



## Bulletin

## The Robert McDougall Art Gallery

A bi-monthly publication containing news, views, and reviews of activities at the Robert McDougall Art Gallery.

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### Olivia Spencer Bower 1905-1982

It was on July 1 that the Gallery learned of the death of Olivia Spencer Bower one of Canterbury's and indeed New Zealand's most accomplished watercolourists. Over the years Olivia Spencer Bower developed the highest regard of her fellow artists and the acclaim of a wide section of the New Zealand public. Her career as an artist began in Canterbury during the 1920s and spanned almost six decades. It was however only during the last two that a positive measure of recognition came her way.

Born in England in 1905 Olivia came to New Zealand in 1920 with her Canterbury-born artist mother and other members of her family. Her first art training was given to her by her mother, but in 1922 she commenced part-time classes at Canterbury College School of Art. As a student she studied under Richard Wallwork, Cecil Kelly and Leonard Booth with success and was awarded scholarships in 1922, 1923, 1926, 1927 and the Rosa Sawtell prize for figure painting in 1926-1927.

It was during this time that interest in the landscape, particularly the North Canterbury landscape where her family farmed, became of particular interest, a subject that was to reoccur through the years. She first exhibited publicly in 1926 at the Canterbury Society of Arts of that year. It was also around that time that some of her fellow students came together to form what was to be known as 'The Group'. Her association with 'The Group' remained until it was disbanded in 1977.

In 1929 she travelled to London where she attended classes at the Slade. On her return to Canterbury in 1931 Olivia spent much time painting



*Self Portrait, Olivia Spencer Bower*

the river beds of many Canterbury rivers, in particular the Kowai, Otira and Waimakariri.

In 1980 she was awarded the Canterbury Society of Arts Silver Medal. From 1940 onward she served

on the Council of the Society through various terms and last year was elected President.

The Gallery recognises the loss that goes with the passing of this artist.

### R.N. O'Reilly

The death has occurred in Wellington after a short illness of Mr R.N. O'Reilly who was for some years the Christchurch City Librarian. During the time he held this position, Mr O'Reilly made not only significant innovations in library management

techniques but contributed a great deal to the cultural life of this city. One of his important contributions was the introduction of the picture loan service, acquiring original works to be loaned for modest sums as a library service. The income from loan

fees financed further purchases and in time the library's picture and reproduction collection became substantial both in number and quality. Mr O'Reilly himself chose original works from exhibitions presented in the city. His judgement



was so acutely perceptive that many of the works he purchased for a few pounds are of such quality and now so valuable that they have had to be removed from the loan collection and hung permanently in the library. Some have been deposited with the Robert McDougall Art Gallery for safe keeping and exhibition.

Ron O'Reilly was a champion of the visual arts of this country, possessing a deeply informed knowledge of its history and contemporary developments. He was a noted collector and as an early enthusiast for the work of the distinguished painters Colin McCahon and Toss Will Woollaston, acquired over the years a

large and important collection of works by these and other artists.

He resigned his position with the Christchurch City Council to become Principal of the National Library School in Wellington where he again gave distinguished service.

From that post he was appointed Director of the New Plymouth Govett-Brewster Gallery. There he was responsible for initiatives which led to the establishment of the Len Lye Foundation and the permanent placement of Lye's works and papers with the gallery.

He was widely regarded in library,

museum and gallery circles and was frequently called upon for professional advice.

His contribution to the professional development of New Zealand's cultural resources was considerable and he will be greatly missed by his many friends and colleagues throughout the country.

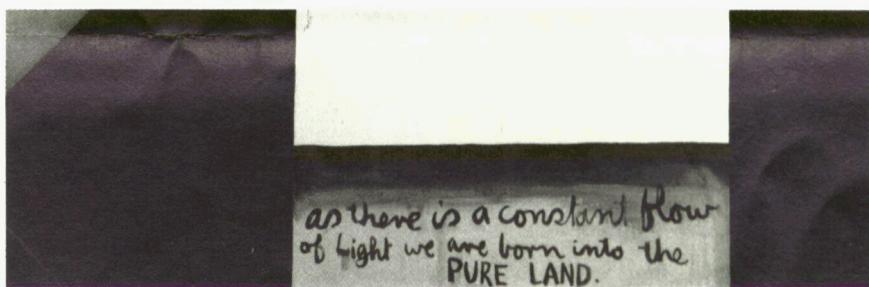
As a result of a special agreement made between the painter Colin McCahon and Mr R.N. O'Reilly the Robert McDougall Art Gallery is to receive, as a gift of the artist, an important McCahon painting dating from 1947, *The Crucifixion According to St Mark*.

### Important Acquisitions

The Gallery has acquired two important additions to its small holdings of the work by the major New Zealand artist Colin McCahon.

*As there is a Constant Flow of Light*, 595mm x 1800mm. The work could be termed classical McCahon containing features characteristic of the artist's imagery. The phrase "As there is a constant flow of light over the pure land" is integrated into the image as a painterly script. Combining with the landscape elements of the work and its strong, clear light, the calligraphy and poetic allusions create the forceful imagery for which the artist has attained international recognition.

It appears certain that the Robert McDougall Art Gallery will receive another important work by Colin McCahon as the result of a special agreement made between the late R.N. O'Reilly and the artist. The work *The Crucifixion According to St Mark* 780mm x 1080mm 1947 is gifted to the Gallery by the artist to pass to the Gallery on the death of Mr O'Reilly in whose possession the work was lodged for the duration of



*As there is a constant flow of light*, Colin McCahon

his life. The recent death of Mr O'Reilly coincided with the request from the Australian National Gallery at Canberra for the loan of the work. The newly built gallery plans an installation of McCahon's work featuring the major work *I Am*, the gift of the Government of New Zealand in 1978 to Australia to mark a goodwill visit and requested *Crucifixion* to represent an important stage in the artist's development.

Mr Gordon Brown, the noted art historian and expert on the work of Colin McCahon, has described *The Crucifixion According to St Mark* as being an historically important work containing much of the iconography of a most fruitful period of the artist's career. In 1947 McCahon was, in his

paintings, placing images from Christ's passion in the New Zealand landscape, often including symbolic lamps and scripture verses.

The Art Gallery Director has agreed to the loan of the work to the Australian National Gallery due to open in October, in accordance with the wishes of the late R.N. O'Reilly and because of the honour that the inclusion of the work brings to the artist, New Zealand painting and the gallery. The loan period is for one year.

The Robert McDougall Art Gallery is extremely pleased to receive these major additions to its collection.

### Notes from the Gallery Diary 1955-1965

**1955 May 16** Official opening of the German Lithograph Exhibition by Dr Boltz of the German Legation.

**October 4** Several paintings damaged by vandals.

**1956 July 27** Official opening of the Lonsdale Silver Collection Exhibition, by the Mayor of Christchurch.

**1957 October 23** Russian Art Exhibition opened.

**1958 March 25** Opening of the Exhibition Five New Zealand Artists.

**April 28** New Zealand Photographic Society holds its convention at the Gallery.

**1959 May 9** Criticism of lack of Public interest in the Gallery draws comments from the Press which reports proposals to increase public interest.

**August 18** Japanese Art and Craft

Exhibition opened at 3.00pm by the ambassador for Japan.

**1960 March 17** Mr W.S. Baverstock appointed first director.

**1961 March 16** Art Gallery Policy under fire, several representatives of the Arts Advisory Committee resign.

**July 8** Tender let for alterations to the gallery and the addition of a night entrance.

**October 18** Works are received from the Sir Leonard Woolley Bequest.

**1962 January 20** Visit to the gallery by the Duke of Wellington.

**March 1** New Rolleston Avenue night entrance formally opened by the Mayor of Christchurch.

**December 19** Colin McCahon's painting "Tomorrow will be the same but not as this is" finally accepted by the Arts Advisory Committee after considerable opposition.

**1963 July 16** Exhibition of British Children's Art.

**November 11** Opening of the Van der Velden Loan Exhibition.

**1964 June 23** 'Three British Painters' exhibition opened.

**1965 February 22** Pan Pacific Art commences with exhibitions Painting in Australia and One Hundred New Zealand Paintings.

### Boyd Webb:

**September 23 — October 17**

The word photography for many may conjure up a simple act of aiming and clicking a shutter. For the past decade however this idea has been steadily altered by the emergence of a small band of dedicated New Zealand artists who have made the photograph a medium that is becoming increasingly more relevant within our society.

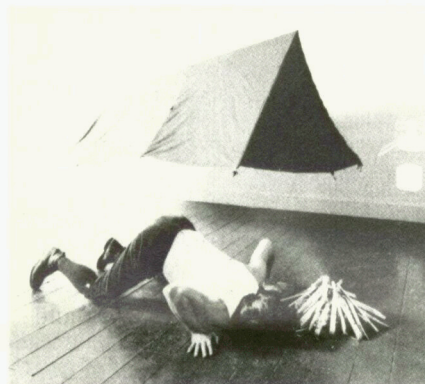


Boyd Webb is one such artist. It is perhaps fitting that the Robert McDougall Art Gallery should display his work as he is Christchurch born and attended the School of Fine Arts between 1968 and 1971.

The exhibition concentrates on his photographic works from the period of 1976 to 1981 and one of its strengths is the implied dimensionality of the individual pieces. At first glance many of the works purport to be documentary evidence of sculptural installations. However a closer examination reveals a far deeper surreal approach, that also draws into question many of contemporary society's overriding concerns. Within this suite of works reference can be found to racial harmony, conservation as well as more mundane pursuits such as camping.

The textural qualities of the individual prints combined with the artist's witty approach to seemingly contentious issues, make this a thought provoking exhibition which will dispel preconceived notions that photography is not a viable art form.

Hamish Keith in his foreword to the catalogue states 'The measure of his art is that he stretches the medium beyond what we once accepted as its limits. That reinforces the truth that what matters is not the medium at all, but what is said'.



*Untitled (Camping) 1978, Boyd Webb*

#### **Still Life in the Age of Rembrandt August 30 — September 26:**

Still life paintings in which inanimate objects like flowers, food and other articles are presented as the independent subjects of a painting are a particularly interesting feature of Dutch and Flemish art of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At first glance they may appear simply as meticulously presented images of everyday articles painted with all the skill and incredible realism of their time. This is one way in which we can view them — as reflections of Dutch society three hundred years ago. The early views of cheeses, breads and fruits, with their simple symmetrical bouquets can be seen as reflecting for us

some of the pleasures and attitudes of the sober and industrious Dutch merchants and tradesmen of the seventeenth century. As their affluence increased we can see how their paintings began to reflect their growing prosperity. Elegant tableware, luxury foods, more elaborate floral pieces, in exquisite silver work or Chinese Wan Li porcelains appear in their painting. By the end of the century the 'Golden Age' had contributed the ornate 'pronk stillevens' or show pieces you will enjoy.

From another angle you could also enjoy examining these paintings as reflecting the 'collections' of the age. Flower growers and merchants valued the paintings as permanent records of their ethereal products and exotic shells and insects along with fine table ware are all included to display the richness and variety of the universe.

Hidden however within most of these apparently simple objects is still

another world, one of quiet emblems, allegories and morals. The butterflies fluttering amid the blossoms, the time piece resting quietly beside the vase, the guttered candle were all capable of conveying to the contemporary viewer a vast range of other messages. They make their own comments on the fleeting moment of time and beauty, they comment on temperance, sobriety, restraint and the futility of earthly fame. Many have been painted as 'vanitas' works — the 'momento more' messages of the age and the didactic panels which accompany the exhibition will help you decipher and enjoy these.

The opportunity to see these Still-Life works as an important category in Dutch seventeenth century art is an unusual one in New Zealand and elsewhere. Many international visitors have delighted to share them with us in this unique exhibition and we are sure you will all take every opportunity to enjoy all they can offer before the exhibition closes on September 26.



*Still life with a view of a river, Van Davidsz de Heem*

#### **Acquisitions**

**The following works have been recently purchased**

##### **Pat Hanly**

*Seated Nude 1957*

Pencil on paper

##### **Richard Killen**

*Island Mortality 1981*

Collage on paper

##### **Philip Clairmont**

*Fireplace (sketch) 1970*

Ballpoint/Watercolour on paper

##### **Philippa Blair**

*Golden Tipi 1981*

Etching Aquatint

##### **David Brokenshire**

*Bowl*

Porcelain

**Presented by Mr Jules Boers of the Netherlands**

##### **Anton Rooskens**

*Printemps II*

Screen print

#### **Building a Collection**

The recent move by the Govett-Brewster Gallery to de-accession part of its collection met with some strong opposition. The Govett-Brewster Gallery's policy is to have a changing collection, turning over older works to replace them with recent examples of developments in the visual arts.

Gallery visitors are sometimes bemused by works which they consider to have little merit. Certainly the manner in which collections are formed and the rationales by which art works are chosen for inclusion in a gallery's holdings provoke a wide range of opinion concerning just what should be acquired.

Acquisition is the most important area of an art gallery's activities and one which should be guided by sound policy based upon a clear understanding of the following factors: What purpose the collection



fulfills, the nature of the existing collection and the extent of funding available for acquisitions.

### The Purpose of a Collection

An art collection fulfills many purposes. Works of art touch on almost all the emotions and experiences known to us. A work of art's purpose may be simply to delight the eye, to propose new ways of perceiving the world or understanding an experience. It may essay a fresh way of creating art or analyse, record, enjoy the observed world. Works of art set down some essential attitudes or ingredients that contribute to the actuality of specific times, places and cultural context.

They therefore present a multitude of facets to which viewers may respond. Art works may be scrutinised and researched intensely by scholars, examined admiringly or critically by artists, pleasurably by gallery visitors, quizzically by children. Art adds much to our enjoyment of life by enriching our experience and contributing to our sense of cultural identity.

So it is that an art gallery contains a kind of visual record of a society's developing ideas and attitudes regarding its perception of the natural world and the world of the mind. Art collections exist to preserve and present the enormous range of individual creative activity in the visual arts, a range which continues to fascinate the knowledgeable enthusiast as it does the new comer making his first gallery visit.

The prime responsibility of a community Gallery must be to create a collection which illustrates the achievements of its best, most sensitive artists. In forming a record of art works of excellence that have been created in a community's existence, it also preserves a record of that community's ideas and values.

### A Gallery of Record

The first aim then of the Robert McDougall Gallery's acquisition policy must be to obtain the best works of the significant practitioners who have worked in the Canterbury region since settlement. It must, as a gallery of record, continue to acquire works by practising artists in order to lay down for future generations an account of the development of art in the region.

A secondary purpose must be to gather a collection which gives an overview of art activity in the larger national community, obtaining works by artists acknowledged as having created bodies of work of consistent excellence.

A third ranking priority is to gather works of expatriate New Zealand artists who have produced works of high quality abroad.

Beyond this range of national interest, the Gallery can only make modest forays into the international art market because of two limiting factors, lack of adequate funding to purchase works of real merit and our distance from the principal art markets. We cannot be on the spot when a work which fits into our collection becomes available and so seldom learn of anything but items of inferior quality.

Today there is little point in a Gallery of the McDougall's resources competing in the international market place for quality European works. Galleries throughout Europe and North America compete for the diminishing supply of master works remaining in private hands. Many galleries have financial resources of quite incredible substance. Wealthy collectors seek important acquisitions as hedges against inflation. This activity has driven the price of good works to stratospheric heights.

The McDougall, unlike other major New Zealand Galleries, has no substantial bequests with which to acquire European works of merit. Occasional access to funds abroad can assist the purchase of specific works as the British National Art Collection Fund assisted in the purchase of the Frances Hodgkins painting, "The Belgian Refugees".

### The Nature of Our Collection

What we must do in our collecting policy is to evolve the existing collection naturally from its present character, filling gaps where those exist, strengthening where poor representation of some artist's works require additions.

There are some two thousand four hundred and thirty-four works listed in the accessions registers. Of these one hundred and forty are oils of the nineteenth century and earlier. There are eighty-seven works of European origin, four Australian and one American. Approximately sixty-one are New Zealand pre 1920 and two hundred and forty-three post 1920. Sculptures, miniatures, ceramics and textiles total three hundred and twelve works. The remaining one thousand, six hundred and seventy-eight works are works on paper. Of these two hundred and ninety are Prints of European origin; five hundred and ninety British Prints, watercolours and drawings, while seven hundred and ninety-eight are New Zealand Prints, watercolours and drawings.

It can be seen that the strength of the collection lies in its works on paper. The Gallery, despite some fine pieces, cannot boast a significant collection of European oils. In the prints and drawings, however, are works of the first quality, that possess the unique signature and vitality of finished paintings. These pieces, often forwarded on approval



*Island Mentality, Richard Killeen, 1981*

from dealers of excellent reputation abroad, have been obtained at relatively modest cost.

It is an important part of the Gallery's acquisition policy to obtain works on paper by both contemporary and historically significant artists. By this means the Gallery can build a representation of internationally regarded artists working today and gradually increase in a systematic, cohesive manner its holdings of quality historical material.

The Gallery recognises the important statements being made today in areas once considered outside the purview of the visual arts. It is now widely agreed that photography is an expressive art form with most galleries now establishing collections. To exclude ceramics from a gallery's acquisition policy would be to overlook a field where a great deal of innovative development in New Zealand art is occurring. The old distinction of art and craft no longer applies. Whatever the nomenclature there is work of such quality being carried out in New Zealand ceramics that it demands to be exhibited in art galleries. Similarly with weaving where standards and concepts have improved and broadened to the degree that the old terms no longer adequately describe the sculptural and graphic dimensions which woven works frequently encompass, hence the Gallery's acquisition area of "Fibre Arts".

### A Unique Identity

In expanding the Robert McDougall Gallery's collection we must be aware that it is to serve scholars at every level of education, excite a sense of pleasure and pride in the gallery visitor and display the highest achievements of our artists to the visitor from abroad.

Art has been described as both a mirror and a hammer, a mirror reflecting the moves and attitudes of the times and to some, it can be a



hammer shattering old, comfortably held beliefs. It is often both, passive and active, disclosing aspects of our cultural identity which are the source of its vitality. It is the quality of uniqueness that makes a collection interesting to a visitor; what it reveals about how we view ourselves and our surroundings. It is for this reason that we must acquire the work of the best New Zealand artists, recognising the energy, intelligence, imagination and confidence that has brought the visual arts of this country to the standard of excellence they now enjoy.

A collection is itself a work in the making and must always be free to accommodate the unexpected, to suddenly begin to grow in a different direction. Any statement of policy must therefore be open-ended, a guide to the path its growth is taking.



*Urban Memory, Peter Siddell.*

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### **The important contribution of our Gallery Volunteers**

During the hectic weeks of the Still-Life in the Age of Rembrandt Exhibition the people of Christchurch will again be very aware of the special contribution our volunteer Gallery Guides and Sales Booth personnel are making in our Gallery. We are extremely grateful for their invaluable assistance and we know how much the people in Christchurch appreciate and enjoy these extra services.

Perhaps many of us are unaware however of the many other activities in which community volunteers are playing an important role. Each

month a volunteer team operates 'An afternoon at the Gallery' a special tour and entertainment for citizens from our retirement clubs and Aged Peoples homes. They assist with large school parties, with OutReach activities to clubs and associations in the community who would like to know more about what their city Art Gallery is doing, or can offer and of course study to prepare themselves as the very helpful Gallery Guides you have all noticed.

Then we also have the folk who help with the hectic special sales booths associated with the touring

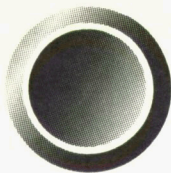
exhibitions, managing our sales and keeping the tills ringing. Together they manage a seven day service which involves a considerable donation to the Gallery's efforts. Also we have a 'behind the scenes' team who help each Bulletin to prepare the several hundred envelopes which carry your newsletters. Working in our basement and beyond the normal areas of the public eye their services are however greatly appreciated by the Gallery. Along with the many others these volunteers are a vital unit in the active and all-embracing community services which the Robert McDougall Art Gallery is offering.

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P.O. Box 237 Christchurch.  
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791-660 Extension 484

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## Newsletter

## Friends of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery Inc

### Dear Friends

As you will be aware, the McDougall is celebrating its Jubilee this year; the Gallery is fifty years old and the Friends, as an incorporated society, are just about to celebrate their first birthday. Your Executive is glad to report that the lusty infant is thriving; we are well pleased with our progress during these first twelve months of our formal existence and we are now beginning to explore new directions in which we can actively assist the aims and work of the Gallery. To do this we need more members and with this end in view we are about to launch a Jubilee Membership Drive. Our present membership stands at about 500 and we would like to double this to 1000 for 1983. This should not be difficult; all it requires is for each of you who is currently a Friend to bring in one new member. All new members enrolled now for 1983 will receive full membership privileges for the remainder of the year.

Brochures setting out our aims and objects are available from the Gallery or from our Secretary, Pat Unger. All of you, however, will receive a brochure with your 1983 subscription notice which will be posted towards the end of November; these notices will be a little early but we want members to have the brochures well before Christmas and we want to avoid double mailing costs.

The McDougall is *your* Gallery and the Friends is *your* Society; by enrolling a new member you are encouraging people to enjoy the former and help the latter.

Yours sincerely  
Robert Erwin President

### Subscription Concerts

To mark International Music Day in October, the Friends, in conjunction with members of the University of Canterbury School of Music, are organising at the gallery a series of special subscription concerts.

The first is the International Music Day Recital on Friday October 1 at 8pm. Carl Pini, violin and Maurice Till, piano will present a programme featuring the works of Mozart and Schubert. And the second concert on Saturday 23 October also at 8pm will feature the touring German cellist Maria Kiegel presently visiting New Zealand on behalf of the Gerta Institute. She will be accompanied by Carl Pini, violin and Maurice Till, piano.

Tickets for each subscription concert will be \$5.00 and will be available

from the Gallery and the School of Music and patrons are advised that as audience space in the Gallery is fairly limited it would be wise to secure your seats fairly early. There will also be a special Sunday Concert at the Gallery on Sunday 24 October at 3pm at which we will again have the pleasure of a short Cello recital by Maria Kiegel. These are all concerts music lovers will be anxious not to miss.

### Print Gift

Mr Julian Boers, an art teacher from the Netherlands who visited the Gallery last year, has given to the McDougall, through the Friends, a gift of a screenprint called *Printemps* by his late father-in-law, the COBRA painter, Anton Rooskens (1906-76). If you are not sure what the COBRA group was keep an eye out next year for a small COBRA exhibition grouped around this gift from Mr Boers.



*Printemps, Anton Rooskens*

### On October 20th

Gerrit van der Lingen, a member of the Friends executive, will show a selection from his extensive slide collection of European works of art, and architecture. He has entitled the programme: 'The Joy of Travel Artwise'. The final Coffee Morning for the year will be in November on Wednesday the 17th. Another executive member, Vivienne Mountford will talk on her speciality, Weaving, both on her own work and in the work of New Zealand weavers in general which she will illustrate with slides.

### Coffee Mornings

In June the largest gathering of Friends yet enjoyed a sparkling and wide-ranging chat about art from Bill

Sutton. Members found Bill so stimulating he is likely to become an annual event! In July about twenty-five people braved a southerly storm and it was a particular pleasure to welcome one of our patrons, Lady Hay, to the meeting. After coffee we walked over to the Ginkgo Gallery in the Arts Centre where Jule Einhorn demonstrated the technique of printmaking. The obvious interest of all who attended and the questions which alone made it clear that everyone found the visit especially enlightening.

### Coming Up

The date of the *September* Coffee Morning is Wednesday 15. The Director of the Gallery, John Coley, will talk to Friends about his recent rip to the U.S.A., as an ambassador from the Christchurch City Council, and will show slides of works seen in the Galleries of Seattle, Los Angeles, and Honolulu.

### The McDougall Jubilee Ball

For those who attended this must have been the event of the year — the young and the not-so-young, elegantly gowned and dressed, cavorting in the Ritziest setting Christchurch could provide! The 30's theme was novel for some and nostalgic for others who recalled Christchurch Balls of the past, particularly of course, the Arts Balls. Your executive is warmly receptive to the idea that this should be an annual event organised by the Friends so if you missed out this year you may just have another chance in the winter of 1983!

### 'Lost' New Members

Have you joined but not yet received your subscription card? Mail for the following has been returned "Gone No Address".

Mr and Mrs B.J.F. Davies  
Mr and Mrs B.J. Robertson  
R.N. St John

Neither do we have names for the following:

C.S.B.A/C No 460717936 \$10.00  
C.S.B.A/C No 340062282 \$15.00  
C.S.B. Cheque Merivale \$5.00 (S. or E. Grant?)  
\$10.00 Cash no name, posted Merivale 9.5.82.

Please ring the Treasurer.

P.O. Box 237, Christchurch  
Botanic Gardens, Rolleston Ave.,  
President — Robert Erwin, 558-675  
Secretary — Pat Unger, 487-482  
Treasurer — Anne Crighton, 557-737