## A GOLDEN PERIOD



Figure 22. Robert Nettleton Field, *Landscape:Taieri Mouth*, 1936, oil on canvas, 260 x 332 mm (image courtesy of the Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa, reproduced with permission of the Robert Nettleton Field Estate).

Post Impressionism, along with other contemporary art trends, finally reached Dunedin with the appointments of two further English imports, W. H. Allen and R. N. Field, and due to their enthusiastic approach, broad knowledge and student popularity, attendance burgeoned and further accommodation was required.

Allen and Field put aside their disappointment and took up the challenge of teaching. The result being, that under their enthusiastic guidance and interest in disseminating their knowledge of current international art and design trends, in the words of Rosemary Entwisle, "The School of Art became once again the nurturing ground for some of New Zealand's greatest artists." And, in the words of F. G. Shewell, "These two artists brought a new outlook to art in Otago as well as to the Art School, the students of which received fresh impetus from their lively and refreshing work as well as a new appreciation of design."

In late 1925, and only a few months after their arrival, Allen and Field bravely stated in the College's prospectus for the following year, that the Art Department would be offering, besides afternoon and evening classes for the public and special juvenile classes for those preparing for scholarship examinations in Drawing, a two year full-time programme for students seeking employment in such as Architecture, Interior Decoration, Stained Glass Work, Painting, Modelling, Engraving, Lithography, Illustrating, Decorating and Design. The first year of which offered, Drawing of common objects, plant forms, birds and animals, followed in each case by practice in Drawing from Memory; Modelling of common objects plants and design; Craftwork, Needlework, Stencilling; Design and Principles of Lettering; Outdoor Studies in pencil and colour; Geometry; English Literature and Composition; and Mythology. The second year included, in addition to the above, Applied Art; Etching; Life Drawing; History of Art; Industrial History; Outdoor Studies and Landscape Painting.<sup>3</sup> Whether all these classes eventuated is unknown, but Allen and Field's enthusiasm was certainly evident.

Though students greatly appreciated their new art teachers, the local art cognoscenti were initially slower to follow suit. Field tells the story that shortly after his arrival in New Zealand he submitted a portrait, *The Derbyshire Woman*, to the Otago Art Society for their Annual exhibition, which was rejected. He decided not to throw it away and resubmitted it again three years later at which time it was accepted with the comment that he had improved enormously<sup>4</sup>

In June 1926, near the end of their first year of teaching, the College Board expressed its appreciation of their work in a report to the Minister of Education saying, "There has been an increase in the number of students seeking instruction in art subjects, and also a more satisfactory attendance at full-time courses of instruction provided in the day school. The success that has already attended the efforts of these two instructors is taken to foreshadow the benefit likely to accrue to art in Dunedin from the influence of these two instructors." Due to the increase in student numbers, the School had been granted the use of four additional College classrooms and the Director reported that "it is now evident that the Board will soon be required to consider the erection of a special building or additional wing for the School of Art Department." The fulfilment of this suggestion would take a further ten years.

The School had now been under the jurisdiction of the King Edward Technical College Board for six years, and during that time the Board had never seen fit to appoint a Head of Art. However, with the increasing recognition and kudos that the art department was receiving, it felt encouraged to rectify the situation by recommending to the Education Department that Allen, an excellent teacher who had good organising skills, along with "a boisterous, brilliant character, but steady and meticulous in his working methods," be considered for the position. The Board's recommendation was approved, and in December 1926 Allen received a letter of appointment from the College Principal, Mr W. S. Aldridge, informing him of his promotion and that he would, in future, be required to advise him on all matters connected with the Department, including correlating the teaching of art with the crafts, and that he would receive an increase in salary of £30. The letter concluded, "I need hardly say that this recognition of the work done in the Department is extremely gratifying to the Appointments Committee, on whose authority the appointment has been ratified." H.V. Miller, a Training College third year art specialist student who attended sessions at the School, considered that, "Allen was more of a teacher. One could also learn from his painting style, which was decorated and pointillist and he really taught etching and linocuts and lettering." And in describing Field, he remarks, "Field had a very different approach to teaching. We found Field more of the true 'artist' with a mild, moody, dreamy style which now and then woke up to more practical



Figure 23. Robert Nettleton Field, Self Portrait, oil on canvas, 385 x 240 mm (collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, reproduced with permission of the Robert Nettleton Field Estate).

teaching; and his work was more influencing in its very modern colour and rhythm. His sculpture was truly modern, with rhythmic beauty and had a tremendous effect on students."

By 1927 the Art Department was running eight evening and five afternoon classes for the public, in addition to a programme for full-time students, tuition to third year Teachers College trainees, two classes for juveniles and further classes for the College's mainstream pupils. And in November, and for the first time since the School had come under the College's administration, a display of art students' work, in conjunction with work from other areas of the College, was presented to the public, upon which the *Otago Witness* noted, "The art work is a special glaring feature of the display. The head of this department is Mr W. H. Allen, who has every reason to be well satisfied with what the pupils have done." 10

As early as 1923 the Education Department had put forward a draft proposal for a system of examinations and qualifications covering a full five-year art and craft programme, culminating in a certificate or diploma of equivalent standard to the associate-ship of the Royal College of Art. Allen, Ellis and the Director of the College considered this idea and forwarded extensive documentation to the Department seeking permission to implement such a scheme. Unfortunately, their offer was declined. In 1926 the Canterbury School of Fine Arts, which came under the jurisdiction of the University of

New Zealand, was granted permission to offer a three year full-time Diploma in Fine Arts, resulting in art departments in other centres, including Dunedin, seeking the same ability. With this in mind, Allen put the suggestion to the Technical College Board in 1928, that they also seek permission of the University Senate to offer a similar qualification. The Board agreed, a presentation was made, but without success due to the Art Department being outside the University's sphere of control. At this stage, the School's only consolation was its ability to successfully prepare students for the University's preliminary examination for the Diploma in Fine Arts, although from 1930, students were able to sit for the Diploma in Fine Arts provided they travelled to Christchurch to take the examination.

1928 was a prosperous year for the School. Robert Don and Robert Fraser were appointed part-time to teach Drawing and Design, and Helen Moran, who had been "... trained in embroidery skills, first in a Belgian convent, then in London," was appointed full-time to teach Art Needlework and Embroidery. She was listed as a member of the art staff, though her time was largely spent in teaching Home Science pupils during the day and embroidery classes for young ladies in the evening.

Throughout his 1928 reports, the Principal often referenced the School. "In the Art Course I am pleased to note a striking development in both junior and senior work as the outcome of three years' service of our

present staff. Students have secured honours in Art Exhibitions in Christchurch in etching and poster work, at the Royal Society of Arts, London, where Mr R. Fraser's poster received high commendation; and in the Railway Department's recent poster competition, Mr S. McLennan secured second prize, and the School was placed first equal on the quality of its whole exhibit." And, "The second Annual Exhibition of work was held in the College buildings (16-17 November). It was estimated that over three thousand people visited the College on Friday afternoon and evening, and a fair attendance was also recorded on Saturday evening. The exhibition has excited so much interest on the two occasions on which it has been held that it will almost certainly become a regular feature of the year's work." And further, "The Department of Education has made the experiment of granting certain Training College students a third year course of special art training, and three students from the Dunedin Training College are at present working 18 hours weekly in our Art Department."

The Principal's positive attitude towards the Art Department combined with its rapidly rising public profile, no doubt contributed to a welcomed announcement by the King Edward Technical College Board that in the future the Art Department would be recognised by its original title, and be known as the Dunedin School of Art.

This year saw the marriage of Field to Marion Iverach, a local school teacher of Scottish descent whom he had met on his excursions with the Student Christian Movement. And of particular interest to his students, was the establishment by Field and Allen of an art club for senior students, which became known as the 'Six and Four Art Club' due to it initially consisting of six women and four men. They met on Saturdays in the Field's newly built home in the seaside suburb of Tomahawk where they worked on various art projects during the afternoon, and met as a club in the evenings. Field enjoyed these gatherings, commenting years later, "a merry time we all had fortified by my wife Marion's pikelets and usually a meal together followed by dancing, music and lots of talk." Marion's memory was more specific. "Each week these students had a project to produce a piece of work - given theme - and many of them would come to our Anderson's Bay home and work on stone or at painting all Saturday afternoon, then meet as a club in the evening for mutual evaluation of work done. It was very stimulating indeed." The group also held a number of well received annual exhibitions.

Allen and Field were most successful in educating their students in the modern movements of art, but were somewhat scathing over what they considered to be an unhealthy indifference shown by New Zealand artists to the same. In a published article in 1929, Allen commented, after having seen the work of nationally accepted artists in the Dominion Exhibition, that he considered the works on display, "may be likened to that of an old man – for the most part it is 'safe,' represents a past age, avoids all experiment, and is full of sentiment. If Art is to take its rightful place in the life of the community there is much to be done. Firstly, we must get rid of the prevalent idea that art is principally concerned with painting and sculpture, and realise that modern developments in architecture, furniture design, stained glass, pottery, textiles, interior decoration, commercial Art, etc., are just as important, perhaps more important, in their effect on the general public. Secondly, Art appreciation - the love of all beautiful things - and the joy of designing and making must form the basis of Art instruction in all our schools - primary, secondary and technical. Thirdly, our Art Societies must occasionally have the courage to purchase works by leading modern artists instead of confining their patronage to the efforts of the 'safer' and older academicians. Finally, the artists of New Zealand must learn to experiment and create."<sup>21</sup>

Field, likewise, was not slow to comment publicly on the value of modern art, as is evident in an address given two years later to the Otago Arts Society in July 1931. "From the point of view of the man in the street, modern art is unintelligible at first sight and it should be one of the aims of the Art Society to assist him in arriving at some kind of conclusion from which he can judge and appreciate this work. All art was the expression of the creative urge in man. There was no art which was not the result of intense emotional experience in the beholder. [Modern Art] devoted itself to a large degree to the expression of rhythmic quality and the simplification of form; and in plastic and graphic art, there was an emphatic clarity of statement and a strong reaction to photographic realism. 'Modernism' as it was called, was creating wonderful things and revealing brilliant personalities."<sup>22</sup>

In 1930, and for the first time, the School offered a third year, 'Advanced Course' in art, whereby, "Advanced students will be permitted to specialise in a group of subjects selected in accordance with the recommendation of the Head of the Department, Mr W. H. Allen, A.R.C.A."23 Student numbers had increased to 21 full-time and 19 part-time, evening class numbers had expanded and an additional modelling and stone-carving class had been instituted. Third year Teachers College students majoring in art had now become a standard part of the intake, and students were continuing to gain entry, and in some cases exhibition success in major external exhibitions, including the Canterbury Society of Art's annual students' competition, the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts Exhibition in Wellington and the Royal Society of Art's Annual Competition of Industrial Design in London. In Allen's August report to the Board, he notes that most first year Technical College pupils were now receiving art instruction of one period per week, covering Principles of Design, Lettering, Stencilling and Carving, and that "Certain domestic classes are being given instruction in batik dyeing, and closer cooperation is evident between the Art and Commercial Departments." In addition, and not for the first time, he argues that "The space and equipment at the disposal of the Art staff are now quite inadequate and additions in this respect are urgently needed if the Department is to function efficiently." He also requested a leave of absence for the following year to travel to England, and suggested that the services of a properly qualified full-time art instructor be obtained for the next year's work.24

The Board approved his leave and sought help from the Education Department to find a suitable replacement, resulting in 13 applications from which to choose. The successful applicant, appointed in March 1931, was 28 year old Canadian born, James Charlton Douglas Edgar<sup>25</sup> (1903-1976) then living in Scotland, who had attended the Edinburgh College of Art from 1924 to 1928, graduating with a Diploma in Painting, and who had gained an MA in History in 1927 and a Diploma in Education in 1929 from Edinburgh University. He was described as being "very effective in the presentation of his subject, and having a full technical knowledge with the ability to impart that knowledge to children of all ages and adults – quiet, refined and gentlemanly in manner. Strongly recommended by four professors and teachers at Edinburgh College of Art, by a Minister of the Union United Free Church, Edinburgh, and by his late Headmaster, in whose school he distinguished himself in lessons, on the sports field and as a prefect." He arrived in Dunedin with his wife Mona in April 1931 to teach Drawing and Painting, and later, also Etching, Commercial Art and Lettering, and in addition, found himself Acting Head of Department, until the position was granted informally to Gordon Tovey on his arrival in 1932.

Allan's other request, that of catering for the rapidly growing roll, was accommodated by the Board agreeing to the School again being allowed to use the old School of Art building and part of the old Moray Place School as additional space for the following year,<sup>27</sup> although this accommodation would last for only a few years due to the buildings by then being "too old and dingy, and the School was withdrawn as rooms in the main building became available."<sup>28</sup>

Allen, and his wife Elena, with their daughters, Sheila and Tui, arrived in England at the end of 1930, and in June 1931 he formally resigned from the staff of K.E.T.C., with the intention of staying permanently in England. However, his family became despondent with the English weather and in September 1933 they returned to New Zealand to settle in the much more accommodating climate of Nelson, where he became Art Master at the Nelson Boys College, and where he was regarded as a breath of fresh air by the local art community. Toss Woollaston described him as "an ally against the philistinism of Nelson." And Francis Shurrock: "Mr Allen's presence in Nelson is a stimulus to live thinking in the community at large about the pictorial arts, for with genial courage he stands firm for the experimenters, the pioneers of further possibilities in outlook and technique, without whom we should all die a dull death," and he continued to paint, "... a steady stream of landscapes, portraits, figure compositions, and also some etchings, engravings, and lino-cuts." He joined the Nelson Suter Art Society, exhibited in major exhibitions throughout New Zealand, his work featured in the 1940 September issue of Art in New Zealand, and in 1942 he became President of the Association of Art Societies and Vice President of the New Zealand Society of Artists. In 1945 he finally returned to England, taking up the position of Instructor of Life Drawing and Painting at the S.W. Essex School of Art in London, where he remained until

retirement in 1961.

Field carried on at the Dunedin School of Art. continued to inspire his students and established himself as a highly respected New Zealand artist. One of his most successful early presentations was his exhibition of paintings and sculptures at the 1931 Christchurch Group Show where his works were regarded as the most challenging on display. Toss Woollaston, who was attending the Canterbury School of Fine Arts at the time, describes his visit to the exhibition as an "explosive stimulation." "Here were shown pictures by two men, which were unlike any art I had ever seen before. They were Christopher Perkins, who worked in the North Island, and Robert Field, then of Dunedin, both Englishmen who had recently come to teaching appointments in New Zealand. The latter appealed to me the more intimately of the two. His pictures, brilliant and heady, were painted with jewel-like, fullsized brush strokes, or with rainbow spots and scales of pure paint shimmering on unpainted backgrounds of wood or canvas. The Canterbury School of Art having produced in me only some feelings of unsuccess and even of doubt whether I wished to succeed along the lines of the curriculum, I saw this new way shining ahead of me. I repaired to Mapua,



Figure 24.William H.Allen, c.1930s (photo courtesy of the Hocken Collection).

gathered up my wages and went to Dunedin. The infectious friendliness of the group of young people gathered about Bob Field emboldened me with delight." <sup>32</sup> Woollaston further observed, "Dunedin in 1932 was the most artistically enlightened place in New Zealand. They were looking at artists unheard of in Christchurch – Matisse, Picasso, Cezanne, and others of the French; and English ones like Matthew Smith, Mark Gertler, Roger Fry, and the New Zealand born Frances Hodgkins. The one quality that united all these artists was excitement. And here it seemed right to be excited. It was a radiant atmosphere kept bright by a few and shining over many." <sup>33</sup>

In July, Edgar, as Acting Head of Art, was asked to present an informal report on the School, which was read out to the Board's Appointments Committee on 19th August 1931. His comments were decidedly uncomplimentary of his colleagues.

"The work of the students in the Art Department is marked by a characteristic progressiveness and originality of ideas embodying a vitality of colouring, an ability to compose, and a fine appreciation of form and rhythm. This evolutionary element should be fostered by every means available. As against this there is in the Department a certain element of parrot-like repetition of ideas and methods as practised by the instructors in their own private work, to the exclusion of an appreciation of anything else but what is essentially modern. Discipline; The senior students, especially certain 'part-timers' regard that feeling of good fellowship that exists in no small measure throughout the whole department between pupil and master, too often in the light of familiarity, lateness, slackness in attendance, and a general desire to do just whatever they are interested in for the moment, regardless of the timetable and what the master has come to teach, are all factors that tend to detract from sound and efficient work. A greater insistence on discipline and a more closely defined curriculum together with greater insistence on it would benefit students and master alike. The Curriculum; Rarely do students carry anything to a definite conclusion - jumping from this to that, they know a little of all things, but not much about

anything. A more settled order of things is greatly to be desired."34

Edgar proposed a revised curriculum covering the first and second year students where he would teach drawing and painting, a new appointment would teach design, and Field would teach sculpture. At the completion of their second year, students who wished to further their studies would then choose from one of four major options; I. Sculpture. 2. Design (Natural Forms, Museum Studies, Historic Ornament and Practical Design). 3. Crafts (Decorative Painting, Metal Work and Jewellery, Writing and Illuminating, Embroidery, and Enamelling). 4. Industrial Art (Textile Design, Wall Paper Design, Poster Design, Book Illustration, and Dress and Fashion Design).<sup>25</sup>

In 1932 Gordon Tovey (1901-1974) was appointed to the vacant Design position, now retitled Commercial Art, and initially taught Art Appreciation, Lettering, Drawing, and later, during two years while Field was overseas, Junior Modelling. He was born in Wellington, had trained in art at the Wellington Technical College under H. Linley Richardson and enjoyed painting, first exhibiting in 1922 at the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts. He worked for the Railways Advertising Branch as a designer from 1924, then spent from 1927 to 1930 in London where he worked as a commercial artist. He married a young English woman, Heather Campbell, in March 1930 and the couple left England for New Zealand a month later. Owing to the depression and lack of available work, Tovey found himself working on a road gang, but in 1932, and although he had no teaching experience, his application for the Commercial Art teaching position at the Dunedin School of Art was successful. As a teacher, he proved to be a good organiser and was particularly interested in promoting child art along personality type lines as promulgated by Herbert Reed in his book *Education Through Art*, combined with the ideas of Arthur Lismer and Dr Paul Dengler. His aim was more towards offering as many pupils as possible within the whole of the Technical College the opportunity to express themselves through art, rather than the more traditional art school philosophy of promoting individual talent and ability.

When Field's father died, Field decided to spend his inheritance on revisiting England, which he did in 1933. He and Marion stayed for two years, and because he felt that he should be teaching more than just Sculpture and Drawing back in Dunedin, he decided to extend his knowledge by researching current art teaching methods in European schools and furthering his interest in pottery. "It became clear to me that the study I could most profitably undertake in London was pottery, so to that end, I enrolled in the Central School of Arts and Crafts, Southampton Row, and later at Camberwell School of Art whose reputation in pottery was first class. It was a time of great personal stimulation and as I was wholly directed towards being of value in the New Zealand educational scene, I concentrated on gathering information, equipment and techniques."

When he returned to New Zealand at the beginning of 1935, he brought with him a kick wheel and a Morgan Crucible (high-firing clay) muffle, since he knew that it would be difficult to acquire anything of the like back in Dunedin. "He became the first person to exhibit pottery as an object of beauty in its own right with the 1935 Group in Christchurch." At the same time he set about establishing pottery as a subject within the School by submitting a request to the College Board for a range of pottery equipment including four wheels, a gas furnace and a room in which pottery could be taught. His recommendations were approved, with the proviso that pottery would, in the meantime, be conducted in a temporary location until a home for it could be established in a new building."

Field had become interested in the work of Franz Cizek, which he had discovered during his UK visit, particularly, Cizek's advocacy that children be given the freedom to experiment widely with both colour and media and with minimal adult interference. "The teacher ought to learn to hover like an invisible spirit over his pupil, always ready to encourage, but never to press of force." This new interest proved fortuitous, as he found on his return to Dunedin that the Teachers College had been closed due to the Great Depression, and would remain so for another year, which meant that there was not the influx of gifted senior students from that source. He was therefore not too devastated when Tovey, now acting Head of School, allocated to him some junior classes,

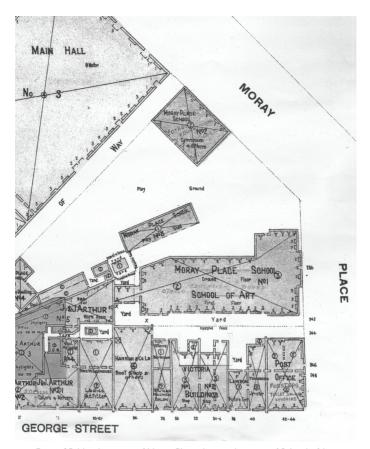


Figure 25. North corner of Moray Place showing location of School of Art.

thus providing him with an opportunity to experiment with Cizek's methods. He also re-established the Six and Four Club by inviting senior students to his house in the evenings and at weekends. These students, in particular, appreciated his encouraging them to pursue and extend their own approaches to art, rather than just perpetuating traditional styles or -isms.

During Field's European sojourn, in addition to the permanent staff of Tovey, Edgar, Miss White and Miss Moran, James Patrick was appointed part-time for the 1934 year to teach Drawing and Design, and Mr B. S. Connor, part-time, to teach Window Dressing and Ticket Writing.<sup>41</sup> Fees for full-time students not holding free places, were £7-10/- per year for those under 21, and £12 per year for those over 21.<sup>42</sup>

Building wise, this was an exciting time, as the King Edward Technical College Board, at a meeting in April 1935, decided that because the School of Art had become such a significant part of the College it should have its own stand alone, purposely designed building. It allocated a corner of the College's property to the proposed School and moved "... that a Government Grant be sought for a permanent art building to be built in 1936." Three months later, sketch plans for the School, designed by the Government Architect, John Mair, arrived from the Department of Education, over which the Board expressed 'gratification' and agreed to accept without serious modification. It approved the final plans in November 1935 and the Principal and Gordon Tovey were authorised to communicate with the Department in regards to internal fittings.

The contract was let in June 1936 and in August it was reported that "Work on the art school was progressing satisfactorily," and though a number of alterations had been suggested by the Building Committee and members of the Art Staff, all were approved. These included the addition of a  $6 \times 6$  foot skylight in the room in which life drawing would be held, the  $20 \times 12$  foot basement area being dug out by a further foot to create an 8 foot high ceiling to make the room more suitable for storage (although it eventually become Field's somewhat claustrophobic and dramatic pottery studio), the addition of sinks in a number of rooms, the juxtaposition of large blackboards, the placement of electrical points for heaters in the life drawing area, a site for a pottery furnace in the basement, passage way picture rail locations and wall colour suggestions.

The building's structure progressed rapidly and in January 1937 the Board called a meeting to discuss matters relating to its opening. It also reported that the furniture and equipment requested by art staff had been approved by the Department of Education to the value of £700-. A further letter from the Department was also presented, formally approving the position of Head of the School of Art to Mr Tovey, which the Board had applied for in late 1936<sup>48</sup>

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