



ON GETTING FED FOR FREE

Well: now that I have your attention, I had better explain that I am not writing about food. Instead I am writing about brain-food, or maybe even soul-food.

I am reflecting upon what channels are available to us—particularly in a year when there is no library conference—where we can meet with like-minded people outside of our workplace, listen and learn about the past and present publishing/book world, and where we can supplement, with little or no cost to our employer (or ourselves), our professional development.

In many towns and cities across the country, the libraries, bookshops and other institutions play host to free book related talks and book launches. Attending these is a great way to learn about the content of our collections and also to meet our readers (call them patrons or users, if you like). Becoming familiar with both has certainly helped my own professional development as a Collection Specialist. Also, in university cities there are often free public lectures. Here in Dunedin we have been blessed in recent years with the development, by its co-convenors Drs Shef Rogers and Donald Kerr, of the Centre for the Book at the University of Otago: <https://blogs.otago.ac.nz/cfb/>.

The Centre hosts a public World Book Day lecture in March, and for the past five years, has conducted an Annual Symposium. The one or two-day symposiums (or would you prefer *symposia*?) have been either free or had a minimal fee.

The inaugural symposium in 2012 covered many of the same topics that LIANZA conferences do; for instance, digital developments and challenges to “the book”, but also book design and other book-related topics. Since 2013, each year’s symposium has been theme based: 2013, Collectors and Collecting; 2014, Art and the Book; 2015, A Sense of Wonder: Children’s Literature; and this year, Book and Place. A call for papers goes out early in each year from Dr Donald Kerr, the University of Otago’s Special Collections Librarian. Each year the speakers have included lecturers and researchers from a range of academic disciplines, practitioners (writers, artists, illustrators, publishers and book designers), booksellers, book enthusiasts, curators, archivists and (I am glad to report) librarians.

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This year, Book and Place began with a talk on Thursday evening, 27 October, by Dunedin writer Neville Peat, who reflected upon the influence of place and nature upon his own writing over the past forty years. The following day's symposium included eleven 20-minute talks, and an hour-long presentation.

The first three talks were grouped together by their historical content. Dr Rosi Crane began proceedings with a lively and well-illustrated talk on the New Zealand Magazine, a now little known and scarce Dunedin-produced journal for the "intelligent gentleman," which became a venue for the discussion of the theory of evolution, and was ironically—given its stance on the "survival of the fittest"—quite short-lived (1876–78). Dr Donald Kerr's talk followed the eleven year research trail of Robert McNab (1864–1917) as he ventured into "an untouched field" collecting books and oral accounts, and copying by hand official records, which led to the many editions of his *Murihiku: a history of the South Island of New Zealand*. Mike Hamblin then told us about the life, work and legacy of George Griffiths (1933–2014), who was a Dunedin author, editor, publisher, journalist, historian, benefactor and musician.

The lecture by Dr Ingrid Horrocks, of Massey University, considered the theme of place in the work of three very different New Zealand essayists: Geoff Park, Steve Braunias and Lyn Jenner. The two short talks that followed examined crime fiction: Margie Michael, from Victoria University of Wellington, gave a sweeping overview of New Zealand crime fiction from *By Passion Driven* (1888) to the work of Paul Cleave and Vanda Symon; Lucy Sussex, from Melbourne, looked at the Dunedin roots in the writing of Fergus Hume and particularly in his international bestseller *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (1886). Lucy's recent book *Blockbuster!: Fergus Hume and the Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (2016) tells it all in detail.

"Books on the Move" was the theme of the next session. Lorraine Johnston, Heritage Collections Librarian at Dunedin Public Library, discussed the research potential of the range of World War One troop transport publications, collected by far-sighted City Librarian, William McEwan (1870–1933). Dr Helen Bones, from Western Sydney University, considered the rise and demise of Australasian literary anthologies, and Dr David Goodwin, a local surveying lecturer, contemplated how an idea of place is created for readers by

text, illustration and maps, particularly imaginative maps.

The last three talks were by "Creators and Consumers." Roger Hickin, of Cold Hub Press in Christchurch, combined poetry and quotes from writers about walking Dunedin streets. We heard how Brasch, Baxter, Frame, Olds, Tuwhare, Wedde, Dallas and Neale have all used Dunedin's presence in their poetry. Young adult author Ella West talked about using real and imagined distinctively New Zealand places in her novels *Night Vision* and *Rain Fall* (due early 2018). Finally, Otago lecturer in creative non-fiction, Dr Paul Tankard, argued that the Regent Theatre's annual 24-hour book sale plays a vital role in Dunedin's egalitarian literary culture and status as a UNESCO City of Literature. His talk also included showing some of his best finds at the sale. Nicky Page, Dunedin City of Literature director, rounded up a day which had included history, biography, creative non-fiction, essays, poetry, anecdote, YA and crime fiction.

The Centre for the Book symposium provides an opportunity for anybody (including librarians) to find out about what treasures are to be found in New Zealand libraries. It also provides an opportunity for the library profession to share what may be hidden or little known. So, look out for next year's call for papers and think about what you could share.

And getting back to my analogy with being fed: food is often part of a book-related event. Over food and drink comes the chance to informally talk with writers, readers and researchers outside of our profession who value and use library collections in ways we might never have thought of.

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