

They should encourage art for the sake of art. His idea was that, instead of taking funds for prizes, they should try and form a valuable library [of books on art]. Excellence in a Society like this for some years must be comparatively not of a high standard . . . they should . . . bring people together who had one common feeling . . . and not allow themselves to be led away with the idea of gaining medals.⁷

William Hodgkins, during his busy life as a lawyer and a father, acted on his opinions. He organised the showing of British and European painting in Dunedin's industrial exhibition of 1889, promoted the building of Dunedin's first gallery, inspired the Art Club, lectured on painting and worked for seventeen years as president of the Otago Art Society, corresponding with painters in New Zealand, Australia and England and arranging for the exhibition and sale of their works.⁸ He was generous with his time and his enthusiasm. In selling his own works he was less successful. In a letter to Cissy, his daughter Isobel Field, he asks her to try to sell some of his paintings which had been exhibited in Sydney. 'Never mind sticking out for the price I put on them—£25 each I think, or was it £20? I forget but if you can get anyone to take them I think it would be better than their coming back. When I think of the hundreds and hundreds of pounds worth of pictures I have sold for artists and the trouble I have taken with their works it makes me a little sore that when I want to sell my own I find such a difficulty . . .'⁹ In an earlier letter he had expressed that continuing worry of painters, framing: 'I sold my little grey Wakatip [*sic*] . . . to Mr J. D. Dunn for £8.8.0 as I was anxious to pay for frames'.¹⁰

The worth of Hodgkins' activity was widely recognised in his own day. At the twenty-first annual meeting of the Otago Art Society the secretary, Dr Scott, reported that since 1875 twenty exhibitions had been held, a Society which had had seven people interested in its formation had now one hundred and sixty members, that it had 'sold £4,875 worth of paintings and acquired others valued at £1,020 . . . displayed on the walls of the Public Art Gallery', and that 'the erection of the Gallery itself was largely owing to the efforts made by the working members of the Society'.¹¹

That he was chief among working members, in regard and in effort, is made clear in the letters and notices which followed William Hodgkins' death on 9 February 1898. The *Otago Daily Times* in its obituary gives a contemporary assessment of Hodgkins' reputation as a painter: 'he ranked as a worker in water-colours with two of the greatest of New Zealand artists—John Gully and J. C. Richmond'.¹² The Christmas issue of the *Otago Witness* in a warmer and more informed tribute gives a picture of 'this large-hearted man' who was: