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John Davis: builder, contractor and borough councillor

By Brian Davis

John Davis
Photo supplied by Brian Davis

September 24, 1886, saw London born carpenter and joiner John Davis, his wife Florence and young children Ivo and Win embark on the New Zealand Shipping Company's *Tongariro* with a steerage passage booked for Auckland. He was to become a prominent builder and contractor and a foundation borough councillor in Mount Eden.

John was born in 1856 in Kentish Town, south-east of Hampstead Heath. Later he and his older sister Julia moved with their mother Sarah to Hammersmith. Sarah worked as a laundress and when he was eight she was able to send him to Latymer Foundation School in Hammersmith. The school had been founded under the will of Edward Latymer in the seventeenth century for the education of poor boys of Hammersmith. John was working as an errand boy in 1871 but by 1881 had left home and was boarding with a family in Hammersmith, listing his occupation as 'carpenter'. He had met Florence, eldest daughter of James Holloway, a fitter and turner born in Trowbridge in Wiltshire. John and Florence were married on 9 August that year and moved to Acton Green before the birth of their first child Ivo. Later they moved to Stamford Hill, Edmonton, where daughter Win was born in October 1885.

Building career

In 1886 John and Florence decided to emigrate to New Zealand, arriving in Auckland in November with Win. Sadly Ivo had died on the voyage. They soon settled in Mount Eden and John began his building career, starting, probably, with houses of which he was to build a good number during his lifetime. John Davis very soon came to some public notice when concerns were expressed that architect Thomas Mahoney specified Baltic pine for the doors and sashes of the new Custom House in Auckland. Many builders

asked why the native kauri could not be used; in March 1887 John wrote a very detailed letter to the *Auckland Star* setting out the qualities of well-seasoned kauri versus imported Baltic pine. He was noted as present, too, at a meeting of the Auckland Builders' Association. His address for the letter was given as Stoneyhurst, Mount Eden, which led me to write the article on this subdivision in the 2014 *Prospect*. By 1888 the family was living in Wynyard Road on the corner of Sunnyside Road (later the northern arm of Edenvale Crescent), no. 22 when street numbers were introduced. They would live there until they moved to Takapuna in 1917.

John Davis continued his career constructing commercial buildings, schools, post offices and hospitals. In an era when the local newspapers the *New Zealand Herald* and the *Auckland Star* regularly published the results of tenders for public buildings his career can be traced in some detail.

His first recorded, but unsuccessful, tender was for the fencing of the Mount Eden Reservoir in October 1887. His first successful ones were to the Auckland Board of Education for schools and school buildings in October 1890, although at the same time he was probably building houses in and around Mount Eden for himself and clients. He continued to tender for a variety of public works through the last decade of the nineteenth century. The smallest was one for £13 5s for 'miscellaneous repairs' for the Education Board; a good number were for schools and school buildings priced usually in the range £100–£500. He quoted for jobs around Auckland, in Northland near Dargaville, in the Waikato at Te Pahi and on the goldfields at Te Aroha. Over these years something like one in three of his tenders was accepted. He carried out some small jobs for the Hospital and Charitable Aid Board and from them came his first big job. His tender of £4,786 for the construction of a new children's hospital was signed on 14 April 1898. Mr Edward Costley had bequeathed £12,150 to the Auckland Hospital so the decision was made to name the new building the Children's Costley Wards. Mr Stichbury, the board chairman, laid the foundation stone in July, noting that the contractor, Mr John Davis, was 'doing his work well'. The building was opened at the end of November by the Governor, Lord Ranfurly. It was a two storey building 'constructed of yellow and red pressed bricks pointed with black' with verandahs on two sides and on the front. The year 1900 saw John Davis carry out significant enlargements to a hotel in Warkworth. The building is still an attractive feature in the town but is no longer used as a hotel. A bigger job was the construction of two houses on the corner of Grafton Road and Symonds Street for the Grammar School Board; these

New children's hospital and convalescent home
Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries,
(Weekly News) AWNS-18981209-4-2

were probably on the southern corner close to the Boys' Grammar School. His price of £2,750 was the lowest of thirteen tenders.

The South African War focused attention on the need for training the militia; John Davis was the successful tenderer for a new Volunteer Drill Hall in Rutland Street on the corner with Wellesley Street East. The building was said to have 'no claims to ornate architecture' but was 'a good plain substantial structure adequate to the requirements of an important volunteer centre like Auckland'. Mr Davis's tender was accepted in January 1902 and the building was opened by the Premier in late October. 'The building work,' said the *New Zealand Herald* was 'most satisfactorily and faithfully carried out.' Mr Seddon had just returned after representing New Zealand at Edward VII's coronation and attending a meeting of Colonial Premiers.[1] Those undergoing medical examinations for compulsory military training in the 1950s will recall the Drill Hall. It was demolished around 1969 and the land used for extensions to the Auckland Technical Institute.

In 1900 the Anglican Diocesan Synod agreed to raise funds to establish a boarding school in Auckland for Maori girls. In the following year, on Queen Victoria's death, it was agreed that the school be named in

her memory. A site in Glanville Terrace, Parnell, was chosen and plans prepared by the Diocesan architect Edward Bartley. John Davis's tender of £2,131 was accepted in September 1902 and the building opened in the following May by the Governor Lord Ranfurly with an address by the recently consecrated Bishop Neligan.

The main building of Queen Victoria School in 2016; the chapel to the right and an office annex were added mid-century

Photo: *The Hobson*, April 2016, page 11

In February 1907 the *New Zealand Herald* noted the large amount of building and construction work being undertaken in Auckland. Many architects, it said, 'were at their wits end to know how to get through the large amount of work entrusted to them'. Building work along with harbour improvements and the duplication of the Auckland–Penrose railway ensured that 'all classes of labour were fully employed'. This was not a boom, said the newspaper, but a true index of the prosperity of the city and district, listing a number of major building works under way or planned. One of these was the Auckland Girls' Grammar School and it was for this major building and in this busy period in Auckland's history that John Davis had just submitted his tender.

The construction of the Auckland Girls' Grammar School building in Howe Street was the biggest of John Davis's career but one which, eventually, came at a significant financial loss. A long-delayed decision to build a permanent home for the school ended when the necessary legislation was passed in October 1906. Although many on the Grammar School Board did not consider the site ideal, tenders were duly called for

by the joint architects, Goldsbro' and Wade and W.A. Cumming, closing on Monday 13 February 1907. Eight tenders were received with the lowest submitted by John Davis for £13,930 being accepted. The architects' estimate had been £12,150 but Mr Wade informed the board that in view of all the circumstances 'the estimate was a very accurate one'. The next lowest tender was for £15,460, the highest for £17,407. Nine months was allowed for completion. The *Auckland Star* said that the plans provided for a very handsome two storey brick building, 127 ft. by 93 ft. facing the harbour on its northern side and Western Park on the west.

Mr Henry Middleton was appointed clerk of works at the end of March and building got under way. In July however Mr Davis had to write to the architects describing the difficulty he was having in obtaining sufficient red bricks. Again in late October he wrote that he and Mr Middleton had been down at the boat but the small number of bricks on board all went to the Blind Institute job. No sign of these troubles was evident in the wide coverage given to the laying of the foundation stone in December of that year. The Hon. George Fowlds had taken on the post of Minister of Education on Richard Seddon's death in 1906. In that role he spoke at the ceremony and stated that, when completed, it would be the most

Auckland Girls' Grammar School
Photo: Brian Davis, 2016

commodious and best equipped school of its kind in the Dominion. The paper gave further details of the building noting that much of the interior was constructed in reinforced concrete as a precaution against fire.

In August 1908 the *New Zealand Herald* reported that the building was progressing well although delays in obtaining some building materials and the torrential rains of the previous year 'had retarded operations considerably' but that the contractor hoped to complete the task by the end of September. Difficulties continued and Mr Davis wrote again to the board in that month reporting that the building was almost completed but he sought an advance on the 25% that had been retained as required by law. While the architects were supportive in regard to the facts of the delays they could not recommend any deviation from the contract and the board continued to hold a firm line. A further letter in October referring to the 'great scarcity of plasterers' again received no practical sympathy from the board.

The new school opened in April 1909 with Mr Fowlds again in an official role. The board chairman, Sir Maurice O'Rorke, spoke of the value of higher education for girls noting that in this country they could have degrees conferred, an advantage not available to their sisters in England. Mr Fowlds spoke of the large amount of government money going into secondary education, almost trebling from the 1903–4 year to the 1907–8 year; this was to a large extent the result of the free place system.[2] In 1904 there were 142 free pupils in the Auckland Province and in 1908 there were 513. Mr C.J. Parr, chairman of the Board of Education, also spoke. Touching on examinations, he said he believed that competition between the sexes for scholarships should be done away with, 'so that the strain on the weaker sex would not be so great'.

The strain on John Davis, however, continued. In early May he wrote at some length to the board noting that his tender was some £1,500 lower than any other which could be accounted for by his 'underestimating the cost of several large items'. He referred also to the wet winter of 1907, the fact that the site was 'made ground'[3] necessitating some foundation work being done two or even three times, the trouble in obtaining red facing bricks and finally an increase in wages that the Arbitration Court had awarded the carpenters' union. He stated that he faced a loss of £570. The architects wrote a covering letter accepting the facts of the case; they noted that although the contract time had been extended by six months because of unavoidable delays this had been exceeded by a further six months. They

were however able to assure the board that the 'work has been well done, and the Board have more than value for the cost of Building'. The board was unmoved and informed Mr Davis that it could not accede to a request for further payment. Family lore has it that as a result of this loss he had to sell some valuable land in the vicinity of Victoria Avenue, Remuera.

John Davis's next, and apparently final, two public buildings were both on Auckland's North Shore. School rolls had been growing and in July 1912 the chief inspector E.K. Mulgan (writer Alan Mulgan's father) recommended the construction of a new school at Belmont. When tenders were called, John Davis's, at £1,978, was the lowest but the board's architect John Farrell decided that this was too high; construction was to be delayed until Mr Davis could be consulted. His price of £1,748 'as per amended plans and specifications' was duly accepted in March 1913. The school was to consist of three classrooms totalling 1,800 sq. ft. with a room for the headmaster, Mr Rupert Harrison, and a teachers' room. Construction proceeded well and the school was opened on 25 August 1913 by Alex Harris, MP for Waitemata. The school proved very popular and within a few years more classrooms were added. The writer attended this school in the years 1940–44. It was demolished in 1978 because the rooms were too large for the now smaller classes, they were difficult to heat, and the building was considered an earthquake risk.

John Davis's final public building was a new post office for Takapuna. A site about half a mile from the business centre of Takapuna had been chosen in 1911 for a new post office but when word got out there were extensive protests with a petition to Parliament in 1912 signed by a large number of residents and almost unanimously supported by the newly constituted Takapuna Borough Council. The site was described as absolutely unsuitable on account of its distance from the central Hall's Corner. The government stood firm however and tenders were called in September 1913. John Davis's tender of about £1,800 was successful. Work began on 3 November 1913 and the building was opened in May 1914. The two storey post office was 'of wood in the early English style, finished externally with rough cast plaster'. The ground floor area of about 1000 sq.ft. was for post and telegraph business and the postmaster and his family were accommodated upstairs.

The last major building in Davis's career was a two storey wooden home in Takapuna. The family had stayed in a bach at Milford in their summer holidays and, as noted above, John had undertaken two significant jobs in the area. Begun in about 1914 it was planned for a client, but when he could

Tiro Nui
Brian Davis, 2016

not pay, John and Florence Davis and their six children moved over from Mount Eden to no. 8 Bayview Road, *Tiro Nui*, in the summer of 1916–17. On the ground floor the house had a sitting room, dining room, a kitchen with a coal range which served as an everyday dining room and a large scullery. The downstairs toilet was outside in the wash house. Upstairs were four bedrooms, a bathroom and toilet. Notable were the return verandahs on two sides of the building on both levels.

Local government

From his arrival in the Colony John Davis was keen to be involved in local affairs; his letter to the newspaper concerning the timber to be used in the new Custom House was noted above. He began his foray into local government when in May 1897 the Mount Eden Road Board sought nominations for casual vacancies on the board. He was unsuccessful that year and fared no better at the regular elections a year later, nor for two casual vacancies in 1899. When Mount Eden became a borough in September 1906, electing three councillors from each of four wards, Davis's electoral prospects improved and he was chosen from seven candidates to represent no. 1 ward at the northern end of the borough**.** He represented the no. 1 ward on the council until 1919 when, having moved to Takapuna, he stood unsuccessfully for election in Mount Eden. Despite his disputatious character he clearly had a following in the borough, topping

the poll for no. 1 ward in 1909. Later that year he was at odds with his fellow councillors who with the mayor, Oliver Nicholson, sought to raise £52,000 to pay off existing loans and undertake the metalling and forming of roads. In particular Mr Davis believed that the council's hope of raising money from the government was 'mere bluff'. His action in speaking out against the majority view at public meetings met with criticism from all his fellow councillors. The mayor moved a vote of censure. "Pass your vote of censure," Davis said, "it does not worry me. I know I am in the right." The motion was passed. A week later at a well-attended meeting of the Ratepayers' Association Mr Davis offered to give £10 to a good cause if the council did, in fact, raise the money in this way. He duly handed over a cheque for the Salvation Army and when the meeting ended 'cheers were heartily given for Mr Davis'. Over five years later (!) when Mr Nicholson was defending his position, another councillor (David Meikle) claimed that the money had been successfully raised from the government and that Mr Davis had not handed over the £10. John Davis issued an immediate threat of legal action against Mr Meikle. "You did it hard, Johnnie!" shouted a voice from the floor; Mr Meikle apologised.

Mount Eden Borough Councillors, 1907
John Davis is almost certainly the short gentleman on the right
Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries. NZG-9171019-15-4

Davis failed to get on to the council in the 1913 elections, not having lodged his application by the due date. He wrote an angry letter to the returning officer, claiming the advertisement giving notice of the election was ambiguous and threatening to take legal action to have the election result declared void. A week later he thought better of it, realising that a new election would cost the borough financially. However he combated the mayor's statements and still felt that his reading of the advertisement was correct.

John Davis had another opportunity to challenge Oliver Nicholson, standing against him for the mayoralty in 1914. He campaigned strongly but was defeated by 1998 votes to 915. A headline in the *Auckland Star* read: ' "Time will tell"; this was the significant prophecy of Mr Davis, the defeated candidate.' Oliver Nicholson was returned for another term in 1916 but the *Star's* headline passed into family lore.

Davis was back in the news in the borough in 1915. The council planned to raise a loan of £135,000, mainly for drainage works, but this was defeated by a poll of ratepayers. Opponents had included the indefatigable John Davis who continued and even increased his dissent when the mayor and council decided to hold a second poll only six weeks later. A correspondent in the *Auckland Star* wrote that the matter did not turn 'on the personal feelings of Messrs. Davis and Nicholson . . . . Great credit is due to Mr Davis for his campaigning work'.

John Davis often seemed ready to take up a cause or to find fault with the mayor and other councillors. To use a phrase more common in that era he was often 'agin the government'. Personal animosity towards Oliver Nicholson may have accounted for some of his outbursts. Most important for Davis was due care with the borough's finances and in the 1915 loan case he called a meeting to set up a Ratepayers and Electors Association where he was elected chairman. In the 1917 council elections the association spoke of the need for economy, for the 'lowest possible rating' consistent with the borough's needs and no more loans during the war. The association's mayoral candidate, school teacher and inspector Ralph Stewart, was unsuccessful against Oliver Nicholson but he was, with Davis, elected to the council.

John Davis was a regular attendee at council meetings and doubtless worked diligently on committees, but controversy and dissension makes for good headlines. Through the war years, press reports of Mount Eden Borough Council meetings did not lack for comments like the following:

'Mr Davis alone dissenting'; 'Messrs Stewart and Davis dissenting'; 'Mr Davis strongly opposed the resolution'; 'both resolutions were passed, Mr J Davis objecting'; 'An argument took place between the Mayor and Cr Davis regarding the latter's fence'; 'a formal protest was made by Mr Davis'; 'several members of the Council spoke in favour of the motion but Mr J Davis strongly opposed it'. A motion concerning council processes in 1916 was opposed by Mr Stewart with Davis seconding the motion. They were the only ones to vote in favour.

In 1916, with the introduction of conscription, John Davis moved that Mount Eden's Roll of Honour should contain only the names of those who volunteered and not those conscripted. Oliver Nicholson seconded the motion and spoke in its favour but after extensive discussion the majority voted against it. The fact that two sons, Stan and Alan Davis, were then serving in France as volunteers was not mentioned, at least in press reports. The mayor was, later in the war, to move a vote of sympathy when Lieut. S. J. Davis was gassed and wounded at Messines.

John Davis never aspired to enter politics at the national level but he was a keen supporter of the Hon George Fowlds, the member for Grey Lynn. In 1908 when Oliver Nicholson was opposing Mr Fowlds, John Davis found an opportunity to confront his adversary and was an enthusiastic Fowlds supporter. He was a member of his Mount Eden committee and was prepared to stand on the stage and assert that Mr Fowlds' opponent was 'not in the same street'. He gave Fowlds strong public support, chairing his Mount Eden branch committee in the 1911 elections and speaking in his support in 1914.

Takapuna

John and Florence Davis and their family moved over to their new home in Takapuna around the summer of 1916–17. John transferred his allegiance from the Mount Eden Bowling Club to the Devonport club and Florence made links with the local Methodist Church. Takapuna had become a borough in 1914 and John was keen to become involved again with local body politics. He was on the council for only two years, 1927–29, but his argumentative character provided plenty of copy for the Auckland press.

He was elected to the committee of the Takapuna Ratepayers and Residents Association in 1920 and missed election to the council in the following year by only a few votes. He stood again in 1927 and was joined by a New Zealander of Irish extraction, John Guiniven. The two men

formed an alliance on a number of issues. Davis must have found himself in familiar territory on a number of occasions, being in a minority of two, either being the only two to vote for a resolution or the only two to oppose one. Mr Guiniven was described, in later years as 'a controversial character known to everyone. His relationship with his Council was always stormy with frequent clashes . . . .'

They were two candidates supported by the Ratepayers' Association whose manifesto sounds similar to the sentiments Davis had been promoting in Mount Eden:

> The association's candidates desired to make it clear that they did not wish to delude the ratepayers with extravagant promises, nor did they wish to gain control of local government for selfish or parochial ends. They had been induced to seek election for no other reason beyond the fact 'that it has become obvious that the domination of the council by sectional interests must cease, and that an end must be put to the wasteful expenditure and mischievous schemes which have characterised local government in Takapuna during the past two years . . . very large sums of loan money had been spent, but nothing had been finished.'

John Davis was open to speaking out on matters, great and small, of concern to him; newspaper reporters were ready to take note. Not long after he joined the council the *Auckland Star* reported:

> Not a few smiles were seen at a meeting of the Takapuna Borough Council last evening when one of the members (Mr J Davis) asked the assistant engineer if he would deny that he was driving two ladies around the back of the lake in the borough motor car on Monday last. In reply, the officer reported that such was the case, but that he was on borough business at the time. The two ladies, he added, were very young ladies, in fact only 'school kiddies,' to whom he was giving a lift.

At the next month's meeting he was expressing a familiar refrain: the council's 'inability to economise'. . .

> Mr J Davis tendered his resignation as member of the works committee at last night's meeting of the Takapuna Borough Council . . . Surprise was expressed by several councillors at Mr Davis' action. The latter said he failed to see where the present council had carried

> out its intention to economise . . . . His step had been taken out of a sense of duty, and in order that he would be able to absolve himself from blame when the ratepayers had to be faced.

At a later meeting he was back on the theme of economy; the *Auckland Star* was always ready for an interesting headline:

> 'Nice Nursing Home.'
>
> "I have heard that Takapuna is a very nice nursing home for workmen, and that we have some very capable nurses," said Mr J Davis at last evening's meeting of the Takapuna Council, in opposing the allocation of the sum of £1500 for streets maintenance. "The other day I watched a workman filling a barrow, and it took him 30 lifts with a long-handled shovel." The grant was authorised.

One can only wonder at his attitude towards his employees on some of the big contracts in earlier years.

In the following year he was even more outspoken about the dismissal of a council employee. Mr Davis considered the council's action to be 'unfair and un-British'. After heated discussion the mayor asked Davis to withdraw while the matter was considered in committee. On his return he was told that he would be suspended unless he withdrew his remarks, deemed to be insulting to the council. This he agreed to do. The newspaper concluded its lengthy article: 'A request by Mr Davis that his objection against the "sentence" passed on the inspector "be recorded," closed the matter'.

In 1929 in the lead up to the biennial elections there were heated words at a meeting of ratepayers:

> Both Messrs J Guiniven and Davis, said Mr Seaman, had been obstructionists on the council, and neither had pulled his weight in the borough's affairs . . . . Mr J Davis challenged the Mayor to name three occasions on which he had actually obstructed business. Mr Williamson said there had been considerably more than three occasions.

John Davis's position on the council was summarised by a reporter from the *Auckland Star* who described a meeting of the Ratepayers Association in 1928:

> Mr J Davis who has not seen eye to eye with the majority of the council in several matters during the council's term, opened in characteristic style. It was, he said, rather a pity to spoil the nice picture painted by the previous speakers. He then proceeded to criticise a number of the actions taken by the council.

Davis was not re-elected to the council in 1929 and failed to gain a seat at some later contests. He was however still able to make his views known in the public sphere. In 1931 he was ready to lodge a protest on a matter that many would have dismissed with annoyance:

> Allegation of overcrowding against a driver of one of the North Shore Transport Co.'s buses was made by a resident of Takapuna at this afternoon's meeting of the No. 2 Motor Omnibus Licensing Committee. Mr J Davis said that on the afternoon of December 22 he boarded a Milford bus at Devonport. When he got in there were 19 people standing. Later a woman and two children got in and stood abreast of the driver. In reply, the transport company denied the overcrowding . . . .

Despite the negative tone of many of the reports, John Davis clearly worked hard on many issues. He supported plans for a harbour bridge and for the amalgamation of the North Shore boroughs.

He died at his Takapuna home in January 1939. The *New Zealand Herald* wrote:

> . . . Mr Davis, who was 82 years of age, was born in London and came to New Zealand 54 years ago. He started in the building trade on his arrival here and had remained in Auckland ever since. He was the contractor for the Auckland Girls' Grammar School in Howe Street and for many primary schools. During a long residence in Mount Eden Mr Davis took a great interest in local body affairs and was a member of the Mount Eden Borough Council for 15 years. When he retired from active business about 20 years ago he went to live at Takapuna and was a member of the Takapuna Borough Council for a term. He was a prominent member of the Fountain of Friendship Lodge and a former trustee, while he was earlier a well-known member of the Mount Eden Bowling Club, and latterly of the Devonport Bowling Club.

John Davis was survived by his wife, Florence, and six children. Win stayed home, looked after her parents and effectively brought up her younger siblings. Stan had a long career in the Union Steamship Co, retiring as manager of the Wellington Branch office. Florence Mary (Dorrie) worked for much of her life in Auckland business offices. Alan followed his father into the building trade while Geoff studied law in Auckland, went on his OE[4], marrying and having two sons, including the writer. He returned to Auckland from Cardiff, Wales, in 1942 as Professor of Law. Gwen married in 1932 but the marriage was short lived.

John & Florence Davis at their Takapuna home c.1938
Photo supplied by Brian Davis

A number of John Davis's buildings are still standing, notably the Girls' Grammar School building in Howe Street. This was deemed worthy in 1994–95 of seismic strengthening and refurbishment at a cost of four million dollars. The board reported that 'the work took 19 months to complete, longer than originally anticipated and more costly than originally estimated.' Queen Victoria School has been extended but is still in active use (although not for Maori girls) and the Takapuna Post Office houses a solicitor and other offices. The Mount Eden and Takapuna councils have been subsumed in Auckland City but councillors still strive in their contentious ways hoping to better the lives of their fellow citizens.

Footnotes

1 Mr Seddon returned to Wellington by taking a special train to Onehunga and catching a steamer; the main trunk line was not to open until 1908.

2 Free Places: In the nineteenth century most students who did attend secondary school paid fees. At the beginning of 1903 the government introduced free places for students who had successfully completed Standard VI (Form II, Year 8). There was initial opposition from some schools who feared that their resources could not cope with a sudden influx of new pupils. As Mr Fowlds' figures show the scheme was widely adopted.

3 Made Ground: Land or ground created by filling in a low area with rubbish or other fill material. Often, such created land is not suitable for building without the use of a pile foundation.

4 Overseas Experience: travels frequently undertaken by young adults.

Sources

Kauri v. Baltic pine: *Auckland Star* and *New Zealand Herald*, 16 March 1887.

Building tenders: *Auckland Star* 28 October 1887; 9 August 1889; 7 October 1890; 10 April 1891; 15 November 1892; 1 June 1894; 9 August 1895; 10 March 1896; 14 April 1898; 20 October 1899; 23 July 1900; 30 November 1900; 17 October 1901; 17 August 1904; 3 March, 11 September 1906; 23 August 1909; 9 November 1910

New Zealand Herald 9 November 1892; 25 October 1893; 27 June 1894; 15 April 1898; 9 September 1898; 7 July 1899; 30 September 1902; 2 June 1904; 22 September 1905; 14 June 1906; 21 February 1907; 9 November 1910; 26 October 1917.

Building openings etc: *Auckland Star*, Costley Wards 11 July 1898, 29 & 30 November 1898; Drill Hall 4 October 1902; Hospital extension 16 February 1910;

New Zealand Herald Drill Hall 6 October 1902; Auckland Girls' Grammar School 5 December 1907; 10 April 1909; Hospital ward 17 February 1910; Takapuna Post Office 21 May 1914.

Local government: Mt Eden: *Auckland Star* 1 May 1897; 9 May 1898; 8, 10,14, 17 September, 16 November 1906; 18 April 1907; 21,24, 27 April 1909; 21, 22 October 1909; 20 June 1912; 22 October 1912; 18 March, 21,29, 30 April, 1 May 1914; 5,18,26 March 1915; 19,29 April, 7 December 1915; 7 March, 29 August 1916; 31 March, 21, 30 April,17 July 1917; 26 April 1919

New Zealand Herald 13,21 October 1909; 27 April 1911; 12 May 1912; 20 February 1913; 4 March, 6, 15 May 1913; 20, 21, 23, 30 April 1914; 24 February, 3,12,18, 26 March, 11 May, 2 November 1915; 11 January , 1 February, 9 May, 18 July, 29 August, 19 September 1916; 26 April 1917; 19 March, 11 June 1918;1 May 1919; 1 February 1939.

Local government: Takapuna: *Auckland Star* 7 July 1920; 28 April 1921; 20 April 1925; 25 March, 30 April, 5, 26 May, 28 July, 13, 18 August 1927; 16 February, 28 March,2,3,19 July 1928; 27 January 1931

New Zealand Herald 20 April 1921; 14,28 April, 16 June, 10 November, 1 December 1927; 1, 11 February,3, 11,30 April, 2, 9 May 1929; 12,29 May 1930.

Mr Fowlds' campaigns: *Auckland Star* 17 October, 3, 9 November 1908; 19 September 1910; *New Zealand Herald* 28 May, 17 October1908; 13 September, 17 November 1911; 12 January 1914.

Auckland Grammar Schools Board: Minutes and letter books 1907–09.

Auckland's first supermarket

By Jeanette Grant

In 1958 Tom Ah Chee, Norman Kent and John Brown pooled their resources and on 18 June opened the 'Otara Foodtown', the first supermarket in Australasia. It was on a 1.1 hectare site at 626 Great South Road, Otahuhu, and today this former supermarket building accommodates a number of shops and a petrol station. However, this one 1,400 sq metre store grew to 23 outlets in Auckland alone.

In Tom's own words:

> It's not a big step from running a successful fruit and vege wholesaler to running a supermarket. I'd seen what was going on in America and saw what was happening: how many people had cars and that if I offered free carparking, then all those cars would belong to my customers.
>
> We found a site . . . . It was the first Foodtown and we had everyone there, the radio stations, literally thousands of people turned up and things got a little crazy. We ran out of stock by 11.00am and we had to get on the radio and say, please don't come to Foodtown. We had five checkouts but needed 25 to cope.

It is possible to trace the inevitable decline of what I would call the boutique shop, usually owner-operated, from that time. Today I think their days are numbered. In the future there will be the supermarkets and the mass retailers like the fruit shed or barn operators. The people aren't

there to run the boutique shops these days and the competition from the larger operators will make it hard for them to survive.

Who was Tom Ah Chee?

Tom Ah Chee
NZ Busines Hall of Fame website

He was born in Remuera on 4 January 1928. His family had retailed fruit and vegetables in Auckland since the days when his grandfather (Chan Dah Chee 1851–1930) sold produce from baskets in Queen Street in the 1870s. When he arrived in the late 1860s, customs officials mistook his given name, Chee, to be his surname and he and his descendants became known as the "Ah Chee" family. He was naturalised in 1882 and this allowed him to bring his wife Joong Chew Lee out to join him in 1886. In the early 20th century the Chinese community consisted of only 296 men and 28 females, although Chinese had been in Auckland for a full generation. Migrants such as Chan Dar Chee survived and prospered in an intensively anti-Chinese era. All Chinese immigrants had to pay a £100 poll tax and faced a test of one hundred English words picked at random at the port of entry. However, they were not in direct competition with European New Zealanders. By the 1900s, the Chinese ran market gardens in Western Springs, Panmure, Mangere and Avondale. The area of market gardens below Great North Road and Surrey Crescent was known as Chinaman's Hill until the late 1990s.

By the turn of the 20th century Auckland had its own 'Chinatown'. Chinese families had established small businesses such as fruit shops, grocery stores and hand laundries in several narrow, steep streets near the city centre—Greys Avenue, lower Wakefield, Hobson and Victoria streets. Here they worked long hours and usually lived upstairs or at the back. The houses were inexpensive and the area was close to the railway station and the wharf. These few streets became the social centre of a Chinese community. The headquarters of the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang/Guomindang), the Chee Kung Tong (better known as Chinese Freemasons), and also the New Zealand Chinese Association's Auckland branch, were all in Greys Avenue. (It was also the location of a couple of illegal gambling and opium houses which were subjected to periodic police raids.)

The Ah Chee family lived in Parnell, and used the site of Carlaw Park as a market garden. They ran a greengrocer's at 13 Queen Street, opposite the central post office, and a depot in Stanley Street. During the first three decades of the 20th century, Ah Chee & Co owned at least seven shops in central Auckland. The company became a vegetable supplier to shipping lines and Auckland's hotels. It also exported two valuable commodities to China: rabbit fur and an edible tree fungus (mu'er) that grew in abundance in Taranaki and other parts of the North Island.

Ah Chee fruit store, 13 Queen Street
Auckland Public Libraries

Grocers like Thomas Doo & Co, and Wah-Lee, were never just stores. They were community motels, banks and post offices all rolled into one. New Zealand customs officials also frequently called upon the Doos as interpreters. Since there were very few Chinese women in Auckland the Doo women shared out their brew of Chinese herbal medicines to help fight the 1918 influenza epidemic. The family's philanthropic work earned the good will of the community, which helped their business considerably. Chinese merchant families known to New Zealand authorities were also rewarded with generous import licensing quotas.

Archaeologists have unearthed remains in Auckland's old Carlaw Park of the house of Tom Ah Chee's grandfather, Chan Dah Chee, who is recorded on government land registry records as having leased the site for 21 years in August 1882. A map drawn 14 years later shows several buildings, including what is believed to be his original home. A brick courtyard and fireplace on the site of the house have been unearthed, plus what is potentially the largest collection of Chinese ceramic remains found in Auckland from the late 19th century. These include fragments of vases and crockery, bearing what National MP Pansy Wong said was 'very old-style Chinese writing'. Pieces of European crockery have been found, and hoes

and a digging fork likely to have been used in the original Mr Ah Chee's adjoining gardens at the south-eastern end of Carlaw Park.

His three sons went to Wellesley Street School and Auckland Grammar. Arthur (b.1895) went to China in 1915 but William (b.1889) & Clement (b.1892) both worked in their father's business. His grandson Thomas Henry Ah Chee was born in Remuera in 1928 to Clement Calliope Ah Chee (1892–1951) and travelled with his parents to Canton in 1931–9. He was a bright pupil but his university education was cut short by his father's death and he then took over the family fruit shop in Newmarket.

Tom himself says:

> I think I was destined to be a retailer. At first I wanted to be an architect, but as it happened there was no alternative but to take over the business. There was the burden of the family and having to ensure they were provided for well. Nowadays young people have a lot more options. But I have no regrets, I am sure fruit retailing is the best training for business and I am sure it is the foundation for my later success. At the time there were five retailers along Broadway and we were all doing well. There were three auction days a week and you had to be there at 7am, figure out what you wanted to buy and physically cart it back. There was always some job to do. Caulis and cabbages had to be trimmed and tidied; carrots, potatoes and other root crops had to be washed. We used to do that in the concrete mixer.
>
> Wednesday evening was always the busiest night because we would redo all the displays for the big trading days at the end of the week. Your display was very important as everything had to look fresh and inviting to draw the customers.
>
> Thursday night would always be late because of the work needed to get things ready for Friday, which was the big day. We'd do 50% of our weekly turnover as people stocked up for the weekend.
>
> After Friday we would open again on Saturday morning and then work for three or four hours, packing away the produce, some of it into the cool store, mopping down the floors and cleaning the shop.
>
> On Sunday it would start again in the afternoon. We'd head there and from about 2pm start getting the produce ready for Monday.

In the 1940s the family began to move away from straight retailing into mass produce retailing.

> The shop on the corner of Great South and St Marks roads became a site where we sold cases of apples. At the same time there was no export of apples and so in the height of the season there was a lot of fruit which orchardists wanted to sell. We'd sell apples like Granny Smiths for 2/6d for a 40lb case.

This first 1958 supermarket was only the start. It had the first automatic doors and air conditioning, and on opening day there was so much excitement that traffic blocked the main road and the street was shut off. Radio announcers appealing to would-be customers to come back the next day, only attracted more interest. Supermarket trolleys were a new concept; bags were paper, not plastic, and boys took customers' shopping to their cars.

A second Foodtown was built and opened in Takanini, South Auckland, in 1961 and that year the company was restructured when the Picot family joined the business. Their family company, Progressive Enterprises, contributed an equal amount of capital to that accumulated by the three original partners and became the parent company to Foodtown Supermarkets Ltd. Tom Ah Chee himself remained involved with Foodtown until 1982, when he resigned as chief executive. By that stage it was a public company owned by Progressive Enterprises.

In 2008 it was announced that the Foodtown brand was to be phased out and rebranded as Countdown over the next five years.

Tom Ah Chee died in 2000, and two years later he was inducted into the New Zealand Business Hall of Fame. This had been established in 1994 by the Young Enterprise Trust. The New Zealand Business Hall of Fame recognises and celebrates individuals who have made a significant contribution to the economic and social development of New Zealand. Laureates are admitted to the hall by the governor-general at an annual black-tie gala dinner. Each laureate has a story of enterprise, hard work and success. Most have contributed generously to their communities

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A tribute from the parish of St George

Adapted from a talk given by Greg Smith on 20 December 2015

Amelia Emma George (née Sutton) was better known as 'Mrs George', which is how she is remembered and always referred to in the parish of St George, Ranfurly Road, Epsom. She was born on 3 May 1848 in Dunedin, the eldest of three children born to Emma (1829–98) and John Sutton (1814–54). As the Otago Settlement only started in that year, she would have been one of the first white children born there.

The *Otago Daily Times* of 1 October 1869 has the notice of her marriage on 30 August 1869 to Major Frederic [*sic*] Nelson George in Dunedin. He had served in the 3rd Waikato Regt during the Land Wars and was a notable big game hunter. Trophy heads he had shot from around the world became a feature of their home. However, by the latter part of the 19th century the couple were living in Auckland on the Wapiti Estate. As the name would suggest, this covered a good part of the land around Wapiti Avenue and present day St Cuthbert's College. Later their large house became for many years the Melrose House for St Cuthbert boarders. Their main interest was horse-racing: breeding and training their own horses—the Wapiti Stud. Nelson was a member of the Auckland Racing Club and bred many winners. He appears on the 1890 and 1898 electoral rolls at Wapiti as a 'gentleman'. Her name is on the petitions for women's suffrage and she appears with him on the 1898 roll as a 'gentlewoman'.

In 1898, shipping records show them arriving in Liverpool from New York. He appears in 1907, 1908 & 1909 on the Reigate Electoral Roll living at Lovell House, Crawley. In the 1911 census they were recorded at 19 St Winifreds Road; he was aged 69 and born in Auckland, while she was 62, born in Otago. They had been married for 41 years and had no family. In 1912 they landed in London from Durban. According to the English probate records, Major Frederick Nelson George died at 'Wapiti', 19 St Winifreds Road, Bournemouth, on 23 October 1914, leaving his widow the sum of £33,534.17.7—which, in modern terms equates to over £3.6 million or around $NZ7.5 million. His New Zealand property was valued for death duties at £15,777 and the *Evening Post* of 26 October 1914 printed a lengthy obituary.

Mrs George returned to Auckland where she appears in the 1928, 1935 and 1938 electoral rolls at 5 Aratonga Avenue, i.e. for two elections after

her death! She is reputed to have moved to Te Aroha about 1928 to live with her youngest half-brother George Alfred McGlashan's family, and she certainly died there on 28 October 1931 at the age of 83. She is buried in Te Aroha's Stanley Street cemetery: Area B, Row 15, Plot 444. The New Zealand probate records show she died worth £48,290.0.0, a massive sum in Depression times.

That is enough of the basic facts. It is more interesting to try to establish what she was like as a person. Without recourse to family diaries, letters and other personal papers, one is left only with the public record and in this case the church records. From these I have tried to glean a picture.

In recent years Mrs George seems to have floated out of the memory of the parish of St George, but when I first came here some 35 years ago she was still a hovering presence. When I think about it, I question whether any of those who referred to her had actually known her. However she still stood as a pillar of the church and Anglican tradition. I often remember the phrase 'Mrs George would turn in her grave' if there were any changes or innovations in Anglican formality. Looking back I think people were probably only expressing their own preferences and maybe a tiny bit of their prejudices.

Having looked through the records I can find nothing, and reading between the lines I can find nothing, to suggest that she imposed her will on the church or tried to keep everyone on the straight and narrow. However, one should possibly not dismiss the grave turning entirely. It may have some substance as the council records show that her gravestone has fallen over at least once.

But generous with this parish Mrs George certainly was. The plaque for the altar which was given by parishioners as a memorial for her after her death states that she was the benefactress of this church as does the original plaque on her portrait. This is without doubt correct but she was not the foundress of the church.

A group of local people had already been congregating in the Wapiti hall converted from the stables of her old home by its then current owner. There was a desire by these people to found an Anglican church in this area. Mrs George happened to come back to New Zealand at the right time. She put her energy and resources into the project. Nelson's death had left her a wealthy widow and she bought the property in Ranfurly Road that this church now stands on and constructed the basic building at her own expense. The old house that had been on the property when she bought it

was used as the church hall to start with. However she demolished this in 1917 and built the basics of the present hall.

The vicarage was more of a problem. The section next to the church was not available at the time so she bought another on the corner of Wapiti Avenue and Market Road. The church itself undertook the construction of that vicarage, later sold in the 1950s when the present vicarage became available.

It must be emphasised that regarding the church and hall, Mrs George built only the basic buildings. Very quickly they were extended. However the records show that she was a big donor to these additions.

If there is any substance to her imposing her will, it possibly concerns all the windows around the church. She was not happy with the originals and changed them to what you see now with the red borders. Personally I have always found these the best architectural feature of our church. Even with the many alterations and additions over the years there have always been enough of these windows to go round. We still have some in storage. They have given the church a great architectural integrity. They make the church feel like an intact heritage building. Thank you, Mrs George.

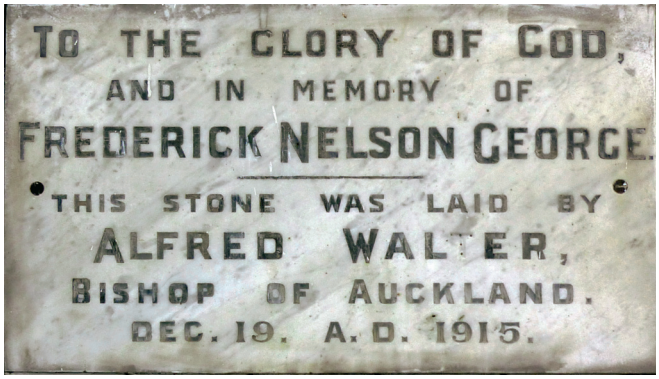
Mrs George's last big contribution came with her will. The church was left £1500 to be held as an endowment trust. When she died in 1931, it was the middle of the Great Depression. For a lot of individuals and institutions these were tough times. For a number of years the income from this endowment was able to bridge the deficit on the running costs of the parish.

There is one fact perhaps more telling of her personality and esteem for this church. During the 1920s there had been early rumblings of a slump. People were not so confident of their investments. Mrs George had made many bequests and legacies in her will, but provided that in the event that her estate was partially insolvent then these were to be scaled back, but not the one to this church.

Coming now to the portrait itself (see cover). This is an unusual picture for a church to own. There is nothing of institutional worthiness about it. It is a personal family portrait. The painting is unsigned.

I think it is fair comment to say that most women who are going to be immortalised in oils want the picture to have an element of mystique and glamour. It can be difficult to achieve this effect in day attire. A woman is only really left with the option of evening dress or no dress if she is

St George's Epsom as it is today
Photo: John Denny, May 2016



St George's Epsom, foundation stone
Photo: John Denny, May 2016

confident enough of her figure. Mrs George has chosen evening dress but with a certain amount of décolletage and other bare flesh as you can see.

The picture was certainly painted a long time before this church was built. My feeling is that it has an 1890s look to it and Mrs George may be about 50 years of age. You can all make your own decision.

The records show that St George's came by the picture in 1927 which may coincide with her departure for Te Aroha. The vestry of the day deputed Mr Preston Chambers to have the picture reframed at Bennetts in Newmarket. Their label is still on the back.

The painting has been hung in various places around the church: the original vestry room, baptistry and latterly the side office. It had become tired and lacklustre. It had sustained minor damage. Conservation work has now been done by the Auckland Art Gallery to stabilise its condition, refresh it but still keep it looking like an old picture. Later generations may revisit its conservation, but it is hoped that what has been done will hold for the foreseeable future.

Coming to the final part now, I would like to say a little about the portrait in its role as a memorial. For St George's this is memorial number one. Certainly there are older ones like those down the sides of the church for soldiers killed in World War One. However they have been memorialised for services to King and Country. This painting is the oldest memorial I can find for service to St George's.

Over the years other memorials have followed for service to the church but in the end it becomes impossible to provide individual memorials for all the faithful servants. If we were to go on adding brass plaques and objects then the church would lose its special simplicity and look like a demented version of Aladdin's cave. The majority must now remain without an individual memorial but even in my time I can look back and think of the many who have done so much to keep this church rolling on.

Accordingly the decision was made that the conservation work on Mrs George's portrait would stand as a memorial for all previous parishioners who have contributed in the church's first century. The dedication plaque has been changed to this effect.

The plaque now reads—*'Amelia Emma George, 1848 to 1931. Benefactress of this Church'* (These are indisputable facts. But perhaps more importantly the inscription continues) *'The conservation of this portrait in 2015 is a memorial to all the parishioners of St George's who have worked so faithfully in the church's first hundred years'.*

"Yes Madam, just what you need!" Super salesman Roy (Royston) McCall

By Helen Laurenson

Many people still remember Royston McCall, or Roy, as he was familiarly known, a salesman without equal in post World War II Auckland. He is remembered as the person who could sell anything to anyone—even the proverbial 'ice to Eskimos'. He could persuade a housewife of the 1950s, who had a cutlery drawer full of such gadgets already, that a new and miraculous vegetable peeler, the latest model available, was just what she needed to make her life easier.

Regularly appearing in the Queen Street branches of Woolworths and McKenzies, the chain stores commissioned him to demonstrate and sell special lines from the counter nearest the street frontage. These could also include hard-to-move items that might have grown stale on the shelves.

There stood dapper Roy McCall, not much higher than the counter itself, with his slicked, dark hair, boundless energy and self-confidence, his rolled-up sleeves, tie, waistcoat and a brisk entertaining line in sales patter, always drawing a crowd and what's more, moving goods in a spectacular way.

When interviewed in 1954 at his home at 3 Centennial Flats, Orakei, it was filled with biographies and portraits of famous men and even had a bust of Winston Churchill atop the grandfather clock. He reported that he had sold everything from chiming clocks to women's underwear and he'd even been able to sell things to his wife, Margaret Lavinia. He had sold 7000 dozen clothes pegs in a week and 1200 pairs of men's socks in one hour. In sharing his secrets for successful selling his firmly held philosophy was "If you can show it, you can sell it!" He listed the personal qualities of a good salesman:

- Quick chatter
- Dignity, but humour
- Courtesy
- Personality of salesman
- Quick service

He advised never answering abuse with abuse, "for you'll get rattled and once that happens, you're finished." And "forget that people call you a crank; because the more unorthodox you are the more you'll sell."

He once served four customers in one minute. That was after the sales patter, but included the sale, wrapping, register and change. On another occasion the store in which he was working had changed to fluorescent lighting and he sold the old light fittings, still *in situ*—even he admitted that was not an easy task!

Roy was born in Auckland on 25 July 1904 to mother Doreen, but no father's name is listed on the birth record. He was always an independent person, leaving home aged 14 and picking up jobs that included selling newspapers, shovelling coal and working night shifts in a bake-house. He became a hotel steward in up-market hotels from Auckland to Bluff. One day in February 1933 he met Woolworth heiress, young Barbara Hutton, at the Grand Hotel in Rotorua and it was that meeting which ultimately changed his life.

According to Roy, "she was so charming to me. She treated everyone the same—as her equals. She was the influence that pushed me into selling." The 19-year-old millionaire told him, "You're wasting your time in the hotel business. Go into selling. You could go a long way. You'll never look back."

In the interview 20 years later when he was at the peak of his success as a super salesman, Roy joked about what he might be selling in the next world—would it be oil-burners or angel-wings? He had to wait some years to find out, however, for he died in 1988 at the age of 83.

For a generation of Aucklanders who remember the enjoyment of 'going to town', and Queen Street as it used to be, lively with its smart specialty shops, department and chain stores, he was indeed one of Auckland's memorable characters and a super-salesman, with the art of making a sale carefully perfected over many years. But such over-the-counter selling seems to have disappeared these days. When did you last see a crowd gathered, spellbound by a performance such as Roy's? Maybe television advertisements and infomercials are the nearest thing we have, but I'd dearly love to stand in the crowd and see Roy in action again!

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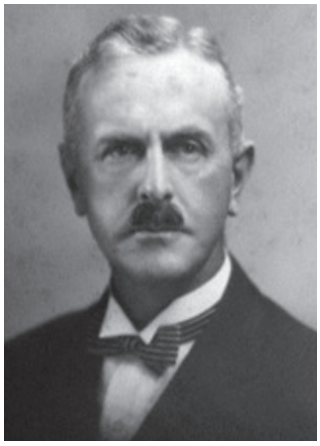
Personal memories

The Doctors Walton

Elaine Bartley (edited by Valerie Sherwood)



Dr Robert H. Walton
Photo: Elaine Bartley

Dr Robert Henry Walton was a well-known medical practitioner in Mount Eden from 1920 until his death at the age of 82. He was born in Conway, Wales, and came to New Zealand with his parents Richard and Alice when he was four years old. The family home in Lovelock Avenue, in Mount Eden, was known as *Chorleywood*.

The youngest of four brothers, Robert was educated at Auckland Grammar School and was in the school's First Fifteen rugby team. Financially supported by his family, he later travelled overseas to further his education at the University of Edinburgh Medical School where he graduated MB ChB in 1908, and followed this by gaining both a Fellowship (FRCSEd) in 1908 and a Doctorate (MDEd) in 1909. Gaining medical registration in New Zealand in 1908, he practised in Auckland until the intervention of World War I when he volunteered, serving in Gallipoli, France and the Middle East. Among the medals he was awarded was the CBE.

Returning to Auckland after the war, Lieutenant Colonel Walton settled in Mount Eden, marrying Eva Beatrice Gummer of *Sylvana,* Horopito Street, in 1925. With their son, Allan Edwin Walton, they lived at *Fairmount*, a substantial home at the corner of Mount Eden and Balmoral roads, where family members continue to live today. A medical surgery was built at the front of the house to allow practice from the home. Robert Walton also conducted a surgical practice from his rooms at the Lister Building in Auckland City.

Allan E. Walton attended Maungawhau District School, followed in his father's footsteps to Auckland Grammar School, then trained in medicine at the University of Otago's Medical School, at that time the only medical college in New Zealand. He was appointed to the staff at Greenlane Hospital as a registrar, before serving in World War II in the RNZAF in the Pacific as a medical officer with the rank of Flight Lieutenant. In 1954 he married Elaine Todd of Epsom and joined his father in partnership in the general practice in Mount Eden and at the Lister Building.

Dr Allan E. Walton
Photo: Elaine Bartley

Dr R. H. Walton died in 1958, practising medicine until the day of his death. His son Allan continued in the practice until his death from leukaemia in 1967 at the age of 49, leaving his wife Elaine and four young children: Jacqueline, Robert, Patricia and Allan.

The family continued to live at *Fairmount.* Dr Allan's son Robert followed in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, having qualified in medicine at Auckland University Medical School. In turn, Robert's son Oliver Walton qualified in the family tradition of medicine, graduating from the Auckland Medical School in 2015.

In 1972, Elaine Walton wed Brian Bartley, a notable civil engineer who died in 2015, gaining four step-children. All the family still regard *Fairmount,* the large home in Mt Eden Road, as 'home'.

A few memories of the past

By John Richards
Retired Assoc Professor of General Practice, University of Auckland

Nineteen thirty-one was the year I was born, delivered by my father, brave man, in the sun room of our house at 8 Milton Road, Mount Eden. Consultative help was immediately available but my mother, who was also a doctor, was scarcely in the frame of mind to offer suggestions concerning the finer points of obstetric practice. I was the first-born and about 16 months later Peter was born. My father was 45 when he married and my mother was 10 years younger.

New Zealand was in the throes of the Great Depression and some years later I began to understand the significance of a depression and the economic upheaval that accompanied it, and became aware also of the terrible war being waged at that time, primarily in Europe. There were still plenty of swagmen tramping the roads of New Zealand, with all their belongings tied into a bundle and carried over the shoulder, looking for work or even a crust.

As part of the household of a popular medical practitioner, who wore a bowler hat (unusual even in those days), a starched winged collar and carried a Gladstone bag, these problems were barely noticed. There always seemed to be sufficient money, there were no debts and schooling was free. Mother and Father each had a car, my mother an Austin ten and my father an Austin 16, solidly built cars, intended to last. My brother and I walked to school barefoot and developed soles to our feet that were like rhinoceros skin. We could walk comfortably on any surface, hot or cold, rough or smooth. The bare feet were not an economic necessity but was so those who could not afford shoes would not be embarrassed.

Despite giving up medical work after I was born, my mother always had help in the house. We had several Pacific Island girls who proved unsatisfactory before we gave Lena Ngawati a trial and were well pleased. Thus began over 20 years of service and an even longer friendship.

Lena was part Maori and came from the Ngapuhi tribe. "Who is that black lady?" asked my brother, who looked at Lena anxiously as she walked up the path to the house for the first time.

Lena lived in a room off the kitchen and was treated almost as a member of the family, except that she did not take meals with us. From memory

(which is not as good as it was) she was paid £2 a week plus board, and to us boys became almost a second mother.

During the years she worked for us, Lena left us for a time when she met a soldier who was shortly to leave for overseas service. He stayed in NZ long enough to give Lena a child, and was killed on active service during the 1939–45 conflict. She kept the child and she too lived with us and was brought up like a family member.

During the war my mother became a temporary part-time anaesthetist at Auckland Hospital, doubtless replacing a doctor who had gone to war. My parents were members of the Emergency Precautions Scheme (EPS), an organisation which had been established with a view to training medical and other personnel to cope with the emergencies of wartime. At the time there were very real concerns about the possibility of an invasion of New Zealand by the Japanese. Hadn't a Japanese fighter plane been observed flying over Auckland and other places, reconnoitring?

If the Japanese came to Auckland, my parents felt that their boys would be at special risk as both parents would be working with the wounded. So it came about that Peter and I spent several months living with our uncle and aunt, George and Jessie Crawley, on their farm at Puahue, not far from Te Awamutu.

We townies, as they called us, had a great time in this very pleasant rural environment. Surprisingly we were also treated with considerable respect by pupils and also teachers, as if we were something special. Among other things I was made the announcer at their sports day.

I had always believed that we were the only evacuees in Auckland, but by chance I mentioned to a very good friend of mine, Eugene Paykel (later to become Professor of Psychiatry at Cambridge University), who was virtually unknown to me until we had both qualified in medicine and did postgraduate work together in Edinburgh, that my brother and I had had this experience and he told me that he too had been evacuated to Te Awamutu and went to school there—talk about coincidence! I have never been really interested in sport and my father was discouraging also as I think he was concerned that I might damage my hands. I believe he hoped that I might become a surgeon, and good hands and dexterity are obviously vital in surgery. As an aside, were he alive I am sure that he would be pleased that his eldest grandchild now works as a consultant in emergency medicine at the Christchurch Hospital.

However at the special annual sports day at Te Awamutu one team was

found to be missing a member and despite the fact that I was several inches taller than the tallest of them I was asked to take his place. I was taller and faster and I made about 20 tries and we won the match with ease.

My parents were regular churchgoers, and attended church twice each Sunday. It was almost a tradition that the morning speaker would come home to our place for a hot meal after the service. My brother Peter and I were quite well behaved most of the time when we had visitors. It would have been too embarrassing to be otherwise. My father, if we misbehaved, would threaten us with what he called 'Jack Supple' a NZ native climbing plant usually known as 'supplejack'. He was a gentle person. I can only recall him using it on me once. I don't remember the reason. Later I attended Auckland Grammar and received 'the strap' on two occasions, both for talking in class. Our church was The Associated Churches of Christ (an American breakaway from the Presbyterians) established by Alexander Campbell in an effort, ironically, to bring together all the denominations in one church. He believed also that much of the service should be in the hands of the laity. Some of the speakers spoke of a 'season of prayer' and would carry on their prayers for a quarter of an hour or more, leading to great restlessness and the feeling that it really was for a season.

One day we spotted the clearing of a section not far from the church and shortly there appeared a large tent and an advertisement encouraging the public to attend the meetings that were planned. We decided to go and see what was happening. Mr (The Associated Churches of Christ do not give their leaders special titles) Henrichsen was an old style hellfire, blood and thunder evangelist based in Australia. Although well meaning he would use every trick in the book to persuade his listeners to make immediate decisions and accept a conversion to Christianity. The shouting, the tears and the haranguing all made great theatre. It was not all bad I suppose, as some of the converts gave stalwart service to the church over many years.

By the time I was of school age almost all the horses had been replaced by the internal combustion engine for carriage and cartage around the burgeoning city. There were some horse carts designated as 'night carts' and used for disposal of sewage. I can remember one other cart that passed our way about once a month. The driver would shout as he passed, 'Any old iron, any old iron?' and we would hear the clip clop of the horses' hooves.

An excellent nearby electric tram service took us to the central city; when I left Kowhai Intermediate School and later Auckland Grammar and started at University I used it every day.

In late middle age my father bought a farm of 320 acres at what was the end of Redoubt Road, Papatoetoe. I think he paid £1200 for it. He had accepted some responsibility for his three nephews, Sam, Don and Vic who were largely brought up by their mother, Mrs Gertrude Cope, whose husband had died in the 'flu epidemic. She inherited a farm in Whitford which occupied much of the land now beautifully planted by Mrs McConnell and known as 'Ayrlie'. My father offered his young nephews work on the farm and Don, who had been a prisoner of war, took up the opportunity of working there for several years.

About half of the farm faced Ardmore and was very rough and quite steep. During the war we would watch the training planes we knew as 'Corsairs' as they practised their skills at Ardmore Airport.

My father regularly took Saturday afternoon off from his practice and enjoyed driving the 15 miles to 'the farm' where, accompanied by my mother, they would grub the gorse which seemed likely to engulf the pastures. My younger brother and I knew the routine and usually went exploring over the property before the tools were allocated. Visitors to our home in Auckland would innocently accept an invitation to join us on a trip to 'the farm' only to find themselves handed a grubber and encouraged to assist with eradication. I think most visitors did not regard this work as very restful, and visitors seemed to be rather infrequent!

Mount Eden Primary School memorial gates

An update by Jeanette Grant

There was an interesting item by Alice Perminter in the *Central Leader* of 4 December 2015 recounting how a group of pupils researching the history of their school's memorial and the soldiers listed on the panels by the 1924 gates, found that . . .

> they were originally etched with the names of councillors from the Mount Eden borough, but following an outcry in the community they were quickly replaced by names of ex-pupils who had also [*sic*] been killed in combat.

The school enlisted the help of Ben Mercer from Ancestry.com who discovered that when the names were replaced, several fallen soldiers who should have been included were omitted. Some of the missing names were brothers of men who were included on the memorial.

The Manor Private Hospital

By Anne Sanders

The 'Turret House' at 107 Wheturangi Road (still standing, and extensively altered) is thought to be part of One Tree Hill Farm when owned by John Logan Campbell. This huge farm was originally the property of Thomas Henry and known as Mount Prospect. Brown and Campbell purchased Mount Prospect, and later Campbell bought the property and renamed it One Tree Hill Farm.

Alfred Duke of Edinburgh (second son of Queen Victoria) was the first Royal to visit New Zealand. He came to the farm first in May 1869 for a pigeon shoot (probably native pigeons!), later planting two oak trees. He visited the property again in March 1890, attending a 'luncheon party' hosted by J. A. Farmer, who was at one time farm manager for Campbell. A well known artist, Nicholas Chevalier, painted a watercolour of the occasion; the painting is believed to be now in London.

One two-storey home was used as a rural summer retreat by John Logan Campbell and his family. Many, many years later, it became known as the Manor Private Hospital.

During the school holidays of 1952 and 1953 I worked as a nurse aid at the Manor Hospital, 103 Wheturangi Road, One Tree Hill. I would catch the tram from my home in Mount Albert to Symonds Street, another tram via Khyber Pass to Great South Road, Aratonga Avenue and a short walk to the Manor Hospital, a grand old two-storey home, with extensive gardens and grounds.

The residents were mainly elderly ladies. When I had time, I enjoyed chatting to one in particular, an interesting American lady. I think she took a liking to me, as on my final day, she beckoned me to her bedside and pressed into my hand, folded in a silk handkerchief, a wooden necklace, telling me an American Red Indian had carved it for her. I remember being very embarrassed by her gift to me. When I arrived home and showed the necklace to my Mother, her comments were "Anne, wrap it away carefully and one day you will enjoy wearing the necklace." Sure enough, I did and still do; the necklace is often admired.

The Manor Hospital was still standing around the 1980s but was put up for sale and sadly demolished and replaced with flats, Aratonga Court and several town houses.

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The Mount Eden Mayoress' Welfare Committee 1960-1989

By Helen Stowell, last secretary of the committee

This committee was founded by the mayoress Mrs Q. E. Dickinson in 1960 and disbanded in 1989 when the mayoress of the time was Mrs Beverley Johns. The general committee of 60 met once a month as representatives of interested welfare workers, churches and welfare organisations in Mount Eden. Mrs Dickinson said one thing the committee did was to visit the 41 pensioners' flats in the borough regularly and take care of various things there.

The committee helped form the Senior Citizens Club next to the Mount Eden War Memorial Hall on Dominion Road. Members formed a hostess committee for the meetings, concerts and outings.

In the later years the Welfare Committee organized electricians from the Power Board to spend a day at the hall of the Eden Roskill pensioner village at 126 Landscape Road, where people could bring their electric blankets to be checked. (It is now under the care of Housing NZ. The Pat Gribble Lounge is seldom used. There is no help from any community group and there are many different nationalities so people may not mix very well. Also, the post box on the street has gone and the bus has been stopped.)

The committee worked for all sections of the community. Members would visit the residents of pensioner villages and the lonely or needy in their own homes to provide company and assistance where necessary. Sometimes food parcels, furniture and other household items would be provided.

The Mount Eden Borough Council would help the committee with a $300 grant from the Community Chest—but other fundraising was always necessary. Once or twice a year a huge fair was held in the Memorial Hall. This became very popular and visitors came from many other suburbs.

The band rotunda in Potters Park today
Photo: John Denny, May 2016

When finance allowed, donations would be made to Plunket, kindergartens, early childhood groups, Home and Family Counselling Services, hospital groups, Child Heart Foundation and many other organisations. Any group which needed some assistance could approach the committee and be considered.

Before Auckland became a super city, the committee built the band rotunda in Potters Park, which was opened in 1989.

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Nurse Effie Warbrick of Edenholme Hospital and the vagaries of fortune

By Val Sherwood

Just before the turn of the twentieth century, in 1897, at Lisburn, County Antrim, Ireland, a daughter was born to Robert Campbell, farmer and carpenter, and his wife Margaret Jane Campbell. The youngest of four children, she was named Victoria Effie. The Campbell family immigrated to New Zealand prior to World War I, some with their spouses. Margaret, the mother, died at East Street, Auckland, on 17 July 1914.

At age 22, Effie married John Warbrick, aged 37, a Lancashire-born man, on 12 April 1919 and they took up residence in Ponsonby. A barman at the Waitemata Hotel in Queen Street, he had enlisted in the Field Artillery in August 1915, and was discharged in December 1918, having been seriously gassed both at Passchendaele, and again at Dicky Bush in February 1918. This led to his hospitalisation in England prior to being invalided home. John's health did not improve, and he died in October 1922 and was buried at Purewa in the Campbell grave, where Effie's mother Margaret lay. There was only one child from the marriage, a son, Mervyn John.

As a widow, Effie trained as a midwife, apparently at St Helen's Hospital, not only gaining the necessary qualifications in the State Examinations, but achieving an 'above 75%' mark. Figuring prominently in the newspaper births notices of the day, was Nurse Warbrick's Nursing Home in Herne Bay, 1926, sometimes described as Nurse Warbrick's, 56 Ardmore Road, and from August 1927, Sister Warbrick's at *Edenholme*, on Mount Eden Road, the maternity hospital which held a prominent position for many years.

In the management of *Edenholme* during the pre-World War II years, Effie encountered many difficulties, a major one of which was the shortage of qualified staff. The regular necessity to work very long hours covering for staff members who were ill or absent led to deficiencies in her own health. This in turn led to her lack of adequate care with her tax records, when despite a warning from the tax inspector, she neglected to file satisfactory returns for the period 1938–40. Summonsed to court in 1941, she was fined a total of £225. In an effort to ameliorate the staffing situation Effie had, around 1940, engaged Sister E. W. Kennerly to share the management of the hospital. Under the Social Security Act of 1940, all licensed hospitals and nursing homes were entitled to claim patient subsidies, easing the

financial burden for both proprietors and patients. In 1952, registration for *Edenholme* still remained in Effie's hands.

On 28 December 1944 the *New Zealand Herald* published an item on its 'Women's Pages' featuring the marriage of Effie Warbrick to Piers Edgcumbe at St Mary's Cathedral, Parnell, at which Dean Fancourt officiated. The bride was described as wearing a gown in dusky pink, with a matching hat. She was given away by her brother, Mr S. Campbell, of Te Aroha. The matron-of-honour, the bride's sister-in-law, was dressed in a 'shrimp brown' cloque, with brown accessories. Both ladies wore a shoulder spray of orchids. The best man was John Sutton, brother-in-law of the bride. During the service the bride's sister Louisa, Mrs Salisbury Sykes, sang Gounod's *Ave Maria*. Effie and her sister were close. They lived together and shared the enjoyment of performing at concerts and social events, Effie as a recitationist. Together they maintained a social presence as members of the Auckland Bridge Club, the Lyceum Club, and the Victoria League. During the 1950s Effie became the president of the Auckland Travel Club.

Piers Edgcumbe and Effie Warbrick on their wedding day, December 1944
Photo supplied by Val Sherwood

From 1944, Edward Piers Edgcumbe was in receipt of a small remittance as heir to an earldom at Mount Edgcumbe, near St Austell, in Cornwall, England. Piers Robert, the only son of the 6th Earl, Kenelm Edgcumbe, had been killed at Dunkirk while serving with the 21st Royal Lancers in World

War II. The earl urged Piers and Effie to make their home with him at Mount Edgcumbe House, originally built in 1347. This was under restoration after having been virtually destroyed, apart from the exterior walls, by incendiary bombs dropped by German planes in 1941 during the blitz on Plymouth. During the major rebuild which commenced in 1958, a steel frame and concrete floors were installed. On receiving the earl's invitation, Piers, Effie and her sister Louisa sold up their Auckland properties and made the move to Cornwall around 1963, but sadly, Louisa died there in 1964.

When Piers succeeded to the title of 7th Earl of Mount Edgcumbe on 10 February 1965, New Zealand critics saw the event as an opportunity to mock the British hereditary system. How was it possible, that a mere New Zealand farmer and his wife could become the Earl and Countess of Mount Edgcumbe?

In Cornwall, Piers continued his interest in agriculture. The 'NZ heirloom' tomato seeds he had taken to Mount Edgcumbe became extremely popular among British horticulturists. As 'Lady Effie Mount Edgcumbe' the new countess took a keen interest in local welfare. Her lifetime involvement in nursing drew her to charitable endeavours, and in particular to become founder and president of the Plymouth Cancer Society. When, in the 1970s, local doctors flagged the need for a hospice to care for terminally ill patients, Lady Edgcumbe threw her energy into the setting up of the Plymouth and Cornwall Cancer Fund, presiding over a committee which would successfully raise the funds to build such a hospital at Saint Austell. Although Effie did not see the fulfilment of her dream, dying at Cornwall in 1975, her role in the cancer fund was taken up by a similarly dedicated lady, Mrs Enid Dalton-White. By 1980 £450,000 had been raised and the building was well under way. The hospice was officially opened by Piers, the 7th Earl of Mount Edgcumbe on October 6 1980.

Edgecumbe, the great house and 865 acre grounds, had been sold during 1971 to the Plymouth City Council and Cornwall County Council, as shared owners. The magnificent grounds and gardens were turned into a country park, though Piers leased back the land to continue farming. Then, when Piers died in 1982 his nephew, Robert Charles, another New Zealand farmer, became the 8th earl. He gave up the lease on the land in 1987. Today the fully restored mansion, surrounded by the Grade 1 listed gardens preserved from the past, is opened to the public. The house is beautifully furnished in 18th century style and displays the treasured possessions of the Edgcumbe family.

Effie was not readily forgotten. On 21 December, 1979, the *Times* published the following:

> A memorial service for the Countess of Edgcumbe was held yesterday at St Andrews, Plymouth. The Rev John Watson officiated and the Bishop of Plymouth pronounced the blessing. The Lord Mayor of Plymouth read the lesson and Mr A Gordon Bellingham, Chairman of the Plymouth and Cornwall Cancer Fund gave the address.

Her achievements continue to be highlighted in the many brochures produced for both the hospice and the historic Edgcumbe House. Thirty years following the opening of the hospice, at a grand tea-party held at Edgcumbe House to mark that milestone, the ribbon for the opening of the celebration was cut by the current Earl. During speeches 'Lady Effie Mount Edgcumbe' received due honour as the chairman founder of the hospice trust. The current Earl having fathered five daughters, the heir apparent is his half-brother, Piers Valletort Edgcumbe, who lives in New Zealand.

Other New Zealanders have inherited British titles. One who was so honoured is Mark de Courcy, who lives in Remuera, and is the current holder of the Irish title 'Lord Kingsale.' He succeeded the 30th Baron in 2005, and also holds the feudal title 'Baron of Ringrone'. His sister, Katherine de Courcy, is archivist at Special Collections at the Auckland City Library.

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Mount Edgcumbe House and Country Park, Plymouth City Council
Mount Edgcumbe Family History

Epsom reflections 1946–2014

A memoir by Natalie Taplin

Introduction

When my father, Edward George Box, returned from service as a sapper in North Africa in 1945, he and my mother, Zoe Box (née Ruddell), my sister Valerie and I moved to Auckland in 1946 to begin a new chapter in the life of our family. I note here that my father, as a young man and before leaving Britain, trained as an A-grade mechanic, becoming chauffeur to Lord Gage of Firle Place, East Sussex, and my mother was a descendant of the first European settler in the Mangakahia Valley, Whangarei.

Move to Manukau Road

Following his discharge from the New Zealand Army, my father intended to buy a service-station but because of a medical condition following his time in the North African desert, his GP stressed the necessity of keeping away from anything to do with oil/machinery, so acting on that advice, he and my mother purchased the Ranfurly Fruit Depot situated at what was then 448A Manukau Road with two-bedroom accommodation upstairs (now long gone and renamed *Mainly Mirrors* with new street number 260 Manukau Road).

I remember being scared each time the gas califont was lit over the bath; dusting the banisters of the stairs taking particular care of the small gap between them which often trapped my hand; also polishing the piano which stood at the bottom of the stairs. Valerie and I had ongoing piano lessons for several years, both classical, until Valerie moved on to 'modern' in her teenage years when she was pleased to be invited to play at the dances held at the Epsom RSA Hall while the band had a break. They were very encouraging as she played *In the Mood*, her favourite piece at that time. I didn't mind having to accompany her as 'chaperone'.

We always did things together when we were young—walking down to Newmarket for the Saturday matinee (with rolling jaffas) at the Rialto Cinema or walking up to the then Regent Cinema (now The Lido); playing around the Sir John Logan Campbell statue at the entrance to Cornwall Park (removed during the war years and re-erected later); paddling in the water then moving on to run around what we called the 'basin'—actually the 'Circus' roundabout—exploring Acacia Cottage and climbing up to

the obelisk—then the long walk home. At that time, Cornwall Hospital in Cornwall Park (previously the 39th General US Army Hospital) was still in place until the Auckland Hospital Board requested its use until National Women's Hospital was built. My first son and daughter were born there in the private doctors' ward in 1960 and 1962. Cornwall Park was our playground while enjoying our school days at Epsom Normal Primary waiting for enrolment at St Anne's School, Takapuna.

In those very early days, milk was delivered by horse and cart from Ambury's Milk Factory (adjacent to Epsom Girls' Grammar). During primary school holidays, Valerie and I were able to wait at daybreak for the milk-cart and ride around the block with the friendly driver before jumping off and returning home. Can you imagine that happening today? Also long gone are the *Auckland Star* boys who used to pick up their deliveries outside Mr Boyd the butcher and tease the girls as they walked by.

My parents established a thriving business at the Ranfurly/Manukau Road corner block of shops along with, on the left-hand side coming from the city, Mr Boyd the butcher (now a Japanese restaurant); another fruiterer who also trained racehorses at Alexandra Park; a dairy; and an old-fashioned grocery store (smelling of flour and biscuits) that became an IGA (later Ranfurly Antiques). What a novelty to walk around the aisles and choose our own goods! But I missed being served from the counter by the friendly grocer.

To the left of our shop right next door was the Quinlan sisters' stationery and lending library. I used to get my weekly *Sunny Stories* from there then walk up about three narrow steps into the library at the rear of the shop. I remember it as being small and cramped, quite dark and full of books on shelves. My mother got all her reading material from there but I was too young to join. However I did love going along the shelves trying to read the titles. It is now a liquor store. A new wing was added in later years with a hardware store (now hairdresser) and two other shops. I did join the Epsom Library at around age 10 and have continued that membership.

I well remember the Ranfurly Fruit Depot with its polished floor and mirrors on the walls behind the fruit displays—particularly the ornate white-framed mirror on the wall behind the counter along with big colourful posters with the message 'Eat more Fruit'; and the brass rail hanging over the counter where grapes were hung and cut with scissors when the particular bunch was selected by the customer. My mother also made jams and jellies from the over-ripe fruit. These sold well, along with

Fruit shop window display
Photo supplied by Natalie Taplin

Mate Grbin and my mother awaiting the daily delivery of goods from the morning auction
Photo supplied by Natalie Taplin

her ready-cooked beetroot. My parents also employed a young man (Mate Grbin) from Whangarei to assist in the shop**.** Young boys used to earn pocket money by bringing in old newspapers to be carefully cut and used as wrapping paper. I remember Mate's wedding around that time, a formal occasion at St Patrick's Cathedral with dancers at the reception performing traditional dances while dressed in traditional Yugoslav costume—so colourful—I can still hear the music and the singing.

The shop always seemed to be busy with people coming and going. The phone rang regularly with orders coming from private hospitals, schools and various boarding establishments in Epsom. These orders were always delivered by my father in his green Ford truck. This Ford truck also took our family to Symonds Street to welcome Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery on his visit to Auckland in 1947. My father remembered him well from his time in the desert when Field Marshall Montgomery took command of the British 8th Army in 1942. In 1946 he was made 1st Viscount Montgomery of Alamein—although my father always referred to him as 'Monty' and was very proud to have the opportunity of seeing him again.

The family awaiting the visit of Field Marshall Montgomery, 1947
Photo: Natalie Taplin

Across the road, on the opposite corner, was a smaller block of shops (Olesons est. 1887) with another grocer, a dairy and Waymouths' Pharmacy. I well remember Mr Percy Waymouth the elder, a very old-school and

well-respected member of the community, also his son John Waymouth the younger, who took over as pharmacist when his father retired from the business. In later years, John was assisted by his wife Paddy, both also filling various important roles in the Epsom community. These were the days when shop-owners swept their footpaths (always a continuous battle with the falling oak leaves from Marivare Reserve), and while so doing people often gathered outside the shop for a friendly chat with the owner.

The removal of the trams—the last tram to Onehunga was on 28 December 1956—and the later installation of traffic lights at the intersection made an enormous difference to the flow of traffic and patronage of the Ranfurly/Manukau Road shops.

Move to Market Road

Around this time (1948?) my parents purchased 101 Market Road, Epsom—a large plain Victorian 'modernised' villa on the lower slopes of Mount St John Domain (Titikopuke).

101 Market Road in the 1940s
Photo: Natalie Taplin

St Anne's School, Takapuna

My sister and I were then attending St Anne's School where we had two and three years as boarders, then completing our intermediate schooling there as day-girls. Happy days. The school (situated in Gibbons Road) with its numerous concrete steps running down to Takapuna beach meant the beach was our playground, especially for rounders when the tide was out. Swimming, dependant on tidal flow (and never swimming on

an outgoing tide), was always enjoyed regardless of the weather. During those later years at St Anne's, my father would drop Valerie and me off at the ferry buildings before continuing his journey to Turners & Growers in his immaculately-maintained red Vauxhall 14 to attend the daily fruit/vegetable/flower auction. Valerie and I would then have a quick debate on whether to catch the Devonport, Bayswater or Stanley Point ferry before catching the relevant bus to Takapuna. After school, we caught the bus at The Strand, Takapuna, then boarded the Devonport ferry—in Queen Street we caught the tram home to Ranfurly Road. All that daily travelling and we thought nothing of it!

Exploring Mount St John

As boarders, during exit weekends we often brought home two or three boarders, as at that time several girls had parents who lived overseas. Naturally, we all reacted to the freedom and spent many happy hours up Mount St John exploring the kumara pits, running round the concrete pads that held anti-aircraft guns in World War II and then running up and down the crater—but always avoiding skidding on the scoria around the site of the old quarry on the Mount St John Avenue side. At night as we went to sleep, we could hear the frogs croaking in the swamp at the bottom of the crater. One time we were all in disgrace, when in very wet weather we all slid down to the swamp which meant our mother had to wash and dry several sets of clothing before our return to St Anne's that evening. Our parents always returned us via the vehicular ferry carrying a large hold-all of fresh fruit to be shared with our friends until our next exit weekend. My father used to say we were eating all the profits!

Epsom Girls' Grammar—Auckland Grammar

St Anne's School was the forerunner to Kristin School, established when St Anne's closed in the 1970s. As it took students only up to intermediate school age, Valerie and I both completed our secondary schooling at Epsom Girls' Grammar—a mere 15-minute walk from home. However I do remember, when proudly riding to school on my new bike, falling off outside Dilworth School when the wheels got caught in the tram-tracks. Only my pride was hurt! Luckily, at that time, there was very little traffic either coming or going—but from then on I walked to school. Our daughter, Anne-Louise, attended Epsom Girls' Grammar and both our

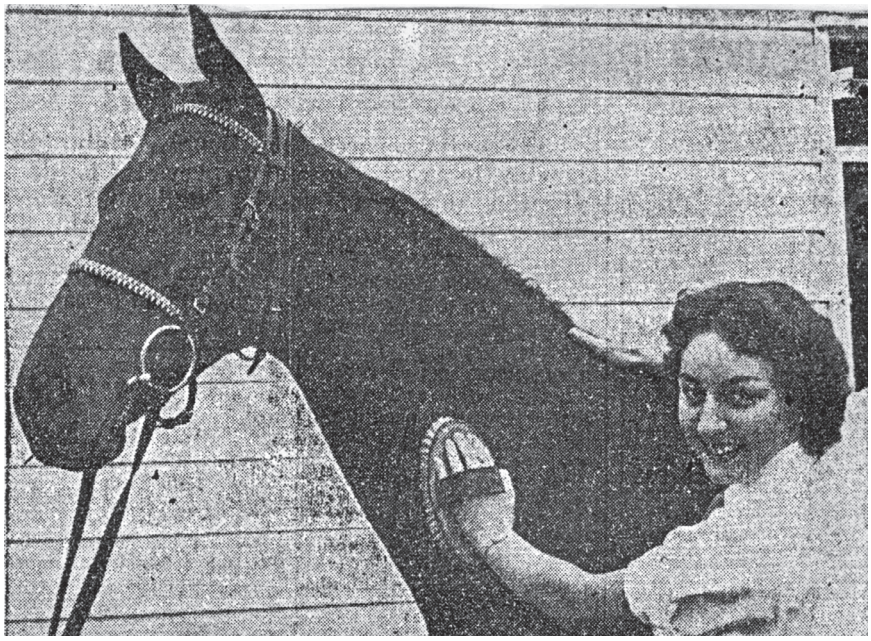
boys, Christopher and Matthew, attended Auckland Grammar—all three enjoyed their Grammar years where lifetime friendships were formed. Christopher always associates his time at Grammar with the smell of hops brewing at Lion Breweries in Khyber Pass.

Market Road

Valerie and I had a very happy life at 101 Market Road. In our early days we would see the ice-man coming up the side path with a huge block of ice on his shoulder. The existing ice chest was later turned into a built-in wardrobe in one of the bedrooms. How very 'modern' we felt when we got our first refrigerator, a large *Smeg* with rounded corners. My mother had the old copper and concrete tubs removed and what a thrill it was when a new washing machine was installed. Every Saturday my job was to wash, starch and iron our father's white shirts (he wore a clean shirt every day) and many times my rubber gloves got caught in the wringer. I had to act very quickly to remove my hands from the gloves but the gloves invariably went through the wringer. Starching the shirts was good practice for starching our petticoats ready for dancing on Saturday nights.

In this rather large house of 3500 sq ft, the sitting room (which we called the 'lounge') had five sets of French doors opening onto a return-verandah as previous owners had taken out a wall and converted two rooms into one. How our mother cooked wonderful meals for up to 25 people (Christmas and birthdays) from the tiny 'scullery' is, in this day and age, hard to believe. Before the first renovations undertaken by our parents, Valerie and I especially remembered the bedroom wallpapers billowing in and out whenever the wind got up. There was no insulation whatsoever, just sarking and hessian. For Valerie's engagement party, my mother had the old green Feltex carpet removed from the entire house, the floors were sanded and the lounge prepared for dancing for around 70 guests. We also participated in 'progressive dinners' for St George's congregation—65 people were easily seated in the lounge and tables ran the length of the room.

In 1958 a subdivision around six houses from 101, was established in Maxfield Place, off Market Road. Formerly the grounds of *Maxfield House* (est. 1882), the paddocks were right on the street-front where horses, if they weren't grazing up the mountain, used to hang their heads over the fence bordering the street. We loved going along to pat them. Valerie also worked part-time in stables at Ellerslie, often riding one of the horses to Market Road before returning to the stables. In the late 1950s, as a stropper, she



Stropping the horse: "Something all horses like—
Miss Box uses a soft body brush on the yearling filly . . . ."
Photo: *New Zealand Herald*

accompanied (on the *Wanganella*) the New Zealand two-year-old glamour filly 'Ganymede' to Rosehill, Sydney where she had been entered in the Golden Slipper Stakes. Valerie's arrival caused quite a stir as this was a role rarely undertaken by girls and she made headlines in several newspapers—in Australia only boys did this job, and there they were called strappers.

Mr and Mrs Leser lived at 97 Market Road and I used to help her spring-cleaning the house for which I was always pleased to receive half-a-crown. Mr Leser had a well-known bookshop in Remuera Road, Newmarket. After leaving home, their son Bernard Leser became Conde Nast Managing Director and founder of *Vogue Australia*. He died in 2015 and his impressive obituary is included in the January 2016 issue of *Tatler*.

Eventually, Valerie and I both married and moved away from home. When our father died in 1972, my husband Bert and I with our family of three children moved back into 101 where we carried out renovations over several years, finally selling in 1995. Over the next few years our good life in Epsom continued as usual.

101 Market Road in the 1990s
Photo: Natalie Taplin

101A Market Road

Also in 1995, we purchased the property directly behind us at 101A Market Road where, being south-facing and high on the mountain, we lost the sun for six weeks in winter. We were happy there too, situated further up the mountain (wonderful views) and beside one of the three entrances to Mount St John. The cattle-race was directly beside the back bedroom window. It was just like living in the country when Grant Latimer, the then farm manager for Cornwall Park Trust, would move his cattle/sheep either up or down the mountain, accompanied by his dogs with much barking and whistling while unloading or loading the truck. Attendance at St George's Anglican Church in Ranfurly Road continued. The church, which celebrated 100 years on 19 December 2015, was important to our family: baptisms, weddings and funeral services all held there. In 2014, a park-bench donated in memory of my husband Bert was installed in the *Marie Kerkham Memorial Garden*—in the church grounds on the lower slopes of Mount St John.

Volcanic cones

I think you can gather how much living on Mount St John meant to all our family. Over the years this included our three grand-daughters: Jessica, Sasha and Zoe. To be situated between Mount Hobson and Mount Eden with One Tree Hill close by meant we had easy access to all three. As a member of the Auckland Volcanic Cones Society I hope and pray the precious volcanic cones will never be hidden from view by new high-rise developments.

Margot Street

When we sold 101A Market Road we moved just around the mountain to Margot Street, first to No. 54 and then several years later next door to No. 52—opposite Diocesan School—with all-day sun and no stairs! More happy years with time to take in the changes occurring all around us.

Gillies Avenue

In December 2013, I sold 52 Margot Street and moved to a flat in Gillies Avenue with a wonderful view from the kitchen sink to the summit of Mount Eden. In the five months I was there, being in the close vicinity of several schools, once again I could see the changing face of Epsom. The 'old' Epsom gradually becoming the 'new' Epsom.

Mangere Bridge

In 2014, I moved with my daughter and her family to a well-established property at Mangere Bridge situated between the village, the waters of the Manukau Harbour and Mangere Mountain—another volcanic cone right on our doorstep and a friendly community and slower pace of life that reminds me very much of the 'old' Epsom my family knew and loved so well.

The History of Epsom

Edited by Graham W.A. Bush and published 2006 by the Epsom and Eden District Historical Society Inc., this book has been a great help to me in the writing of this memoir. I thank all those concerned who had the vision and stamina to undertake such an enormous project over a course of five years. In the words of the Reverend Warren Limbrick, former Vicar, St Andrew's Epsom, a book written by true 'Epsomites' for all 'Epsomites' to enjoy.

March 2016

The early history of Bramwell Place

By Jennifer Wilkins

As an immigrant to New Zealand I would say that settling in, assimilating, is a matter of time and effort. As I accumulate elements of being a New Zealander into my British bones—the odd vernacular phrase, for instance, and a love of native plants—I've watched my kids become absolute New Zealanders through school and sports and friendships. We've gradually tied ourselves in with many threads. One of those threads is the simplest of things. By dint of my address I am one of a lineage of people connected to a specific place. Perhaps it is because I am an immigrant and a keen researcher that it intrigued me so much, but I felt that to know more about that lineage would be to strengthen my ties to my neighbourhood.

My particular address made it easy to pick up the thread. I live in a street that is named after a person and I live in the house in which he lived. I began only with his name, Roland Bramwell, but with the benefit of the prolific and detailed newspaper journalism that upholstered the early colonial era, and by following the audit trail through land records, I found fascinating details of the people who have owned or leased the land that became my address, spanning nearly 100 years, from the initial purchase of the wider Epsom area from Maori in 1841 to the final subdivision in the late 1920s of the section that I live on today. It's a tale of place and people, many of whom were immigrants just like me.

It would have pleased me more than anything to discover something of my address's Maori lineage, to find that my garden was once a kumara plantation, or that Bramwell Place was the site of a Waiohua family's allotment. *From Tamaki-Makau-Rau To Auckland* tells the wider tale, and *The History of Epsom* narrows details to the area, but I have searched for pinpoint archaeological records, and for hard evidence, including quizzing my immediate neighbours on the incidence of shells in their soil in the hope that we would discover a local midden, to no avail. My study of the pre-history of my address is incomplete.

> The capital!—a few boats and canoes on the beach, a few tents and break-wind huts along the margin of the bay, and then—a sea of fern stretching away as far as the eye could reach.

So wrote early settler John Logan Campbell in his classic memoir, *Poenamo*, and so began Auckland.

In September 1840, the Crown purchased a triangle of 3,500 acres of a region known as Tamaki-Makau-Rau from Ngati Whatua for the sum of £50 in cash, plus goods to the value of £215, which consisted of a quantity of blankets, clothing fabric, caps, tobacco, pipes, pots, sugar, flour and hatchets. This land would become downtown Auckland. In mid-1841, the Crown purchased several more blocks, including 13,000 acres in a diamond shape abutting the original triangle. That rough diamond included the valley that would become known as Epsom and, within that valley, a piece of land that would one day be in my care. By the close of business on 29 June, 1841, my quarter-acre belonged to Queen Victoria.

For the whole block, the Crown paid £200 in cash, plus four horses, thirty blankets, ten cloaks, one tent and one desk; and then, later, £25 in lieu of the cloaks. My section amounts to one fifty-two thousandth, so, at an extravagant guess, Queen Victoria obtained my address for a halfpenny, plus the ear of a horse, the corner of a blanket, a tent peg and the knob of a desk drawer.

As the newest destination in the Empire, peacefully negotiated, untainted by a penal past, and a relatively short sail from the established outposts of Australia, Auckland was expected to quickly burgeon in immigrant numbers, and it would be vital to establish local sources of food.

Maori were superb fishermen and market gardeners (growing kumara, maize, taro, watermelon, pumpkin and potatoes), and they kept poultry and pigs (well, to be precise, the pigs ran wild, thriving on fern roots, but were easily hunted by dogs when required). There was a bustling trade in supplying early colonists with the sustenance they needed, and the settlers were truly grateful that they did not have to be entirely self-sufficient; but they craved breads, dairy produce, a wider range of vegetables, and meat other than pork. They couldn't supplement their diet by hunting deer or even small mammals because there were none and there was no natural pasture (the landscape was dominated by fern) so it was impossible to keep herds of cattle. Aucklanders desperately desired new would-be pastoralists.

In 1841, to encourage emigration by farmers, the surveyor general drew up a map (see figure 1) of the greater Auckland area, on which my neighbourhood—limned by Balmoral, Manukau, Mount Albert and Mount Eden roads—about four miles from Auckland's downtown, is designated 'small farms'.

In a flourish of grand cursive strokes the cartographer has also embellished the area with the words 'volcanic soil of the finest description'.

"Map of the Harbour of Waitemata, New Zealand, and of the adjacent country showing the situation of Auckland, the capital of the colony, and also the isthmus which separates the owaters of the Firth of Thames on the eastern from those of Manukau on the western coast . . ."
Felton Mathew, surveyor general, 1841
Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, NZ Map 6601

If land could flirt, those words would be the horticultural equivalent of a come-hither, and in anticipation of a land rush the volcanic valley was divided into a neat tessellation of allotments. They have proven quite indelible, these original allotments, their borders evident in the woof and warp of our local roads today.

Some were bought with the business of farming in mind, naturally; but many were bought by land-jobbers who wished simply to make a profit and move on. Among the latter was Robert Tod, who bought allotment 59, within which I reside.

Robert Tod, a Scot, came to New Zealand via Australia, where he had operated as a shipping agent. He landed in December 1839 at the fledgling settlement of Port Nicholson (Wellington) where New Zealand Company officers had just negotiated the purchase of a very large tract of land from local Maori, and the company's ships, laden with supplies and hundreds of settler families, had begun to arrive.

The place was beginning to bustle. Tod, too, negotiated with local Maori, for a prime waterfront section at Thorndon, an area earmarked for the epicentre of the new city, and with the help of Maori labourers he quickly set up his family home and established a quayside business.

His land purchase drew the wrath of the infamously bellicose New Zealand Company, which claimed that Thorndon in its entirety belonged to it. The company proceeded to harass Tod using one of the several intimidation methods it liked to employ—on this occasion, character-mauling veiled as public indignation.

On 6 June 1840, the *New Zealand Gazette* (Port Nicolson's nascent newspaper) published an editorial on 'Mr. Robert Tod's Case' which amounted to a lengthy diatribe. In the same issue, a copy of a letter that had been sent to Tod by the secretary of the settler's council was also published, which threatened to point him out to the police as a dangerous person (intention thus accomplished), and raised the question of whether he was entitled to 'the fellowship of his countrymen'. The New Zealand Company was being duplicitous. The editor of the *Gazette* was also the secretary of the settler's council and a shareholder in the New Zealand Company, and the police force was made up of New Zealand Company immigrants called up by the president of the settler's council, who also happened to be the principal agent of the New Zealand Company.

Tod was no timorous beastie. He stood his ground, suspecting that once New Zealand became a Crown colony, as was rumoured to be afoot, prior

land claims would have to be approved by the Crown. The company's land claim was no more valid than his own. There is an old saying in Scotland: 'possession is eleven points in the law, and they say there are but twelve'. He made sure he had his paperwork in order and his family *in situ*. A few years later, the validity of Tod's purchase would be upheld by the Land Claims Court.

In April 1841, Tod came up to Auckland for the long-awaited inaugural Crown land auction of small downtown lots. Many hopeful immigrants of modest means had collected for this much anticipated land share. Unfortunately for them they were outbid by land-jobbers who pushed up prices and by government officials who had been given beneficial payment terms. The surveyor general, for instance, bought three lots. The Crown had expected to realise about 15 to 18 shillings per perch (40 perches being equivalent to a quarter acre), so it was sensational, and sickening to many, when the first two lots each went for a staggering £7/perch. After this spirited start the auction room settled down a little and prices, though still astounding, steadied at an average of around £4/perch. Heads must have turned then when Tod made a bid at just over £10. He bought three lots that day and paid the highest price per perch by far. Robert Tod had *arrived*.

The second set of Crown land sales in September 1841 included three areas: suburban land close to downtown (i.e. Parnell), cultivation allotments earmarked for market gardens, but swampy (i.e. Newmarket), and small farms with good volcanic soil (i.e. south Epsom). The swelling masses hoped that these sections would be more affordable, but again, it was mostly the same speculators and officials who bought, and at prices that still precluded those who just wanted to settle down on a wee patch of country land and live happily ever after.

Tod played the big spender once again; £600 bought him a 3-acre suburban allotment, a 3-acre cultivation allotment and three contiguous farm allotments covering 42 acres. (These were allotments 59, 33 and 34—bordered today by Manukau Road, Onslow Avenue, St Andrews and Empire roads. Bramwell Place and Atherton Road are central within allotment 59. Banff Avenue separates allotments 33 and 34)

Despite his large landholdings Tod was not interested in farming or in settling down in Auckland. He rapidly subdivided his three suburban acres into thirty-six tiny sections and within four days of the auction these were advertised for sale as the 'Village of Parnell'.

Within weeks he announced plans for a new township, called Anna,

to be developed on his 42-acres of rural land. Anna was to include two churches, a central hippodrome, a market-place, reservoirs, and an array of terraces, streets and places divided into more than 200 allotments.

Nothing ever became of Anna. It was a bizarre plan for a garden-city from which to commute into a capital that had not yet been built. It was unlikely anyone would back such a fanciful plan—a rural hippodrome would not have been as enticing to a lender as, say, a commercial wharf or a quarry. It would not have taken Tod long to revert to the neater algorithm of straightforward subdivision, but he would still have wanted to convey a sense of added value, that these were more than just sliced up sections of wilderness. Adjacent landowners had similar thoughts. Just three weeks after the Crown auction, an advertisement was distributed announcing the development of the previously unheard of 'VILLAGE OF EPSOM!!!'. (Those exclamation marks are not mine.)

This outrageous advertisement ignored the reality of the place—a wild, manuka shrub-dotted, bracken fern-infested hinterland—describing instead the village-to-be. Epsom was delightfully situated half-way between the 'metropolis' of Auckland and the colony's 'second town of importance', Manukau—a place that had yet to be surveyed. The advertisement then lapsed into unities of opposites. Epsom village would have a racecourse (imminently true) enabling 'business combined with amusement', and yet it would be 'a quiet retreat from the noisy world'. As for the requirements of the lifestyle gardener, the valley was 'sheltered from winds', yet was cooled by sea breezes. It went on, lost in hyperbole, to point out that the richness of its soil could not be 'outvied in the whole world' and that nowhere in New Zealand was there 'a place so rich in romantic scenery as this'.

Despite the fanfare, the village of Epsom, like the township of Anna, did not take off. For many years it remained rural, no more than a hamlet. Tod did not sell a single farmland subsection, ever.

The History of Epsom (2006) cites several reasons for the lack of interest in the Epsom area in the early days. Firstly, at the time of the farm auctions the proprietor of the local newspaper wrote strongly against the unchecked creation of many small townships fearing a proliferation of 'roadside inns . . . surrounded by a few dirty hovels, inhabited by the worst characters'. Secondly, in the early 1840s there were simply not enough immigrants to drive any sort of demand for small, out-of-town, premium-priced, residential lots. And thirdly, the majority of Tod's neighbours saw the value

of the land in the wealth of its soil, and the area was destined to be farmed for the foreseeable future.

Weighing up his options, Tod chose to hold his land and let it appreciate with time. While he went off to pursue his fortune elsewhere, he is likely to have leased his land to a settler-farmer.

Before any kind of farming was possible the land had to be cleared. It was no easy job getting rid of bracken fern, swiddening [cutting and burning] being perhaps the best method and one which had been employed by Maori for centuries. Some sections stayed in fern for several years. A recently arrived immigrant described in his journal what he found on a hike out to Epsom in 1842:

> Saw some nice cottages and gardens, and two farms of about 10 acres, each under cultivation in wheat and barley. There were also two herds of cattle with bells on their necks to indicate their whereabouts when in the fern, which is everywhere around. Observed one plough at work, drawn by bullocks.

Over the next few years the Epsom valley developed into a gilded, undulant landscape of arable fields lightly dotted with cottages and hayricks, and was held up as the paragon of pastoral settlement with its 'lovely gardens and blooming corn-fields . . . more like an English landscape than a wild New Zealand district . . . [with farms] more like old homesteads than recent clearings.' A traveller in 1846 wrote back to England about '[t]he few houses . . . called by anticipation the village of Epsom', whose fields were 'whitening to the harvest, . . . cut out of these undulating hills, divided by belts of wood, which had a most pleasing appearance, not unlike some parts of Kent.' A windmill added charm to the bucolic scene, while a roadside inn added piquancy. By 1848, there were 147 immigrants living at Epsom, almost all of whom belonged to families who farmed.

These blissful portrayals belie the difficulties of farming in the area in the early colonial era. Epsom's roads were notoriously bad. The other gripe was that the local windmill's grindstone, three feet in diameter, was inadequately small and the mill was often out of order. Ludicrously, bushels of wheat were being shipped to Sydney to be ground while much of Auckland's flour was imported. Inevitably, arable crops began to be replaced by pasture for the production of dairy, meat and wool, and Epsom began to change colour from Kentish gold to a more Hibernian green.

Robert Tod, meanwhile, who had based himself in Sydney, was declared

insolvent in 1847 with a string of creditors to whom he owed the enormous sum of £3,300. He forfeited everything, including his New Zealand land, to a trustee.

One of Tod's creditors was a merchant named Ranulph Dacre, so it is probably no coincidence that in 1854 Ranulph Dacre bought Tod's Auckland land, comprising the village of Parnell (only seven out of thirty-six subdivisions had been sold) and his 42-acre Epsom farm, all for the sum of £600 (presumably well discounted).

Dacre was no more a farmer than Tod had been, but he was certainly the better businessman. Originally from England, Dacre was a mariner at heart and had built himself a fortune as a mercantile agent based in Sydney shipping goods to Britain from the Pacific, including products from New Zealand, such as whale oil, timber and flax. He first visited New Zealand as early as 1824, trading and negotiating with Maori years before the Treaty of Waitangi. He bought swathes of forested land, extracting kauri. Early in the 1830s, for instance, Dacre won a large contract to supply the British Admiralty with a hundred kauri masts. Such operations were often beset with difficulty. When Dacre sailed from Sydney to New Zealand to fulfil the masts order he found his progress marred by the Maori musket wars and by the robbery of his timber by rivals.

Kati Te Wherowhero, a high ranking chief of the Waikato people, once took passage on Dacre's barque, *Bolina*, from the Bay of Islands, where Kati had been visiting his wife's family. Disembarking at Thames, Kati was captured by a rival Maori group incensed by an attack they had just suffered at the hands of some of Kati's kinsmen. Kati would certainly have been killed were it not for the influence of an elder who decided that his group had more to gain politically by being merciful than from being vengeful. All the same, Kati's belongings, luggage, weapons and all, just unloaded from the *Bolina*, were ransacked on the beach in an episode known in Maori history as 'the stripping of Kati'.

Dacre was later to be stripped of his wealth too, in the collapse of the Australian economy in 1842. But he managed to hold onto his substantial tracts of land in New Zealand, enabling him to rebuild his fortune, and he became one of Auckland's wealthiest and most landed citizens. My address was a very small piece in Dacre's asset portfolio yet it remained in his family's possession for nearly 25 years. The farm was leased out, as it had been in Tod's day, to a string of leasehold farmers. One of those farmers was the inimitable Ernest Roden Hill.

Commencing in 1873, Hill would work the Epsom farm for 13 years, paying about £100 per annum in rent. Becoming an Epsom farmer was a step up in the world for Hill. He had been a smallholder leasing a cottage with four acres in the nearby village of Onehunga, and had worked as a carter and as a cattle warden with the filmic title Ranger of the Auckland Hundred, whose duty it was to impound stray cattle.

You could say he was a cowboy, and as a young man, prone to speeding, or 'furious riding' as it was called, and involved in the occasional episode of fisticuffs, he certainly lived up to the negative connotations of the moniker. In fact, Ernest Hill seems to have been one of those characters around whom bad news collects.

Cash flow may have been a problem. A few years into his Epsom farming venture, in 1876, one of Hill's hayricks went on fire consuming 26 tons of hay, worth about £60. Since it was 10pm at night, not to mention mid-winter, when the fire was discovered, it was suggested by the commentators of the day that it had been started deliberately. Hill, miraculously, was insured.

Over time, with a few court appearances under his belt, Hill seems to have gained a reputation for dishonesty. In 1881, when he alleged his house had been burgled, the crime was reported in the press with barely dampened scepticism:

> The police have received a somewhat vague report of the robberies from which it appears that the houses of Mr Ernest R Hill, and Mr Head, have been entered, and what is the more remarkable, in broad daylight, and that articles of jewellery were taken from the house of Mr. Hill, but nothing of value has been missed from the residence of Mr Head.

As well as being conspicuously unlucky, Hill appears to have had a nasty streak. He was accused of making continued attacks against another man, and of lying in wait with intent to injure. He was also charged with using insulting and abusive language—in the newspaper report of that particular court hearing, Hill's middle name, Roden, unfortunately was misspelled as 'Rodent'.

In 1878 the Dacre family sold their Epsom farm to a well-known local businessman, Michael McGarry. He, owning other farms and businesses, would have been happy to inherit the leasehold arrangement with Hill, even if he was a difficult character, since farms for lease or sale could languish on the market for many months. When Hill's lease expired in 1886, however,

McGarry did not renew it, possibly because Hill was not paying his bills. Within days of Hill moving out of the farmhouse, but before he returned the keys to McGarry, the house went on fire in the early hours one morning and burnt to the ground. Given the odd hour of day, and since the building was unoccupied, it was suspected that the fire had been deliberately set, although the culprit was never discovered.

Several months later Hill was declared bankrupt, owing £835 to farming community creditors. He protested in court that his business had failed, not as a result of his own shortcomings, but due to factors beyond his control, bad debts and failing crops. He moved on from farming and from the Epsom area, but a final oddity occurred in 1889 when he wrote to the council at Onehunga to offer them 20 acres of land for a cemetery near the Anglican Church at Epsom—a description which sounds uncannily like allotment 59, which still belonged to McGarry, who was, coincidently, trying to sell it. The council, sensing mischief or disillusionment, resolved that they were not in a position to accept Hill's offer.

When he was 32 years old and not yet married, Michael McGarry and a business partner, John Brierly, bought the annual leaseholds of two tollgates, one on Mount Eden Road and the other nearby on Newton Road. It was 1866.

McGarry lived next to the Newton Road tollgate, but would have much preferred to live next to the Mount Eden tollgate and rent a room at Galbraith's pub where he and Brierly were regulars. McGarry asked the publican for a room but was refused because Galbraith had two teenage daughters at home and knew far better than to have an unmarried man living in the house. Galbraith's 18-year-old daughter fell pregnant anyway, and Galbraith took Brierly to court seeking damages for seduction. McGarry was his key witness.

McGarry found himself in the awkward position of being pitted against his friend and business partner, but gave evidence nonetheless that Brierly had admitted his impropriety to him but had not been prepared to take responsibility for the girl's predicament. Brierly's fate was thus sealed. The judge awarded Galbraith significant damages, and Brierly, with a smudge on his character, a strain on his business relationship, and a much-diminished beer budget, had to find himself a new pub.

McGarry continued in the tollgate business, minus John Brierly, for many years, running various tollgates around the city including the busy Newmarket tollgate and weighbridge. Much of the agricultural produce

from Epsom passed over the Newmarket weighbridge on its way between vendor and purchaser, and McGarry became somewhat of a court regular, called frequently as a dependably honest witness to a variety of commercial disputes ranging from under-deliveries to rotten deliveries and the occasional thrown punch.

Tollgates were not popular at all, but when the Newmarket gate was finally removed in 1876 locals lamented the loss of two institutions: one being the familiar little wooden booth which was carted off to be re-used elsewhere; the other being McGarry's familiar face. It seems that everyone knew and liked Michael McGarry.

As a businessman, McGarry was entrepreneurial. He was also speculative, investing in gold and in land. The late 1860s brought the gold rush to the Auckland region. Very small amounts of alluvial gold were known to be present in the soil at Thames, a sleepy backwater, and local Maori sometimes brought small quantities to Auckland to sell, so it was not altogether surprising when a tell-tale glint was noticed in a quartz rock face behind a waterfall. But it suggested the existence of something much larger. Within days gold prospectors, many of whom were running out of luck in other gold fields, had flocked to the area like an absurd migration of bling-dazzled magpies, and within a year there were 18,000 people living a rough, chaotic, hopeful existence in tiny Thames. A small number of Thames' quartz reefs were immensely rich in gold, but Thames was not a place for manual panning. Extraction was only viable on a mechanical scale since to release its treasure the rock had to be smashed to smithereens, and operations were limited to specialist mining companies which often raised capital by selling shares. In 1869, McGarry bought £500 of shares in a Thames mining company—a very significant investment.

This and other sharemarket gambles of his must have paid off nicely (in aggregate, at least) for, a decade or so later, McGarry would be comfortably well off, able to purchase two small but valuable farms in Mt Eden and Epsom. He also bought land in the Waste Lands of the Waikato, some of the richest farmland in New Zealand, confiscated from Maori after the Waikato Wars.

In 1886 McGarry's Epsom farmhouse and dairy were mysteriously burnt to the ground, but McGarry had insured his property and the farmhouse was soon rebuilt. The farm's days were numbered, however. Epsom, Auckland's original farming district, had reached adolescence and its complexion was changing fast. In the 1890s, new larger farms in the Waikato were

supplying Auckland with grains, milk and meat, and Epsom's fertile valley drifted from mixed arable and pasture to market gardens planted in rows of vegetables. Not only that, Epsom's big landowners, many of whom were early settlers from the 1840s, 50s and 60s, were getting old and wanted to cash in and retire. The division of their farms into smaller farm holdings and generous residential sections marked the beginning of the end of rural Epsom.

McGarry's farm fragmented naturally—originally three lots, it had always been bisected by a public road (The Drive). Part of the land was sold to the Diocese of Auckland and subsequently, another section to Anglican clergyman the Rev Robert Burrows. The land on the west side of the road, allotment 59, was offered for lease in 1888: '20 Acres at Epsom, close the Church of England, in fine order, with plenty of water'.

The water mentioned could have been a pond since the area was originally quite swampy in parts. There may even have been two ponds because the allotment is pinched along its middle by a gentle north-south ridge that is a watershed falling east and west. The ridge would have been a wonderful place to take in the splendid omnium-gatherum of surrounding landscapes.

To the south-west, close to the farm boundary, there was a shelterbelt of pine trees beyond which the ridge continues to the high point of a massive circular torus of explosively erupted matter belonging to the Three Kings brotherhood of volcanoes (Landscape Road).

To the west is meteorological drama; from there the Tasman Sea hurls its raucous weather inland, often conjuring flaming dusks. Under these emotional skies, the distant, rain-forested Waitakere Ranges are tissued in green gauzy layers like a cool damp underworld.

To the north are the lava spills of Mount Eden, the city's highest peak. Its southern flank is always bathed in black, its human-made terraces defined by the darkest shadows, like literal contour lines.

To the north-east is the smaller volcano, known as Mount St John, at Newmarket; and beyond it, jutting out of the silvery gulf, is the air-sniffing snout of Rangitoto, Auckland's young volcanic pup.

To the east, the farm ridge slopes downhill to what was once swampy low ground (The Drive) but which, by 1890, had become market gardens lined up behind houses and stores fronting onto Manukau Road. Across the road the land rises again, soon steeply, stepping up grand, hand-carved platforms to the wrinkled summit of One Tree Hill.

To the south-east, standing on McGarry's ridge, there would have been a glimpse, just perhaps, of the Manukau harbour glinting in the sunlight with the fins of a thousand sharks.

A certain Roland Bramwell, Esq, must have liked what he saw from the ridge. In 1892 he bought half of McGarry's Epsom farm, being the eastern side of allotment 59, amounting to 11 acres. He positioned his new home, 'the top house', on top of the ridge in a 'splendid healthy position'.

The youngest son of an Anglican clergyman based in Cheshire, Bramwell had arrived in New Zealand in 1867 at the age of twenty, feeling glad, no doubt, to have survived the journey. It's not that he had travelled in the typical, arduous manner, 'cattle class' on an immigrant ship sailing around the southern tip of Africa and across the Indian Ocean—a crowded, stinking 12-week journey. Far from it. Bramwell travelled first class on passenger steamers taking less than two months to cross the Atlantic and the Pacific on a brand new route, via Panama. It is most likely, given the date of his connecting Pacific leg, that Bramwell crossed the Atlantic on the *La Plata* from Southampton, departing 2 November. Alas a passenger list that would confirm his passage does not survive.

The isthmus at Panama could be crossed by rail from Aspinwall (now known as Colon) on the Caribbean Sea to Panama City on the Pacific Ocean in a journey time of about four hours. The Panama railroad provided the fastest journey time between the east and west coasts of North America until the completion of the Pacific Railroad to San Francisco in 1869. Two years before Bramwell's journey the railroad would have transported troops fighting in the American Civil War, and ten years before that, when the railroad first opened, it would have transported gold-diggers heading to California in the Gold Rush.

Roland Bramwell alighted from his rail car at Panama City and boarded the steamship *Kaikoura* bound for New Zealand, 6,500 miles away. His journey across the Pacific passed 'without incident in fine weather'.

It was designed to be an enjoyable voyage. The Sydney–Wellington–Panama route was new, and the *Kaikoura* was a new ship—an iron-hulled, brig-rigged, coal-powered, screw steamship—one of four commissioned by the shipping company, which also was new. Bramwell's first class ticket gave him a comfortable cabin with access to a spacious spar-deck for walks, and a saloon where there is likely to have been a piano, a library, and steam tea and percolated coffee in endless supply. The saloon class meals were 'equal to that of any first-class hotel in London', and to keep food fresh

and drinks cool, there was a 'capacious ice-house, capable of containing sufficient ice for the entire voyage'.

This new service provided a relatively speedy and reliable mail channel and brought the news from London and New York much faster than ever before, but it was not a financial success owing to a lack of both cargo and passengers. In fact, although the *Kaikoura* accommodated 100 first, 60 second, and 50 steerage passengers, with similar facilities to be found on her three sister ships, the service averaged no more than 30 passengers per sailing and was discontinued in 1868 after less than three years of operation. Roland Bramwell was one of only a very small handful of people ever to travel to New Zealand in this way.

Young Roland landed first at Dunedin, a town booming from the Otago gold rush. By 1868 it was harder to make a fortune there than it had been and Bramwell was uninterested in that sort of gamble. He was of gentrified stock and saw his future in the accumulation of land. In 1869, he bought 400 acres of Crown grant land on the banks of the Manawatu River, 140km north of Wellington.

He hadn't been living in the area for very long when he waved down a river boat as it passed by the banks of his farm and asked for a ride. Unfortunately the craft, a clinker cutter, was inadequate for the complexities of the river and before long it hit a snag, listed to the side and started to fill with water. It was at this point that the men on board discovered that three of them could swim and six of them could not. Bramwell was one of those who could, and he and the two other swimmers set off for the shore to get help. One of them, the captain of the vessel, was swept downstream and was never seen again. A second man nearly didn't make it either, but he shouted to Bramwell who had already reached the bank to please come back and swim with him. Bramwell obliged and they both were able to reach the bank safely and get help for those still stranded on the wrecked cutter.

Heroic, kind, affluent, educated, fit, young and single, Bramwell was also an accomplished pianist and, by many accounts, a truly gregarious soul. Even by the most exacting, Austenesque standards of manhood, Mr Bramwell was a catch. It was Annie McWilliam who reeled him in. They married romantically on New Year's Day, 1873, and they wasted no time in purchasing yet more land and in starting a family—within seven months they'd bought 500 acres of Taranaki farmland, and within ten months they'd had a daughter.

The young Bramwells threw themselves into social life, which revolved around the Anglican Church and the Masonic Lodge. But Roland was not content—he sought greater challenges and wider horizons, and he wanted to make more money. In 1875 he travelled by steamship to San Francisco, a journey time of three weeks, and there made a series of investments in land that eventually led him to a citrus plantation in Orange Valley. He wrote to his bank manager in New Zealand about southern California's 'delicious' climate which seemed to him like 'a perpetual spring', and he explained his business plan:

> All those who have stuck to orange growing have made plenty of money, but it requires considerable capital to start with, and gives no return for about three years, but after that it is plain sailing.

Bramwell would flit between California and New Zealand for many years as he managed his trans-Pacific empire. Both he and Annie travelled frequently, although not always together. Annie usually travelled with her young daughters back and forth within New Zealand, visiting family, friends and farm businesses as far apart as Taranaki and Hokianga, as well as to England on more than a few occasions. Bramwell, likewise, travelled to England several times. He also undertook an enviable two-month round trip on the South Sea Islands mail ship, the *Janet Nicoll*, calling at Tonga, Samoa, Rarotonga and Tahiti.

Increasingly, he travelled to Australia. His cross-Tasman trips took him occasionally to Melbourne, but more often to Sydney, from where he would catch another ship up the east coast to Brisbane or he would take the mail train to Wallangarra. He was a purposeful traveller. In the mid 1880s, the interior of northern Queensland was just beginning to be settled and Bramwell was curious enough to head up there and buy some land in an area known as the Atherton Tablelands. It was not easy land to develop, densely forested with heavy rainfall and a very hot, humid climate. If, not when, finally cultivated and planted, crops readily succumbed to insect infestations.

Many proprietors simply leased their land out to Chinese farmers who were more tenacious. In an interview with a rural Queensland newspaper in 1902, Bramwell blustered about why New Zealand agriculturalists, like himself, were interested in investing in the region. It was, he said, a matter of there being too many taxes in New Zealand (land tax, property tax, and income tax) and too much risk associated with New Zealand's Workman's

Compensation Act, which exposed farm owners to the possibility of having to sell their property in order to pay compensation to any labourer who injured himself while working for them.

Bramwell held onto his Atherton land for about 30 years, possibly unable to sell it. It was without much fuss that the Queensland Government, after World War I, acquired most of the settled land, including Bramwell's, for returning soldiers. Nevertheless, he visited the region frequently, taking opportunities to explore the far north, disembarking at various ports along the Queensland coast from Rockhampton, north of Brisbane, to Cooktown, north of Cairns: places that are on the edge of wilderness even today.

Bramwell used Auckland as a travel hub—it made sense because he was so often travelling back and forth to Australia and San Francisco, as well as taking frequent domestic sailings, via Auckland, between their farm in Hokianga and their farm in Taranaki. He invested in a house in Devonport and his family must have frequently been in residence for they were firmly enough established in society to be invited to a garden party at Government House in 1892 hosted by the Countess of Glasgow, wife of Lord Glasgow, the new governor of New Zealand.

That was the year that Bramwell exchanged his Devonport house in part consideration for 11 acres of Michael McGarry's Epsom farm, valued at £1,100. The farmland had no buildings—no farmhouse or outbuildings had ever been built upon it—and the Bramwells were able to choose any spot they liked for their new home. They chose the ridge, with its slow sunrises over One Tree Hill, its fiery sunsets over the distant Waitakeres, and its all-day sun. It was on his return home to Epsom from a regular trip to Australia that Bramwell very nearly lost his life in yet another boat disaster.

On Tuesday 30 October, 1894, the morning editions reported with some 'anxiety' that the steamship *Wairarapa* was overdue from Sydney, having been expected at Auckland the day before. Another steamer had left Sydney a day after the *Wairarapa* and had arrived in Auckland as scheduled without sighting the missing ship en route. It was supposed, therefore, that some unfixable mechanical failure had occurred, such as a break in the main shaft, and that she was probably drifting with the wind and the current southwards in the Tasman Sea.

The public was assured that the steamer was 'well-found in every respect', had only recently had an overhaul, and that other steamers crossing the Tasman were going to 'keep a good look-out.' All the same, Mrs Bramwell

and her daughters must have been extremely concerned for Roland, who was a passenger.

Within hours came the tragic news. In the very early hours of Monday morning, just four hours' sail from Auckland, the *Wairarapa* had 'ran ashore in the pitch dark' at a secluded corner of Great Barrier Island. Out of 250 people on board, 112 crew and passengers and the captain had lost their lives. Survivors' accounts tell of harrowing experiences.

As the steamer travelled down the far northeast coast of New Zealand the ocean air was dense with fog, but the ship's officers had been checking and rechecking the logs and the captain was sure he was on course. The ship steamed on at 13 knots through the murky dusk and into the thick dark night. There was no indication of land until the moment the ship struck the rocks. Somehow, she was 23 miles off course.

The impact occurred just after midnight, and passengers were violently roused from their sleep, thrown from their beds. They had enough time to don life-jackets and get on deck, but the ship was listing awkwardly to port and was filling with water as powerful waves crashed over the deck. People were being swept overboard, particularly those, it is reported, who opted to kneel and pray rather than hang onto the ship's rails.

Two lifeboats were successfully launched off the port side with 29 people in one, and 35 in another, but the ship suddenly canted mercilessly, the deck rotating to the perpendicular, throwing many more people into the water and causing everyone to scramble for whatever hold they could find, mostly about the rigging. Bramwell managed to cling to the shrouds of the mast.

Life rafts were cut adrift and several people in the water were able to clamber onto these and to save others, too. Although it was dark, and the sea was rolling with massive waves crashing against the rocks and over the vessel, the two lifeboats circled the ship constantly picking up whomever they could reach. Some of those washed overboard swam towards the rigging from where they were thrown lines and hauled up out of the water.

Others were not so lucky, particularly the very old, and the very young and their mothers who tried to save them. Some people were swept away, or were dashed against the rocks, or were killed by cargo, wreckage and horses falling into the water. The captain had remained at the bridge, and a lady passenger had taken refuge there with him, but at 4am the bridge broke away taking the captain and the lady with it.

The ship's few lit lamps were extinguished soon after the crash and the extent of the scene was not fully apparent until dawn, when it was realised that the ship had run into a cliff 600 feet high. People still clinging to the rigging were freezing and exhausted and every now and then someone would lose their strength and fall in. Some people had been in the water for hours, unable to help themselves in the swell and unable to be helped, drowning one by one.

Around twelve people made it to the rocks, battered and bruised. Some crew members managed to swim to the rocks too, pulling a rope across, but they were unable to affix it to anything and all they could do was hold it taut while those still on the wreck took turns to pull themselves 'hand over hand' along the rope to the rocks. All but two (who lost their grip) were saved in this way, numbering around 50 people, including Roland Bramwell.

Eventually the survivors were found by local Maori, and some of the ship's officers managed to travel overland to raise the alarm at Port Fitzroy. It was four days before Bramwell reached his home in Epsom, dressed solely in his tattered nightshirt. Not that it put him off sea travel. Invincible and indefatigable, within a year of the *Wairarapa* disaster Bramwell had travelled to Australia, and to England via Cape Horn, returning via San Francisco.

In the first decade of the new century, when they were nearing their sixties, the Bramwells began to dispose of major assets, such as their Hokianga farm, and Bramwell submitted plans to the council for the subdivision of his Epsom land into suburban lots—he named the subdivision the Atherton Estate.

He reserved one and a quarter acres around his own house and garden, with an additional paddock to the side. A photograph taken near the summit of One Tree Hill, dated 1905, just before the Atherton Estate was developed, shows Bramwell's house bounded by trees and hedges, and surrounded by fields. By 1910, new villas dotted the vicinity. Times were changing.

In 1915, Bramwell registered himself as the owner of a car. He no longer needed a paddock to graze horses. Few people in Epsom did since the area was so well serviced by the electric tramcars that trundled between downtown and Onehunga along Manukau Road. The landscape was no longer the manuka- and fern-covered wilderness it had been in 1840; no

Onslow Avenue (right), Atherton Road (right of centre), Empire Road (left of centre), Manukau Road (near foreground obscured), The Drive (left to right middle distance)

Photo: Winkelmann 23 July 1905
Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, 1-W1225.

longer sown in oats, barley or wheat, or in clover, as it would have been throughout the latter half of the 19th century. The Bramwells now lived in camellia clad suburbia at No. 18 Atherton Road, Epsom.

Bramwell's home was sold in 1929, just a few months before he died, possibly by his daughter, for he no longer lived in the region. The lot was subdivided into five quarter-acre sections by its new owner, forming Bramwell Place. Bramwell's house was moved several metres and rotated by ninety degrees so that it centred one of the new sections perfectly.

Now, 87 years later, the quarter-acre of land that has seen so many characterful owners has found quietude in the hands of this writerly, foreign-born owner. I am its steward and its amanuensis—the threads by which I have sewn myself in.

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