

# **Legacy in Light: The Peter Bush Collection**

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## **Abstract**

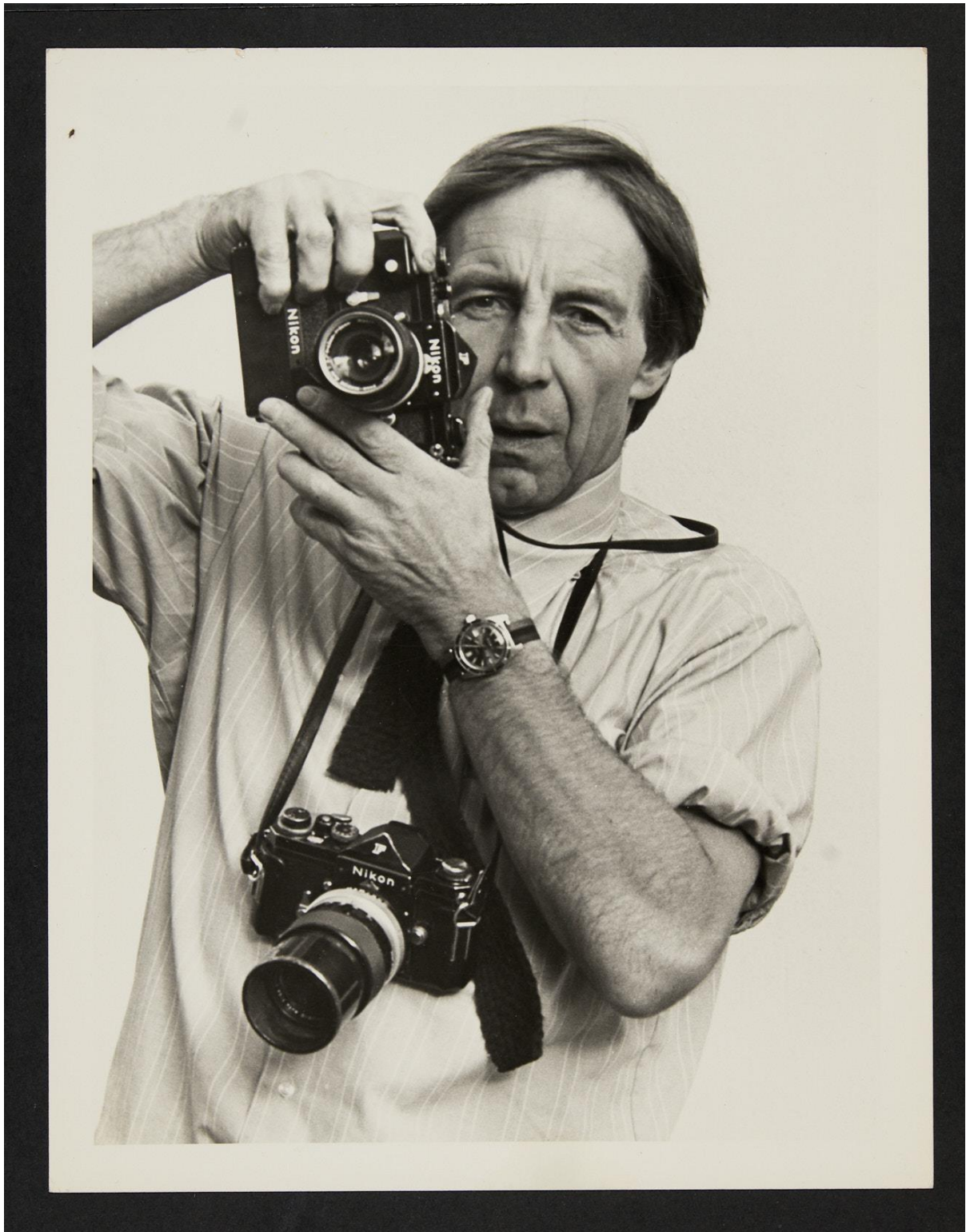
Within the heritage sector, the opportunity to incorporate a significant, standalone collection in its entirety with an existing collection rarely presents itself. The sheer size of, and topics covered by, the Peter Bush collection qualifies it as a truly unique taonga of national significance. This article details a short history of Peter Bush's life and travels, the items he collected as a prolific photographer, and the project to rehouse and begin cataloguing his life's work.

## **Introduction**

The Peter Bush Collection represents a lifetime of photography, with the images captured transforming from a day or projects work into culturally significant items through the lens of time. The Collection documents key moments on New Zealand's sporting fields, iconic historical events, natural landscapes, and provides insight into the day-to-day life of New Zealanders. Diverse, gritty and cosmopolitan, Peter seldom missed a chance to indulge his adventurous streak, a trait vividly reflected in the wide range of topics covered.

Dive into the captivating journey of Peter, an adventurous child whose early fascination with the camera blossomed into a legendary career as one of New Zealand's most extraordinary photojournalists. This article unveils how Peter's home evolved into a treasure trove of photographic history, bursting at the seams with his iconic work, and how it eventually found a new sanctuary in one of New Zealand's prestigious heritage institutions. Join us as we explore the discovery, rehousing, funding endeavours, and the dedicated team behind this monumental project. We'll also glimpse into the exciting future possibilities,

ongoing developments, and the legacy of Peter's remarkable contributions to photojournalism.



*Figure 1 - Peter Bush in portrait, and in his zone, with multiple cameras. Photograph: Unknown. Peter Bush, Collection of Te Manawa, Courtesy of the Bush Family. All Rights Reserved.*

## Early Exposure

Beneath the wide brim of a weathered hat, eyes twinkling with numerous tales untold, he stood at the crossroads of history and humanity. A raconteur by nature and adventurer that followed his heart, he roamed the farthest corners of the globe, his camera a constant companion, capturing the vibrant tapestry of life in all its forms. From searching the deepest jungles of Malaya for Communist rebels, to the sidelines of a sold-out All Blacks test match against the Springboks at Ellis Park Stadium in bustling Johannesburg, his lens has immortalised the essence of diverse cultures, the whispers of foreign lands, and the raw brutality, and beauty, of a national game. Each photograph, a story; each story, a chapter in a life lived beyond the ordinary, rich with experiences that defy the bounds of imagination.

Although this opening line appears at home on the back of a thriller novel, it is, in fact, the fitting description of a real, larger-than-life swashbuckling Kiwi legend - Peter Bush. Peter's path was set on this intrepid course during his early childhood, raised on the wild West Coast of the South Island. Born in Stanley Bay in Auckland on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1930 to Louise MacDonald, a hotel receptionist, and Maurice Henry Bush, a commercial traveller, Peter grew up in Kumara, 30 kilometres northeast of Hokitika. From a young age, Peter pursued a relatively care-free childhood with school friends in tow, egging each other on from one childhood adventure to another. A regular deer hunter with Uncle Jack, his mother's younger brother, Peter also made the local creeks and abandoned mines his home away from home. During one of these escapades in 1941, when fears of a Japanese invasion were very real, Peter and his friends discovered some gelignite and detonated it, causing a panic in Kumara.<sup>i</sup> This appears to have been a semi-regular occurrence in the region, as the *Greymouth Evening Star* reported, "Greymouth has had a series of such explosions", with this explosion coming after an article in the *Star*, "warning parents to be on the look-out for

detonators, as it was known that a considerable quantity had fallen into the hands of children...”<sup>ii</sup>

Peter was sent to Wellington to attend Star of the Sea around the age of 10 as his ruffian escapades took a toll on his mother and grandma who ran the Dundalk Pub and Hotel. He soon returned to finish his intermediate schooling on the West Coast. Post-graduation, Peter attended Sacred Heart College in Auckland as a boarder where, he cheekily stated, “my schoolwork deteriorated: I went from third in class to thirty-seventh, an extraordinary feat given that there were only 32 pupils in the class.”<sup>iii</sup> Peter enjoyed cricket and rowing, but it was at Sacred Heart that he discovered his love of rugby playing for the 1<sup>st</sup> XV. He was selected for the Auckland secondary school reps along with four others, including Keith Davis, Sacred Heart’s halfback who was later chosen as an All Black. Although Peter did not pursue rugby, rugby would pursue him for the remainder of his life.

With the pay from his first job, out in the tobacco fields of Motueka, Peter purchased his first in a very long line of cameras, a Box Brownie. With this camera he took photographs of his co-workers and the Tasman region. His first paid photojournalism position was with the *Herald* as a cadet, earning 12 shillings and six pence a week (\$70 NZD in 2024). Peter’s first big outing was with the Tararua Tramping Club on a journey over the legendary Southern Crossing, starting at Otaki Forks and ending in Kaitoke, Upper Hutt. Upon proving his worth with the speed graphic camera by capturing 36 memorable shots of the group, Peter was sent on a follow-up outing by the *Herald* to the Hollyford Track where he promptly fell down a gully, nearly ending his life. It was to be the first of numerous, adventurous close calls throughout his lifetime.

## **A Lifelong Album**

Returning from journeys that took him to Australia, South Africa, England, North America, India, and everywhere in between, Peter joined the *Truth* in Wellington in 1963.

Covering rugby, criminal justice, Page 3 models, and any manner of events in the region, he sought to settle down and bought what would become the family house (and later, *de facto* archive) in Ōwhiro Bay in 1969. Peter's lawyer friend, Shane Treadwell, tried to discourage him from purchasing the house as it was not a sought-after address. Continuing his adventurous streak, Peter went as far as to buy the house without seeing the interior, stating to the real estate agent, "yeah, this will do".<sup>iv</sup>

Later, the darkroom and office in the upstairs quarters of the house were created to process the latest assignment from one of many publications that contracted to Peter after he took redundancy from *The Truth*. Peter removed all his camera gear, negatives and office materials from Taranaki Street, where Truth ended up after Press House in Willis Street shut down. These rooms slowly became populated with developing paraphernalia (enlargers, film drying cabinets and negative cabinets) associated with physical film cameras. The move was made tougher as it coincided with the steep learning curve of converting from physical to digital film formats. Later, the rooms walls took on the look of a pop-up art gallery, replete with framed photographs, wall calendars, and the famous golden "Roving Bushy" jersey gifted to Peter by the All Blacks. Downstairs, piles of negatives from a multitude of publications were filed away in labelled cabinets as projects were completed. Tripods, cameras, bags, and all manner of photographic gear collected in the minimal free spaces left over. All this while children grew into adults, friends and neighbours passed through to visit, and life continued its inexorable journey forward.



*Figure 2 - A life lived to the full, with the items collected along the way to prove it. This is one corner of the upstairs portion of the Bush family home -boxes of prints and negatives, camera gear and work documents, in a relatively good state of reference. Photograph: Evan Greensides. All Rights Reserved.*

In amongst the boxes and ephemera collected along the path of time, a stunning array of events immortalised in film began to snowball into a taonga of national significance:

- Images of life in the army during the Malayan Emergency in 1957-58. This includes a single photograph of the infamous “Man Eating Tiger”, shot and tied to the back of a car to be sold for parts in Chinese medicine.
- The Beatles Tour of New Zealand, 1964 (complete with an image of Ringo Starr hitting George Harrison in the head with a poi).
- The visit of Lyndon Johnson in 1966 to shore up support for the War in Vietnam, the first President of the United States to visit New Zealand.

- The only known colour photographs of the sinking of the *Wahine*, its survivors and the aftermath, in 1968.
- The 1975 hīkoi to protest the continuing loss of Māori land.
- The 1983 British and Irish Lions tour of New Zealand, where the visitors lost all four games against the All Blacks.
- 1995 Rugby World Cup held in South Africa, culminating in the epic final game between the hosts and the All Blacks.



*Figure 3 - The Beatles step off a Tasman Empire Airways Limited (TEAL) flight and are adorned with oversized plastic tiki and greeted by Te Pataka Concert Party. Ringo Starr finds it hilarious to swing a poi at his bandmate, George Harrison. Photograph: Peter Bush. Beatles Tour of New Zealand, 1964, Collection of Te Manawa, Courtesy of the Bush Family. All Rights Reserved.*

Peter never went without his camera, and the various personalities, topics and events he captured prove it. The family used to joke the only exception to that was when he went to the bathroom. As the archival team at Te Manawa are still in the process of identifying and flagging more topics and gems of significance, this joke rings true.

Throughout his working life, Peter lived with a single goal in mind: capturing the image. This was a mantra also applied to capturing the time he spent with his growing family: portrait shots of a 3-year-old Trinette on the front steps of a house; camping amongst the forest at Butterfly Creek in Eastbourne; an entire roll of film dedicated to capturing the majesty of Fin, the family Labrador. It is these special moments, forever locked in black and white, that show the depth of skill Peter was able to elicit from his talents.

### **A New Home, with a Side of Funding**

Nearing 92 years old, with his Collection taking up the entirety of the upstairs portion of the family house, Peter and the Bush family made the decision to have Peter's lifework rehoused with an acceptable heritage institution that could ensure permanent care and access. The Bush Family thus set off on a long and arduous journey, full of its own setbacks and victories.

The first hurdle encountered was securing a new, permanent home, capable of storing and conducting the necessary archival work for the Collection. The Bush Family reached out to several institutions, including the Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL) and Te Papa. The ATL participated in funding submissions and showed interest in accommodating the Collection at their Wellington facility. Despite these initial discussions, the plans were unable to materialise. Similarly, outreach to Auckland Libraries was considered, but concerns over potential storage costs and resource limitations led to this option being unfeasible. Over his lifetime, Peter fielded requests from individuals to purchase the Collection, though, as many were overseas,



these were denied as the priority was for it to remain, in its entirety, within Aotearoa. The Bush Family also explored the option of a public/private association, using the Ans Westra Collection partnership between David Alsop and ATL as an example.<sup>v</sup>



*Figure 4 - Photograph: Peter Bush. Lady Diana Spencer, Princess of Wales, meets the locals on a Royal Tour of New Zealand, 1983. Collection of Te Manawa, Courtesy of the Bush Family. All Rights Reserved.*

The second hurdle was securing funding to commence cataloguing work with the Collection. Two applications were sent to Creative New Zealand via Arts Grants 2021/22, rounds 5 and 6. Although positive feedback was received and encouragement was received to re-apply, funding was unsuccessful on the second try. The primary concern for Creative New Zealand was that the collection was not aligned to an organisation, and that the Collection was largely unquantified and lacking descriptive information.<sup>vi</sup>

Thus began a Catch-22 scenario: without funding, institutions would not entertain storing the Collection and starting archival work; with no permanent storage commitment from an institution, funding could not be secured.

## Getting a Leg Up

While in talks with ATL, Rachel Bush noted that the solution to the problem was the completion of a discovery project. Peter's Collection, in its uncatalogued state, was relatively inaccessible and of an unknown quantity and quality for any suitable institution to acquire.

On 22 November 2022, Rachel was interviewed on Radio New Zealand's *Nine to Noon* show by Kathryn Ryan under the title, *Efforts to preserve photographer Peter Bush's life's work*.<sup>viii</sup> During the interview, Rachel outlined the rugby and social history events covered by her father, the challenges encountered to secure funding and a new home, and the importance of the Collection to New Zealand. At the very end of the interview, Rachel went for the heritage sector equivalent of the long-distance drop goal – asking for assistance with funding, and an archivist with free time and resources.

It was Te Manawa Museum of Art, Science & Heritage, in partnership with the New Zealand Rugby Museum, that were able to answer the call of The Bush Family and offer the collection a potential home in Palmerston North. Following a conversation with Te Manawa's Chief Executive Susanna Shadbolt, a collaborative effort was initiated. This included conducting a discovery report to evaluate the feasibility of housing the Collection, securing necessary funding, and embarking on the extensive process of organising, rehousing, and digitising close to 300,000 images – the heritage sector equivalent of 3 points.

With a potential solution to the first hurdle of a new home now in motion, the second hurdle of funding had been partially cleared at the same time. Focusing on the funding aspect as a matter of priority, and with Creative NZ no longer an option after two passed-in applications, the Bush Family made the decision to forgo the charity route and apply directly to grants in relevant sectors. In December 2022, the Bush Family secured funding of \$50,000 from the [Peter M Acland Foundation](#). The ball was now truly in play.



*Figure 5 - Photograph: Peter Bush. All Blacks versus South Africa, N.D., Collection of Te Manawa, Courtesy of the Bush Family.*

## **‘The Bushies’**

With initial funding now secured, the discovery report was on track to be completed by April 2023. The bulk of the Acland Foundation grant money would be used to employ a full-time Archivist, with support from Te Manawa staff to re-house and transfer the collection, erect minimum archival standard shelving in an environmentally controlled storage area, organise the collection into broad topic areas, and to catalogue and describe each of the collection’s subsets. It was envisaged that any images discovered during this process deemed to have exhibition, commercial or public interest value would be flagged and digitised, then made available for broader public consumption.

A fourth and final funding application was made in August 2023 for up to \$450,000 to the Lottery Grants Board, Lottery Environment and Heritage Fund, with amendments made according to previous guidance that only collections that were in an institution’s possession could be funded.<sup>viii ix</sup> Over two days in early August, a team made up of Talei Langley, Cindy Lilburn, Clive Akers and Mike Parkinson Te Manawa and the New Zealand Rugby Museum travelled south to the Bush Family home in Ōwhiro Bay to transition the Peter Bush Collection to its new home in Papaioea to check off this funding requirement. In a flurry of activity, items were wrapped and reboxed, skeletal spreadsheets of information created, and multiple van trips made. A third day trip with Talei and Stephen Berg, Director of the New Zealand Rugby Museum, was completed to make final decisions about 3D objects and ephemera to include in the Collection. As Lotteries would not consider funding without Te Manawa having ownership of the Collection, Te Manawa made a high-risk leap of faith by transferring the collection, accessioning it, and submitting to Lotteries later.

On 9<sup>th</sup> November a final decision was received – Lottery Environment and Heritage (LEH) noted that the funding request now aligned with Lottery Grants Board outcomes and the Committee’s priorities and funding criteria. Even in the face of high demand and

significantly less Government funding than previous years, all the funding requested by Te Manawa was granted. LEH priority was aimed at funding one year of the project, for upgrading storage facilities, forming a project team, arrangement and description, and a digitisation project. <sup>x</sup>

With an enlarged funding pool now in hand, plans and budgets were revised for a project team to be assembled. Juliet Galuszka, (Te Manawa Collections Manager), would be seconded to the project as an Archivist, and a job advertisement seeking a new archivist position was placed, with Eleya Rider, an Archival Intern from Christchurch Art Gallery, accepting the role. I was offered, and eagerly accepted, the role of Peter Bush Project Manager. A room on the second floor of Te Manawa was converted to a multipurpose storage/working area, complete with environmental controls, workstations and digitisation equipment. After crafting a project strategy, adoption of best-practice guidelines, and standard operating procedures (SOPs), and learning each other's subject interests, each team member picked up their first box and dug in - 'The Bushies' were in play.

### ***Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua***

While the project has moved from infancy to walking on its own, we are now hitting a running pace. The initial groundwork laid by Te Manawa's movement team, and the relative original order of Peter's material, have enabled the Team to make discoveries and achieve early successes. These discoveries include a set of personal letters, caricature and photographs from Carmen Rupe to Peter; the 1967 visit of South Korean Vice-President, Nguyen Cao Ky, and his wife, Dan Tuyet Mai, to New Zealand; and a multitude of portraiture shots of New Zealand personalities and political figures. To the end of June 2024, over 6000 items have been catalogued and over 500 individual images digitised.

It is an understatement that the images Peter captured of individual rugby players that formed All Blacks, regional and local rugby teams will add significantly to the historical record of the game. The New Zealand Rugby Museum volunteers, with their photographic memories and eye for detail, are amazing at identifying individuals, matches and subject matter the project team are unsure or unaware of. Of note, Peter's skill as a photographer of any subject he captured have been undervalued. His images have an artistic quality that, as an individual ignorant of the intricacies of rugby, I can appreciate. His images are iconic because his compositional instinct and skills matched, or exceeded, the significance of the sporting moments he captured.

While our sight is firmly set on securing the past and making it accessible and digital, we walk forward into the future with optimism, ready to seize the opportunities the Collection offers:

- Te Manawa and New Zealand Rugby Museum's [Rugby Jamboree](#) generated great interest in the Peter Bush Collection through talks, tours and a silent auction. This initial success has led to development of the official Peter Bush Launch Event, scheduled for Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> August 2024, with items donated by ex-All Black Captain Dan Carter.
- We are working with the team at [Digital NZ](#) to upgrade Te Manawa's [Collection Search](#) API to make available the digital records and images the project team creates.
- A dedicated [landing page for the Peter Bush Archive](#) has been created to host ongoing social media, blogs and project developments to keep members up to date.
- As we seek to complete the arrangement and description and digitisation of the Peter Bush Collection in full, we will continue to apply for funding opportunities as they arise.
- The [New Zealand Memory of the World Programme](#) seeks to recognise items of recorded heritage which have national significance. Initial discussions have been

positive, and we will apply for the Peter Bush Collection to be added to the list once arrangement description is at an advanced stage.

Sadly, Peter Bush passed away on 16 December 2023. Peter's daughter, Rachel, reflecting on her father's passing, stated:

My father was a powerful life force. A man teeming with energy, adventure and laughter. A self-made professional with a relentless passion for capturing the perfect moment. A lover of the outdoors, a hater of bureaucracy, an epic storyteller and a friend and mentor to so many.<sup>xi</sup>

As kaitiaki of Peter's taonga, the Bushies, Te Manawa and the New Zealand Rugby Museum will keep Peter's legend and mana safe for eternity.



*Figure 6 - Peter Bush (second from right) at his Island Bay home with (from left): Peter Bush Project Manager Evan Greensides; Te Manawa Chief Executive Susanna Shadbolt; Rachel Bush, Peter's daughter; New Zealand Rugby Museum Director Stephen Berg.*

**You can keep up to date with the latest news, events and developments on the Peter Bush Collection via <https://www.teamanawa.co.nz/category/peter-bush/> All donations to progress work on the Peter Bush Collection are gratefully accepted by Te Manawa.**

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<sup>i</sup> A Life in Focus, page 12

<sup>ii</sup> Papers Past – Greymouth Evening Star. 17 January 1941, page 6.

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/GEST19410117.2.25>

<sup>iii</sup> A Life in Focus, page 19

<sup>iv</sup> A Life in Focus, page 234

<sup>v</sup>Ryan, Kathryn. “A Living Museum for Ans Westra.” Radio New Zealand, April 19, 2016.

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/ninetoon/audio/201797756/a-living-museum-for-ans-westra>.

<sup>vi</sup> Email from Creative New Zealand to Rachel Bush. 23 June 2022.

<sup>vii</sup>Ryan, Kathryn. “Efforts to Preserve Photographer Peter Bush’s Life’s Work.” Radio New Zealand, November 21, 2022. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/ninetoon/audio/2018868063/efforts-to-preserve-photographer-peter-bush-s-life-s-work>.

<sup>viii</sup> Te Manawa Museums Trust Board meeting. Thursday, 17 August 2023 (page 11)

<sup>ix</sup> Te Manawa Museums Trust Board meeting. Thursday, 20 July 2023 (page 9)

<sup>x</sup> Email from Lottery Environment and Heritage to Susanna Shadbolt. 9<sup>th</sup> November 2023.

<sup>xi</sup> “Photographer Peter Bush Dies Aged 93.” Radio New Zealand, December 16, 2023.

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/504925/photographer-peter-bush-dies-aged-93>.