

This small portrait was painted by the artist for her sister's fiancé, Will Field. It was the subject of an extensive correspondence, some of which bears on the dating of the portrait and incidentally throws light on the artist's working methods and disposition at the time. Soon after receiving the gift, Will wrote to Isabel, *Touching that picture..... I meant to have asked you when writing last how long Fannie was occupied on it. I noticed she dates it 1891, & so I suppose the dear little soul has been pegging away at it for months & all for my undeserving self.....* To this Isabel replied, *Fannie desires me to thank you for reminding her that it is 1892 & not 91 as she thought; Fan persists in leading such a very anchorites (if there is such a word) life utterly oblivious of dates, & you have rudely awakened her to the fact that the world is a year older than she thought the picture took about a week altogether to paint. She is most anxious that you should understand that it is not a case of cold meat hashed up & she has not been lagging away at it for the last 12 months.* Will then wrote, *I was a little relieved to discover that Fannie had not been occupied over that portrait for a period running into two different years. I should like to alter that 1 into 2. I suppose it can be done.*

Evidently the change was never made.

Text from p. 124 *Works of Frances Hodgkins in New Zealand*, E H McCormick, Auckland Art Gallery, 1954

Late in 1891 Isabel went to Wellington to spend a holiday with Miss Holmes of the Dunedin Art Club who now lived in the capital. There she met a young lawyer, William Hughes Field, and by the time she returned home early in February 1892 they had agreed to marry. 'Will' Field, as he was called by the Hodgkinses (who thus distinguished him from W M and Willie), travelled to Dunedin later that month to act as best man at a friend's wedding. During his stay he was introduced to Isabel's family and their engagement was announced. The meeting is commemorated in a photograph taken in the grounds of Cranmore Lodge. It must have been one of Isabel's off days. She stands behind her parents, awkwardly posed and unbecomingly dressed. The most relaxed and attractive figures in the group are Fanny and Will, both seated on the ground. They could easily be taken for the engaged couple.

At their first meeting they had indeed become firm friends and Will left with a promise from *the dear little girl* that she would paint him a likeness of his fiancée. When a few weeks later he received a small portrait of Isabel,

he found difficulty in expressing his gratitude for *the lovely picture*. 'I at once give up all thought of finding adequate words,' he wrote, & *simply say. Fanny, that I do truly & earnestly thank you from the bottom of my heart.*'

He went on to encourage the young artist with words discerning praise: *I trust that you will persevere in this kind of work, for if you do there must surely be a brilliant future before you.*

Text from p. 17 *Portrait of Frances Hodgkins*, E H McCormick, press, 1981, 1982, 1990

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