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Alexander Turnbull Library



The Alexander Turnbull Library in Bowen Street, Wellington, circa 1930s. Photographed for New Zealand Railways.

Grey, Turnbull, Hocken - The collectors

Three collectors were pre-eminent in their contribution to New Zealand library holdings in the 19th and early 20th century: Sir George Grey, Alexander Turnbull and Dr Thomas Hocken. Grey's donation to the Auckland Public Library influenced similar acts of generosity by Turnbull and Hocken. But while his other achievements have overshadowed this act, Turnbull and Hocken are largely known for the collections that bear their names.

Sir George Grey

Sir George Grey (1812-98) is best known in New Zealand for his two terms as governor (1845-53 and 1861-68) and one as premier (1877-79). But he also made a notable contribution to the holdings of New Zealand libraries, particularly Auckland City Libraries. Donald Kerr, who has written a detailed account of Grey's book collecting and the formation of his libraries in *Amassing treasures for all times: Sir George Grey, colonial bookman and collector*, describes him as an 'obsessive collector of rare books and artefacts, which he selflessly bequeathed to the people he governed'. Grey started collecting by the early 1830s. Some decades later, in 1861, he donated most of his collection to the South African Public Library. **But he continued to acquire further material and in 1872 announced his desire to donate books to a public library in Auckland, should one be established.** The Auckland Public Library opened in a new building in 1887 and by the time of his death in 1898 Grey had donated about 15,000 items to the institution. Among the treasures in

Auckland City Libraries' Grey Collection are a rare copy of Shakespeare's first folio, and a copy of the original music and words to *God Defend New Zealand*.

Alexander Turnbull

Alexander Horsburgh Turnbull (1868-1918) was the son of a successful businessman, Walter Turnbull. His family's wealth enabled him to indulge his interest in collecting from a young age. He purchased the first item in his collection, a copy of J.H. Kerry-Nicholls's *The King Country; or, explorations in New Zealand*, in 1885, aged 17. At this time he was working in the London office of the family firm, Turnbull, Smith and Company, wholesale drapers. The company was sold in 1888 and in 1892 Alexander became a partner in Wellington-based W. & G. Turnbull and Company, general merchants. Following his father's death in 1897 he and his brothers came into a sizable inheritance. According to Rachel Barrowman, in her book *The Turnbull: a library and its world*, 'a particularly energetic period of collecting followed'. By this time the themes of Turnbull's collection had largely been established: New Zealand, Pacific exploration, Scottish history, English literature, John Ruskin, and the fine arts. By 1907 Turnbull had started making plans for the future of his collection, initially willing it to Victoria University College. But in 1916 he decided to leave the collection to the Crown 'as the nucleus of a New Zealand National Collection'. On his death in 1918 the collection included some 55,000 volumes as well as manuscripts, photographs, paintings and sketches. Among the treasures in the Alexander Turnbull Library are Boethius's *De Musica* (1120-1150), the oldest complete book in New Zealand, and Augustus Earle's early painting, *Meeting of the artist and Hongi at the Bay of Islands, November 1827*.

Hocken rescues the Treaty

In 1908 Thomas Hocken 'rescued' the Treaty of Waitangi from the basement of the Government Buildings. He discovered the 'damaged' and 'presumably rat eaten' documents amid a heap of old papers and rubbish. Fortunately facsimiles had been made in 1877 and these were subsequently used to restore the original documents.

Dr Thomas Hocken

Dr Thomas Morland Hocken (1836-1910) spent 40 years practicing medicine in Dunedin. He was appointed as the Dunedin coroner in 1863 and held the position for 22 years. He was also appointed to a number of honorary positions, including honorary physician and surgeon to Dunedin Hospital (1864-87). In a chapter in *Ka taoka hakena: Treasures from the Hocken Collections*, Rachel Barrowman says that while it is not clear what sparked his passion for collecting, by the 1870s it had become 'an enduring one'. He first expressed a desire to give his collection to the public in 1897, having admired Grey's generous gift to the Auckland Public Library. But at this time he was still making use of the collection. A deed of gift was finally signed with the University of Otago in 1907, and the library opened in a wing of the University's museum in March 1910. Hocken himself was too ill to attend the opening and died just two months later. The collection he gifted included some 4500 volumes as well as manuscripts, maps, plans, drawing and pictures. Among the treasures in the University of Otago Library's Hocken Collections are the letters and journals of Samuel Marsden and other Anglican missionaries, and E.M. Chaffers' 1841 chart of Port Nicholson, the only known copy of the first map printed in New Zealand.

Further information

Links

- [George Grey \(DNZB\)](#)
- [The history of Auckland City Libraries \(Auckland City Libraries\)](#)
- [Real gold: treasures of Auckland City Libraries \(Auckland City Libraries\)](#)
- [Alexander Turnbull \(DNZB\)](#)
- [Our history \(National Library of New Zealand\)](#)
- [Thomas Hocken \(DNZB\)](#)
- [Who was Dr Hocken \(University of Otago\)](#)

Publications

- *Ka taoka hakena: Treasures from the Hocken Collections*, ed. by Stuart Strachan and Linda Tyler, Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2007.
- Rachel Barrowman, *The Turnbull: a library and its world*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1995.
- Wynne Colgan, *The Governor's gift: the Auckland public library 1880-1980*, Auckland City Council, Auckland, 1980.
- Donald Jackson Kerr, *Amassing treasures for all times: Sir George Grey, colonial bookman and collector*, Oak Knoll Press, Delaware, and Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2006.
- A.G. Hocken, *Dr Hocken of Dunedin: a life*, East Riding Press, Oamaru, 2008.
- E.H. McCormick, *The fascinating folly: Dr Hocken and his fellow collectors*, University of Otago Press, Dunedin, 1961.

Alexander Turnbull Library

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Further information and copies of this image may be obtained from the Library through its 'Timeframes' website, <http://timeframes.natlib.govt.nz>

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Community contributions

Sally A Coles

14 Jul 2011

Sir George Grey was a great-great Uncle of mine. His niece Annie Matthews married Seymour George, who where my Great grand-parents. One of their sons Sydney Thorne George was my grandfather.