

THE MANAWATU  
JOURNAL  
OF HISTORY



2007 ISSUE NO.3





Cover illustration: *The Manawatu Flows On*, 1993. John Bevan Ford. Collection of Massey University Library. Reproduced by permission.

John Bevan Ford (1930-2005) was born in Christchurch. His mother was of Ngati Raukawa ki Kapiti ancestry and his father of English/German descent. He lived in the Manawatu from 1974, when he came to work at Massey University. John was a full time painter for the last twenty years of his life.

This painting has its origins in an invitation to travel to the Netherlands, with a series of works commemorating, and giving a Māori perspective on, the anniversary of Dutch explorer Abel Tasman's arrival in New Zealand in 1642. The artist has used a pen loaded with liquid acrylics, on watercolour paper. The taniko border of the cloak above the land signifies mana, and that the land is a land of distinction; the floating threads emanating from the sacred upper edges of the cloak symbolise the local people's whakapapa (genealogy), and show that the space above the land is an active space. Below, the Manawatu River flows out of Te Apiti, the Manawatu Gorge, and meanders across the plains. The scroll-like figure above the gorge represents the region's first navigator, the pre-Māori taniwha (spirit) Okatia, who became a totara tree and carved out the path of the river on his way from the Wairarapa, east of the ranges, to the west coast. The canoe of the next navigator, Kupe, can be seen to the left of Okatia. One of Kupe's wives was Ruahine, after whom the ranges to the left of the picture are named. The third great navigator was Tasman, and his boat is also in the sky, to the left of Kupe's. Constellations and single stars in the sky are the Māori equivalent of the compasses that Tasman used as navigational tools. The place where the Manawatu River meets the Pohangina was the site of an outpost of the Rangitāne people. The site has since been washed away by floods, but here the artist has 'brought it home' and populated it by including at the bottom right edge the patterns of some very old flax belts from the Manawatu Museum (now Te Manawa). Some of these patterns also appear in the traditional taniko borders of the cloak. The unusual vertical pattern in the centre of the cloak, which is not traditional, was inspired by a very early carved canoe prow cover found in Taranaki by Richard Cassells, when he was working at the Manawatu Museum. Shapes from that carving also appear on the figure of Okatia.

*Lucy Marsden*

ISSN 1176-9602

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*The Manawatu Journal of History* is an initiative of the Palmerston North Heritage Trust in conjunction with the Manawatu Branch of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust. It is published annually.

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Correspondence from readers and potential contributors is welcomed.  
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Design: GSA Design Ltd.

Printed by Stylex Print, Palmerston North in conjunction with the *Manawatu Evening Standard*.



PALMERSTON NORTH  
HERITAGE TRUST  
P.O. Box 1345, Palmerston North  
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# PROMOTING SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY OVER A CENTURY: THE MANAWATU BRANCH OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND



GREGOR YEATES

For the past one hundred years there has been a Manawatu Branch of the Royal Society of New Zealand.

The preliminary meeting to form the Manawatu Philosophical Society, as it was then called, was held in the Palmerston North Borough Council Chambers on 29 June 1904. On 16 January 1905, the society was incorporated by the New Zealand Institute. Under the New Zealand Institute Act 1903, and Rules, it was an autonomous organisation. With thirty-eight and forty-one members listed for 1904 and 1905 respectively, the Society was clearly active.

The Royal Society of New Zealand is an independent body, established under Acts of Parliament dating from 1867. Its name is derived from the Royal Society, London which is described in the second Royal Charter of 1663 as 'The Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge'. RSNZ draws on expertise of those in member organisations to promote a critical awareness of science and technology in schools, in industry and in society. It administers several funds, publishes scientific journals, offers science advice to government, fosters

international scientific co-operation and recognises excellence.

The list of members of the Manawatu Philosophical Society for 1904 includes several associated with education in the early days of the borough. The first president, Kenneth Wilson, MA, had come to New Zealand in 1874 as headmaster of the fledgling Wellington College. After fifteen years he came to Palmerston North and opened a private high school where he was principal for a decade from 1891. The president for 1905–06, John Vernon, was Headmaster, then Rector, of Palmerston North High School (1902–1918). T F Fairbrother, F Foote, R Keeling, C H Warden and F E Watson are among early teachers who were members.

The Society followed the general pattern of such bodies in provincial towns, presenting lectures and papers by local and visiting scholars on a wide range of topics. In 1904 there were five meetings, and some abstracts from presentations at these meetings were





*K. Wilson*

Kenneth Wilson (1842–1920). Founding father of the Manawatu Philosophical Society.

*Image from Transactions 53:xi, 1921.*

published in the *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute*. In 1905 ten meetings were held. The *Transactions* report that three were 'thrown open to the public'. A further meeting, *Some recent discoveries in Babylon and the laws of the Great Kong Huma-Rabi* by Rev I Jolly, was held before a very large audience in the Opera House. A paper *The Waterloo of the Waikato, fought in 1830, and its Effects on the After-enacted Land Laws of that Part of the North Island*, describing the effects of firearms on inter-tribal fighting, was read by W Welch to the Branch in April 1909 and subsequently published in full. In 1912 Kenneth Wilson presented a paper called *Footprints of the Moa*. This paper described and illustrated footprints found by Mr Coles in the Manawatu River near the foot of Fitzroy Street. It drew favourable comment from leading biologists of the day. Concrete casts of the footprints are now in the collection of Te Manawa.

The dedication of members of the Manawatu Philosophical Society to a broad spectrum of activities was demonstrated

on 21 April 1908 when a special Council meeting agreed, 'to consider the question of an exhibition of pictures'. However, an Art Society was formed for the purpose. The Manawatu community depended on and supported many local initiatives. Just before the outbreak of war in 1914 Dr A A Martin, who was Society president in 1906–07, was sent by public subscription to England and America to investigate the potential of X-rays in the medical field.

After early meetings in the Fire Brigade Hall, in July 1905 the Palmerston North Borough Council placed a room in the old Council Chambers at the Society's disposal. The Society's library was housed in the building and meetings held there. On Thursday 14 June 1906 the museum was opened by Sir Robert Stout. In 1910 the former fire station was moved from Coleman Place to a frontage in Cuba Street and from 1911 it served as home of the Society and housed its museum and library.

A second-hand telescope and observatory were purchased from Napier in 1906. On 9 November 1906 it was agreed 'children of sixth standard of all schools be allowed to use the observatory free of charge'. Meteorological instruments were obtained with Sir Joseph Ward's help, and maintained for many years by J W Vernon. The society's observatory, housed in the Square, was under the charge of its Astronomer, Captain J O R Hewitt, RN (1909–13) who was succeeded by C T Salmon (1916) and A J Colquhoun (1917). Mr R H F Grace was responsible for it in 1920.

The society took an active interest in the New Zealand Institute, especially in the period 1917–19, in relation to reports to the National Efficiency Board and the foundation of the Fellowship, and also initiated recommendations for the extension of Tongariro National Park. The Second New Zealand Institute Science Congress was held in Palmerston North in January 1921, based at Palmerston North Boys' High School. In addition to formal presentations there were



popular evening lectures on 'the scientific control of insect pests' and 'liquid air'. Field excursions to Tiritea, the Glaxo Factory, Pohangina Reserve, Manawatu Gorge, Miranui Flax Mills and Mangahao Hydro-Electric Works suggest local businesses also benefited from the Congress.

However, during the Great War membership, the Society's income base, had fallen from seventy to between forty-five and fifty. After Kenneth Wilson died in 1920, the records of the Society's activities are less complete, and without his drive activity declined. In 1918 the museum had had eighty to a hundred visitors daily, but by 1920 average attendance was twenty-two. With more exhibits, there were also concerns about both space and fire risk. Attempts were made to obtain accommodation in the Borough Council's new building and fruitless discussions about accommodation were also held with the High School Board regarding the Technical School being used as a museum, library and reading room.

In 1924 the Society was served notice to vacate the museum building. On 21 June 1926 a deputation from the Society, comprising Messrs. De Berry, C T Salmon and J B Gerrand waited on the Borough Council. The Society records say that it was suggested



*The Square, about 1915, showing lakelet, cannon and, on the extreme right, the Observatory. The Occidental Hotel and Bank of New Zealand are at the top of Fitzherbert Avenue*

*Photograph from Ian Matheson City Archives, Palmerston North: Sq 372.*

'that the Council should take over the Assets and Curios now belonging to the Manawatu Philosophical Society. Mr. De Berry stated that the Society had not earned the support which it deserved, and it was therefore not in a position to maintain the present Museum, and he, on behalf of the Society, offered the whole of the Assets and Exhibits in order to liquidate its Bank Overdraft'. Subsequently 'a payment of the sum of 130 for the whole of the Exhibits' was approved, and the Deputy Mayor reported that space for the storage of the curios could be found in the Council's Store at the rear of the Council Chambers. More than 5600 items were catalogued. By March 1927 the exhibits had been packed before the old museum was damaged by fire on 13 December 1927. Although details of the transfer have not been located, Petersen notes that 'the society's valuable collection of books of New Zealand interest formed the nucleus of the Public Library's extensive New Zealand reference collection'.

Plans to house the museum in the public library that opened in 1929 on the corner of the Square and Fitzherbert Avenue were unfulfilled. However, in 1935 it was noted that the town library contained numerous bird and animal specimens belonging to the Society and that there was a possibility of a museum being arranged in the library building. Ownership aside, this possibility did not come to fruition, but the author recalls display cases of birds in the library stairway in the early 1950s. Some of the material is now housed in the collection of Te Manawa.

Despite the transfer of the museum to the Borough Council, the observatory was under Society control when they granted its use to the Boys' Meccano Club in 1929. 'The matter of a site to which to remove the Observatory' was discussed and left in the hands of Professor Peren, principal of the newly established Massey Agricultural College. In October 1935 the Town Clerk, Mr J R Hardie, advised the then reconstituted Society that 'the telescope and building was the property of the Society'. Mr Laurie



Inglis was delegated to make the telescope operational. In 1938 alterations to the Square required the removal of the observatory, but at that time there was still hope of it being sited at Massey Agricultural College. The original telescope is now in the hands of Palmerston North Astronomical Society.

Society activity continued and for 1925, 1926, 1928 and 1929 there are basic reports published in the *Transactions* with the Secretaries being C T Salmon, J S Hornblow (1926 & 28) and J S Merton and the membership being fifty-six, fifty-seven, fifty-nine and sixty-one respectively. In 1929 at least four Palmerston North residents (E B Levy, H Patterson, G S Peren, J S Yeates) were listed as members of the Wellington Philosophical Society.

Meldrum Elliott is listed among Manawatu Philosophical Society members for 1904, and was elected President in 1908, 1918 and 1935. Initially the representative on the Manawatu Philosophical Society on the Board of Governors of the New Zealand Institute (1918–1931), he continued to be a valued member of the Board of Governors as the New Zealand Institute's Honorary Treasurer (1921–1943). He was also a government appointee to the RSNZ Council. When the Branch was at a low, in January 1927, he anticipated greater prosperity in the future and strove to keep the spirit of the Manawatu Branch active. Massey Agricultural College was established in 1926 and the first lecture given in 1928; there were government scientific units near the campus. Although the museum exhibits had been packed up by March 1927, it was anticipated that these institutions would raise interest in the Society.

On 9 August 1928 Elliott chaired a meeting for reconstitution attended by A H Cockayne, H H Allan, G G Gibbs, G H Cunningham, G S Peren, W Riddet, E B Levy and W Cottier. H H Allan was elected President. Subsequently grants were made to Dr Cunningham for Mycological Survey of Tongariro National Park and to Messrs Wild and Zotov (Feilding)



*The Square in the late 1930s, showing the lakelet and observatory. The Grand Hotel and All Saints Church are in the background.*

*Photograph from Ian Matheson City Archives, Palmerston North: Sq 376.*

for research into Sexuality of NZ Coprosmas as Related to Wild Hybrids. Meetings, generally held in the Brick School, All Saints Church, continued until September 1929, but despite local scientific strength the revived society did not survive. In 1932 the New Zealand Institute reported that it had not been resuscitated and Manawatu was omitted from the list of member bodies in The Royal Society of New Zealand Act 1933. Some local individuals continued to belong to the national Society as members of the Wellington Branch. In 1935 those listed were H H Allan, C R Barnicoat, W Hamilton, G H Cunningham and J S Yeates.

On 1 May 1935, Elliott once more convened a meeting to form a branch in Palmerston North. Twenty-three attended, and on the motion of H R Whitehead, seconded by F H McDowall it was resolved to form a Branch of the Society. The first annual meeting was held on 22 May 1935, followed by a paper on Little Barrier Island by W M Hamilton. Although the Proceedings say the Branch was admitted to the RSNZ in 1935, it was unable to comply with the Rules until its membership increased and its annual income reached 25. In the 1935–39 period there were contributions by E E Chamberlain, G H Cunningham, C P McMeekan and J Melville, J C Neill, I L Thomsen, J S Yeates and V Zotov. Meetings were held in the Boys' High School, the





M A Elliott (1869-1946). Foundation member of the Manawatu Philosophical Society; long-time national treasurer of the Royal Society of New Zealand; Palmerston North Borough and City Councillor.

*Image from Ian Matheson City Archives, Palmerston North, CC9.*

Theosophical Society hall, and in the Royal Dutch Lounge. With a financial membership of about fourteen and an annual income of less than the £25 required under the Rules, the branch council decided to go into recess on 20 October 1940. There seemed to be an element of indifference from the scientists in Palmerston North, who then exceeded fifty in number. The assets of the Branch were handed to RSNZ; there is no reference to any photographs, books or telescopes. In 1952 there was an attempt to resuscitate the Branch but, apparently due to the local activity of the Animal Production Society, which already had their own professional body, it was not possible to enrol sufficient members.

In 1965 the Manawatu Branch of RSNZ was readmitted following a meeting held at Palmerston North Girls' High School on 29 June. This was the result of an enthusiastic move by three fellows – I J Cunningham, F H McDowall and H R Whitehead – supported by members of both the scientific and lay communities. Drs McDowall and Whitehead

had also been instrumental in the 1935 resurgence. Ira Cunningham became the Branch President, with membership of 105. The assets (£33) held in trust by RSNZ were transferred back to the revived Branch. The first talk, in August 1965, was *Progress in Population Regulation* by W C Clark. Many meetings were held on Massey University College's Hokowhitu campus and later in the lecture theatre at the Public Hospital.

Since 1965 RSNZ Manawatu Branch has flourished, adapting its activities as academic activities, research funding and public awareness and support of science have varied. While some members who joined in 1965 continue to serve actively on Council, there has been a varying pool of interested people providing drive. Long-serving Council members have included farmers, engineers and lawyers – not just academic and research scientists. The Branch was responsible for mounting the Twelfth New Zealand Science Congress, which was held in the city in 1972, with Branch Vice-President Dr Tim Brown as secretary. The congress included public sessions in the Opera House. Outreach to the broader community, begun in 1905, has continued as a key aspect of Branch activity.

In 1974, on behalf of the Branch, Dr Bernard Forde approached John Peart (Head of Science at Palmerston North Teachers' College) and set in train what is now the Fonterra Manawatu Science and Technology Fair. The Branch continues to provide prizes for the Fair. Branch members were also active in establishing 'Science Centre Inc' and thus the Science Centre and Manawatu Museum (now incorporated into Te Manawa). Moving monthly meetings to the Science Centre in 1994 significantly increased public attendance, and initiation of electronic announcements via email in 2000 gave a further, sustained increased attendance by both scientific members and the public. Coverage in local papers also attracts a few people to Branch meetings. The initiation of the Manawatu Lecture in 1998 provided a platform to recognise aspects of





*RSNZ Manawatu Branch Presidents photographed at the Centennial Meeting on 19 April 2005.*

*Gregor Yeates (2000, 2001), Vincent Neall, (1984), Richard Haverkamp (2004, 2005), Arthur Todd (1991), Peter Pharazyn (1998, 1999), Bernard Forde (1975), David Edge (1986), Elisabeth Todd (2002, 2003), Richard Wigley (1983), James Inglis (1979)*

science relevant to the historical and future development of the Manawatu. Over 400 attended a lecture by New Zealand-born Nobel Laureate Alan MacDiarmid at Massey University College of Education in July 2001 and the 1400 seat Regent on Broadway was filled to capacity in July 2004 to hear Robert, Lord Winston. Public attendance at meetings, rather than the number of financial members, is the current yardstick of success and is only possible through contributions in kind by many individuals and organisations. Financial membership is at present just over a hundred.

Science advances by human endeavour. Since 1905 Manawatu has changed from a community driven by local initiatives to a significant primary-production, value-added region with internationally recognised educational and research capacity. Residents have seen 'progress' and 'improvement' in the quality of their life – electricity reticulation, refrigeration, motor vehicles,

sealed roads, antibiotics, medical X-rays, valve radios, computer chips, processing of primary produce – which reflect science-based technological advances. Glaxo, New Zealand Pharmaceuticals, Allflex and PEC (Marton) have been among successful local businesses with strong science bases.

Since 1935 many presidents of the branch have been researchers and educators from Massey and its associated research organisations. However, in keeping with earlier years, the chair is often occupied by a member of the wider community. These schoolteachers, medical practitioners, magistrates, lawyers, farmers, dentists and engineers help span the gap between research and the technology that makes life in the Manawatu now so different from that in 1905. Whatever scientific and technological advances occur in the next century, RSNZ Manawatu Branch aims to be here, continually striving to inform and educate the wider community in scientific matters.



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- The variously titled *Transactions and Proceedings* of the New Zealand Institute (1869–1932) and of the Royal Society of New Zealand (1933–).

### Newspapers

*Manawatu Evening Standard* (microfilm).

### Primary sources

- Minute books of the Palmerston North Borough and City Council, held in the Ian Matheson City Archives, Palmerston North.
- The minute books known for the Society for the period 1904–20 November 1973 are held in the Ian Matheson City Archives, Palmerston North. The current minute book runs from late 1973 and includes the annual report for 2005 that lists known officers since 1904 and all members in 1904, 1976–77 and 2005.

## APPENDIX

To mark its centennial, at an April 2005 meeting the Branch chose to present Certificates of Excellence, to not only highlight the dependence of the Manawatu and its people on science and technology but also to recognise the contribution that scientists and technologists have made to the wider community. They were to:

- Palmerston North City Council 'for applying technology to supply potable drinking water and to collect and dispose of wastes – the essential tasks underpinning any urban society'.
- Horizons Regional Council, and their predecessor the Manawatu Catchment Board 'for planning and carrying out catchment and river works, especially the Lower Manawatu Scheme, to enhance and protect both rural and urban land'.
- Palmerston North Hospital 'for providing residents of the Manawatu region with the best available health and medical care science and technology.
- Mr Michael Greenwood (plant biologist): 'for 25 years of unstinting efforts in the conservation of Keeble's Bush – a remnant of the podocarp-broadleaf forests once widespread on the Manawatu Plains'.
- Dr Bernard Forde (plant physiologist) 'for many years' service as a Palmerston North City Councillor & Deputy Mayor, and as an executive member of RSNZ Manawatu Branch, of The Science Centre Inc., of the Friends of Te Manawa, of Arena Manawatu and of the Manawatu Tree Trust, and services to environmental planning locally, regionally and nationally'.
- Dr David Warnock (ophthalmologist) 'for efforts in establishing a medical museum in Palmerston North'.