



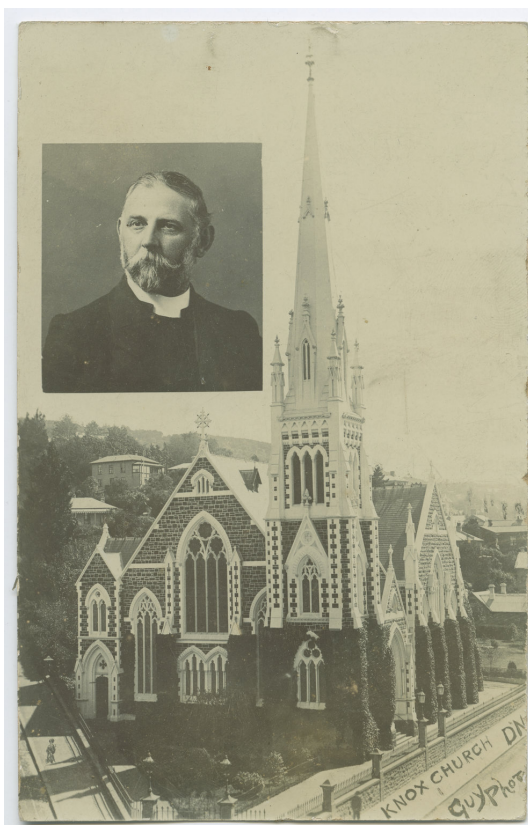
# Hewitson Library

By Jennifer Jeffery

Digital Content Curator, Presbyterian Research Centre / Hewitson Library

*"I must be a preacher... but where I am to find a home I don't know. The Methodists won't have me. I don't think I could confine myself to the limits of the Anglican Prayer Book. I am sure that I could not swallow the Westminster Confession of Faith of the Presbyterians. What is to become of me?"<sup>1</sup>*

## History of the Library



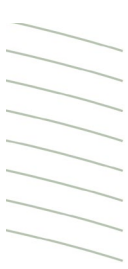
*Hewitson and Knox Church, Dunedin, c.1905*

The Hewitson Library is located on the premises of the prestigious Knox College, Opoho, Dunedin. Currently, the College is utilised by boarding students who attend the University of Otago, as a comfortable study space for the next generation of thinkers. The impressive red-brick building stands tall among the background of residential properties and the Dunedin Botanic Gardens of the North East Valley. The Hewitson Library is open to the public, offers electronic books and other digital resources and the use of its facilities is free of charge.

The Hewitson Library development occurred due to the generosity of ministers who donated their personal collections for theological students to utilise. In 1876, the Presbyterian Synod granted £200 for Professor William Salmond, the first Professor of Theology at the Theological Hall in Dunedin, to provide the nucleus of the Theological College Library. It was incredibly challenging for Salmond to find a space suitable for this

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<sup>1</sup> William Hancock, 'Memories of William Hewitson,' in *William Hewitson, First Master Of Knox College: Memorial Tributes to the Rev. William Hewitson, B.A., by students, colleagues and friends*, ed. John Dickie and J. D. Salmond (Dunedin: Reed, 1935), 6-7.



assortment of important literature – the classroom in the Professor’s house which was hijacked for this purpose, was deemed unsuitable. In 1879, Reverend Doctor James Copland, Moderator of the Presbyterian Synod of Otago and Southland, proposed to Synod that £500 be spent on books, in conjunction with building a Theological College and Library. This notion was defeated. Instead, it was decided that the Theological College Committee, a sub-committee of the Synod of Otago and Southland, would spend just £50 on literature.<sup>2</sup>

The shelves were filling with literature at an exponential rate. In 1887, Professor John Dunlop, inducted as Professor of Theology at the Theological Hall that same year, was asked by the Theological College Committee to generate a catalogue of all the books held by the College. By 1895 this mammoth task was still incomplete. It was revealed that numerous books spent the last decade of the nineteenth century in boxes – practically useless to everyone. The books were salvaged, but it did not eliminate the pressing need of a purpose-built space to hold this literature. Professor John Dickie, who was offered the role of Chair of Systematic Theology in 1909, was later appointed to care for the Hall Library collections. Dickie set to work cataloguing the numerous volumes, establishing rules regarding lending as well as more consistent purchasing to grow the collection.<sup>3</sup>

In 1936, as collections within the Library grew, questions were raised as to who exactly took the final responsibilities for the co-ordination of each donation. A Library Committee was proposed in October 1937, due to the frail relationship between the Standing Committee of Knox College Council and the Theological Hall Committee. Nothing eventuated until 1942. With Dickie’s passing in 1943, the position of chief protagonist for the Library was handed to Reverend H. J. Ryburn, the new Master of Knox College and Convenor of the Library Committee. Ryburn was appointed honorary librarian for the Theological Library this same year. All three libraries, the Theological Hall Library, Theological College Library and Staff Library, now shared one librarian.<sup>4</sup>

Results from a major report in 1948 showed that all three libraries were suffocating under the current conditions. The Library was overflowing from the large lecture room, the Old Testament lecture room, the New Testament lecture room, the Chapel vestry, and the Professor’s room, with older books being kept in a wooden shed. This system was unsatisfactory. Planning for a new library began, as well as provisions for classrooms in the new Hall block. In 1955, the new Theological Hall Block was opened, which included the library – with well-designed stacks and spaces for students to study. Another step forward was the employment of Sister Nora Calvert – the first librarian. Calvert

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<sup>2</sup> Ian Breward, *Grace and Truth: A History of Theological Hall Knox College, Dunedin 1876-1975* (Dunedin: Theological Education Committee Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, 1975), 124.

<sup>3</sup> Breward, *Grace and Truth: A History of Theological Hall Knox College, Dunedin 1876-1975*, 125.

<sup>4</sup> Breward, *Grace and Truth: A History of Theological Hall Knox College, Dunedin 1876-1975*, 126.

was sent to Library School in 1956, then returned to begin cataloguing the whole collection on the Bliss system. Calvert promoted that the library at Knox College should be the official repository of Presbyterian books and pamphlets.<sup>5</sup>

## Professor William Hewitson

### Early Life

William Hewitson's story begins in Smythesdale, a small gold mining town near Ballarat, Victoria, 1860. Hewitson was the son of Thomas Hewitson, an English migrant who managed a mine and



*Rev. William Hewitson, c.1905*

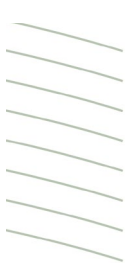
inherited Irish blood from his mother, Catherine McMahan. Hewitson would absorb his parent's attributes to grow into a tall and imposing man, paired with a kind demeanor.<sup>6</sup> The family moved to Clunes when Hewitson was young, where Hewitson developed his educational talents including Latin, French and mathematics. Hewitson moved to Ballarat to study for his matriculation, where he engaged heavily with free discussions among the students. Hewitson wanted to expand beyond his parental globe of thought, and turned towards sociology, religion and studies of a speculative nature. Hewitson would often spark conversations with men much older than himself, igniting his desire for education.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Breward, *Grace and Truth: A History of Theological Hall Knox College, Dunedin 1876-1975*, 127-128.

<sup>6</sup> Alison Clarke, *A Living Tradition: A Centennial History of Knox College, Dunedin – 1909-2009* (Dunedin: Knox College, 2009), 43.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Hewitson Roberts, "Boyhood and youth," in *William Hewitson, First Master Of Knox College: Memorial Tributes to the Rev. William Hewitson, B.A., by students, colleagues and friends*, ed. John Dickie and J. D. Salmond (Dunedin: Reed, 1935), 6-7.



Hewitson left his schooling career at the age of fifteen and began work in the office of a large drapery store in Ballarat. For two years, Hewitson studied commercial methods and accountancy with seventeen other clerks but devoted his spare time to religious studies. It was during this time as a clerk, Hewitson preached his first sermon and became a lay preacher delivering services to village churches and meeting houses.<sup>8</sup> Growing up Methodist, Hewitson preferred a more structured style of worship, and a more liberal theology. At the age of nineteen, Hewitson became an employee of the Union Bank, where he studied accounting. At twenty-three, Hewitson was appointed accountant to the Union Bank in his hometown, and this propelled him into the position of branch manager in Annandale at the age of thirty-five. However, Hewitson felt a calling to ministry, and applied to theological colleges.

### Call to Ministry

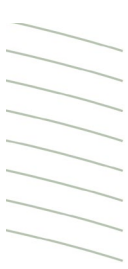
Hewitson's first application to Melbourne's Anglican College was rejected, though his did not halt his career in the ministry. Hewitson was offered a placement and scholarship to Ormond College, a hall of residence which also housed the Presbyterian Theological Hall. Hewitson's venture at the College was successful. In 1890, Hewitson was ordained as a Presbyterian Minister, and awarded a Bachelor of Arts.

To ignite his Presbyterian ministerial career, Hewitson became an assistant to pioneer minister Allan MacVean, in the Melbourne district of Brunswick. The expectation was for Hewitson to become an elder, but these plans were altered. In 1895, the prestigious position of minister opened at Dunedin's Knox Church when the Knox minister, Reverend Doctor Donald Stuart died in 1894. The Church had over 1,000 adult members and was considered to be one of the largest churches in the Southern Hemisphere.<sup>9</sup> Arrangements were made for ten Australian ministers to preach, each for a month, at Knox Church. Hewitson was the first preacher who was scouted to come to Dunedin. The thousand strong Knox Church congregation thought Hewitson was most fitted to be minister, however it would be no easy feat to claim Knox Church's pulpit. He was a crafted orator and could create tensions without losing control of his voice, nor would he mutter something inappropriate that he would regret later. Hewitson was forth in talking about his views and plan and was incredibly loyal

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<sup>8</sup> Roberts, *William Hewitson, First Master Of Knox College: Memorial Tributes to the Rev. William Hewitson, B.A., by students, colleagues and friends*, 8.

<sup>9</sup> Clarke, *A Living Tradition: A Centennial History of Knox College, Dunedin – 1909-2009*, 43.



to his ideals. Hewitson paired rich sympathy with the expertise of wise council.<sup>10</sup> In 1895, Hewitson became the Presbyterian minister at Knox Church, Dunedin.

### Knox College

Through his work at Knox Church, Hewitson was applauded for having the ability to encourage Presbyterian men to straighten to their fullest height – physically and intellectually. In 1908, Hewitson was appointed Master of Knox College, as well as Professor of the English Bible and Practical Thinking in the Theological hall. For twenty years, Hewitson held these dual positions. Although the college did not open till 1909, Reverend Andrew Cameron, who was the Secretary and later Convenor of the Theological Committee, and Hewitson, had strong feelings towards their desired Presbyterian Residential College<sup>11</sup>. Hewitson was dedicated to train and influence a flurry of successors who would have the skills and knowledge to serve their brethren in their chosen professions. This was evident from the numerous successful students who studied under Hewitson at Knox College, and had the capabilities to extend their discipline abroad.

### Foreign Christian Committee

Hewitson, who also had a strong commitment to the Foreign Christian Mission, became the Convenor for the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand's Foreign Mission Committee. In this role, Hewitson travelled the globe – India, the United States of America, China and the United Kingdom. Hewitson and his wife, Margaret Eckersall, wrote numerous entries in local newspapers reflecting on their adventures and encounters in foreign lands.

One series of newspaper articles written by Hewitson, all titled “Forty-One Days in India,” was published in the *Otago Daily Times*. In this series, Hewitson offers elaborate descriptions of his encounters in the Orient, through which he travelled by train for 3,600 miles. Hewitson pauses to recognise the importance of the sacred spot, the River Ganges. Hewitson is also confronted by the crippling poverty of forty million people, the strenuous agricultural activities, and the sickness that

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<sup>10</sup> John Collie, “Ministry in Knox Church, Dunedin, New Zealand,” in *William Hewitson, First Master Of Knox College: Memorial Tributes to the Rev. William Hewitson, B.A., by students, colleagues and friends*, ed. John Dickie and J. D. Salmond (Dunedin: Reed, 1935), 15-17.

<sup>11</sup> A. M. Douglas, “William Hewitson, The First Master of Knox College, Dunedin,” in *William Hewitson, First Master Of Knox College: Memorial Tributes to the Rev. William Hewitson, B.A., by students, colleagues and friends*, ed. John Dickie and J. D. Salmond (Dunedin: Reed, 1935), 24-26; Allan C. Watson, “William Hewitson, The First Master of Knox College, Dunedin,” in *William Hewitson, First Master Of Knox College: Memorial Tributes to the Rev. William Hewitson, B.A., by students, colleagues and friends*, ed. John Dickie and J. D. Salmond (Dunedin: Reed, 1935), 26-28.

is brought on from starvation. Children become famine orphans, as their parents succumb to the ills of malnourishment.<sup>12</sup>

In vast contrast to the despair in India, Hewitson wrote an article for the *Evening Star*, which exclaimed his awe of the large universities established in the United States of America. Hewitson, Eckersall and Miss W. P. Rule (Hewitson's niece), freely explored the incredible nation as 'No particular duty was assigned me.'<sup>13</sup> Hewitson was overwhelmed by the physical size of the great universities and the extent of the university's enrolment. Hewitson visited some of the oldest and largest, both privately-owned and State owned, to specifically investigative theological seminaries.

### Moderatorship



*Hewitson window, Ross Chapel*

After years of showing his obedience in teaching young students the craft of ministry and leadership, and through his work in New Zealand's Foreign Mission Committee, Hewitson was honoured with the duties of Moderatorship. Hewitson traversed New Zealand in search for congregations – large and small – to bestow his appreciation as the figure head for the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. Hewitson was also talented with children and young people, as his kindred spirit made them feel welcome, he was a conscious listener, and a wise father and council. Evidence of his successful courageous leadership is apparent in the multiple departments of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand.<sup>14</sup>

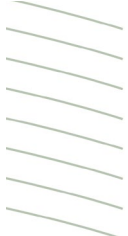
### Death

The news that Hewitson had died suddenly was matched with great sorrow from the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. Hewitson was on his way to seek assistance from a nurse, for his wife who was ill, and whilst seated in a tram car, he quietly

<sup>12</sup> William Hewitson, "Forty-One Days in India," *Otago Daily Times*, 6 July 1905.

<sup>13</sup> William Hewitson, "Professor Hewitson – He Visits America," *Evening Star*, 21 February 1924.

<sup>14</sup> William Hewitson, *The Outlook*, 20 February 1933.



died. Hewitson was aged 72.<sup>15</sup> Hewitson was dedicated to ensuring that even after his death, he would support and guide ministry students who attended Knox College. Money was allocated from his estate into a trust to purchase books, apparatus, scholarships and financial aid to undergraduates and graduates of Knox College.<sup>16</sup>

In honour of Professor William Hewitson's contributions, a stained glass window was unveiled in Ross Chapel, Knox College, by Miss. W. P. Rule, on behalf of the former students.<sup>17</sup> A year later in 1936, and two years after Professor William Hewitson died, Miss W. P. Rule donated Hewitson's collection as the nucleus of the Staff Library. The Hewitson Library bears the name of an impressive man, who positively influenced a generation of men beginning their own personal spiritual and academic journey.

In 2012, the Hewitson Library separated from Knox College. The College remains primarily as a residential hall for the University of Otago, whilst the Hewitson Library which still stands on campus, is now managed by the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand.



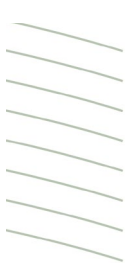
*Interior view of the Hewitson Library*

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<sup>15</sup> "William Hewitson," *The Outlook*, 20<sup>th</sup> February 1933.

<sup>16</sup> William Hewitson, "Legacies to Institutions – Professor Hewitson's Bequest." *Otago Daily Times*, 20 January 1933.

<sup>17</sup> "Knox College; Hewitson Memorial Window," *The Outlook*, 22 April 1935.



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*Otago Daily Times*. Dunedin, New Zealand, 6 July 1905 – 20 January 1933.

*The Outlook*, Wellington, New Zealand 20 February 1933 – 22 April 1935.

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