

DOROTHY BUTLER

Books have played an important part in my life, and on occasions have led to experiences I cannot explain. Some would call them coincidental, but I am not so sure. In a way I find them reassuring, and accept that there are mysteries in life which we cannot yet know or understand.

One of them was shared by Dorothy Butler, OBE.

She was one of several experienced writers who helped me when I first began writing for children. I'd read *Cushla and her Books* and *Babies need Books* as well some of her fictional stories when I was studying Education as an adult student. Her bookshop in Ponsonby was a treasure house.

I first met Dorothy in the Pakuranga Mall when she was travelling around promoting the series of videos in which she was filmed reading stories to children. I bought three of those videos, and my children spent many hours watching them. I was sorry when the series was discontinued, but they led the way to more sophisticated story-sharing sessions for children on television.

Later our paths crossed at book events, and on one special occasion in 1994 our daughter Stephanie and I visited Dorothy at the home she shared with her husband Roy in Karekare, on Auckland's West Coast. I had heard how Dorothy shared her knowledge and library of books with local children, and admired her for it. A highlight of that visit was spending time in her library, and when opening a copy of *Come Back Ginger* recently I found a photograph of Dorothy in that library, taken that day.

In 1996, along with others in Storylines and the children's books community, we were both interested in the idea of establishing a national children's literature centre, similar to Dromkeen in Australia. I had recently visited Dromkeen while on a trip to Melbourne, and had been impressed with the collection of manuscripts, illustrations and informative displays. School parties of children could enjoy a feast of literature in a beautiful setting, and



Visiting Dorothy Butler's home library at Karekare with Stephanie, 1994.

the original work of writers and illustrators could be safely preserved. People who depend on creative activities to make a living often do not have the space or right conditions in their homes to store an accumulation of their work.

I happened to learn that the historic Carnegie Hall in Onehunga was vacant and that the Council was looking at ideas for its use and preservation. For many years it had been a library we visited regularly when we lived in Mangere Bridge. With its imposing façade of pillars, elegant entry and timber panelled walls, it was a beautiful setting for art and books. Having been given Council permission to borrow the keys, Dorothy and I visited the building and were delighted with its character and atmosphere. As we walked through the rooms, Dorothy reminisced:

“About 1950 I was inspired by the field of children’s literature when I bought and read Dorothy Neal White’s *About Books for Children*.” Looking around that Carnegie-sponsored former library, her eyes widened. “Would you believe it! Now I recall that Dorothy Neal White was sponsored by

the Carnegie Corporation which had paid for her to train as a librarian in America.”

2/6/96

To Dorothy for your info — Jennifer Beech.

THE CARNEGIE BUILDING

FLOOR PLAN

History of the Building

The Carnegie Building in Princes Street is a landmark in its own right. In 1909, Andrew Carnegie, wealthy industrialist and humanitarian (Carnegie Corporation of New York), agreed to donate £2,000 for a new Library building if the Onehunga Borough Council provided the site. After lengthy negotiations with the Carnegie Corporation, arrangements were finalised and the building was erected on the Military Parade Reserve for the sum of £2,675. The Library was opened to the public in 1912.

Built of brick, with cement facings in front, there are four Corinthian columns with four figureheads above, depicting the Mayor and chairman, John Rowe, Architect, John Park, Builder, W. Maud junior, and Andrew Carnegie. There is a design over the door in the form of a shield with a profile of Andrew Carnegie, underneath is a narrow ribbon with the inscription "Carnegie Free Library".

For more than fifty years this Edwardian building housed the borough's library, until it proved too small for this purpose. From the 1970's it was used by a number of community organisations, including the Citizens' Advice Bureau.

In 1975, an engineering report cast some doubt on the building's structural stability, and recommended that extensive strengthening work be carried out. Efforts from within the local community over the next ten years were not successful in raising the necessary funds, or in persuading the Council of the day to finance the work. The building seemed destined for demolition.

However, in 1987, in a controversial and split-decision the Council resolved to provide the required sum - over \$400,000 - from special funds. The work was completed in July 1988, and the building re-opened in August for use as a meeting and reception venue for public hire.

The Carnegie Building has now been classified 'B' by the Historic Places Trust, as a building worthy of permanent preservation. The Council has entered it on the Register of Notable Buildings in its proposed district planning scheme, as a statement of its importance in the local heritage.

Conference and Community Building

The facilities provided at the newly restored and renovated Carnegie Building, situated close to the heart of Onehunga, enable conferences, meetings, seminars, exhibitions, wedding ceremonies, and other small receptions to be held.

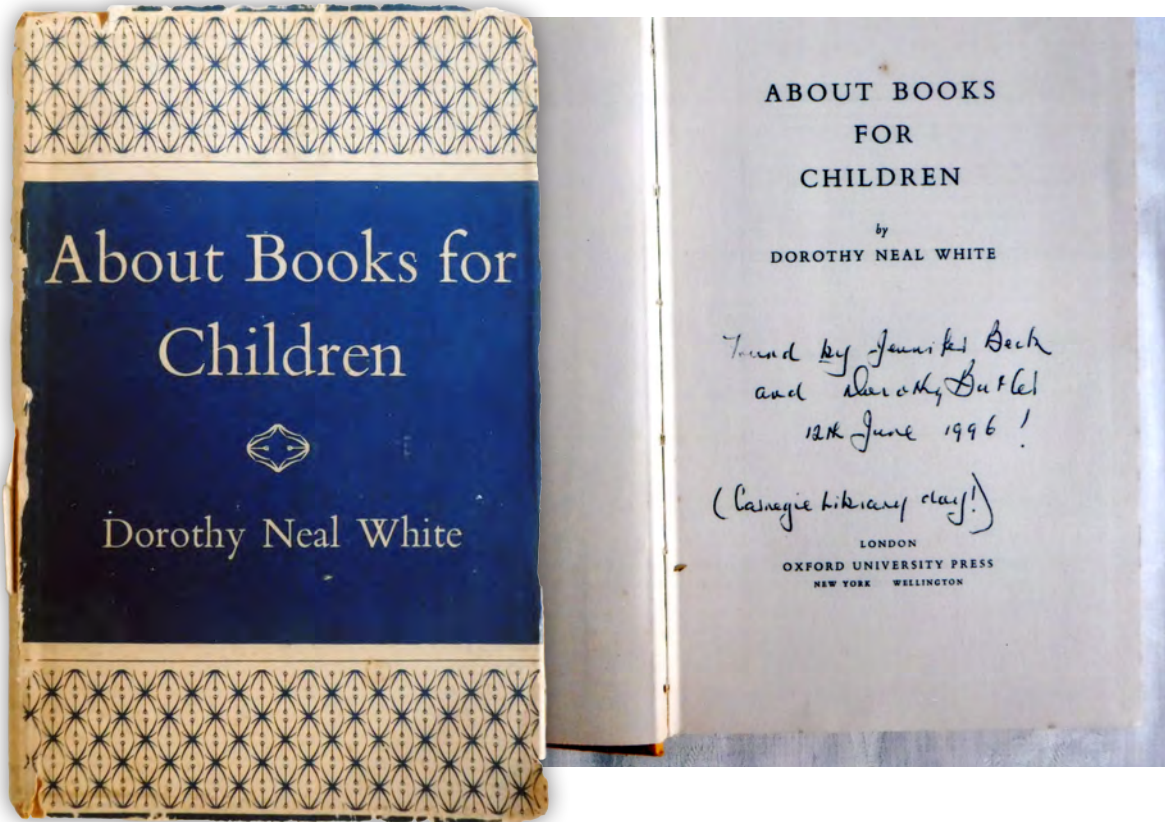
Full details of the fees and charges, as well as the building's occupancy limits set against these facilities are outlined on the enclosed information sheet.

Hirees are asked to provide for their own outside catering arrangements (including crockery and cutlery for other than small committee-type meetings).

A map overleaf shows the location of the building, and where car-parking facilities can be found within easy-walking distance.

THE CARNEGIE BUILDING

We later had lunch in Onehunga and then visited the fascinating *Hard to Find but Worth the Effort* bookshop in the main street. We browsed through the New Zealand section, children's section and rare books section, and were just about to leave when I said, "There's upstairs rooms too. You should see them." Dorothy clambered up the narrow wooden staircase without complaint, even though she had already driven from the far side of Auckland and was over seventy years of age. As I write this now, I can sympathise.



Dorothy Butler and Carnegie connection.

Suddenly, we saw it, in a dark room lined with old books. Like a highlighted face in a group portrait, the book seemed to stand out for us among the hundreds of others. There it was, a copy of *About Books for Children*, by Dorothy Neal White. Dorothy and I stared at one another. I bought the book for the modest sum of seven dollars, and she wrote in it, including the exclamation marks:

*Found by Jennifer Beck and Dorothy Butler,
12 June, 1996!
(Carnegie Library Day!)*

Although using the Carnegie Hall as a children's book centre did not eventuate, I will always have the memory of that visit.

