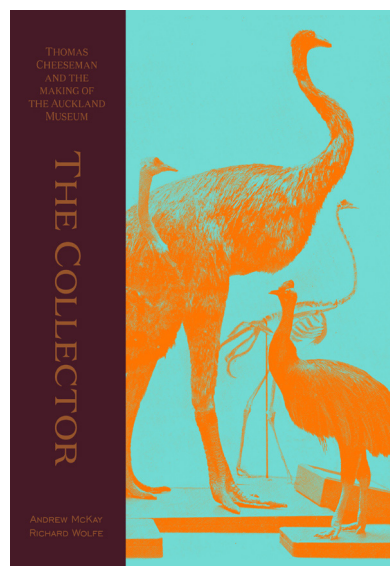


# The Collector

## *Thomas Cheeseman and the making of the Auckland Museum*

ANDREW MCKAY AND RICHARD WOLFE



\$65

CATEGORY: Biography, botany, museums

ISBN: 978-1-99-101626-3

THEMA: DNB, GLZ, PST, 1MBN

BISAC: SCI020000, SCI011000,

NAT026000, BUS100000

PUBLISHER: Massey University Press

IMPRINT: Massey University Press

PUBLISHED: November 2025

PAGE EXTENT: 320

FORMAT: Hardback

SIZE: 240 x 180mm

RIGHTS: World

AUTHORS' RESIDENCE: Tāmaki  
Makaurau Auckland, New Zealand

### THE VIVID BIOGRAPHY OF A COLONIAL SCHOLAR, SCIENTIST AND GENTLEMAN

When Thomas Cheeseman arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand in 1853 at the age of eight, the world outside knew little of this country's people, plants, animals and environment. Within weeks, he began a lifelong love of collecting and classifying, and by his early twenties he was making waves in colonial scientific circles.

Appointed the director of the Auckland Museum when it was not much more than a shed of curiosities, by sheer force of dedication he developed it into one of New Zealand's leading museums and scientific institutions. Along the way he cultivated relationships with the leading scientists of the day, including Charles Darwin and directors of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, William and Joseph Hooker. And he collected many thousands of specimens and objects, making a vital contribution to our understanding of New Zealand's natural history.

This handsome, richly illustrated book tells both his story and the story of the fine museum he founded.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Richard Wolfe** is a cultural historian and curator who has written or co-authored around 40 books on everything from the moa to New Zealand art. He was a display artist at the Auckland and Canterbury museums, and co-curated the first major exhibition of Kiwiana (a term he helped invent). Richard lives in Auckland with his wife, the artist Pamela Wolfe.

**Andrew McKay** has a Masters of Heritage Conservation from the University of Auckland and his PhD was focused on Thomas Cheeseman, the visionary founding curator of the Auckland Institute and Museum. He lives in Auckland and works in finance.

### SALES POINTS

- A vivid and accessible insight into a remarkable early scientist and museum director
- Over 100 images, including important botanical specimens and historic photographs
- Handsome design, the perfect gift

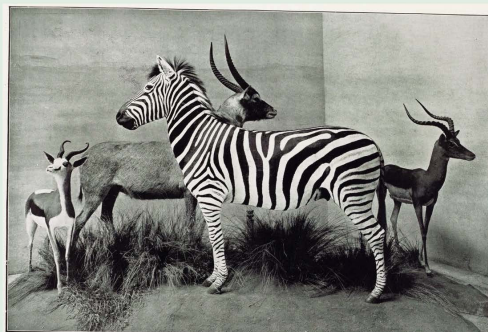
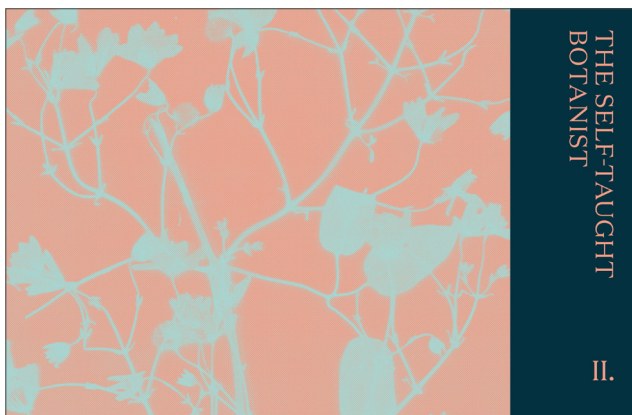
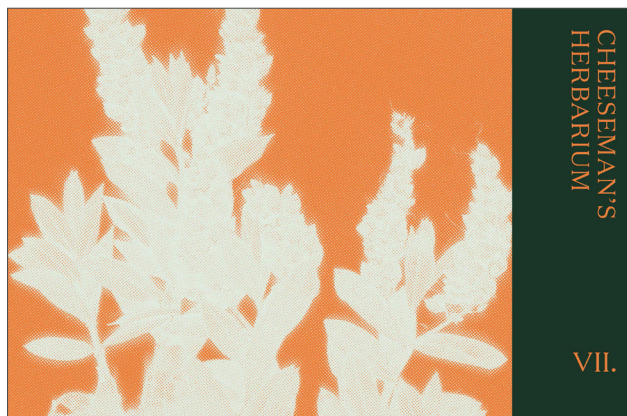
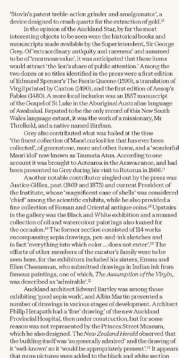
ISBN 978-1-99-101626-3



**Massey University Press**  
Albany Campus, Private Bag 102904,  
North Shore 0745, Auckland, New Zealand

**Email** editor@masseypress.ac.nz  
**Phone** +64 9 213 6886  
www.masseypress.ac.nz

**Media contact**  
Gemma Finlay, Notable PR  
**Email** gemma@notablepr.co.nz  
**Phone** 027 628 9695



native birds gifted by Mr. W. Griffiths in 1873 after 1852.

Other significant donors mentioned included the first secretary, John Alexander Smith, and the delightfully named Frederick Septimus Peppercorn. Returning to the present, it was pointed out that *new building occupied 'only a portion' of the site, suggesting future extensions would be possible. In fact, the first Cheeseman would be responsible for affecting no less than three significant additions to the original building, And as the Institute prepared for the grand opening, there was cause for optimism. Seven years earlier it had about 120 members, as the number had now grown to at least 220.<sup>18</sup>*

The *New Zealand Herald* anticipated that the opening would be a defining moment in the history of the college, the progress made in 'the development of thought and culture in this part of the colony', and represent 'a field of promise for the future advancement of scientific inquiry'. Giffen and Grey were singled out for recognition of their efforts to make the new

involvement in the 'promotion of scientific enquiry' and the latter because of his reputation for 'practical good sense and

The official opening ceremony took place as planned on the evening of 5 June, attended by upwards of 2,000 people. [30] The right to hold precisely this ceremony the Margraves of Normandy entered the building, presided by His Honour Mr. James C. Calles, current President of the Institute, and accompanied by Lady Normandy and Sir George Grey. The Auckland Star described the ceremony, which took place in presence of one of the largest gatherings it had seen inside a building in the city, as 'a triumphant crowning act'. As the official party proceeded to aulis erected at the eastern end of the hall, they were received with the 'National Anthem', played on a harmonium which was said to be the largest and most powerful instrument of its type accurately observed.<sup>31</sup>

Thomas Gillies appointed, giving a short history of the Auckland Institute. It was cheered by the audience when he expressed the hope that the Museum and Library of the Institute might one day develop into free public facilities 'equal to any thing of the sort in the Southern Seas'. In the meantime, he pointed out that the building had cost some £4,000, of which nearly £3,000 was accounted for private subscriptions, while £1,000 of the Auckland Corporation had been personally responsible for the remaining £2,000. However, he was confident the central Government would come to their aid, and thereby assist an institution 'worthy not only of the province of Auckland but of the colonist itself'.<sup>20</sup>

For his part, George Grey expressed his pleasure on entering a museum 'built by private enterprise'. He acknowledged those who had made it possible, and exhorted the community to now pledge itself to the benefit of its ability, whether by contributing funds, specimens, or delivering lectures to assist them in this 'noble task'. Finally, His Excellency the Governor spoke, recognising the growth in the 'Australian colonies of libraries, museums, and literary and scientific organisations as encouraging evidence of enlightened progress'. He was also happy to report that the example of such 'valuable' institutions, already established in Dunedin, Christchurch and Wellington, was now being followed in Auckland.

of Maseri chiefs had visited the Museum, and examined the displays. They reportedly expressed great admiration for the different weapons, especially the mere *poumava*, and the large masks displayed on the walls of the upper gallery. Some three weeks later, a local newspaper reflected on the opening on 5 June on a 'memorable epoch in Auckland for all who feel