

ULSTER NEW ZEALAND TRUST

Murray Wilton Dilworth Headmaster 1979-1997

Warmest greetings to all who are gathered for this official re-opening of the UNZT on the occasion of the new exhibition of Ulster-New Zealand memorabilia.

The links between Ulster and New Zealand go back many years and in many forms. Indeed it is to Ulster that we in New Zealand owe a debt of gratitude for providing our country with statesmen, leaders in peace and war, musicians, captains of industry, inspiring educators, churchmen and sportsmen, as well as 'good and useful members of society'. Ulstermen and women made their mark Downunder in so many ways.

More specifically, the close connection between Ulster and Dilworth School in Auckland, New Zealand, could be said to have begun in 1815, not with the Battle of Waterloo but upon the birth of James Dilworth. His education at the Royal School Dungannon imbued in him a sense of loyalty and reliability to go with his innate qualities of perseverance and determination, attributes which are spelt out in the Royal School motto "Perseverando" as well as in the Dilworth School motto "Firmiter et Fideliter".

James Dilworth made a fortune in farming and land dealing and left all his worldly worth to found the school that bears his name, directing that it should be a school modelled on English Public Schools, but with a charitable purpose similar to that of Christ's Hospital and other similar schools in Britain. But he also required his executors to ensure that an opportunity might be offered to qualified families in Ulster to have their sons educated in Auckland. Not surprisingly, this requirement of Dilworth's Last will and testament was difficult to implement and only about 20 Ulster boys were sent to the Auckland school, which initially had the name "Dilworth Ulster Institute", between 1906 and 1930.

In 1986, just a few years into my 18-year term as Dilworth's sixth Headmaster, the first Old Boy to hold the position, I urged the Dilworth Trust Board to consider resuscitating the Irish scheme. The following year, accompanied by the Trust Board chairman Mr Bill Cotter and our respective wives, I visited Northern Ireland to determine if the scheme could be workable in the late 20th century. Our visit was organised and hosted by the Royal School Dungannon and its iconic Headmaster Paul Hewitt, who ensured that no stone was left unturned in our quest to revive the import to New Zealand of worthy Ulster boys from deserving families.

When it became clear that the project was basically unworkable, Mr Hewitt and I conceived a plan to implement the spirit of James Dilworth's will, if not the letter. Together we formulated a plan to establish an exchange scheme for graduates of each school to spend a "gap year" in the other school. Initially it was one-way traffic, with two and eventually up to five RSD graduates spending a year at Dilworth School as resident tutors and sports coaches. Eventually it became possible for boys from Dilworth to experience the same advantage at RSD, and now there is a regular annual exchange of young men and women. It is a highly successful and unique programme, a life-changing experience for our young people, and a vital tool in promoting the Ulster-New Zealand relationship.

A further link in the Ulster-New Zealand chain was forged in 1994 when we unveiled at Dilworth a full-sized replica of the Donaghmore Cross which was so familiar to James Dilworth. It was created on the initiative of the Dilworth Old Boys' Association whose members contributed generously to its cost as well as to providing the manpower and materials for the physical completion of a magnificent work of art. It is a source of great joy to know that here at Ballance House there is now an exact maquette of the Dilworth Cross to serve as a reminder of our links as well as the legacy in New Zealand of your export James Dilworth.

I would like to place on record that the scheme owes its success to two important factors. First, the wholehearted and enthusiastic support of Paul Hewitt, without whom the programme would never have come to fruition. Secondly the goodwill and financial support of the governors of both schools who to this day recognise the value of the exchange and are generous in their total endorsement of the scheme.

I wish you well as you launch your renewed Ballance House exhibition and I express my hope that it will be an enjoyable experience for all who visit and provide a strong incentive to maintain what is in every way a very precious link.