relict of the life and work of Sir Julius von Haast, dutifully preserved, ordered and interpreted by his son; and the Gideon Mantell Collection, which, almost by chance, found its repository in Wellington.[3] Except for the occasional use of an item here and there from the collection for purposes alien to the life and work of Haast himself, the collection has been virtually ignored by scholars since its acquisition by the Library. While the Mantell Collection contains primarily materials relating to the life and work of Gideon Mantell, the English geologist, it contains also a valuable series of letters from his son Walter Mantell detailing his Moa discoveries during the 1840s and early 1850s. Both collections along with selections from the very important correspondence collection of Richard Owen principally in the General Library of the British Museum (Natural History)[4] and others help to fill out the record of the Moa's entry into the history of science.

By the time of New Zealand's precipitate initiation as a British colony, Richard Owen, Professor Owen as he was to be referred to throughout his professional career, was already a distinguished member of the scientific community. Thirty-six years old, he had been actively engaged for almost a decade in a series of researches which were laying the foundation of a new natural history, a biology which treated organic forms as living systems rather than as compendia of often superficial and always descriptive detail with only the slimmest of theory to serve as a unifying principle. A series of brilliant papers had earned him Dieffenbach's accolade as 'the most eminent comparative anatomist of the age,'[5] one of a small group of those of 'our own race . . . most distinguished or zealous in the advancement of science and the pursuit of human knowledge.'[6] And in receiving the Royal Society's Copley Medal a few years later, he was praised, with Cuvier whose mantle many thought he had inherited, as occupying an eminence in Comparative Anatomy and Palaeontology 'not reached by any other philsophers in modern times.'[7] Owen's research into the anatomy and mode of generation of the marsupials and the monotremes which grew out of his Hunterian work, stimulated a life-long interest in both the fossil and extant fauna of Australia.[8]

Owen's interest was a reflection of a national one and one which imposed a particular responsibility upon the keepers of empire. It was one in which the whole of the British public could involve itself in the discharge of its colonial responsibilities through the anticipated contributions to a universal fund of knowledge. To George Grey, about to start off on his second and ill-fated expedition up the Swan River, Owen, already in the midst of his work with Australian fossils, with the kangaroo and with the problems of generation of the still strange platypus, wrote in expectant en-