Council of NZ Society, July 3, 1851. (2 pp.)
21. Minutes of meeting of Council NZ Society, July 3, 1851 (4 pp) and of Aid Committee. (4 pp.)
22. Minutes of the Committee of Rules of the NZ Society, July 3 to 30, 1851 (22 pp.)
23. Nine formal Nominations to Membership of the N.Z. Society, dated between August 8 and November 28, 1851—viz : Philip Deck, E. A. Hargreaves, Hon Constantine A. Dillon, John Varnham, John Roy, P M Harvey, John Telford, Dr Logan, and Rev. R. Taylor, with signatures of proposers and seconders. (9 pp.)
24. A letter to Walter Mantell, late Hon Sec, N.Z. Society, dated September 9, 1851, by Thos S. Ralph, Secretary, acknowledging receipt of property belonging to the Society. (2 pp.)
25. A rough draft of the Presidential Address to the New Zealand Society by Sir George Grey, September 26, 1851. (25 pp)
26. Draft of two letters (October 3 and October 28, 1851) by the Secretary, N.Z. Society (Thos. S. Ralph) suggesting the formation of Branches of the Society in Nelson and Otago, and the interchange of specimens for the Museum.

27. Paper on "The Comparative Strength of N.Z. and Australian Woods," by C. R. Carter, read by W. Fitzherbert, October 22, 1851. (4 pp.) (This is the first paper recorded in the minutes as having been read before the Society.)
28. Paper on "Fossil Shells of the Wairarapa," by S. E. Gimstone, read before the N.Z. Society, November 28, 1851. (4 pp)
29. List of subscriptions (10/6 each) received by Captain W. B. Rhodes, Treasurer to the N.Z. Society, between January 5, 1852, and January 19, 1853. (3 pp.)
30. Sundry Accounts, etc. of the N.Z. Society, 1852-3.
31. A letter from Wanganui, dated January 12, 1852, by Rev. Richard Taylor to the Secretary, N.Z. Society, acknowledging election to membership of the Society. (1 p.)
32. A short note, dated January 16, 1852, of a meeting of the Council of the N.Z. Society to consider a proposal of a premium for the best mode of preparation of the N.Z. flax. (2 pp.)
33. Note on the aquatic plant Chara or Nitella, by (Dr.) T. S. Ralph; paper read before the N.Z. Society on March 5, 1852 (10 pp)
34. A circular letter, dated April 24, 1852, from Downing Street, addressed to the Governor, Sir George Grey, C.B.E., etc., and signed John S. Packington. (2 pp)
35. A letter from Otago, dated May 22, 1852, from Walter Mantell to the Secretary, N.Z. Society, reporting receipt of a letter from Mr. William Swainson, F.R.S.,* declining an Honorary Membership of the Society. (1 p.)
36. A letter from Chas. Enderby, dated from Wellington, October 13, 1852, to his Excellency Sir Geo. Grey (6 pp.)
37. Draft of a letter, dated 17th January, 1853, from the Secretary, N.Z. Society, Edward Roberts, to the Colonial Secretary, requesting a grant from the Legislative Council to the funds of the Society. (2 pp) Also two letters in reply (January 24 and August 20) signed by Alfred Domett, Civil Secretary, regretting that the Executive Council cannot recommend the grant because of "the present state of the Public Funds". (2 pp. each.)
38. Copy of a letter dated January 24, 1853, from Edward Roberts, Hon. Sec. of the N.Z. Society, to George Grove, Esq., Sec. of the Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, John St., Adelphi, London. (10 pp)
39. MS. copy of Second Annual Report of the N.Z. Society, dated January 25, 1853, and signed by Edwd. Roberts, Hon. Sec (13 pp.)
40. A letter from Government House, Wellington, dated August 2, 1853, signed "G. Grey, Govr. in Chief," and addressed to the N.Z. Society. (5 pp.)
41. Draft of a letter dated September 6, 1853, regarding the shipping of one ton of flax to London on behalf of the N.Z. Society (1 p)
42. Draft Report of a General Meeting of the N.Z. Society, October 14, 1853, together with two proposals for membership (C. Clifford and J. May). (2 pp.)
43. A letter from Sir Geo. R. Faimee, Bideford, Devon, dated September 14, 1854, to the Secretary of the New Zealand Branch, Society of Arts, Wellington, regarding N.Z. flax (4 pp.)
44. A rough draft of names of members of the "Old" Society and of those joining the "New" Society. (1859 ?)
45. A list of subscriptions paid to the N.Z. Society, July 10, 1859; (1 p.); also a list of names, with notes of subscriptions paid (no date). (2 pp.)
46. A letter from the Director of Museums, Melbourne, dated August 5, 1859, to W. L. Buller, regarding exchange of specimens with the N.Z. Society. (1 p.)
47. A letter from the Manager Australian Museum, Sydney, dated August 6, 1859, on the same topic (3 pp.)
48. A letter from the Secretary, South Australian Institute, to W. L. Buller, Secretary and Curator, N.Z. Society's Museum, dated August 17, 1859, on the same topic. (2 pp.)
49. A letter from the N.Z. Society's Room, dated August 19, 1859, and signed by W. L. Buller, addressed to His Honour, the Superintendent, Wellington, notifying him of the

* This William Swainson appears to have been at one time a resident of the Hutt; his name occurs in the list of members published in 1851, though the name (along with several others) has subsequently been ruled out in ink in the surviving copy.

- appointment of Officers to the Society, and requesting him to transfer the property of the "late New Zealand Society to this Society." (2 pp.)
50. Two short letters (August 24 and 29, 1859) from (Dr.) F. J. Knox to W. L. Buller regarding specimens for the Society's Museum. (2 pp.)
 51. Two proposals for election to Membership of the N.Z. Society dated August 25 and October 10, 1859. (2 pp.)
 52. A letter from Octavius Hadfield, Otaki, to the Hon. Sec., N.Z. Society, dated September 1, 1859, accepting office as Vice-president. (1 p.)
 53. A letter from the Private Secretary's Office, Auckland, signed F. G. Steward, and dated September 15, 1859, to W. L. Buller, acknowledging notification of the election of Sir Geo. Grey to the Presidency of the N.Z. Society, and forwarding a donation of £10 (1 p.); also Buller's reply (1 p.)
 54. A letter addressed to Walter Buller, Hon Sec, N.Z. Society, from Vienna, dated March 15, 1865, and signed "Prof. Dr. Ferdinand von Hochstetter," acknowledging the receipt of a Diploma from the N.Z. Society nominating him an Honorary Member; and asking for a second copy of the document, as the first had suffered shipwreck and was almost totally illegible. (2 pp.)
 55. A memo with accompanying notes from the Geological Survey Office and Colonial Museum, Wellington, dated July 21, 1867, and signed by James Hector, regarding the N.Z. Society. (6 pp.)
 56. Cash book of the N.Z. Society, October, 1867
 57. "A paper for the Wellington Philosophical Society, by the Bishop of Wellington, Vice-President. On the Celtic Origin of the English Vowel Sounds." dated at Wellington, August 12, 1868 (2 pp. printed)

APPENDIX. OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY, 1851-1951.

New Zealand Society, 1851-1868.

Wellington Philosophical Society, 1868-1939

Wellington Branch, Royal Society of New Zealand, 1939-1951

PRESIDENTS

Sir Geo Grey	1851-53	Prof. T. H. Easterfield	1903-04
Mr. Wm. Lyon	1858	Mr. Maitin Chapman	1905-06
Colonel T. Gore Browne	1859	Prof. H. B. Kirk	1907-08
Mr. Robert Hart	1860-61	Mr. A. Hamilton	1909-10
Sir Geo Grey	1868-69	Mr. G. V. Hudson	1911-12
Hon. W. B. D. Mantell	1870	Prof. T. H. Easterfield	1913
Mr. W. T. L. Travers	1871	Dr. C. Munro Hector	1914
Dr. J. Hector	1872-73	Mr. Thos. King	1915
Dr. C. Knight	1874	Dr. C. M. Hector	1916
Dr. J. Hector	1875	Mr. G. Hogben	1917-18
Dr. W. L. Buller	1876	Mr. R. W. Holmes	1919-20
Mr. J. Cairuthers	1877	Dr. C. E. Adams	1921-22
Mr. Thos. Kirk	1878	Mr. J. Allan Thomson	1923
Dr. A. K. Newman	1879	Mr. P. G. Morgan	1924
Mr. Martin Chapman	1880	Mr. A. C. Gifford	1925-26
Dr. J. Hector	1881	Mr. F. W. Ferkert	1927-28
Mr. W. T. L. Travers	1882	Dr. W. R. B. Oliver	1929-30
Hon. G. Randall Johnson	1883	Dr. E. Marsden	1931-32
Dr. W. L. Buller	1884-85	Dr. J. Henderson	1933-34
Dr. A. K. Newman	1886	Dr. P. Marshall	1935-36
Dr. Hutchinson	1887	Mr. A. E. Hefford	1937-38
Mr. W. M. Maskell	1888	Mr. C. M. Smith	1939-40
Mr. A. de B. Brandon	1889	Mr. F. R. Callaghan	1941
Mr. Chas. Hulke	1890	Dr. H. H. Allan	1942
Mr. E. Tregear	1891	Mr. R. L. Andrew	1943
Sir Walter Buller	1892	Dr. L. I. Grange	1944
Major-General Schaw	1893-94	Mr. H. S. Lamburd	1945

Mr. Thomas Kirk	1895	Dr. J. K. Dixon	1946
Mr. W. T. L. Travers	1896-97	Mr. H. C. McQueen	1947
Mr. Edward Tregear	1898-99	Mr. M. Ongley	1948
Mr. G. V. Hudson	1900-01	Prof. L. R. Richardson	1949
Mr. W. T. L. Travers	1902	Dr. L. Bastings	1950-51

The following List of Secretaries was inadvertently omitted from the final printing of Dr. L. Bastings' article on the History of the New Zealand Society, 1851-1868, in Vol. 80, pages 359-366. Would recipients please paste this errata slip on page 366 following the List of Presidents—Editor

SECRETARIES

Mr. Wm. Mantell	1851	Dr. C. E. Adams	1916-17
Dr. T. S. Ralph	1852	Mr. J. Allan Thomson	1918
Mr. Edward Roberts	1853	Mr. C. G. G. Berry	1919-20
Mr. W. L. Buller	1858-61	Mr. H. Hamilton	1921-22
Mr. Robert Pharazyn	1868-70	Mr. E. K. Lomas	1923-24
Mr. F. M. Olivier	1871	Mr. W. J. Phillipps	1925-28
Mr. Richard B. Gore	1872-1903	Mr. F. R. Callaghan	1929-36
Mr. T. King	1904-09	Mr. R. E. R. Gimmott	1937
Mr. C. E. Adams	1910-14	Dr. J. T. Salmon	1938-50
Mr. A. C. Gifford	1915	Mr. R. M. Waite	1951