

# New Zealand

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CHAPTER

## Founded 1976

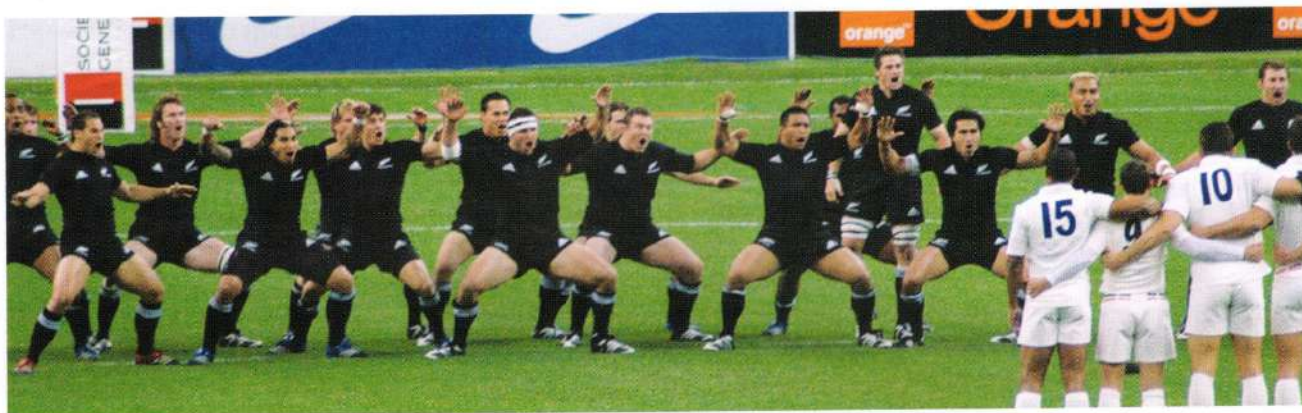
Alastair Rothwell



The New Zealand Society for Surgery of the Hand was formed on 13th November 1976 at a meeting in Auckland of 36 orthopaedic and plastic surgeons interested in hand surgery. The meeting had been convened by Mr Alan McKenzie who was elected the first President. Mr. Earle Brown was the first secretary and the other elected committee members were Messrs G Blake, J Lester, O Mehrotra and A Rothwell. Initially it was called the New Zealand Hand Club but about ten years later was changed to The New Zealand Society for Surgery of the Hand. In the early years meetings of the Society were normally "piggybacked" onto that of another group such as the New Zealand Orthopaedic Association when it had an eminent hand specialist guest lecturer.

As time passed, independent meetings of the society were held, but, increasingly, full time hand





**FIG. 1** The New Zealand "All Blacks" Rugby Team performing the haka, the traditional dance of the Maori of New Zealand.

surgeons recognized the need for a larger peer group, particularly for continuous medical education (CME) and became increasingly involved with the Australian Hand Surgery Society. After a very successful combined meeting in Queenstown in 2005, it was agreed to formalize a greater association of the two societies and in 2006 many NZ hand surgeons became corresponding members of the Australian Hand Surgery society. They regularly attend the Australian society's meetings and the expectation is that New Zealand will host regular combined conferences in rotation with the Australian state Hand societies

### Training

The New Zealand Society for Surgery of the Hand does not undertake or sponsor any formal training programmes. However, since 2005 two Hand Fellowships with the Regional Hand Service, in Auckland, (one for a plastic surgically trained and one for an orthopaedically trained surgeon) have been available. In addition there has always been a steady flow of New Zealanders receiving Hand Fellowship training in Australia. In 2010 the first Australian surgeon was selected for one of the Hand Fellowships available in NZ.



**FIG. 2** The hands of Richie McCaw, captain of New Zealand All Blacks rugby team and International Player of the Year 2009.

### Research

Throughout the 1960's through to the 1980's Mr. M Flint an academic plastic surgeon published extensively on the changes to proteoglycans, glycosaminoglycans and collagen in flexor tendons, ligaments, dermis and Dupuytren's disorder placed under varying conditions of physical stress and culture. Another area of his interest was Langer's lines which led to his "circle technique" for determining the optimal line of skin tumour excision.



In the late 1980's the Spinal Cord Injury Upper Limb Research Group was set up by Prof A Rothwell in Christchurch. It has produced a number of publications on a diverse range of topics including reconstructive arm and hand surgery, psychometric analyses of upper limb function in relation to impairment and participation before and after surgery, patterns of manual wheelchair propulsion for different spinal cord injury levels including the changes following upper limb surgery and defining the optimum working space for an individual confined to a wheelchair.

As the Fellowship program has developed in Auckland, increasing emphasis is being placed on research and audit. The Fellows are expected to be actively involved in the development and management of appropriate clinical trials.

### **The Development of Hand Surgery and National Personalities**

Although hand surgery did not become recognised as an independent specialty in New Zealand until the early 1990's many surgeons, both Orthopaedic and Plastic, prior to that time undertook acute and elective hand surgery as a major sub speciality interest. Most of them had no for-

mal Fellowship training but attended appropriate courses and visited overseas Hand units during their careers. In the Auckland region the early surgeons included Messrs W Pike, W Manchester, O Nicholson and J Williams; in the Wellington region Messrs F Hutter, C Bossley, and M Lovie; in the Canterbury region, Messrs J Lester and G Blake; and in the Otago region, Prof.N Nisbet and Mr A McKenzie.

Over the last 15 years the numbers of full or near fulltime hand surgeons have steadily increased in the major metropolitan regions as well as in some of the more provincial regions. It is noteworthy that Dr Karen Smith, a Hand surgeon in Auckland, was the first female Orthopaedic surgeon admitted to the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons.

Independent hand units for the management of acute hand injuries by orthopaedic and plastic surgeons were formed in Christchurch in the early 1980's and in Auckland in the mid 1990's. These units also function as major tertiary referral centers. The 1980s also saw the development of Hand Therapy groups encouraged by hand surgeons who recognised the vital role of therapists in hand rehabilitation.