

C a n t e r b u r y V i g n e t t e

alfred

WALSH

1859 - 1916

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[R M A G i n h o u s e]

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alfred
wilson **WALSH**

Neil Roberts



Robert McDougall Art Gallery
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Greymouth Harbour (cat no 13)

In April 1911 a writer for *Triad*, the New Zealand monthly Journal of Literature, Music and Art, reviewing the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts Annual Exhibition in Wellington wrote; 'I find it refreshing to turn to the watercolours of A. W. Walsh Here is an artist who does not only paint New Zealand trees and hills he paints also New Zealand atmosphere and New Zealand light and he composes these elements so agreeably within the stiff borders of the paper that I derive the same pleasure I derive from nature'.¹

Such a response would no doubt have pleased Walsh whose work was not always appreciated and who, by 1911, had had half a century studying nature. As an artist his sole objective was the pursuit of its truths. The second half of the nineteenth century had seen the rise of the 'truth to nature' movement that included painting en plein air and emerged in a variety of manifestations in British, European and colonial painting. In Australia it developed among those artists who were dubbed impressionists and later called the Hiedelburg painters. They included Tom Roberts, Arthur Streecon, David Davies and Charles Conder. They painted out of doors and in the 1880s and 1890s developed a new vision for landscape painting in Australia. In New Zealand in the 1890s the Scottish immigrant artist, James Nairn, with a number of younger followers who formed the Wellington Art Club in 1892, painted regularly out of doors near Silverstream in the Hutt Valley where they had a base at a cottage named 'Pumpkin Cottage'. Nairn, through his studies in Paris and his connection with the Glasgow School of the 1880s, used impressionist methods and introduced a form of impressionism that was more Scottish than French in its treatment of light. In contrast, Alfred Walsh was a

freer, independent spirit. From an early age he had roamed the hills and environs of Dunedin sketching and painting, fascinated by nature in which he immersed himself in a manner more akin to a Romantic than a Realist. Like the studio artists of the nineteenth century, when working out of doors, he was concerned with the changing effects of nature that was interpreted by rapid brushwork and economy of detail with an emphasis on suggestion rather than description. Whereas the 'Heidelberg' and 'Pumpkin Cottage' artists were keen to capture impressions of nature as quickly as possible and as close to the reality of nature as they saw it, Walsh was concerned with expressing his reaction to nature, which led to his paintings being expressionist rather than impressionist. In Walsh there is either a sense of calm and stillness as in the gentle dapple of light through trees or passion for the urgency of nature with rushing water, sea crashing against rocks or the tangled dark dense growth of bush. All the places of nature had its mood. At times he heightened his palette to intensify the expression he was making and this aroused criticism when such works were exhibited. Watercolour was his medium, although well into the 1890s he also painted out of doors in oil. These paintings often lacked the life and energy he achieved with a labyrinth of deft brush strokes when using watercolour. In 1929 a former student of Walsh, John Cam Duncan, wrote recalling his impressions of him working, 'sometimes watching him, the dark beard and kind eyes, bent over his work I wondered if the picture he was working on would ever arrive. Over the paper with its chaotic mass of flowing colour, he was a wet worker, his brushes guided by instinct, genius, - I know not what - darted here and there designing, taking out, putting in all those telling blobs of colour which went to making one of his exquisite landscapes. Yes they just grew and he, Walsh, himself could never explain how he did it.'²

Many years later Leonard Booth also a former student and colleague at the Canterbury College School of Art, in a discussion with Winston Rhodes on radio, recounted his early impressions of Walsh working at Kaikoura, probably in 1911. He found that; 'he was placing his colours with complete disregard for conventions which were, in my belief, the very fundamentals of his art. In the end he produced painting that made manifest to an astonishing degree a spirit of the subject.'³ Booth believed that the principles contributing to Walsh's success were two fold: 'first that his feelings and thoughts about nature were inspired not by paintings and writings or other products of men, but nature herself; and second that his technical methods were developed not from the technical methods of others but from his own experimenting and were directed to the purpose, no other of his feelings and thoughts. The biography of Alfred Walsh like the biography of every great painter is a story of sustained endeavour to comprehend first himself, and second a way to expression of himself.'⁴ Booth believed that Walsh's lack of popularity as an artist during his lifetime could be attributed to 'the originality in his feeling and thinking and this peculiarity in his expressing his feelings and thinking earned for him fierce disapproval of persons whose minds were open to ideas only that were orthodox, imported from Europe.'⁵ The criticism of others may not have greatly concerned him as master of his own situation. As an artist he was highly self critical, often destroying works that did not measure up.

In his earlier years in Dunedin Walsh's painting was a relatively solitary activity but by the late 1870s, as a part-time student at David Con Hutton's Dunedin School of Art, he painted and sketched with others. At that time his favourite painting places were on the Otago Peninsula and Purakanui. After he moved to Christchurch in 1887 he developed a close friendship with a young artist from Dunedin, William K. Sprott, who also became a regular painting companion. Visiting the Otira, Little River and Kaikoura, they would camp and paint sometimes meeting up with other artists. Kaikoura was a place of special significance to Walsh, visiting almost annually between 1890 and 1911. He always thought that it was a place that he would *'finish up'*.⁶

After Sprott's death in 1893 Walsh found other painting and camping companions in George Herbert Elliott and later students Sydney Thompson, Robert Procter, Leonard Booth and Gerald K. Webber, but none replaced Sprott. As a person Walsh was described by those who knew him as a strange mixture of child, poet and dreamer. In 1926 William Wauchop, who knew him during the last years Walsh was teaching at Canterbury College School of Art, described him as 'a picturesque figure tall and handsome with blue eyes that betrayed his Irish breeding and almost prepared one for his loud outbursts of merry laughter. He had a keen sense of humour and greatly appreciated a funny story, especially his own. The Maoris he befriended called him 'the funny man'. He was genial and chivalrous but as ingenuous as a child'.⁷ Wauchop illustrated this by relating a simple incident that occurred on a crowded tram when a seated Walsh offered his seat to one of a group of women standing. He said in a loud voice "you'd better take my seat you look the oldest".⁸ Even though offense might have been taken Walsh would not have intended it and would have been surprised if it had.

Although Walsh spent a total of 28 years teaching, which included his time at Dunedin School of Art and Canterbury College School of Art, teaching was not his forte and it did not improve as the years moved on, ultimately contributing to his decision to reluctantly resign in 1910. Whilst in a formal sense, according to Victorian standards, Walsh may have been seen as a bad teacher, it was through his example as an artist that inspiration came for his students and that may have been more important than the exactness of his teaching practice. Walsh never travelled beyond New Zealand as he found enough inspiration where he lived. His subjects were always simple and he often remarked that 'It is possible to make a picture out of anything'⁹ and there is no question that in his work he reveals this. In the years since his death in 1916, Walsh has received scant attention yet he stands, without doubt, the most important plein air painter to have been active in New Zealand during the late colonial period.

Neil Roberts
Curator



Low Tide, Kaiōura Coast, 1904 (cat no 9)



Early Years 1859 - 1886

Alfred Wilson Walsh was born on 26 July 1859¹⁰ at Kyneton in Victoria, Australia, the eighth child of Captain William Walsh and Catherine Wilson. Both of Walsh's parents were born in Ireland - William Walsh in Dublin in 1816 and Catherine at Drogheda, 84 kilometres north in County Meath in 1824. They married in 1852 and within a short time, like many others, William Walsh emigrated with his wife and young family to Australia, lured by the goldfields. They eventually settled at Kyneton, Victoria, where William took up farming. By the time Alfred Walsh was born, four of seven children had died in infancy. Possibly because of his life in the British army, William was not easily settled and when the goldfields opened in Otago he was again drawn to seek his fortune. In 1862 Catherine bore the last of her ten children and two years later the family left Australia for New Zealand. They eventually settled in North Dunedin and it was there that Walsh spent his childhood. Little is known of his formative education or his very early years other than when, in the early 1870s, his father abandoned the family and is thought to have returned Australia, Walsh had to seek employment. From an early age he had shown an aptitude for drawing and with this natural ability was able to find a place with the Public Works Department as a junior assistant draughtsman. The departure of his father drew Walsh closer to his mother and of her surviving children he was to remain the most devoted. The environs of North Dunedin where Walsh lived, with hills and bush close by, must have contributed to Walsh's passion for nature and in his spare time he roamed the hills and valleys in search of subjects for his pencil and brush.

By 1875 Walsh was attending evening classes from 7 to 9pm at Dunedin School of Art in Moray Place where David Con Hutton taught Free Hand Drawing, Model Drawing, Drawing and Painting from the Cast on Monday and Wednesday and on Tuesdays and Thursday evenings Practical Geometry, Solid Geometry, Perspective, Architectural and Mechanical Drawing. On Saturdays classes were occasionally available sketching from nature and popular places for Hutton to take his students were Water of the Leith, the Botanical Gardens and Ocean Beach. The Dunedin School of Art after 1876 was effectively a department of the Normal School under the control of the Board of the Education District of Otago. Hutton was expected to provide a very full programme of classes with limited staff. One of the problems that he had was that his evening classes were too large to attend to all his students equally and his programme of day teaching was increasing. In 1878 he requested further assistance. Walsh was one of his most promising students and Hutton offered him a position as a pupil teacher in drawing, which he accepted and was duly appointed by the Otago Education Board.¹¹ His position involved teaching Freehand, Outline Drawing from blackboard exercises, drawing from the flat and solid models, practical geometry and perspective drawing to pupils, from Standard I to IV. It is uncertain as to whether Walsh was totally satisfied with his role in local Dunedin City and suburban schools, but it provided him with good teaching experience, without which he would likely never have moved to Canterbury. In 1879 Walsh's 18 - year- old younger sister, Catherine Frances, married the Dunedin accountant and merchant, Thomas Kew Harty, which left just Walsh and his younger brother living at home with their mother.

The opportunity to spend more time sketching and painting especially during the summer vacation must have provided Walsh with a better opportunity to further his work than he had had when working for the Public Works Department. This situation was unfortunately short-lived as early in 1883 the Otago Education Board requested that Hutton reduce expenditure, with the result that he was obliged to dispense with his male assistants, including Walsh. Without a position at the Dunedin School of Art, Walsh as a young artist probably had to consider strengthening his place in the Dunedin art community. Among his well known artist contemporaries were George W. Carrington, Laurence W. Wilson, Peter Power, Frank Brooke-Smith, J Elder Moultray, Grace Joel, Alfred O'Keeffe, Frances Hodgkins, Jenny Wimperis and George O'Brien with whom Walsh is thought to have received instruction in 1883. In 1883 he also became a working member of the Otago Society of Arts and began exhibiting with these and other prominent Otago artists. At the Annual Exhibition of the Society held in December he exhibited 2 paintings, *View from Chain Hills*, *Green Island* and *Gull Rocks Tomahawk* which was painted en plein air on the Otago Peninsula.¹² Over the following three years he showed an average of 2 works annually that included subjects such as *On Flagstaff Hill*, *Old Boat and Fishing net Maori Kai*, *A Long Beach Pūrakānui*¹³ which attracted only scant review in the local press. With no hope of continuing to teach at Hutton's school, Walsh returned to work as a draughtsman in the Public Works office where at least as a government servant he had a regular income.

Desirous to return to teaching art, Walsh was likely on the look out for any positions that were vacant, but in the early 1880s art education in New Zealand was in its infancy with Dunedin leading the way. The only other Art School in the South Island was Canterbury College School of Art in Christchurch, which opened in 1882 with just two permanent staff - David Blair as Headmaster and George Herbert Elliott as his assistant. In 1885 when a scandal erupted around David Blair, which led to his court appearance, the Canterbury College Board asked for his resignation, which took effect in October 1886. Elliott, who had carried the burden of the School while Blair was under investigation, was promoted to Headmaster, which left his own situation vacant. Encouraged by this opening, in November 1886, Walsh wrote to Elliott for information concerning the position of assistant. He then sought Hutton's advice as to whether or not he was capable of teaching the subjects required. Hutton believed he was and on 8 December he made an application offering to travel to Christchurch for an interview if required. Walsh stated that he had no formal qualifications other than his time at the Dunedin School of Art and a proficiency certificate from D.C.Hutton.¹⁴ On paper he was not a likely candidate but he no doubt had Hutton's support in his favour and Elliott must have been satisfied, recommending to the Board of Canterbury College that Walsh be appointed. For Walsh, then 28 years of age, with limited prospects in Otago, it was a new beginning.

Christchurch 1887 - 1911

Early in 1887 Walsh travelled to Christchurch and took up his position at Canterbury College School of Art at the beginning of the first term at a salary of £120 per annum. In 1887 the School of Art syllabus offered instruction in: Freehand Drawing from Flat, Round or Solid forms, Practical Plane and Solid Geometry, Light and Shade from Round or Solid Forms, Botanical Drawing as applied to Design Landscape, Still Life and Flower Painting in oil tempera or watercolour plus Figure from the Antique and Life, Nude or Draped. Classes were held from 12noon - 1 pm Monday, Wednesday and Friday with the landscape class on Tuesday and Thursday. Evening classes were held Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 7pm - 9pm. As well as Walsh and Elliott there were male and female student assistants. William E. Chapman and E. Louise Bradbury took junior classes.

Soon after his arrival in Christchurch Walsh became a working member of the Canterbury Society of Arts (CSA) and in March 1887 he exhibited two paintings of Dunedin subjects at the Annual Exhibition. Later in the year he also showed at the second Black and White Sketch Exhibition and in November at the Otago Art Society where he continued to exhibit. Initially Walsh painted around the environs of Christchurch - the Estuary, Sumner, Taylors Mistake and the Heathcote River. He also visited Little River, accessible by rail since the previous year which with its Maori village, became a place of special significance for him, as did Kaikoura some years later, and one that he returned to again and again. It is likely that in Little River he found a substitute for Purakanui, a place he enjoyed painting in Otago, which was also a Maori settlement.



Taumutu, 1902 (cat no 7)

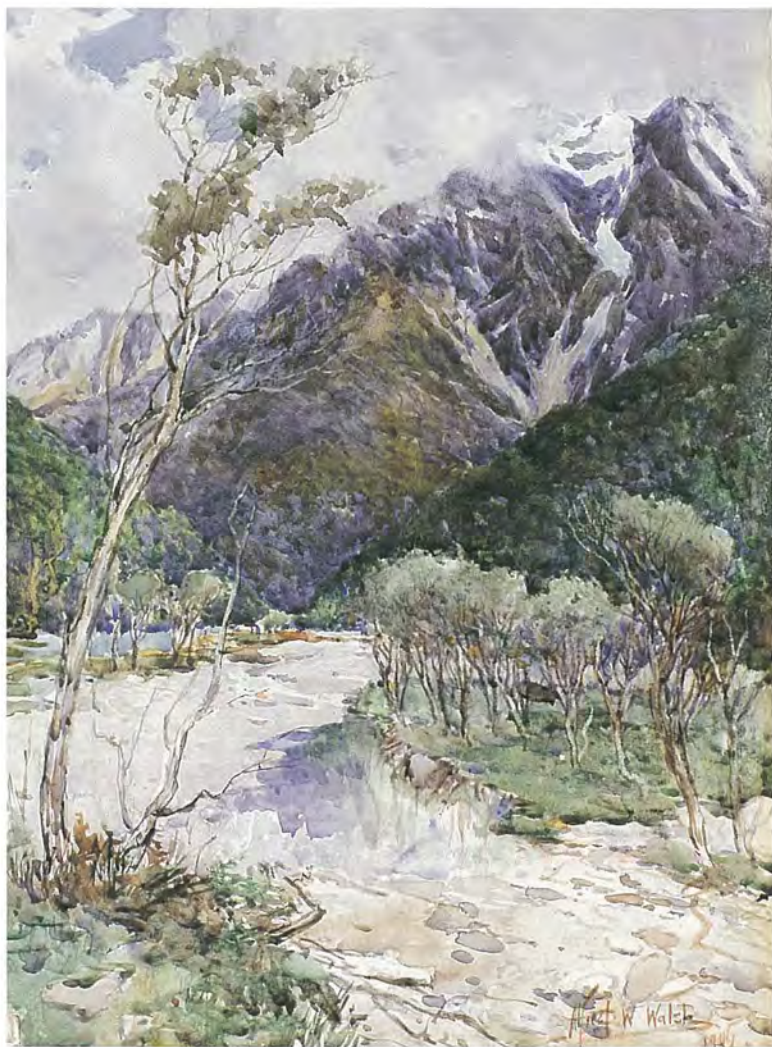
Walsh, as a teacher at the School of Art and a member of the CSA, got to know many of the prominent artists in Christchurch and his interest in painting was in accord with many of them. By 1889 plein air painting was being endorsed by a number of artists. Stimuli for the enthusiasm for plein air painting may have come from the artist Edmund Gouldsmith who had arrived in Christchurch the year before Walsh. English born and trained, he had spent several years in Adelaide before coming to New Zealand and was aware of the plein air artists in Australia. As well as Gouldsmith there was William Menzies Gibb who had trained in Melbourne and English born and trained George Herbert Elliott and John Madden who also painted out of doors. All eventually became members of the sketch group, the Palette Club, which was formed in 1889. The prime objective of the club was to paint directly from nature. Although Walsh got on well with most of these artists, it was those of the younger generation such as W. E. Chapman and W. K. Sprott, both from Dunedin, that he found his most conducive painting companions. It was only Sprott in whom he found a love of nature equal to his own and as a result they formed a special bond. Up until Sprott's premature death from tuberculosis in 1893, he was Walsh's closest friend and though five years younger he exercised a strong influence over him in many ways. They spent many vacations together camping and in their ramblings in search of painting subjects, particularly in Kaikoura, Sprott would often recite rhymed verse. His favourite was the closing stanza from *The Sick Stockrider* by A.L Gordon

*let me slumber in the hollow where the wattle blossoms wave
With never stone or rail to fence my bed;
Should the sturdy station children pull the bush flowers on my grave
I may chance to hear them romping overhead.*¹⁵

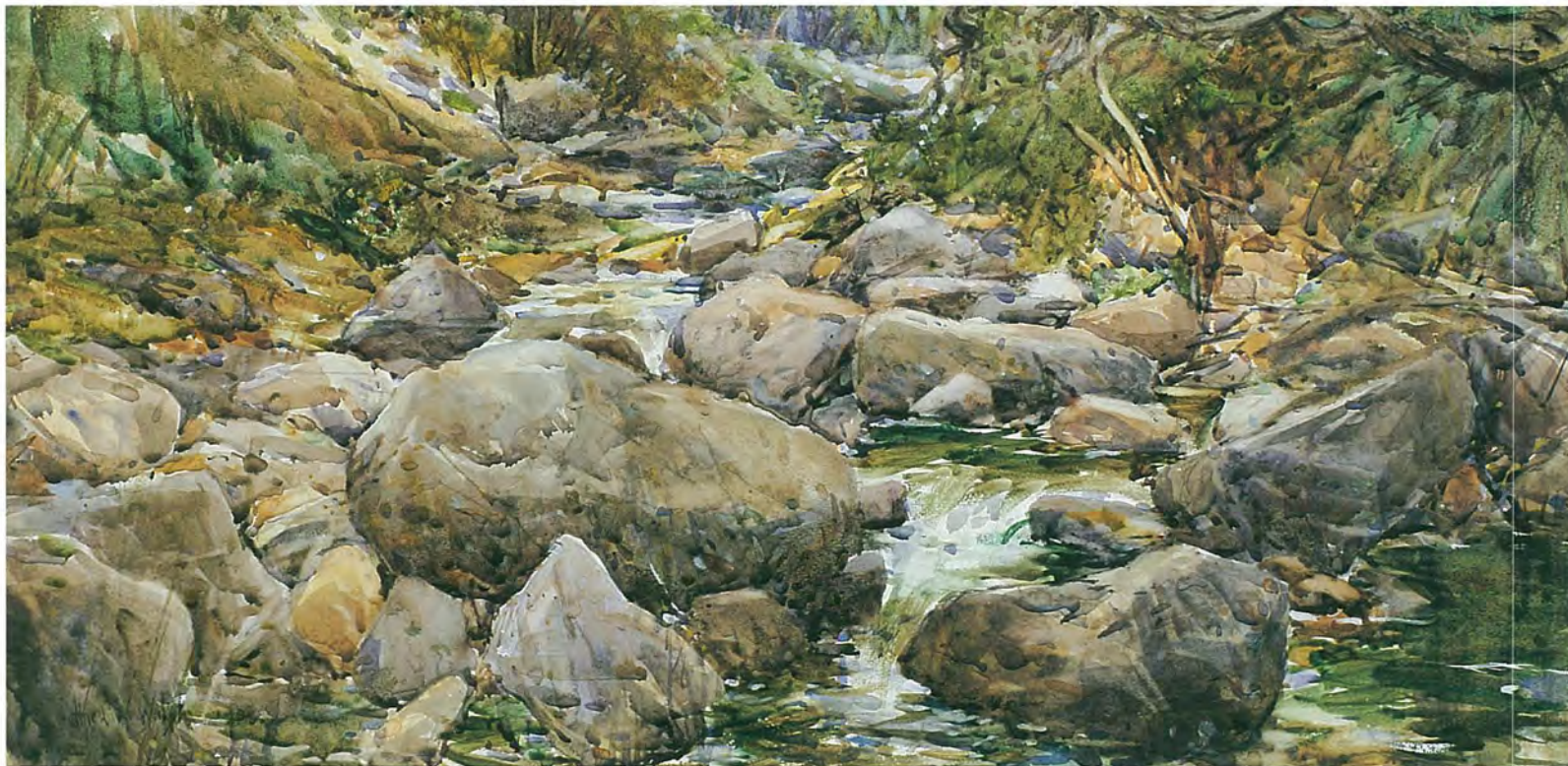
It is clear he had a real sense of his own mortality.

William Kinloch Sprott, like Walsh, began his career as a part-time artist working as a clerk in the Dunedin branch of the Standard Insurance Company. In 1881 he was transferred to the Christchurch office and then in 1883 to Auckland where he studied part-time with Walter Wright. In 1886 he returned to Christchurch and the following year enrolled full-time at the Art School. Within a very short time was recognised as one of the most promising young artists in Canterbury.

In 1888 Walsh took up residence in Searells Road, Papanui where he was able to exercise his other passion, gardening. Later, when his mother moved up from Dunedin to live with him, this was a particular interest they both shared. Of the two works he showed at the CSA, a reviewer for the *Lyttelton Times* was less than favourable; 'Mr A.W. Walsh's slight sketch, *A Showery Day Port Chalmers* (No 60) has no distinctive quality to



In the Otira, 1905 (cat no 12)



Stream with Boulders (cat no 10)

call either for praise or blame, and the same criticism applies to his other picture, *On the Estuary, Christchurch* (No 217).¹⁶ He also exhibited a watercolour, *Evening Otago Peninsula*, at the 1888 Melbourne Centennial International Exhibition where Elliott, Gibb, Gouldsmith and students of the Canterbury School of Art were also represented.

During the summer vacation 1888/89 Walsh spent time painting again at Little River where he made several watercolour paintings at the Pa and surrounding areas. He also painted at Decanter Bay and the Bealey near Arthurs Pass. When he exhibited in April 1889 at the CSA there was criticism of the 'defects' in his work¹⁷ but *Maori House - Little River* received some favourable comment in press reviews. Whilst the traditionalists were not happy with the plein air artists, there was strong support from many in the CSA. On 10 April 1889 the President of the Canterbury Society of Arts, Richmond Beetham, in his address at the opening of the Annual Exhibition, stated 'You cannot improve upon nature's handiwork and unless the artist, young or old, constantly works with nature-and by working from nature I mean painting in colour from nature in the open air - he or she will inevitably come to utter grief.'¹⁸ As a gesture to the avant-garde movement of plein air painting, sketch clubs began to be formed in Auckland, Nelson, and Dunedin. In Christchurch it was the Palette Club, formed mostly by students and staff of Canterbury College School of Art, who met weekly to work from a model and in weekends and vacations would travel to more remote areas around Canterbury. Prominent among the founding Palette Club members were George H. Elliott, William E. Chapman, William K. Sprott, E. Gillett Culliford, Margaret Stoddart, Eleanor F. Gee, William Menzies Gibb and Alfred Walsh. They held their first exhibition at the Canterbury College School of Art in October 1890 and although it was very favourably received it was the only occasion when Walsh showed at a Palette Club exhibition during the seven years of its existence. In the years that followed its membership swelled to 83 by 1895 and it was largely captured by a lobby group led by J. M. Madden and became somewhat political, losing some of the spirit that it had initially and with which Walsh would have had some empathy.

The most important exhibition event of 1889/90 was the New Zealand and South Seas Exhibition held at Dunedin. Walsh submitted two watercolours and two oils receiving a third merit award *Taylor's Mistake Banks Peninsula*. In 1890, in contrast to previous years, the CSA held its Annual Exhibition in November. When reviewed, Walsh received some better remarks for his small oil *Margin of the Sandhills New Brighton* (cat no 2), described as being 'at last, a little better than a sketch'.¹⁹ Acceptance of oil paintings made quickly out of doors without 'finish' was still being criticised.

In the summer of 1890/91 Walsh, in the company of Sprott, who was by then on the staff of the Art School as a full master assistant, took the steamer to Kaikoura where they camped and painted. Kaikoura was a revelation to Walsh and there he found his spiritual home. The mountains,

sea and bush - the elements of nature that attracted him most - were together in one place and there were also the Maori villages that greatly interested him. He returned almost annually for the next twenty-one years.

By 1891 Walsh was no longer a working member of the Otago Art Society, nor was he sending paintings to Dunedin for exhibition, making the CSA almost the sole venue at which he exhibited. He selected two oils for inclusion in the 1891 CSA Annual Exhibition. His painting *On the Kaikoura coast* was criticised when reviewed for its 'lack of vigour' by *The Press*²⁰ and praised by the *Lyttelton Times* which wrote; 'considered as a study of waves his picture is certainly successful'.²¹

Walsh spent the summer of 1891/92 painting with George Herbert Elliott, William Sprott and possibly William Menzies Gibb. They travelled to the Teramakau Valley and Lake Brunner painting then to Kaikoura. The results of these excursions were exhibited at the 1892 CSA Annual Exhibition at which Walsh received some criticism concerning his use of colour from the *Lyttelton Times* reviewer who wrote 'Mr A W Walsh's work this year is violent; there is no other word to express the sense of surprise these pictures create in ones mind. They are pictorial puzzles; one doesn't know what the artist means and is compelled to "give it up". Violent smoky clouds violent purples, still more violent greens; the effect is to say the least, unpleasant'.²² Walsh was clearly experimenting and it is possible that Sprott may have encouraged him to intensify his palette. During the second half of 1891, with the desire to spend more time painting, Sprott had left his position at the School of Art. His health, which was not robust, worsened and in 1893, during a visit to Tauranga, he took ill and died soon after in Auckland. Walsh was devastated by the loss of his friend and painting companion.

In 1893, after seven years a working member of the CSA, Walsh was nominated and elected to the Council of the Society. That year Petrus van der Velden became a working member and Walsh may have got to know him. Whether or not they had an appreciation of each other's work is uncertain. Van der Velden, who was Walsh's senior by some 22 years, spoke of him often with laughter as "the Irishman" and Walsh referred to Van der Velden contemptuously as "that Dutchman", and therein lay their difference. The following year Van der Velden was elected to the CSA Council and would have been associated with Walsh, but there is no evidence of any kind of real liking or understanding between the two artists developing, although they had some attitudes in the approach to the landscape in common.

Throughout the 1890s Walsh continued his visits to Kaikoura and on the visit in 1894 made a watercolour of the camp which had been set up in front of a cave entrance. *Camping at Cave* (cat no 3) recalls slightly Tom Roberts' 1886 oil *The Artists Camp*. Like this work, Walsh has avoided

detailed definition of form with more careful handling of the sapling branches in the foreground and has the same informality of nature in its composition.

By 1895 Walsh was still painting out of doors in oils but focussing more on watercolour as a medium which offered for him more potential to enliven the way in which he worked before nature.

At the School of Art he continued to teach the landscape just one day a week in terms one and two and drawing the remainder of the time at both day and evening classes. A whole new young generation of artists seriously interested in painting out of doors was emerging among the students at the Art School and included: Sydney L. Thompson, Charles Bickerton, Leonard Booth, Roland Westropp, Robert Procter, Raymond McIntyre and Annie Elizabeth Abbott. Most of them had the benefit of Walsh's experience and several later on joined him camping at Kaikoura over the summer.

After Canterbury College School of Art became affiliated to the Department of Art and Science at South Kensington in 1896 there was encouragement for staff who did not hold professional art teaching qualifications to sit the South Kensington Examinations. In 1897 Walsh sat examinations that included: Freehand Drawing and Modelling, Freehand Advanced Drawing, Drawing from Light and Shade, Drawing from the Antique and Still Life Painting.²³ It may have also equipped him to becoming familiar with the new course requirements. This was the only time that he prepared and sat examinations. He also began exhibiting again at the OAS.

During the late 1890s he continued his annual visits to Kaikoura and also camped with other artists in the area around Bealey and the Waimakariri Valley. By 1900 Walsh was well established in Canterbury with thirteen years teaching at the Art School. He was regarded as a senior artist and when a Fine Arts Committee was formed for the Canterbury Jubilee Industrial Exhibition, Walsh was elected as a member to assist in planning the Fine Arts Gallery which focused on Canterbury artists and also included work by Walsh.

In 1902 Walsh moved from Searells Road to a property in Mays Road close to Papanui Road. At that time the district was still semi rural and he often made pastoral and orchard studies close to his home. The summer visits to Kaikoura continued and in 1903/ 1904 among his painting companions remarked on by the Kaikoura Star was Leonard Booth who was on the staff at the School of Art and was considered to be one of New Zealand's most promising graphic artists.²⁴ Walsh's work had become considerably freer and gestural in his paint handling and gave rise to the comments by reviewers that his style was '*aggressively splashy*'.²⁵

During the summer of 1904/05 Walsh painted at Kaikoura but also on the West Coast at Otira and Greymouth. When he showed work at the CSA in 1905 he had real success with two paintings. *Greymouth Harbour* (cat no 13) and *In the Otira* (cat no 12) were both purchased by the Society for its collection. Press reviews were also favourable, particularly *The Spectator* which commented; 'Perhaps our most *improving* artist is Mr A. W. Walsh who is now doing fine work, in fact his pictures are fit to go anywhere and that is saying a good deal - but when we come to the watercolours - *Arthurs Pass* (248) and the two *Greymouth Sketches* (249 and 253) as well as the *Otira Scene* (261) - clearness of the work compels admiration. They are probably the best pictures Mr Walsh has ever painted.'²⁶

In October 1905 the enthusiasm for his work continued when Walsh exhibited several works at the CSA Sketch and Photographic Exhibition. These were described in *The Press* as being 'commendable'²⁷. In the summer of 1905/06 Walsh visited Marlborough and spent time painting at Pelorous and Queen Charlotte Sounds and Havelock. Among his companions were William Menzies Gibb and Sydney Lough Thompson who had just returned from Europe. Thompson established a studio at 97 Cambridge Terrace and it was there that an artist's sketch club was formed in 1906 whose members included; Sydney Thompson, Alfred Walsh, William Menzies Gibb, Charles Bickerton, Cecil Kelly, Andrew Kennaway Henderson, Edwin Bartley, Raymond McIntyre and Leonard Booth. The artist's club was not unlike the Palette Club, meeting weekly in either Sydney Thompson's studio or that of William Menzies Gibb in Worcester Street.

In April 1906 Walsh also became a member of the Christchurch Savage Club which was a social and entertainment club set up in 1893 modeled on that founded in London in 1857. Among its artist membership in 1906 were William Menzies Gibb, Sydney Thompson, Walter Bowring and James Lawson Balfour.²⁸ His election as a member of the Club may have been encouraged by the departure of George Herbert Elliott, his friend and colleague. Elliott had resigned as head of Canterbury College School of Art in 1905 to take up another position and had been a foundation member of the Savage Club. The arrival of Robert Herdman Smith as head of the School of Art brought about changes to the syllabus but these did not greatly effect Walsh who still continued teaching general drawing and landscape for 21 hours each week and painting whenever time permitted.

In 1906 he exhibited 5 works at the CSA Annual Exhibition and it was his design that was used on the cover of the catalogue that year and the three subsequent years. Although Walsh had 8 works in the Colonial section of the New Zealand International Exhibition he was unsuccessful in gaining any awards, being overshadowed by more popular and, in some cases, less creative artists. During 1907 he visited Marlborough again painting in the Sounds and the following year returned to paint at Little River and Westland spending time at Greymouth and Lake Brunner. By



Low Tide Auckland Harbour (cat no 18)

1908 he was showing his work and getting a more favourable reception at the Auckland, Dunedin and Christchurch Art Societies as well as the Academy of Fine Arts in Wellington. Even though his work was gaining more approval his teaching was not. Early in 1909 when salary increases for staff at the School of Art were announced, Walsh's was left unchanged. In a letter he wrote to the Board of Canterbury College he believed that he was entitled to an increase as his salary had not changed since 1894 and he was working more hours.²⁹ Walsh's 1909 teaching schedule included day classes during the week in Drawing and Painting, Plant Form, Still Life, Still Life and Antique plus Drawing from the Landscape and Nature. He also taught 30 pupils from the Normal School on Tuesday afternoons. On Monday and Wednesday evenings he taught Elementary Drawing. On Saturday mornings he taught teachers Freehand Drawing and in the afternoon Landscape from Nature. In all it involved teaching a total of 302 students during the 25 hours he taught each week. Unfortunately Walsh's appeal to the Board of Canterbury College was not supported by Herdman Smith who considered the £200 per annum salary that Walsh received was appropriate, even though much younger and less experienced tutors were receiving 25% more. Walsh must have felt further let down when during the latter part of 1909, while Herdman Smith was away in Europe, as Senior Assistant Master he was obliged to be Acting Director for some months in Herdman Smith's absence with no additional remuneration. In December 1910 issues concerning Walsh's salary and teaching finally came to a head when Herdman Smith advised that the Canterbury College Board had decided to reduce Walsh's teaching hours and his salary accordingly. Initially in conversation with Herdman Smith he accepted this but then reconsidered. In a letter to Herdman Smith on 5 December³⁰ Walsh suggested an alternative stating that if the Board of Canterbury College granted him 6 months leave of absence at his current salary from 1 January 1911, so that he could seek another position, he would resign. This was granted by the Governors of Canterbury College on 19 December with the request that his resignation was to take effect on 30 June 1911. After twenty-four years at the School of Art Walsh was now without a steady income with only a small pension and the occasional picture sale. His future may not have seemed too bright and he was now also alone. In March of 1909 Walsh's 85-year-old mother Catherine (Kate) had died in the Mays Road home after succumbing to the rigors of cancer. Walsh had lived most of his life with her. As a devoted son they shared a great deal and he had cared for her until her the end. Catherine had borne 10 children but only two survived her. Her long life had not been without much sadness and disappointment.

In the summer of 1910/11 Walsh travelled again to Marlborough to paint and in the months that followed returned to Otira and Greymouth. He had also spent time in Auckland early in 1911. When the paintings from these trips were first shown at the 1911 CSA Annual Exhibition, the comments in the *Lyttelton Times* continued to be favourable. The reviewer of the exhibition wrote; 'Mr Walsh's work is always characterised by vigor qualities that are always welcome in a work of art'.³¹

In 1911 Walsh made a final trip to his spiritual home, Kaikoura, and painted some of his most successful works there. When these were shown at the CSA Annual Exhibition the following year they were lauded, with the *Lyttelton Times* reviewer again supportive, remarking that he 'has work that would do credit to any gallery in Europe. It is truly fresh and characteristic of New Zealand life and atmosphere'.³² Walsh also spent time in Wellington early in 1911 painting at Plimmerton. His visit there may have been at the invitation of Frederick Sedgewick who had painted at Kaikoura with Walsh and others in the summer of 1903/04.³³

Auckland 1911- 1916

During 1911 Walsh sold his Mays Road property and moved to live permanently in Auckland. He had exhibited in Auckland since 1908 and was acquainted with a number of artists there. He may have also had hopes of gaining a position at Elam School of Art, which was developing under the directorship of E. W. Payton and was relocating to new premises in 1911. There were some vacancies on its staff including one made by Archibald Nicoll, who had left for Britain, but the prospects of Walsh getting one of these was not good. He was 52 years old with no formal qualifications apart from years of teaching practice that had not improved as he got older. In Auckland he had developed a close relationship with Emily Conolly the 56-year-old spinster daughter of Justice E. T. Conolly (1822 - 1908). How long they had known each other or the circumstances of their meeting is now obscure. Both had cared for their respective parents and were now alone. Walsh and Emily Conolly married at St Marks Anglican Church, Remuera on 26 March 1912. Emily was not without some means and after their marriage they both lived at her house, 13 Cleveland Road, Parnell. Having seemingly less concern for his future, Walsh was able to devote as much time as he liked to his painting. He was particularly attracted to Auckland Harbour with its bays and foreshore, especially on calm, clear mornings and he went out painting whenever he could. Between 1913 and 1915 Walsh continued to send works for exhibition to Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland making occasional sales, but his life was not without its problems. For many years he had been a heavy whisky drinker, taking his stone flask along with him as he painted. By early 1915, when he was diagnosed with cirrhosis of the liver, it became evident that his alcohol abuse had taken its toll and would end his life. Early in September of the following year, while on a visit to Tauranga, Walsh was admitted to the small hospital there where he died on 10 September 1916.³⁴ Many of his former students, colleagues and artist friends mourned his passing as they had immense respect for Walsh as a painter. Among these was Sydney Lough Thompson who was still away in France. On his return to Christchurch in November 1923 he was accorded a civic reception at which he spoke of his admiration for Walsh "there are some familiar faces missing in the gathering. One in particular is the late Mr A. W. Walsh whose work I always admired and whom I believed to be a genius".³⁵

Notes

- 1 Triad 10 April 1911 p 6
- 2 Art New Zealand No 3 March 1929 p 169 'New Zealand Painters
(The late A Walsh -An Appreciation John Cam Duncan)
- 3 Transcript of a radio discussion between H Winston Rhodes and Leonard H Booth (undated) on " Art and Nature" made in Christchurch as part of a winter series.pp-3-4
- 4 op cit
- 5 ibid. p 4
- 6 The Work of Alfred Wilson Walsh and Albert Hanson exhibition catalogue March 1926 prepared by William Wauchop
- 7 ibid.
- 8 ibid.
- 9 The Work of Alfred Wilson Walsh and Albert Hanson exhibition catalogue March 1926 prepared by WA Wauchop
- 10 Birth Certificate of Alfred Walsh
- 11 Report for the year ending 31 December 1878 of the Board of Education District of Otago Appendix G Drawing Masters Department
- 12 Otago Society of Art Annual Exhibition catalogue 1883
- 13 Otago Society of Art Annual Exhibition catalogues 1884 - 1886
- 13 Letter from Alfred Walsh to G H Elliott 8 December 1886
- 15 Extract from a book of poems often carried by Walsh when out Sketching
- 16 Lyttelton Times 2 April 1888 p 6
- 17 Lyttelton Times 23 April 1889 p5
- 18 Lyttelton Times 11 April 1889 p5
- 19 Lyttelton Times 24 November 1890 p 5
- 20 The Press 8 April 1891 p 5
- 21 Lyttelton Times 15 April 1891 p 5
- 22 Lyttelton Times 19 April 1891 p 5
- 23 Results of the Examinations of the Science and Art Department of South Kensington London 1897
- 24 Kaikoura Star 22 January 1904 p4
- 25 ibid.
- 26 The Spectator 4 April 1905
- 27 The Press 9 October 1905 p4
- 28 Register of Members of the Christchurch Savage Club 1893 - 1920
- 29 Letter from Alfred Walsh to the Board of Canterbury College Board of Governors 24 February 1909
- 30 Letter from Alfred Walsh to Canterbury College Board of Governors 5 December 1910
- 31 Lyttelton Times 25 March 1911 p5
- 32 Lyttelton Times 26 March 1912 p9
- 33 Kaikoura Star 22 January 1904 p 4
- 34 Death Certificate of Alfred Walsh
- 35 The Press 28 November 1923 p 5

1. *The Bay* 1886
Watercolour 223 x 370mm
Collection: Sarjeant Gallery Te Whare O Rehua,
Whanganui
2. *Margin of the Sandhills, New Brighton* 1890
Oil on board 291 x 445mm
Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery Christchurch
Purchased 1975
3. *Camping at Cave* 1894
Watercolour 225 x 370mm
Collection: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki
Purchased 1962
4. *In the Bush* 1901
Watercolour 400 x 295mm
Collection: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki
Purchased 1957
5. *Heathcote Estuary* 1901
Watercolour 235 x 400mm
Collection: Hocken Library, Te Uare Taoka o Hakena,
University of Otago, Dunedin
6. *Fishing Boats Summer* 1902
Watercolour 225 x 302mm
Collection: Hocken Library, Te Uare Taoka o Hakena,
University of Otago, Dunedin
7. *Taumutu* 1902
Watercolour 335 x 435mm
Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery
Presented by Miss J.E. Storry, 1969
8. *Sea Study* 1903
Watercolour 160 x 270mm
Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery
Presented by Mrs Isobel Prosser, 1992
9. *Low Tide Kaiōkōwa Coast* 1904
Watercolour 325 x 440mm
Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery
Presented by the family of James Jamieson, 1932
10. *Stream with Boulders* 1905
Watercolour on board 313 x 643mm
Collection: University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts
11. *An Alpine Stream Otira* 1905
Watercolour 570 x 404mm
Collection: Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.
Bequest of John Campbell, 1942.
12. *In the Otira* 1905
Watercolour 390 x 272mm
Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery
Presented by the Canterbury Society of Arts, 1932
13. *Greymouth Harbour* 1905
Watercolour 253x 320mm
Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery
Presented by the Canterbury Society of Arts, 1932
14. *Landscape with Huts* 1909
Watercolour 253 x 354mm
Collection: Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.
Bequest of W.S. Wauchop, 1972.

15. *Head of an Old Man* 1909
 Watercolour 255 x 178mm
 Collection: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki
 Purchased 1968
16. *Shipping in a Harbour* 1909
 Watercolour 188 x 238mm
 Collection: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki
 Purchased 1975
17. *Across the Fox River* 1910
 Watercolour 254 x 355mm
 Collection: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki
 Purchased 1967
18. *Low Tide Auckland Harbour* 1911
 Watercolour 400 x 301mm
 Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery
 Presented by G.W. Bradley, 1951
19. *Otira* 1911
 Watercolour 400 x 300mm
 Private collection, Christchurch
20. *Ships, Auckland Harbour* 1913
 Watercolour 272 x 374mm
 Collection: Sarjeant Gallery Te Whare O Rehua,
 Whanganui
21. *Calm Morning Auckland* 1913
 Watercolour 278 x 388mm
 Collection: Hocken Library, Te Uare Taoka o Hakena,
 University of Otago, Dunedin
22. *Steamship at Sea*
 Watercolour 176 x 268mm
 Collection; Robert McDougall Art Gallery
 Presented by Millicent and Winifred Jennings, Sumner 1974
23. *Two Men Fishing*
 Watercolour 150 x 95mm
 Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery
 Presented by Mrs Isobel Prosser, 1994
24. *On the Wharf*
 Watercolour 360 x 240mm
 Collection: Russell Smith

- 1859 Born 26 July at Kyneton, Victoria, Australia, son of Catherine & William Walsh.
- 1861 Birth of Walsh's sister Catherine Frances.
- 1862 Birth of Walsh's brother George William.
- 1864 Arrives in New Zealand with his family. Living George Street, North Dunedin.
- 1872 Walsh family living at Dundas Street, Dunedin.
- 1875 William Walsh abandons the family and returns to Australia.
- 1876 Joins Public Works Department. Walsh Family living in Forth Street, Dunedin.
Begins attending evening classes with David Con Hutton.
- 1878 Appointed as a student teacher at Dunedin School of Art.
- 1879 Marriage of his sister, Catherine Frances Walsh. His mother and brother live in Frederick Street, Roslyn.
- 1883 Begins exhibiting with the Otago Art Society (OAS) with 2 works.
Has to relinquish his teaching position at Dunedin School of Art.
Receives instruction from George O'Brien.
- 1884 Continues to work in the Public Works Office.
Exhibits 2 works at the OAS Annual Exhibition.
- 1885 Exhibits 3 works at the OAS Annual Exhibition.
- 1886 Applies for position of assistant master at Canterbury College School of Art.
Exhibits 2 works at the OAS Annual Exhibition.
- 1887 Takes up the position of assistant master at Canterbury College School of Art.
Becomes a working member of the Canterbury Society of Arts (CSA).
Exhibits 2 works at the CSA Annual Exhibition.
Exhibits 2 works at the OAS Annual Exhibition.
Exhibits 3 works at the Second Black and White Sketch Exhibition CSA.
Spends time painting at Little River.

- 1888 Takes up residence at Searells Road, Papanui.
 Exhibits 2 works at the CSA Annual Exhibition.
 Exhibits 4 works at the OAS.
 Exhibits at the Centennial International Exhibition, Melbourne 1888.
- 1889 Becomes a member of the Palette Club.
 Makes a visit to Bealey.
 Exhibits 4 works at the CSA Annual Exhibition.
 Exhibits 4 works at the OAS Annual Exhibition.
 Exhibits 4 works at the New Zealand and South Seas Exhibition, Dunedin.
- 1890 Visits Kaikoura for the first time painting with W.K. Sprott.
 Exhibits at the Palette Club exhibition.
 Exhibits 4 works at the CSA Annual Exhibition.
- 1891 Paints at Kaikoura.
 Exhibits 2 works at the CSA Annual Exhibition.
 Exhibits 1 work at the Third Black and White Sketch Exhibition CSA.
 Ceases to become a working member of OAS.
- 1892 Visits Westland painting at Lake Brunner, Lake Poerua and Teramakau.
 Visits Wellington, Kaikoura and Routeburn, Otago.
 Exhibits 5 works at the CSA Annual Exhibition.
- 1893 Death of W. K. Sprott. Visits Wellington and Kaikoura painting.
 Elected to the Council of the Canterbury Society of Arts.
 Exhibits 3 works at the CSA Annual Exhibition.
 Exhibits 1 work at the NZAFA.
- 1894 Painting at Kaikoura during the summer.
 Exhibits 3 works at the CSA Annual Exhibition.
- 1895 Paints at Arthurs Pass and Kaikoura.
 Exhibits at the 1895 exhibition of Art and Industry.
 Exhibits 5 works at the CSA Annual Exhibition.

- 1896 Visits Greymouth painting.
Visits Kaikoura.
Exhibits 4 works at the CSA Annual Exhibition.
- 1897 Takes South Kensington examinations in Freehand Drawing and Modelling,
Freehand Advanced Drawing, Drawing from Light and Shade and Painting Still Life.
Exhibits 2 works at the OAS Annual Exhibition.
- 1898 Visits Kaikoura.
Exhibits 4 works at the CSA Annual Exhibition.
- 1899 Painting at Bealey and Lake Pearson.
Exhibits 2 works at the CSA Annual Exhibition.
Exhibits 2 works at the OAS exhibition.
- 1900 Appointed to the Fine Arts Committee of the Canterbury Jubilee Exhibition.
Exhibits 2 works at Canterbury Jubilee Exhibition.
Exhibits 2 works at the CSA Annual Exhibition.
- 1901 Camps with other artists at Arthurs Pass in the Waimakariri River valley and Mt Torlesse.
Visits Marlborough, Queen Charlotte and Pelorus Sounds.
Exhibits 6 works at the CSA Annual Exhibition.
Death of Walsh's sister Catherine Harty.
- 1902 Moves to live at Mays Road. Paints at Kaikoura and Greymouth.
Exhibits 3 works at the CSA Annual Exhibition.
- 1903 Visits Kaikoura camping with several other artists.
Exhibits 4 works at the CSA Annual Exhibition.
- 1904 Painting at Kaikoura.
Exhibits 4 works at the CSA Annual Exhibition.
- 1905 Visits painting at Arthurs Pass, Otira, Greymouth and Kaikoura.
Exhibits 3 works at the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts (NZAFA).
Exhibits 5 works at the CSA Annual Exhibition.

- 1906 Exhibits 8 works at the New Zealand International Exhibition.
 Visits Havelock and Pelorus Sound.
 Becomes a member of the Christchurch Artists Club.
 Becomes a member of the Christchurch Savage Club.
 Exhibits 5 works at the CSA Annual Exhibition.
 Exhibits at NZAFA.
- 1907 Painting at Pelorus Sound.
 Exhibits 7 works at the CSA Annual Exhibition.
 Exhibits 3 works at the NZAFA.
- 1908 Paints at Lake Brunner, Greymouth and Little River.
 Exhibits 8 works at the CSA Annual Exhibition.
 Exhibits 4 works at NZAFA Annual Exhibition.
 Exhibits 1 work at the OAS Annual Exhibition.
 Exhibits 3 works at the Auckland Society of Arts (ASA).
- 1909 Paints at Kaikoura in January and at Springfield and the Waimakariri in June.
 Death of Catherine Walsh at 85 years.
 Acting Director, Canterbury College School of Art.
 Exhibits 8 works at the CSA Annual Exhibition.
 Exhibits 3 works at NZAFA.
- 1910 Visits West Coast painting at Greymouth and South Westland also painting at
 Otira, Arthurs Pass and Pelorus Sound.
 Exhibits 6 works at the Canterbury Society of Arts Annual Exhibition.
 Resigns from the staff of Canterbury College School of Art.
 Exhibits 4 works at NZAFA.
 Exhibits 2 works at the OAS Annual Exhibition.

- 1911 Visits Wellington painting at Plimmerton.
Spends last summer painting at Kaikoura.
Visits Auckland painting the Harbour.
Resigns from the CSA Council.
Exhibits 8 works at the CSA Annual Exhibition.
Exhibits 4 works at the ASA Annual Exhibition.
Exhibits 7 works at NZAFA.
- 1912 Leaves Christchurch to live in Auckland.
Marries Emily Conolly on 4 March at St Marks Church, Remuera.
Exhibits 5 works at the CSA Annual Exhibition and at ASA and NZAFA.
Living at 13 Cleveland Road, Parnell.
Paints around the bays of Auckland Harbour.
Exhibits 8 works at CSA Annual Exhibition.
Exhibits 6 works at the ASA Annual Exhibition.
- 1913 Exhibits 3 works at CSA Annual Exhibition.
Exhibits 5 works at the ASA Annual Exhibition.
- 1914 Visits Rotorua and Tauranga.
Exhibits 5 works at the CSA Annual Exhibition.
- 1915 Exhibits 5 works at the CSA Annual Exhibition.
Exhibits 4 works at the NZAFA Annual Exhibition.
Exhibits 3 works at the ASA Annual Exhibition.
Revisits the West Coast painting.
- 1916 Dies 10 September at Tauranga Hospital.

Alfred Walsh (centre) with fellow artists Leonard H. Booth (left front) Gerald K. Webber (right front) and William Menzies Gibb (seated back right) c 1910



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- Electoral Rolls (Otago and Canterbury) 1867 - 1919 (DPL) &(CPL)
- Index to the Register of Births Deaths and Marriages 1862 - 1916 (CPL)
- Transcript of a radio broadcast 'Winter Series' - Discussion on 'Nature and Art' between H. Winston Rhodes and Leonard H. Booth (undated) (RMAGA)
- Obituary *The Press* 13 September 1916 p5
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- Reports of the Education Department -Province of Otago 1878 - 1883 (NA)
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- *Wises N. Z. Post Office Directory*, Dunedin 1876 - 1890 H. Wise & Co Ltd. Dunedin (CPL)
- *Harnett's Dunedin Directory 1864 - 1876* Harnett and Co Dunedin (DPL)

Abbreviations

CPL	Canterbury Public Library
DPL	Dunedin Public Library
HL	Hocken Library, University of Otago
MML	McMillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury
NA	National Archives, Christchurch
RMAG	Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch



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