

Staging the Past:

The Period Room in New Zealand

Volume I

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Abstract

Before 1940, few of the nation's museums actively collected or displayed artefacts associated with the history of European settlement in New Zealand. Over the following three decades, an interest in 'colonial history' blossomed and collections grew rapidly. Faced with the challenge of displaying material associated with the homes of early settlers, museums adopted the period room as a strategy of display. The period room subsequently remained popular with museum professionals until the 1980s, when the type of history that it had traditionally been used to represent was increasingly brought into question.

Filling a gap in the literature that surrounds museums and their practices in New Zealand, this thesis attempts to chart the meteoric rise and fall of the period room in New Zealand. Taking the two period rooms that were created for the New Zealand Centennial Exhibition in 1939 as its starting point, the thesis begins by considering the role that the centennials, jubilees and other milestones celebrated around New Zealand in the 1940s and 1950s played in the development of period rooms in this country, unpacking the factors that fuelled the popularity of this display mode among exhibition organisers and museum professionals. The thesis then charts the history of the period room in the context of three metropolitan museums – the Otago Early Settlers Museum, the Canterbury Museum, and the Dominion Museum – looking at the physical changes that were made to these displays over time, the attitudes that informed these changes, and the role that period rooms play in these institutions today.

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Last but not least, I would like to thank my family and friends for their ongoing support – I could not have done this without you! Dudley and Jesse Stephenson – thank you so much for all your love and support over the years. I miss you both dearly.

Abbreviations

ANZ	Archives New Zealand Te Rua Mahara o te Kāwanatanga
AM	Auckland Museum
CM	Canterbury Museum
DPL	Dunedin Public Library
LHCC	Lower Hutt City Council Archives
MONZ	Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa
NLNZ	National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa
NZHPT	New Zealand Historic Places Trust Pouhere Taonga
OSM	Otago Settlers Museum
HCL	Hutt City Libraries Heritage Centre
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Introduction

Before 1940, few of the nation's museums actively collected or displayed artefacts associated with the history of European settlement in New Zealand.

Over the course of the next three decades an interest in 'colonial history' blossomed and collections grew rapidly. Faced with the challenge of displaying material associated with the homes of early settlers, museums adopted the period room as a strategy of display. The period room subsequently remained popular with museum professionals until the 1980s, when the type of history that it had traditionally been used to represent was increasingly brought into question.

During the 1990s many of New Zealand's metropolitan museums underwent substantial redevelopment, providing these institutions with the opportunity to update their displays on a widespread scale. As a result, many of the period rooms that had been in place since the 1950s and 1960s were dismantled and the collections stored.

Filling a gap in the literature that surrounds museums and their practices in New Zealand, this thesis attempts to chart the meteoric rise and fall of the period room in New Zealand. Taking the two period rooms that were created for the New Zealand Centennial Exhibition in 1939 as its starting point, the thesis begins by considering the role that the centennials, jubilees and other milestones celebrated around New Zealand in the 1940s and 1950s played in the development of period rooms in this country, unpacking the factors that fuelled its popularity among exhibition organisers and museum professionals. The thesis then charts the

history of the period room in the context of three metropolitan museums – the Otago Early Settlers Museum, the Canterbury Museum, and the Dominion Museum – looking at the physical changes that were made to these displays over time, the attitudes that informed these changes, and the role that period rooms play in these institutions today.

Literature Review

In the 1980s the ‘new museology’ called for an examination of the ways in which museums create meaning. As a result, museum professionals and scholars began to examine the modes of presentation used by such institutions, an area of museum studies that had previously been largely ignored in favour of histories that focused on objects and collections. Among the many scholars who have addressed the knowledge-making capacity of museums are Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Emma Barker, Carla Yanni and Stephanie Moser, whose work provides important insight into the way in which different strategies of display contribute to how a museum object is seen and understood.¹ As Barker observes, displays are always *produced* by museum staff and thus they are necessarily ‘a form of representation as well as a mode of presentation.’²

¹ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1998. Emma Barker, ed., *Contemporary Cultures of Display*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999. Carla Yanni, *Nature’s Museums: Victorian Science and the Architecture of Display*, London: Athlone Press, 1999. Stephanie Moser, ‘The Devil is in the Detail: Museum Displays and the Creation of Knowledge’, *Museum Anthropology* 3, no. 1 (2010): 22-32.

² Barker, 1999, p. 13.

Complementing this body of literature, other scholars and museum professionals have contributed to our understanding of this issue by examining how the practices and principles that underpin certain display strategies have evolved over time. One particular sub-set of display that has received much attention in the past three decades are reconstructions, or what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett refers to as ‘in situ displays’, a form of display in which the original context from which the artefact or artefacts were derived is re-created or evoked.³ As a display type, the term reconstruction covers a diverse range of display techniques, including waxworks, habitat groups, period rooms, life groups, dioramas, tableaux, replicas, and period environments. Among those scholars whose work has critically engaged with the implications of one or more of these particular display strategies are Alison Griffiths (life groups, habitat dioramas), Stephanie Moser (life groups) and Karen Wonders (habitat dioramas).⁴

Since the emergence of the period room in Europe and the United States of America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a small body of literature has addressed this method of display. The oldest and by far the largest subset of this literature takes the form of books and articles devoted to the history of an individual room or suite of rooms within the context of a particular institution.⁵ Written largely by museum professionals, much of this literature has

³ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, p. 3.

⁴ Alison Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference: Cinema, Anthropology & Turn-of-the-century Visual Culture*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2002. Alison Griffiths, *Shivers Down Your Spine: Cinema, Museums, and the Immersive View*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2008. Stephanie Moser, ‘The Dilemma of Didactic Displays: Habitat Dioramas, Life Groups and Reconstructions of the Past’, in Nick Merriman, ed., *Making Early Histories in Museums*, Washington: Leicester University Press, 1999, pp. 97-116. Karen Wonders, *Habitat Dioramas: Illusions of Wilderness in Museums of Natural History*, Uppsala University: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1993.

⁵ Examples of this type of literature include: George Francis Dow, ‘Museums and the Preservation of Early Houses,’ *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 17, no. 11, Part 2: An

been concerned with exploring the origins of the main architectural elements or furnishings of a given room and how the elements of these rooms have been re-presented and re-interpreted over time.

Since World War II, these histories have been joined by a second body of research in which museum professionals began to look more broadly at the concept and conventions of the period room, as well as the general history and functions of such displays. After 1960, museum professionals also began to address the challenges of curating period rooms, with writers increasingly reflecting on both past practices and the issue of authenticity.⁶ While the primary focus of this literature was initially the perceived disadvantages of the period room, museum professionals, such as Sarah Medlam and Julius Bryant, have recently attempted to balance the problems that have come to be associated with such displays with discussion about the positive role that they can play in the museum sector today.⁷

American Wing for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Gift of Robert W. de Forest and Emily Johnston de Forest, (November 1922): 16-20. Eda Diskant, 'A Dutch Room of the Seventeenth Century in the Philadelphia Museum of Art', *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin* 80, no. 341, A 17th Century Dutch Room, (Winter 1984): 1-24. Amelia Peck and James Parker, eds., *Period Rooms in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art Publications, 2004.

⁶ See: A.E. Parr, 'Habitat Group and Period Room', *Curator: The Museum Journal* 1, no. 4 (1963): 325-336. Edward P. Alexander, 'Artistic and Historical Period Rooms', *Curator: The Museum Journal* 7, no. 4 (October 1964): 263-281. Dianne H. Pilgrim, 'Inherited From the Past: The American Period Room', *The American Art Journal* 10, no. 1 (May 1978): 5-23. Wendy Kaplan, 'The Reinstallation of the Oak Hill Rooms', *M Bulletin (Museum of Fine Arts Boston)* 81, (1983): 46-59. Julia Porter and Sally MacDonald, 'Fabricating Interiors: Approaches to the History of Domestic Furnishings at the Geffrye Museum', *Journal of Design History* 3, no. 2-3 (1990): 175-182.

⁷ Sarah Medlam, 'The Period Rooms', in Christopher Wilk and Nick Humphrey, eds., *Creating the British Galleries at the V&A: A Study in Museology*, London: V&A Publications, 2004, pp. 165-200. Julius Bryant, 'Curating the Georgian Interior: From Period Rooms to Marketplace?', *Journal of Design History* 20, no. 4 (2007): 345-350. Julius Bryant, 'Museum Period Rooms for the Twenty-First Century: Salvaging Ambition,' *Museum Management and Curatorship* 24, no. 1 (2009): 73-84.

Within the last two decades significant research regarding the history of the period room has also been undertaken by scholars working outside of the museum sector. In 1995 the French scholar Bruno Pons produced a detailed study of the reconstitution of decorative schemes from private French residences by museums in Britain, France and America in which he attempted to place such displays not only within the historical context of the history of period rooms but also the histories that they were designed to represent, specifically the history of French architecture and design.⁸ Further research regarding the use of architectural salvages in the production of period rooms in European and American museums was published in 2007 by architectural historian John Harris, who focused in particular on the representation of English interiors.⁹

In recent years further literature regarding the period room has also been produced within the academic realm. In America, Hillary Murtha at the University of Delaware, and Marjorie Schwarzer at John F. Kennedy University, California, have both recently offered fresh perspectives on the history of the period room and its function in museums today.¹⁰ In Britain, Trevor Keeble, Head of the School of Art and Design at Kingston University, London, and Jeremy Ansley, Professor of Design History at the Royal College of Art, were among the scholars who contributed to *The Modern Period Room: The*

⁸ Bruno Pons, *French Period Rooms, 1650-1800: Rebuilt in England, France and the Americas*, France: Editions Fatou, 1995.

⁹ John Harris, *Moving Rooms*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2007.

¹⁰ Hillary Murtha, 'The Reuben Bliss Bedchamber at the Brooklyn Museum of Art: A Case Study in the History of Museum Period Room Installations', *Winterthur Portfolio* 40, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 205-218. Marjorie Schwarzer, 'Literary Devices: Period Rooms as Fantasy and Archetype', *Curator: The Museum Journal* 51, no. 4 (October 2008): 355-360.

Construction of the Exhibited Interior 1870 to 1950.¹¹ This compilation of essays by scholars, architects and museum professionals published in 2006 addressed the issues and conventions that surround period rooms that represent modern interiors.

Another area of research into which this thesis fits is the growing pool of literature that addresses various aspects of the history of museums and their practices in the New Zealand context. Among the general surveys that have been produced regarding museums and art galleries in New Zealand are a report by Sydney F. Markman and Henry Richards published in 1933 and a directory compiled by Keith W. Thomson in 1981, both of which provide a brief overview of the development of local museums and their individual histories.¹² This subject was further addressed in the 1980s by Susan Sheets-Pyenson, who included New Zealand museums in her study of the emergence of such institutions in colonial contexts in the nineteenth century.¹³

In addition to these general histories, a number of publications have also addressed the history of individual institutions in New Zealand. The earliest accounts were often produced in connection with important milestones. Some of these histories simply appeared in annual reports, while others were published

¹¹ Trevor Keeble, Brenda Martin and Penny Sparke, eds., *The Modern Period Room: The Construction of the Exhibited Interior 1870 to 1950*, New York: Routledge, 2006.

¹² Sydney F Markman, *A Report on the Museums and Art Galleries of Australia and New Zealand*, London: The Museums Association, 1933. Keith W. Thomson, *Art Galleries and Museums in New Zealand*, Sydney and Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1981.

¹³ Susan Sheets-Pyenson, *Cathedrals of Science: The Development of Colonial Natural History Museums during the Late Nineteenth Century*, Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988.

separately in commemorative publications.¹⁴ More recently, however, scholars and museum professionals have begun to take a more in-depth look at the history of individual institutions, including Stuart Park, who has undertaken research into the early history of the Auckland Museum, and Seán Brosnahan, who produced a detailed history of the Otago Early Settlers Association and their museum to coincide with the centenary of the organisation in 1998.¹⁵

In the twenty-first century the practices of New Zealand museums have increasingly been addressed. Among the areas that have been examined by scholars in recent years are the collection and display of Māori artefacts and the display of natural history specimens.¹⁶ A growing body of literature has also come to surround the collection and display of non-indigenous collections in New Zealand museums. In 2002 Australian scholar James Michael Gore looked at the representation of national identity in the national museums of Australia (Canberra) and New Zealand (Dominion Museum/Te Papa, Wellington).¹⁷ The

¹⁴ Examples of commemorative histories include: Thomas Cheeseman, *The First Fifty Years of the Auckland Institute and Museum and its Future Aims: A Jubilee Sketch*, Auckland: Wilson and Horton, 1917. Eric Skinner and William Martin, eds., *Short History of the Otago Early Settlers Association 1898-1948 and Guide to the Museum*, Dunedin: Laing & Matthews, 1949. Richard K. Dell, *The First Hundred Years of the Dominion Museum*, Wellington: Dominion Museum, 1965. Arthur W.B. Powell, ed., *The Centennial History of the Auckland Institute and Museum, 1867-1967*, Auckland: Council of the Auckland Institute and Museum, 1967.

¹⁵ Stuart Park, 'John Alexander Smith and the Early History of Auckland Museum, 1852-1867', *Records of the Auckland Museum* 35, (1998): 13-43. Seán G. Brosnahan, *To Fame Undying: The Otago Settlers Association and its Museum 1898-1998*, Dunedin: Otago Settlers Association, 1998. Other in-depth histories include: Michael D. Summers, 'Auckland Museum: Origins, Growth and Influencing Factors,' Master of Arts, University of Auckland, 2003. Johannah C. Massey, 'Theatre of Wonders: the Emergence of the Southland Museum, 1869-1945', Master of Philosophy in Museum Studies, Massey University, Palmerston North, 2000.

¹⁶ Examples of this type of literature include: Brian J. Gill, 'History of the Land Vertebrates Collection at Auckland Museum, New Zealand, 1852-1996', *Records of the Auckland Museum* 36, (1999): 59-93. Conal McCarthy, *Exhibiting Māori: A History of Colonial Cultures of Display*, Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2007. Emma Meyer, 'Making Moa: Spectacular Science and Natural History at the Canterbury Museum and the National Museum of New Zealand, 1865-2006', Master of Arts in Museum and Heritage Studies, Victoria University of Wellington, 2008.

¹⁷ James M. Gore, 'Representations of History and Nation in Museums in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand: The National Museum of Australia and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa', Doctor of Philosophy in History, University of Melbourne, 2002.

history of collecting and displaying objects representative of Pākehā history in museums has subsequently been addressed from multiple perspectives by Daniel Smith, Bronwyn Ann Wright, Bronwyn Labrum, Julia Waite and Rebecca Rice.¹⁸ Within this existing scholarship, however, the period room has received very little attention. This thesis attempts to address this absence by exploring its history in New Zealand museums and how the use of this strategy of display has changed over time.

What is a period room?

At its broadest, the term ‘period room’ has been utilised to describe rooms or spaces decorated in such a way as to evoke a past era. Such a definition encompasses historical interiors that have been recreated in a diverse range of contexts, including private residences, museums, historic buildings, film, television and magazines. This essay is concerned solely with period rooms that have been created for the purposes of display in the context of a museum environment. More specifically, it looks at those created in the context of purpose-built museum galleries as opposed to historic house museums.

¹⁸ Daniel C.P. Smith, ‘City Revealed: The Process and Politics of Exhibition Development’, Master of Arts in Museum Studies, Massey University, Palmerston North, 2003. Bronwyn A. Wright, ‘Exhibiting Pakeha Social History at the Auckland Museum’, Master of Arts in Museums and Cultural Heritage, University of Auckland, 2006. Bronwyn Labrum, ‘Making Pakeha History in New Zealand Museums: Community and Identity in the Post-War Period’, in Simon J. Knell, Suzanne MacLeod and Sheila Watson, eds., *Museum Revolutions: How Museums Change and Are Changed*, London and New York: Routledge, 2007, pp. 149-159. Julia Waite, ‘Under Construction: National Identity and the Display of Colonial History at the National Museum of Singapore and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa’, Master of Arts in Museum and Heritage Studies, Victoria University of Wellington, 2008. Rebecca Rice, ‘The State Collections of Colonial New Zealand Art: Intertwined Histories of Collecting and Display’, Doctor of Philosophy in Art History, Victoria University of Wellington, 2010.

The general consensus in the scholarship that surrounds the period room is that the term refers to a room created in modern times that is decorated in such a way as to evoke a past era. Supplementing this rather broad definition, scholars have identified a number of characteristics that further help to define what constitutes a period room. The scholar Bruno Pons, for example, asserts that a period room must utilise at least some elements that date to the period that the room seeks to represent.¹⁹ Among the characteristics that have often been attributed to the period room is that it should make reference to a particular historical interior or to a specific type of historical interior and that an attempt be made to furnish it in accordance with the period that it is designed to represent.²⁰ As several writers have asserted, these two characteristics work to distinguish the ‘period room’ from the ‘period setting’, with the latter simply acting to create an ambience that complements the particular period of the artefacts being shown.

While all period rooms act as a representational device, it is important to observe that not all period rooms are created with the same goals in mind. A period room may attempt to recreate a particular historical interior *or* be designed to be representative of a type of interior that was built in a particular place during a certain period. In the case of the former, the aim may be to reconstitute a room utilising as many of its original parts as possible. Equally, the room may contain no elements of the original decorative scheme being re-created. Instead, genuinely old elements drawn from other sources may be used to re-create the look of the room or it may be replicated almost entirely with modern materials. Any combination of original features, genuinely old elements and modern

¹⁹ Pons, 1995, p. 13.

²⁰ Parr, 1963, p. 335. Pilgrim, 1978, p. 13. Pons, 1995, p. 12.

materials are possible. This is also true in the case of period rooms that are designed to illustrate a particular type of historic interior. The approach that is taken in the construction of period rooms differs not only between different museums but also often within individual institutions, where various approaches can co-exist side-by-side within a single gallery.

Period rooms can also differ from one another in terms of the narrative that they are designed to represent. As Trevor Keeble has observed, the period room tradition can be divided into two main categories that each have their own conventions.²¹ The first of these categories, the so-called ‘social historical’ period room, tends to contain a range of everyday items, with emphasis being placed on the nature of the decorative ensemble as a once lived-in reality. Within these displays, historical artefacts and modern artifice are combined not only to give the visitor an impression of what interiors looked like in the past but also to hint at the human narratives that once played out in these spaces. By contrast, ‘art historical’ period rooms are presented as exemplars of quality craftsmanship or good design. These interiors, Keeble argues, are generally ‘returned’ to the state in which they had first been installed and lack the signs of occupancy that are intrinsic to the ‘social historical’ period room.

²¹ Keeble, 2006, p. 3.

The period room tradition – an international context

Although period ambiances appeared in the homes of private collectors as early as 1700, it was not until the last three decades of the nineteenth century that European museums began to install the first period rooms. A seminal figure in the development the period room was Arter Hazelius (1833-1901), who was responsible for staging vignettes of local costume, objects and furnishings at the Nordiska Museet in Sweden as early as 1873.²² More recently, historian John Harris has argued that an equal, if not greater, role in the development of this strategy of display was played by the Dutch architect Pierre Cuypers, who was responsible for installing a number of seventeenth-century period rooms at the Historische Tendoostelling van Amsterdam in Holland in 1876 that were created partially out of panelling salvaged from old buildings.²³ Following on from these early examples, a fashion for chronological sequences of period rooms soon developed in the Netherlands, Switzerland and Germany.²⁴ When the Swiss National Museum in Zurich, Switzerland, was completed in 1898, for example, the museum contained over 13 ‘historical interiors’ of Swiss origin presented as part of a wider range of displays that celebrated the fine and decorative arts that the nation had produced between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries.²⁵

From the 1890s, the period room also began to be adopted as a strategy of display by museums in the United States of America. In 1895, Charles Presby Wilcomb installed a ‘colonial kitchen’ and a ‘bedroom’ at the Golden Gate Park

²² Pilgrim, 1978, p. 5.

²³ Harris, 2007, p. 3.

²⁴ Harris, 2007, p. 5.

²⁵ Pons, 1995, p. 107.

Museum in San Francisco.²⁶ Further rooms followed at the Essex Institute in Salem, Massachusetts, where a kitchen (1750), a bedroom (1800) and a parlour (1800) were installed by George Francis Dow in 1907.²⁷ Building on these humble beginnings, the tradition of the period room reached the peak of its popularity in the US in the 1920s. A key moment in the history of the period room came in 1924 when the Metropolitan Museum of Art (hereafter the Met) in New York opened the American Wing.²⁸ Used to display examples of American fine and decorative art, the new wing featured a chronological sequence of period rooms that charted the history of American design and ‘good taste’ between the seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries. This suite of rooms, which constituted the first large and systematic collection of period rooms to be installed in the US, had a major impact not only on the other galleries at the Met, where further period rooms and several period reconstructions were installed in the years that followed, but also on other American museums, including the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Brooklyn Museum, New York, which soon opened their own suites of period rooms.²⁹

By the 1950s, however, the period room tradition had come under scrutiny from museum professionals who began to question the validity of such displays within

²⁶ Edward N. Kaufman, ‘The Architectural Museum from World’s Fair to Restoration Village’, *Assemblage*, no. 9 (June 1989), p. 28. James Deetz, ‘A Sense of Another World: History Museums and Cultural Change’, in Bettina M. Carbonell, ed., *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2004, p. 377.

²⁷ Dow, 1922, p. 17.

²⁸ Gary Kulik, ‘Designing the Past: History-Museum Exhibitions from Peale to the Present’, in Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig, eds., *History Museums in the United States*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998, pp. 14-15.

²⁹ The Boston Museum opened its new decorative arts wing in 1928. The Brooklyn Museum opened a series of 19 American period rooms (ranging in date from the 1720s to the 1820s and arranged by region) a year later in 1929. See: Sally Anne Duncan, ‘From Period Rooms to Public Trust: The Authority Debate and Art Museum Leadership in America’, *Curator* 45, no. 2 (April 2002), p. 97. Pilgrim, 1978, p. 14.

the museum context. One of the recurring themes in the debates that surrounded the period room was the extent to which such exhibits could be regarded as 'authentic'. As the century progressed, other aspects of the display strategy came under fire, including their spatial requirements, their longevity, their static nature, and the extent to which historical accuracy could be achieved. Since the emergence of museum studies in the 1980s, the period room has also fitted into wider debates regarding the relative merits and disadvantages of realist display strategies, particularly in terms of the type of learning experience that they offer. Among the specific concerns that have been raised by scholars is the fact that such displays invite visitors to experience it as a 'first-hand' experience of, or direct encounter with, the geographical location or historical moment being recreated and as such implicitly invite the museum visitor to read the contents of the display as fact rather than a fiction based on the facts available.³⁰

Despite its fall from grace in the mid-to-late twentieth century, the period room remains in use as a strategy of display in museums around the world. Several high profile institutions in Europe and the US have recently reaffirmed their commitment to displaying period rooms. In the early 1990s the Geffrye Museum in London began the task of refurbishing its suite of period rooms, with the newly restored displays reopening in 2006.³¹ The Victoria and Albert Museum, also in London, has recently refurbished its English period rooms, with five rooms being re-installed and re-interpreted as part of the creation of the British

³⁰ Ludmilla Jordanova, 'Objects of Knowledge: A Historical Perspective on Museums' in Peter Vergo, ed., *The New Museology*, London: Reaktion Books, 1989, pp. 25-26. Michelle Henning, *Museums, Media and Cultural Theory*, England: Open University Press, 2006, p. 44. Griffiths, 2008, p. 4.

³¹ Bryant, 2009, p. 76.

Galleries, which opened in November 2001.³² Since 1990 similar developments have taken place in the US with the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, undertaking major renovation projects in connection with their period rooms.

This Thesis

As stated at the start of this introduction, the aim of this thesis is to chart the history of the period room in New Zealand, focusing primarily on the use of this strategy of display by museums in Dunedin, Christchurch, and Wellington. In looking at the history of the period room, the goal is not to promote the retention of existing period rooms or their future use. Rather, this thesis is underpinned by the belief that an understanding of the history of how things have been displayed in museums is essential to a critical and thoughtful use of display strategies in the future. By contributing to our understanding of how things were displayed in the past, it is hoped that this research will contribute to the collective understanding of current museum practice.

Taking the two period rooms that were created for the New Zealand Centennial Exhibition in 1939 as its starting point, Chapter 1 considers the role that centennials, jubilees and other milestones celebrated around New Zealand in the 1940s and 1950s played in the development of period rooms in this country, unpacking the factors that fuelled the popularity of this mode of display among

³² Bryant, 2009, pp. 75-76.

exhibition organisers and museum professionals. Building on chapter one, chapters two to four chart the history of the period room in the context of three metropolitan museums: the Otago Early Settlers Museum, the Canterbury Museum, and the Dominion Museum. Each of these chapters looks in more detail at the context in which period rooms were installed in each of these institutions as well as the attitudes that informed the changes that were made to the physical appearance of each display over time, the contexts in which they were shown, and how they were interpreted.

Like all research, the scope of this thesis was in many ways shaped by both the timeframe of the project and the availability of resources. After initial research revealed the extent to which the period room had been employed as a strategy of display in New Zealand, the decision was made to focus on the history of period rooms within a more specific context – the metropolitan museum. As a result, this thesis touches only briefly on the rich history of those period rooms that were created in the context of museums located outside the main centres or within the context of house museums and historic villages. The focus on the metropolitan museum, however, is in many ways a fitting starting point for future research in this field as initial research strongly indicates that these museums played a key role in disseminating this form of display in the local context.

Another criterion which has been used to focus my research concerns the content of the period rooms themselves. At its broadest, the term ‘period room’ can be used to refer to any exhibit that recreates or evokes a room representative of a

particular historical style or period within the context of a museum environment. Using such a definition, the history of period rooms in New Zealand would embrace a wide range of exhibits, with period interiors from a diverse range of contexts, including immigrant sailing ships, domestic residences, banks, shops, schools and even museum galleries, having been recreated or evoked in museums across New Zealand since the 1950s. Rather than attempting to cover such a diverse range of displays, this thesis focuses solely on period rooms that reconstitute or recreate a domestic interior, a category that is here understood to include both displays that represent a room from a residential dwelling and those that represent the private quarters aboard a sailing ship.

While the decision to focus solely on the representation of domestic interiors was in part driven by the rich history of domestic period rooms that was uncovered as my research progressed, it also takes its lead from the scholarship that has been produced in recent years in connection with the growing disciplines of interior architecture and interior design.³³ Addressing the nature of interior space from various perspectives, scholars have begun to address the ways in which people interact with domestic space and the role that it plays in the construction of identity. The ideological baggage that accompanies our understanding of domestic space, I would argue, plays an important role in shaping a museum visitor's encounter with representations of historical domestic interiors, such as period rooms. Regardless of how unfamiliar a period room may be in terms of its design, furnishing, level of technology, or the activities undertaken by its

³³ Examples of this type of literature include: Susan McKeller and Penny Sparke, eds., *Interior Design and Identity*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004. Mark Taylor and Julieanna Preston, eds., *Intimus: Interior Design Theory Reader*, Great Britain: Wiley Academy, 2006.

occupants, the concept of 'home' is familiar to the majority of visitors. As a result, such displays invite a particular type of interaction that other types of interiors do not, facilitating immediate comparisons between the homes with which we as viewers are familiar and the spaces on display.

Sources

While the history of the period room in New Zealand has received scant attention in the existing scholarship, numerous sources exist with which to chart the use of this strategy of display in the local context. The annual reports published by each of the metropolitan museums during the period under consideration proved a rich source of information regarding their activities, as did museum newsletters, commemorative publications, guide books, pamphlets, and promotional materials, which provided information regarding the appearance and content of individual displays, the context in which they were developed, and how their developers intended for them to be interpreted. Another pool of resources that proved invaluable to my research were local newspaper reports which, in addition to supplementing the information supplied by the official museum publications, also provided valuable insight into the public reception of individual displays and the contexts in which they were understood over time.

Further information still was yielded by the files of correspondence, planning documents, drawings, and inventories held by the metropolitan museums in their collections and archives. Installation photographs in particular have been an

essential source of information for this thesis, providing an invaluable record of what a display looked like at a particular moment in time. While these images can by no means be taken as simple reflections of reality, when combined with other sources they enable a richer and more complete picture of the displays to be formed, particularly those that no longer exist.³⁴

One of the major challenges that researchers face when dealing with the history of New Zealand museums is the extent to which individual museums have or have not preserved archival material relating to the development of their displays. In relation to period rooms, the amount of archival material held varies greatly between institutions. At one end of the spectrum, both Te Papa and the Canterbury Museum retain large and varied collections of material documenting their period rooms, while at the other, the Auckland Museum and the Otago Museum hold very little material regarding the development of such displays. Inevitable gaps in the historical record were also produced by the fact that many of the people who were involved in the production of period room displays in the 1950s and 1960s worked for their respective institutions in an honorary capacity, meaning that much of the documentation and correspondence that they produced did not enter the official archive.

Additional challenges were also posed by the redevelopment work that is currently being undertaken at the Otago Settlers Museum, which meant that

³⁴ As scholar Julia Noordegraaf has pointed out, installation photographs are selective accounts of reality that have their own conventions. Most installation photographs, for example, are in black and white and show the galleries without visitors. They also show only those parts of the display that fits the frame and were sometimes staged for photographing, with features such as lit candles or food being added to enhance the effect of the display. See: Julia Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display: Museum Presentation in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Visual Culture*, Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen and NAI Publishers, 2004, p. 20.

access to its archival records were severely limited. The major redevelopment of the National Library and the Alexander Turnbull Library also rendered some resources inaccessible as did the earthquakes in Christchurch, which closed the museum for several months following the February 2011 catastrophe.

A source that was not explored as part of my research was oral history. A small number of the museum professionals who worked on the installation of period rooms before 1980 are still alive at the time of writing. Their recollections of the development, installation and reception of these displays would no doubt enrich the information that has been assembled here from published and archival material. The same would be true of the museum professionals who were involved in the subsequent redevelopment and removal of many of the displays discussed in this thesis. It is hoped that the research presented here will lay the foundation for further exploration of this field in the future.

Chapter 1: The Centennial Exhibition and the emergence of a period room tradition in New Zealand

In 1940 New Zealand celebrated its national centennial, commemorating both the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi and the start of organised European settlement. New Zealand's commemoration of the centennial was a major event. Around the country large ceremonies, re-enactments and pageants were held, memorials were built, lists of early settlers were drawn up, and local histories were written. The unofficial centrepiece of the centennial year, however, was the New Zealand Centennial Exhibition held in Wellington between November 1939 and May 1940. This chapter looks at two innovative displays that were created for this event, the 'North Island Pioneer Hut (1840)' and the 'South Island Pioneer Room (1850-60)': two of the earliest, if not the first, period rooms to be created in New Zealand. Locating these two displays within the wider history of the collection and display of material associated with European settlement in New Zealand, this chapter considers the influential role that the national centennial and other local milestones played in the adoption of the period room as a strategy of display by local museums after 1940.

Opened to the public on 8 November 1939, the New Zealand Centennial Exhibition was the first and longest-running event on the centennial programme. Located in the Wellington suburb of Rongotai, the exhibition site featured around seven acres of displays as well as numerous other attractions. Like many of the events that were held in the centennial year, the exhibition was intended in

part as a tribute to the achievements of the pioneers, which were represented throughout the grounds via displays of historical material.³⁵ At the same time, however, the event was also a celebration of the material progress that New Zealand had achieved since 1840. Throughout the exhibition, modern methods of construction and lighting were in evidence, and modern goods and recent technological advancements proliferated among the displays. Within this context, the monuments and displays devoted to the pioneers did not simply serve to recall the past. As the historian Jock Phillips has observed, the combination of the old and the new made visible an evolutionary chain of progress from the past to the present, which highlighted the social, cultural and technological advancements made over the course of the nation's first 100 years as a member of the British Empire.³⁶

Celebrating the fact that New Zealand had been the first nation to grant women the vote, the Centennial Exhibition featured an entire court devoted solely to 'the story of women's work and its part in the national life of New Zealand.'³⁷

Located in the Tower Block, the Woman's Section was comprised of three display areas and a theatre in which a programme of lectures and demonstrations were held. Complementing the displays of goods produced by contemporary women that were located in the Women's Fine Arts and Crafts Section and the Country Women's Section, the Loans Section showcased antiques and other

³⁵ This aim was not only inscribed in the foundation stone of the exhibition buildings, which described the event as 'commemorating the dauntless courage of our pioneer men and women', but was given prominence within the grounds by two enormous sculptures by William Trethewey, one of a pioneer man and one of a pioneer woman, that were located on either side of the building's central tower. See: Jock Phillips, 'Afterword: Reading the 1940 Centennial' in William Renwick, ed., *Creating a National Spirit: Celebrating New Zealand's Centennial*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2004, p. 276.

³⁶ Phillips in Renwick, 2004, p. 277.

³⁷ *New Zealand Centennial Exhibition Official Catalogue: Wellington, 1939-1940*, Wellington: New Zealand Centennial Exhibition Company, 1939, p. 59.

‘articles of historic interest’, including historical documents, maps, pictures, textiles and a diverse range of ‘bygones’ from around New Zealand.³⁸ Divided into two parts, the Loans Section consisted of a ‘General Loans Section’, in which material was laid out in display cases, and a suite of two period rooms, the ‘North Island Pioneer Hut (1840)’ and the ‘South Island Pioneer Room (1850-60)’, which were designed to evoke the appearance of two very different nineteenth-century domestic interiors.

The idea that the exhibition should feature a section showcasing goods produced by, or of interest to, women was proposed by the Directors of the New Zealand Centennial Exhibition Company as early as June 1937.³⁹ By September that same year, a committee of 17 members had been established to oversee the organisation of the Women’s Section.⁴⁰ In the months that followed the Executive Committee chaired by Mrs Ailsa Craig Dalhousie Hislop (b.1896) came to be supported by a series of sub-committees that were put in place to direct the development of the individual areas of the exhibition and the various events that were to be held in connection with the displays. The Loans Section was organised under the auspices of a Wellington-based sub-committee chaired by the Vice President of the Executive Committee, Lady Roberts, with the assistance of branch committees in New Plymouth, Christchurch and Dunedin, and a Whanganui representative, which both oversaw the acquisition of loan

³⁸ ‘Historic Treasures On View: Loan Collection: Period Rooms in the Women’s Section’, *The Dominion*, 15 November 1939, p. 11. A catalogue of the items that were displayed in the two rooms was provided in the guidebook. See: *New Zealand Centennial Exhibition November 1939 – April 1940 Women’s Section Catalogue*, Wellington: National Magazines, 1939, p. 8-23. Hereafter *Women’s Section Catalogue*...

³⁹ New Zealand Centennial Exhibition Company Limited, Minutes of Special Meeting of Directors, 21 June 1937, ANZ: IA 1, 2005, 62/4, part 3.

⁴⁰ New Zealand Centennial Exhibition Company Limited, Minutes of Meeting of Directors, 6 September 1937, ANZ: IA 1, 2005, 62/4, part 3.

material in their respective regions and contributed to the development of the displays.

As few records regarding the development of the displays in the Women's Section survive, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly when and how period rooms came to feature among the displays in the Loans Section. The earliest reference to a period room in connection with the Women's Section appears in an article that was published in the *Evening Post* in early February 1939.⁴¹ Outlining the organisers' plans for the Women's Section, the article reported that 'a room such as might have been found in the early pioneer homesteads in this country' was to form the centrepiece of the South Island displays in the Loans Section. The origins of this exhibit, the article noted, could be traced back to the Christchurch-based branch of the Loans Committee, which had been responsible for proposing the use of this method of display. The idea had been enthusiastically received by the Dunedin-branch of the committee, which agreed to collaborate with the Cantabrians on the project.

Although the absence of archival records makes it impossible to know what influence individuals subsequently had on the design of the South Island Pioneer Room, it is likely that a substantial contribution was made to the project by Heathcote George Helmore (1899-1965), who sat on the Christchurch-based branch of the Loans Committee in the role of Honorary Architect.⁴² While

⁴¹ 'Pioneer Homestead for Centennial', *Evening Post*, 6 February 1939, p. 16.

⁴² **Heathcote George Helmore**, MBE, 1899-1965

Born in 1899, Helmore trained at the Canterbury School of Art in the early 1910s before travelling to England in 1920, where he spent time working as an architectural draughtsman in the office of the eminent English architect Sir Edwin Lutyens. Upon his return to New Zealand, he and fellow architect Guy Cotterill (1897-1981) established the firm Helmore & Cotterill in

decisions regarding the contents of the room are likely to have been collaborative in nature, both Helmore's professional experience and his subsequent contribution to the development of the period room in New Zealand suggest that he wielded considerable influence over the layout and interior finishes.

In contrast to the South Island Pioneer Room, the origins of the North Island Pioneer Hut remain ambiguous. In February 1939 when the plans for the Women's Court were announced in the *Evening Post*, it was intended that the South Island Pioneer Room would be the only exhibit of its type to feature among the displays.⁴³ While the North Island was also to be represented by a collection of articles associated with early European settlement in New Zealand, it was stated that the organisers had elected not to employ the same strategy of display as their South Island counterparts. Subsequent press reports offer little insight into the origins or subsequent development of the North Island Pioneer Hut, with the earliest known reference to the exhibit post-dating the start of construction.⁴⁴

Christchurch in 1924. The firm quickly established a reputation for designing private residences for an elite clientele by means of commissions such as the Georgian Revival mansion *Fernside*, which was built in the Wairarapa in 1924, and *Vogel House*, Lower Hutt, that was built in 1932.

Taking an active interest in the arts, Helmore sat on the Council of the Canterbury Society of Arts in various capacities between 1927 and 1962. From 1944, the architect also contributed substantially to the Canterbury Museum, first as an inaugural member of the Friends of the Canterbury Museum and later as a member of the Canterbury Museum Trust Board (CMTB), a position that he held between 1952 and his death in 1965. In addition to providing the museum with architectural advice, Helmore acted as the museum's Honorary Consultant in Period Furniture and worked with the museum to plan several temporary exhibitions involving its collections of decorative and applied arts and colonial history material.

See: Peter Shaw, (1991), *A History of New Zealand Architecture*, Auckland: Hodder Moa Beckett, 2003 (3rd edition), pp. 94-95, 120. John Stacpoole, *Colonial Architecture in New Zealand*, Wellington: Reed, 1976, pp. 94, 120. Roger Duff, 'Obituary: Heathcote George Helmore (1899-1965)', in Canterbury Museum, Annual Report for the Year 1965-1966, pp. 7-8.

⁴³ 'Pioneer Homestead for Centennial', *Evening Post*, 6 February 1939, p. 16.

⁴⁴ 'Women's Section: The Pioneer Hut', *Evening Post*, 13 October 1939, p. 9.

Although the origins of the North Island Pioneer Hut remain unclear, its design can be securely attributed to the Official Secretary of the Women's Section, Doreen Monica Walsh (1895-1970).⁴⁵ Although not a member of the Loans Committee, Walsh played a key role in the organisation of many of the displays in the Women's Section. Trained in journalism, Walsh was assisted in the process of developing the design of the Pioneer Hut by local architect W. Keith Cook.⁴⁶ While it remains unknown to what extent Cook influenced the final design of the display, it seems likely, given his professional background, that he was responsible for providing the working drawings that were used to guide its construction.

The process of installing the structure of the period rooms appears to have been well under way by early October 1939 when the first detailed descriptions of the displays appeared in the local press.⁴⁷ Constructed in the form of a box that visitors viewed through the absent fourth wall, the rooms were assembled using a combination of architectural salvages and modern materials. The bulk of the materials that were used in the construction of the North Island Pioneer Hut were sourced from *Trentham*, a large family homestead that had been built in the Hutt Valley during the early years of Wellington settlement, which was demolished in

⁴⁵ **Doreen Monica Walsh, 1895-1970**

Born in New Zealand in 1895, Walsh was trained in journalism and had a professional background in publicity and radio. Walsh's parents, James Austin Walsh and his wife Jane (née Towler), had emigrated to Auckland from England in the 1880s. Her brothers, Leo and Vivian Walsh, were noted engineers who played a key role in the development of both military and civil aviation in New Zealand in the early twentieth century. Walsh is known to have assisted her brothers in the construction of the first New Zealand-built aeroplane, the *Manurewa No 1*, for which she and her sister, Veronica, sewed hundreds of yards of material for the wings. See: 'Energy and Enterprise: Organising Ability of Miss Walsh', *The Weekly News*, 8 November 1939, p. 33. R.L. Williams, 'Walsh, Vivian Claude – Biography', from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 1 September 2010, URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/3w3/1>.

⁴⁶ The design of the Pioneer Hut is attributed to Walsh and Cook in the guide to the displays. See: *Women's Section Catalogue*, 1939, p. 12.

⁴⁷ 'Women's Section: The Pioneer Hut', *Evening Post*, 13 October 1939, p. 9.

1939.⁴⁸ These elements were supplemented with other materials, both historic and modern, that were sourced from as far north as Kerikeri in the Bay of Islands.

In contrast to the North Island Pioneer Hut, architectural salvages played only a minor role in the design of the South Island Pioneer Room. Constructed largely out of modern materials, the only architectural elements of the room that are known to have been salvaged from a historical building were its two casement windows. Located in the back wall of the display, these elements had originally formed part of a house that had been built on the banks of the Avon River in Christchurch for the physician and early photographer Dr. Alfred Charles Barker in the early 1850s.⁴⁹ Parts of the fireplace were also historical artefacts in their own right, with the steel fender and firearms having been brought to Dunedin by Mr John Sidey aboard the *Blundell* in 1848.⁵⁰

With the structural elements of the two displays in place, representatives of the respective branches of the Loans Committee subsequently began the task of furnishing the two spaces. In the North Island Pioneer Hut this process was carried out by Walsh with the assistance of the Chairwoman of the Wellington-

⁴⁸ *Trentham* was built for Richard Barton (1790-1866) and his family who were the first European settlers to live in the upper Hutt Valley. The homestead, which grew from humble beginnings as a slab whare to contain a total of 22 rooms, remained standing in the Upper Hutt suburb of Heretaunga until 1939 when the building was demolished to supply timber for the construction of administration buildings for the New Zealand Boy Scouts Centennial Jamboree. The outbreak of World War II, however, forced the event to be cancelled before construction of the new buildings could even begin. Some of the material, including slabs of adze-hewn timber and a cast-iron window, subsequently passed into the ownership of Mr E. Grant Taylor, who lent them for use in the construction of the Pioneer Hut. For information regarding the history of *Trentham* and its demolition see: Ashley J. Hawke (compiler), 'Scrapbook of material re demolition of Barton Homestead, Trentham Park for Scout Jamboree,' UHCA: 45.

⁴⁹ *Women's Section Catalogue*, 1939, p. 13.

⁵⁰ *Women's Section Catalogue*, 1939, p. 17.

based Loans Committee, Lady Roberts, and fellow committee member, Olive Rita Barron (b.1888). The furniture and other exhibits in the South Island Pioneer Room were arranged by the Chairwoman of the Christchurch-based branch of the Loans Committee, May Gertrude Moore, who travelled to Wellington in the last week of October to oversee the completion of the room.⁵¹

Unveiled to the public on 8 November 1939, the North Island Pioneer Hut and the South Island Pioneer Room formed one of the star attractions of the Women's Section. Located side-by-side within the Loans Section, the living conditions that each room represented were intended to be viewed in direct contrast to one another, with the narrative progressing from the Pioneer Hut to the Pioneer Room.⁵² Recreating the interior of a small single-room dwelling, the North Island Pioneer Hut was designed to illustrate the conditions under which the first settlers lived when they settled 'somewhere in the North Island' around 1840 (**Figs 1.1-3**).⁵³ Imitating methods of construction that were commonly used in the North Island during the early years of European settlement, the walls of the hut were framed with unshaped tree trunks and clad in vertically-laid slabs of native timber. Locally available materials were also used in the construction of the roof, which was thatched with raupo, and the chimney, which was built of local riverstones.⁵⁴ The modest interior also featured a single cast-iron window

⁵¹ Moore was the only member of the South Island committee that travelled to Wellington to supervise the installation of the displays. See: 'Personal Notes', *Evening Post*, 23 October 1939, p. 12. 'Exhibition Personalities: A Preview by Workers in the Woman's Section', *The Weekly News*, 8 November 1939, p. 18.

⁵² *Women's Section Catalogue*, 1939, p. 1.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Photographs that were taken of *Trentham* when it was demolished show that the house contained a stone chimney similar in design to that which appeared in the Pioneer Hut. It is possible that the chimney in the Pioneer Hut was modelled on this structure. See: Ashley J. Hawke (compiler), 'Scrapbook of material re demolition of Barton Homestead, Trentham Park for Scout Jamboree,' UHCA: 45.

and a door. Located in the rear wall of the display, both of these elements looked out onto a large mural showing an immigrant sailing vessel anchored in a harbour.⁵⁵ The floor, which was the only element of the display where historical building materials were simulated rather than recreated, was designed to evoke the appearance of compacted earth.

Representing a single-room dwelling, the North Island Pioneer Hut showcased a diverse range of furniture, including a colonial oven, a sea-chest, a tall boy, and an antique wooden cradle. All of the furniture was imported, with most of the pieces having arrived in New Zealand aboard immigrant ships in the 1840s. The room also contained an assortment of other household items, including a range of cooking utensils, a china tea set and a spinning wheel, as well as a small number of ornaments and pictures. Like the furniture, many of these objects were imported, with only a small number of items having been made locally.

Designed to represent an early Victorian parlour ‘in the home of a more prosperous family who have been able to gather the amenities of life about them’, the decoration and furnishing of the South Island Pioneer Room differed dramatically from that of its earlier counterpart (**Figs 1.4-5**).⁵⁶ While the Pioneer Hut represented a dwelling in which most household tasks and activities were undertaken within the same space, the Pioneer Room represented part of a larger timber dwelling in which the division of space enabled each of its rooms to serve

⁵⁵ The artist responsible for this mural was not recorded. While the official catalogue made no mention of the contents of the scene, it was described in the *Dominion* as representing a view of Port Nicholson (now Wellington harbour) from the Petone foreshore. See: ‘Historic Treasures On View: Loan Collection: Period Rooms in the Women’s Section’, *Dominion*, 15 November 1939, p. 11.

⁵⁶ *Women’s Section Catalogue*, 1939, p. 1.

a more specialised function. Reflecting the role that the parlour played as the public face of the household in the Victorian era, the South Island Pioneer Room was elaborately decorated. In addition to being hung with boldly patterned wallpaper, the walls of the display were fitted with large timber skirting boards, a scotia, moulded architraves, and a carved timber mantelpiece.

The higher standard of living that had been achieved by New Zealand's wealthier families by the 1850s was also indicated by the selection of furnishings that were displayed in the South Island Pioneer Room. Reflecting the function of the parlour as a site of leisure and entertainment, the furnishings in the Victorian parlour included musical instruments and games, as well as ample seating. A large Aubusson carpet covered much of the room's timber floor and chinz curtains framed each of the windows. The room also contained a profusion of smaller artefacts, including many that served a purely ornamental function. In keeping with the North Island Pioneer Hut much of this material was imported, with most of the pieces having arrived in New Zealand between 1840 and 1860.

Consistent with the aim of representing 'two periods in the early history of the Dominion', the period rooms were carefully stage-managed to create the illusion of encountering the past.⁵⁷ From the detail that was lavished on the architecture of the two spaces to the selection and arrangement of the furnishings, every aspect of the displays was designed to contribute to this effect. In order to heighten the impression that the visitor had interrupted the scene in mid-action, both of the rooms were occupied by mannequins dressed in period costume that

⁵⁷ *Women's Section Catalogue*, 1939, p. 1.

were posed in such a way as to suggest that they had been frozen in the midst of an activity.

Supplementing the displays themselves, information about the respective periods that the rooms represented was supplied in the form of a guide book. This guide also contained a detailed inventory of the contents of the rooms, with each entry corresponding to a number that was affixed to the individual items within the two displays. One aspect of the period rooms that was emphasized by the guidebook was the extent to which genuinely historical construction materials and furnishings had been used.⁵⁸ The importance that was placed on the provenance of each individual item was made explicit by the inventory, which identified their date of arrival in New Zealand and any association that they had with local personalities or historical events.

Echoing the official catalogue, ‘authenticity’ was a recurrent theme in the press that surrounded the two displays. Terms such as ‘authentic’ and ‘genuine’ frequently appeared in descriptions of the two rooms and the historical associations of individual items within them were often highlighted.⁵⁹ Another aspect of the period rooms to which the press frequently drew attention was the realistic atmosphere of the two displays. A reporter for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, for example, described the Pioneer Hut as being so realistic ‘that one would not be surprised if the woman sitting at the table called out to the laughing

⁵⁸ *Women’s Section Catalogue*, 1939, pp. 8-18.

⁵⁹ Examples include: ‘Women’s Section: Important Contribution to Centennial Exhibition: Record of 10 Years’, *Dominion*, 8 November 1939, p. 4. ‘Historic Treasures On View: Loan Collection: Period Rooms in the Women’s Section’, *Dominion*, 15 November 1939, p. 11. ‘Pioneer Homestead for Centennial’, *Evening Post*, 6 February 1939, p. 16.

child looking through the window, or rose to rock the baby sleeping beside her in the cradle.’⁶⁰

‘...the nucleus of permanent collections in which posterity would delight’

Like all displays of material, the North Island Pioneer Hut (1840) and the South Island Pioneer Room (1850-60) were products of the time in which they were created. When planning for the Women’s Section began in the late 1930s, material associated with the history of European settlement in New Zealand played only a minor role in the collections of most local museums. Few museums actively acquired material associated with the colonial period (1840-1907), and as a result the collections held by such institutions remained small in size. The state of museum-based collections was reflected in the contents of the two period rooms, which were furnished almost entirely with material derived from the homes of private lenders. Locating the Centennial Exhibition within its broader context, this chapter now turns to look at the history of museum-based ‘colonial history’ collections in New Zealand and the role that the 1940 Centennial and other local milestones played in fuelling the rapid growth of these collections in the 1940s and 1950s.

While a small amount of material associated with the history of European settlement in New Zealand entered museum collections before 1900, such artefacts were accorded little, if any, role within these institutions well into the

⁶⁰ ‘Glimpses of Pioneer Days... Turning Back the Clock at New Zealand Exhibition’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Women’s Supplement, 19 March 1940, p. 5.

twentieth century. As Australian scholar James Michael Gore has argued, this trait can in part be attributed to the nineteenth century origins of many of these institutions.⁶¹ The first major museum to be established in New Zealand was the Auckland Museum, which opened to the public in 1852. Other centres followed suit, with museums subsequently being established in Wellington (1865), Christchurch (1867), Dunedin (1868), Invercargill (1875) and Whanganui (1894). All of these institutions shared the common goal of advancing local knowledge about New Zealand's natural resources. As such, specimens and artefacts representative of the natural sciences constituted the core focus of their collecting activities in their early years.

Another key factor that Gore identifies as having contributed towards the relative absence of colonial history material from most New Zealand museums prior to 1950 was the general absence, or limited sense, of a national and historical consciousness that existed in New Zealand well into the twentieth century.⁶² Rather than looking to its own past to define itself, New Zealand as a nation instead fostered a sense of national identity that was based on being European (particularly British) and white. This identity, Gore argues, was perpetrated by museums in their display galleries where Māori taonga were displayed as ethnographic artefacts rather than as representative of the country's human history, and Pākehā historical collections remained largely absent from the displays altogether.⁶³ As long as the United Kingdom remained the nation's primary cultural reference point, museums had little incentive to devote their

⁶¹ James M. Gore, 'Representations of History and Nation in Museums in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand: The National Museum of Australia and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa', Doctor of Philosophy in History, University of Melbourne, 2002, p. 87.

⁶² Gore, 2002, p. 20.

⁶³ Gore, 2002, p. 82.

limited resources to the acquisition or display of material representative of New Zealand's social history.

Unsurprisingly then, the earliest efforts to preserve material associated with the colonial period did not occur within the walls of New Zealand's established museums. As the historian Gavin McLean has observed, an interest in the preservation of material associated with European settlement was demonstrated at a community level as early as the 1890s when significant local milestones, such as the 50th anniversary of the start of organised European settlement in 1840, promoted a more sustained re-examination of the local past.⁶⁴ Spurred on by these events, historical societies and Early Settlers Associations were founded in communities around New Zealand, including Dunedin (1898), Auckland (1899), Wellington (circa 1912) and Christchurch (1923). In addition to drawing attention to the history of their local area by means of written histories and commemorative events, these groups often took a specific interest in preserving the physical traces of the past, resulting in the formation of collections of material relating to local historical figures and events.

Founded in 1898 to commemorate the first 50 years of planned European settlement in Otago, the Otago Early Settlers Association (OESA) was one of the earliest organisations to actively collect and display material associated with the colonial period. Attempting to create a tangible record of the early history of the Otago province, the OESA acquired historical documents, photographs, books and other paper-based records that contained information about the settlement of

⁶⁴ Gavin McLean, 'Where Sheep May Not Safely Graze: A Brief History of New Zealand's Heritage Movement, 1890-2000', in Alexander Trapeznik, ed., *Common Ground? Heritage and Public Places in New Zealand*, Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2000, p. 27.

Otago, later expanding the scope of the collection to include artefacts that had historical links to that same period.⁶⁵ In September 1901 the OESA secured an office space in the Agricultural Building, Crawford Street, where it arranged its collection into displays for the first time. Open daily for public inspection between 9am and 12.30pm, these displays not only marked the beginnings of the Otago Early Settlers Museum (OESM), but are thought to have constituted New Zealand's first social history museum.⁶⁶

The first major imitator of the Otago Early Settlers Museum was the Old Colonists Museum (OCM), which opened in Auckland in March 1916. Founded by the Auckland City Council, the OCM was housed alongside the Public Library and Art Gallery in their shared Kitchener Street premises.⁶⁷ Laid out in two large upstairs rooms, the collection consisted primarily of historical documents, photographs, pictures, early maps, and artefacts associated with life in the Auckland Province in its early years. While the bulk of the collection was acquired by means of public donation, a number of historical documents, pictures, and other paper-based items were transferred to the new museum from the Library, the Art Gallery and the Auckland Museum, which had all previously collected material on a small scale.⁶⁸ The OCM subsequently remained the focal point of such collecting in Auckland until 1956, when the ever-increasing storage

⁶⁵ Seán G. Brosnahan, *To Fame Undying: The Otago Settlers Association and its Museum 1898-1998*, Dunedin: Otago Settlers Association, 1998, p. 21.

⁶⁶ McClean, 2000, p. 27.

⁶⁷ For further information about the establishment and subsequent history of the OCM see: 'Old Colonists' Museum', *Auckland Star*, 27 August 1915, p. 9. Wynne Colgan, *The Governor's Gift: the Auckland Public Library 1880-1980*, Auckland: Richards Publishing and Auckland City Council, 1980, pp. 86-87, 141-142. Brosnahan, 1998, pp. 33-34.

⁶⁸ The Auckland Museum agreed to transfer a total of 127 items to the OCM, including pictures, drawings, photographs, historical documents and sets of old newspapers. See: 'The Days that Were: Old Colonists' Museum', *Auckland Star*, 10 February 1916, p. 7. Auckland Institute and Museum, Annual Report for the Period 1915-1916, p. 8. Hereafter AMAR....

requirements of the adjacent Library and Art Gallery forced the museum to close.⁶⁹

It was also during the first two decades of the twentieth century that some of New Zealand's established museums began to take an interest in the colonial period. One of the first museums to actively acquire material representative of the history of colonial settlement in its region was the Canterbury Museum, where an 'Early Colonists collection' was established in 1909.⁷⁰ In 1916 the Dominion Museum in Wellington followed suit, establishing the National Historical Collection.⁷¹ Both projects, however, focused almost exclusively on the acquisition of paper-based records, and as a result few three-dimensional artefacts were accessioned. Both endeavours were also short-lived. In Canterbury, interest in the 'Early Colonists' collection' peaked around 1911 before falling away, while in Wellington, the National Historical Collection lasted little more than four years, with the bulk of the material being transferred to the Alexander Turnbull Library in 1920.⁷² Consequently, 'historical collections' played only a minor role in museum collections in the decades that followed, with the OCM and the OESM remaining the only major repositories of colonial artefacts well into the 1940s.⁷³

⁶⁹ Upon its closure the paper-based material was divided between the Library and the Art Gallery. The three-dimensional artefacts remained in storage until 1965 when they were donated to the Auckland Museum for use in Centennial Street, a replica streetscape representing early Auckland that was installed at the museum in 1967. See: AMAR, 1966, p. 10. AMAR, 1968, pp. 16-19.

⁷⁰ 'Early Canterbury,' *Star*, 23 July 1909, p. 4.

⁷¹ 'Old New Zealand Making Historical Collections', *Evening Post*, 17 May 1916, p. 3.

⁷² 'Old Canterbury Relics: Question of Housing', *Evening Post*, 6 June 1913, p. 3. Gore, 2002, p. 208.

⁷³ A record of the state of historical collections in local museums in the early 1930s is offered by a report on the museums and art galleries of Australia and New Zealand that was prepared by S.F. Markham and W.R.B. Oliver for the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Published in 1933, the report observed that a number of 'historical collections' containing pictures, maps and articles existed around the country, including the Otago University Museum (Hocken collection),

Reflecting the state of museum-based colonial history collections in New Zealand in 1939, the organisers of the Women's Section relied predominantly on private individuals to supply the artefacts that were required to furnish the North Island Pioneer Hut and the South Island Pioneer Room. In contrast to the ample support provided by private citizens, only four museums contributed material for use in the displays. Of these four institutions, the OESM made the most substantial contribution, providing a gentleman's umbrella, a parasol, some samplers, a slush lamp, a soda water bottle and a number of items of clothing for use in the South Island Pioneer Room.⁷⁴ A small number of artefacts were also supplied by the OCM and the Hawke's Bay Museum and Art Gallery, Napier, while the Canterbury Museum supplied three paper-based documents. The Dominion Museum, whose proximity to the event would have made it an economical source of material, made no contribution to the displays.

In the 1940s and 1950s attitudes towards permanent collections of historical material in New Zealand began to change. The impetus for this change was largely driven by the centennials, jubilees and milestones marked by communities around New Zealand between the late 1930s and 1950s, which generated a variety of events and projects, such as the identification of significant sites or re-enactments of local 'firsts'.⁷⁵ In raising awareness of the local past, McLean argues, these milestones contributed to a more widespread

Canterbury Museum, Wellington, New Plymouth (Skinner Collection) and Wanganui Museums. See: Sydney F. Markham, *A Report on the Museums and Art Galleries of Australia and New Zealand*, London: The Museums Association, 1933, p. 94.

⁷⁴ *Women's Section Catalogue*, 1939, pp. 17-18.

⁷⁵ Local centennials of European settlement, for example, were marked by New Plymouth (1941), Nelson (1942), Dunedin (1948), Christchurch (1950), Greytown (1954), and Invercargill (1956).

understanding of the nation's past as being unique and not merely a continuation of that of Britain.⁷⁶ That is not to say that Britain suddenly ceased to play a role in defining New Zealand's national identity. On the contrary, the 'mother country' continued to play a large part in the definition of New Zealand nationalism for many years after the 1940 Centennial which, as the historian Jock Phillips has observed, signified 'not just the signing of the treaty with Maori, nor a century of settlement and government, but also a hundred years of membership in the British Empire.'⁷⁷

The 'discovery' that New Zealand had a history of its own was accompanied by a greater awareness of the physical traces of that past and an interest in their preservation. At the time of the 1940 Centennial, the National Centennial Committee requested that its regional committees compile lists of historic places, objects and sites in their districts. Calls were also made for local communities to host exhibitions of historical material. In a memo that was distributed in July 1939 to the provincial committees responsible for organising events in connection with the centenary celebrations, the link between this undertaking and the establishment of permanent collections was made explicit. As the memo states:

It is known that in many countries overseas there are permanent collections, which are on display in cottages or houses of the period when the furniture, etc., was in use. One can well imagine the interest that would be taken by the younger folk in the inspection of out-of-date furniture, medical instruments, costumes, tools and implements which were used by their ancestors, and of early pictures, documents, etc.... The articles to be displayed would be those of common use, the ideal

⁷⁶ McLean, 2000, p. 30.

⁷⁷ Phillips in Renwick, 2004, p. 281.

collection being those which would represent exhibits of historic interest and the worldly possessions of a pioneer family in the Province or town where they lived. One doubts whether a complete collection could be got together at this date, but at any rate the effort entailed would assuredly be worth while, and with later discoveries, might conceivably form the nucleus of permanent collections in which posterity would delight.⁷⁸

While the 1940 Centennial failed to generate many exhibitions of the type that was envisioned by the Department of Internal Affairs in 1939, it foreshadowed both the establishment of New Zealand's first house museums and the prominent role that exhibitions of historical material came to play in the programmes of events that were organised to mark the local milestones celebrated by various communities around the country in the decades that followed.

Forming one of the highlights of the centennial programme, the New Zealand Centennial Exhibition generated its own calls for the establishment of permanent collections of colonial history material. As early as March 1940, the *Evening Post* received an anonymous letter to the Editor that called for the North Island Pioneer Hut to be preserved for posterity.⁷⁹ Further letters followed, including one that not only advocated the preservation of 'those articles closely associated with the homes and lives of the peoples of earlier generations' but suggested that this project could be expanded 'bearing in mind that the commonplace articles of today are the historical relics of tomorrow.'⁸⁰ Although appeals were made in the press for the Dominion Museum to accession the Pioneer Hut, no action was

⁷⁸ Wellington Provincial Council, 'New Zealand Centennial Organisation, Circular', No. 3, 6 July 1939, LHCC: 'Lower Hutt Borough Council Town Clerk's Department Correspondence, Centennial Exhibition 1930-1941', Arch 77914.

⁷⁹ New Zealander, 'The Pioneer Hut', *Evening Post*, 1 March 1940, p. 6.

⁸⁰ Another New Zealander, 'The Pioneer Hut', *Evening Post*, 9 March 1940, p. 12.

taken.⁸¹ Following the closure of the Centennial Exhibition in May 1940, the structure of the Pioneer Hut was instead re-erected in Jubilee Park, a section of around 13 acres of natural bush in the Lower Hutt suburb of Normandale, and furnished with ‘antiques from early New Zealand’ under the leadership of the Chairwoman of the Women’s Section, Lady Roberts, and the Wellington Early Settlers Association.⁸²

In addition to fuelling the creation of a more permanent memorial to the homes of early settlers, the Loans Section also provided a model for the exhibitions of historical material that were held in connection with other local milestones. Like the Loans Section, the majority of these exhibitions were both loan-based and temporary, with the majority of material being sourced from private homes. Despite their transitory nature, however, these exhibitions played an important role in fostering the development of permanent museum-based collections in their respective regions. In particular, the large attendances that such exhibitions attracted and the positive reception that they received in the press helped to demonstrate to local museums that a strong interest in New Zealand’s ‘colonial history’ existed within their community, which in turn encouraged the creation of more permanent collections and displays.

⁸¹ See: B.B., ‘The Pioneer Hut’, *Evening Post*, 13 March 1940, p. 10. New Zealander, ‘The Pioneer Hut’, *Evening Post*, 28 March 1940, p. 8.

⁸² Located in a natural bush setting near the lake, the Pioneer Hut was rebuilt complete with a stone chimney, its original colonial oven, and a new fourth wall. While the Pioneer Hut remained in place for many years, it is unclear how long it remained furnished. A short history of Jubilee Park that was written in November 1971 described the building as ‘the remaining half of a pioneer hut’ and noted that vandalism had necessitated that the original thatched roof be replaced with more permanent material. The Pioneer Hut was eventually demolished, leaving just the stone chimney. See: ‘The Last Look: Exhibition Today’, *Evening Post*, 4 May 1940, p. 13. ‘Jubilee Park Fernery Built: Workmen Commended: Gift of Pioneer Hut by Lady Roberts’, *Evening Post*, 20 July 1940, p. 13. ‘Jubilee Park: Official Opening: Delightful Fernery’, *Evening Post*, 1 February 1941, p. 12. C.J., ‘History of Jubilee Park Scenic Reserve’, 20 November 1971, HCL: ‘Parks and Reserves – Jubilee Park’, 13228 A10. Hutt City Council, *Percy Scenic Reserve and Jubilee Park Draft Management Plan*, Lower Hutt: Hutt City Council, March 2009, pp. 51–52.

‘...education through the sense of sight’: the rise of the period room after 1940

In contrast to the document-rich collections that had been formed by New Zealand museums in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the collections that were put together in the wake of local centennials, jubilees and other milestones were dominated by artefacts associated with the pioneers and early settlers. The cult of the ‘pioneer relic’ and the ‘settler relic’ that emerged over the course of the 1940s and 1950s posed new challenges in terms of display. The following section looks more closely at the display of historical material in New Zealand prior to 1940 and the role that reconstructions would play in the display of this material in the wake of the New Zealand Centennial Exhibition.

Echoing the role that international fairs and expositions had played in the development and dissemination of new techniques of display abroad, the Centennial Exhibition acted as a testing ground for the widespread application of the latest display strategies and techniques. Drawing on skill sets that had begun to be fostered within the museum sector in the late 1930s, the exhibition featured a number of large-scale reconstructions, including a scale-model of New Zealand that occupied around 64,000 square feet and a life-size representation of Waitomo Caves complete with carefully modelled stalagmites and stalactites, a subterranean river, glow-worms and atmospheric effects.⁸³

⁸³ ‘Dominion Court: Model of New Zealand as Big as a Football Field’, *Dominion*, 14 November 1939, p. 20.

Seen by around 2.6 million people over the course of the six months that it was open, the Centennial Exhibition had a major impact on the exhibitions that were held to mark local milestones in the years that followed. As many of these exhibitions centred on showing artefacts associated with early settlers, period rooms were commonly featured among the displays. One of the earliest exhibitions known to have featured period rooms was the Nelson Pioneer Exhibition, an exhibition of colonial artefacts that was held at the historic Bishop's Schoolroom in Nelson in 1947, in which an array of domestic artefacts was arranged into four bays to evoke room settings.⁸⁴ In the years that followed further period rooms were created in connection with a number of local centennials, including those in Dunedin (1948), Christchurch (1950), Invercargill (1956), and Hawke's Bay (1958).

While many of the displays that were created for these events were in place for only a short period, local milestones also provided the catalyst for the installation of the first permanent period room displays within the context of a New Zealand museum. In 1948 Otago celebrated the first 100 years of planned European settlement in the region. A key event on the centennial programme was a large-scale historical exhibition staged in Dunedin at the OESM in 1948. Laid out in a series of colourful tableaux, the Otago Centennial Exhibition featured a suite of three period rooms that were designed to represent the interior of a domestic dwelling in the region around 1860. Furnished with material from the museum's collection, the rooms were retained following the closure of the exhibition in June 1948, becoming the first permanent period room displays in New Zealand.

⁸⁴ *Nelson Historical Exhibition, 1858-1958: A Display of Relics Commemorating Nelson's 100 Years as a City*, Nelson: Nelson Centennial Historical Exhibition Committee, 1958, p. 48.

Two years later, the centenary of the Canterbury Province provided the catalyst for the installation of the first period rooms at the Canterbury Museum in Christchurch. Opened on 24 August 1950, the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition featured a suite of eight period rooms furnished predominantly with material lent by local families. Following the closure of the exhibition, three of these rooms were retained as part of the museum's displays until 1955 when the museum building was closed to undergo extensive redevelopment. Building on the success of the centennial exhibition, the museum subsequently installed an entirely new suite of permanent displays devoted to the 'Early Colonists' theme, including a suite of six period rooms that opened in 1959.

In the two decades that followed, museums in New Zealand's other metropolitan centres installed permanent period room displays. At the same time that the Canterbury Museum was planning its suite of colonial period rooms, the Dominion Museum was engaged in planning a pair of rooms to house a collection of English furniture that it had received from the estate of local collector Ella Grace Elgar in 1946. Opened in 1951, these rooms were the first period rooms to be created in New Zealand that were representative of a history of design rather than of colonial settlement. In the late 1950s the Otago Museum began to discuss the installation of period rooms in connection with their own collection of decorative and applied arts, culminating in 1961 with the opening of a period room representing an eighteenth-century dining room.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Planning for the dining room display had begun in 1955 when the Friends of the Otago Museum launched a project to acquire English furniture for the museum's collection. Located in the Lower Hocken Wing, the exhibit formed part of a new suite of displays devoted to the decorative arts that opened in December 1961. See: Association of Friends of the Museum,

Following the model offered by the Canterbury Museum, both the Auckland Museum and the Dominion Museum later installed galleries devoted to the theme of early European settlement. Created in collaboration with local department store Milne & Choyce, Centennial Street opened at the Auckland Museum in 1967.⁸⁶ The new suite of displays, which took the form of a reconstructed nineteenth-century streetscape, included a weatherboard cottage containing two period rooms.⁸⁷ A similar approach was taken at the Dominion Museum, where a three-roomed weatherboard cottage was reconstructed as part of the installation of the Colonial History Gallery between 1967 and 1969.

It was not only the metropolitan museums that embraced the period room as a strategy of display after 1950. One of the first regional museums to employ period rooms for the display of colonial artefacts was the Southland Museum in Invercargill, which installed rooms representing the kitchen, parlour and bedroom of a pioneer cottage in its Pioneer Hall around 1956.⁸⁸ In the 1960s and 1970s similar displays were installed in museums across the country, including the Rotorua Museum and the Wanganui Public Museum, which installed

Annual Report for the Year 1955-1956, p. 1. Otago Museum, Annual Report for the Year 1961-1962, p. 23.

⁸⁶ The idea for Centennial Street was proposed to the museum authorities in 1965 by the Directors of the local department store Milne & Choyce. Financed by the firm, the displays were initially displayed for six months at Milne & Choyce's Queens Street store before being relocated to the Auckland Museum in 1967 for permanent display. AMAR, 1967, p. 14, 26-28. AMAR, 1968, pp. 16-19.

⁸⁷ It is interesting to note that the Centennial Street cottage differed from the period room displays created by the other metropolitan museums in that the interiors were produced at a reduced scale. Rather than recreate the layout of a typical cottage of the period, the interior of the building was simply divided along its central axis to produce two rooms of roughly the same size. The room on the left represented a drawing room, while the room on the right was furnished as a bedroom. A small area was also set aside immediately inside the front door for a small viewing area, although this remained off-limits to the public whilst the Cottage was on show at Milne and Choyce.

⁸⁸ 'Pioneer Cottage Mirrors the Life of an Early Southlander', *Southland Daily News*, 9 October 1956, p. 3.

‘colonial cottage’ displays in the late 1960s and the early 1970s respectively.⁸⁹

The number of period rooms that could be found in New Zealand museums by the mid 1970s is indicated by comments made by the American travel writer John McDermott in 1976, who noted in his guide to New Zealand that ‘reproducing colonial cottages seems to be a patriotic duty of New Zealand museums.’⁹⁰

The popularity that period rooms enjoyed within the context of local museums from the late 1940s reflected wider changes that had begun to occur in the museum sector towards the end of the previous decade. While public education had been a core function of local museums since the foundation of the first collections in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, renewed emphasis was placed on this role following the inauguration of the Schools Service in 1938, a programme which sought to forge closer links between museums and their local schools.⁹¹ Funded by the Carnegie Corporation, New York, the scheme resulted in the appointment of full-time education officers at the four major metropolitan museums (Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin) and the instigation

⁸⁹ Installed in 1968 in preparation for the opening of the museum the following year, the ‘colonial cottage’ at the Rotorua Museum consisted of a yard, a shed, a kitchen and a bedroom ‘typical of those of the early days of New Zealand settlement.’ See: ‘Rotorua Museum Colonial Cottage’, *Rotorua Post*, 29 March 1974, p. 3. Letter to Edna Stephenson from P.W. Verrall, 7 November 1968, AM: ‘Misc A-Z, Centennial Street’, MA 2004/6.

The first mention of the Colonial Cottage at the Wanganui Public Museum appears in the Annual Report of 1971. The exhibit, which represented a cottage ‘typical’ of those occupied by rural settlers circa 1860, consisted of a bedroom, a living room and a tool shed. See: Wanganui Public Museum, Annual Report for the Year 1970-1971, p. 6. Donald W. Cimino, *Guide to the Exhibits: The Wanganui Regional Museum, Maria Place, Wanganui, New Zealand*. Whanganui: Board of Trustees, Wanganui Regional Museum, 1984, p. 20-23.

⁹⁰ John W. McDermott, *How to Get Lost and Found in New Zealand*, Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1976, p. 121.

⁹¹ The Schools Service was inaugurated in February 1938 and was carried on by the Museums Trust until March 1941. From April 1941 the scheme became a regular part of the education system in New Zealand, with responsibility for it passing to the Education Department. See: Henry C. McQueen, *Education in New Zealand Museums: An Account of Experiments Assisted by the Carnegie Corporation of New York*, Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1942, pp. 7-9.

of a programme of regular class visits for school-aged children. Bringing the needs of the child learner to the fore, the Schools Service encouraged museums to reassess the manner in which they displayed their collections. Specifically, the programme gave momentum to the installation of displays that were capable of reconciling clear, easily understood messages with visual appeal. One form of display that came to be seen as a powerful tool for achieving these aims was the reconstruction, with habitat diorama, diorama and period environments all being adopted by the metropolitan museums on a widespread scale from the late 1940s.

Against this backdrop, period rooms offered a practical solution to the problem of displaying newly acquired collections of colonial history material, which were both object-rich and incredibly diverse in scope. Making use of the spatial codes that underpin the layout of the traditional New Zealand home, the period room enabled a large number of artefacts to be displayed while at the same time locating them within a system that was immediately comprehensible to a non-specialist audience. This system, which conveyed information through the use of visual connections, was particularly useful in instances where the type of artefact being shown was no longer in use. The basic function of a colonial oven, for example, was indicated not only by placing it within a kitchen setting, but also by placing it in proximity with more familiar artefacts, such as pots and pans, which helped to establish a visual link between it and the task of preparing food.

Chapter 2: Otago Early Settlers Museum

In 1948 Otago celebrated the first 100 years of planned European settlement in the region. A key event on the centennial programme was a large-scale historical exhibition that was held in Dunedin at the Otago Early Settlers Museum (OESM) between 23 February and 12 June 1948. The Otago Centennial Exhibition, which supplemented the museum's existing displays, traced the history of European settlement in Otago from the time of first contact between local Māori and Europeans to the 1940s. A prominent feature of the exhibition was the Pioneer Cottage, a suite of three period rooms that were designed to represent the interior of a domestic dwelling in the region around 1860. Following the closure of the exhibition in June 1948, the Pioneer Cottage was retained as part of the museum's permanent displays and subsequently remained in place for over four decades. This chapter traces the physical history of this display from its inception to its removal, and reflects on the evolving attitudes towards the display of 'colonial history', education in museums, and conservation to which it responded over time.

In March 1898 Otago commemorated the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the first immigration ship, the *John Wickliffe*, at Port Chalmers on 23 March 1848. During the celebrations, a public meeting was held in Dunedin to discuss the idea of establishing a local branch of the New Zealand Natives Association (NZNA). The idea of joining the NZNA, however, was soon abandoned, with the group instead electing to form an entirely new organisation, the Otago Early Settlers

Association (OESA), where membership was made up of those early settlers who had arrived in Dunedin prior to 31 December 1861 and their descendants over 21 years.⁹²

In its early years a key role of the OESA was to organise events at which its members could gather and reminisce about the past. At the same time, the Association also set about creating a more tangible record of the early history of the Otago province. In addition to recording anecdotes and reminiscences about the past, the organisation's newly appointed Executive Committee also began to actively acquire a range of historical documents that contained information about early European settlement in the region.⁹³ While paper-based documents, such as manuscripts, photographs, books, newspapers and maps, remained the sole focus of the Association's collecting activities in its early years, it was not long before the scope of the collection was expanded to encompass artefacts, beginning with Captain William Cargill's Kilmarnock bonnet, which entered the collection in July 1902.⁹⁴ Numerous other artefacts soon followed, including a table made by local craftsman John Hill in 1948.

In September 1901 the Association secured an office space in the Agricultural Building on Crawford Street.⁹⁵ In addition to providing the organisation with a venue in which to host its meetings, the space also provided the OESA with the opportunity to arrange its collection into displays for the first time. Open daily

⁹² Membership to the new organisation was initially open only to male descendants, but within a year was opened up to include female descendants over 21 years. See: Seán G. Brosnahan, *To Fame Undying: The Otago Settlers Association and its Museum 1898-1998*, Dunedin: Otago Settlers Association, 1998, pp. 6-9.

⁹³ Brosnahan, 1998, pp. 9, 20.

⁹⁴ Brosnahan, 1998, p. 21.

⁹⁵ Brosnahan, 1998, p. 20.

for public inspection between 9am and 12.30pm, these displays marked the beginnings of what would later become known as the Otago Early Settlers Museum. When the lease expired 12 months later, the OESA relocated to an office in the nearby Stock Exchange Building.⁹⁶ Following the move at least part of the collection was again organised into displays, with the same opening hours being maintained.

From these humble beginnings, the OESM grew significantly in the two decades that followed. In 1905 the OESA and the Trustees of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery successfully petitioned the New Zealand Government to supply a piece of surplus railway land on which the two organisations could construct their respective premises.⁹⁷ Officially opened on 23 March 1908 to coincide with the 60th anniversary of the arrival of the *John Wickliffe* in Port Chalmers, the OESA's new building featured two purpose-built gallery spaces in which to display its growing collection.⁹⁸ By 1919, the growth of the collection had been such that a new gallery, the Donald Reid Memorial Wing, was erected at the north end of the complex, opening in November 1922.⁹⁹ In the late 1920s, the floor area of the museum grew once again when the neighbouring building came up for sale following the relocation of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery to new premises in Logan Park.¹⁰⁰ This purchase not only provided the OESA with a second hall in which to host events but effectively doubled the size of the

⁹⁶ Brosnahan, 1998, p. 27.

⁹⁷ Brosnahan, 1998, p. 23.

⁹⁸ Brosnahan, 1998, pp. 25-26.

⁹⁹ The idea for this wing had been mooted as early as 1914 but had been put on hold due to the outbreak of World War I. Brosnahan, 1998, p. 34.

¹⁰⁰ Brosnahan, 1998, pp. 44-45.

museum, allowing for a comprehensive re-organisation of the displays across four rooms.

While modifications were repeatedly made to the layout of the collection during the 1910s and 1920s, the strategies of display that were employed changed very little over the course of this same period. Between 1908 and the late 1940s, the walls in each of the galleries were hung with row upon row of paintings and photographs of the province's early settlers. Although the ongoing growth of the collection made it difficult to maintain a clear taxonomic system, many of these portraits were arranged in chronological order based on the date of arrival of the ship aboard which the sitter had immigrated.¹⁰¹ Against the backdrop of these illustrated passenger lists, further paintings and photographs were accommodated on free-standing screens while furniture, machinery and other large collection items were displayed in rows alongside a variety of tightly packed display cabinets.

Otago Centennial Exhibition, 1948

In 1948 Otago celebrated the first 100 years of planned European settlement in the region. As part of the programme of events that was held to mark this significant milestone, the Association hosted a large-scale temporary exhibition in connection with the OESM. Opened on 23 February 1948, the Otago Centennial Exhibition represented a dramatic break from the strategies of display

¹⁰¹ Brosnahan, 1998, p. 36.

that had historically been used by the Association to present its collection. Mounted in two large halls at the rear of the museum building, the exhibition showcased historical artefacts against the backdrop of a series of large, colourful tableaux that were designed to bring the history of the province vividly to life. Complementing these displays, the exhibition also featured a suite of three period rooms that were designed to represent the interior of a domestic dwelling in the region around 1860.

Following the organisational model offered by the New Zealand Centennial Exhibition of 1939, the official programme of events held in connection with the centenary of the Otago province was co-ordinated by the Otago Centennial Association (OCA), a committee made up of representatives from the Dunedin City Council and several other local organisations.¹⁰² In August 1945 representatives of this organisation met with the Executive Committee of the OESA to discuss their provisional plans for the centennial celebrations.¹⁰³ Around September the following year the OCA formally approached the OESA with a request that their contribution to the official centennial programme take the form of an exhibition of historical material. The idea was put to the Executive Committee, which resolved that a sub-committee should be formed to investigate the idea further.¹⁰⁴

As part of the process of assessing the feasibility of the project, the Association approached the OCA's Honorary Architect, Henry McDowell-Smith (1888?-

¹⁰² *Otago Centennial 1848-1948: Official Souvenir Programme*, Dunedin: Otago Centennial Association, 1948, p. i.

¹⁰³ Minutes, Executive Committee meeting, 14 August 1945, OSM: Otago Early Settlers Association Minute Book, May 1941 – May 1950. Hereafter Minute Book, 1941-1950.

¹⁰⁴ Minutes, Executive Committee meeting, 3 September 1946, OSM: Minute Book, 1941-1950.

1965), to produce a draft layout of the exhibition. Presented to the newly appointed Exhibition Sub-Committee on 13 November 1946, these plans received a positive reception.¹⁰⁵ A model and rough plans of the exhibition layout were consequently shown to the Executive Committee the following month.¹⁰⁶ The committee was so impressed by the architect's preliminary designs that they agreed not only to go ahead with the exhibition, but also to explore the possibility of retaining the displays as a permanent feature of the museum. In March 1947 the Executive Committee voted unanimously in favour of the idea, resolving that the exhibition would be carried out in 'a permanent manner' with the intention that the halls would be used in future for the purpose of 'displaying our exhibits to better advantage.'¹⁰⁷

As none of the plans that McDowell-Smith produced in relation to the exhibition appear to have survived, it is difficult to ascertain when period rooms came to feature as part of the exhibition layout. The earliest known reference to the use of this strategy of display dates to January 1947 when the Exhibition Sub-Committee discussed the idea of modifying two small rooms off the Pioneer Hall to house 'a cottage of 3 rooms.'¹⁰⁸ Further details about the display were released two months later when the *Otago Daily Times* reported that the exhibition was to feature 'three rooms of an early settler's home furnished in the fashion of the period.'¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Minutes, Exhibition Sub-Committee meeting, 13 November 1946, OSM: Minute Book, 1941-1950.

¹⁰⁶ Minutes, Executive Committee meeting, 3 December 1946, OSM: Minute Book, 1941-1950.

¹⁰⁷ Minutes and Report, Executive and Sub-Committee meeting, 4 March 1947, OSM: Minute Book, 1941-1950.

¹⁰⁸ Minutes, Exhibition Sub-Committee meeting, 30 January 1947, OSM: Minute Book, 1941-1950.

¹⁰⁹ 'A Retrospect: Early Settlers' Museum: Centennial Plans', *Otago Daily Times*, 1 March 1947, p. 6.

A possible catalyst for the inclusion of period rooms in the Otago Centennial Exhibition was a project that had been launched by the OESA in September 1945 at the suggestion of Crosby Morris, a long-serving member of the Executive Committee. At a meeting that was held that month, Morris reported that he had been approached with the suggestion that ‘we might have in our Museum rooms furnished as typical early day homes.’¹¹⁰ Throwing his support behind the venture, Morris recommended that the Association begin to acquire the furnishings necessary to create such rooms. The matter was referred to the Museum Committee, which decided unanimously in favour of the proposal, resolving in March 1946 that the President of the Association should be encouraged to launch an appeal for donations of ‘early day furniture’ at the Anniversary Functions that were to be held later that month.¹¹¹ While it is not possible to state with any certainty that these plans fed directly into the design of the Otago Centennial Exhibition, it is likely that they helped to secure a place for period rooms within the exhibition layout at an early stage of its development.

At the end of August 1947, the Early Settlers Hall and the Pioneer Hall were closed to the public to enable work to begin on the task of installing the exhibits.¹¹² Consisting of a painted façade and three rooms, the Pioneer Cottage was installed by members of the OESA in collaboration with a team of contractors, including commercial artists Colin Wheeler and John W. Brock, who were responsible for painting all of the large-scale murals that featured in the exhibition. Photographs of the interior of the cottage that were published in the

¹¹⁰ Minutes, Executive Committee meeting, 11 September 1945, OSM: Minute Book, 1941-1950.

¹¹¹ Minutes, Museum Committee meeting, 5 March 1946, OSM: Minute Book, 1941-1950.

¹¹² Minutes, Executive Committee meeting, 18 July 1947, OSM: Minute Book, 1941-1950.

Otago Daily Times on 19 February 1948 show that both the Parlour and Kitchen were largely complete by this time (**figs 2.1-2**).¹¹³ Among the ‘finishing touches’ that were yet to be added were the wire screens, which were installed across the front of the two rooms in the days that followed.

Opened on 23 February 1948, the Otago Centennial Exhibition was designed to take visitors on a journey through the history of European settlement in the Otago region (**fig 2.3**). Consisting of a chronological sequence of reconstructed environments, the exhibition commenced at the south end of the Pioneer Hall with a pair of tableaux representing a whare-runanga and a whaling station scene that were designed to evoke life in the Otago region prior to the start of organised settlement.¹¹⁴ Continuing along the east wall of the gallery, the exhibition continued with a diorama of the first immigration ships, the *John Wickliffe* and the *Phillip Laing*, entering Otago Harbour in 1948, followed by a pit-saw scene, the Pioneer Cottage, and a display of gold mining equipment that was set against the backdrop of a mural depicting Gabriel’s Gully at the height of the gold-rush in 1861. The sequence of displays continued in the adjacent Early Settlers Hall, where vehicles and farming equipment were staged in connection with a series of murals representing rural Otago landscapes. Completing the historical narrative, a model of Dunedin in 1940 and aerial views of the province were also displayed in this hall.

¹¹³ ‘Display at Otago Early Settlers’ Museum of Historical Scenes’, *Otago Daily Times*, 19 February 1948, p. 3.

¹¹⁴ For detailed descriptions of the exhibition layout see: ‘Early Settlers Display Depicts Life During Pioneer Years’, *Evening Star*, 23 February 1948, DPL: Clipping Book, Otago Early Settlers Association, Z993.81 OTA. ‘Vivid Glimpses of the Past’, *Otago Daily Times*, 24 February 1948, p. 4.

Located at the south end of the Pioneer Hall, the exterior of the Pioneer Cottage formed part of one of the large murals that Wheeler and Brock painted onto the walls of the gallery. Designed to represent a domestic dwelling in the region around 1860, the mural depicted a small stone cottage with a thatched roof and a brick chimney located against the backdrop of a man-made bush clearing (**fig 2.4**). Attempting to create the illusion that the scene formed a continuation of the space occupied by the visitor, perspective was used to create the illusion of three-dimensionality when the display was approached from the south end of the gallery. While the front façade of the cottage was aligned with the gallery wall, the building was rendered so that the south façade was visible. Perspective was also applied to the thatched roof, which diminished in height as it approached the north end of the gallery, and to the sash window at the centre of the façade. In order to enhance the illusion, three-dimensional elements were also integrated into the scene, including a saddle and a harness, which were affixed to the front wall.

Entered and exited by means of real doors that were located at either end of the exhibit's painted façade, the interior of the Pioneer Cottage consisted of a suite of three period rooms that were viewed from a corridor that ran the width of the display. Furnished as a bedroom, a parlour and a kitchen respectively, each of these rooms was designed to provide a detailed architectural backdrop against which to understand the collection items that they were used to display (**figs 2.5-7**). In terms of its layout, the Pioneer Cottage attempted to recreate the floor plan of an early stone cottage. The need to accommodate a storage area immediately behind the display, however, meant that concessions had to be made in both the

Bedroom and the Kitchen, where the traditional rectangular floor plan was sacrificed in order to maximise the depth of the displays without cutting off access to the space behind.

Practical considerations also impacted on the design of the cottage in other ways. As a result of both the Association's modest display budget and the type of building that the Pioneer Cottage was designed to represent, very few historically appropriate building materials were used in the construction of the display. In place of using real sash windows, for example, the windows in the Pioneer Cottage were created by recessing sash bars into the newly installed partition wall at the rear of the display. Many of the interior finishes were also evoked rather than recreated, with paint being used to simulate materials such as thatch and stone.

Against this backdrop, each of the rooms was furnished with a diverse range of household items, including furniture, ornaments, textiles, tools and utensils.

While the majority of the objects on display were drawn from the collection of the OESM, the Association were unable to supply or acquire a nineteenth-century double bed for use in the Bedroom. As a result, one was created specifically for the display by the local furniture supplier Scoullar and Chisholm, which modified an old single bed that was in the firm's possession at the time to make it large enough to display one of the quilts from the museum's collection.¹¹⁵ Once the rooms had been furnished, each of the spaces was

¹¹⁵ The process of modifying the bed included the creation of new horizontal posts that were 'aged' on the footpath in Rattray Street to match the look of the legs. See: Margaret Pryde, 'Notes for Mr S. G. Brosnahan', 19 August 1997, OSM: 'To Fame Undying' Research Material, 1997-1998.

carefully stage-managed to create the illusion of occupancy. In the Kitchen, for example, the table was set for a meal, while in the Parlour the open fireplace contained the remains of a fire.

1948-1972

Having been viewed by over 24,000 paying visitors over four months, the Otago Centennial Exhibition closed to the public on 12 June 1948.¹¹⁶ In the months that followed, the decision to retain the displays in the Early Settlers Hall and the Pioneer Hall had a significant impact on the OESM. Firstly, the transformation of the two halls into museum galleries dramatically increased the amount of space that was available for the display of the museum's ever-growing collection.¹¹⁷ In the wake of the centennial exhibition, the museum authorities took the opportunity to integrate further displays into the layout of both the Early Settlers Hall and the Pioneer Hall. Among the displays that were added to the Pioneer Hall, for example, were a series of showcases that had formerly been on display in the Main Gallery and a collection of paintings, photographs, and prints.¹¹⁸ As a result of this process, the Association was able to integrate new material into the adjacent galleries while at the same time helping to relieve some of the problems that had previously been caused by overcrowding.

¹¹⁶ Admission was charged to the Otago Centennial Exhibition only. Admission to the existing galleries remained free. See: Minutes, Executive Committee meeting, 6 July 1948, OSM: Minute Book, 1941-1950.

¹¹⁷ In the wake of the exhibition public interest in the museum remained high with the press reporting that new material was continually being added to the displays. See: 'Early Settlers' Museum Continues to Expand', *Otago Daily Times*, 25 January 1949, p. 4.

¹¹⁸ 'Early Settlers Now Have Room for More Exhibits', *Evening Star*, 26 June 1948, DPL: Clipping Book, Otago Early Settlers Association, Z993.81 OTA. Eric Skinner and William Martin, eds, *Short History of the Otago Early Settlers Association 1898-1948 and Guide to the Museum*, Dunedin: Laing & Matthews, 1949, p. 36.

The retention of the centennial displays also had long-term consequences for the display galleries. Prior to the Otago Centennial Exhibition, both the Early Settlers Hall and the Pioneer Hall served as venues for meetings and events. In deciding to retain the centennial displays, the Association not only sacrificed the use of the halls for their own events, but also the public hire of the halls, which had long been the organisation's main source of revenue. Aware that the decision would have major financial implications, the OESA established an investment fund using the proceeds of a fundraising appeal that was held in connection with the centennial.¹¹⁹ Despite this, however, the Association struggled financially in the decades that followed, as low returns on their investments and a steady decline in membership left it heavily reliant on bequests to cover the museum's operating expenses.¹²⁰

The Association's financial difficulties were reflected in the appearance of the museum's display galleries, which changed very little between 1949 and the early 1970s. While new acquisitions continued to be integrated into the display halls, financial constraints severely limited the Association's ability to expand or substantially modify the displays. As a result, the Otago Centennial Exhibition had a minimal impact on the appearance of the existing museum galleries, where artefacts continued to be displayed against the backdrop of the Association's portrait collection. Of the new displays that were added to the museum after 1948, most replicated the style of the earlier galleries. The only exception to this rule was a display representing the interior of a blacksmith's shop, which was

¹¹⁹ 'Plan for Permanent Pioneer Exhibition', *Otago Daily Times*, 7 March 1947, p. 8.

¹²⁰ Brosnahan, 1998, pp. 64-66.

installed in the Early Settlers Hall in 1956.¹²¹ This exhibit was the only display created during the 1950s and 1960s that employed the realist techniques that had characterised the centennial displays.

The state of the Association's finances between 1949 and 1972 also impacted on the Pioneer Cottage. One of the few sources of information regarding the appearance of the exterior after 1948 is an account of the display that was written in 1997 by Margaret M. Pryde, a former Secretary of the OESA who was responsible for the day-to-day management of the museum between April 1943 and 1972.¹²² Describing the layout of the OESM as it was at the time that she left the museum in December 1972, the manuscript indicates that few changes had been made to the area in front of the cottage since it was installed, with many of the items that she describes corresponding to those visible in photographs taken between 1948 and 1949.

The interior of the exhibit also appears to have remained largely unchanged. In 1969 timber-framed viewing windows were installed across the front of the three period rooms to replace the wire security screen that had been installed in 1948.¹²³ The architecture of the three rooms themselves, however, does not appear to have been altered as part of this process. The contents of the three rooms also remained relatively constant, with new material simply being added over time (**figs 2.8-11**).¹²⁴ By 1972, a second table and several ornaments, for

¹²¹ Brosnahan, 1998, p. 66.

¹²² Margaret Pryde, 'Notes for Mr S. G. Brosnahan', 19 August 1997, OSM: 'To Fame Undying' Research Material, 1997-1998.

¹²³ Brosnahan, 1998, p. 69.

¹²⁴ While there are no known photographs of the Pioneer Cottage Bedroom after 1950, the fact that the contents of this room remained relatively constant after 1948 is indicated by Pryde's

example, had been added to the Parlour setting, while in the Kitchen the number of cooking utensils continued to grow in both number and variety.

In 1949 the OESA published a short history of the Association and a guide to the museum. Providing only a basic outline of the contents of the different galleries, this guide offered little insight into the contents of the Pioneer Cottage, noting simply that it represented a ‘model pioneer’s cottage’ with ‘three typical rooms furnished as was usual in a pioneer’s home a century ago.’¹²⁵ Labelling within the displays was also kept to a minimum. From a photograph that was taken of the Parlour in 1948, it is known that the display was originally accompanied by at least one interpretation panel when it first opened. As the panel faces away from the camera, however, its content remains unknown. Further interpretive text appears to have been added to the display in the years that followed. Numbered labels that are visible in a photograph that was taken of the Kitchen around 1950 indicate that supplementary information about the name or function of some of the objects in this area had been added to the display by this time.

Changes to the Pioneer Cottage, 1972-1990

In contrast to the preceding two decades, the 1970s and 1980s were a period of great change at the OESM. Between 1901 and the late 1970s the museum was

description of this room, which corresponds closely to a photograph that is thought to have been taken of the display shortly after it was installed. Pryde’s notes provide the first and only record of the objects that were located along the Parlour wall of the room, which included a Scotch chest with a crocheted white cotton runner. See: Margaret Pryde, ‘Notes for Mr S. G. Brosnahan’, 19 August 1997, OSM: ‘To Fame Undying’ Research Material, 1997-1998.

¹²⁵ Skinner and Martin, 1949, p. 36.

overseen by a special sub-committee of the OESA that made key decisions regarding its development. Responsibility for the day-to-day management of the museum, however, traditionally fell to the Secretary of the Association, who oversaw the acquisition of material for the collection and the arrangement of the displays.¹²⁶ This organisational model was followed until 1977, when Seddon Bennington was appointed as the museum's first Director.¹²⁷ Within a year of his appointment, Bennington was joined by a small team of temporary staff, who were encouraged to attend industry-specific conferences and workshops to develop their skills. By 1980, this initiative had resulted in the appointment of four permanent staff members, including Angela Burns, who became the museum's first Curator in April that year.¹²⁸ Further professional staff members, including a second Curator, were added in the years that followed.

The appointment of permanent museum staff and their increasing involvement with the wider museum community played a major role in fostering change at the OESM in the late 1970s and 1980s. Among those changes that had the greatest impact on the appearance of the display galleries was the development of a programme of temporary exhibitions, which would see new displays being added to the museum on a regular basis for the first time in its history. New demands were also placed on the galleries by an increasing emphasis on the use of the

¹²⁶ The role of Secretary was held by a number of people between 1898 and 1977, including Margaret Pryde (Secretary 1943-1972) and Eric Holman (Secretary 1973-1981). Holman, who was a retired car parts salesman, was the first member of the OESA's staff to participate in museum-specific training, attending a three day workshop run by the Art Gallery and Museums Association of New Zealand (AGMANZ) following his appointment as Secretary. Brosnahan, 1998, p. 70.

¹²⁷ Bennington remained the Director of the OESM until 1979 when he shifted to Wellington to become the Director of the City Art Gallery. The position has since been held by Ian Pentecost (Director 1979-1983), Elizabeth Hinds (Director 1983-1997) Pricilla Pitts (Director 1997-2007) and Linda Wigley (Director 2007-present).

¹²⁸ Brosnahan, 1998, pp. 75-76.

museum as an educational resource for school-aged children, a role that the museum's staff attempted to enhance in the early 1980s by instigating a programme of classes that enabled children to participate in hands-on activities within the museum environment.¹²⁹ Further changes to the galleries were introduced from the mid 1980s when the museum authorities resolved to abandon the museum's traditional focus on early European settlement in the region in favour of addressing the wider social history of Otago up to the present day.¹³⁰

Against this backdrop, the Pioneer Cottage underwent its own series of transformations in the 1980s. On 16 October 1982 the OESA published a series of articles in the *Otago Daily Times* to promote the value of the museum to the community. An element of the museum that was highlighted by this two-page advertising feature was the 'recently restored' Pioneer Cottage.¹³¹ Although the article does not directly address the changes that were made as part of the restoration process, it is clear that modifications had been made to the contents and arrangement of the Kitchen by this time. A key driver of change appears to have been the museum's education programme, which began to use the Kitchen to host hands-on bread-making classes for small groups of school-aged children as early as May 1982.¹³² These classes not only brought visitors into the Kitchen for the first time, but enabled them to interact with some of the articles that it contained. This interaction, although transitory, had a significant impact on the

¹²⁹ 'Programmes for Young at Museum', *Otago Daily Times*, 16 October 1982, p. 17.

¹³⁰ Brosnahan, 1998, p. 79.

¹³¹ 'Cottage Shows Early Family Life', *Otago Daily Times*, 16 October 1982, p. 16.

¹³² 'Programmes for Young at Museum', *Otago Daily Times*, 16 October 1982, p. 17. Untitled, *Otago Daily Times*, 29 May 1985, p. 20.

appearance of the display, as the kitchenware that the children used during their classes became a permanent feature of the room (**fig 2.12**).

In 1985 an extensive renovation project was launched to refresh the look of the Pioneer Cottage. As part of this process, the mural that had been used to represent the exterior of the cottage was replaced in May 1985.¹³³ Attempting to enhance the illusionism of the scene, the new façade was constructed entirely from historically appropriate building materials, including schist for the walls and thatch on the roof. Complementing the changes that had been made to the exterior of the display, historically appropriate building materials were also integrated into the design of the period rooms, including timber beams, which were added to the cottage ceilings, and a pair of schist fireplace surrounds that were constructed in the Kitchen and the Parlour (**figs 2.13-14**).¹³⁴ Changes were also made to the contents and arrangement of the rooms, with several details being added to further enhance the illusion of reality. In the Parlour, for example, sheet music was arranged on top of the harmonium while nearby a pair of reading glasses, a pipe and a book were carefully arranged on one of the tables as if momentarily abandoned by their owner.

Complementing the changes that were made to enhance the apparent realism of the display, an effort was also made to make the exhibit more instructive. In order to achieve this aim, text and images were increasingly used to supplement and enhance the narratives that it was designed to convey. A report on the state

¹³³ Untitled, *Otago Daily Times*, 29 May 1985, p. 18.

¹³⁴ A photograph of the Kitchen that appeared in the *Otago Daily Times* in late May 1985 indicates that the fireplaces were in place by this time. See: Untitled, *Otago Daily Times*, 29 May 1985, p. 20.

of the museum's collections and displays that was written by the museum's Curator, Angela Burns, in March 1985 records that a wall display featuring photographs of pioneer homes and some information about the colonial housewife and her daily chores had been installed in the area in front of the cottage by this time and that there were plans to draw up a key to help visitors identify some of the items that were displayed in the Kitchen.¹³⁵

In the 1980s the museum also began to publish the first commentaries on the display. In 1982 the museum prepared a detailed account of the Pioneer Cottage for an advertising feature that was published in the *Otago Daily Times*.¹³⁶ In contrast to the descriptive account that had appeared in the 1949 guide to the museum, this article provided information about the type of building that the display represented, the furnishings that it contained, and the activities that would have taken place there in the 1860s.¹³⁷ Short profiles of the Kitchen and Parlour were also prepared five years later, appearing in an updated guide to the museum that was published in 1987.¹³⁸ Although less detailed than the article, these profiles emphasised similar aspects of the display, focusing in particular on the types of activities that would have been undertaken in such spaces in the nineteenth century.

In addition to the physical changes that were made to the Pioneer Cottage in the 1980s, the wider context in which it was viewed also evolved and changed. As a

¹³⁵ Angela Burns, 'Otago Early Settlers Museum Collections, Exhibitions and Displays', 26 March 1985, OSM: 'To Fame Undying' Research Material, 1997-1998.

¹³⁶ 'Cottage Shows Early Family Life', *Otago Daily Times*, 16 October 1982, p. 16.

¹³⁷ Skinner and Martin, 1949, p. 36.

¹³⁸ Elizabeth Hinds, ed., *Otago Early Settlers Museum*, Dunedin: Otago Early Settlers Association, 1987, pp. 9, 15.

result of the broadening scope of the museum's collection after 1984, displays representing twentieth-century domestic interiors were installed for the first time at the museum. Opened on 4 November 1988, the temporary exhibition *Shoe String Years*, for example, featured a suite of three 'rooms' representing a kitchen, a laundry and a bathroom that were designed to illustrate the mix of pride and poverty that characterised New Zealand homes during the Depression in the 1930s.¹³⁹ Six years later, another suite of twentieth-century interiors were temporarily installed in preparation for the opening of *New Zealand! New Zealand! In Praise of Kiwiana*, a touring exhibition exploring New Zealand's popular culture of the 1950s and 1960s. Held at the OESM between 9 December 1994 and 12 March 1995, this exhibition included a pair of displays representing the kitchen and the living room of a 'typical' New Zealand home in the 1960s.¹⁴⁰

Redevelopment, 1990-2000

Dramatic changes continued to occur at the OESM in the 1990s. On 1 April 1991 the OESM became a department of the Dunedin City Council (DCC).¹⁴¹ In keeping with an agreement that had been reached between the OESA and the DCC the previous year, responsibility for managing the museum subsequently passed to a newly appointed Board of Trustees that was made up of representatives of both parties. At the same time, responsibility for funding the

¹³⁹ Sharon Lippert, 'Logical Versatility of the Past', *Otago Daily Times*, 7 November 1988, p. 20.

¹⁴⁰ Charmian Smith, 'Marking the halcyon days of the '60s', *Otago Daily Times*, 8 December 1994, p. 22. John Gibb, 'Kiwiana' Exhibition Proving Successful', *Otago Daily Times*, 2 March 1995, p. 5. A photograph that was taken of the Kitchen while the exhibition was on show at the Auckland Museum in 1990 appears in the museum's annual report. See: Auckland War Memorial Museum, Annual Report for the Year 1990-1991, p. 29.

¹⁴¹ Brosnahan, 1998, p. 90.

museum's operating expenses and future maintenance passed to the council, with money being raised as part of rates. The OESA remained the nominal owner of the museum until late 1994 when the Association officially donated the land, the museum building, and the collection to the people of Dunedin.¹⁴² That year, the museum was also re-branded, dropping the word 'Early' from its name to become the 'Otago Settlers Museum' (OSM) in an attempt to reflect the changes that had been made to the scope of its collections and displays since the mid-1980s.

In addition to the administrative changes that were made at the OESM in the early 1990s, the decade was also a period of great change for the public galleries. In 1992 the Board of Trustees launched a fundraising campaign in preparation for a multi-million dollar redevelopment of the entire museum complex.¹⁴³ The project, which more than doubled the size of the museum building, included the purchase and refurbishment of the adjacent NZR Bus Station Depot as well as the construction of a new reception area and a large purpose-built textile storage facility.¹⁴⁴ Long deferred repair work was also undertaken in the museum's existing display galleries, which were progressively closed for strengthening and refurbishment between 1993 and 1999. As part of this process, almost all of the displays that had been created at the museum prior to 1990 were de-installed, including those in the former Early Settlers Hall (the Transport Gallery) and the

¹⁴² Brosnahan, 1998, p. 93.

¹⁴³ Throughout the 1980s discussion had surrounded the deteriorating condition of the museum building. Repair work, however, continued to be deferred due to the uncertainty that surrounded the future of the museum on its Moray Place site, which continued to be leased from the Railways Department. In 1989, the government offered the OESA the freehold title on the site and a committee was immediately formed to begin planning the redevelopment of the museum complex. See: Brosnahan, 1998, pp. 81-82, 91.

¹⁴⁴ Advertising Feature, 'Otago Early Settlers Museum Redevelopment', *Otago Daily Times*, 3 December 1993, pp. 24-25.

Pioneer Hall, which were closed for redevelopment in 1993 and 1994 respectively.¹⁴⁵

A combination of the old and the new, the Pioneer Hall reopened as the Hall of History on 31 July 1994. Entered by means of the new reception area that had been built at the south end of the old museum complex, the Hall of History featured a new long-term exhibition, Kai Tahu Whanui ki Otago, which told the story of Otago Māori in the 150 years after the sale of the Otago block to the New Zealand Company in 1844. Complementing this exhibition, the north end of the gallery was occupied by a series of displays exploring the history of Chinese and European settlement in Otago. Of the displays that had been installed in preparation for the Otago Centennial Exhibition 46 years earlier, only the Pioneer Cottage was retained, with the remaining tableaux in both the former Pioneer Hall and the Early Settlers Hall being removed as part of the redevelopment process.

Although no record appears to have been made of the Pioneer Cottage at the time that the Hall of History opened in 1994, a series of photographs that were taken of the Parlour and the Kitchen later that decade show that the appearance of the display changed very little between 1987 when the guide to the museum was published and the late 1990s.¹⁴⁶ While some minor modifications were made to the contents and arrangement of the rooms, all of the major elements remained in place throughout this period. A noteworthy change that may have been made to the display after 1987 was the addition of a pair of mannequins, one representing

¹⁴⁵ 'Museum's Transport Section on the Move', *Otago Daily Times*, 13 October 1993, p. 19.

¹⁴⁶ Photographer unknown, Pioneer Cottage Parlour and Kitchen, circa 1999, OSM: OESA, box 2.

an adult female wearing a silk crinoline dress and paisley shawl and the other a male child, that first appear in photographs of the Parlour in the late 1990s. The exact year that these figures were added, however, remains unclear. Outside the period rooms, additional interpretation also appears to have been added, including a small panel located in the Parlour window and a larger panel on the wall opposite, which contained both text and images.

The retention of the Pioneer Cottage in 1994, however, appears to have been only a temporary measure. In the history of the OESA that was published in 1998 to mark the Association's centennial, author and Curator Seán Brosnahan noted that plans were being made to replace the Pioneer Cottage with 'a more diverse presentation of domestic interiors from the 1840s-1950s at some time in 1999.'¹⁴⁷ In due course, the museum authorities officially announced their plans to close the display in April the following year. In the statement that was released to the press, the museum acknowledged that the cottage display remained popular and would be sadly missed by some visitors.¹⁴⁸ The primary reason that was given for the closure of the exhibit was the deteriorating condition of some of the objects that were used to furnish the period rooms, with the museum's Director, Pricilla Pitts (Director 1998-2007), noting that many of the timber furnishings urgently required conservation. The museum's Collection Manager, John Timmins, later expanded on this issue, stating that, in the absence of climate control systems, the environment within the display no longer met current museum standards, leaving collection items vulnerable to further

¹⁴⁷ Brosnahan, 1998, p. 59.

¹⁴⁸ Memo to Valmal Shaw from James Lee (Otago Settlers Museum), 'Subject Information For 'Projects' Section of City Talk' ('Bold Action to Save Collection Items'), 27 April 1999.

deterioration.¹⁴⁹ As a result of these concerns, the Pioneer Cottage closed to the public in May 1999 and was immediately dismantled.

From Reconstruction to Immersion – Across the Ocean Waves

While the idea of reinstating the Pioneer Cottage was discussed at the time of its removal in 1999, these plans were later abandoned in favour of using the area to install Across the Ocean Waves, a new long-term exhibition exploring the theme of migration that opened to the public on 4 September 2004.¹⁵⁰ Entered by means of a door located in the east wall of the Hall of History, the exhibition begins with an open area designed to accommodate school groups. The displays in this area, which include several cases and a video presentation, serve as an introduction to a full-scale reconstruction of the steerage quarters of a nineteenth-century immigrant ship that forms the centrepiece of the exhibition (**figs 2.15-18**). Developed by the design firm Story Inc in collaboration with the museum's curatorial team, the Steerage Quarters is designed to convey something of the conditions in which married couples and families lived during their voyage from Europe to Otago in the 1840s and 1850s.¹⁵¹ In addition to recreating the cramped

¹⁴⁹ Andrea Jones, 'Museum Setting Sail For New Experience', *Otago Daily Times*, 23 June 2001, p. 4.

¹⁵⁰ Fiona Hill, 'Settlers Museum Board Keen to Continue Upgrade', *Otago Daily Times*, 13 May 1999, p. 4. 'Settling in for the Long Haul', *Otago Daily Times*, 4 September 2004, Magazine p. 4.

¹⁵¹ The exhibition concept for Across the Ocean Waves was taken from a temporary exhibition of the same name held at the museum to mark the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the *Philip Laing* at Port Chalmers. The exhibition, which opened on 15 April 1998, included interactive replicas of the two-tier bunks that were allocated to married couples and families aboard the ships that brought European immigrants to Otago in the nineteenth century. Visitors were invited to lie on the bunks and, with the help of a soundscape, 'imagine nights in a rolling sea with just a small wooden board between their mattress and that of the next couple.' See: Angela Crompton, 'Exhibition Looks at Migrants', *Otago Daily Times*, 16 April 1998, p. 4.

spatial conditions endured by early European settlers, the display attempts to evoke the atmosphere of such spaces by means of the lighting scheme, which includes a lantern that swings to simulate the rocking motion of a ship, and a soundscape featuring noises such as the creaking of the ship against the waves and footsteps on the unseen deck above.¹⁵²

While the Steerage Quarters shares many similarities with the Pioneer Cottage, the display differs from the earlier period rooms in several key ways. In contrast to the Pioneer Cottage, the Steerage Quarters does not serve as a means to showcase artefacts from the museum's collection. Furnished entirely with props and modern replicas, every aspect of the Steerage Quarters is designed to enable visitors not only to enter the display, but to engage with it, whether that be by climbing into the bunks, sitting at the table, or by picking up the various objects and utensils that it contains. While this emphasis on immersion and interactivity echoes the hands-on model of museum education that had been applied to the Pioneer Cottage Kitchen in the 1980s, it also reflects a fundamental shift regarding the function of recreated environments at the museum. Rather than serving as backdrop to a collection of artefacts, the display is instead designed to evoke a historical experience, enabling visitors to visualise the conditions endured by the region's earliest European settlers on their voyage to New Zealand.

¹⁵² During the development process, the museum investigated introducing a number of effects to heighten the illusion of the scene, including having the cabin built to simulate the movement of a ship and the use of holograms. These features, however, proved too expensive to use in the display. In 1995 the museum also investigated the possibility of adding smells associated with an ocean voyage to the display, but this idea was later abandoned. See: Andrea Jones, 'Museum Setting Sail For New Experience', *Otago Daily Times*, 23 June 2001, p. 4. John Gibb, 'Ocean Smells Being Considered for Exhibition', *Otago Daily Times*, 14 April 2005, p. 5.

In order to flesh out the visitors understanding of what it was like to occupy the space represented by the Steerage Quarters, a range of media is also integrated into the exhibition. While the Pioneer Cottage had formed part of a larger sequence of displays, the period rooms themselves had largely been designed to be viewed in isolation. By contrast, Across the Ocean Waves conveys information using a number of different display strategies. Supplementing the replica of the cabin, the exhibition features a series of other displays that address a range of themes by means of collection artefacts, images and text. Further information is supplied by means of a series of short dramatised scenes that are played on screens in the gallery. Based on diary entries, these scenes add to the information conveyed by the Steerage Quarters by representing several aspects of life aboard an immigrant vessel that can not be conveyed by means of a recreated environment or by the physical objects that it contains.

Chapter 3: Canterbury Museum

Located in central Christchurch, the Canterbury Museum has a long and rich history of using reconstruction as a strategy of display. The strong history of such displays continues today with a number of the galleries featuring re-created environments. This chapter charts the history of period room displays at the Canterbury Museum from the installation of the first rooms at the time of the Canterbury Centennial in 1950 through to the present day, looking at the circumstances in which these displays were installed and how the tradition has evolved over time.

Founded under the leadership of geologist Dr. Julius von Haast, the Canterbury Museum opened to the public on 3 December 1867.¹⁵³ The museum was housed in three rooms on the first floor of the Canterbury Provincial Government Buildings until 1869, when a separate building was erected in the Christchurch Botanic Gardens near Antigua Street (now Rolleston Avenue) to house its rapidly growing collection. Opened on 1 October 1870, the building initially consisted of a single gallery with a mezzanine floor above, but soon grew, with a new two-storey wing being added to the south end of the building in 1872. In June 1874 control of the museum passed from the Provincial Council to the Board of Governors of Canterbury College (now the University of Canterbury).

¹⁵³ For general information regarding the history of the Canterbury Museum see: Julius von Haast, 'Haast - On the Early History of the Canterbury Museum,' *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 14, (1881): 503-516. Canterbury Museum, *Guide to the Collections in the Canterbury Museum, Canterbury, New Zealand*, Christchurch: T.E. Fraser, 1906 (3rd edition), pp. 2-3. Canterbury Museum, *Canterbury Museum: A Short Guide*, Christchurch: Canterbury Museum, 1946, pp. 3-6. Keith W. Thomson, *Art Galleries and Museums in New Zealand*, Sydney and Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1981, pp. 76-77.

Over the course of the next two decades, the museum continued to grow, with further additions being made to the building in 1876 and 1882. Faced with a decline in available funds after 1890, the museum building subsequently remained largely unaltered until the 1950s, when the necessary capital was raised to construct a substantial new wing as a memorial to the centenary of the Canterbury Province.¹⁵⁴ The Hundredth Anniversary Wing (now the Roger Duff Wing) was the last section of the current museum building to be built, opening in 1977.

When the Canterbury Museum opened in 1867, geological, botanical and zoological specimens made up the bulk of the material that was on display.¹⁵⁵ By 1870, the collection had grown in scope, with a small number of ethnographic artefacts forming part of the new displays.¹⁵⁶ While the natural sciences and ethnology remained the primary focus of the museum's collecting activities throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the collection nevertheless expanded during this period to accommodate a small selection of paper-based records and artefacts associated with the early years of European settlement in New Zealand.

By the time that the third edition of the museum's guide to the collections was published in 1906, photographs of Canterbury pioneers and early settlers were displayed in the vestibule behind the main entrance to the museum alongside two

¹⁵⁴ Prior to this decade, some minor 'temporary' additions were made to the building, including a small gallery that was erected at the rear of the site in 1941 to accommodate a large relief model of the Canterbury Plains that the Canterbury Museum acquired after the closure of the New Zealand Centennial Exhibition in 1940. See: Canterbury Museum, 1946, p. 4.

¹⁵⁵ 'The Museum at Christchurch,' *Otago Daily Times*, 9 December 1867, p. 5.

¹⁵⁶ 'Christchurch Museum,' *Timaru Herald*, 5 October 1870, p. 3. 'The Museum,' *Star*, 1 October 1970, p. 2.

iron cannons that had been used in the early years of settlement.¹⁵⁷ Further items were found in Case 29 of the Maori Room where a small eclectic mix of ‘Pakeha relics’ were displayed, including the remnants of a coffin, a copper plate, and several guns.¹⁵⁸ These items, which were all of Pākehā manufacture, were associated either with European contact with local Māori or with the pioneers who had arrived in New Zealand prior to the official settlement of the region.

In 1909 the Canterbury Museum began to actively acquire materials associated with European settlement in New Zealand. That year, a committee was established to oversee the creation of a new section dedicated to the preservation of ‘mementoes and records’ relating to the history of Canterbury, with emphasis being placed on European settlement in the region.¹⁵⁹ The committee met with the Board of Governors in July 1909 and a sub-committee was appointed to organise a public appeal for material. The press reports that surrounded the newly established ‘Early Colonists Collection’ record that photographs, correspondence, early newspapers, and maps made up the bulk of the material that was subsequently accessioned, with only a small number of artefacts entering the collection in the years that followed.¹⁶⁰

At an early stage in the development process, discussions began about the creation of displays devoted to the museum’s new collection. In July 1909 the museum’s Assistant Curator, Mr R. Speight, reported to the Board of Governors

¹⁵⁷ Canterbury Museum, 1906, p. 220.

¹⁵⁸ Some casts and two flags are also listed as having been displayed. See: Canterbury Museum, 1906, p. 218-219.

¹⁵⁹ ‘Early Canterbury,’ *Star*, 23 July 1909, p. 4.

¹⁶⁰ ‘Canterbury’s Early History,’ *Ashburton Guardian*, 6 August 1909, p. 4. ‘Canterbury Records: The Efforts at Preservation,’ *Star*, 3 September 1909, p. 1. ‘Early Canterbury: The Historical Collections,’ *Star*, 5 November 1909, p. 4. Untitled, *Evening Post*, 17 April 1911, p. 6.

and the Early Colonists Committee that it was his intention that part of the statuary room would be reserved for such material.¹⁶¹ Finding space in the museum's already crowded galleries for a permanent display, however, proved impossible in the years that followed. In place of a permanent display, 'small articles of interest' were instead exhibited from time to time in the recent acquisition case.¹⁶² At least two such displays were created, with the press reporting that items from the Early Colonist Collection were in place in this area of the museum in April, May and August that year.¹⁶³

Despite the initial enthusiasm that surrounded the acquisition of material for the Early Colonists Collection, interest in the project waned after 1911. After an unsuccessful attempt was made to revive interest in the project around 1913, the colonial history collection received little attention until after 1937.¹⁶⁴ That year, the Board of Directors appointed Robert Alexander Falla (1901-1979: Director 1937-1948) as the Director of the Canterbury Museum. During Falla's tenure as Director, attitudes towards colonial history began to change, with 'the European settlement of New Zealand' being listed as a branch of the collection alongside natural history and ethnology for the first time.¹⁶⁵ As a result, colonial history began to be accorded a greater presence within the collection, with items classified as 'early colonial' or 'historical' frequently appearing in the yearly list of accessions that were published in the museum's annual reports after 1941.

¹⁶¹ 'Early Canterbury,' *Star*, 23 July 1909, p. 4.

¹⁶² 'Canterbury Museum: Early Colonists' Section,' *Ashburton Guardian*, 22 July 1911, p. 2.

¹⁶³ Untitled, *Evening Post*, 17 April 1911, p. 6. Untitled, *Evening Post*, 3 May 1911, p. 4.

'Christchurch Day by Day,' *Ashburton Guardian*, 8 August 1911, p. 2.

¹⁶⁴ 'Old Canterbury Relics: Question of Housing,' *Evening Post*, 6 June 1913, p. 3.

¹⁶⁵ Canterbury Museum, Annual Report for the Year 1941-1942, p. 5. Hereafter CMAR...

As the collection began to grow, so too did its presence within the public galleries. Following Falla's appointment in 1937, attempts were made to modernise many of the museum's displays. One of the many changes that were introduced to the galleries as part of this process was the establishment of a suite of displays devoted to the Early Colonists theme. In place by 1946, the new Early Colonists Section was located alongside displays of European antiquities on the first floor of the 1872 wing. In addition to showcasing a selection of photographs and historical records, the section also featured a range of artefacts representative of the 'domestic life and early industries of the province.'¹⁶⁶ Among those items that were used to represent the domestic realm, a prominent role was given to a selection of household furniture and fittings, which were 'displayed as much as possible in groupings such as the furnishing of a pioneer's room.'¹⁶⁷

Canterbury Colonists Exhibition, 1950-1951

In 1950 the people of Canterbury celebrated the centenary of the province. As part of the programme of events that was held to mark this occasion, the Canterbury Museum organised its first large-scale exhibition of material associated with European settlement in the Canterbury region. Located in the former Hall of Ethnology, the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition constituted not only the museum's first real attempt to construct a visual history of the early colonial period, but also a turning point in terms of its approach to display.

¹⁶⁶ Canterbury Museum, 1946, p. 63.

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*

While habitat groups and dioramas had featured among the displays for over five decades, the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition represented the first wide-scale adoption of reconstruction as a strategy of display.¹⁶⁸ Opened in August 1950, the exhibition was laid out in the form of a chronological sequence of eight period rooms that sought to evoke the types of domestic spaces in which early Cantabrians had lived.

As the documentation surrounding the planning of the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition is extremely fragmentary, much remains unknown about the origins of the event. A letter that the museum's newly appointed Director, Roger Sheppard Duff (1912-1978: Director 1948-1978) wrote to Margaret Pryde at the Otago Early Settlers Museum in late October 1948 indicates that planning for the exhibition was certainly under way by this time.¹⁶⁹ Due to the intended scale of the project, the Early Colonists Exhibition Committee was formed to assist the Director in the task of planning the event. Established as early as December 1948, this committee was made up of a small number of representatives of the local community, including Heathcote Helmore (Chairman), Phyllis Boyle, Aubrey Cox, and Rose Reynolds.¹⁷⁰ Further assistance was later offered by the Women's Kitchen Committee, which oversaw the acquisition of material for use in one of the displays.

¹⁶⁸ As early as the 1870s part of the museum's collection of mammals was mounted in groups on special platforms that were designed to evoke their natural habitat. The museum's first habitat diorama, which represented a portion of shoreline in Antarctica, was later mounted by the museum's taxidermist, W. Sparks, around 1905. By 1946 several more habitat groups had been added to the display galleries. See: Canterbury Museum, 1906, p. 54. Canterbury Museum, 1946, p. 20.

¹⁶⁹ Letter to Margaret Pryde from Roger Duff, 21 October 1948, CM: Series 6/6, Folder B4/F7.

¹⁷⁰ The earliest reference to the Committee appears in a letter dated that month. See: Letter to Stanley Northcote-Bade from Roger Duff, 13 December 1948, CM: Series 6/6, Folder B4/F7.

One member of the development team who is known to have made a particularly substantial contribution to the project was the Chairman of the Early Colonists Exhibition Committee, Heathcote George Helmore (1899-1965). As noted in Chapter One, Helmore was a registered architect who took an active interest in the cultural life of the Canterbury region.¹⁷¹ One of the many organisations with which he was involved in the 1940s was the Friends of the Canterbury Museum, an organisation that had been formed in July 1944 to support the future development of the museum.¹⁷² At the time of the Canterbury Centennial, Helmore was also a member of the Canterbury Centennial Association (CCA), the organisation responsible for overseeing the centennial programme. As a member of the Executive Committee and as Chairman of the Arts and Cultural Committee, Helmore was actively involved in organising a number of pageants and exhibitions on behalf of the CCA.¹⁷³ In his role as Chairman of the Early Colonists Exhibition Committee, Helmore was responsible not only for designing the layout of the exhibition and the decoration of the period rooms, but was also instrumental in the process of soliciting material on loan from local families for use in the displays.¹⁷⁴

Another figure who can be identified as having played a significant role in the planning of the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition was Rosa (Rose) Josephine Reynolds (1907-1994).¹⁷⁵ Born in Christchurch in 1907, Reynolds brought to the

¹⁷¹ See: Chapter 1, footnote 42.

¹⁷² CMAR, 1966, p. 7.

¹⁷³ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Letter to Heathcote Helmore from the Secretary (Canterbury Museum Trust Board), 4 October 1950, CM: Series 6/6, Folder B4/F7.

¹⁷⁵ **Rosa (Rose) Josephine Reynolds**, MBE, 1907-1994

Born in Christchurch in 1907, Reynolds was the daughter of Fanny Josephine Reynolds, whose parents had arrived in Canterbury aboard the *Sir George Seymour* and the *Bangalore* in 1850 and 1851 respectively. In the mid-1930s, Reynolds travelled to London where she studied

exhibition committee both an enthusiasm for local history and an extensive knowledge of historical textiles. Reynolds' association with the Canterbury Museum began around 1948, when she was asked by the Canterbury Pilgrims and Early Settlers Association to care for their small collection of period costumes. At Reynolds' request, the then Director of the Canterbury Museum, Robert Falla, agreed not only to make space available at the museum to store the collection, but also to supply Reynolds with a display case in which to exhibit some of the garments and accessories. Her first display, which was located in the museum's foyer, presented a single mannequin dressed in a gown 'as worn by an early settler.'¹⁷⁶ Further displays followed, including an additional four display cases showcasing Victorian needlework. By 1949, her work with the collection had resulted in her appointment as the museum's Honorary Custodian of Period Costume.¹⁷⁷ In this role, Reynolds not only assisted with the planning of the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition, but also undertook the task of cleaning and cataloguing the museum's existing collection of colonial history material.¹⁷⁸

In addition to the work undertaken by Helmore and Reynolds, a substantial contribution was also made to the development of the exhibition by Wellingtonian Stanley Northcote-Bade (1906-1997).¹⁷⁹ Providing advice and

at the Royal School of Needlework. Returning to Christchurch, she put the keen interest in historical textiles that her studies had fostered to use, becoming involved with local amateur theatre groups, for which she researched and produced replicas of historical garments.

See: 'A Century Ago in Christchurch: Colonial Museum Display', *Weekly News*, 23 December 1959, p. 5. Grace W. Green, 'Past Lives Again Because...Labour of Love Has...Provided Rich Heritage', *Christchurch Star*, 29 January 1966, p. 14. CMAR, 1974, p. 34.

¹⁷⁶ CMAR, 1963, p. 7.

¹⁷⁷ CMAR, 1950, p. 10.

¹⁷⁸ CMAR, 1960, p. 10.

¹⁷⁹ **Stanley Northcote-Bade**, 1906-1997

Based in Wellington, Northcote-Bade earned a living as a civil servant, working for many years as a clerk for the Department of Health. Around 1936, Northcote-Bade was approached by the Dominion Museum in Wellington to advise them on matters relating to the decorative arts. In

practical assistance throughout the planning process, Northcote-Bade brought to the development team not only knowledge regarding the history of New Zealand furniture, but also experience in managing large-scale loan exhibitions. Little more than a year before planning for the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition began in 1948, Northcote-Bade had been responsible for organising the Nelson Pioneer Exhibition, a major exhibition of early colonial artefacts that was held in the Bishop's Schoolroom, Nelson.¹⁸⁰ His experience in organising this event was of particular interest to the Canterbury Museum, not only because it had involved working extensively with the local community to secure relevant material, but also because Northcote-Bade had been responsible for compiling the suite of four period rooms that had featured among the displays.

Northcote-Bade's involvement with the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition appears to have begun in late 1948, when Duff met with him in Wellington to discuss the project.¹⁸¹ At Duff's request, Northcote-Bade travelled to Christchurch in March the following year to speak to both the Early Colonists Exhibition Committee

this role Northcote-Bade played an instrumental role not only in promoting the acquisition of material associated with European settlement but also fostering the display of such material at the museum after 1940 (See Chapter 4).

A strong advocate for the preservation of New Zealand's built heritage, Northcote-Bade also became actively involved with the National Historic Places Trust (now the New Zealand Historic Places Trust Pouhere Taonga) following its establishment in 1954, serving for several years as a member of the Wellington Regional Committee. Other organisations within which Northcote-Bade played an active role include the Hutt District Historical Society, the Early Settlers and Art Association, and the New Zealand Federation of Historical Societies.

One particular aspect of local history in which Northcote-Bade took a life-long interest was colonial furniture, an interest that culminated in 1971 in the publication of *Colonial Furniture in New Zealand*, a comprehensive and highly regarded book on the subject of nineteenth-century New Zealand furniture.

See: Stanley Northcote-Bade, *Colonial Furniture in New Zealand*, Auckland: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1971. Yvonne Airey, 'Someone Should Write Our History Says Sam', *Upper Hutt Citizen*, undated (circa November 1985), UH: 'Airey, Yvonne Elizabeth: Newspaper articles written by Yvonne Airey 1967-2006', 9. Yvonne Airey, Untitled, *Upper Hutt Leader*, May 1989, UH: 9.

¹⁸⁰ *Nelson Historical Exhibition, 1858-1958: A Display of Relics Commemorating Nelson's 100 Years as a City*, Nelson: Nelson Centennial Historical Exhibition Committee, 1958, p. 48.

¹⁸¹ Letter to Stanley Northcote-Bade from Roger Duff, 13 December 1948, CM: Series 6/6, Folder B4/F7.

and the Friends of the Canterbury Museum about his experience.¹⁸² Within months of his visit, Duff began to explore the possibility of having Northcote-Bade temporarily seconded to the Department of Internal Affairs to enable him to assist the Canterbury Museum in a fulltime capacity in the lead-up to the exhibition.¹⁸³ The request was granted and Northcote-Bade subsequently travelled to Christchurch to work for the museum in the capacity of ‘Organiser’ between 18 June and 30 July 1950.¹⁸⁴ In this role, Northcote-Bade assisted the exhibition committee in the task of tracking down and collecting family heirlooms as well as supervising the installation of the displays.¹⁸⁵

Like the origins of the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition itself, little is known about how or when period rooms came to feature in the museum’s plans for the event. As the previous two chapters have shown, the exhibition organisers certainly had a number of local precedents to draw on by 1948. In addition to the South Island Pioneer Hut, which Helmore had assisted to create for the New Zealand Centennial Exhibition in 1939, and the rooms designed for the Nelson Pioneer Exhibition by Northcote-Bade, the museum was also able to draw inspiration from the Otago Early Settlers Museum where period rooms had been installed earlier that year. Aware of the work that had been undertaken at this institution, Duff approached the Secretary of the Otago Early Settlers Association, Margaret Pryde, as early as October 1948 for information about

¹⁸² ‘Centennial Display at Museum: Plan Outlined by Director’, *Press*, 12 May 1949, p. 3.

¹⁸³ Letter to Heathcote Helmore from Roger Duff, 1 August 1949, CM: Series 6/6, Folder B4/F7.

¹⁸⁴ CMAR, 1951, p. 11.

¹⁸⁵ Given his research background, Northcote-Bade may also have been responsible for preparing the written interpretation that accompanied each of the displays in the guidebook.

these displays.¹⁸⁶ While it is unknown to what extent the design of these displays influenced the contents of the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition, it is likely that the popular success enjoyed by these earlier displays helped to garner support for the widespread use of period rooms at an early stage in the development process.

While the plans and drawings that Helmore created in connection with the exhibition do not appear to have survived, correspondence and contemporary press reports shed some light on how the contents of the exhibition and its layout developed over time. The earliest known reference to the layout of the exhibition appears in a letter that Duff wrote to Northcote-Bade in December 1948.¹⁸⁷ Providing Northcote-Bade with a brief overview of the proposed project, the Director stated that ‘period interiors’ were to be arranged along one side of the gallery while miscellaneous examples of furniture, clothing, domestic utensils and other relics were to be displayed in cases along the other. By March the following year more detailed plans had begun to emerge about the contents of the displays. Speaking to the Friends of the Canterbury Museum that month, Duff stated that the exhibition would feature:

...about four furnished rooms from what might be called a gentleman’s residence of 1850 to 1860, the rooms of a more humble cottage of the same period, and probably a cabin or stateroom from one of the early immigrant ships. As an island exhibit it is hoped to reconstruct the hut occupied by Dr. A.C. Barker, one of the first settlers in Christchurch.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ In response to Duff’s request for information, Pryde sent the museum a series of photographs of the displays. In his reply Duff was enthusiastic about the displays, noting that the photographs ‘conveyed such a vivid impression of the effectiveness of your Early Colonial display that I will not be satisfied until I have inspected the halls personally.’ See: Letter to Margaret Pryde from Roger Duff 21 October 1948, CM: Series 6/6, Folder B4/F7.

¹⁸⁷ Letter to Stanley Northcote-Bade from Roger Duff, 13 December 1948, CM: Series 6/6, Folder B4/F7.

¹⁸⁸ ‘Centennial Display at Museum: Plan Outlined by Director’, *Press*, 12 May 1949, p. 3.

With the exception of the ‘gentleman’s residence’, which was eventually reduced to two rooms, the series of displays described by Duff at this time all formed part of the final exhibition layout.

Despite the fact that the themes of many of the displays were in place by March 1949, ideas regarding the contents of the exhibition continued to be developed in the months that followed. In May 1949 Duff wrote to A.D.I. Manson in Westland to enquire whether he would be willing to lend his collection of pre-1950 furniture to the museum to enable it to furnish a period room representative of the decade 1840-50.¹⁸⁹ Later that year, enquiries also began to be made in regards to the availability of Victorian clothing and furnishings in the hopes of extending the historic period covered by the exhibition through to 1900.¹⁹⁰ While the 1840s room envisioned by Duff did not form part of the displays, a room in the Victorian style was eventually incorporated into the exhibition layout to complete the chronological series.

Once a theme had been assigned to each of the period rooms, the task of designing their décor was carried out by members of the Early Colonists Exhibition Committee. As noted above, Helmore was responsible for designing the structure of each of the period rooms, including both the layout of architectural elements and the selection of finishes. The task of selecting the contents of each room, however, is likely to have been more collaborative in nature. As the museum’s collection of domestic furnishings and clothing from the period 1850-1900 remained relatively small in the late 1940s, most of the

¹⁸⁹ Letter to A.D.I. Manson from Roger Duff, 10 May 1949, CM: Series 6/6, Folder B4/F7.

¹⁹⁰ Letter to A.M. Buck from Rose Reynolds, 6 July 1949, CM: Series 97/91, Box 20, Folder 168 Item 2442.

material that was to form part of the displays had to be solicited on loan from the wider community. Working with local families, the Early Colonists Exhibition Committee and their many supporters undertook the task of compiling lists of what material could be made available for use in the displays. This process continued until around June or July 1950 when a decision was made regarding the material that would be shown in each of the displays.¹⁹¹

Long before the contents of the individual displays had been finalised, work commenced on preparing the gallery space in which the exhibition was to be held. In November 1949 the Ethnology Hall was closed to the public and the museum's staff began the task of relocating both the collections and the existing display cases into temporary storage.¹⁹² Once the gallery had been cleared, the structure of the period rooms and their internal finishes were installed by a team of builders and decorators. While most of the materials that were used in the construction of the rooms were modern, a small number of architectural elements from early local buildings were incorporated into the displays, including a set of cast-iron window casements from a house in Lyttelton once occupied by the founder of the Canterbury settlement, John Robert Godley (1841-1861).¹⁹³

Once the selection of furnishings had been finalised, Northcote-Bade and the Early Colonists Exhibition Committee began the task of collecting all of the

¹⁹¹ A letter that Duff wrote to a potential donor in late May 1950 stated that the organisers had not yet made any final decisions regarding the selection of material. See: Letter to J.M. Polhill from Roger Duff, 29 May 1950, CM: Series 6/6, Folder B4/F7. As part of Northcote-Bade's role was to oversee the collection of loan material, it is likely that the selection process took place around the time that he took up his position as Organiser in June 1950.

¹⁹² CMAR, 1951, p. 9.

¹⁹³ Canterbury Museum, *Canterbury Colonists Exhibition at the Canterbury Museum on the Occasion of the Centenary of the Province*, Christchurch: Friends of the Canterbury Museum, 1950, p. 14.

material that they had managed to secure for use in the displays. With the architectural shell of each of the period rooms already in place, the rooms were then furnished by the development team under the direction of Helmore.¹⁹⁴ Further assistance was offered by members of the Friends of the Canterbury Museum and the Canterbury Pilgrims and Early Settlers Association, who offered their support during the process of preparing the displays.

After around two years of planning, the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition was officially opened on 24 August 1950. Attempting to construct a visual history of European settlement in the Canterbury region between 1840 and 1900, the exhibition opened with a large-scale diorama of the first four ships sent to Canterbury under the auspices of the Canterbury Association (the *Charlotte Jane*, *Randolph*, *Sir George Seymour* and *Cressy*), which were shown anchored in Lyttelton Harbour on New Year's Day in 1851.¹⁹⁵ The voyage theme continued with a large-scale mural representing the route taken by the *Randolph* and the *Sir George Seymour* from England to New Zealand, which was located on the entrance wall above. The remainder of the hall was used to display a diverse range of items representative of the period 1840-1900, with the bulk of this material being shown in a sequence of eight fully-furnished period rooms (fig 3.1).

Following the diorama of the 'first four' ships, the sequence of period rooms began in the south-west corner of the gallery with a reconstruction of the stateroom occupied by James Edward FitzGerald aboard the *Charlotte Jane*

¹⁹⁴ Canterbury Museum, 1950, p. 5.

¹⁹⁵ The diorama was created by the museum's display staff in collaboration with prominent local artists Russell Clark and William Sutton.

during its voyage to Canterbury in 1850 (**fig 3.2**).¹⁹⁶ Moving through the exhibition, visitors then encountered ‘Lyttelton Cottage (1850-60)’, a pair of rooms that were designed to represent the interior of a small cob cottage in the 1850s, and ‘Christchurch House (1850-60)’, a suite of two rooms representing the parlour and the bedroom from a larger timber dwelling of the same period (**figs 3.3-6**).¹⁹⁷ A replica of *Studding Sail Hall*, a V-hut erected by Dr. Alfred Charles Barker in Canterbury in 1850, completed the suite of displays devoted to the first decade of settlement (**figs 3.7-9**).¹⁹⁸ The final period room in the chronological sequence, the ‘Victorian Room (1890s)’, was located along the back wall of the gallery (**fig 3.10**). Complementing the earlier displays, this exhibit showcased material of a slightly later period in the context of a Victorian parlour.

In terms of their structure, the majority of the period rooms that were created for the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition closely followed the model offered by the South Island Pioneer Room of 1939. Located along the west and north walls of

¹⁹⁶ James Edward FitzGerald (1818-1896) was the Secretary of the Canterbury Association, the inaugural editor of Canterbury’s first newspaper, the *Lyttelton Times*, and later the first Superintendent of the province of Canterbury (1853-1857). See: W. David McIntyre, ‘FitzGerald, James Edward – Biography’, from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Te Ara – the Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, updated 1 September 2010, URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/1f9/1>.

¹⁹⁷ In contrast to the settlements established in the North Island in the 1840s, the Canterbury Plains were not a plentiful source of timber for building construction. As a result, many of the structures that were built in the early years were constructed from cob, a mixture of clay, water, grasses and animal manure that was compressed into blocks. The cob mixture was made on site and forked onto a foundation made of stone or brick. The mixture was then compressed to form a short layer of blocks. The process could take several months as each layer was left to dry before the subsequent layer was added. Once the walls were complete, the door and window openings were cut and the exterior and interior surfaces of the cob were plastered to make them waterproof. See: Jeremy Salmond (1986), *Old New Zealand Houses 1800-1940*, Auckland: Reed, 2005, pp. 38-41.

¹⁹⁸ Dr. Alfred Charles Barker (1819-1873) was a surgeon who arrived aboard the *Charlotte Jane* with his wife, Sarah, and their children in 1850. Interested in photography, he actively recorded early Canterbury and local personalities between the 1850s and the 1870s. See: John B. Turner, ‘Barker, Alfred Charles – Biography’, from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Te Ara – the Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, updated 1 September 2010, URL: <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1b4/1>.

the hall, the FitzGerald Cabin, Lyttelton Cottage, Christchurch House, and the Victorian Room were all constructed in the form of a three-sided box that visitors viewed through the absent fourth wall. In addition to the construction of partition walls to form the back and sides of the individual rooms, false ceilings were also installed to ensure that the spaces were approximate in dimension to those typically found within domestic residences of the period. The floor of the gallery, which was clad in timber floorboards, was retained in each of the rooms, disguised only by the large carpets that were displayed in the Christchurch House rooms and the Victorian Room.

In contrast to those period rooms that focused solely on the task of representing an interior space, Studding Sail Hall sought to represent both the interior and exterior of the building upon which it was based. V-huts, which took their name from the steeply pitched roof that formed two sides of the structure, were commonly erected by settlers in the region during the first few months of settlement to provide accommodation while more permanent dwellings were constructed.¹⁹⁹ Larger and more elaborate than many of its contemporaries, the roof of *Studding Sail Hall* was clad in the discarded studding-sail from the *Charlotte Jane* while the walls at either end of the structure were clad in pieces of timber of various shapes and sizes. Inside, the building was subdivided into two areas using packing cases to create two separate rooms. The replica recreated all of these features, with the two rooms being viewed through a doorway and an unglazed window that were located in the end walls of the structure.

¹⁹⁹ Canterbury Museum, 1950, p. 8.

As Duff stated in the guidebook that was published to accompany the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition, a core function of the displays was to present artefacts of the colonial era in their 'living habitat.'²⁰⁰ Attempting to create the illusion of encountering objects in their 'natural' environment, the organisers lavished attention on all aspects of the individual displays. Following the model offered by the period rooms that had been created for the Centennial Exhibition a decade earlier, the architectural fabric of each of the period rooms included a variety of architectural elements. The fabric of the Lyttelton Cottage Kitchen, for example, incorporated a window, a door and a large fireplace containing a colonial oven. Throughout the exhibition an attempt was also made to represent a range of historical wall finishes. In both Christchurch House and the Victorian Room patterned wall paper was hung on each of the walls while in Lyttelton Cottage a whitewash finish was used to simulate the appearance of cob walls.

For those rooms that were located around the perimeter of the gallery, the inclusion of windows posed a particular challenge to the organisers. In order to ensure that these features did not work against the realism of the scene, painted murals were commissioned for use in each of the rooms.²⁰¹ In the FitzGerald Cabin a mural seascape painted by prominent local artist, Russell Clark, was installed behind the three sloping windows that dominated the rear wall of display. A further five scenes were created for the exhibition by Louise Grey. Serving an important narrative function, the murals used in the Lyttelton Cottage Bedroom and Kitchen presented views of Lyttelton Harbour and Diamond

²⁰⁰ Canterbury Museum, 1950, p. 5.

²⁰¹ Canterbury Museum, 1950, p. 14.

Harbour respectively while those in Christchurch House represented scenes of early Christchurch around 1850. The scene in the Victorian Room also served to locate the contents of the display geographically, presenting a view of the Southern Alps.

Against the backdrop of these architectural settings, the museum assembled a diverse array of domestic artefacts from all over the Canterbury region. In addition to showcasing a range of furniture, the rooms were furnished with an assortment of household items, including textiles, light fixtures, pictures, ornaments, tools and utensils. The sheer volume and diversity of the artefacts that were on display along with the manner in which they were arranged added to the illusionism of the displays, helping to recreate the appearance of a lived-in interior. In contrast to the architecture of the rooms, however, the furnishing of the individual displays was characterised by a resolute emphasis on authenticity, with only a small number of modern replicas being used.²⁰²

In terms of their design, the period rooms that were created for the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition can be divided into two categories. Like the period rooms that had been created for the Otago Early Settlers Museum in 1948, most of the period rooms that featured in the exhibition did not recreate an interior that had actually existed in Canterbury during the period being represented. Instead, the role of these displays was to create a composite picture of a particular type of interior. The rooms that made up Lyttelton Cottage, for example, were designed to represent a cob cottage of the 1850s, a type of structure that had been built by

²⁰² With the exception of some of the window dressings, no replicas were used in the furnishing of the rooms.

the majority of settlers in the months following their arrival. Complementing Lyttelton Cottage, Christchurch House provided visitors with a glimpse of the types of spaces that were found in larger timber residences of the same period while the final room in the sequence, the Victorian Room, represented a parlour of the 1890s decorated in the Victorian style. Within each of these rooms, the décor and furnishings served to evoke not one but multiple historical realities, distilling out those features shared by many historical interiors and compressing them into one scene.

In contrast to these five exhibits, both the FitzGerald Cabin and Studding Sail Hall sought to recreate as closely as possible two identifiable historical interiors as they appeared in the early 1850s. In order to achieve this goal, Helmore drew heavily on a number of archival records in the process of designing these two displays. One source that strongly influenced the design of the FitzGerald Cabin was a watercolour sketch painted by FitzGerald during the ship's voyage through the South Atlantic (**fig 3.11**).²⁰³ In addition to informing both the architectural design of the room and its finishes, this sketch also guided the contents of the display, with many of the artefacts that it contained acting as direct surrogates for those visible in the drawing. The double extension couch that was used in the display, for example, was not only of an equivalent age and type to that used by FitzGerald, but was located in the same position within the room as its counterpart in FitzGerald's drawing.

²⁰³ Canterbury Museum, 1950, p. 7.

Like the FitzGerald Cabin, the design of Studding Sail Hall was heavily based on contemporary accounts of the original building. Among the sources that Helmore is known to have drawn on in the process of designing the display are three sketches that Dr. Barker produced of *Studding Sail Hall* during the period that he and his family occupied the structure in the early 1850s (**figs 3.12-13**).²⁰⁴ While the earliest of these sketches provided Helmore with a partial record of the exterior of the building, the two other drawings documented the appearance of the living area. These drawings informed both the contents of this area of the display and its arrangement, with articles associated with the Barker family being used to recreate as closely as possible the appearance of the space as Barker had recorded it in the sketch dated 28 February 1851.

Regardless of whether the display represented a specific or generic historical interior, each room was carefully stage-managed to heighten the illusionism of the scene. This illusion of reality relied not only on the detailing of the architecture and the contents of the rooms, but also on a number of effects that were used to imply occupancy. In almost all of the rooms mannequins were used to stand in for the early Cantabrians who would have inhabited such spaces. Considered by the organisers to be an integral feature of the period rooms, the models were not simply placed within the displays, but were instead posed in such a way as to suggest that they had been frozen in the midst of activity.²⁰⁵ In Studding Sail Hall, for example, mannequins representing Dr. Barker's wife,

²⁰⁴ Canterbury Museum, 1950, p. 8.

²⁰⁵ All of the mannequins that were used in the rooms were created specifically for the purposes of the exhibition by Dorothy Hall. In a letter to the Editor of *Country Life*, Helmore wrote that the introduction of specially-designed lay figures to the displays 'helped a great deal in giving the rooms a more realistic and lived in appearance, which is too often lacking in the period rooms of museums.' See: Letter to the Editor (*Country Life*, London) from Heathcote Helmore, 28 June 1951, CM: Series 6/6, Folder B4/F7.

Sarah, and her companion, Laetitia Bowen, could be found sewing, while the young A.L. Barker played at their feet. In some rooms other props were also employed. In Lyttelton Cottage, for example, the remains of a fire could be seen on the top of the colonial oven, while elsewhere in the room a leg of meat, dried flowers and some onions were suspended from the ceiling. The realistic effect sought by the organisers appears to have been a success, with the illusion of reality repeatedly being praised in the press that surrounded the exhibition.²⁰⁶

When the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition opened in August 1950, the period rooms were accompanied by a short brochure the size of a folded A4 page that included a brief introduction to the Early Canterbury Hall and its main features.²⁰⁷ By November 1950 further information about the displays was available in the form of a guidebook.²⁰⁸ Introducing the displays in chronological order, the guidebook commented on the design of the individual displays and their contents, encouraging visitors to make comparisons between the different living conditions that they each represented. Supplementing the text, an inventory of the items that were displayed in each of the rooms was also supplied. These lists not only identified the owners of the historic artefacts that were on display, but recorded each object's date of arrival in New Zealand (where known) and any association that it had with local personalities or historical events.

²⁰⁶ See, for example: 'Victorian Garb Makes Fine Museum Display', *Christchurch Star Sun*, 24 August 1950, p. 6.

²⁰⁷ Canterbury New Zealand Centennial Association Inc., 'Early Colonists Exhibition, 24 August 1950 – May 1951', 1950, CM: Series 6/6, Folder B4/F7.

²⁰⁸ Canterbury Museum, 1950.

The catalogue, however, provides only a partial glimpse of the exhibition. In April 1951 the museum took the opportunity to make a number of small changes to the period rooms.²⁰⁹ Individual pieces of furniture and other artefacts were removed from some of the rooms at this time, while in other areas new material was incorporated into the displays. In Christchurch House and the Victorian Room striking changes were also made to the human dramas played out by the mannequins (**figs 3.14-16**). In the Christchurch House Bedroom, for example, a second figure was added while in the Christchurch House Drawing Room and the Victorian Room the mannequin groups were modified to enhance the narrative effect of the display. In order to accommodate the occupants' new activities, minor alterations were also made to the layouts of these three rooms. Following these changes, the displays appear to have remained largely unaltered until the closure of the exhibition on 31 May 1951.

The Hall of Folk Culture, 1951-1955

Capturing the imagination of the local public, the Early Colonists Exhibition was reportedly seen by over 77,000 paying visitors during the nine months that it was open.²¹⁰ The event also received a positive reception from the museum authorities, with the President of the Canterbury Museum Trust Board, James L. Hay, describing the event as being 'without doubt the most successful exhibition

²⁰⁹ 'Changes in Early Colonists Exhibition', *Press*, 14 April 1951, p. 3. Some articles had already been added to the display cases earlier that year. See: 'Exhibition at Museum: Early Colonists Display: More Articles Added', *Press*, 23 January 1951, p. 7.

²¹⁰ Letter to the Editor (*Country Life*, London) from Roger Duff, 28 June 1951, CM: Series 6/6, Folder B4/F7.

in the museum's history.'²¹¹ Deeming the exhibition to be a great achievement, Helmore and Duff approached the British journal *Country Life* to run an article about the displays, a request that resulted in a two-page spread in the magazine in August 1951.²¹² In his letter to the Editor, Duff explicitly linked the popularity of the exhibition with the display techniques that had been used, remarking that the exhibition's success reflected 'the interest created by the first large-scale introduction in New Zealand of the period room as a method of reconstructing our Colonial past.'²¹³

While most of the artefacts that had been used to stage the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition were returned to their owners following its closure in May 1951, the event had a lasting impact on the Canterbury Museum. In addition to the influx of donations of 'Early Colonist' material that the museum received in preparation for the opening of the exhibition, its development helped to fuel plans for the creation of more permanent displays.²¹⁴ Looking back on the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition in 1959, Duff noted that he had frequently discussed the idea of developing a permanent 'Colonial Display' with Helmore, Reynolds and other enthusiasts in the build-up to the Canterbury centennial.²¹⁵ At the time, however, the creation of permanent displays was prevented by the fact that the museum had insufficient space to accommodate new material without eliminating existing themes from the galleries.

²¹¹ James L. Hay, CMAR, 1951, p. 5.

²¹² R.G.N., 'New Zealand Colonists Exhibition', *Country Life*, August 1951, pp. 428-429.

²¹³ Letter to the Editor (*Country Life*, London) from Roger Duff, 28 June 1951, CM: Series 6/6, Folder B4/F7.

²¹⁴ CMAR, 1949, p. 14. CMAR, 1950, p. 11.

²¹⁵ Roger Duff, 'Foreword', in Rose Reynolds, *Canterbury Colonists Galleries, Canterbury Museum*, Christchurch: Canterbury Museum, 1960, p. 3.

The museum's interest in colonial history, however, came at a fortuitous time. As early as 1946, a proposal had been put forward by the museum authorities that the museum building should be enlarged and remodelled as a permanent memorial to the Canterbury centennial.²¹⁶ Legislation regarding the future maintenance and development of the museum was subsequently drawn up, with the local authorities taking over financial responsibility for the institution in September 1947.²¹⁷ Shortly after the new management structure came into effect in April 1948, a public meeting was held to further discuss the development of the museum.²¹⁸ The idea received a positive public response, and in March the following year the proposal was officially endorsed by the Christchurch City Council. Against this background, the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition came to be seen by the museum authorities both as a preview of the Early Colonists gallery that they planned to install following the construction of this substantial new wing and of the types of display strategies that they hoped would be employed throughout the museum as a result of the widespread redevelopment of the public galleries.²¹⁹

Due to the ambitious scale of the project, it was soon realised that planning for these major changes to the museum building would continue well into the 1950s.

In the months following the opening of the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition,

²¹⁶ Canterbury Museum, 1946, p. 6.

²¹⁷ Between 1874 and the late 1940s the museum's operating costs were funded almost entirely from the annual proceeds of a land endowment. The revenue provided by this fund, which had gone into decline in the early twentieth century, left little scope for the museum authorities to invest in major changes to the museum building or the displays that it contained. In September 1947 the New Zealand Government passed the Canterbury Museum Trust Board Act, which transferred responsibility for the museum from the Canterbury University College Council to the Christchurch City Council. For the first time in its history the museum had a regular income to fund future maintenance and development, with money being raised by the local authorities as part of rates.

²¹⁸ 'Museum as Centennial Memorial', *Press*, 5 May 1949, p. 4. CMAR, 1949, p. 6.

²¹⁹ CMAR, 1950, p. 7. CMAR, 1951, p. 9.

attention thus turned to the question of how the museum could best make use the former Ethnology Hall after its closure in 1951. Rather than reinstall the displays that had been removed in preparation for the exhibition, the museum authorities resolved to use the hall to create a more permanent preview of the types of displays that they hoped to install as part of the upcoming redevelopment.²²⁰ As early as April 1951, the decision had been made to retain the FitzGerald Cabin and Lyttelton Cottage as part of a new suite of displays. The Early Colonists Exhibition Committee and the Women's Kitchen Committee thus began the task of securing, either on extended loan or via donation, the material necessary to furnish the displays, which were to remain in place until such time as work on the redevelopment could begin.²²¹

Following the closure of the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition in May 1951, work immediately commenced on the task of returning display items to their respective owners and de-installing the unwanted displays, including the framework of both Studding Sail Hall and the Victorian Room, which were completely dismantled at this time. Renamed the 'Hall of Folk Culture', the gallery was subsequently divided into two parts by a large curved screen that ran diagonally down the length of the hall. Under the leadership of Reynolds, a new Early Colonial Section was developed for the space located to the south-west of this wall, while to the north-east, a new suite of displays devoted to South Seas material was installed by the museum's display staff.

²²⁰ CMAR, 1952, p. 8.

²²¹ Early Colonists' Exhibition Committee, Minutes of Meeting, 26 May 1951, CM: Series 6/6, Folder B4/F7.

Officially opened on 4 April 1952, the displays that made up the Early Colonial Section began at the south end of the gallery with the diorama of Lyttelton Harbour, the mural of the voyage out, and a display of scrimshaw that had all been installed in 1950 in preparation for the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition.²²² The displays continued along the west wall of the gallery with the FitzGerald Cabin, the Lyttelton Cottage Bedroom and the Lyttelton Cottage Kitchen. These were followed by two new displays, one containing evening dresses of the 1870s and the other day dresses of the same period, which Reynolds developed in the former Christchurch House Bedroom and Drawing Room. Along the opposite wall, the section concluded with a display of English fashion plates covering the period 1790-1910 and a diorama of Ferrymead railway station in 1863.

Although no photographic record appears to have been made of either the FitzGerald Cabin or the Lyttelton Cottage rooms after June 1951, contemporary press reports and other written sources provide some clues as to the appearance of these three displays following the opening of the Early Colonists Section. While few, if any, changes were made to the fixed décor of the rooms, some modifications were made to the manner in which they were furnished. From a series of partial inventories that were made to accompany each of the displays, it is clear that the museum managed to retain much of the furniture that had previously been shown in the three rooms.²²³ Where this was not the case, new material was brought in to complete the ensemble. Some rearrangement of the furniture also took place, with several pieces being relocated from one display to

²²² 'Early Colonial Display Features Clothes and Furniture', *Christchurch Star Sun*, 3 April 1952, p. 6. CMAR, 1952, p. 8.

²²³ 'Replica of Cabin aboard the *Charlotte Jane*', 'Cob Cottage Kitchen', and 'Cob Cottage Bedroom', undated, CM: Series 97/91, box 21, folder 176, item 2651.

another. The single extension couch, for example, was moved from the cabin to the Lyttelton Cottage Bedroom, while the spinning wheel and sea chest from this room were relocated to the Kitchen.

While little information regarding the other types of artefacts that were displayed in each of the rooms survives, these too appear to have been a mix of the old and the new. Among those items that are known to have been retained are a Dutch wall clock and a baby's bath that remained on display in the Lyttelton Cottage Kitchen and Bedroom respectively while new items included a white porcelain vanity set, which was relocated from the Christchurch House Bedroom to Lyttelton Cottage.²²⁴ Four mannequins dressed in reproduction costume of the 1950s were also added to the Lyttelton Cottage displays, with one male and one female figure being shown in the Kitchen and a boy and a girl being shown in the Bedroom.

Complementing the three refurbished period rooms, the two new displays of 'period costumes' that were developed for the Early Colonists Section showcased mannequin groups alongside a selection of furniture and various *objets d'art* from the museum's collection and those of private lenders. While velvet curtains were installed in the former Christchurch House Bedroom to provide a more neutral backdrop for the articles that were displayed there, the former Christchurch House Drawing Room was refurnished in the manner of a Victorian drawing room. From a partial inventory that was created in connection with the display it is known that the scene was composed of a range of furniture,

²²⁴ 'Cob Cottage - Kitchen' and 'Cob Cottage - Bedroom', undated, CM: Series 97/91, box 21, folder 176, item 2651.

including a square topped piano, a couch, and a bookcase, as well as a diverse selection of ornaments and pictures.²²⁵ Against this backdrop, two female figures were shown engaged in conversation on the couch, while across the room a young woman sat playing the piano. A fourth figure is described as having been seated 'engrossed with a stereoscope'.²²⁶

With the exception of the Fitzgerald Cabin, which appears to have remained largely unchanged between the opening of the Early Colonists Section in 1952 and its closure in 1955, the displays in this area continued to grow and evolve over the course of this same period.²²⁷ Within a year of the section being opened, the Victorian Parlour scene was redeveloped to accommodate a display of wedding dresses, with measures being taken to conceal the remaining décor of the room at this time.²²⁸ By 1953 concerns had been raised regarding the deterioration of articles in the Lyttelton Cottage rooms and the decision was made to glaze the front of the two displays.²²⁹ In preparation for the installation of the new wall, both the Bedroom and the Kitchen were at least partially de-installed, with some of the items being lent to the local firm A.J. Whites in October that year for the purpose of setting up a period room in their main window.²³⁰ While the content of the Kitchen was subsequently reinstated, Reynolds took the opportunity to completely refurnish the former Lyttelton

²²⁵ 'Evening Dresses of the 'Seventies' and 'Day Dresses of the 'Seventies', undated, CM: Series 97/91, box 21, folder 176, item 2651.

²²⁶ 'Early Colonial Display Features Clothes and Furniture', *Christchurch Star Sun*, 3 April 1952, p. 6.

²²⁷ CMAR, 1953, p. 20. CMAR, 1954, p. 12. 'Replica of Cabin Aboard the *Charlotte Jane*', undated, CM: Series 97/91, box 21, folder 176, item 2650.

²²⁸ Brocade and lace curtains were made to mask the fireplace and windows of the room. CMAR, 1953, p. 20.

²²⁹ Rose Reynolds, CMAR, 1953, p. 21.

²³⁰ Letter to E.H. Treleaven from Roger Duff, 24 September 1953, CM: Series 6/6, Folder B4/F7.

Cottage Bedroom.²³¹ Re-presented as a 'Sitting-Room in a Cob House of the Fifties', the new display contained a number of the pieces that had been removed from the Victorian Parlour scene earlier that year as well as a number of more recent acquisitions. Not missing an opportunity to showcase more of the textile collection, Reynolds also incorporated five female figures dressed in period costume into the new scene.

Throughout the early 1950s work also continued on raising funds for the Centennial Memorial Wing. As part of the fundraising effort, the museum authorities organised 'Museum Week', a week-long festival of events that was held in March 1953. In addition to hosting a series of lectures and film screenings, the museum worked with local businesses to stage a series of temporary displays in shop windows around central Christchurch.²³² Designed to highlight the breadth of material that the museum would be able to display once the expansion and refurbishment of the building was complete, each of the displays featured material from a different area of the museum's collection.

Following the model offered by the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition, the Early Colonists Collection was represented by an 'Early Colonists room', a display of living room furniture and household effects created on the premises of Calder MacKay on Worcester Street. Specialising in the sale of furniture and furnishings, Calder MacKay was able to supply the museum with a large display

²³¹ CMAR, 1954, p. 12. 'Cob Cottage - Kitchen' and 'A Sitting-Room in a Cob House of the Fifties', undated, CM: Series 97/91, box 21, folder 176, item 2650.

²³² 'Canterbury Centennial Memorial', *Press*, 21 March 1953, p. 6. 'Museum Week', *Christchurch Star Sun*, 23 March 1953, p. 2. 'Film About Notornis: Brilliant Record in Colour: Meeting to Launch Museum Week', *Press*, 24 March 1953, p. 13. 'The Canterbury Museum: Subsidy on Appeal Funds: Sums Given Tomorrow Eligible', *Press*, 27 March 1953, p. 2.

window complete with an existing decorative scheme that included floral wall paper and a large fireplace.²³³ Against this backdrop, the museum showcased a diverse array of furnishings representative of those found in Canterbury living rooms in the 1850s, including a Mahogany folding table previously owned by Dr. Barker and a single extension couch donated to the museum by the Cholmondeley family, which had both previously featured in the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition (**fig 3.17**).²³⁴ Like the former, the room even featured a costumed mannequin. However, while the display shared many characteristics with its earlier counterparts, it also differed in important ways. In contrast to the rooms that had been created for the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition, less emphasis was placed on recreating the layout of the type of space that was being represented or on creating the illusion of viewing a real interior. Written interpretation also featured prominently within the displays, with labels being used to identify the provenance of all the larger pieces of furniture.

With the help of fundraising events such as Museum Week, the Canterbury Museum was soon well on the way to raising the funds necessary to cover the cost of constructing the Centennial Memorial Wing. In preparation for the widespread redevelopment of the building, the museum was closed to the public on 9 September 1955.²³⁵ By April 1956, building contractors were on site and construction of the new wing commenced. At the same time, work began on the task of progressively de-installing, renovating and redeveloping each of the museum's existing display galleries. The Early Colonists Section remained in

²³³ For information about Calder MacKay see: Wises New Zealand Post Office Directory, 1950-51, p. 988.

²³⁴ A label that was located at the front of the display identified the material as having been 'in use in a living room during the first ten years of the Canterbury settlement.' See: fig 3.17.

²³⁵ CMAR, 1956, p. 5.

place until July 1958 when attention turned to the Hall of Folk Culture.²³⁶ The majority of the hall was cleared at this time, including those areas occupied by Lyttelton Cottage and the former Christchurch House rooms.

Canterbury Colonists Galleries

On 10 November 1958 the Canterbury Museum was officially reopened to the public. Due to the ambitious scale of the project, the redevelopment of the display galleries was only partially complete at the time of opening. Of the nine galleries that were reopened, six were still in the process of redevelopment while the remainder of the museum building remained closed pending the installation of new displays.²³⁷ Among the areas of the building that remained closed were the Canterbury Colonists Galleries, a new suite of displays devoted to the Early Colonists theme. Work on these displays, however, subsequently progressed quickly, with the completed galleries being officially opened on 16 December 1959. Located in the original 1870 wing of the museum building and part of the adjacent 1872 wing, the new galleries consisted of an L-shaped replica streetscape, two suites of period rooms, and a period costume gallery that were designed to immerse visitors in the history of early Canterbury and bring that past vividly to life.

As noted earlier in this chapter, the idea of developing a suite of permanent displays on the Early Colonists theme appears to date to the mid 1940s when the

²³⁶ 'Schedule for Early Colonists Galleries', 1958, CM: Series 97/91, box 20, folder 168, item 2459.

²³⁷ CMAR, 1959, p. 7.

museum authorities began to discuss the future development of the museum building.²³⁸ Further momentum was gained in the build-up to the opening of the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition in 1950, when Duff began to discuss the creation of such displays with Helmore, Reynolds and other interested parties.²³⁹ In the wake of this event, Reynolds remained on as the museum's Honorary Custodian of Period Costume, with the role soon expanding to include all colonial exhibits. In this capacity, Reynolds worked tirelessly both to maintain the Early Colonists Section in the Hall of Folk Culture and to prepare for the creation of the proposed new displays. The correspondence, notebooks and drawings that she produced between 1951 and 1959 certainly attest to the fact that she was involved in all aspects of the planning process, from the development of the collection and the design of the new displays, to the process of securing the external funding necessary to finance the cost of installing them.

One of the first challenges that Reynolds faced in designing the Canterbury Colonists Galleries was finding a suitable location for the displays within the museum building. In the early stages of the planning process, a space in the new Centennial Memorial Wing was allocated for the purposes of installing an 'Early Colonist Hall'. This plan, however, was later abandoned after it was realised that the lofty ceilings in this area of the building were not suited to the types of displays that were envisioned for this section. After numerous discussions on the matter, the 1870 wing, which consisted of a single gallery with a mezzanine floor above, and the two galleries on the ground floor of the adjacent 1872 wing were

²³⁸ In regards to the Early Colonists Section that was in place in 1946, the guide to the museum published that year noted that the museum authorities hoped to expand this section and others dealing with the early history of the province 'in a new wing.' Canterbury Museum, 1946, p. 63.

²³⁹ Canterbury Museum, 1960, p. 3. 'Opening of Museum's Colonial Galleries', *Press*, 17 December 1959, p. 2.

selected. These areas of the museum, Reynolds wrote, were an ideal location for the new Early Colonists section because they had both ‘an intimate charm’ and ‘the right architecture’, having been constructed in the period that was being represented.²⁴⁰ It was also noted that the use of three different gallery spaces as opposed to a single large space had practical benefits, reducing the cost of installation by reducing the amount of framework that was required for the displays.

Once the location of the new Early Colonists section had been finalised, the task of designing the displays commenced. One of the earliest records regarding the arrangement of the galleries comes in the form of a letter that Reynolds wrote to Helmore in 1957.²⁴¹ Among the displays that Reynolds envisioned for the galleries at this time were two replica streetscapes, one representing the 1860s and the other the 1890s, ‘a large room of the Georgian period’, ‘a cob cottage’ and a period room on an unspecified theme. In addition to these elements, Reynolds hoped that the mezzanine gallery in the 1870 wing could be floored over to accommodate a further three period rooms and that a fourth room could be accommodated on the ground floor at the north end of the 1870s wing. As plans for the galleries progressed, however, the layout of the displays changed dramatically. By the time that Reynolds came to prepare detailed working drawings later that same year, the idea of including a streetscape representing the

²⁴⁰ Rose Reynolds, ‘Report on Early Colonial and Costume Galleries’, May 1958, CM: Series 6/6, folder B5/F10.

²⁴¹ Letter to Healthcote Helmore from Rose Reynolds, ‘Canterbury Museum: Questions re alterations for Early Colonists Hall etc’, 1957, CM: Series 97/91, box 20, folder 163, item 2299.

1890s had been discarded and the number of period rooms had been reduced, with new displays being developed to take their place.²⁴²

While the inclusion of period rooms in the design for the new Canterbury Colonists Galleries was no doubt influenced by the work that had been done at the Canterbury Museum itself since the late 1940s, the introduction of a recreated historical streetscape was strongly influenced by ‘Kirkgate’, a re-created Victorian streetscape that formed the centrepiece of the York Castle Museum in York, England.²⁴³ Designed by the museum’s founder, Dr. John L. Kirk, in the late 1930s, Kirkgate showcased everyday objects from the past against the backdrop of historic shop fronts and interiors that had been salvaged from buildings across Britain. Light and sound effects were also used to enhance the Victorian atmosphere of the display environment.²⁴⁴ While it is unclear whether Reynolds had the opportunity to view these displays first-hand, both Duff and Helmore are known to have visited the museum. Helmore was particularly impressed by the displays, writing to Duff that Kirkgate was ‘quite the best thing of its kind that I have seen on my travels’ and that the museum should ‘try and do something like it on a small scale.’²⁴⁵

As few details regarding the process of designing the Canterbury Colonists Galleries survive, little is known about how the design of the period rooms developed over time. Of the six rooms that came to feature in the final layout of

²⁴² CMAR, 1958, p. 11.

²⁴³ Canterbury Museum, 1960, p. 3.

²⁴⁴ ‘Step into the Past of Kirkgate’, in York Castle Museum, *Kirkgate Examiner*, undated, p. 8. URL: <http://www.kirkgatevictorianstreet.org.uk/pages/examiner.htm>.

²⁴⁵ Postcard to Roger Duff from Heathcote Helmore, undated, CM: Series 97/91, box 21, folder 176, item 2636.

the galleries, Reynolds was responsible for designing the décor of the three-room Cob House and the Victorian Room. The remaining displays, which became known as the Georgian Room and the Stuart Room respectively, were designed by Helmore.²⁴⁶ While the earliest known descriptions of the Cob House and the Victorian Room post-date the start of construction, a detailed description of Helmore's plans for the Georgian and Stuart rooms appear in a letter that Reynolds wrote to a contact in England in early November 1957.²⁴⁷ The letter, which provides a number of details regarding the interior finishes and the contents of both of the Georgian and Stuart rooms, indicates that many aspects of these displays had been finalised by this time.

In August 1957 the museum received an estimate for the cost of constructing the Canterbury Colonists Galleries from local builder, L.E. Kilburn.²⁴⁸ As the cost of the project greatly exceeded the income of the museum, Reynolds worked with the local business community to secure sponsors for each of the major displays, including each of the storefronts that were to make up the streetscape. A commercial sponsor was also found for the Georgian Room, with the cost of installation being partially funded by the local auctioneering firm, H.G.

²⁴⁶ Rose Reynolds, 'Report on Early Colonial and Costume Galleries', May 1958, CM: Series 6/6, folder B5/F10.

²⁴⁷ Letter to H.W. Maxwell from Rose Reynolds, 11 November 1957, CM: Series 97/91, box 20, folder 163, item 2307.

²⁴⁸ The estimates that Kilburn submitted on 19 August 1957 itemised the cost of each of the individual shops and other displays. The period rooms were by far the most expensive components of the galleries. In contrast to the estimated cost of installing the individual storefronts, which ranged between £85 and £370, the cost of constructing the Stuart, Georgian and Victorian Rooms were estimated at £525, £500 and £465 respectively. The Cob House had the largest budget of any display with an estimated construction cost of £600. See: L.E. Kilburn, 'Estimates for Canterbury Colonists Galleries', 19 August 1957, CM: Series 97/91, box 21, folder 170, item 2467.

Livingstone.²⁴⁹ By contrast, funding for the remaining period rooms were sought from the wider community. The cost of installing the Cob House was met by means of a £600 donation from the Canterbury Pilgrims and Early Settlers Association, while an appeal to the descendants of Dr. A.C. Barker resulted in a donation of £130 towards the cost of installing the Victorian Room.²⁵⁰ The remaining costs, including that of installing the Stuart Room, were met by the Canterbury Museum Trust Board.

By early 1958 L.E. Kilburn was on site and work commenced on the task of constructing the framework of the displays.²⁵¹ Following the reopening of the museum in November 1958, members of the museum's display staff were also on hand to assist with the installation process. The museum's Preparator, Raymond J. Jacobs (1906-1974, Preparator 1940-1972), played a particularly active role in the installation of the period rooms, where he was involved in simulating the appearance of cob on the walls of the Cob House, painting the Victorian Room, and preparing backdrops for the windows in the pre-colonial rooms.²⁵² Additional assistance was offered by numerous firms and individuals, who contributed in various ways to the decoration of the Victorian and Georgian Rooms.²⁵³ In addition to overseeing both the construction of the displays and the

²⁴⁹ Rose Reynolds, 'Report on Early Colonial and Costume Galleries', May 1958, CM: Series 6/6, folder B5/F10.

²⁵⁰ CMAR, 1958, p. 11. Letter to descendants of the Barker family from Roger Duff, 15 May 1958, CM: Series 6/6, folder B5/F10. Letter to J.C. Whaiter from Roger Duff, 16 January 1959, CM: Series 6/6, folder B5/F10.

²⁵¹ CMAR, 1959, p. 19.

²⁵² Canterbury Museum, 1960, p. 5. Unidentified newspaper clipping, 'New Work at Museum: Colonist Section Progress', 1959, CM: Series 97/91, box 22, folder 182A, Scrapbook – Newspaper Clippings 1957-1974.

²⁵³ Canterbury Museum, 1960, p. 5.

arrangement of the collection material, Reynolds created around 70 wigs for the mannequins that were to occupy the galleries.²⁵⁴

By the end of July 1958, the framework of the pre-colonial period rooms was in place and the process of decorating the three rooms commenced.²⁵⁵ By early November that year, the framework of the Cob House was also complete, with Reynolds able to report that the display was being painted and that the task of setting up the furnishings and figures would soon begin.²⁵⁶ In July 1959 Reynolds hosted representatives of the *Press* on a private tour of the partially completed galleries. Photographs of the Cob House Kitchen and Bedroom that accompanied this article show that the process of furnishing these two rooms was almost complete by this time.²⁵⁷ By contrast, work continued in the Victorian and pre-colonial period rooms, with the article reporting that the furniture in these areas was yet to be arranged.

Officially opened on Wednesday 16 December 1959, the opening of the Canterbury Colonist Galleries was timed to coincide with the anniversary of the arrival of the Canterbury Association's first four ships at Port Cooper (now Lyttelton Harbour) in December 1850.²⁵⁸ Following the route prescribed by Reynolds in the guidebook that accompanied the displays, a visit to the galleries commenced on the ground floor of the 1872 wing with 'Wakefield Square', a series of four replica store-fronts representative of early Canterbury firms that

²⁵⁴ Canterbury Museum, 1960, p. 4.

²⁵⁵ 'Schedule for Early Colonists Galleries', 1958, CM: Series 97/91, box 20, folder 168, item 2459.

²⁵⁶ Rose Reynolds, 'Cob House Progress Report', 5 November 1958, CM: Series 97/91, box 20, folder 168, item 2440.

²⁵⁷ 'Months of Work in Colonial Galleries', *Press*, 18 July 1959, p. 17.

²⁵⁸ 'The Past Comes to Life', *Christchurch Star*, 16 December 1959, p. 2.

were used to showcase artefacts from the museum's collection. Turning the corner into the 1870 wing, the displays continued along 'Christchurch Street' with a further eight shop-fronts and a three-roomed cob house, while along the east side of the hall 'Captain Thomas Street' led out of the gallery to the Hall of Transport (**figs 3.18-19**). In order to further evoke the atmosphere of a mid nineteenth-century streetscape, the floor of the two galleries were finished in such a way as to resemble a gravel roadway and historical light fixtures were used to illuminate the displays.

Having looked at Christchurch Street, visitors were encouraged to ascend the stairs to the mezzanine floor to view the Period Costume Gallery, where mannequin groups dressed in nineteenth-century outfits and accessories were staged against the backdrop of a series of tableaux scenes. One of the displays, for example, featured two women and a small boy in clothing from the 1870s admiring birds in an aviary, while elsewhere in the gallery two female mannequins dressed in gowns of the Empire period were shown against the backdrop of a painted English garden scene. Returning downstairs, visitors completed their tour with a visit to the Period Room Gallery. Located in the former Fossil Room on the ground floor of the 1872 wing, the displays in this area included a suite of three period rooms representative of the Victorian, Georgian and Stuart periods, as well as two wall cases devoted to the display of period furniture, *objets d'art* and armour.

Like the period rooms that had been created for the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition nine years earlier, those installed in the Canterbury Colonists

Galleries were designed to both showcase material from the museum's collection and to illustrate the conditions in which earlier generations lived. Consisting of a kitchen, a sitting room and a bedroom, the Cob House was designed to represent the interior of small cob cottage of the 1850s (**figs 3.20-21**).²⁵⁹ Supplementing this display, the Period Room Gallery presented a Canterbury drawing room of the 1860s alongside representations of two interiors that pre-dated the colonisation of New Zealand (**figs 3.22-24**).²⁶⁰ The first of these displays, the Georgian Room, showed a drawing room of the first half of the Eighteenth Century, while the last display in the sequence, the Stuart Room, represented a small chamber in a manor house of the Seventeenth Century. Like many of their predecessors, there is no evidence to suggest that any of these displays were based on a single, identifiable historical interior, with each of the rooms instead being designed to create a composite picture a specific type of interior in a particular period.

While all of the period rooms in the Canterbury Colonists Galleries shared a common underlying function, two different approaches were taken in terms of their structure. In contrast to the period rooms that had previously been installed at the Canterbury Museum, the Cob House did not operate as a stand-alone exhibit. Located along Christchurch Street, the display formed part of a wider immersive environment that was designed to evoke the atmosphere of an early Canterbury streetscape. In keeping with this aim, Reynolds attempted to integrate the display into the wider setting by installing a façade along the front edge of the display, with three small viewing windows being used to provide

²⁵⁹ Canterbury Museum, 1960, p. 47.

²⁶⁰ Canterbury Museum, 1960, pp. 71-76.

visual access to the interior. In order to evoke the architecture of a building, the wall surface was scored to simulate the look of weathered cob and a series of diamond-paned windows that had been salvaged from the former Lyttelton residence of John Robert Godley were installed.²⁶¹ By contrast, no attempt was made in the Period Room Gallery to integrate the displays into a wider setting, with the interiors of the Victorian, Georgian and Stuart rooms each being viewed through a large plate-glass window.

Like their predecessors, the interiors of the period rooms in the Canterbury Colonists Galleries were designed to provide a detailed architectural backdrop against which to understand their contents. In addition to the windows that featured along the front of the Cob House, the cottage interior featured numerous architectural details, including windows, doors, and exposed timber rafters. In several cases these elements were used to suggest the presence of unseen spaces. A panel door that was located in the back wall of the Kitchen, for example, was described by Reynolds as leading to a servant's bedroom and a porch at the back of the house, while the narrow, twisting staircase in the Living Room was used to indicate the presence of attic bedrooms above.²⁶² In the Period Room Gallery architectural elements were also integrated into the design of each of the rooms. The Victorian Room, for example, featured a large French window, moulded skirting boards and a large cast iron fireplace, while in the Stuart Room a large brick fireplace formed the centrepiece of the west wall.

²⁶¹ Canterbury Museum, 1960, p. 47.

²⁶² Canterbury Museum, 1960, p. 47.

Complementing the architectural details that were incorporated into the design of each of the rooms, an attempt was also made to recreate or evoke historical wall finishes. In the Cob House, tongue-and-groove boards were used in the construction of the wall between the kitchen and the living room, while elsewhere in the cottage the walls were painted to evoke the appearance of cob. Further wall treatments were illustrated in the Period Room Gallery. In the Victorian Room the walls were hung with boldly patterned wallpaper, while in the adjacent Georgian Room, pale green coloured brocade was installed above the line of the timber dado. The décor in the adjacent Stuart Room was entirely different again, with the walls in this area being lined with stained timber panelling, plaster and brick.

In order to ensure that every detail within the frame of the individual displays contributed to the illusion of reality, painted murals were again used behind the windows in many of the rooms. In the Cob House, the windows in the back wall of the display looked out onto two scenes of early Christchurch painted nine years earlier for use in Christchurch House.²⁶³ In the Period Room Gallery, two new scenes were created by Jacobs for the displays. Located beyond the French window in the Victorian Room, the first of these scenes represented Dr. Barker's garden on Worchester Street, while in the Stuart Room the window looked out onto a park with grazing deer.²⁶⁴

²⁶³ Canterbury Museum, 1960, p. 50.

²⁶⁴ The scene of Dr. Barker's garden includes a large gum tree, which frequently appeared in photographs that the surgeon took of local personalities at his home. Canterbury Museum, 1960, p. 5.

Designed to illustrate how early Cantarbrians lived, the Cob House and the Victorian Room were both furnished with an array of furniture, ornaments, pictures, utensils and textiles from the museum's Early Colonists collection. While some of this material had previously been displayed either in the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition or in the Hall of Folk Culture, most of the artefacts that were used in these four period rooms were accessioned in preparation for the opening of the new galleries. In each of these rooms, the furnishings were arranged in such a manner as to evoke the appearance of a lived-in residence. This effect was enhanced by the use of props, including an artificial leg of meat in the Cob House Kitchen and the remnants of a fire in each of the fireplaces. Each of the rooms was also occupied by a group of mannequins that were used to both showcase costumes and accessories and to 'bring an air of life' to each of the scenes.²⁶⁵

By contrast, a more art-historical approach was taken in both the Georgian and Stuart rooms, where furnishings from the museum's collection of European decorative and applied arts were shown alongside several pieces from the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and Helmore's private collection.²⁶⁶ In addition to being more sparsely furnished than their 'colonial' counterparts, the Georgian and Stuart rooms contained few of the commonplace and everyday items that characterised the furnishing of the other rooms.

Narrative incidents nevertheless continued to be introduced to the displays via the use of mannequins. In the Stuart Room a mother sat in front of the fireplace, cautioning her husband not to wake the baby in the cradle beside her while in the

²⁶⁵ Rose Reynolds, 'Cob House Progress Report', 5 November 1958, CM: Series 97/91, box 20, folder 168, item 2440.

²⁶⁶ Canterbury Museum, 1960, pp. 74-76.

Georgian Room one of the female mannequins was shown entertaining a pet monkey.

Supplementing the contents of the period rooms, the Period Furniture Case showcased a range of furniture and porcelain representative of a number of different periods alongside two mannequins in pre-colonial clothing (**fig 3.25**). Located opposite the Victorian and pre-colonial rooms, this display did not attempt to recreate a domestic interior in its entirety. Like the period rooms, however, the design of the display was informed by a strong desire to show collection items in their historical context. Attempting to evoke the décor of some of Canterbury's more elaborately decorated homesteads, the walls of the case were lined with silk brocade from the former drawing room of *Holly Lea*, a historic residence located on nearby Manchester Street that had been built in 1899.²⁶⁷ The décor of a room was further evoked by means of a skirting board that ran around the bottom edge of the case. Offering an alternative to the full-scale period room, it is notable that the use of this display strategy would be further developed at the Canterbury Museum for the display of European furniture in the years that followed.

At the time that the Canterbury Colonists Galleries opened in 1959, signage was kept to a minimum. In Wakefield Square and Christchurch Street, for example, signage was limited to the sign writing that appeared on the façades of the individual shops, while in the Period Room Gallery each of the displays was accompanied by a single label identifying the period represented. Information

²⁶⁷ The pale-gold brocade from *Holly Lea* was acquired specifically for use in the Canterbury Colonists Galleries. See: Canterbury Museum, 1960, p. 79. 'Schedule for Early Colonists Galleries', 1958, CM: Series 97/91, box 20, folder 168, item 2459.

about the displays was instead supplied in the form of an illustrated guidebook that was issued by the museum in March 1960.²⁶⁸ Written by Reynolds, the guidebook provided a brief outline regarding the history of Canterbury and the establishment of Christchurch, as well as an introduction to each of the displays and an inventory of their contents. In regards to the period rooms, Reynolds' interpretation of the displays consistently highlighted the relationship between the décor that was shown and the history that it represented. In the text that accompanied the Cob House, for example, Reynolds outlined the process of constructing a cob cottage and commented on the technology that would have been available to the residents of such buildings in the 1850s. Melding fact with fiction, Reynolds also drew attention to the narratives being played out by the mannequins, using the text to both identify individual characters and relate their activities to the period being represented.

Beyond the Canterbury Colonists Galleries, 1958-1980

Following the removal of the Early Colonists Section in 1957, work began on the task of refurbishing the former Hall of Folk Culture. Renamed the Hall of Transport and Shipping, the gallery was one of six that was reinstalled with a combination of old and new displays in preparation for the reopening of the museum in November 1958. Building on the former Early Colonists Section, the displays in this gallery addressed a number of themes relating to early European settlement in the Canterbury region, including the voyage out, whaling and

²⁶⁸ Canterbury Museum, 1960.

shipping, and land transport.²⁶⁹ Among the existing displays that were retained as part of the refurbishment process were the diorama of the first four ships in Lyttelton Harbour and the former FitzGerald Cabin. Although no record of cabin's appearance survives from this period, notes regarding the redevelopment project indicate that several changes were made to the display at this time, including the installation of a plate-glass viewing window at the front of the display and the addition of an access door.²⁷⁰ A fire detector was also installed within the cabin as part of the wider upgrade of the services in the hall.

In 1965 the task of redeveloping the displays in the Hall of Transport and Shipping resumed.²⁷¹ Renamed the Hall of Colonial Settlement, the area was designed to serve as an introduction to the Canterbury Colonists Galleries. Upon its completion in 1980, the gallery covered a range of themes regarding life in early Canterbury, including whaling, gold mining, and the arrival of the first four ships.²⁷² Complementing the style of display that had been used in the adjacent galleries, reconstructions played a major role in the new hall. Between 1967 and 1971 a reconstruction of an early banking chamber on the Hokitika goldfields in the 1860s and dioramas representing an Akaroa blockhouse and a gold mining scene at Ross were installed.²⁷³ The last of the displays to be installed in this gallery, a replica streetscape representing a rural Canterbury township in the early years of settlement, opened in late March 1980. Designed by Reynolds

²⁶⁹ CMAR, 1959, p. 10. 'Canterbury Museum to be Reopened on Monday', *Press*, 8 November 1958, p. 14.

²⁷⁰ Memorandum, 'Hall of Transport', 7 Aug 1958, CM: Series 6/6, folder B5/F9. 'Schedule for Early Colonists Galleries', 1958, CM: Series 97/91, box 20, folder 168, item 2459.

²⁷¹ CMAR, 1965, p. 13. 'Museum Hall Change: Space for Flight Exhibition', *Press*, 23 May 1964, p. 18.

²⁷² CMAR, 1966, p. 11.

²⁷³ 'Antarctic Collection Given to Museum', *Press*, 21 October 1967, p. 16. CMAR, 1968, p. 12. CMAR, 1971, pp. 19-21.

prior to her retirement in 1977, the streetscape consisted of a Blacksmith's forge, a one-teacher school, a butchery, an accommodation house, and a simulated dirt road complete with a Cobb and Co. coach pulled by two model horses.²⁷⁴

In preparation for the installation of these displays, the former FitzGerald Cabin was relocated to another site within the gallery around 1965 and refurbished.²⁷⁵ A photograph that was taken in the late 1960s or early 1970s shows that several changes were made to the interior of the cabin as a result of its relocation, including the installation of a new mural seascape (**fig 3.26**). While the cabin retained much of the furniture that it had been used to display since the opening of the Early Colonists Section in 1952, modifications were also made around this time to the manner in which the cabin was furnished. No longer attempting to recreate the layout of FitzGerald's cabin, the arrangement of the display was adapted to accommodate new pieces of furniture as well as a large number of other domestic artefacts.²⁷⁶ Significant changes were also made in terms of the lighting of the room, with a period light fitting being incorporated into the lighting scheme for the first time in its history.

In the 1960s and 1970s attention also turned to spaces beyond the walls of the museum building. Over the course of these two decades, members of staff were called on by a number of smaller local museums to assist in the planning and installation of displays. As part of this process the Museum assisted in the creation of a number of period rooms, including those that were installed at

²⁷⁴ CMAR, 1982, pp. 15-16.

²⁷⁵ CMAR, 1966, p. 11.

²⁷⁶ 'Cabin', undated, CM: Series 97/91, box 21, folder 173, item 2501.

Akaroa Museum in 1964 and Rangiora Museum in 1976.²⁷⁷ In the early 1970s the museum also collaborated with the Christchurch City Council on the transformation of the city's oldest surviving residential dwelling into a house museum, supplying 70 domestic artefacts from its collection to furnish the recently restored structure.²⁷⁸

Removal and Redevelopment

Following the opening of the Canterbury Colonists Galleries in 1959 it appears that few changes were made to the period rooms in this gallery. While adjustments were no doubt made to the displays as part of their ongoing maintenance, these changes are likely to have been relatively minor. The detailed summaries of the museum's activities that were published in its annual reports certainly indicate that the attention of its staff lay elsewhere throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, with no reference being made to the period rooms. This assertion is further supported by a photograph of the Georgian Room that appeared on the cover of the museum's annual report for the period 1971-1972, which records that while some alterations had been made to the attire and

²⁷⁷ The layout of the Akaroa Museum, which was designed by Canterbury Museum display technician Ralph Riccalton and installed with the assistance of the museum's display staff, featured a kitchen alcove that included a fireplace. The Canterbury Museum also assisted the Akaroa Museum with the task of furnishing *Langlois-Eteveneaux House* (1841-1845), a cottage in the Louis Phillip style that was located adjacent to the new museum building. In addition to contributing advice, the Canterbury Museum lent material from its collection for use in the house and the kitchen alcove. For details about the Canterbury Museum's assistance to the Akaroa Museum see: CMAR, 1965, p. 16. Various papers, CM: Series 97/91, box 22, folder 183, Akaroa Museum.

The Rangiora Museum, which opened in 1967, was extended in 1976. Both Duff and Riccalton assisted the Rangiora and District Historical Society to develop plans for the layout of the museum, which included a suite of furnished rooms. CMAR, 1977, p. 22

²⁷⁸ Known as Deans Cottage, the building was opened on 29 June 1970. A major project to re-furnish the cottage was later undertaken by the Canterbury Museum in November 1985. CMAR, 1971, pp. 21-22. CMAR, 1986, pp. 14-15.

arrangement of the mannequin group, the layout of the furnishings in this room remained largely unchanged (**fig 3.27**).

In 1969 the Canterbury Museum entered its hundredth year of operation. To celebrate this important milestone, a substantial new wing was constructed between 1973 and 1977. As part of the development of the Hundredth Anniversary Wing, several of the existing public galleries were closed in April 1974.²⁷⁹ The Period Room Gallery, which was to become one of the main thoroughfares between the new and existing galleries, was among the affected areas. Following its closure, Reynolds and the museum's newly appointed Assistant Curator of Colonial Collections, Jennifer Quérée, took the opportunity to substantially redevelop the displays in this area. While the Victorian Room was retained as part of the new suite of displays, both the Georgian and Stuart rooms were de-installed at this time.²⁸⁰ A temporary exhibition entitled *Two Centuries of Curtains and Covers* was installed in the space formerly occupied by Georgian Room, while the former Stuart Room was remodelled as an early nineteenth-century photographer's studio. The contents of cases opposite the period rooms were also redeveloped, with a selection of Victorian chairs being installed in preparation for the opening of the Hundredth Anniversary Wing in March 1977.

While the reasons for removing the pre-colonial rooms from the Period Room Gallery went unrecorded, the decision was no doubt informed by developments that had occurred at the museum since the opening of the Canterbury Colonists

²⁷⁹ CMAR, 1976, p. 17.

²⁸⁰ Little evidence survives regarding the changes that may have been made to the Victorian Room at this time. CMAR, 1977, p. 19.

Galleries in 1959. When the Canterbury Museum reopened in 1958, furniture played an extremely minor role in the museum's Hall of European Fine Arts, with only a single open platform being allocated for the display of such material.²⁸¹ This remained the case until 1965 when the hall was redesigned by Helmore with the assistance of Ralph Riccalton. Reopened in late April 1967, the refurbished hall showcased groups of furniture, textiles, and *objets d'art* against the backdrop of wallpapered bays that were designed to evoke rather than recreate domestic décor (**fig 3.28**).²⁸² The installation of these displays not only provided the museum with a space in which to exhibit a broader selection of period furniture, but also allowed such material to be located squarely within the history of design as opposed to the history of European settlement in New Zealand. The existence of these displays was no doubt taken into account by the museum's staff when the opportunity to redevelop the Period Room Gallery arose in the 1970s.

In October 1984 the Canterbury Museum Trust Board received a report from the Christchurch City Council on the condition of the museum building.²⁸³ In response to the report's findings, an ambitious project was launched to strengthen and renovate the nineteenth-century wings. From 1986 the displays in these areas were progressively de-installed to allow extensive work to be

²⁸¹ 'Reopening of Museum', *Press*, 11 November 1958, p. 12.

²⁸² The displays in this hall were initially redesigned by Helmore for a loan exhibition of period furniture, porcelain, silver and glass that was held in connection with the Pan Pacific Arts Festival in 1965. Opened on 18 February, the exhibition ran for a month. Following the closure of the exhibition on 12 March, the framework of the displays was retained. In 1966 Helmore died, bequeathing a collection of pre-Victorian furniture and European, Chinese and Japanese ceramics and *objets d'art* to the museum. In the months that followed, pieces from this collection were incorporated into the displays in accordance with a plan that Helmore had developed prior to his death. See: 'The Press Preview of the Festival (1)', *Press*, 17 February 1965, p. 15. 'Fine Old Furniture Well Displayed', *Press*, 20 February 1965, p. 16. CMAR, 1965, p. 15. CMAR, 1966, pp. 24-26. CMAR, 1967, p. 9. CMAR, 1968, p. 10.

²⁸³ CMAR, 1985, p. 6.

undertaken on the structure of the building.²⁸⁴ The first of the period rooms to be removed was the Cabin aboard the *Charlotte Jane*, which was de-installed as part of the process of clearing the Canterbury Colonists Hall (the former Hall of Colonial Settlement) between 1989 and 1990.²⁸⁵ The Cob House and the Victorian Room followed two years later, with the displays in the 1870 and 1872 wings being cleared between November 1992 and January 1993.²⁸⁶ When a modified version of Christchurch Street was installed later that decade, none of the period rooms were reinstated as part of the new displays (**figs 3.29-30**).²⁸⁷

Following the removal of the period rooms, furniture and domestic artefacts associated with the colonial period were instead shown in the Mountfort Gallery of Decorative Arts and Costume, an entirely new suite of displays that opened in the 1870 wing on 17 September 1997.²⁸⁸ Covering over three centuries of design history, the displays in the Mountfort Gallery included two pairs of purpose-built showcases devoted to the display of furniture and *objets d'art* of the periods 1600-1830s and 1830s-1930s respectively (**figs 3.31-32**). In addition to locating furniture from the Early Colonists Collection squarely within the history of design rather than the history of European settlement, the Mountfort Gallery also marked a radical departure from the Canterbury Colonists Galleries in terms of

²⁸⁴ The redevelopment of the galleries was undertaken in stages, with the renovated galleries progressively reopening between 1989 and 1999.

²⁸⁵ It is interesting to note that in March 1992, Quérée announced that the davenport desk that had been brought out on the *Charlotte Jane* by James and Fanny Fitzgerald had recently been donated to the Canterbury Museum and that this desk would 'be included in the reconstruction of the popular cabin display in the new history galleries.' An exhibit of this nature, however, was never installed. See: CMAR, 1990, p. 16. CMAR, 1992, p. 8.

²⁸⁶ CMAR, 1993, p. 11.

²⁸⁷ Laid out in the spaces formerly occupied by Wakefield Square and the Period Room Gallery, the new Christchurch Street opened in July 1998. While it retained many of the features of the original street, modifications were made to the layout of the gallery as well as to the design and contents of the stores.

²⁸⁸ CMAR, 1998, p. 5.

the strategies of display that it employed. In direct contrast to the Canterbury Colonists Galleries, the designers of the Mountfort Gallery made no attempt to tailor the design of the individual displays to the period or style represented by their respective contents. Attempting to display the pieces of furniture and other *objects d'art* as uniformly as possible, the design of the entire suite of displays was instead guided by the nineteenth-century architecture of the gallery space, which was restored as part of the refurbishment process.

While the substantial redevelopment of the museum's nineteenth-century display galleries resulted in the removal of all of the period rooms that had been created at the Canterbury Museum in the 1950s and 1960s, the process directly resulted in the installation of an entirely new kind of period environment. Opened on 14 April 1989, the Victorian Museum was designed to evoke the atmosphere of the Canterbury Museum itself in its early years. Curated by Jennifer Quérée, the new displays showcased a selection of specimens and artefacts representative of those exhibited at the museum in the nineteenth century using the taxonomies and display techniques that had been used during this period (**fig 3.33**).²⁸⁹ A small room representing the office of the museum's founder and first Director, Julius von Haast, also formed part of the displays (**fig 3.34**). Located in the 1876 wing, an appropriate period ambience for both the 'gallery' and the 'office' was provided by the former library, which was restored as closely as possible to its nineteenth-century appearance. Further ambience was provided by the lighting, with modern replicas of the old gas lamps that were originally used to illuminate the museum being used in the room.

²⁸⁹ Garry Arthur, 'First Director Presides over Victorian Room of New-Look Museum', *Press*, 14 April 1989, p. 11. CMAR, 1990, p. 16.

Recent Developments

Since 2000, two new period rooms have been installed at the Canterbury Museum. The first of these displays, a partial replica of *Studding Sail Hall*, opened at the museum in October 2000 (**figs 3.35-38**). Representing part of the V-hut erected by Dr. Alfred Charles Barker in Canterbury in 1850, this exhibit was developed by the museum's display staff in preparation for Heritage Week, a festival held in Christchurch 13-20 October 2000 to raise awareness of the city's built heritage.²⁹⁰ After the festival ended, the exhibit was retained, becoming a permanent feature of the long-term exhibition *Ngā Taonga Tuku Iho o Ngā Tūpuna/Treasures Left to Us by Our Ancestors*, which showcases material associated with Māori and European settlement in the Canterbury region.

On 4 July 2008, the Canterbury Museum opened Fred and Myrtle's Paua Shell House, a partial replica of the former home of Fred and Myrtle Flutey at 258 Marine Parade, Bluff (**figs 3.39-41**). Occupied by the Fluteys' for over 40 years, the villa became a local icon and visitor attraction in the mid-1960s when Fred and Myrtle began to open their home to the public. The star attraction of the house was the living room, where hundreds of New Zealand paua shells were affixed to the wall surfaces. The house remained open to the public until 2000, when Myrtle Flutey passed away. The partial replica of the Fluteys' home was installed in 2008 after the Fluteys' collection was lent on short-term loan to the

²⁹⁰ CMAR, 2000, p. 9. Christchurch City Council, 'Carter Group Heritage Week 2000', from Archive of Christchurch City Council Websites, Christchurch City Council, URL: <http://archived.ccc.govt.nz/HeritageWeek/2000/ToursOpenDays.asp>.

Canterbury Museum by the couple's grandson, Ross Bowen.²⁹¹ Attempting to evoke the experience of visiting the original house at Bluff, the exhibit consists of a full-scale replica of the front façade of the house, the entrance hall and two front rooms as well as the front section of the property, including a driveway and a lawn. Inside, the hallway and living room were furnished to recreate the former appearance of those at Bluff.

While the partial replicas of Studding Sail Hall and the Flutey's home continue the Canterbury Museum's long history of employing period rooms as a strategy of display, the two exhibits differ in key ways from their earlier counterparts. In direct contrast to the period rooms that were de-installed between 1989 and 1993, both of these displays were based on specific and well-documented historical interiors. In contrast to the former replica of Studding Sail Hall, which had attempted to recreate the entire structure, its twenty-first century equivalent recreated only those areas of the hut that had been documented by Dr. Barker in his drawings. In the case of the Flutey's house, the curators relied even more heavily on historical documentation, making use not only of the original architectural plans of the building and an extensive photographic record its interior, but also information gathered from the house itself before the collection was de-installed.²⁹²

In addition to the ever-increasing role that historical documentation has played, it is notable that greater emphasis has also been placed on the authenticity of the fabric of the displays. Of all of the period rooms that the museum could have

²⁹¹ Christopher Moore, 'Paua for the People', *Press*, 7 May 2008, from Stuff, Fairfax Media New Zealand, URL: <http://www.stuff.co.nz>.

²⁹² *ibid.*

attempted to recreate, Studding Sail Hall was one of only two for which the museum held a number of the original furnishings. Taking the quest for authenticity one step further, the Paua Shell House was not only the first period room in the museum's history to be furnished with artefacts drawn from a single source, but also to incorporate material salvaged from the two rooms being represented into the fabric of the display.²⁹³ These details were not lost in the press that surrounded the later of the two displays, where museum representatives repeatedly highlighted the museum's efforts to make both the fabric of the display and the experience that it offered as 'authentic' as possible.²⁹⁴

Replacing the guidebook model that had previously been used in connection with both the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition and the Canterbury Colonists Galleries, the curators of Studding Sail Hall and the Paua Shell House attempted to enrich the narratives told by the object-based elements of the individual rooms by integrating both text and images into the design of the displays. In contrast to its earlier counterpart, the partial replica of *Studding Sail Hall* that was built in 2000 is displayed alongside an extended label that provides further information about the settlement of the Canterbury region, the Barker family and life in *Studding Sail Hall*, as well as a diagram identifying some of the articles that are displayed in the hut and a large photomural of a series of V-huts. Likewise, the Paua Shell House is presented alongside a number of different sources of information that

²⁹³ Among the items salvaged from the original house were the carpet, the light fittings, and a pair of French doors.

²⁹⁴ See: Christopher Moore, 'Paua for the People', *Press*, 7 May 2008, from Stuff, Fairfax Media New Zealand, URL: <http://www.stuff.co.nz/print/4514042a6535.html>. 'Paua Shell House on Exhibition in New Canterbury Home', 3 News, 3 July 2008, from 3 News, URL: <http://3news.co.nz/defaultStrip.aspx?tabid=213&articleID=61822>.

aim to enrich the experience of viewing the rooms, including a text-based information panel, a series of historical photographs of Fred and Myrtle and their home at Bluff, and a short video presentation.

While Studding Sail Hall continues the museum's longstanding tradition of having visitors view the interior of the structure from an external position, the Paua Shell House was designed to enable visitors not only to enter the house, but to walk around the two rooms with no ropes or barriers being used to separate visitors from the collection. While on the surface this design feature would seem to distinguish the Paua Shell House from its earlier counterparts, it is in many ways a continuation of the quest for realism that underpinned the design of all of the museum's earlier period rooms. Where Helmore and Reynolds had relied on stagecraft to create the illusion of viewing a real historical interior, the decision to let visitors enter the Paua Shell House takes this aim one step further, heightening the sense of immediacy by recreating not only the appearance of the rooms in minute detail but also how they would have been viewed at their original location.

Chapter 4: Dominion Museum

Making their debut in the early 1950s, period rooms formed part of the displays at the Dominion Museum in Wellington for over forty years. In contrast to both the Otago Early Settlers Museum and the Canterbury Museum, the first period rooms to be installed at the Dominion Museum were not designed to represent New Zealand's colonial past. The 'Elgar Rooms', which opened in 1951, consisted of a suite of two rooms that were designed to showcase a collection of English period furnishings that the museum received from the estate of Ella Grace Elgar in 1946. Further period rooms, both temporary and permanent, were created in connection with the museum in the decades that followed, culminating in the creation of the Colonial Cottage in 1969. This chapter traces the history of these displays, looking at the circumstances in which they were installed and how these exhibits evolved over time.

Located on the grounds behind Parliament in the Wellington suburb of Thorndon, the Colonial Museum opened to the public in December 1865.²⁹⁵ In 1907 New Zealand officially became a self-governing dominion of the British Empire. In keeping with the nation's change of status, the museum also changed its name, becoming the Dominion Museum. In 1930 the Government passed the National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum Act, which resulted in a new

²⁹⁵ For general information regarding the history of the Dominion Museum see: Richard K. Dell, *The First Hundred Years of the Dominion Museum*, Wellington: Dominion Museum, 1965. James M. Gore, 'Representations of History and Nation in Museums in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand: The National Museum of Australia and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa', Doctor of Philosophy in History, University of Melbourne, 2002. Conal McCarthy, *Exhibiting Māori: A History of Colonial Cultures of Display*, Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2007.

building being erected on Mount Cook to house both the museum's collection and the newly established National Art Gallery. Designed by Gummer & Ford, the building was formally opened on 1 August 1936. The Dominion Museum was later renamed the National Museum in 1972, before merging with the National Art Gallery in 1992 to form the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa). Te Papa remained on site at Mount Cook until 1994 when the museum was relocated to its current premises on the Wellington waterfront, which opened in 1998.

Throughout the Nineteenth Century, the collection of the Colonial Museum consisted primarily of natural history specimens and ethnological artefacts. Although some objects associated with European settlement found their way into the collection prior to the turn of the century, such material was not officially recognised as a subset of the collection until the early Twentieth Century, when a separate accession register was established for 'General History' records.²⁹⁶ A separate 'Technology' register was also later established to encompass furniture, machinery, and other implements of Pākehā manufacture.²⁹⁷

Following the lead of the Canterbury Museum, an interest in actively acquiring materials associated with European settlement in New Zealand developed at the Dominion Museum in the 1910s. In the annual report of 1915, the museum's

²⁹⁶ The first entries in the register were mostly historical documents, with only a small number of artefacts being classified in this manner. The register included a number of retrospective entries regarding material accessioned between July 1909 and 1919. See: Accession Register, 'General History, Historical Records', Vol. 1, 1919-1967, MONZ: History Department.

²⁹⁷ The furniture collection, which would play a vital role in the establishment of period rooms at the Dominion Museum, continued to be classified as 'technology' until the late 1950s or early 1960s when a separate accession register was established for 'period furniture'. See: Accession Register, 'Technology', undated, MONZ: History Department. Accession Register, 'Period Furniture', undated, MONZ: History Department.

Director, James Allan Thomson (1881-1928, Director 1914-1928), argued for the establishment of a definite museum policy, listing 'New Zealand History' as one of the major fields that should be developed at the museum.²⁹⁸ By 1916 the National Historical Collection had been established and Thomson launched an appeal for donations of historical documents, paintings, drawings and various other paper-based records relating to the early history of New Zealand.²⁹⁹ Work on the project continued for several years, with Thomson reporting in January 1918 that the museum continued to approach relatives of early settlers for donations of material.³⁰⁰

The National Historical Collection, however, was relatively short-lived. In 1918 the Wellington-based collector Alexander Horsburgh Turnbull (1868-1918) died, bequeathing some 55,000 volumes of books, pamphlets, periodicals and newspapers, and thousands of maps, manuscripts, paintings, drawings and prints to the State.³⁰¹ The collection was kept together, forming the nucleus of the Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL), a national reference and research facility that opened in Turnbull's former home in Bowen Street in June 1920. In the months that followed, the paintings, historical documents and other paper-based materials that had been acquired for the National Historical Collection were transferred from the Dominion Museum to the ATL.³⁰² The museum retained all of the artefacts that had been accessioned on the General History register, but

²⁹⁸ Rebecca Rice, 'The State Collections of Colonial New Zealand Art: Intertwined Histories of Collecting and Display', Doctor of Philosophy in Art History, Victoria University of Wellington, 2010, p. 75.

²⁹⁹ 'Old New Zealand Making Historical Collections', *Evening Post*, 17 May 1916, p. 3.

³⁰⁰ 'Historical Documents: Work Of Collection Proceeding', *Evening Post*, 31 January 1918, p. 11.

³⁰¹ J.E. Traue, 'Turnbull, Alexander Horsburgh – Biography', from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Te Ara – the Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, updated 1 September 2010, URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/2t53/1>.

³⁰² Gore, 2002, p. 208.

these remained small in number for over two decades, with little discussion surrounding the collection again until the late 1940s.

Reflecting the marginal status of the General History and Technology collections at the Dominion Museum at this time, displays devoted to the theme of early European settlement in New Zealand did not feature in the public galleries until after the museum relocated to Mount Cook in the mid-1930s. Substantially larger than its predecessor, the new building provided the museum's Director, Walter Reginald Brook Oliver (1883-1957, Director 1928-1947), and his team with the opportunity to develop displays on a range of themes that the old galleries had been unable to accommodate, including a small area devoted to New Zealand history.³⁰³ Among the items that are known to have featured in this section are a series of enlarged photographs of various New Zealand ports, a communion cup and case once owned by the explorer Captain James Cook, and a model of his ship, the *Endeavour*.

While the move to Mount Cook enabled the Dominion Museum to cover a more diverse range of themes in its public galleries, little, if any, of the museum's small collection of period furniture was showcased in the new exhibition halls. Letters that Oliver wrote in response to offers of furniture indicate that there was indeed a strong resistance to the display of such items at the museum in the 1930s and early 1940s, with the Director stating in 1941 that the management committee were of the opinion that it was not desirable to display articles of furniture 'as the galleries in the Museum are arranged to cover only ethnological,

³⁰³ Dominion Museum, Annual Report for the year 1936-1937, p. 8. Hereafter DMAR...

biological, and similar specimens.³⁰⁴ The amount of space required to display furniture was also considered problematic, as was the large size of the galleries, which Oliver noted in 1937 made them unsuitable ‘for arranging Period rooms.’³⁰⁵

Although official policy continued to marginalise furniture and other domestic artefacts of Pākehā manufacture well into the 1960s, an interest in this area of the collection gradually emerged at the Dominion Museum in the 1940s and 1950s. An influential figure in this process was Stanley Northcote-Bade (1906-1997), a local amateur historian who was approached by the museum authorities around 1936 to advise them on matters relating to the decorative arts.³⁰⁶ Around 1944, Northcote-Bade presented the museum authorities with a proposal advocating for the establishment of a collection of decorative and applied art objects at the museum.³⁰⁷ In this proposal, Northcote-Bade not only encouraged the museum to establish an ‘Early Colonial’ section featuring locally-made artefacts associated with the early years of European settlement in New Zealand, but also actively promoted the display of such material. Although his proposal did not find immediate success, he continued to advocate for the museum’s nascent ‘colonial history’ collection, contributing greatly to its growth and public visibility after 1950.

³⁰⁴ Letter to C.G.F. Morice from W.R.B. Oliver, 19 March 1941, MONZ: ‘Technology and Textiles: Furniture – Purchases, Presentations, Offers to Sell, Part 1’, 1922-1959, MU2/71/3.

³⁰⁵ Letter to W.R. Stowe from W.R.B. Oliver, 19 October 1937, MONZ: MU2/71/3.

³⁰⁶ For further information about Northcote-Bade see: Chapter 3, footnote 27.

³⁰⁷ Stanley Northcote-Bade, ‘A Preliminary Proposal for the Practical Establishment of a Permanent Ethnological Section at the Dominion Museum’, circa 1944, MONZ: MU252/1/1.

In addition to supporting the development of the museum's collection of domestic furniture and artefacts, Northcote-Bade was also a strong advocate for the use of period rooms. In the proposal that he submitted to the museum authorities in the mid-1940s, Northcote-Bade devoted an entire section to outlining the types of exhibition spaces that would be required by the museum in order to display pieces of furniture representative of different periods to their best advantage. In regards to the display of early colonial furniture, he not only advocated that the dimensions of the display spaces should be modelled on extant examples of early colonial rooms, but that an early colonial room itself might be re-established in the museum 'after the style of the existing Maori meeting house.'³⁰⁸

The Elgar Rooms

In 1939 World War II broke out in Europe. As the war gained momentum in the Pacific, the museum building was requisitioned for defence purposes, becoming the headquarters of the Royal New Zealand Air Force.³⁰⁹ Officially closed to the public on 8 June 1942, the museum's display galleries were cleared to make way for the building's new tenants. After the military vacated the building in August 1946, the display galleries sat vacant for two years. During the closure period, Oliver retired after 18 years of service as the museum's Director and was succeeded by Dr. Robert Alexander Falla (1901-1979, Director 1947-1966).

Taking up the post in 1947, Falla's first major task was to regain full use of the

³⁰⁸ Stanley Northcote-Bade, 'A Preliminary Proposal for the Practical Establishment of a Permanent Ethnological Section at the Dominion Museum', circa 1944, MONZ: MU252/1/1.

³⁰⁹ DMAR, 1943, p. 4.

museum building. Progress towards this goal was finally made in July 1948 when the Ministry of Works began the task of restoring and redecorating the interior.³¹⁰ By March the following year, the museum had regained use of the entire building, enabling Falla and his team to begin installing displays in preparation for the re-opening of the museum on 29 September 1949.³¹¹

The refurbishment, which enabled the museum authorities to apply contemporary ideas regarding museum display on a widespread scale, heralded a new era in terms of the use of realist display strategies at the museum. In the natural history galleries, the timber stands on which New Zealand birds had previously been mounted were replaced by artificial branches that employed new techniques in modelling flowers and foliage to imitate each bird's individual habitat.³¹²

Further displays that employed realist techniques were added to the galleries in the years that followed, including a series of three habitat dioramas in 1951 and a reconstruction of a Māori moa-hunters' camp in Takahe Valley, Fiordland, which went on display in 1953.³¹³

It was also during the wartime closure that the Dominion Museum began planning its first suite of period rooms. Opened in 1951, the 'Elgar Rooms' showcased a range of antique English furniture alongside a small selection of *objets d'art* sourced from England, China and Japan. In contrast to both the

³¹⁰ 'Restoring Museum: Work Has Started', *Evening Post*, 27 July 1948, p. 8.

³¹¹ DMAR, 1950, p. 5.

³¹² 'Dominion Museum's Metamorphosis, Fresh Paint: Striking Displays: Modern Lighting', *New Zealand Free Lance*, 28 September 1949, p. 14.

³¹³ The first of the habitat dioramas, a Takahe group, opened in February 1951. This was followed by scenes representing a group of kiwis in a bush setting and little blue penguins in a rock cleft nest, which went on display a few months later. See: DMAR, 1951, p. 5. 'New Exhibits at Dominion Museum', *Evening Post*, 11 June 1951, p. 8. 'Moa-Hunters' Display at Museum', *Evening Post*, 30 September 1953, p. 12.

Otago Early Settlers Museum and the Canterbury Museum where local centennials gave momentum to the installation of the first period rooms, the catalyst for the creation of the Elgar Rooms was local collector, Ella Grace Elgar (née Pharazyn, 1869-1945), who single-handedly provided the museum with the collection necessary to furnish such a display.

The daughter of Charles Pharazyn Junior, Ella Elgar was born into one of the Wairarapa's wealthiest colonial families.³¹⁴ Her grandfather, Charles Pharazyn, had been one of the country's earliest sheep farmers, a tradition carried on by his sons, including Ella's father. In 1890 she married Charles Elgar, a sheep farmer who managed large tracts of land for the Pharazyn family, and the couple settled on Charles' 1,134 acre Wairarapa estate, *Fernside*, where they prospered, particularly during World War I (1914-18) when the price of wool remained high. The couple had one child, Enid Awa Elgar (1890-1916), who died of tuberculosis in 1916. Frequent travellers, the Elgars made regular trips to Europe, China and Japan, where they actively acquired antique furnishings for the large nineteenth-century homestead on their estate. In November 1923 tragedy struck when the lavishly furnished homestead was destroyed by fire.³¹⁵ In the aftermath of the disaster, the couple commissioned Christchurch-based architectural firm Helmore & Cotterill to design a magnificent new homestead for the site, which the Elgars set about furnishing with antique furniture and *objets d'art* that they collected while travelling aboard. The collection continued

³¹⁴ 'Biography of Ella Grace Elgar (née Pharazyn)', from Collections Online, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, URL: <http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/Theme.aspx?irn=842>. 'Obituary: Mrs Ella Elgar', 1945, source unknown, MONZ Corporate Records: History Collection and Information – Ella Grace Elgar Bequest, INAC297/04.

³¹⁵ 'Luxurious Homestead Burnt', *Evening Post*, 22 November 1923, p. 7.

to grow rapidly until 1930 when Charles died suddenly, age 75.³¹⁶ Ella subsequently remained at *Fernside* until 1943, when she moved to Christchurch. The collection, however, remained *in situ* until after her death in August 1945.

In her will, Ella bequeathed part of the substantial collection of antique furnishings that she and her husband had collected to the National Art Gallery in Wellington.³¹⁷ The National Art Gallery, however, declined the bequest, citing ‘exigencies of space’ as the reason for their decision.³¹⁸ Rather than see the collection dispersed, the Secretary of the National Art Gallery, F.H. Bass, wrote to the Director of the Dominion Museum, W.R.B. Oliver, in December 1945 to suggest that the museum authorities consider accepting the bequest. Oliver and Northcote-Bade subsequently travelled to *Fernside* on 19 January 1946 to view the material and, based on their recommendations, the museum authorities agreed that the bequest should be accepted.³¹⁹ The remainder of the collection was dispersed by means of an auction held in April that year.³²⁰

Under the terms of the bequest, the museum was required to erect two period rooms, ‘a Queen Anne and Stuart Room’ and ‘a Georgian Room’, in which to display the collection.³²¹ These rooms, Elgar stipulated, were to consist of three walls and a false ceiling, with the fourth wall being removed so as to allow the

³¹⁶ ‘Obituary: Mr Charles Elgar’, *Evening Post*, 21 April 1930, p. 11.

³¹⁷ ‘Estate Mrs Ella Grace Elgar: Abstract from will with reference to the National Art Gallery’, MONZ: ‘Gifts: Elgar Bequest’, 1946-1951, MU3/5/13.

³¹⁸ Letter to W.R.B. Oliver from F.H. Bass, 10 December 1945, MONZ: MU3/5/13.

³¹⁹ Memo to the Secretary, Board of Trustees, National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum from W.R.B. Oliver, 28 February 1946, MONZ: MU2/71/3.

³²⁰ *Catalogue, being part of the famous collection of antiques and art belonging to the late Mrs Chas. Elgar: to be sold by public auction at the homestead Fernside, Featherston on Tuesday and Wednesday 2nd and 3rd April, 1946*, Wellington: Kingsway Ltd. and Dunbar Sloane, 1946.

³²¹ ‘Estate Mrs Ella Grace Elgar: Abstract from will with reference to the National Art Gallery’, MONZ: MU3/5/13.

public to view the interior without entering it, and each room was to feature windows, a fireplace, and a door. In order to ensure that her vision for the displays was carried out, Elgar not only made provision in her will for £500 to be made available to cover the cost of installing the two displays, but requested that the installation process be carried out under the supervision of Heathcote George Helmore, who had assisted her to prepare the terms of the bequest.³²²

As noted in Chapter 1, Helmore was a Christchurch-based architect that was heavily involved in pioneering the use of the period room as a strategy of display in New Zealand. In addition to having prior experience designing such displays, Helmore had a longstanding acquaintance with Elgars, for whom he had designed *Fernside* in 1924. While Helmore's exact contribution to the terms laid out in Elgar's will remains unknown, it is notable that the detailed specifications regarding the design of the displays that it provides closely followed the model offered by the South Island Pioneer Room, which Helmore had designed for the New Zealand Centennial Exhibition in 1939. Given that Helmore was himself a collector of antique English furniture, it is possible that he not only advised Elgar on what form the display should take, but also helped to select the contents of the bequest, which included not only a range of furniture, but also period light fittings and floor coverings.

In keeping with Elgar's wishes, the Dominion Museum engaged Helmore to design the two period rooms. The design process appears to have begun around May 1949, when the museum authorities supplied Helmore with a plan of the

³²² Clause 6d, 'Estate Mrs Ella Grace Elgar: Abstract from will with reference to the National Art Gallery', MONZ: MU3/5/13.

space that had been provisionally allocated to the project and a list of the furniture that was to be displayed. After visiting the museum later that month, Helmore supplied Falla with a sketch plan of the proposed layout of the rooms. While the sketch plan itself does not appear to have survived, the letter that accompanied it records that the displays were to occupy the equivalent of three bays, with two bays comprising a 'walnut section' and one a 'mahogany section'.³²³ Within days of receiving the plan, Falla wrote to Helmore to report that an alternative space had become available along the western side of the south-east hall, where the two period rooms were to be installed alongside displays of 'other furniture and articles of historical or decorative interest' that the museum's staff were in the process of developing.³²⁴ The description of the area that Falla provided in this letter suggests that it was roughly approximate in size to the original site and required no major alterations to the overall design.

In July 1949 Helmore's sketch plans for the Elgar Rooms were presented to the Board of Trustees of the National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum and the Finance Committee, which both agreed that the project should proceed.³²⁵ A second sketch plan of the rooms was consequently supplied by Helmore later that month.³²⁶ Like its earlier counterpart, the current whereabouts of the plan is unknown. From the letter that accompanied it, however, it is clear that the design of the display was still a work in progress, with Helmore indicating that he would send instructions regarding the plasterwork and timber mouldings in the near future.

³²³ Letter to Robert Falla from Heathcote Helmore, 2 June 1949, MONZ: MU3/5/13.

³²⁴ Letter to Heathcote Helmore from Robert Falla, 9 June 1949, MONZ: MU2/71/3.

³²⁵ Letter to Heathcote Helmore from Robert Falla, 7 July 1949, MONZ: MU2/71/3.

³²⁶ Letter to Robert Falla from Heathcote Helmore, 14 July 1949, MONZ: MU2/71/3.

The following month, Falla obtained quotes regarding the cost of installing the displays from the local builder, J. McArley, who was to install the timber framing and panelling in each of the rooms, and from the Carrara Ceiling Company, which had been engaged to install the fibrous plaster ceilings and cornices.³²⁷ The estimated cost, which totalled £548, was an immediate cause for concern for the museum authorities as it exceeded the £500 that had been bequeathed for the purposes of constructing the display even before other significant costs, including Helmore's own fees, had been taken into account. While additional funding was subsequently made available by the museum's Board of Trustees, an attempt was made to reduce the cost of the displays by omitting an elaborate fireplace that had featured in Helmore's original design for the larger of the two rooms.³²⁸

Following the start of construction in January 1951, Falla wrote to Helmore to request information regarding the surface finishes that were going to be used in each of the rooms.³²⁹ In his reply, the architect stated that he envisioned that the timber panelling in the Queen Anne Room would be painted 'in that particular green which was used so much at that period with the mouldings picked out in gilt' while in the Georgian Room he hoped to procure wallpaper to hang between the chair rail and the cornice, which were both to be painted.³³⁰ The curtains,

³²⁷ Letter to Heathcote Helmore from Robert Falla, 18 August 1949, MONZ: MU2/71/3.

³²⁸ Letter to the Manager, Carrara Ceiling Company, from Robert Falla, 1 November 1950, MONZ: MU2/71/3. Even with such measures the final cost of the project was £988.1.4. See: Letter to F.H. Bass from J.R. Deal, 16 November 1951, MONZ: MU3/5/13.

³²⁹ Letter to Heathcote Helmore from Robert Falla, 8 January 1951, MONZ: MU2/71/3.

³³⁰ Letter to Robert Falla from Heathcote Helmore, 16 January 1951, MONZ: MU2/71/3.

which were the last design element in each of the rooms to be selected, were later ordered by the museum authorities in August 1951.³³¹

While work progressed on the design of the period rooms, the Elgar collection was provisionally arranged across three bays in preparation for the reopening of the museum in September 1949.³³² While few records of these displays survive, an article that appeared in the *New Zealand Free Lance* that month records that the first two bays contained items representative of William and Mary period and the early eighteenth century, while the third bay was used to display furnishings representative of the late eighteenth century.³³³ While the exact contents and arrangement of the displays remains unclear, the illustrations that accompanied the article show that the furnishings were arranged around the perimeter of the bays, with no attempt being made to evoke a domestic environment (**fig 4.1**).

The original installation of the Elgar furniture remained in place for around 14 months. Once the three bays had been cleared, the carpenters commenced the task of installing the framework of the period rooms on 8 January 1951.³³⁴ By the end of the month, the fabric of the rooms was in place and craftsmen from the

³³¹ Letter to Heathcote Helmore from Robert Falla, 7 August 1951, MONZ: MU2/71/3.

³³² 'Museum Open Again to the Public', *Evening Post*, 30 September 1949, p. 9. DMAR, 1950, p. 5.

³³³ In this article the two areas of the display are referred to as the 'William and Mary and Queen Anne room' and the 'Georgian room'. While the exact contents of the 'rooms' remains unclear, several items can be identified as having been used in the display. Among the items that were displayed in the 'William and Mary and Queen Anne room' were a black lacquer cabinet and stand (PF39), an oil painting entitled *The Birds* attributed to the Dutch artist Melchior d'Hondecoeter (1992-0035-2276), a walnut chair (PF46), a pair of mirrored candle sconces (PF57/1-2), a high backed chair (PF45), and a carpet. Items displayed in the 'Georgian room' included a dressing commode (PF67) and a clock (PF74). See: 'Dominion Museum's "New Look"', *New Zealand Free Lance*, 28 September 1949, p. 38.

³³⁴ Letter to Heathcote Helmore from Robert Falla, 8 January 1951, MONZ: MU2/71/3.

Carrara Ceiling Company were on site to install the plaster work.³³⁵ Once this task was complete, painters were brought in to paint the walls and mouldings. At the request of Helmore, this task was carried out by the Wellington firm Bartlett, which had been responsible for painting the interior of *Fernside* over 20 years earlier.³³⁶ By May, sufficient progress had been made that Helmore was able to begin the task of installing the Elgar furniture with the assistance of Northcote-Bade.³³⁷ The following month, the public was given their first glimpse of the display when the screens behind which the construction of the rooms had taken place were dismantled.³³⁸ By this time, the only elements that were yet to be installed were the curtains, two of the carpets, the chandeliers, and oil paintings, which were all gradually installed in the months that followed.

On 12 September 1951 the first images of the ‘recently completed’ Elgar Rooms were published in the *New Zealand Free Lance* (**figs 4.2-3**).³³⁹ The Queen Anne Room occupied the equivalent of two bays, while the Georgian Room was located in a single bay to the right.³⁴⁰ Following the model offered by the period rooms that had been created for the New Zealand Centennial Exhibition in 1939, the Elgar Rooms each consisted of three walls and a ceiling, with visitors viewing the interior of the display through the absent fourth wall. The only

³³⁵ Letter to Heathcote Helmore from Robert Falla, 18 January 1951, MONZ: MU2/71/3.

³³⁶ Letter to Robert Falla from Heathcote Helmore, 16 January 1951, MONZ: MU2/71/3.

³³⁷ The trip to Wellington was one of two that Helmore made during the process of constructing the displays, with his first site visit having taken place in late February. See: Letters to Robert Falla from Heathcote Helmore, 31 January 1951 and 15 June 1951, MONZ: MU2/71/3. In addition to assisting Helmore with furnishing the rooms, Northcote-Bade is also credited with providing advice during the earlier stages of the construction process. See: Letter to Stanley Northcote-Bade from Robert Falla, 5 April 1951, MONZ: MU2/71/3.

³³⁸ ‘New Exhibits at Dominion Museum’, *Evening Post*, 11 June 1951, p. 8.

³³⁹ ‘Real Home in Dominion Museum: Georgian Rooms for Period Furniture’, *New Zealand Free Lance*, 12 September 1951, p. 30.

³⁴⁰ The width of each bay was delineated by the location of the columns that supported the roof of the gallery.

structural element of the display that was not custom-built at the time of installation was the floor, with no attempt being made to replicate timber floorboards.

Within this framework, Helmore lavished attention on the architectural detailing and decoration of the rooms. In order to enhance the impression of encountering the interior of a residential dwelling, two windows and a doorframe were incorporated into the design of the display.³⁴¹ The windows, which were glazed with opalescent glass, were located in the rear wall of each of the rooms, while the door was located in the left wall of the Queen Anne Room. Historical wall finishes were also replicated throughout the two rooms. In the Queen Anne Room, the walls were lined with moulded timber panelling and capped with a large plaster cornice. Adding to the opulence of the room, the entire wall surface was painted green using a stipple technique to create depth of colour, and the mouldings were picked out in gilt. By contrast, the walls in the Georgian Room were fitted with a low timber dado, and then plastered above the line of the chair rail. Like the Queen Anne Room, the walls of the Georgian Room were then painted, with a rich pearl colour being used on the walls to complement the colour of the cornice and the dado, which were highlighted in ivory.³⁴²

While the Elgar Rooms did not recreate any one room at *Fernside* in all of its details, the decorative schemes used in the two period rooms were heavily indebted to the interiors that Helmore had designed for the Elgar's neo-Georgian

³⁴¹ From photographs that were taken of the display in the 1950s, it appears that the doorframe was originally not fitted with a door.

³⁴² Although no colour photographs of the Georgian Room survive, the colour of the walls was described in press commentaries. See: 'Real Home in Dominion Museum: Georgian Rooms for Period Furniture', *New Zealand Free Lance*, 12 September 1951, p. 13.

style homestead in 1924. The primary reference point for the Queen Anne Room was the Elgar's large formal drawing room, upon which Helmore based the design of the panelling and the cornice, as well as the display's colour scheme. *Fernside* also provided a model for the adjacent Georgian Room, where the mouldings and wall finishes were reminiscent of those used in the other formal reception rooms of the house.

In order to complete the two displays, a small selection of soft furnishings and period light fixtures were also installed in each of the rooms. In the Queen Anne Room the windows were hung with pearl-coloured brocade drapes that were modelled on a four-poster bed draping of about 1735, while those in the Georgian Room were based on a design by the eighteenth-century English furniture-maker, Thomas Sheraton.³⁴³ Further soft furnishings were introduced in the form of two small Chinese rugs in the Queen Anne Room and a pair of French carpets in the Georgian Room. In contrast to the drapes, which were both modern replicas, all of the carpets were derived from the estate of Ella Elgar.³⁴⁴

³⁴³ The curtains in the Georgian Room featured grey floral motifs on a maroon background. 'Real Home in Dominion Museum: Georgian Rooms for Period Furniture', *New Zealand Free Lance*, 12 September 1951, p. 13. 'The Ella Grace Elgar Bequest of Furniture and Period Rooms', circa 1950, MONZ: 'Michael Fitzgerald: General Subject Files', MU244/6/8.

³⁴⁴ It is notable that the two Chinese rugs did not form part of the original Elgar Bequest. In her will, Elgar left the museum a single large Chinese rug. After visiting the museum to install the furniture in 1951, Helmore noted that the use of one large Chinese rug did not suit the proportions of the Queen Anne Room. As Helmore had purchased two smaller Chinese rugs from the Elgar estate, he offered to trade these for the one in the museum's collection. The offer was accepted, and Helmore dispatched the rugs to Wellington in late July 1951. Letters to Robert Falla from Heathcote Helmore, 15 June 1951 and 25 July 1951, MONZ: MU2/71/3.

Against this backdrop, the antique furniture and paintings that had formed part of the Elgar Bequest were displayed.³⁴⁵ In contrast to the structure of the display, which closely followed the model offered by the period rooms that had been created at the Otago Early Settlers Museum and the Canterbury Museum only a few years earlier, the manner in which the Elgar Rooms were furnished differed dramatically from their earlier counterparts. Where period rooms had traditionally been used by local museums to evoke the conditions in which a certain group of people had lived during a certain period, the core function of the Elgar Rooms was to illustrate the history of English furniture design. This aim found expression not only in the exclusion of commonplace and everyday items from the display, but also in the arrangement of the rooms. Instead of attempting to recreate the layout of a typical drawing room or dining room of an English manor, the furniture was arranged so as to highlight the stylistic features and craftsmanship demonstrated by the individual pieces that the rooms contained. This characteristic is particularly evident in the Queen Anne Room where almost all of the items were placed so that they faced the front of the display.

As noted above, Elgar made provision in her will for £500 pounds to be given to the Board of Trustees of the National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum on acceptance of the bequest.³⁴⁶ This money, the will stated, was to fund not only the cost of installing of the period rooms but also the cost of producing a catalogue to accompany the display. This catalogue, which was drafted but never published, provided a brief introduction to the history of both the Elgar

³⁴⁵ Not all of the collection was displayed. In the absence of a fireplace, for example, the museum was unable to display the carved timber overmantle. A small selection of porcelain that had formed part of the bequest also appears to have been left out of the display in its early years.

³⁴⁶ Clause 6, 'Estate Mrs Ella Grace Elgar: Abstract from will with reference to the National Art Gallery', MONZ: MU3/5/13.

collection and English furniture design between 1700 and 1900 as well as supplying a detailed inventory of the furniture and *objets d'art* that had formed part of the bequest.³⁴⁷ In the absence of a catalogue, the only interpretive material that appears to have been provided in connection with the period rooms during the 1950s were a series of three labels that were located along the back wall of the display. In place by September 1951, these labels identified the fact that the contents of the display had formed part of the Elgar Bequest as well as identifying the period in which the furniture in that area of the display had been built.³⁴⁸

As few records were made of the Elgar Rooms between their installation in 1951 and the late 1960s, little is known about the appearance of the two rooms during this period. Photographs that were taken of the two rooms in October 1954 show that some minor revisions had been made to the contents and arrangement of the displays by this time (**figs 4.4-6**). In the Georgian Room, for example, one of the Mahogany dining chairs had been removed from the display and several other pieces of furniture, including a pair of upholstered window seats, a card table and a second Mahogany dining chair, had been relocated within the room. Similar changes were made in the Queen Anne Room, with at least two items, a candle stand and a dining chair, being removed from the display. By 1954, some additions had also been made to the two rooms. In the Queen Anne Room, some of the furniture began to be used to display the porcelain plates and bowls that

³⁴⁷ The style of writing indicates that this draft was produced on behalf of the museum by Stanley Northcote-Bade. See: 'The Ella Grace Elgar Bequest of Furniture and Period Rooms', c.1950, MONZ: MU244/6/8.

³⁴⁸ These areas of the display were identified as exhibiting furniture of the period 'Stuart-William and Mary', 'Early 18th Century' and 'Later 18th Century' respectively. There is no evidence to suggest that any further information accompanied the physical exhibit.

Elgar had bequeathed to the museum, while in the Georgian Room the Elgar collection was supplemented with a small selection of porcelain and some Chinese figurines derived from other sources. Further items of this kind may have been added in the years that followed.

The Colonial Exhibition, 1954-55

At the same time that the museum authorities began working towards the goal of reopening of the public galleries in the late 1940s, concerns began to be raised regarding the increasingly inadequate levels of storage and exhibition space that were available. By 1950, pressure on the museum building had become such that the idea of abandoning the process of collecting period furniture, technology and other ‘bygones’ was discussed.³⁴⁹ In the absence of a separate institution to house such collections, however, the museum authorities decided that the Dominion Museum would continue to accept, and where possible exhibit, ‘all important material’ while at the same time supporting any future attempts to establish a technological museum in the region. As a result of this policy, the museum not only established a new ‘Historical and Technological Section’, but also began to accept offers of such material in growing numbers after 1950.³⁵⁰

One particular area of the Historical and Technological Section that experienced rapid growth in the early 1950s was the museum’s collection of furnishings associated with the colonial period. Upon her death in 1951, Amy Clapham,

³⁴⁹ DMAR, 1950, p. 6.

³⁵⁰ DMAR, 1952, p. 6.

whose family arrived in New Zealand aboard the *Lord William Bentinck* in 1841, provided the Dominion Museum with the opportunity to accession anything of interest from her home. The selection, which was made on behalf of the museum by Northcote-Bade, included several pieces of furniture and a range of domestic artefacts.³⁵¹ Other significant gifts and bequests followed, including a substantial collection of early New Zealand furniture that was donated by Ada Caroline Dorset in 1951, and a set of bedroom furniture that was bequeathed to the museum by the Saxton family in 1953.³⁵²

While the collection continued to grow, the amount of gallery space that was available at the museum hampered its ability to display colonial furniture and domestic ‘bygones’. When the public galleries reopened in 1949, a section devoted to relics of European settlement in New Zealand featured in one of the galleries.³⁵³ As no record appears to have been made of the contents of these displays, it is unknown whether it featured any domestic furnishings. One of the few pieces of furniture associated with colonial settlement that is known to have been exhibited in the early 1950s is a walnut canopied bed that had once belonged to Sir George Grey (1812-1896, Governor of New Zealand 1845-1853), which was purchased and placed on display in conjunction with other

³⁵¹ The items selected by Northcote-Bade included a four poster bed (PF132), a chest of drawers (PF126), a firescreen (PF17), a large American weight-driven wall clock (PF119), lustres (PF30), a set of bedroom china, and a painted screen. ‘Museum’s Antique Treasure Hunt’, *Evening Post*, 10 August 1951, p. 8. Accession Register, ‘Period Furniture’, undated, MONZ: History Department. Accession Register, ‘Ceramics, Vol. 1’, undated, MONZ: History Department.

³⁵² Ada Dorset was a descendant of William Dorset and his wife Charlotte who arrived in Wellington aboard the *Hope* in 1846. Her bequest included a music canterbury (PF11), three balloon back chairs (PF101/1-3), a canopy bed (PF122), a bidet (PF156), a washstand (PF157), four Rosewood chairs (PF158/1-4), a chest (PF159), a four poster bed (PF160), a single bed (PF161), a fireside chair (PF162), two deck chairs (PF163-4), and a footstool (PF166). In addition to the bequest material, a cabin bed (PF89), which had arrived in Wellington aboard the *Tory* in 1839, was purchased from her estate. See: Accession Register, ‘Period Furniture’, undated, MONZ: History Department. ‘Old Colonial Costumes Lost to Nation’, *Evening Post*, 11 October 1951, p. 10.

³⁵³ DMAR, 1950, p. 5.

period furniture in January 1950.³⁵⁴ Little progress appears to have subsequently been made in the galleries, with the museum reporting in 1953 that it had been unable to expand the displays in the 'Historical and Technological Section'.³⁵⁵

In 1954 the museum temporarily overcame the problem by borrowing a suite of galleries on the first floor of its shared Mount Cook premises to host a large-scale temporary exhibition of material associated with the history of European settlement in New Zealand. Opened to the public on 7 December 1954, the Colonial Exhibition showcased a selection of historical documents, paintings, drawings, and watercolours from the collections of the Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL), the National Archives, and the London-based collector, Rex Nan Kivell.³⁵⁶ Complementing these displays, the exhibition also featured a wide range of artefacts associated with the colonial period, including builder's hardware, scrimshaw, firearms, toys, clothing and domestic furnishings. The furniture was displayed both in small groups and against the backdrop of 'rooms' designed to represent early New Zealand interiors.

While the documentation surrounding the planning of the Colonists Exhibition is extremely fragmentary, the origins of the event can be traced back to the late 1930s when a proposal was put forward that the museum should host an exhibition of material associated with the early years of European settlement to

³⁵⁴ The bed went on display on 11 January and remained in place for at least two months. See: 'Sir George Grey's Bed In Museum', *Evening Post*, 11 January 1950, p. 8. Letter to H.D. Skinner from Robert Falla, 3 March 1950, MONZ: MU2/71/3.

³⁵⁵ DMAR, 1953, p. 6.

³⁵⁶ National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum, *Colonial Exhibition at the National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum, Buckle Street, Wellington, December 1954 to March 1955*, Wellington: Wright and Carman, 1954, p. 1. DMAR, 1955, p. 7.

coincide with national centennial celebrations in 1940.³⁵⁷ In 1939, however, war broke out in Europe and the exhibition concept was shelved. Although the idea was discussed again in the early 1940s, this plan too was thwarted when the museum building was requisitioned for wartime service in 1942.³⁵⁸ Due to the closure of the museum building, which lasted seven years, no further progress was made towards hosting such an event until around 1952 when Northcote-Bade began to explore the feasibility of organising an exhibition of this nature.³⁵⁹ A proposal was subsequently placed before the Director, who agreed that the project should proceed.

Having successfully convinced the museum authorities to host an exhibition of colonial material, Northcote-Bade took responsibility for overseeing much of the planning process.³⁶⁰ Given Northcote-Bade's background, it is likely that period rooms featured as part of the exhibition layout at an early stage in its development. As noted above, Northcote-Bade had long been a strong advocate for the period room, having promoted the use of this strategy of display to the museum authorities as early as 1944. By the early 1950s, he also had a wealth of experience in organising such displays, having been involved in planning and installing the Nelson Pioneer Exhibition (1947-48), the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition (1950-51) and the Elgar Rooms (1952).³⁶¹

³⁵⁷ Letter to Roger Duff from Stanley Northcote-Bade, 14 May 1952, CM: Series 6/6, Folder B4/F7. National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum, 1954, p. i.

³⁵⁸ Stanley Northcote-Bade, 'Report on Colonial Exhibition', circa 1954-55, MONZ: 'Collections and Exhibitions: Colonial and Centennial 1954-1968', MU2/73/6.

³⁵⁹ Letter to Roger Duff from Stanley Northcote-Bade, 14 May 1952, CM: Series 6/6, Folder B4/F7.

³⁶⁰ Letter to V.F. Fisher from G.C. Shaw, 21 December 1954, MONZ: 'Collections and Exhibitions: Exhibitions – General, Including All Temporary Displays, Part 1, 1937-1960, MU2/71/6.

³⁶¹ The idea that period rooms would feature in the exhibition had almost certainly been raised with Falla by April 1953 when the Director wrote to Nelson-based photographer Richard T.J.

Although the origins of the period rooms remain unclear, correspondence in the museum's archives sheds some light on how the design of these displays developed over time. In December 1953 Falla wrote to the manager of a local demolition company regarding the architectural salvages that the museum was hoping to obtain for use in the period rooms. Following up on discussions that Northcote-Bade had previously had with the firm, Falla formally requested that the company supply the museum with two double-hung windows with small panes, two doors, and a fireplace, as well as sufficient skirting boards and architraves for two rooms.³⁶² However, as plans for the exhibition evolved in the months that followed, a further two rooms were added to the proposed exhibition layout and the design of the rooms was refined to include fewer architectural salvages.

In addition to sourcing material for the fabric of the rooms, Northcote-Bade was also responsible for overseeing the acquisition and selection of artefacts to furnish them. When planning for the exhibition began in the early 1950s, the museum's collection still contained only a relatively small number of furnishings suitable for display in period rooms, a problem that was compounded by the fact that a significant number of items had been sent to Northland around 1952 for display in Pompallier House.³⁶³ In order to supplement the museum's collection, Northcote-Bade thus began the task of actively soliciting material from local

Blick to request copies of photographs that he had taken of the Nelson Pioneer Exhibition in 1947. Letter to Richard T.J. Blick from Robert Falla, 30 April 1953, MONZ: MU2/71/3.

³⁶² Letter to Capill from Robert Falla, 17 December 1953, MONZ: MU2/71/3.

³⁶³ Erected by French missionaries in 1841 for use as a printing works, 'Pompallier House' was opened to the public as a house museum in 1949. The material that the museum lent to the Internal Affairs Department for use at the property, which consisted predominantly of furniture from the Dorset bequest, remained in Northland until the late 1960s. See: Letter to the Secretary, Internal Affairs Department, from Robert Falla, 23 November 1951, MONZ: MU2/71/3. DMAR, 1958, p. 15. 'Inventory of Exhibits at Pompallier House as at 4.5.1967', 1967, MONZ: 'Display/Exhibition Files', MU252/1/4.

families. As part of this process, he travelled to the Marlborough and Nelson Districts in December 1953.³⁶⁴ The trip, which resulted in a number of significant acquisitions, was later followed by visits to the Wairarapa and areas along the West Coast as far as New Plymouth.³⁶⁵ The process of acquiring material continued well into 1954, with some items proving harder to source than others.³⁶⁶

Installed by the museum's display staff in collaboration with representatives of the ATL and the National Archives, the Colonial Exhibition opened to the public on 7 December 1954.³⁶⁷ As built, the exhibition featured a series of four period rooms that were located in two of the smaller subsidiary galleries. Constructed by the Dominion Museum's Display Technician, Harry J. Allan, and furnished by the museum's display staff under the leadership of Northcote-Bade, the suite of period rooms consisted of a kitchen and two parlours designed to represent the decade 1840-50 and a parlour of around 1875 (**figs 4.7-4.10**).³⁶⁸ Following the model offered by both the New Zealand Centennial Exhibition and the Canterbury Colonists Exhibition, each of the period rooms were constructed in the form of a three-sided box that visitors viewed through the absent fourth wall.³⁶⁹ In contrast to their earlier counterparts, however, the rooms did not feature a false ceiling and no attempt was made to represent historical wall

³⁶⁴ Stanley Northcote-Bade, 'Trip to Marlborough and Nelson Districts, December 14th – 22nd 1953', circa December 1953, MONZ: MU2/71/3.

³⁶⁵ Stanley Northcote-Bade, 'Report: Historical Exhibition', 1954?, MONZ: MU2/73/6.

³⁶⁶ 'Home Scenes of Early N.Z. to be Recaptured in Museum Exhibition', *Dominion*, 19 November 1954, p. 12.

³⁶⁷ Stanley Northcote-Bade, 'Report on Colonial Exhibition', circa 1954-55, MONZ: MU2/73/6.

³⁶⁸ Letter to V.F. Fisher from G.C. Shaw, 21 December 1954, MONZ: MU2/71/6.

³⁶⁹ In order to prevent visitors from entering the displays, rope barriers were installed across the front of each of the rooms. These barriers, which are absent in the publicity images, can be seen in a series of photographs that were taken by photographer Charles Hale in 1955 while the gallery was occupied by visitors. See: Charles Hale, Colonial Exhibition, 1955, MONZ Picture Library: MA_B.001776 and MA_B.001777.

finishes. Designed to be in place for only three months, the period rooms instead relied on a strategic selection of architectural elements to evoke the interior of a domestic dwelling. In the room titled ‘Ships Furniture 1840-50’, for example, domestic architecture was referenced by means of a timber skirting board, a fireplace salvaged from a historic Wellington residence, and a chandelier. Samples of wallpaper were exhibited separately nearby.³⁷⁰

Against this backdrop, each of the period rooms showcased a selection of early New Zealand furniture and other domestic artefacts, including china, ornaments, pictures, textiles and utensils. However, unlike the displays that had been installed at the Canterbury Museum four years earlier, the rooms were not designed to be ‘typical’ of early New Zealand homes. While the rooms continued the tradition of grouping furnishings in accordance with the type of room in which they would have traditionally been found in a nineteenth-century New Zealand household, they also separated the collection into groups based on particular design characteristics. In the first of the two period room galleries, the ‘Kitchen 1840-50’ was used to display furniture and other domestic artefacts associated with cooking and eating, while the adjacent parlour scene was furnished entirely with furniture that had been designed for use aboard sailing ships. Complementing these displays, the first of the rooms in the second gallery showcased furniture that had arrived in New Zealand as cargo, while the final room in the sequence, the ‘Sitting Room (circa 1875)’, was furnished predominantly with pieces made from New Zealand native timbers.

³⁷⁰ National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum, 1954, p. 9.

Following the model offered by the exhibitions of colonial material that had previously been held in other centres, the labelling that accompanied the period rooms in the Colonial Exhibition was minimal. The wall labels, which were located alongside each of the rooms, simply identified the period being represented and, in the case of the later three rooms, the type of furniture that was on display. Rather than forming part of the displays themselves, additional information about the contents of the period rooms was instead provided in the form of a catalogue, which commented on the design of the individual displays and identified any association that the artefacts had with local families or historical events.³⁷¹

Temporary solutions

Like its predecessors, the Colonial Exhibition proved popular with the public, attracting many visitors, including a large number of school groups.³⁷² The exhibition was also well received in the press, where it was repeatedly touted as the largest and most comprehensive display of historical material ever to be held in the country.³⁷³ While many of the architectural salvages and artefacts that had been used to stage the exhibition were returned to their owners following its closure on 6 March 1955, the event had a lasting impact on the Dominion Museum. In addition to the influx of donations of early New Zealand furniture

³⁷¹ National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum, 1954.

³⁷² Stanley Northcote-Bade, 'Report on Colonial Exhibition', circa 1954-55, MONZ: MU2/73/6. 'Looking Inside Early Homes', *Evening Post*, 11 February 1955, p. 11.

³⁷³ 'New Zealand's Biggest Historical Exhibition', *Evening Post*, 7 December 1954, p. 20. 'Washing-Machines, Pressure-Cookers: Household Aids For Pioneers Now Museum Pieces', *New Zealand Free Lance*, 8 December 1954, p. 9.

and furnishings that the museum received in the build-up to the exhibition, the interest generated by the event resulted in further growth in the collection in the years that followed, with a vast range of material, including period furniture and textiles, being acquired between 1955 and the early 1960s.³⁷⁴

The exhibition also helped to generate a renewed interest in installing a permanent suite of displays devoted to early New Zealand furniture. In 1955 Falla wrote to a representative of the local Early Settlers and Historical Association stating that the museum was hoping to install a ‘temporary kitchen’ in the public galleries as a means to display more material from the history and technology collections ‘pending more permanent arrangements’.³⁷⁵ The limited amount of display space that was available at the museum, however, remained problematic and it was not until March 1957 that the museum authorities were able to report that a bay of ‘colonial period furniture associated with New Zealand’ had been installed.³⁷⁶ Progress towards the installation of permanent displays was slow in the decade that followed, with only a single reference being made to the display of period furniture within the museum’s own galleries in the annual reports that were published between 1958 and 1963.³⁷⁷

Unable to provide exhibition space within its own walls, the museum increasingly made its collection of furniture available for display at other venues. Among the many exhibitions to which the museum contributed material in the late 1950s was an exhibition illustrating the development of commerce in

³⁷⁴ See: DMAR, 1959, p. 18. DMAR, 1960, p. 18. DMAR, 1961, p. 19. DMAR, 1962, p. 18. DMAR, 1963, p. 21.

³⁷⁵ Letter to C.J. Freeman from Robert Falla, 18 April 1955, MONZ: MU2/73/6.

³⁷⁶ DMAR, 1957, p. 16.

³⁷⁷ The 1958 annual report recorded that a ‘temporary display of period furniture’ was in place at the museum by this time. DMAR, 1958, p. 15.

Wellington that was held at the National Art Gallery in 1956, and the Wanganui Antique and Historical Exhibition, which was held in Whanganui in September 1959.³⁷⁸ Many more exhibitions featuring the museum's furniture collection followed in the early 1960s, including an untitled exhibition at the Linden Community Centre (9-10 July 1961), the Early Wellington Exhibition (October 1963), and the Lower Hutt Jubilee Exhibition (14-18 February 1966).³⁷⁹

Throughout this period, the manner in which the museum's furniture collection was displayed continued to be characterised by an interest in evoking the domestic contexts from which the material had been drawn. In many cases this aim was simply achieved by grouping the furniture in accordance with the type of room in which it had traditionally been used. For the Lower Hutt Jubilee Exhibition in 1966, for example, furniture and other household effects of the period 1840 to 1860 were staged to evoke a kitchen, a drawing room and a bedroom respectively without the aid of any architectural elements (**figs 4.11-12**).³⁸⁰ Some detailed architectural backdrops, however, were also created during this period. In October 1963 the museum's collection was drawn on by the iconic Wellington department store Kirkcaldie & Stains to create a pair of period

³⁷⁸ 'Early Wellington Exhibition: Mayor Escorted By 'Soldiers' Of 1840s', *Evening Post*, 15 June 1956, p. 10. DMAR, 1960, p. 18.

³⁷⁹ For information about the Linden exhibition see: 'Museum Show For Linden', *Evening Post*, 9 March 1961, p. 11. Letter to Robert Falla from I.M. Campbell (Town Clerk, Tawa Borough Council), 24 March 1961, MONZ: 'Collections and Exhibitions: Exhibitions – General, Including all Temporary Displays, Part 2', 1960-1966, MU2/71/7. DMAR, 1961, p. 12.

³⁸⁰ Organised by the Dominion Museum at the request of the Lower Hutt City Council, the Lower Hutt Jubilee Exhibition was installed in the Horticultural Hall supper room as part of a series of events that were held to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the area's elevation to Borough status in 1891 and the 25th Anniversary of its elevation to city status on the same day in 1941. The three bays of furniture were installed by the museum's display technician, H.J. Allan, and Display Artist, Nancy M. Adams with the assistance of Northcote-Bade. See: Letter to Robert Falla from E.C. Perry (Town Clerk, City of Lower Hutt), 5 November 1965, MONZ: MU2/71/7. 'Lower Hutt Jubilee: Colonial Furniture and Household Effects 1840-1860: From the Collection of the Dominion Museum', 1966, MONZ: MU2/71/7. 'Pioneer Display for Jubilee', *Dominion*, 15 February 1966, p. 3. 'Hutt History on Display from Monday', *Evening Post*, 16 February 1966, p. 29.

rooms at the firm's Lambton Quay store (**figs 4.13-15**).³⁸¹ Building on the model offered by the period rooms that had been installed at the Dominion Museum in 1954, these displays brought together a strategic selection of architectural salvages, historical wall finishes and furnishings to evoke the living room and kitchen of a 'typical' Wellington home in the 1860s.³⁸²

Reflecting the growing interest that surrounded the use of historical buildings as a means to display furniture and domestic artefacts in the 1960s, the museum's collection was also drawn on during this decade to temporarily furnish historical Wellington residences. In 1961, part of the museum's collection was used to stage a two-day exhibition of early New Zealand furniture and household objects that was held in Pauatahanui to commemorate the centennial of the local Post Office and the 130th year of Pākehā settlement in area. Laid out in an old cottage that had been built in the region in the mid-late Nineteenth Century, the collection was staged alongside a range of artefacts lent by local families to evoke the appearance of a dwelling in the early years of the settlement.³⁸³ When a similar exhibition was held in the historic Porirua homestead *Papakowhai* three years later, the museum's collection was once again called on, with a substantial

³⁸¹ Collectively known as the 'Early Wellington Exhibition', the two period rooms were installed to commemorate the firm's centenary. See: Advertisement, 'Kirkcaldie's Centenary Celebrations: 2nd Ideal Home Exhibition', *Dominion*, 1 October 1963, p. 7. Advertisement, 'Shopping around Kirkcaldie's', *Evening Post*, 17 October 1963, p. 23. DMAR, 1964, p. 15.

³⁸² 'Early Wellington', October 1963, MONZ: 'Nancy Adams: Exhibition Catalogues', MU448/1/7.

³⁸³ The Pauatahanui Centennial Exhibition was organised under the auspices of the Pauatahanui Centennial Committee with the help of Northcote-Bade, who was actively involved in the development of the exhibition and the installation of the displays. Referred to by Northcote-Bade as 'the old Stace cottage', the building was located on *Riversdale*, a property owned at the time of the centennial by O.M. Lane. See: Stanley Northcote-Bade, 'Draft: Pauatahanui P.O. Centennial', 1961, MONZ: MU2/73/6. 'Settled 130 Years Ago: Pauatahanui Was Awake Once More', *Evening Post*, 1 July 1961, p. 18. 'Pioneer Days Recalled at Pauatahanui', *Evening Post*, 3 July 1961, p. 12. 'Pauatahanui Interest: Move To Preserve Historic Cottage', *Evening Post*, 5 July 1961, p. 17.

number of pieces being used to refurnish the house in the manner of the colonial period.³⁸⁴

The Colonial History Gallery

In March 1967 the museum's newly appointed Director, Richard K. Dell (1920-2002, Director 1966-1980) announced that a designated department would be established to manage the museum's collection of material related to the 'colonial history of New Zealand', a criteria that applied to the bulk of the history and technology collections at the time.³⁸⁵ The creation of the Colonial History Department resulted in the appointment of a full-time staff member to oversee the management of the history and technology collections, with David P. Millar being appointed as the inaugural Curator of Colonial History in April 1968.³⁸⁶ The establishment of the department also had a major impact on the display galleries, where the museum's efforts to better represent the collection culminated in the opening of an entire suite of permanent displays devoted to the theme.³⁸⁷

³⁸⁴ Opened to the public on 2 July 1965, the exhibition was one of a number of events that were held in the Porirua area to celebrate its attainment of city status. At the helm of the project was Northcote-Bade, who chaired the Papakowhai Colonial Homestead Committee, a committee comprised of representatives of the Porirua Borough Council and other local organisations, which oversaw the organisation of the event. See: *Papakowhai Colonial Homestead, Paramata*. Porirua: s.n., 1965, p. i. 'For Public View at Paramata: Historic Home to be Restored', *Evening Post*, 2 July 1965, p. 8. Leila Hockly, 'Papakowhai Has Appeal For Devotees Of Past', source unknown, NZHPT Central Regional Office: 'Papakowhai Homestead', Vol. 1, file 12013 239.

³⁸⁵ DMAR, 1967, p. 12.

³⁸⁶ Prior to Millar's appointment, the History and Technology Section was managed by several members of staff on top of their other duties. See: DMAR, 1954, p. 7. DMAR, 1960, p. 18. DMAR, 1969, p. 25.

³⁸⁷ Notably, the short term measures included creating displays of colonial furniture at the nearby Wellington Winter Show grounds, where the museum had rented space to house some of its larger collection items since 1964. See: DMAR, 1967, p. 16. DMAR, 1964, p. 15.

Planned and installed between 1967 and 1972, the Colonial History Gallery attempted to take visitors on a journey through the history of European settlement in New Zealand from first contact with local Māori through to 1899.³⁸⁸ Upon completion, visitors entered the gallery through a life-sized representation of the poop deck of Captain James Cook's ship, the *Endeavour*. Further displays addressing the theme of early exploration followed, including a life-sized reconstruction of the 'Great Cabin' aboard the *Endeavour*, which was used to display a range of material associated with Cook and to 'convey something of the cramped conditions which sailors endured at the time.'³⁸⁹ Moving through the gallery, visitors then encountered the Elgar Rooms and a range of displays addressing the early history of the Wellington region, including early industries, its settlement under the auspices of the New Zealand Company, and life in the province in its early years.

One of the star attractions of the early Wellington section was a suite of three period rooms that were constructed in the form of a one and a half storey cottage of the type built in Wellington in the 1840s. As noted earlier in this chapter, the idea of constructing a suite of period rooms representing colonial interiors had been in circulation at the museum since the early 1950s. The earliest known reference to a cottage display appears in a letter that Falla wrote in September 1963, in which the Director stated that 'we hope before long to furnish a colonial cottage in the fashion of the 1850s.'³⁹⁰ The construction of the display, however,

³⁸⁸ While it remains unclear when such a gallery was first proposed, the task of developing exhibits for the Colonial History Gallery had begun by 9 February 1967 when a display meeting was held to discuss the basic theme of the displays in the Colonial History Gallery and its layout. Nancy Adams, Diary 1967, 9 February, MONZ: MU267/1/2. DMAR, 1968, p. 19.

³⁸⁹ DMAR, 1972, p. 23.

³⁹⁰ Letter to Rex Miller from Robert Falla, 17 September 1963, MONZ: MU252/1/4.

was again deferred and it was not until the development of the Colonial History Gallery in 1967 that practical progress began to be made towards the goal of installing this new suite of period rooms.³⁹¹

While the idea of installing a suite of colonial period rooms can be traced back to Northcote-Bade, the task of designing the display fell primarily to the museum's Display Artist, Nancy M. Adams (1926-2007).³⁹² Brought in to assist with the task of designing the layout of the galleries as early as February 1967, Adams immediately became involved in planning the cottage display, producing a series of sketches of the bedroom later that month.³⁹³ After the project officially received the green light from the museum authorities on 1 May 1967, Adams began the task of developing the contents of the display, utilising the museum's accession registers, files and records to compile a list of the furniture and other historical material that was available for use in the exhibit.³⁹⁴

³⁹¹ DMAR, 1964, p. 15. 'Notes on the Elgar Rooms at the Dominion Museum', 1965, MONZ: History Collection and Information – Ella Grace Elgar Bequest, INAC297/04.

³⁹² **Jacqueline Nancy Mary Adams**, CBE, 1926-2007.

Known to her friends and colleges as Nancy, Adams had a long and varied career. In 1943 Adams joined the staff of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR), where she worked in the Botany Division as a technical assistant. A talented artist, Adams went on to become the official Botanical Artist at Botany Division in 1950, producing illustrations for all of the major botanical works produced in New Zealand in the 1950s and early 1960s.

In 1959 Adams left DSIR and joined the display staff of the Dominion Museum. In addition to her involvement with the preparation and presentation of exhibits, Adams also became involved with the colonial history collection, taking responsibility for the registration and care of the textile collection as early as 1965. Her role later expanded to include other areas of the Colonial History Collection, including period furniture. In 1969, however, her focus shifted to marine algae and she took up the role of Assistant Curator of Botany, a position that she retained until her retirement in 1987.

Throughout her career she continued to produce botanical illustrations and is today considered one of New Zealand's foremost botanists and botanical artists.

See: DMAR, 1965, p. 21. Patrick Brownsey, 'Obituary: Nancy Adams, CBE, QSO, 1926-2007', in *New Zealand Botanical Society Newsletter*, No. 88, June 2007, pp. 13-15. 'Biography of Nancy M. Adams', from Collections Online, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, URL: <http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/theme.aspx?irn=2222>.

³⁹³ Nancy Adams, Diary 1967, 28 February, MONZ: MU267/1/2.

³⁹⁴ Nancy Adams, Diary 1967, May, MONZ: MU267/1/2.

In addition to working with the collection, she also began the task of further developing the design of the three period rooms. As part of this process, Adams collected historical images of early Wellington cottages and made arrangements with the Ministry of Works to view several local houses that were due for demolition. Among the sources that Adams is known to have looked at as part of this research process is a photograph of the former Thorndon home of the Dorset family, which was supplied to her by the *Evening Post* in 1967, and an old cottage at 18 Arthur Street, Te Aro, which she viewed on 7 February 1968.³⁹⁵ Another notable source of information on which Adams drew was Northcote-Bade, who provided advice regarding the detailing of the interiors and how they should be furnished throughout the design process.³⁹⁶

Although few records of this process survive, a snapshot of Adams' early ideas regarding the display is provided by a set of three sketches that have been preserved in the Museum of New Zealand's archives.³⁹⁷ The group of drawings, which includes two views of the exterior of the structure and one view of the interior, show a two storey cottage with a living room scene located on the ground floor and a bedroom above. At this time, the main body of the cottage featured three large viewing windows that provided visual access to the interior of the display. The first of these windows, which was located in the front façade of the cottage, looked into the living room, while a second window in the gable wall provided further visual access to the ground floor. The third window, which

³⁹⁵ Nancy Adams, Diary 1967, 6 November, MONZ: MU267/1/2. Nancy Adams, Diary 1968, 7 February, MONZ: MU267/1/3.

³⁹⁶ Nancy Adams, Diary 1967, 30 May and 9 August, MONZ: MU267/1/2. Nancy Adams, Diary 1968, 7 February, 16 May and 20-26 August, MONZ: MU267/1/3.

³⁹⁷ Nancy Adams, Untitled (Developmental sketches of the Colonial Cottage), circa 1967, MONZ: MU252/1/4.

looked into the bedroom, was located at the top of a flight of stairs which led to a platform that ran the width of the display. In the bedroom itself, Adams envisioned that the room would be furnished with a set of bedroom furniture that had formed part of the Saxton Bequest in 1953 and a bed covered in a patchwork quilt.³⁹⁸

Constructed by the museum's Display Technician, Harry J. Allan, in 1967, the structure of the cottage was one of the first elements of the Colonial History Gallery to be installed. In place as early as December 1967, work commenced that month on the task of decorating the three rooms.³⁹⁹ Playing an active role in all aspects of the installation process, Adams was responsible for undertaking much of the work in the cottage in the months that followed, including painting the walls and ceilings, staining the timber woodwork, installing shelving, preparing and arranging the collection items, and making curtains. Putting her skills as an artist to use, Adams also created all of the props that were required for the display, including a mural representing a view of Wellington in the 1840s that was fitted behind the window in the Living Room.⁴⁰⁰

Unveiled to the public in 1969, the Colonial Cottage formed a visually dominant feature of the new Colonial History Galleries. Designed to represent the type of home 'that an early settler might have built in the 1840s', the display was laid out in the form of a one-and-a-half storey weatherboard cottage with a steeply

³⁹⁸ The Saxton Bequest consisted of a washstand (PF18/1), a dressing table (PF18/2), a chest of drawers (PF18/3), and a pair of chairs (PF19/1-2) that had been brought to New Zealand by John Waring Saxton and his wife Pricilla aboard the *Clifford* in 1842.

³⁹⁹ Nancy Adams, Diary 1967, 11-13 December, MONZ: MU267/1/2.

⁴⁰⁰ Nancy Adams, Diary 1968, MONZ: MU267/1/3.

pitched gable roof and a single storey lean-to at the rear.⁴⁰¹ Inside, the cottage accommodated a suite of three period rooms, with a living room and kitchen on the ground floor and an attic bedroom on the floor above. While Adams had originally envisioned that the Living Room would be viewed from a position along the front façade of the cottage, visual access to this room was instead provided by a large plate-glass window that was located in the gable wall. A further two windows were located in the walls of the adjacent lean-to, enabling visitors to examine this room from two sides. Having viewed the two ground floor rooms, visitors then ascended a flight of stairs to a platform where they could inspect the interior of the attic bedroom through a window in the front façade. The final element of the display, the tool shed, was located beneath the viewing platform, with the interior of the display being viewed through the absent fourth wall.

Designed to provide a detailed architectural backdrop against which to display the museum's collection, the interior of the Colonial Cottage brought together a range of architectural elements. While most of the materials that were used in the construction of the rooms were modern, a small number of architectural salvages were incorporated into the display, including a large sash window, a door, and parts of a fireplace that had been salvaged from a Thorndon cottage built in 1847 by the early Wellington settler William Dorset.⁴⁰² Supplementing

⁴⁰¹ Nancy M. Adams, *An Early Wellington House*, Wellington: Dominion Museum, 1968, unpag. DMAR, 1968, p. 20.

⁴⁰² Located on the corner of Grant Road and Park Street in the Wellington suburb of Thorndon, 'Dorset Cottage' was built by William Dorset (1802-1877) for his family following their arrival in Wellington aboard the *Hope* in 1846. The cottage is particularly relevant to the history of the Colonial Cottage not only because parts of the building and some of its furnishings were used in the display but also because Adams is known to have looked at the building during the design process. It is notable too that Northcote-Bade was also familiar with the building, providing a detailed description of the architecture and the décor in his 1971 publication on colonial

these elements, a range of other historically appropriate architectural features and finishes were reconstructed for the display, including a timber floor in each of the downstairs rooms and a brick fireplace in the Kitchen. However, unlike the period rooms that had been installed at the Canterbury Museum almost 10 years earlier, no attempt was made to install or simulate historically appropriate wall finishes in any of the rooms.⁴⁰³ In contrast to its South Island counterpart, the design of the display was also less emphatic regarding the detailing of the rooms, with elements that would have served no display function, such as an internal staircase, being excluded from the display.

Occupying around one and a half bays in the gallery, the cottage provided the museum with the opportunity to display a wide range of furniture, ornaments, utensils, and textiles from its collection, as well as a small number of paintings from the collection of the National Art Gallery. Designed to represent a Wellington home during the first decade of settlement, the bulk of the furniture and other domestic artefacts that were shown in the cottage were known to have arrived in the region before 1850.⁴⁰⁴ The majority of these items had entered the collection prior to 1967, with many of the pieces having been donated in the 1950s and early 1960s.

furniture. See: Stanley Northcote-Bade, *Colonial Furniture in New Zealand*, Auckland: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1971, pp. 21-22, 93, 96.

⁴⁰³ Adams diary records that she discussed the use of wallpaper with Northcote-Bade during the construction of the display, suggesting that this feature was excluded based on cost or availability rather than by design. See: Nancy Adams, Diary 1968, 16 May, MONZ: MU267/1/3.

⁴⁰⁴ Although no photographic record appears to have been made of the Kitchen and the Bedroom prior to 1982, the contents of these two areas can be partially reconstructed from the catalogue that was produced to accompany the displays. See: Nancy M. Adams, *An Early Wellington House*, Wellington: Dominion Museum, 1968.

Although few records survive regarding the appearance of the Colonial Cottage at the time that the Colonial History Gallery opened in 1969, photographs taken of the Living Room following its completion in August 1968 provide a partial record of how the contents were arranged at this time. In addition to documenting the spatial relationships that existed between the various components of the display, these photographs reveal that an attempt was made not only to evoke the layout of a domestic interior, but also to create the illusion of occupancy (**fig 4.16**). Following the model offered by the Canterbury Museum, the room featured two female mannequins, who served not only to showcase items from the museum's textile collection, but also stood in for the early Wellington residents who would have occupied such spaces.

While the variety of furniture and other domestic artefacts that were shown in the Bedroom makes it likely that the furnishings in this area were arranged in a similar manner to those in the Living Room, the contents of the Kitchen indicates that the layout of this room was not designed to replicate that of a colonial kitchen. Containing very little in the way of furniture, the various household goods, kitchenware and utensils were instead showcased on and around a colonial oven that had been salvaged from the historic Marlborough homestead *Langley Dale*. Further items were shown on a set of shelving that was fitted to the rear wall of the room. Like the Living Room, however, an attempt does appear to have been made to create the illusion of occupancy, with several props, including fruit, ham and a loaf of bread being created by Adams for use in this room.

Like its predecessors, the Colonial Cottage was not accompanied by labels in its early years, with supplementary information instead being provided in the form of a small guidebook. Prepared by Adams during the process of installing the display, the guide featured a brief introduction to the history upon which the design of the cottage was based as well as comments regarding the contents of each of the rooms.⁴⁰⁵ Once again, the commentary was characterised by a strong focus on the people with which the individual collection items were associated, particularly those local families who had arrived in Wellington during the first decade of settlement. In regards to the Kitchen, the text also served a second core purpose, acting to identify the function of those items that were likely to be unfamiliar to the contemporary audience.

Refreshing the Elgar Rooms

Located in the gallery where the new displays were to be installed, the Elgar Rooms were renovated and refreshed over three years as part of the redevelopment project. In May 1968 the front of the two displays was glazed in. Designed by Adams, the new viewing wall was clad in timber and fitted with three large plate-glass viewing windows.⁴⁰⁶ Around the same time that this work was done, the windows in the rear wall of the display were also re-glazed.⁴⁰⁷ As

⁴⁰⁵ Nancy M. Adams, *An Early Wellington House*, Wellington: Dominion Museum, 1968.

⁴⁰⁶ Nancy Adams, Diary 1968, 7 February and 16 May, MONZ: MU267/1/3.

⁴⁰⁷ Nancy Adams, Diary 1968, 23 May, MONZ: MU267/1/3. In late June, Adams records that she spent several days painting a 'mural' for the Elgar Rooms, which she later installed on 26 July 1968. However, as no photographic record of the image survives, it is unclear what the scene showed or where it was located. See: Nancy Adams, Diary 1968, 19-25 June and 26 July, MONZ: MU267/1/3.

part of the renovation process, a new timber floor was also laid in each of the rooms, followed by the addition of new lighting in the early 1970s.⁴⁰⁸

Following the installation of the new viewing wall in May 1968, Adams began the task of cleaning the furniture in the two rooms and reorganising the display.⁴⁰⁹ While the changes that were made to the contents and arrangement of the individual rooms at this time went unrecorded, a series of photographs that were taken of the Queen Anne Room in the mid 1970s indicate that a substantial rearrangement of the furniture took place during the renovation process (**figs 4.17-19**). In addition to relocating items within each of the rooms, some pieces were also moved from one room to the other, including one of the two window seats that had formerly been displayed in the Georgian Room. Notably, the new arrangement of the furniture in the Queen Anne Room was characterised by an interest in making the layout of the room more closely resemble that of a domestic residence. At the right end of the Queen Anne Room, for example, a chair was now placed at the open desk of the bureau cabinet, while at the opposite end of the display a set of dining chairs were placed around the dining room table.

The addition of a glazed partition wall along the front edge of the display also allowed a number of smaller items to be exhibited in the rooms for the first time. By the mid-1970s, the Queen Anne Room featured two floor standing vases from the Elgar collection, a clock, a globe, and a silver goblet. In keeping with the

⁴⁰⁸ The earliest reference to the floor appears in Adams' diary in November when she records that the floor was being painted. See: Nancy Adams, *Diary 1968*, 13 November, MONZ: MU267/1/3. DMAR, 1971, p. 19.

⁴⁰⁹ Nancy Adams, *Diary 1968*, 21-27 May, MONZ: MU267/1/3.

changes that had been made to layout of the furniture, the first props were also added, with a glass inkwell and feather being placed on the open desk of the bureau cabinet. The glazing-in of the rooms also enabled period costume to be displayed for the first time, with a female mannequin dressed in an eighteenth century red brocade gown being installed by Adams in the Queen Anne Room in May 1967.⁴¹⁰

Supplementing the physical changes that were made to the Elgar Rooms at this time, the modifications that were made to the surrounding gallery had a major impact on the context within which the rooms were seen and interpreted. Prior to 1967, the two rooms had been one of many displays in the gallery that had been used to present material from the museum's collection of European decorative and applied arts.⁴¹¹ During the redevelopment of the gallery, however, these displays were removed to make way for material associated with New Zealand's own history. As the contents and design of the rooms were in no way typical of New Zealand homes, the display instead came to act as a foil to the colonial rooms, representing the styles of interior architecture and furniture design that formed the background to New Zealand's own design history.

⁴¹⁰ Nancy Adams, Diary 1968, 21-22 May, MONZ: MU267/1/3.

⁴¹¹ By 1961 a display of French furniture had been installed in the bay adjacent to the Elgar Rooms. Later that decade, an English table and some chairs of a slightly later date than those represented in the period rooms were also on display alongside a selection of European china. See: Letter to Robert Falla from Stanley Northcote-Bade, 31 August 1961, MONZ: 'Technology and Textiles: Furniture – Purchases, Presentations, Offers to Sell, Part 2', 1960-1967, MU2/71/4. 'Royston's Notes for Labels for Period Rooms', circa 1963-1967, MONZ: MU252/1/4.

The 'New Look' Colonial History Gallery

In 1972 the Dominion Museum officially changed its name to the National Museum. Around the same time that the organization was re-branded, the museum authorities also adopted a long-term plan to comprehensively redevelop and modernise the museum's display galleries.⁴¹² In order to demonstrate the types of improvements that would be made as part of this wider redevelopment project, renovation work was carried out in the Colonial History Gallery between 1980 and 1982. Developed under the leadership of Michael K. Fitzgerald (History Curator 1971-present), who had replaced David Millar as the museum's Curator of Colonial History in August 1971, the 'new look' Colonial History Gallery was a mix of the old and the new.⁴¹³ In addition to enabling the curatorial team to refresh the contents of the gallery, the project also resulted in major changes being made to the gallery environment, with modern display cases being installed throughout. The entire look of the gallery was also transformed by means of a new lighting scheme, which added drama to the museum environment by creating striking visual contrasts between the dimly lit gallery space and the brightly lit displays (**fig 4.20**).

As part of the redevelopment, the Elgar Rooms were once again modified in line with contemporary ideas about museum display. While few, if any, changes were made to the fabric of the rooms themselves, the viewing wall that Adams had designed in 1968 was replaced at this time with a glass curtain wall. In

⁴¹² J.C. Yaldwyn, 'National Museum: Priority of Temporary Exhibitions within Total Display Programme', 11 July 1983, MONZ: Total Museum Display, MU16/1/6.

⁴¹³ David McGill, 'The Solid Gold, Born-Again Colonisation of the National Museum', *Evening Post*, 24 April 1982, p. 6. DMAR, 1983, p. 20. DMAR, 1982, p. 16.

addition to improving visual access to the rooms, the new wall modified the way in which the two rooms interacted with the space of the viewer. Rather than forming a flat barrier across the front of the display, the wall was indented to form three bays. While the new viewing wall in the Georgian Room projected outwards into the gallery space, the two bays in the Queen Anne Room projected inwards, enabling visitors to get a sense of entering the room.⁴¹⁴ As part of the installation of the new viewing wall, a new lighting scheme was also developed for each of the rooms. In the Queen Anne Room a row of florescent lights were fitted along the top edge of the new viewing wall, while in the Georgian Room a crystal chandelier that had formed the centrepiece of the room since it was installed in 1951 was used to light the space for the first time.

Like the renovation project that had been carried out in the Elgar Rooms over a decade earlier, the rejuvenation of the displays in the 1980s also involved substantial changes being made to the arrangement of the Elgar furniture. The curatorial team also took the opportunity to incorporate further artefacts into the display, including an array of glassware, silverware, ceramics and other *objects d'art*. Further mannequins were also introduced, enabling the museum to showcase a range of Edwardian and Victorian dresses from the museum's collection. The function of these elements was not only to generate new interest in the Elgar Rooms in the short-term, but also to address the concerns that had come to surround their static nature. The introduction of further mannequins, for example, did not only enable the museum to exhibit more of its textile collection

⁴¹⁴ This aim was expressed by Curator, Michael Fitzgerald, who stated that the walls were designed 'to give people a more intimate approach to the display, it feels as though you are actually in the room.' See: Jan Bieringa, 'Interview with Mike Fitzgerald, Colonial Historian National Museum', Art Galleries and Museum Association New Zealand, *AGMANZ News* 13, No. 2 (June 1982), p. 12.

at any one time, but introduced an element of ongoing change to the display, with Fitzgerald stating in 1982 that the attire worn by the mannequins would be cycled over time.⁴¹⁵

During the development of the ‘new look’ Colonial History Gallery, the decision was also made to retain and refurbish the Colonial Cottage. As part of this process, the Living Room was subject to several cosmetic changes, including the removal of the large carpet that had previously been shown on the floor and the installation of a new mural and curtains (**figs 4.21-22**). Re-imagined as a dining room, the contents of this space was also modified slightly, with several pieces of furniture being relocated or removed to make way for other collection items. A greater number of smaller household artefacts were also introduced into the display at this time and a new lighting scheme was installed, with spotlights being used to enhance the lighting levels in the room.

Although a lack of documentation regarding the appearance of the Bedroom and Kitchen prior to 1980 makes it difficult to gauge what, if any, changes were introduced in these areas as part of the renovation process, it is likely that these rooms were modified in a similar manner to the Living Room. From a pair of photographs that were taken of the Bedroom in 1982, it is clear that the majority of the furnishings that had been installed in 1968 were retained as part of the refurbished display.⁴¹⁶ Some additions, however, had been made by this time, including a desk, a female mannequin, and a range of smaller artefacts.

⁴¹⁵ Bieringa, 1982, p. 13.

⁴¹⁶ Photographer unknown, Colonial Cottage Bedroom, 1982, MONZ Picture Library: MA_F.000167/4 and MA_F.000167/5.

One notable addition that was made to both the Elgar Rooms and the Colonial Cottage as part of the refurbishment process was the addition of extended labels. Building on the two key themes that had characterised the interpretation of the Elgar Rooms since the 1950s, the labels drew attention to both the Elgar Bequest and the respective periods that the rooms represented. By contrast, the new label that was installed in the Living Room of the Colonial Cottage was used to highlight the fact that many of the furnishings in this area had been used in the homes of Wellington settlers over the period 1840-1870.⁴¹⁷ Comments that were made in the press at the time that the gallery opened in 1982 provide further insight into how the curatorial staff intended the Colonial Cottage to be viewed at this time, with Fitzgerald stating that the aim of the exhibit had shifted from pretending that it was ‘some sort of colonial cottage’ to simply using the rooms to showcase furniture and other articles brought out to New Zealand by early Wellington families.⁴¹⁸

One of the key catalysts for this shift away from using the cottage to illustrate the architecture of early Wellington residences was the recent establishment of the city’s first house museum. Officially opened to the public on 23 November 1980, the Colonial Cottage Museum on Nairn Street provided Wellingtonians with the opportunity to view colonial furniture and other domestic artefacts against the backdrop of a series of restored nineteenth-century interiors that were still located within their original architectural context.⁴¹⁹ Where the museum’s

⁴¹⁷ ‘Colonial Furniture’, undated, MONZ: Display/Exhibition Files, circa 1980, MU252/1/9.

⁴¹⁸ Bieringa, 1982, p. 12.

⁴¹⁹ The idea of establishing a house museum in Wellington dated to the early 1970s when the Colonial Cottage Museum Society (CCMS) was formed to investigate the idea. In 1977 the Society reached an agreement with the Wellington City Council that the Nairn Street cottage would be used for this purpose. The cottage was subsequently restored over a number of years

Colonial Cottage had previously been the only permanent and publicly accessible representation of an early Wellington house furnished in the manner of the colonial period, the educational role that it had historically served was now able to be fulfilled outside the walls of the museum. As such, the interpretation that accompanied the display shifted the visitor's attention away from the architecture of the cottage onto the furniture that it was used to display.

Following the reopening of the Colonial History Gallery in 1982, few changes were made to the fabric of the period rooms or the layout of the furniture. As Fitzgerald had envisioned, however, minor adjustments were repeatedly made to the selection of ceramics, glassware, textiles and other small *objects d'art* that formed part of the Elgar Rooms (**figs 4.23-27**). A similar situation appears to have occurred in the Colonial Cottage, with photographs indicating that minor adjustments were made over time to the collection of smaller household objects that were shown in this area (**fig 4.28-31**).

The End of an Era

In the years following the redevelopment of the Colonial History Gallery, the museum authorities continued to investigate the possibility of making widespread changes to the museum's layout. While planning initially centred on the museum's existing Mount Cook site, the option of replacing the old museum

with the help of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust Pouhere Taonga and furnished with the assistance of the National Museum. See: Jan Harris, ed., *Making Good on Shaky Ground: A Story of Colonial Wellington, William Wallis and His Cottage*, Wellington: Friends of the Colonial Cottage Museum, 2001, pp. 92-98. 'Checklist of Items on Loan to Nairn Street, Colonial Cottage', August 1982, MONZ: Nairn Street Cottage Museum, 1974-1995, MU244/6/5.

building soon came to the fore and in 1986 the New Zealand Government approved plans for the construction of a new building to house the National Museum. A site was subsequently selected in 1989, and work commenced on the task of planning the new galleries with the architectural firm, Jasmax Architects. Opened in 1998, the building housed the collections of both the former National Museum and the National Art Gallery, which had merged to form the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa) in 1992.

While work continued to progress on the design of the new building in the early 1990s, the National Museum took the opportunity to refresh some of its existing display galleries. One area of the museum that was selected for redevelopment at this time was the Colonial History Gallery, which was cleared in 1992 to make way for *Voices He Putahitanga: The People and the Land*, an exhibition exploring the history of New Zealand from first discovery to the present.⁴²⁰ In preparation for the installation of this entirely new suite of displays, the Elgar Rooms and the Colonial Cottage were completely dismantled around May 1992. While the fabric of the period rooms was not preserved, a detailed photographic record was made of the displays prior to their deinstallation. Of the five rooms, the Queen Anne Room was the most thoroughly documented, with measured drawings being commissioned from the Wellington architectural firm Synaxon Hill Group to provide a record of both the floor plan of the room and its mouldings.⁴²¹ The Queen Anne Room was also the only exhibit to be recorded

⁴²⁰ Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Annual Report for the period 1 July 1992 – 30 June 1993, p. 9.

⁴²¹ Synaxon Hill Group, *Elgar Rooms* (floor plans, elevations, and moulding details), June 1992, MONZ: National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum Building Plans, MU218/26/5.

in colour, with photographer Alan Marchant taking the first colour photographs of this area of the display in May 1992 (**figs 4.32-33**).

In the early 1990s, the decision was made that the Elgar Rooms would not be reinstated at the museum's new waterfront site. As Elgar's will stipulated that the collection was being gifted to the State on the understanding that it would be permanently displayed in period rooms, the museum approached Elgar's descendants for permission to change the terms of the bequest. Writing to senior members of the family in late April 1992, the head of the National Art Gallery, Jenny Harper, indicated that one of the key reasons why the museum authorities did not wish to reinstall the displays was their longevity, which not only caused damage to the individual collection items over time, but also hampered the museum's ability to show the breadth of its collection.⁴²² Similar sentiments were later expressed by the museum's CEO, Cheryll Sotheran, who stated in the press that the museum was seeking to change the conditions of the bequest in order to provide it with more flexibility in terms of how the collection could be displayed.⁴²³

Recent Developments

Located on the Wellington waterfront, Te Papa opened to the public on 14 February 1998. While no period rooms featured among the new displays, a small number of items from the Elgar collection were displayed as part of On the

⁴²² Letter to the Elgar Family from Jenny Harper, 24 April 1992, MONZ Corporate Records: 'History Collection and Information – Elgar Collection – Correspondence', H135-E01-11.

⁴²³ Cheryll Sotheran, 'Cheryll Sotheran Replies', *Dominion*, 19 April 1996, p. 11.

Sheep's Back, a long-term exhibition exploring the history of the wool industry in New Zealand. In contrast to the manner in which the furniture had previously been displayed at the museum's Mount Cook site, no attempt was made to recreate a room in which to house the pieces of furniture. Instead, the items were displays on a low plinth alongside a large photomural of the drawing room at *Fernside*.⁴²⁴

In 2010 Te Papa installed a new long-term exhibition exploring New Zealand's social and cultural history. Entitled *Slice of Heaven: 20th Century Aotearoa*, the exhibition features a tableau scene representing a New Zealand living room during World War II (**figs 4.34-35**). In addition to representing a post-1900 interior, the living room tableau contrasts sharply with the Colonial Cottage in terms of its design. Firstly, where the cottage had attempted to recreate an entire suite of rooms, the tableau scene presents only a shallow slice of a room. An attempt is also made to integrate the domestic scene into a much wider narrative, with information about life in New Zealand during the war being conveyed both through a series of text and image-based panels at the front of the display and by an audio track that plays on the room's radio.

Complementing the living room tableau, *Slice of Heaven* also features a series of cases that are used to display furniture and other household items representative of the individual decades between 1900 and 2000. While these display cases do not attempt to recreate a room in its entirety, an attempt has been made to evoke

⁴²⁴ This display remained in place between 14 February 1998 and 23 April 2007. Changes were made to the selection of artefacts that were on view over the course of this period. See: 'On the Sheep's Back 50% Developed Design', 1 August 1996, pp. 40, 85, MONZ: MU361/22/3. 'Sheer Hard Work and Grassy Empires Plinth Layout Work-P02, 25/08/97', in 'On the Sheep's Back Installation Document', 27 August 1997, MONZ: MU392/2/2.

the context from which the articles have been drawn, with each of the cases being lined with reproduction wallpaper patterns and skirting boards in a manner reminiscent of the Period Furniture Case that was installed at the Canterbury Museum as part of the Canterbury Colonists Galleries in the 1950s (**fig 4.36**). This approach indicates that the desire to visually contextualise items still plays a part in contemporary display practice.

Conclusion

Offering a practical solution to the challenge of presenting colonial furniture and other domestic artefacts in a comprehensible and visually interesting way, the period room flourished in New Zealand's metropolitan museums in the 1950s and 1960s. The period rooms that were installed between 1948 and 1969 subsequently remained largely unaltered until the 1980s when a new generation of museum professionals began to modify the displays to better reflect contemporary ideas and practices. During this decade, however, the popularity of such displays went into decline, culminating in the 1990s in the removal of almost all of the period rooms that had been installed prior to 1970. Remnants of the tradition survive at the Auckland Museum, with the colonial cottage remaining on display as part of the former Centennial Street (now renamed Auckland 1866).

As illustrated in the preceding chapters, the modification and removal of period rooms at the OESM, the Canterbury Museum and the Dominion Museum in the 1980s and 1990s was fuelled by a number of factors. One of the key concerns that came to surround the period rooms that had been installed in these museums in the mid-twentieth century was the type of history that they represented. Specifically, the resolute focus on the colonial period (1840-1907) that had characterised the representation of New Zealand history fell out of favour, with museum professionals increasingly seeking to present a broader and more inclusive view of the nation's past. By the 1980s, ideas about museum education

had also radically changed, with museums increasingly moving away from the object-focused and didactic model of communication offered by reconstructed environments, towards narrative-driven and participatory modes of display. At that same time, a growing awareness of conservation issues in the 1980s raised concerns regarding both the damage that continuous display had begun to cause to some of the artefacts in the rooms and the dangers that the longevity and inflexibility of such displays posed to collection items into the future. The proliferation of house museums and historical villages from the mid-1960s helped to further fuel the crisis of confidence, serving to raise questions regarding their historical accuracy.

Since the removal of many of the period rooms that had been installed in the mid-twentieth century, collections of furniture and domestic artefacts have largely been exhibited by museums using more flexible modes of display, such as plinths and cases, which enable curators to more easily make changes to the contents of the gallery over time. Nevertheless, several new period rooms have been constructed in New Zealand museums since 2000, including Studding Sail Hall and the Paua Shell House at the Canterbury Museum, and the Steerage Quarters at the Otago Settlers Museum. Differing in several key ways from their earlier counterparts, these exhibits demonstrate how the period room continues to evolve as a strategy of display in response to the changing demands that have been placed on museum galleries since the 1950s and 1960s.

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