

We found that the school had been founded by John Holdsworth (1854–1935), a New Zealander of English Quaker stock. A search of the annual reports of the Society of Friends revealed that in 1937 a Miss A. Mabel Holdsworth had been a guest from England. She was even included in a photograph of the delegates.

We were able to contact local friends, who remembered fondly the brief period when she taught at the school, and confirmed that Mabel Holdsworth did indeed draw and paint. Recently we obtained considerable biographical information about our artist, thanks to the Friends' House in London.

Alice Mabel Holdsworth was the eldest of three children of Charles James and Mary Alice Holdsworth, and was born in Wilmslow, Cheshire, in 1878. She continued to live with her parents until they died, then moved to Shrewsbury in 1934. It was as Clerk of the Australia and New Zealand Committee of Friends that she visited New Zealand and travelled widely here. While the headmaster of the Friends School, Arthur Douglass, and his wife took six months' leave of absence, Mabel Holdsworth and Nora B. Gibbons took over supervision. Mabel was in fact the niece of the school's founder, and it is interesting to note that John Holdsworth's second wife, Lucy Violet Hodgkin (1869–1954) was also an artist. Born in Northumberland, she travelled widely before marrying John Holdsworth in 1922 and settling in New Zealand. She was the author of a number of devotional works and exhibited with the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts in the 1920s.

Mabel Holdsworth returned to England in 1938, generously leaving her V8 car for the use of the Society when she left, and subsequently donating her sketchbooks to the Alexander Turnbull Library.