

A Brief History of the Royal Society of New Zealand Wellington Branch

The body that we know today as the Royal Society of New Zealand Wellington Branch was founded in July 1851 as the New Zealand Society, with Sir George Grey as its first President. However, a letter written by a Mr A. P. Holroyd, dated 17 August 1844 (quoted in Louis E. Ward's 1928 publication - *Early Wellington*), provides evidence that a New Zealand Society already existed in England and that it was intended to establish one or more branches in New Zealand.

From 1867 onward, the society underwent various legal and constitutional changes, and changes of name, as outlined in the following paragraphs.

The Society was re-constituted in November 1867 and named the Wellington Philosophical Society. In 1868 it was incorporated under the New Zealand Institute Act 1867. The early meetings are all summarised in the Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute, and a reading of them gives some indication of the enthusiasm and wide range of topics covered by members talks, for the meetings primarily were an opportunity for members to present and debate papers.

For example, in 1889, the new President gave an inaugural address on the taxonomy of the North Island kiwi. Sir James Hector gave the vote of thanks, and it is recorded that "Sir James went into the subject at length" and that, in the ensuing discussion, the question of the bad smelling drains in Wellington was also raised, and photos of the recent earthquake in the Amuri district were discussed.

The fourth meeting of that year was very topical, the issue of Chinese settlement in New Zealand and Australia was raised, suggesting a licencing system (remember at that date, Europeans were still prohibited from travel beyond the Chinese Treaty Ports) and "as gardeners they were a necessity" (meaning horticulture, not domestic gardeners!).

The Society was renamed in 1938 as the Wellington Branch of the Royal Society of New Zealand, and incorporated in 1939 under the Incorporated Societies Act 1908 as the Wellington Branch of the Royal Society of New Zealand Incorporated. The branch in those days was large, with over 400 members and a monthly newsletter "Science in Wellington" sent out by post to each member. There was an Astronomy Section, with the Society telescope and observatory next to the Carter observatory; a Geology Section; a Science Teaching section; a Geophysics Section a Physics Section an Archaeology Section, each holding their own monthly meetings

The ongoing issue of being mistaken for the parent body, the RSNZ led to much discussion about the name, and in 1995 the Branch was incorporated and renamed Science Wellington Incorporated. Dissatisfaction with the name brought about another change and the Branch was reconstituted in

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1999 as the Royal Society of New Zealand Wellington Branch, and in 2001 was renamed again as the Royal Society of New Zealand Wellington Branch Incorporated.

In 2009 the Branch was registered as a Charitable Entity with the Charities Commission (registration number CC42176).

Today the Branch is a Regional Constituent organisation of the Royal Society of New Zealand, under the Royal Society of New Zealand Act 1997, Section 14. It is a Committee under Sections 14(2) and 28(3). Thus, the Royal Society of New Zealand Wellington Branch Incorporated is both an incorporated society and charitable trust, registered with both the New Zealand Companies Office and the Charities Commission. The society operates under a Constitution and is governed by the requirements of the Incorporated Society Act 1908 and the Charitable Trusts Act 1957.

The objects of the Branch are to promote and advance science, technology and the humanities in the Wellington region. It does so by hosting public lectures, providing scholarships for doctoral students to assist them in attending overseas conferences and symposia, and supporting the annual Wellington Regional Science Fair by providing a significant monetary prize.