

The Moa and the professionalising of New Zealand science

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It is appropriate that the Auckland Institute published Archey's valuable memoir on the Moa¹ to inaugurate its Bulletin series. Archey's summing up of the Moa problem a century after the first of the bones were identified and brought to the attention of a scientific audience raised the subject to a new investigative level. His monograph and the more recent work in New Zealand pre-history brought order into the century-long search for the place this giant bird occupied both in natural history and in the history of New Zealand.

With the bringing to London of a femoral fragment in 1839 and its identification by Richard Owen, the Moa phenomenon became the core around which an important segment of science in the Colony crystallised. The continuing discovery of new data and the elaboration of both a body of information and the shifting theories to which it gave rise provide a case history for the growth of science in New Zealand. The main characters are few: Richard Owen and Gideon Mantell in London, Walter Mantell, Julius Haast, James Hector and, in a later phase, F.W. Hutton in the Colony. The nature of their relationships within a scientific community which had still not taken form reveals something of the process by which science occurs. Beyond those personal relationships exist those of institutions and establishments and of the home country and the Colony; and both were coloured with strong tints of a national science. Despite the ideals of a science beyond politics and national interests which so excited the hopes of the early builders of modern science, scientific activity was national in practice and scientific accomplishments contributed to national pride. Although his evolution may have become universal, Darwin was English and led his colleagues to believe that a period of English dominance in the biological sciences had arrived.² In the nineteenth century, following the path of empire, science had itself taken on an imperial aspect.

Two manuscript collections in the Alexander Turnbull Library provide an important body of archival data for an understanding of the development of science during New Zealand's earlier decades. These are the large mass of literary material which is the