

**Message from Hamish McDouall, Mayor of Whanganui District, NZ  
for The Ballance House Anniversary Event, 4 September 2021**

**Kia ora koutou (Pronounced: Key Aura Ko Toe)**

Greetings from New Zealand. Greetings from the other side of the world. Greetings to all those gathered at Glenavy for this opening and anniversary - particularly the ex-pat Kiwis. I also acknowledge the presence of the Deputy High Commissioner. I can tell you that Spring has arrived in Aotearoa (pronounced A Oh Tea A Row A) - lambs are jumping around, daffodils are blooming, the sun has real warmth and Monteiths Summer Ale is back on sale.

At a time when politics, climate and a pandemic are dividing humanity the enduring and deep connections we have developed mean so much more.

Whanganui and Lisburn & Castlereagh share a historic connection through the incredible legacy of John Ballance. Just two weeks ago John and his wife Ellen were featured in a national magazine article about their significant contribution to women's suffrage.

It was a great privilege to visit Ballance House in 2018, and to meet Jack Ballance. My regards to all I met that weekend - particularly former Mayor Uel Mackin and David Twigg whose relative Emma won a gold medal at the recent Olympics - for New Zealand!

I was sad to hear of the passing of former Mayor Margaret Tolerton earlier this year. It is her signature on the 2014 Declaration of Friendship between Lisburn and Whanganui that has pride of place next to the entry to my office. She was delightful company.

Greetings to the new Mayor Stephen Martin. I hope to meet you one day soon. Perhaps we can Zoom. If lockdown has taught us anything it is that we can retain connections around the world in much more intricate and timely ways.

In the meantime, I have been demonstrating my passion for Ballance House. I have spoken to the British Council, the British High Commission and the Irish Ambassador here about the potential for Ballance House to be the heart of New Zealand-Irish friendship. Everybody has been enthusiastic about this idea. And I have collected a box of New Zealand books in order to update the library!

On behalf of the entire Whanganui District I offer our warmest congratulations on 30 years of honouring John Ballance, creating a destination, strengthening the enduring relationship with New Zealand and most importantly (for me) connecting Whanganui with your beautiful district.