

1870 - 1876

THE INITIAL YEARS



Figure 4. David Con Hutton, *David Edward Hutton, Eldest Son of the Artist*, 1873, watercolour, 840 x 655 mm (image courtesy of the Hocken Collection).

At the time of Hutton's appointment to head up the first school of art in New Zealand, Impressionism was becoming recognised in Europe as the current modern art movement. However, Hutton brought with him a preference for Naturalism and Realism, wherein realistic portraiture and renderings of nature held sway, and he encouraged his students in this direction.

The new settlement's leaders regarded a sound basic education as the right of all. They were also aware of the value being placed on drawing and design in England and Scotland as evidenced by their growing number of design schools, and with the recent introduction of drawing as a subject into their public elementary school systems. As a result, drawing and design were regarded as appropriate and important subjects to be taught within all Otago schools.

The rapid development of Otago's educational system and the establishment of art in its schools can be largely credited to the diligence and enthusiasm of one man, John Hislop, (1821-1904), who was responsible for "the education scheme in Otago having [by 1870] become the envy of New Zealand and the Australian colonies."¹ He arrived in Dunedin in 1856, taught at East Taieri School for four years, and in 1861 was appointed secretary to the Otago Education Board and inspector of schools. As a student in Edinburgh he had attended the Normal School, the University of Edinburgh and the Edinburgh School of Arts, where he "succeeded in gaining the first prizes in all classes he attended,... and at the conclusion of the prescribed course, was awarded its diploma."² The promotion of art and general education in Otago was secured with his appointment to the Board.



Figure 5. John Hislop, 1870, Architect of the Otago Education Scheme (courtesy of the Presbyterian Research Centre-Archives).

The first indication of the Otago Provincial Council's interest in finding a drawing master appeared in the minutes of its June 3rd 1868 meeting, when it was announced that "the resolution to appoint a Drawing Master was almost unanimously agreed to last session, on the motion of the honourable member for Taieri, Mr Reid, only a sum was not voted."³ This was rectified a year later, at the Council's May 20th meeting in 1869, when a salary of four hundred pounds was approved.⁴ The promotion of art education within the Province had by now become a popular talking point, as exemplified by a discussion held at the Acclimation Society's annual meeting on Tuesday 29th June, after which it was announced that they would like to see "the establishment of a permanent School of Art in the City."⁵

Due to the interest expressed by city dignitaries, and with the encouragement of John Hislop, a search was begun in late 1869 to find a suitably qualified art master who would teach and help promote the subject within the Province. The contract drawn up by the Provincial Government required that the duties of the appointee would be "to teach drawing in its various departments in the said schools and in particular to teach the High School of Dunedin, and to visit and teach in the district schools of the Province ... and that the said Superintendent and the Provincial Government shall provide at their expense, whatever Models, Drawing Materials and other appliances shall be requisite for carrying on the duties of the teacher in said schools."⁶ It was also agreed that in addition to the salary of four hundred pounds, that all travelling expenses would be paid.

The selection of a Drawing Master was left in the hands of Mr Auld, the Home Agent in Scotland who, after a brief search, appointed David Con Hutton (1843-1910) to the position.⁷ Hutton, born in Dundee, Scotland, began his professional career as a student at the Dundee School of Art and was appointed an art pupil teacher

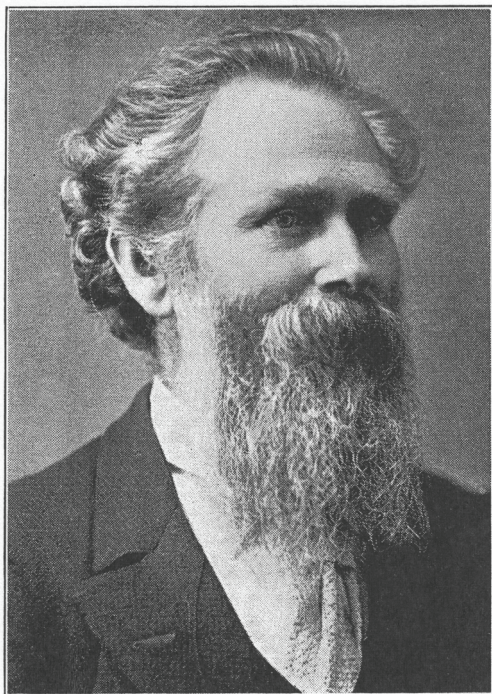


Figure 6. David Con Hutton, Head of the Dunedin School of Art from 1870 to 1908.

in 1859. He studied modelling and gained several prizes and medals, including two national medallions, and a year later, at the age of 17, he published the 'Free Hand Drawing' series of booklets which were adopted for use in a number of elementary schools in England and Scotland. He completed his pupil teachership with distinction in 1863 and at the age of twenty-one gained his Art Master's Certificate from South Kensington, London. A year later he won a Science Certificate in practical, plane and solid geometry and the National Medallion of the Science and Art Department for outline drawing and drawing from nature in the competitions held at the South Kensington Board of Science and Art in May 1864. He then gained employment as Art Master at the Perth School of Art in 1865 where he remained until his departure for New Zealand in October 1869.⁸

At the age of 26, he set sail from Glasgow, arriving in Port Chalmers on January 1870 with his wife Catherine and young son David Edward. Sadly, seven months after their arrival, Catherine died at the age of 25. He later married Helen Douglas, from Edinburgh, who had arrived in Port Chalmers with her widowed mother in 1858, and in due course a further four sons and five daughters were born.⁹

Between 19th January and 25th February 1870, several articles appeared in local newspapers about the new school and its Principal, beginning with the January 19th issue of the *Otago Daily Times*, which announced the arrival of Mr and Mrs Hutton on the handsome new clipper ship, *Christian McAusland*, from Glasgow, after a "very smart passage of 79 days," and that, "All passengers considered themselves as having good provisions and water as per contract ticket, and well satisfied with general treatment."¹⁰ The most extensive write up appeared in the *Otago Witness* on 19th February, which devoted two columns to a detailed description of the many cases of models and casts for the Drawing School, saying, "We were favoured last week with a view of the drawing models which arrived in Dunedin by the *Christian McAusland* a few days ago. They are from the studio of Signor Brucciani, and filled eleven large cases. As their contents were for educational purposes, they were brought from Glasgow free of freight by the owners of the vessel. Mr Hutton, the newly arrived drawing master, is now engaged in unpacking and placing them, and as a contract has been entered into by the Education Board to have six drawing tables, to accommodate 50 pupils, placed in one of the rooms of the new Post Office building within a fortnight, the drawing classes will soon be in operation. ... We have no hesitation in saying that a better collection of models does not exist in the Australian colonies. Unfortunately some of them were fractured during the passage from England, but they are rapidly being set to rights by Mr Hutton and his assistants, and in a day or two will be quite ready for public inspection."¹¹

Two large rooms were provided for the Drawing School in the old Princes Street Colonial Bank building, then known as the new Post Office building, which shortly became the University Building and eventually the Stock Exchange, and suitable desks and fittings were sourced to furnish them.¹² Its opening was announced via an advertisement on February the 24th in the *Otago Daily Times*, which stated that "Mr Hutton, Provincial Drawing Master will shortly open the following mentioned drawing classes in the new Post Office Building, Princes Street, Dunedin." It went on to list a class for Teacher and Pupil Teachers, admission free, a class for Girls on Mondays,



Figure 7. Dunedin Stock Exchange Building, the initial location of the School of Art.

Wednesdays and Fridays, with a fee of 15/- per quarter, a class for pupils of the High School, admission free, and youths not attending any of the Government Schools would be admitted as pupils of this class on payment of a fee of 10/- per quarter, and concluded by saying that Mr Hutton would also be contacting masters of local district schools with a view to providing drawing lessons in as many of them as possible.¹³

By late March, within a month of the school's opening, it was reported that the ladies' class contained 15 students, the young men's class contained 70, and a teachers' class of 40 was being held every Saturday. In addition, "gas was being laid up to a room, which is fitted up for the holding of an artisans' evening class, due notice of the commencement of which will be given."¹⁴

The results of the School's initial public inspection, held six months after its opening, were highly complimentary "We must congratulate Mr Hutton on the progress which has been made since the establishment of the Drawing Classes, some of the specimens which we were shown bearing proof of sound practical teaching and being highly meritorious from an artist point of view. ... The chalk drawings, taken from the plaster models with which the school is so liberally supplied, are, many of them, really excellent. ... The water colour drawings, particularly some of those which are the work of lady pupils, are highly creditable." The writer of these comments also mentioned that the school had recently received additional teaching material, "in the form of a large number of lithographs and chromo-lithographs, copies of paintings, water-colour drawings, chalk and sepia pictures and etchings, comprising a large number of copies of the work of Turner, Birket Foster, and other eminent artists. These, as copies from which to study, are, and will be found to be, invaluable to the students."¹⁵

At the end of the year the School held, on its premises, its first public exhibition, reported as "a number of sketches executed by pupils at the Government School of Art is satisfactory evidence of the excellence of the tuition imparted there. Considering the short period during which the school has been in operation, Mr Hutton must be congratulated upon the progress made by his pupils, some of whose productions give evidence of considerable talent. The sketches consist of drawings in pencil, chalk and watercolour, and there is also one oil

painting, representing a pastoral scene, which is very nicely executed. The water-colour sketches are also very pleasing, the coastal scenes, especially, showing both spirit and finish. Several of the chalk heads are worthy of praise, but perhaps the most creditable specimens exhibited are the drawings of mechanical subjects, some of which are executed with an excellence that is really surprising.”¹⁶

The Otago Education Board announced Hutton’s teaching a success, the public was appreciative of the work of the students, and his students in particular acknowledged his efforts by “presenting him with a handsome gold Albert greenstone drop-piece, bearing a suitable inscription, as a mark of their appreciation of his service during the past year. The presentation took place in the class-room, and was made by one of the pupils in the name of his fellow students, with a few appropriate remarks, which were suitably responded to by Mr Hutton.”¹⁷ New Zealand now had its first School of Art. It would be twelve years before Canterbury followed suit, sixteen years before the Wellington Education Board founded its School of Design and twenty years before an Auckland benefactor founded the Elam School of Art.

The Post Office building, in which the School was located, was handed over to the fledgling Otago University at the end of 1870 and the School of Art was closed for part of March and April of 1871 while the University pondered the building’s best use for professors and students. The School reopened on the 1st of May, having expanded to three rooms in a different area of the building, in rooms in which “the light is excellent and the situation central. ... The two classrooms to be opened on Monday have roomy sitting accommodation for 55 pupils. There is also a third room set apart for modelling and drawing from casts, which it contains.” The *Otago Daily Times* editorial from which this extract was taken also discussed the lack of prizes being available to outstanding students and recommended that sponsors be sought for such medals and boxes of colours as are presented to students in Britain via the Science and Art Department. And in addition, notified its readers that visitors were welcome “to be present during the time the evening class is engaged, and to those who take an interest in such a school, the trouble of paying it a visit would be well repaid.”¹⁸

During its first year, the School was variously called the Drawing School, the School of Arts, and the Design School, but by the end of the year the title, School of Art, appears to have become the accepted norm. The first formal account of the School’s activities appeared in the Education Board’s 1871 annual report, which stated, that “the School of Art, for which ample accommodation was provided in the University Building, was attended last year by 104 students. The teachers’ class was attended by 26 students, the ladies’ afternoon class by 33 students, and the young men’s evening classes by 45 students. ... In addition to the classes in the School of Art, Mr Hutton has given lessons twice weekly in the Girls Provincial School to 130 pupils, in the Boys High School to 93 pupils, and in the following mentioned schools, one hour per week, North Dunedin, Middle Dunedin, South Dunedin, Mornington, Caversham, and Port Chalmers, making altogether 837 day school pupils. The pupils of the Girls’ School and the Boys’ High School received instruction in freehand drawing and shading from copies. As soon as they are sufficiently advanced, drawing from models will be introduced, and the boys in addition will receive lessons in mechanical drawing. In the district schools, freehand drawing has been taught, and where the masters have provided copies, shading from examples. I am able to report that Mr Hutton has performed his duties with diligence, ability and enthusiasm during the past year.”¹⁹

His teaching week consisted of four 7-9pm artisan classes, two 6-7pm pupil-teacher classes, four two-hour ladies classes, a two hour and a one hour class for each of the Girls Provincial School and the Boys High School, and an hour each in six suburban elementary schools.²⁰ All of which added up to a particularly heavy workload when taking preparation and travelling time into consideration. It would be a further four years before he was granted his first teaching assistants.

In his annual report for 1872 Hutton describes the subjects being taught: “The students attending this [ladies] class receive instruction in freehand, outline from copies and from the round, shading from copies and from the round, painting from copies, and from the round, and from nature in watercolours and oils. On Saturdays, the

more advanced pupils are taken out to sketch from nature. The drawing and paintings executed by the students of this class evince great talent and industry. The students [in the artisan classes] receive instruction in all the elementary subjects, together with Practical Geometry, Perspective, Mechanical and Architectural Drawing, Drawing and Shading from the round, Painting from copies and from the round, Drawing and Painting the human figure, Designing, etc. The works executed by the students attending the various classes were very good and their diligence while in school is beyond all praise."²¹

He also mentions that in August, twenty-four drawings and painted works of the students were forwarded to the Grahamstown Industrial Exhibition held at Thames, which attracted considerable attention and upon which the School was complimented in the *Auckland Daily Southern Cross Advertiser*. Hutton's appreciation of his students' achievements is further spelled out in a comment made at the end of 1872 by the Secretary of the Otago Education Board: "He has repeatedly assured me that the aptitude and proficiency exhibited by many of the pupil teachers and the ordinary pupils of the schools here exceed anything that fell under his notice when similarly employed in the schools of the old country."²²

In 1873, discussions were held on establishing a Normal School in which teachers in training could gain experience working in the classroom, and it was recommended that part of the proposed school should be set aside for the purpose of affording proper accommodation for the School of Art. "The want of suitable accommodation has acted most detrimentally upon the usefulness of this most deserving institution. And if steps are not soon taken to have the School of Art held in a suitable building, the injury will be increased."²³ The school had now moved three times, all within the same building. "If the adage that 'three removes are as bad as a fire' applies in most cases, it applies with more than ordinary force to the School of Art, as not only is some damage bound to happen in each case, and at each removal expensive fittings have to be put up, but also on account of the injury done to the teaching facilities of the institution by a removal having to be made, as has been the case during this session – the result being the closing of the school for some weeks. Besides, it is only fit and proper that so important an institution should have its own local habitation, instead of being only allowed to occupy a corner in the building of another institution on sufferance."²⁴

Arriving this year, "At Mr Hutton's request, the Government has provided a large supply of casts, chromolithographs, models, drawings etc., for the use of the students of the School of Art, as well as for the use of the pupils of the public schools, not only in Dunedin and Suburbs, but throughout the Province."²⁵ Again, as on the arrival of the first shipment, many of the casts were found to be damaged on unloading, although Hutton, along with the assistance of a Mr Somerville was able to restore most of them to their original form, and the School now had "an ample supply of excellent examples of models, similar to those used by the Science and Art Department, London."²⁶

A criticism of the School, based on its end of year exhibition, appeared in a local newspaper on 23rd December 1873, which briefly complimented the School on its student accuracy of working from models, but went on to report, "Now that such proficiency has been acquired, such hand and eye, and such a knowledge of the principles of colouring, we trust that next year original painting of scenes in the neighbourhood will be presented. It must not be forgotten that the end and purpose of art study is not merely to copy, but to produce. Anything short of this no artist should dream of. It is a good thing to copy a good picture, but it is better to be able to paint one from nature that others will delight to gaze upon and copy." On a positive note, the article did compliment Hutton on the achievements of his artisan classes, which were aimed at preparing boys for the trades by teaching them to draw accurately from copies. "We were glad to find that Mr Hutton has many pupils anxious to master this useful branch, youths employed in mechanical operations... who are fitting themselves to be designers."²⁷ Though the reporter was unlikely to know that Hutton's programme was based on what was then the accepted practice in Britain, he certainly made a valid point regarding students being largely confined to working from copies.



Figure 8. Dunedin 1874 (photo courtesy of Toitu Otago Settlers Museum).

Copying was an established and a long standing method for teaching student artists, but its overuse was a worry for those who were aware that in the end, students had to raise themselves beyond this process if they were to become credible practicing artists. This awareness was not new. Sir Joshua Reynolds, the first President of the Academy of Fine Arts in London, had expressed similar concerns one hundred years earlier in his address delivered to the students of the Royal Academy on the distribution of prizes in December 1769. “I consider general copying as a delusive kind of industry: the student satisfies himself with the appearance of doing something; he falls into the dangerous habit of imitating without selecting, and of labouring without any determinate object; as it requires no effort of mind, he sleeps over his work: and those powers of invention and composition which ought particularly to be called out and put in action, lie torpid, and lose their energy for want of exercise.”²⁸ Reynolds was a highly respected and powerful figure in the art world and it is somewhat surprising to find that his concern over the limitations of copying as an end in itself, upon which he commented in a number of his addresses to the Academy, was largely ignored by Britain’s future art and design schools, and initially in New Zealand’s first School of Art.

An important decision affecting the School, made in late 1873, was that the Education Board, after several years of discussion on the inadequacy of teacher training within the Province, announced that the Provincial Council has “expressed its intention to take steps for the erection of a suitable building for the School of Art in connection with the proposed Normal School Building,”²⁹ no doubt in answer to the many public complaints received along with pressure from John Hislop, and in particular to Hutton’s on-going accommodation concern. “The temporary location of the school, and, in consequence, the make-shift character of its arrangements, cause a great many inconveniences. The erection of a building specifically constructed for the purposes of a School of Art will prove the only effectual remedy. It is a remarkable proof of the importance of the School, that, notwithstanding the want of space, light, and convenience, the use made of it has so considerably increased.”³⁰

Throughout 1874, Hutton continued to promote ‘copying’ as an appropriate activity for his students, although he had, since 1872, run ladies’ classes for the study of landscape painting from nature, which he considered “a very desirable feature in the School.” These students visited a variety of locations, including, “Ocean Beach, Waters of Leith, Botanical Gardens and elsewhere every Saturday for the purpose of sketching from nature.”³¹ Hutton had also introduced two new subjects, pottery and metalwork jewellery. Pottery consisted of making planters and flower pots with decorative relief forms on their surfaces, along with the application of glazes. Metal-working covered casting and chasing, hammering and the use of dies and repose in a range of materials, including iron, bronze, metal plate and some silver and gold. Not only had his subject offerings expanded, but also his student numbers. He was now responsible for 178 students attending the School of Art, and 1494 pupils in the surrounding primary and secondary schools, all of whom received a weekly hour of tuition.³²

- 1 *Otago Daily Times*. 23 January 1871: 3.
- 2 "Obituary." *Otago Witness*. 25 May 1904: 27.
- 3 *Otago Daily Times*. 4 June 1868: 2
- 4 *Ibid.*: 21 May 1869: 2.
- 5 *Otago Witness*. 3 July 1869: 10.
- 6 Agreement between John Auld as Home Agent for and on behalf of the Government of Otago, New Zealand, and David Con Hutton of the Art School, Perth, 1869. (Hocken Library, AG-763-053/008)
- 7 Departmental Reports. *Otago Education Board Annual Report for 1870*: 3.
- 8 Kathleen Stuart Hutton. Revision of the Manuscript and Biography of David Con Hutton. 1969. (Hocken Library. Misc-MS-0017) and *Cyclopaedia of New Zealand, Otago and Southland Provincial Districts*. (Cyclopaedia Co. Ltd. Christchurch, 1905) 105.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 *Otago Daily Times*. 19 January 1870: 2.
- 11 *Otago Witness*. 19 February 1870: 6.
- 12 *Otago Education Board Annual Report for 1870*: 3.
- 13 *Otago Daily Times*. 24 February 1870: 1.
- 14 *Otago Witness*. 26 March, 1870: 14.
- 15 *Ibid.* 25 June 1870.
- 16 *Otago Daily Times*. 15 December 1870: 2.
- 17 *Otago Witness*. 11 February 1871: 14.
- 18 *Otago Daily Times*. 29 April 1871: 2
- 19 *Otago Education Board Annual Report for 1871*: 4.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 *Otago Education Board Annual Report for 1872*: 54.
- 22 *Ibid.*: 18.
- 23 *Otago Daily Times*. 24 December 1873: 7.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 *Otago Education Board Annual Report for 1873*: 4.
- 26 *Ibid.*: 21.
- 27 *Bruce Herald*. 23 December 1873: 7.
- 28 Reynolds, Sir Joshua. *The Discourses*. (Henry Frowde. Oxford U.P. London. 1907) Discourse No. 2: 14.
- 29 *Otago Education Board Annual Report for 1873*: 4.
- 30 *Ibid.*: 21.
- 31 *Otago Education Board Annual Report for 1874*: 17.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 *Ibid.*: 4.
- 34 *Otago Education Board Annual Report for 1875*: 4.
- 35 *Otago Daily Times*. 10 December, 1874: 1.
- 36 *Ibid.* 24 August 1875: 3.
- 37 *Tuapeka Times*. 29 December 1875: 3.
- 38 *King Edward Technical College Jubilee Booklet*. December 1939: 13.

