

Drawn from Nature: Wallpaper patterns in New Zealand's Schools of Art and Design

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ABSTRACT: Schools of art and design were established in New Zealand from 1870 to foster the development of technical skills in the trades and the creative and decorative arts. These schools flourished throughout the latter two decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century. Informed by the teachings of the South Kensington School in England, students in New Zealand were instructed in the design of patterns for interior finishes, such as wallpapers, tiles, linoleum and textiles. The blossoming Arts and Crafts movement not only guided the teaching models of these schools, but encouraged students to explore the graphic possibilities of flora and fauna, which in the New Zealand context resulted in original decorative patterns with native motifs.

This paper will explore the design of wallpaper patterns by students at the New Zealand schools of art, focusing on those produced between the mid-1880s and the late 1890s. The influence and inspiration for these patterns will be traced, from the Arts and Crafts movement, the teaching methods at schools of art and design, to the natural New Zealand environment.

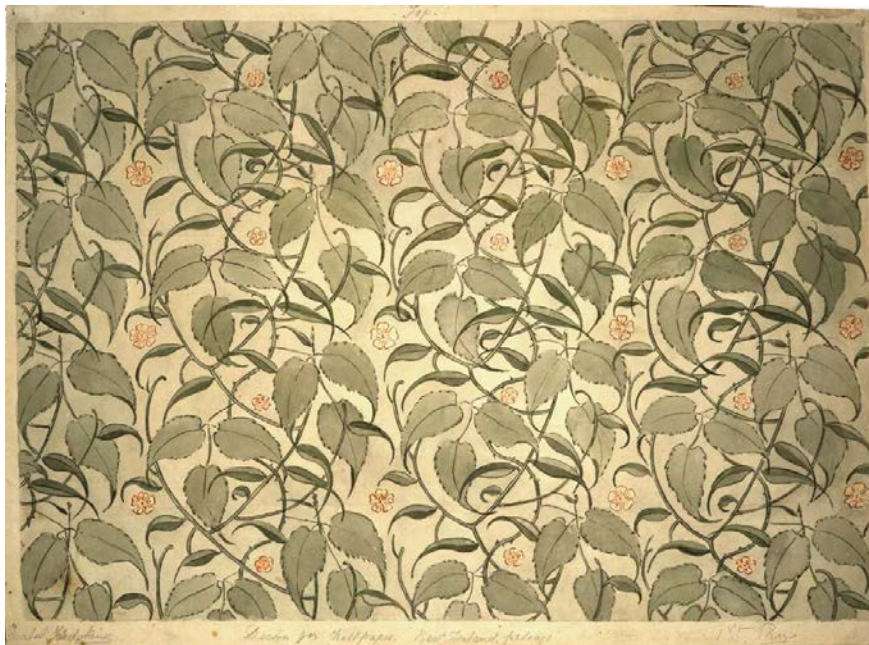


Figure 1: Isabel Jane Field, nee Hodgkins (1867-1950), Design for wallpaper, New Zealand foliage, 1885. Submitted in the Art Section of the New Zealand Industrial Exhibition, Wellington, 1885. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. Ref C-018-019.

The New Zealand Industrial Exhibition, held in 1885 in Wellington, incorporated an art section which featured 416 works. Portraits, photographs and landscapes of European or overseas subjects, reminiscent of British art galleries and exhibitions, were displayed next to artworks depicting native New Zealand landscapes, flora, fauna and Māori portraits. These more traditional forms of art were interspersed with decorative designs, including hand-painted tables, screens, mirrors and a "Design for Wall-papers, New Zealand foliage" by Miss Isabel Hodgkins, sister of Frances Hodgkins,¹ which received an honourable mention in the awards section.²

¹ Frances Hodgkins (1869-1947) is one of New Zealand's most well-known nineteenth- and early twentieth-century painters. Gill "Hodgkins, Frances Mary" np.

² New Zealand Industrial Exhibition Committee *New*

The wallpaper design, which is now held at the Alexander Turnbull Library, depicts the stylised leaves and flowers of the native tātāramoa (bush lawyer) (**Figure 1**).

The inclusion of uniquely New Zealand artworks and decorative designs within the context of an exhibition whose express purpose was to showcase the developments in local industry and technology, not only illustrates New Zealand's developing sense of nationhood, but also the influence of the first schools of art, and the flourishing Arts and Crafts movement of the late nineteenth century, with its focus on nature-inspired designs in the decorative arts.

The optimism for this exhibition to provide the impetus for the establishment of local decorative art industries was voiced by William Hodgkins, Isabel's father and a founding member of the Otago Art Society, during the medal presentation ceremony. Citing the large quantities of wallpaper that were imported into New Zealand each year, he stated the potential for a local wallpaper industry. Native flax would provide the raw

Zealand Industrial Exhibition 1885, Wellington, Catalogue (Art Section Revised) pp 136–44.

material to manufacture the paper, and the growing number of students in New Zealand's art schools would provide a ready workforce to design wallpaper patterns.³ However, the non-profitability of such a venture had already been foreseen by Robert Winter in an essay on *New Zealand Industries: The Past, Present, and Future* written for the 1885 exhibition. He cited the relative cheapness of imported wallpapers, and the immense costs and labour required to import and run the machinery required to manufacture continuous paper rolls and to print these, as being the main inhibitors to the establishment of a local wallpaper industry.⁴

Despite the absence of a New Zealand wallpaper manufacturing industry until the mid-twentieth century, wallpaper patterns were produced as works of decorative art within New Zealand's schools of art and design from the late nineteenth century onwards. This paper will explore the design of wallpaper patterns in New Zealand, focussing on the period from the mid-1880s when Isabel Hodgkins created her wallpaper design, to the 1890s. Two of the main contexts in which

³ "Presentation of Exhibition Medals" p 3.

⁴ Winter "New Zealand Industries" p 27.

these designs were created will be explored; the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement, and the teaching model of the British and New Zealand schools of art and design. The principles these instilled led to the creation of uniquely New Zealand made wallpaper patterns, inspired and drawn from native plant and animal life.

Wallpaper in nineteenth century New Zealand: Import and Design

British wallpaper designs adorned the walls of homes and businesses in nineteenth-century New Zealand from the time these were first commercially imported or brought to this country by European settlers in the 1830s.⁵ Between 1880 and 1900, over 98% of wallpapers came from the United Kingdom, with only small proportions coming from Asia, Europe or North America.⁶ In contrast to imported and mass-produced wallpapers, which covered the walls and provided a backdrop to the interior decoration of rooms, New Zealand-made wallpaper designs were handmade works of art, mounted or framed and hung on the walls of art schools and art

⁵ Based on research currently being conducted by the author for her PhD thesis.

⁶ Based on wallpaper imports from the *Statistics of New Zealand*, 1880 to 1900.

exhibitions. Most, if not all, of these wallpaper patterns were designed by students, or affiliated artists, from one of the five schools of art established in New Zealand between 1870 and 1892.

Isabel Hodgkins' design is one of the earliest known New Zealand-made wallpaper patterns, and one of only a few nineteenth-century designs which have survived within a collecting institution. Prior to being exhibited at the Industrial Exhibition in Wellington, Hodgkins' tātāramoa design was displayed at the 1885 Otago Art Society Exhibition alongside wallpaper patterns created by Miss Maxwell, which featured naturalistic motifs of exotic plants (cactus, hemlock and chrysanthemum) and a marine design.⁷ Further evidence of a wallpaper design dating to the 1880s is a decorative panel or dado submitted by Margaret Stoddart, a student of the Canterbury School, to the 1888 Auckland Art Society Exhibition.⁸

Inspired by a wallpaper design competition offered by the British magazine *The Studio* in

⁷ Otago Art Society *Catalogue of the Tenth Annual Exhibition, 1885* p 8.

⁸ Calhoun *The Arts & Crafts Movement in New Zealand, 1870-1940* p 37.

one of their first issues in 1893,⁹ a number of art societies in New Zealand offered a similar prize category in their exhibitions.¹⁰ In 1896, the Canterbury Society offered a prize for a plate, dado or wallpaper, and the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts in Wellington offered a prize for a decorative design for an 18-inch wallpaper frieze in 1897. These two competitions did not seem to have been very popular, as the newspaper reports for both exhibitions do not mention the prize winners.¹¹ At its meeting on the 30 March 1897, the Otago Art Society elected to include a competition in the upcoming annual exhibition for a design for a wallpaper with frieze based on New Zealand foliage. The entries had to be produced on paper using watercolour, and needed to conform to the standard dimension for a manufactured wallpaper roll, being 21 inches wide. The competition entries were to be displayed in a separate room of the exhibition dedicated to works of decorative art designed by art school students.¹² A report on the exhibition in *The*

⁹ "Prize Competitions for Art Students" p ix.

¹⁰ Calhoun *The Arts & Crafts Movement in New Zealand, 1870-1940* p 66.

¹¹ "Society of Arts Annual Exhibition" p 1; "Wellington [New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts]" p 3.

¹² Otago Art Society *Minute Book 1897*.

Evening Star noted the pleasing display:

It is one of the best and at the same time most useful things of this kind we have seen ... Examples of designs suitable for tileworks, linoleums, wall paper, book illustrations, and other branches of practical use are shown in these works, all of them the product of New Zealand students taught, fostered, and encouraged by competent teachers.¹³

David Edward Hutton, a pupil teacher¹⁴ at the Dunedin School of Art and son of its director, David Con Hutton, won the competition, with only one other entry having been submitted.¹⁵ Hutton's award-winning wallpapers were rediscovered by the author during a recent visit to the Hocken Collections in Dunedin (**Figure 2**). Both the body paper and frieze depict what appear to be the stems, leaves, berries and flowers of the native poroporo (*Solanum aviculare*) shrub,¹⁶ with the frieze further embellished with a kiwi bird, fantail and a chevroned band.

¹³ "The Otago Art Society's Exhibition: The Private View" p 2.

¹⁴ Pupil teachers assisted the art teachers while completing their own studies.

¹⁵ Otago Art Society *Annual Report and Balance Sheet for 1897*.

¹⁶ Plant identification courtesy of Maria Rogers, landscape architect, Victoria University Wellington.

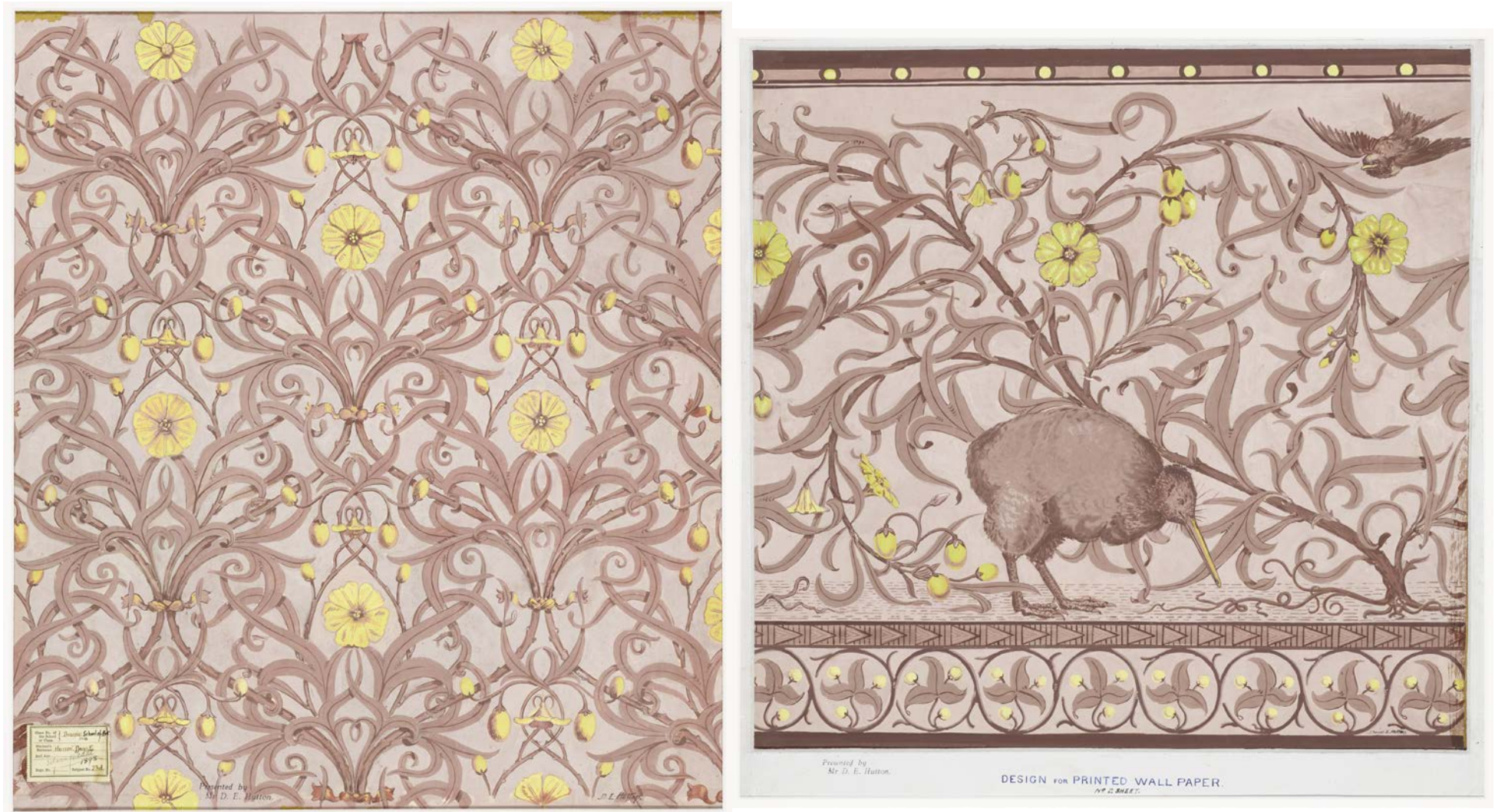


Figure 2: David Edward Hutton (1866-1946), Design for printed wallpaper No 1 sheet (left) and No 2 sheet with kiwi (right), gouache on paper. Submitted for the Otago Art Society competition in April 1898. Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago. V2013-003-013 & 014.

Arts and Crafts Wallpapers: British precedents and Antipodean adaptations

The surviving New Zealand wallpaper designs produced by Hutton and Hodgkins show the unmistakable imprint of the Arts and Crafts movement, with designs drawn from, but not emulating, nature.¹⁷ Ann Calhoun has written extensively on the Arts and Crafts movement in New Zealand and its connection to the art schools and the creative output of its students. She attributes the rise of the movement in New Zealand with the establishment of the Wellington School of Design in 1886 by Arthur Dewhurst Riley, a self-confessed disciple of William Morris, a figurehead of the Arts and Crafts movement.¹⁸ The movement flourished in New Zealand throughout the 1890s, aided by the establishment and growth of art schools, which incorporated British Arts and Crafts designs into their decorative art teaching modules.¹⁹ designs produced by Hutton and Hodgkins show the unmistakable imprint of the Arts and Crafts movement, with designs

¹⁷ Calhoun *The Arts & Crafts Movement in New Zealand, 1870-1940* p 14.

¹⁸ Calhoun *The Arts & Crafts Movement in New Zealand, 1870-1940* p 58.

¹⁹ Calhoun *Simplicity and Splendour* p 56.

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Wallpaper patterns produced in the later part

²⁰ Calhoun *The Arts & Crafts Movement in New Zealand, 1870-1940* 14.

²¹ Calhoun *The Arts & Crafts Movement in New Zealand, 1870-1940* p 14.

²² Calhoun *The Arts & Crafts Movement in New Zealand, 1870-1940* p 58.

²³ Calhoun *Simplicity and Splendour* p 56.

of the nineteenth century by British Arts and Crafts designers such as William Morris, Walter Crane, and Charles Francis Annesley Voysey, all depict features of the style in individual ways. Geometric patterns are frequently inspired by historic ornamentation from around the globe, and floral designs represent abstracted and two-dimensional versions of their natural forms. All are designed to provide subtle backdrops to a room, and are carefully crafted to show the hand-made mark of the artist, with each having their own unique style. With his deep respect and appreciation for nature, Morris' wallpaper patterns sought to distil the botanical attributes of plants into complex intertwining patterns which masked pattern repeats.²⁴ Floral patterns by Crane also sought to depict entwined, sinuous and arabesque lines, characteristic of the Art Nouveau style.²⁵ The designs by Voysey were frequently flatter and more abstracted than those by Crane and Morris, with large and boldly coloured patterns featuring in his earlier wallpaper designs.²⁶

²⁴ McColgan "Naturalism in the Wallpaper Designs of William Morris" p 143.

²⁵ Hapgood *Wallpaper and the Artist* pp 73-77.

²⁶ Eckardt Ledes "Voysey Wallpapers and Fabrics" p 128.

²³ Jones *The Grammar of Ornament* Plate 2.

The wallpaper designs by Hutton and Hodgkins show the use, or at least awareness, of the techniques used by British Arts and Crafts wallpaper designers. Both depict entwined, two-dimensional floral patterns, and a degree of complexity which masks, to a certain extent, the pattern repeats, showing an adoption of both Morris' and Crane's approach. The elongated and entwined leaves of the native poroporo in Hutton's wallpapers are reminiscent of the overlapping and elongated designs by Crane. The use of the chevroned band in Hutton's wallpapers is a clear indication that he has sighted and identically replicated an indigenous pattern from the Sandwich Islands depicted in Jones' *The Grammar of Ornament*,²⁷ a standard textbook in nineteenth-century schools of art and design in the British Empire.²⁸ Whilst both the Hutton and Hodgkins wallpapers integrate techniques established by British Arts and Crafts designers, they are also examples of the unique New Zealand Arts and Crafts movement, which drew inspiration from native flora and fauna.²⁹

²⁴ Calhoun *The Arts & Crafts Movement in New Zealand, 1870-1940* p 19.

²⁵ Calhoun *Simplicity and Splendour* pp 8-10.

²⁶ Calhoun "A Trade for Their Daughters" p 17; Waite "The Art and Science of New Zealand's First Design

Schools of Art and Design

Both David Edward Hutton and Isabel Hodgkins were associated with the Dunedin School of Art and the Otago Art Society, the first New Zealand art school and art society, established in 1870 and 1875 respectively. Their wallpaper designs reflect the drawing techniques taught within the Dunedin school, and subsequent art schools elsewhere in New Zealand, which represented only a slightly modified version of the United Kingdom precedent, the South Kensington art education model.³⁰ They were created within the context of this transplanted syllabus which included the creation of ornamental designs, including wallpaper, to teach the geometry and patterns of repeating designs that can be mechanically reproduced and which, within the context of a local industry, would lead to improved designs. Whilst New Zealand's decorative art and furniture industries were still in their infancy in the late nineteenth century, it was hoped that the training of skilled artists would lead to the better designs once these industries were established. In the case of wallpaper designs produced at the New Zealand schools of art, the skills of graduates would not be needed until at least 1958, when the Dear

Textbook" p 106.

Distribution Company of Levin, a silk screen processing company, began manufacturing a range of wallpapers under the "House of York" brand. By this time, tastes in wallpaper design had changed, favouring more minimal and abstracted designs aligned with the modernist movement.

By the 1850s, art and design education was firmly established in the United Kingdom, with over twenty schools throughout England and Scotland teaching students mechanical drawing, ornamental design, woodcarving, metal work and jewellery alongside classical fine arts subjects such as life, botanical and landscape drawing.³¹ The foundations of this model, termed the South Kensington model, was based on providing students with examples of good design, depicted in publications such as Jones' *The Grammar of Ornament*, Pugin's *Floriated Ornament*, and Christopher Dresser's *The Art of Decorative Design*, and by way of physical examples of what was deemed good contemporary and classical design held by the South Kensington Museum (later renamed the Victoria and Albert Museum). Richard Redgrave, who was appointed to the London school in 1846 as

³¹ Tomlin *Dunedin School of Art* p 17.

"Master of Flower Drawing and Botany," instigated a 23-step course in conventionalisation, involving the gradual stylisation of natural, mainly botanical, designs.³² The application of this approach in the design of British wallpapers from the mid-nineteenth century can be seen in the wallpaper patterns created by Jones, Pugin, Dresser, Morris and Crane, representing examples of their teachings, either in their roles as authors and designers, or as teachers and examiners at the South Kensington schools or museum.³³

The establishment of New Zealand's art education system occurred at a time when the South Kensington model was well established. In 1879 the sentiments which led to the establishment of art schools in the United Kingdom were echoed by the Royal Commission on Education in New Zealand, who applauded the work of the Dunedin School of Art and called for more such schools to be established, stating that:

In all civilized countries, schools of art and design are recognised as an important means of cultivating the

³² Frayling *The Royal College of Art* pp 40-42.

³³ Morris "William Morris and the South Kensington Museum" p 14.

taste of people ... But independently of such considerations, they have a high practical value in their relation to several professions and to the manufacturing industry.³⁴

The desire to transplant the same art and design teachings from Great Britain to New Zealand was so strong amongst politicians, educators and artists, that four additional schools were founded; the Canterbury College School of Art in Christchurch (1882), the Wellington School of Design (1886), the Elam School of Art and Design in Auckland (1889), and the Whanganui Technical School (1892). Despite the absence of any large-scale manufacturing of decorative products in nineteenth-century New Zealand, which would have employed art graduates, there was a strong optimism at the time that industries would be established, even if these were "not as numerous or well-equipped as in the older countries [Britain]."³⁵

All of the first directors of these schools had received their training in one of the South Kensington model schools in the United Kingdom, and endeavoured to replicate the

³⁴ Royal Commission on Education "Report of the Royal Commission" p 31.

³⁵ Dunedin National Industrial Association *Dunedin Industrial Exhibition, Catalogue of Exhibits* p 8.

teaching within their schools along these lines.³⁶ The 1886 prospectus of the Canterbury College of Art states:

The work carried on in the school has for its object the systematic study of practical art and the knowledge of its scientific principles, with a view to developing the application of art to the common uses of life, and to the requirements of trade and manufactures ... it is similar to that of Art Schools under the Art Department of the Committee of Education, South Kensington, London.³⁷

The courses offered by the schools were largely a copy of those offered in the United Kingdom, which alongside fine arts training in landscape, life and botanical drawing, also included courses that provided students with the necessary techniques for creating ornamental and decorative designs, such as outline drawing, geometric patterns, drawing from copies, and botanical drawings as applied to industrial design.³⁸

³⁶ Calhoun *The Arts & Crafts Movement in New Zealand, 1870-1940* p 20; Chalmers "South Kensington and the Colonies" pp 69-74.

³⁷ Canterbury College School of Art *Courses of Study Lectures* (1886).

³⁸ Tomlin *Dunedin School of Art: A History* p 17; Canterbury College School of Art *Courses of Study Lectures* (1882); Wellington Technical School *Technical School Evening Classes* (1895).



Figure 3: Drawing Class at the Wellington Technical School. Photographer unknown. ca 1897. Alcorn Family: Photographs of Wellington Technical School and Alcorn's Liberty Emporium. Ref: PAColl-3016. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

Several teachers brought with them some of the necessary publications and examples of good classical and contemporary design which were the basis of the South Kensington

teaching model. David Con Hutton brought casts, copies of artworks and drawing books with him, including a copy of Edward Hulme's *Suggestions in Floral Design* which

illustrated how flowers can be abstracted, subsequently ordering further casts and other material for the Dunedin school from his contacts at the South Kensington School in London.³⁹ In 1881, Hutton produced and published New Zealand's first drawing book for teaching purposes, *Second Grade Freehand Drawing*. The method depicted by Hutton follows that of William Dyce, a Scottish painter and member of the South Kensington school, in his *Drawing Book of the Government School of Design*, where a sheet is bisected by a central axis with a simplified drawing of a leaf or flower on one side, with a more stylised version drawn on the opposite side and a central motif inspired by these. Some of Hutton's examples used native plants, showing his adaptation of Dyce's precedent to the native New Zealand context.⁴⁰

These courses, reference collections and books prepared the basis from which students in New Zealand could receive an almost identical art education as students in Britain, but with resources which included examples from New Zealand nature. The Wellington

³⁹ Constitution and Rules of the Otago Art Society and a Handwritten History.

⁴⁰ Waite "The Art and Science of New Zealand's First Design Textbook" p 110.

School of Design, initially accommodated in three rooms in a Featherston Street building, was the first to become formally affiliated with the South Kensington School in 1888, with others soon following suit. By the mid-1890s, students within all New Zealand art schools were able to submit their work for examination to London.⁴¹

Drawing on the applied arts focus and syllabus of the South Kensington system, the creation of decorative designs for industrial production, such as tiles, linoleums, fabrics and wallpapers, was also on the teaching module of New Zealand art schools soon after their formation.⁴² In addition to copying or adapting designs from books or samples, botanical motifs provided another source of inspiration, especially for the design of wallpaper patterns. In the absence of museum collections of plant specimens and decorative design, which provided one of the main sources of inspiration for students in Britain's art schools, teachers and students at the New Zealand schools would bring botanical specimens into class, either of native or exotic

plants. A photograph from 1897 of Mrs Bloom's drawing class at the Wellington Technical College (former School of Design) shows students in the process of creating decorative designs from books, artworks or fresh flowers (**Figure 3**). The framed repeating patterns on the walls most likely are examples of wallpaper or textile designs brought or sent over from Britain, with some potentially also representing designs produced by the students.

A step-by step process of conventionalising native New Zealand plants was also on the syllabus of the course on "Principles and Practice of Decorative Design" taught by Samuel Hurst Seager at the Canterbury School of Art from 1894. As per Seager's description of the content of this course "the teachings of the surrounding nature, the flora and fauna of New Zealand, will be placed before the students as the source whence all good original design should spring."⁴³

Beginning in the first decade of the twentieth century, New Zealand's schools of art made a more concerted effort to promote the

industrial adoption of the ornamental designs that were being created. The intention presumably was to equip students to work as designers within existing local industries, such as pottery, textile and carpet manufacture, or within as yet to be established industries, such as wallpaper manufacture. The ethos may have been "train them (students) and they will come (industries)." For example, Robert Herdmann-Smith, the director of the Canterbury Art School from 1905, brought a strong graphics and design focus to the school, advocating for "considerable time given to the study of plant-form and their application to ornament."⁴⁴ Trade courses on painting and decorating were taught alongside courses in plain and solid geometry, as applied to industrial arts at the Wellington Technical School,⁴⁵ and a wide range of applied arts classes, such as woodcarving, glass making, metal work and jewellery were added to the curriculum at the Elam School of Art in Auckland.⁴⁶

The South Kensington model of industrial art education was strongly influential in New

⁴¹ Calhoun *Simplicity and Splendour* p 88.

⁴² Canterbury College School of Art *Courses of Study Lectures* (1882, 1886); Tomlin *Dunedin School of Art* p 24; Daly-Peoples *Elam 1890-1990* np.

⁴³ Canterbury College School of Art *Courses of Study Lectures* (1894) p 5.

⁴⁴ Christchurch Art Gallery "Selective Chronology" np.

⁴⁵ Centennial Committee of the Wellington Technical College *From Riley to Royal* p 59.

⁴⁶ Daly-Peoples *Elam 1890-1990* np.

Zealand until at least 1913, when the New Zealand Education Department decided to dispense with the South Kensington examination system.⁴⁷ Calhoun believes that this is one of the reasons why the design teachings of the British model, with one of the emphases being on the production of repeating patterns of ornamental designs for machine production, never entered the realm of decorative art industries, such as carpets, textiles and wallpapers, in New Zealand when these became more well established in the twentieth century.⁴⁸

Conclusion

The wallpaper designs by Isabel Hodgkins and David Edward Hutton, are to date the only known surviving examples of New Zealand designed and inspired wallpaper patterns dating to the nineteenth century. However, there are bound to be others produced within the context of the transplanted South Kensington teaching model in New Zealand's schools of art and design, and the flourishing Arts & Crafts movement in the late nineteenth century. The potential application of these designs to

inform the local manufacture of wallpaper in New Zealand, either through craft or machine production, was further promoted through their display at local art society exhibitions and the 1885 New Zealand Industrial Exhibition. However, the relative cheapness of imported British wallpaper and their vastly improved designs as a result of the Arts and Crafts movement, combined with the high cost of establishing a wallpaper manufacturing plant in New Zealand, meant that these designs never transitioned from works of art to items of interior design.

homes in the form of New Zealand designed and inspired wallpapers by the 1890s?

It is interesting to consider what may have been if the conditions had been different. What if British wallpaper was less affordable to nineteenth century New Zealanders? What if the art schools had fostered or provided resources for students to establish hand-made boutique wallpaper businesses? What if an entrepreneur had taken the financial leap of faith to establish a wallpaper printing factory? If this was to have occurred in the late nineteenth century within the context of what was a flourishing New Zealand art movement, informed by the inclusion of botanical, and often native, motifs, could we have seen tūi, pīwakawaka, pōhutukawa and other icon native motifs adorning the walls of

⁴⁷ Calhoun *Simplicity and Splendour* p 37.

⁴⁸ Calhoun *Simplicity and Splendour* p 37.

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