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### Report on Dunedin Scottish Festival September 2014

The *Dunedin Scottish Festival: celebrating Dunedin's links with Scotland and Robert Burns* was held from Sunday 31 August to Wednesday 3 September with an additional programme item, the Ceilidh Scottish Dancing Club Open Night being held on Saturday 6 September.

The Festival was arranged by a special committee of the Otago Scottish Heritage Council, to provide a setting for the Annual General Meeting of the Robert Burns Association of the Pacific Rim which the New Zealand members of the Association were invited to host for 2014. The aim of the Festival organizers was to involve all the Scottish organizations in the region and to provide a range of activities to which all the public were welcome.

The Festival commenced on Sunday morning with a Scottish Heritage Service at First Presbyterian Church of Otago where the Rev Dr Thomas Burns, nephew of Robert, was the first minister. The church was decorated with tartan and the Rev Dr Tokerau Joseph extended a welcome in Gaelic to the visitors, ma

ny of whom were kilted or wearing tartan. Dr Royden Somerville, President of the Dunedin Burns Club, and Michael Lynch, President of the Robert Burns Association of the Pacific Rim, read from the Old Testament and Gospel before Rev Anne Thomson preached on "*Burning and yet not consumed.*" The congregation kindly welcomed everyone after the service to morning tea in the Burns Hall and the fare included haggis and shortbread.

Visiting Burns Club members attending the festival were Michael and Daisy Lynch, Alister and Jane MacLeod, Bev and Uilleam Tait, Noel and Marion Wright, Bill and Lorraine Schrank (Melbourne), Rosemary McKay (Adelaide), Janet and Douglas Williamson (Auckland) and Chris and Neil Boyd (Wanganui).

The weather for the festival was turned out to be sunny each day although a not uncommon cool breeze blew up Stuart Street from the harbour to the Octagon during the afternoon opening ceremony at the Robert Burns statue when the Mayor Dave Cull opened the Festival. A poem by Robert Burns, *Corn rigs are bonie*, was read by David Howard, the University of Otago Robert Burns Fellow for 2011. A variety of activities with a Scottish theme followed with an opportunity to take part in Highland Games sports activities in the upper Octagon including tossing the caber, a tug of war and carrying weights. In the lower Octagon, the City of Dunedin Pipe Band played a medley and was followed by highland dancers accompanied by the Official Piper of the Dunedin Burns Club, Raymond Goodfellow. Children with a wide variety of ages and ethnic backgrounds participated in highland flings, sword dances, sailor's hornpipes and jigs, including young boys wielding shillelaghs. A winning song from the 2014 Commonwealth Games Baton competition was sung and a fiddle orchestra played Scottish music. An opportunity was provided for the public to try highland dancing and playing the chanter.

On Sunday evening the visitors were kindly hosted by Ann and John Barsby at their heritage Royal Terrace residence to a sumptuous meal and informal get-together.

On Monday morning, the visitors left from the Leviathan Heritage Hotel, opposite the Toitu Otago Settlers Museum, at 0850 in a convoy of four cars to visit the grave on Thomas Burns, his wife Clementiana, his son Arthur and other family members at the Southern Cemetery before proceeding along a leafy route—Queens Drive, Burma Road, Polworth Road, Wakari Road and Tanner Road—to Craigieburn, an 1860's Scottish settlers farm site where Paul Pope conducted us on a two-hour tour. Elizabeth and William Rankin, together with their daughter Elizabeth, arrived on the 7.2 hectare bush subsistence farm site in 1860 and worked hard cutting and selling firewood. William died in 1872 and Elizabeth remarried in 1879 to Edward Tanner. She lived on the property until her death in 1921 aged 94. Their daughter married a nearby farmer Robert Sheriff, had ten children and died in 1949 aged 93. These pioneers were early conservationists and preserved a four hectare block of native bush including about 60 rimu trees that were hundreds of years old and could have been felled for their valuable timber.

After lunch at the Otago Museum we looked at some of the woollen products of the Mosgiel Woollen Mill which was founded in 1871 by Arthur Burns, son of Thomas Burns. The mill won the reward of £1,500 offered in 1868 by the Provincial Government to produce 5,000 yards of woollen cloth. They produced 11,000 yards in their first year. We also inspected some Maori artefacts and the best preserved moa leg, completed with feathers, dried tendons and claws found by gold miner Peter McLeod in a cave in a gorge of the Waikaia River in approximately 1984. We then walked to the nearby University of Otago, where Dr Burns was the first chancellor, and were able, with the kind permission of the University of Otago, to inspect his 2 m high portrait in the meeting room of the University Council, in the blue-stone clocktower building.

We then drove to the near Waters of Leith beside the Dunedin Stadium to inspect the Dunedin-Edinburgh Stone, sculpted by Edinburgh-based Sylvia Stewart from Edinburgh granite and gifted to the city by the City of Edinburgh, a sister city of Dunedin. The sculpture had been unveiled by the Mayor Dave Cull and Professor Tom Devine, University of Edinburgh, on 22 November 2011, and a greeting was read, at that time, from the Lord Provost of the City of Edinburgh. A similar sculpture by Sylvia Stewart, The Owheo Monument, is situated at Rennie's Isle in Leith, Edinburgh, and was created from volcanic magma (basalt) rock from the Water of Leith, Dunedin.

The convoy then proceeded by Butt's Road, past the University Oval cricket ground to the Northern Cemetery to see the grave of John Barr, Craigielea, an engineer and successful ship-builder in Scotland, who arrived in the *Acro* in 1852 and died on 18 September 1889. He founded the Dunedin Burns Club in 1861 and was a poet who became laureate to the Caledonian Society. He embraced life in Otago and wrote in the style of Burns. In *A history of Otago*, Erik Olssen noted that Barr "mocked the pretensions" and "emerged as the poet laureate of the Scots-Presbyterians." "His command of dialect, his caustic satire of "money-grubbing" and excessive drinking, but most of all his delight in having escaped the botched Old World made him the popular voice of the Scots Middling folk." In a border accent by the grave side, Neil Boyd read a stanza from "To my old dog Dash" from Barr's book *Poems and songs: descriptive and satirical* (Edinburgh: John Grieg and Son; 1860).

The New Zealand Centennial memorial on Signal Hill was our next stop. It commemorated 100 years since the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, between the Maoris and the British Crown, on 6 February 1840 and in front of the monument was situated a large piece from the rock on which Edinburgh Castle stands, gifted to Dunedin on 3 April 1941 to symbolize the bond between Edinburgh and Dunedin. The plaque on the rock had the words from Burns "Auld Lang Syne" and on the centennial monument itself were carvings of thistles and ferns.

In response to a request we made detour to visit Baldwin Street, advertised as a world's steepest street, and Louise Borrie took Bill and Lorraine for a ride to the top. We all then went on a one-hour guided tour of Olveston, an historic Dunedin home built by Dunedin businessman, collector and philanthropist David Theomin for this wife Marie and children Edward and Dorothy. It was a family home from 1906 to 1966 when it was gifted, on Dorothy's death at 78, to the city. The home had a complement of servants, copper-lined sinks that were more gentle on the dinner ware, an internal signaling system for the staff, natural lighting in the roof over the billiard table, and an outside window in the kitchen for deliveries to be made to. A 1921 Fiat car was in the garage. It provided a contrast to the initial living conditions of William and Elizabeth Rankin at Craigieburn.

We returned to our accommodation by driving past Knox Church, the other imposing Presbyterian Church in Dunedin. After an evening meal, most of us joined the Ceilidh Scottish Dancing Club for their weekly club night at St John's Church Hall, Roslyn, for some enjoyable dancing. This was open to the public as part of the Scottish Festival and a number of visitors from Taiwan also joined in.

On Tuesday morning at a Mayoral reception at the Mayor's office, Mayor Dave Cull spoke of his recent trip to Edinburgh and showed us a gift, in 1948, from the citizens of Edinburgh which incorporated some rock from the Edinburgh Castle site. Councillor Neville Peat showed us through the Council Chambers and meeting rooms with various portraits hung in them. A tour of the Dunedin City library followed with a display of some books of Scottish interest from their collections and a tartan stained glass window designed by Shona MacFarlane. A further tour of the Dunedin Art Gallery featured the painting by Charles Hardie of Robert Burns meeting Walter Scott. In the afternoon, Seán Brosnahan, Curator Toitu Otago Settlers Museum, led us on a city walking tour from the Burns stature in the Octagon around the original waterfront area where the Scottish pioneers came ashore in 1848 and the first barracks, school and church were situated. We finished, after an hour and a half, with a talk by the Reverend John Sinclair at First Church on the church and saw at the display, at the rear of the church featuring Thomas Burns.

A showing, at Toitu Otago Settlers Museum, of the documentary, *An immigrant nation—Hoots Mon, The Scots in New Zealand*, was most interesting and showed how some emigrant families had been split apart with some members returning from New Zealand to Scotland to marry and live. Others had embraced life in New Zealand and brought their Scottish culture with them, including piping, highland dancing, highland games and the haggis.

On Tuesday evening, we accepted the invitation from Jack McLeod, Patron of the Dunedin Burns Club, to attend the Orphans Club of Dunedin concert. The Club, formed on 20 April 1898, featured items by the Club members and provided a homely and enjoyable mixture of musical items, poems, and a skit. The music featured a big band and a ukulele orchestra that had a sing-along. One item with a Scottish flavour was by an accordionist, wearing a Glengarry hat and glancing intermittently at the audience, who played *Marching through the heather*. Other vocal items included *Mocking bird hill* and *Diamonds are a girl's best friend*. The audience was very encouraging when the words or the tune became temporarily lost. A 92-year sang another number to a guitar accompaniment when difficulties were experienced with the Karaoke system for Stardust. The Club had a great atmosphere about sharing entertainment together away from the television and Jack noted that the practicing of items helped give purpose in life to many members. An 87-year-old was due to perform at the next concert. (Music with participation has been called "Musik").

A Scottish Symposium was held at Toitu Otago Settlers Museum on Wednesday morning with a welcome being extended by Dr Somerville. Professor Liam McIlvanney, Stuart Chair of Scottish Studies, Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies, University of Otago, spoke on *Burns in the South*

*Seas*. He mentioned how John Barr made an important contribution in poetry and that he wrote in the style of Burns to describe life in Otago rather than simply expressing being homesick for Scotland. He described how James K Baxter had written *Man on a horse* as a commentary on *Tam o' Shanter*. Emeritus Professor Lawrence Jones, University of Otago, spoke on *Burns and Burns Fellows* and the Reverend Peter Matheson, who taught at the University of Edinburgh for nearly 20 years, described the *Peculiarities of Scottish Humour* and how the earthiness of the language helped him to feel grounded. Professor Michael Schmidt, OBE, FRSL, University of Glasgow, gave a lecture on *The country mouse and the town mouse: publishing Scottish poetry*. After lunch Seán Brosnahan led us on a tour of the Museum's Scottish and Burns collections, Vilma Nelson spoke on the design and weaving of tartans, and, during afternoon tea, we were entertained by Scottish fold music on Celtic harps.

The AGM of the Robert Burns Association of the Pacific Rim followed with Alister McLeod being elected President and Royden Somerville Junior Vice-President.

In the evening *A Wee Blether and a Bit of Fun* was held at Toitu Otago Settlers Museum with celtic music from a Dunedin ceilidh orchestra, a panel discussion on *Dun-edinburgh or Done with Edinburgh: Is Dunedin Still a Scottish City?*, highland dancing, a talk on *Whisky* by John Eckoff, an *Address to the Haggis* by Hugh Marshall and supper. The panel was chaired by William McKee and the speakers were Professor Liam McIlvanney, Mayor Dave Cull and Seán Brosnahan. Liam noted that what it meant to be Scottish was changing and that Edinburgh and Glasgow were Scottish in a way that was probably different to how we imagined them to be.

Thanks were extended to all who helped the Festival by attending and organizing the various functions. The major partners in the Festival were acknowledged: Dunedin Burns Club; Caledonian Society of Otago; Otago Scottish Heritage Council; Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies, University of Otago; Otago Community Trust; Dunedin City Council including Toitu Otago Settlers Museum and **dunedin**, [www.DunedinNZ.com](http://www.DunedinNZ.com). The staff of Toitu were gratefully thanked: Ms Jennifer Evans, Director; Seán Brosnahan, Curator; Kirsty Glengarry, Visitor Experience Manager; Donna Shield, Retail Coordinator; William McKee, Exhibition Developer; and Rua MacCallum, Visitor Programmes Officer. A presentation was made to Ann Barsby, QSM, Committee Member Dunedin Burns Club and Director, Robert Burns Association of the Pacific Rim, for her especial contribution and this was vigorously acclaimed.

Bruce Spittle

Secretary

Dunedin Burns Club