

Making History

**100 years of New Zealand
Physiotherapy 1913-2013**

Hand Made History – a progress report

Two years ago this month, the project to update our New Zealand physiotherapy archives and prepare for our centenary in 2013 began, and so it is probably a good time to tell you some more about the project and give you a report on our progress.

The project began in October 2006 when I approached Gail Leach with a proposal to put our historical "affairs" in order. I had spent some time in England looking at the magnificently organised archives of the Chartered Society, and had been dismayed at the poor order of the archives in New Zealand. So, with NZSP support, we formed a Working Group whose job it was to propose a plan to remedy the problem.

The group – Erik Dombroski, Barbara Hetherington, Gill Johnson, Ann McKellar, and latterly Billie McLeod, and I set about its task, and by October 2007 had produced a comprehensive funding proposal to allow the group to promote, collate, organise and archive our material.

From early 2007 we had begun advertising the project and gathering material wherever it could be found and through a process of snowball referral, began making contact with literally hundreds of interesting and interested physiotherapists.

Our intention, from the outset, was not to produce the "definitive" history of physiotherapy in New Zealand. We knew of the excellent histories that had been written about physiotherapy in America, Australia, Canada and the UK in recent years, but our view was that we wanted to promote something more collaborative; something less didactic; more participatory. We also thought we could take advantage of modern technology and incorporate audio recordings, photographs and videos into the project.

So, from the outset, our plan was to build a "virtual" archive open to all New Zealand physiotherapists: a repository; a reference point; and resource for anyone wishing to learn more about our past.

Our biggest commitment (certainly in terms of time and money) has been our archive of oral histories. To date, we have gathered narratives of physiotherapy history from 28 physiotherapists including some of New Zealand's most eminent practitioners. But we've not focused only on the profession's famous names. After all, there are many "everyday" physiotherapists who have their own stories to tell, and their own experiences to represent. So we have travelled from Northland to Southland to gather these stories and these too will be incorporated into our collection of narratives.

Having advertised the project at every turn, we have been

sent old books, journals, photographs, medals, certificates, department records; even the odd corset and tipping bed. A big thank you to all those who have chosen to send us their treasured possessions rather than throwing them away. Our premise is that we do not know how important these pieces of history might be, and so it is our duty to preserve them for whoever may need them in the future. All these items will be catalogued this summer and incorporated into our web site – virtually speaking of course!

The website has been a mission unto itself. Because of its potential size, we have had to be very careful in planning its design. It will be in development for a few months yet, but will soon be available for viewing in all its glory. It will hold all the audio, photographic and video archives, a virtual library or books and text documents. We will also be constructing an interactive timeline that links key events in New Zealand's history to major events in physiotherapy around the world.

One of our most exciting recent projects is in collaboration with the Physiotherapy Board, who have kindly made available the entire register of members – dating back to 1921 and the first register of members. From this you will be able to locate yourself, your classmates, and any physiotherapists you know of, and if they are linked to any other content on the site you will be able to navigate to that at the click of a button.

Eventually, our plan is to have a site that is used by physiotherapists as a meeting point – where we talk about our profession, where it has come from, where it is now and where it is going.

We are indebted to the support of the NZSP and the many members of the profession who have given their time in the pursuit of this project. If I may, I would like to finish this report by publicly paying tribute to two people without whom this project would not have been possible.

The first is Ailsa Cornell. Barely a week goes by without Ailsa promoting the project to someone, connecting us with someone, or contacting me with someone we should talk to. The reason you are reading this article is in no small part because of her enthusiasm and support.

The second is Gail Leach. More than anyone Gail deserves our thanks. Gail's unerring support, advice and professionalism has been the driving force behind this project. She has been our link to the NZSP National Executive; our sounding board; our friend; our sponsor and mentor. She is a consummate professional and we will miss her greatly in her retirement. We wish her many congratulations and all the very best for the future.

David Nicholls
Chair, New Zealand Physiotherapy History Working Group