



## THE ULSTER NEW ZEALAND TRUST at THE BALLANCE HOUSE

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[www.theballancehouse.com](http://www.theballancehouse.com)



Birthplace of John Ballance (1839-1893) ● Journalist and Politician ● Premier of New Zealand (1891-1893)

### Farewell to Two Great Volunteers

Sadly the recent period of lockdown has not only distanced all of us from friends and family but it has not allowed us to present suitable farewells to some great friends who have passed on.

This has also hit us here at the Ulster New Zealand Trust through the recent much lamented deaths of **Professor Hilary Bracefield** and **Mrs Helen McClenaghan OBE**. Both were outstanding professionals in their respective, though related, fields of education, with illustrious careers and they have left their respective marks on Northern Ireland society with legacies which will only with difficulty be equalled.



Professor Hilary Bracefield  
1938 - 2020



Mrs Helen McClenaghan OBE  
1943 - 2020

A native of Dunedin in the South Island of New Zealand, Hilary Bracefield spent a lifetime in music education ending in the Chair of Music at the University of Ulster by way of the universities of Otago, Birmingham and the Ulster Polytechnic where she arrived in 1976 until her retirement after a busy and eventful life deeply immersed in Ulster's musical and literary society.

Helen McClenaghan was a colleague of mine for over 25 years in her role as first Senior Education Officer and ultimately from 1998 as Chief Executive in the Southern Education Library Board up until its subsumation in 2009 into the new Education Authority. She possessed all the finest qualities of good leadership: wisdom, encouragement, patience, equanimity, loyalty, dedication and integrity, displaying them all at the crucial moments in what was a most demanding role. Her sterling work for the Church of Ireland in various capacities reflected the clear spiritual foundations on which her values were built and shone through in her relationships wherever she was involved.

Both of these ladies were possessed by a vision for the future generations of young people across all three sectors of education and commanded much respect from their peers and colleagues as they sought to influence the life of the Province.

Both Helen and Hilary gave most generously of their time and talents to UNZT as they supported the work at The Ballance House over several decades. Hilary through her desire to see the links maintained and cherished between Ulster and her native New Zealand, and Helen in the same way, but also through the distant blood-line shared with our founder, Jill McIvor. Both served as volunteers in whatever way they could, reaching a fitting, if somewhat poignant, climax in receiving their Queen's Award at the official ceremony last summer.

Friends and volunteers marvelled at how these two formidable but charming ladies could turn their keen hands - or indeed minds - to a wide variety of tasks, from the menial to the more creative. They made the corporate work of our volunteers and their leaders so much more pleasant and enriching. Although we never quite persuaded Helen to give a talk at one of our major events, Hilary revelled in the opportunity at the 2019 Waitangi Day celebration, when the music of World Wars was the topic of her lecture, delivered with that idiosyncratic and waspish sense of humour which was her trademark.

Both of these great ladies, whose achievements and memory are firmly etched into the colourful cultural and educational history of Northern Ireland, will be sorely missed at The Ballance House; it will not be the same without them. But we will all rise to what would be their deepest challenge to continue with the same vision as they shared to ensure our future success.

To their closest relatives, Hilary's sister, Lindsay in New Zealand, and to Stephen, Helen's husband and daughter Frances, we want to express our deepest sympathy on their huge loss and our heartfelt gratitude for the privilege of sharing their loved ones with us over so many rewarding years of outstanding service.

**Paul Hewitt**  
**Chairman**  
**Ulster New Zealand Trust**