



Preservation Post

Newsletter of the Christ Church Preservation Society (Inc.)

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“Looking to the future to preserve our past” Christ Church Taita

There's been a lot happening around Christ Church in the past few months. We are in the process of refurbishing the inside of the windows – the weather (both sun and damp) has been taking a toll over the years. This is a very laborious task and we thank Committee member Chris Pynenburg and his team for their dedication to this work.

We held a working bee in June and cleared a great deal of seedling trees that have for some time been encroaching on the graves and coming up among other trees.



John Stevens, Nick Duncan, Michael Stewart, Mary Stevens – team work makes a difference



President, John Daysh

Completion of Courtyard area



Thanks to a generous bequest from the estate of Ngaire Wild (nee Singer), we have been able to complete the courtyard area in front of the Utility Block and erect a seat under the trees

on the Southern Boundary adjacent to the Singer family grave in Ngaire's memory. Both will provide a sunny, sheltered spot for visitors to enjoy the church and its surroundings.



164th Annual Service – 6 May

Excerpts from Frances Underwood's talk to this year's annual service: Frances has researched both her maternal and paternal ancestry as well as her husband's Underwood ancestry.

She concentrated on two families - the Hooper family and the Harris family. Her great- great- great- grandfather, John Hooper, is buried here with his wife as well as her husband Stephen's great- great- great- grandfather, Abraham Harris and his wife.

In 1841 the Hooper's from the village of Horsington in Somerset and in 1840 the Harris's from the village of Broomfield in Essex left the old country forever and made their way to the new settlement of Wellington.

John Hooper's first wife, Jane, had had 5 children in Horsington before she died in childbirth in 1838. John did not stay widowed for long as he remarried and had a son with Caroline Wadman a year later in 1839. John's occupation was an agricultural labourer but wages were meagre

(about 1 shilling a day) and the rigid class system meant life was always going to be difficult when you were illiterate and of the 'labouring class'. So the prospect of a long sea voyage to New Zealand with the enticement of possible ownership of land and new prospects in an egalitarian society must have seemed very appealing to John and Caroline Hooper.

Caroline was eight months pregnant when she and her husband John boarded the ship the 'Arab' in June 1841 with their five children. Absolutely incredible to realise that they embarked on the journey knowing that the baby would be born at sea. (there were actually 6 births during that voyage) They endured so much tragedy during the turbulent voyage- According to a diary written by a fellow passenger, George Darling, the new baby was born on the 9th July but died a week later and also the eldest daughter, Sarah, a seamstress aged 15, died from dysentery and she was given a sea burial off the coast of Africa.

John and Caroline must have been both shattered and relieved to disembark at Port Nicholson on 16th October 1841 with their 4 children. Eliza Hooper, now the eldest child, was aged 9.

Imagine the early days... the family made their way to the Taita area from Petone, John found work as a farm labourer and the family flourished. Literally. By 1859 John and Caroline had a further 10 children so it was perhaps not surprising that the eldest daughter, Eliza, left her ever

increasing family and married at the age of 17 to 22 year old George Whiteman.

George Whiteman had arrived in Wellington in October 1841 with his family on the ship the 'Gertrude' and when he was aged about 18, whilst pig hunting in the Hutt Valley he found himself in a densely forested valley and once he reported the find to the new governor, Sir George Grey, it was called Whiteman's Valley.

George and Eliza had 6 sons in quick succession. [Frances is descended from the 6th son, Henry Whiteman, born in 1860.]

John Hooper, remained in the vicinity of Christ Church Taita and lived to the age of 88. In 1853 he was aged about 50 when he assisted the builder of Christ Church, Sidney Hirst, so even though his gardening and agricultural labouring skills had been his main occupation in England he became the apprentice to the builder of Christ Church, in Taita. It must have been a close family friendship because three of the Hooper children married Hirst children.

In the Evening Post obituary of 29th December 1892 John Hooper was described as follows: "*Mr Hooper was in many respects a remarkable man, despite want of education and a certain roughness of manner, he possessed many high and noble qualities. He was held in the greatest respect by all who knew him and stories illustrative of his high sense of honour and kindness of heart were freely recounted yesterday by the old*

friends who stood around his grave to pay their last tribute of respect to him. Mr Hooper was noted as one of the strongest and lustiest men in the infant settlement and although weighing nearly 17 stone (that's 108 kgs) he was extremely active and industrious. Many stories are told of his physical prowess. His industry and perseverance were amply rewarded and in his later years he enjoyed a competence. Mr Hooper was in every sense a good colonist and his death is sincerely regretted by all who knew him "

John Hooper was the patriarch of about 130 grandchildren (80 of them were from just one daughter, Eliza) That is absolutely remarkable and hopefully the 'lustiness' mentioned in the obituary is referring to his numerous brood of children.

Abraham and Sophia Harris left the village of Broomfield, Essex for Gravesend and boarded the ship the 'Bolton' with their five children and after a journey of 4 months arrived in Wellington on 21 April 1840. This was of course one of the earliest ships to arrive in Petone and according to family legend their eldest daughter, Mary-Ann, aged 9, caused great dismay among the local Maori when she came ashore at Petone Beach carrying her Victorian doll. When the Maori first saw the life-like wax doll they thought it was a dead baby and they broke into a loud lament.

By the time the eldest daughter, Mary Ann Harris, married John Houghton in this very church on 18th April 1854 her mother and father had had another 6

children. Her father, Abraham, was a key person in the history of this church. Although he had been a gardener and brickmaker back in England, he became one of the Wellington region's largest timber merchants and in this role he milled most, if not all, the timber (mostly totara) to build Christ Church in Taita. The logs were donated by the Daysh family and then milled free of charge by Abraham. Presumably Abraham Harris must have known George Whiteman as well because he was also a bush-feller and sawmiller and very well-known in the area.

It is fascinating to realise how quickly the landscape of the Hutt Valley changed in those early years from 1840 to 1860. Vast forests of kahikatea, matai, rimu, rata, tawa and totara were felled in order to create land for settlement, grazing and cultivation. As many as 300 sawyers were working the area, clearing the bush and forest. Looking at early photographs the hills and valleys became scarred and barren with stumps littering the land. Of course the early settlers almost immediately experienced the consequence of such rapid land clearance with several major flooding episodes of the Hutt River and subsequently the 1848 and 1855 massive earthquakes also changed the landscape.

Another small anecdote about Abraham and Sophia is that they managed to bring a cutting of a favourite rose from England and they carefully transported it inserted into a potato to keep it moist during the long

sea voyage. It is now known as the 'Harris rose' amongst descendants and is being grown in gardens throughout New Zealand. It is also flourishing right here over the Harris gravestone just outside this church. Abraham and Sophia Harris are both buried in the graveyard of this church and their descendants are numerous having had 13 children. In 1984, at the 130th annual service, about 150 Harris family descendants gathered here for the unveiling of the brass plaque acknowledging their contribution to the construction of the church.

Mary Ann Harris and her husband John Houghton lived their married life in central Wellington but apparently Mary Ann would regularly walk from Wellington to Taita along the newly formed Hutt Road that had been elevated by about 1.5 metres with the huge 1855 Wairarapa earthquake. She would visit her mother and father, Abraham and Sophia, with her new baby, and then would often get a ride back with a passing cart. The original hitchhiker! It was Mary Ann and John's only surviving child, Harriet Ellen Houghton, who married Henry James Underwood in 1879.

So we come full circle - we can be fairly sure that the Hooper's knew the Harris's during those early days in Taita. They worked together, probably socialised together, worshipped together and are buried here. In the early days there were probably only about 30 families living close to Christ Church and there would have been a strong sense of community and attachment to all that this church

represents. Both families made the decision to leave England forever and to put their heart and soul into starting a new life for themselves and their children. They prospered and have contributed greatly to the essence of Wellington. We can wonder how life would have been if these families had stayed in England. They would have probably been stuck in their low social rank and likely not have exerted much influence during their lifetimes.

This precious church is the constant in our family history landscape and it is reassuring to imagine in 20, 50 or 100 years it will still be the physical connection for thousands of descendants of its original worshippers. Our ancestors' legacy lives on and for that we are grateful. Christ Church also lives on and hopefully it will continue to watch over the area as it is witness to progress and change.

125th Anniversary of Women's Suffrage Petition in 1893

Welch family descendant Joan Worthington advises us that S A Welch and D Welch of Taita signed the petition. Full names and addresses did not appear on the document, but we can assume that S A Welch is Sarah Arabella Welch, who donated the land for the Sunday School. Joan's great-grandmother Harriet Harvey (nee Welch), sister-in-law to S A Welch also signed this petition.

Ashes Wall

A niche in our Ashes Wall costs just \$750.00 plus GST. Contact Janice Henson, Secretary, for further details.

Janice-klaw@xtra.co.nz



Weddings

10 March

Rebecca Wright to Matthew Scott

24 March

Esther Longley to Angus Hutton

5 April

Amber Landall to Lloyd Photiou

Interments

15 June

***Alfred Michael Searle
Catherine (Kate) Cropp***

The Society is grateful to Brother International (NZ) Limited for printing this newsletter

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