Rich man, poor man, environmentalist, thief

Biographies of Canterbury personalities written for the Millennium and for the 150th anniversary of the Canterbury Settlement

Richard L N Greenaway

Christchurch City Libraries
Te Whare Pukapuka Aa Iwi Otautahi

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Cover illustration: RB Owen at front of R T Stewart's Avon River sweeper, late 1920s.

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For Daisy, Jan and Richard jr

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Preface

Unsung heroines was Canterbury Public Library's (now Christchurch City Libraries) contribution to Women's Suffrage Year in 1994. This year, for the Millennium and 150th anniversary of the founding of the Canterbury Settlement, we have produced *Rich man, poor man, environmentalist, thief*.

In both works I have endeavoured to highlight the lives of interesting but forgotten city dwellers. In a number of cases, these have been people associated with my own stamping ground to the east of the town. Extensive information on sources has been included, in part to support the text, in part to give researchers, genealogical and otherwise, a good idea of what primary and secondary material is available.

I thank Christchurch City Libraries staff: Glenda Fulton and Margaret Clune who allowed me the time to do research; Microfiche and Microfilm Centre staff, Helen Brown, Tom Trevella, Hamish Gordon, Neil Fitzgerald, Kate Ogier and Ann McGrain who hunted out useful pieces of information; Enid Ellis, Jane Rogers, Joanna Bellringer and, especially, Patricia Sargison who read the text and suggested improvements; and the production team, Jenny Drummond, John Lloyd and Sasha Bowers. Assistance came also from the staff at the Alexander Turnbull Library; Jane Teal and Jo-Anne Smith, archivists at Anglican Archives and the Canterbury Museum respectively; the Macmillan Brown Centre at the University of Canterbury; and National Archives, Christchurch, whose extensive primary resources do indeed constitute a 'national park of the historical imagination'.

Genealogical friends, Rona Hayles and Margaret Reid, found overseas information at the Family History Centre of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Professional researchers Valerie Marshall in Christchurch and Jane Smallfield in Dunedin showed themselves skilled in the use of the archive holdings of Land Information New Zealand. In Wellington, Leonard Dangerfield was, as usual, diligent and resourceful. Dianne Snowden extracted Tasmanian convict material. As with *Unsung heroines*, my aunt, Gwendolene Agassiz and mother, Daisy Greenaway, provided information from their store of knowledge of Christchurch people and places.

A note on the title. Pat Sargison looked at the occupations of those who appear in the text, took an old song and changed the lyrics to:

'Teacher, tailor, taxidermist, printer,

rich man, poor man, environmentalist, thief'.

It was decided that, of the two lines, the second would make the more catchy title.

Richard L N Greenaway
Aotearoa New Zealand Centre
Christchurch City Libraries

October 2000

The City of Christchurch Coat of Arms

Maria Thomson (1809 – 1875)

When establishing its settlement, the Canterbury Association laboured mightily to include among its attractions a fee-paying high school for the sons of the well-to-do. Little consideration was given to the possibility that the daughters of the prosperous might seek a similar boon and thus there was no provision for a Christ's College for girls. Nevertheless, the upwardly mobile did demand a high school education for their daughters and it was Maria Thomson who filled this gap in the market.

In December 1852, at Gravesend, Maria Thomson, 43, boarded the Lyttelton-bound vessel *Hampshire*. She did not quibble at the fact that, for six weeks, winds confined the ship off the coast of England:

'In the placid beauty of calm weather and the awful grandeur of the storm – in the boundless roll of the ocean and the glorious expanse of the heavens – I feel an intense worshipful admiration and a peaceful enjoyment far more perfect than usually falls to the lot of any on the busy land.'

The *Hampshire* finally reached its destination on 6 May 1853.

To Maria it was of the utmost importance that she find, in Canterbury, 'a happy and prosperous home'. Although from a cultured background and experienced at teaching the daughters of the well-heeled, she had suffered 'great vicissitude ... and unusually sharp trial'. Whether her husband, Charles Thomson, had contributed to these problems is uncertain. It is clear, however, that, in an age when a woman's persona was absorbed within that of her spouse, Maria was an extreme conformist. In her advertisements, even in her death notice, she is Mrs Charles Thomson; only in land records and her will is she Maria. Yet when she arrived in Christchurch, she was already a widow.

Maria purchased, for £220, parts of Town Sections 1047 and 1049, a 43 perch property situated towards the western end of Oxford Terrace. On this site, on 22 March 1854, she opened the 'Christchurch Ladies' School' in a building called 'Avon House'. The school, which catered for day girls and boarders, subjected both groups to a well organised regime. Boarders had hair brushing for eight minutes, both night and morning, and twice each Sunday, trooped off to divine service at St Michael's. An honour much sought after by younger pupils was that of carrying the lamp which lit the path at night. Maria's curriculum included the genteel female accomplishments – pianoforte, guitar and singing – but other disciplines included writing, arithmetic, English, drawing and a strong dose of foreign languages – Latin, French, German and Italian. The pupils' limited spare time was spent in picnics and simple games, of which hopscotch was a favourite.

The surnames of Maria's pupils are a roll-call of families who were climbing or already at the top of the greasy social pole – Boag, Alport, Brittan, Ollivier, Mathias, Moorhouse, Deamer, Caverhill, Miles, Coward, Barker and Gresson. Doubtless each girl learned the skills needed to manage a large household and a socially prominent spouse. But there were problems. Infections spread quickly in crowded classrooms and bedrooms, and, sometimes, there emanated from the school an overpowering smell of disinfectant.

One pupil, Mary Brittan, sought to stage a farce, the *Old maid*. Alas, of the eight characters, five were male. Maria vetoed a scheme to have, in the male roles, either young men or girls dressed in trousers. Instead a reluctant Mary organised a game of charades. Mary Brittan was, however, a pupil on whom Maria would smile. She married William Rolleston in 1865 and, three years later, he became Superintendent. As first lady of Canterbury, Mary was an unofficial but charming and

Maria Thomson
Weekly press: jubilee number, 15 December 1900, p98

effective bulwark of the Establishment.

While 'Avon House' would, for several generations, be 'a very comfortable looking cottage', it had but a short life as a school. Between 1858 and 1860 Maria purchased Town Sections 115 and 116, 'fronting Antigua Street and Salisbury Street', and 117 and 118 which fronted Antigua Street; today they would be described as on the Park Terrace-Salisbury Street corner. The school was ensconced on this one acre site in a 'large, two-storeyed, timber house'. An 1862 *Lyttelton times* report stated that, on Papanui Road, builders were erecting for Mrs C Thomson a girls' school-cum-dwelling place, a 'very large and handsome house ... decidedly the largest private house in or about Christchurch'. The project was abandoned. Maria's second school would eventually become the town house of landowners Joseph Hawdon and William 'Ready Money' Robinson.

Having been persuaded by friends 'at Home' to return to England, Maria announced that she would close her school 'at the expiration of one year, dating from midwinter 1863'. However, her departure was delayed. In 1864 she had a 'ladies school' on Town Belt East (FitzGerald Avenue) and, the following year, at Avonside, taught working class children. The parents paid so that their offspring could attend an Anglican primary school, which was part-funded by the provincial government.

After visiting the 1865 New Zealand Exhibition in Dunedin, Maria travelled through the country to Auckland. The Queen City, with its 'monotonous never-ceasing down-pouring of rain', was the 'dullest place on earth', though parts looked well from the deck of an Australia-bound ship. Melbourne, Adelaide, Ceylon, Aden, Suez, Alexandria, Malta and Marseilles – these were stopping-off points on the way to the United Kingdom.

Maria haggled with boatmen in Egypt and took in the usual – and unusual – sights. She appreciated how, in the Melbourne Cemetery, the boundaries of the various denominations were

‘The Queen City, with its ‘monotonous never-ceasing down-pouring of rain’, was the ‘dullest place on earth’, though parts looked well from the deck of an Australia-bound ship.’

Stained-glass windows to the memory of Maria Thomson, St Michael's and All Angels' church, Christchurch

marked by simple pathways. A pure white monument bore the Christian names and dates of birth and death of three children who had not lived beyond one year; there was 'something very affecting in this simple and elegant record, without a comment or superfluous word, without even the names of the bereaved parents'. In England, Maria edited her journal which was published, in 1867, as *Twelve years in Canterbury, New Zealand*.

The school mistress soon succumbed again to the call of the Antipodes. By 1868 the *Glenmark* had brought her back to Lyttelton and she was placing her restrained advertisements in Christchurch newspapers. Till 1875 'Mrs Clark [and] Mrs Chas Thomson' operated a school in Maria's old stamping ground, Oxford Terrace. It is probable that Maria was in charge of academic subjects. A kindly soul, Mrs Clark had

previously run the Richmond House Seminary for Young Ladies, teaching girls to 'sew, read, write and do their sums in that order'.

One of Maria's friends was the Rev Henry Jacobs. The second Mrs Jacobs, Emily Thompson, had been an 'Avon House' pupil, and her sister, Mary, was on the staff. Jacobs described Maria as having 'a vigorous... almost masculine mind... strong good sense... [and] acquirements and accomplishments of no mean order'. Away from the school situation – in which she was known as the 'great moral engine'– she showed 'true kindness of heart... feminine tenderness... and ... lively sense of humour.' Jacobs listed the distinguishing points of Maria's character as conscientiousness, love of truth, genuineness, consistency and an unostentatious but deep and fervent piety.

Maria was an active businesswoman. To upgrade her school and pay for trips within New Zealand and to the 'Old Country', she found it necessary to mortgage her properties. Sometimes she dealt with friends including Judge Henry Barnes Gresson (father of an 'Avon House' girl), the Rev William Fearon and the Church Property Trustees. Businesses with which Maria associated included the Permanent Investment Loan Association and New Zealand Trust and Loan Company. In the former she held shares; the latter was linked to the cautious well-established Union Bank of Australia. Others with whom Maria had a commercial relationship included the genteel Torlesse family, prominent bureaucrat John Marshman, and shrewd businessmen Richard Harman, Richard Packer, Joseph Hawdon, and George and Robert Heaton Rhodes. Maria was a good credit risk, had an interest in a large amount of land and held mortgages over the property of working class people to whom she loaned money.

During her Christchurch years, Maria adhered strictly to a rule whereby part of her income was set aside for her God, His church and the poor, the details being kept separate from other accounts. As she grew older, she pondered on 'the mysterious future... the changes which death would bring'. On 8 October 1875 she made her will. A cousin in England and a niece 'at present or lately residing in the Boulevard de Sebastopol, Paris,' received legacies. Tosswill family members, including Maria's god-daughter, Ellen Mary Tosswill, were provided for; so also was Mary Fereday, wife of Maria's lawyer. Maria's main concern, however, was that the work of the church would benefit on her demise. The residue of her estate – estimated at £1600 – was left in trust to the bishop and Henry Jacobs 'to be applied to such religious and charitable purposes as they in their discretion shall think fit'.

Maria would have been pleased that the efforts of 'old friends [who were] not pupils' raised sufficient money for a memorial window in the chapel in the Barbadoes Street Cemetery, while ex-pupils easily gathered together a sum to cover the cost of two windows in the south-eastern corner of the second St Michael's church. Designed by the architect Benjamin Woolfield Mountfort, these depicted 'Christ in the house of Mary and Martha' and 'Christ and the disbelief of St Thomas'. Maria would also have nodded approvingly when Henry Jacobs pumped substantial sums from the Maria Thomson Fund into the establishment and maintenance of Cathedral Grammar, both a preparatory school for Christ's College and a place which provided free education to boys who were members of the Cathedral Choir.

Maria anticipated that she would meet a sudden end – and she did. She suffered a stroke. Jacobs came to sit with his friend and, 'after a few hour's illness', she died on 21 December 1875. Her death notice was brief, her career and funeral ignored by the papers, perhaps at the lady's instruction. Maria's gravestone in the Barbadoes Street Cemetery overlooks the Avon. The death date and age of the deceased are given in Latin. Part of the inscription states bluntly:

'Here lieth all that was mortal of Maria, relict of Charles Thomson...'

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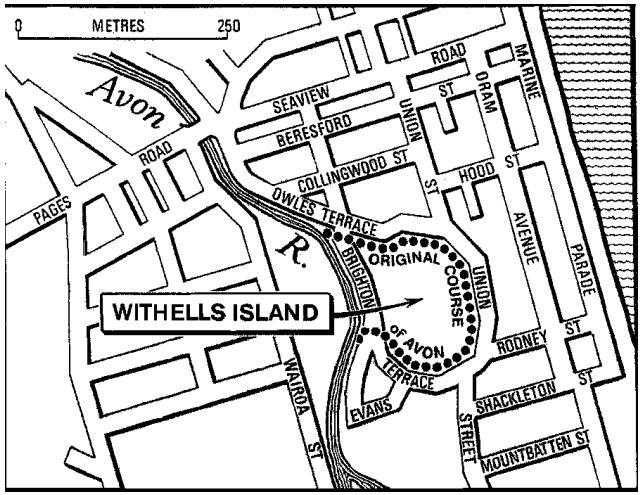
Weekly press, jubilee number, 15 December 1900, p98

In the 1890s, old rowing men, among them the luminaries Augustus Blakiston, Richard Harman and Archdeacon Edward Atherton Lingard, came down the Avon and passed the spot where Bickerton Street nears Porritt Park. Called 'Wainoni' or 'Bickerton's' and the property of popular unorthodox academic Alexander William Bickerton, the land had, in the 1870s, 'humped up into a series of low shifting sandhills, barren except for a few hardy native plants' and a lonely cottage. The area had then been known as 'Vennell's' after a minor riverside denizen, George Vennell, a gardener, whose mysterious fate had attracted national media attention.



The Avon at New Brighton showing the original course of the river and the 1859 'cut'
Press, 20 February 1976

Many characters had dwelt along the Avon and there were stories to tell apart from that of the missing gardener. Some of the rivermen recalled how capitalists' attempts to bring trading vessels up to Christchurch were frustrated by the presence of sandbars and shoals in the lower reaches of the waterway. In 1859 these oldsters accompanied contractors McGrath and Brady to New Brighton where mushrooms 'grew thickly adjacent to the river banks right up to the niggerheads, and the swamps round about were smothered with wild ducks'. The beach was strewn with whalebone and timber, the latter having been washed down from the mills further north. The contract men sold these items, the bone long serving as bowers and other decorations in residences within and about the city. Too late, the men discovered that the fish which the gulls were devouring on the beach were frost-fish, a delicacy.

Rowing men at Herring Bay, New Brighton about 1900. The man at front left is the painter, Owen Merton

Although a new channel was cut and the course of the river diverted, there was an insufficient depth of water in the Avon for the merchants' dream of tall ships coming up the waterway to be realised. However, boating men delighted in a clear run from the site of the Seaview Road bridge. Later, youngsters would swim and seek whitebait and frogs in the willow-fringed original watercourse and wild ducks were shot on 'Withell's Island', the flax-covered property between the channels. Eventually a horse tramway would cart huge sandhills from the lower end of Oram Avenue and fill in the old watercourse.

Many oarsmen recalled purchasing fresh milk, eggs and butter at Kerrs Reach, sitting under the trees, smoking, and

'Eventide': photo of an 1888 John Gibb painting of the river at Burwood.
Original owned by the Parochial District of Burwood

chatting with Peter Kerr. After the genial Scotsman's death in 1877, his widow, Margaret, a 'fairly big woman with a warm and generous heart', carried on the tradition of hospitality.

Further down, John Paynton's tiny dwelling had a wine and beer licence. A 'rustic... house covered with ivy' and commonly termed the 'Old Brown Cow', the place had two whalebones arched as an entrance and, on either side, a holly fence. Wayfarers consumed strawberries and cream and drank wine or 'a long draught of nut brown ale' served 'in a homely style'. When the licence was moved to the old Bower Hotel site, Thomas Free's establishment continued with the strawberries and cream menu, adding whitebait teas and 'a tot of... rum straight from the barrel and well over-proof'. The hostelry was so popular with the rowing fraternity that it survived in 1894, the year that there was a general reduction in the number of liquor licences.

The Dallington bridge, built in the 1880s, was testament to the abortive venture of H J C Jekyll and H P Hill to span the Avon and establish a tramway route to New Brighton. Years before, 'Broome Farm' had stretched from the site of McBratney's Road back to that of the bridge. An avenue of eucalyptus led to the house from the direction of Dudley Creek, and the garden and orchard were celebrated in Christchurch. At 'Broome Farm' dwelt Avonside Anglican stalwarts Ellen and John Dudley, the latter 'a fine specimen of the old colonist who brought out his family, library, plate etc'. After John's death in 1861, Ellen married schoolteacher William De Troy, and, to the boating fraternity, the place became 'De Troy's'. The family welcomed all oarsmen, the ladies tipping a bucket of cherries into each boat and giving a send-off 'so charming that De Troy's was a delightful break – one of many – that enhanced the trip down'. In June 1867, Ellen's daughter, Emily Maria Dudley, a young woman whose 'face and figure were well known on the Avon', married grim North Island soldier-magistrate Reginald Newton Biggs. Seventeen months later the couple and their infant son were killed by the 'dusky fiend', Te Kooti, in a pre-emptive strike at Matawhero near Gisborne. William De Troy eventually became clerk to the Ashley Road Board. He, his wife and their daughter, Lucy, died 'under particularly sad circumstances' but of natural causes within a few weeks of one another, in 1894.

However, always, when the boating veterans reached the spot near Kerr's, where George Vennell had lived, their minds were concentrated on his fate.

George Vennell, a ploughman from Whitcombe, Dorset, was five feet four inches in height, had a large head, red hair and eyebrows, low forehead, fair complexion and hazel eyes. In youth he was convicted for theft, whipped and imprisoned. On 22 October 1838, at the age of 20, he was tried at the Somerset Quarter Sessions for stealing clothing and sentenced to be transported for 15 years. His ship, the *Marquis of Hastings*, arrived in Tasmania on 18 July 1839. George's colonial crimes ranged from absconding to 'being in a public house on Sunday' to 'ill-using and causing the death of a calf, the property of his master'. He was incarcerated, put in a hard labour gang and subject to solitary confinement.

On 28 August 1854, in the District of Morven, George Vennell married Mary Scollan. The groom, claiming to be 33, was in fact a little older; Mary was 22. More than a decade later, the couple moved to Christchurch. George, clad in corduroy trousers, faded pea-jacket and black billycock hat, was by now stout, grey-haired and addicted to alcohol. Despite his fondness for drink, his contemporaries considered him 'an honest hard-working man in moderately good circumstances'. On 30 July 1871, however, George's 'beloved' Mary died of cancer at Haast Street, Avonside.

Even while Mary lay dying, George was in contact with the woman who would become his second wife. Maria Thompson had led a chequered career. As Maria Drake, 24,

she stood in the dock at the Central Criminal Court, London, on 28 November 1842. A native of Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, a dressmaker and milliner, and five feet three inches in height, she had a fair complexion, brown hair, hazel eyes, long thin nose and wide mouth. Convicted for stealing a watch and watch stand, she was sentenced to transportation for seven years and, on 19 July 1843, reached Tasmania on the *Margaret*. Fifteen years later and now called Maria Thompson, she appeared on the capital charge of 'feloniously, unlawfully and maliciously' leaving a parcel of arsenic-laced custard and cake outside another woman's door. Oliver Adams and Mary Ann Paul, people unknown to Maria, partook of the food and fell violently ill. The judge 'finding the Court of Requests Room most inconveniently crowded, adjourned to the Supreme Court below'. There he took the guilty verdict and condemned Maria to death. The sentence was commuted to penal servitude for life.

Discharged from prison on 8 July 1871, Maria came immediately to Christchurch in the company of her daughter, Hannah; her son, Francis or Frank Sanderson, followed shortly thereafter. In an 'Intention to marry' file, George described himself as a gardener of 51 who had been four years in the city; Maria stated that she was a widow, a servant and aged 52 years. On 31 January 1872, at St Luke's church, George wed the grandiloquently named Henrietta Maria Patience Lydia Sanderson Thompson.

Hannah, Maria's daughter, married Richard Leaver, the son of a prominent tailor (also Richard) in 1873, and Frank Sanderson also married. Maria and George lived in a rented cottage on an isolated spot on the sandhills. Sometimes, George's increasing love of the bottle proved embarrassing, especially when, while trying to draw water, he fell into the river and needed vigilant neighbours to rescue him. In 1879, Maria decamped, moving closer to the city and living with her children. In the magistrate's court the claim was made that, in an attempt to frame George, Maria, Hannah and Richard Leaver had stripped his cottage of its furniture and planted stolen garments.

In August 1879, George's neighbours, concerned that the blinds were drawn and that the old man had been missing for a week, called the police. When officers arrived, they immediately suspected foul play. A meal had been prepared but not eaten. Somebody had fired bullets through the window and peppered the wall opposite. There was blood on the wall, furniture and brown paper which had attached itself to a gorse fence. Evidence showed that George's body had been dragged through the garden hedge, a post and rail fence and laid on a sandhill. On the sandhill there was found blood which had oozed from a head wound.

Policemen dragged the river, pushed holes into the mud and dived into the waters, recovering scraps of a blood-stained blanket. However, they were quickly forced out by the intense cold.

Newspaper correspondents pointed out that the police did not have the resources to scour the large area of open and broken ground adjacent to Vennell's. Moreover, the citizenry showed scant interest in this 'most cowardly and cold-blooded murder' which had been committed on its doorstep. When there had been similar outrages elsewhere, even 'in districts difficult and dangerous to explore', people had turned out en masse. In this case they did not do so.

Even so, some responded to police calls for help. Others volunteered when publicans provided transport to and food at the sandhills. One group obtained refreshments from hotelkeepers and storekeepers on the pretext that they had been sent by the police. The greatest inducements to a lethargic populace were those offered by the police – £100 for the recovery of George's body, £250 for information leading to a conviction.

George's fellow riverside dwellers were scrutinised as potential suspects. It was thought that money might have motivated one, 'Vaughn'. This was probably Edward Vaughn who later dwelt in a snug scrub-surrounded camp on the south

‘Convicted for stealing a watch and watch stand, she was sentenced to transportation for seven years and, on 19 July 1843, reached Tasmania on the *Margaret*.’

bank of the Avon opposite Hardy Street, and, with mock-aristocratic hauteur, styled his German companion, 'Frank', as 'my man'. Another neighbour, John Lilly, was eliminated as a 'poor feeble creature' who cared for 'nothing beyond a pint of beer'.

However, within a short time, the police viewed this as a domestic crime. They noted that Maria had returned to the property and washed the floor, commenting: 'You know I could never live in dirt'. Aware that Frank Sanderson hated his step-father, they became convinced that he had committed the murder. Frank, a cook, with dark hair, blue eyes, large nose and sallow complexion, was kept under surveillance and, on one occasion, briefly imprisoned for wife desertion. Some family members who felt themselves tainted by the scandal returned to Australia; certainly Richard Leaver junior was living there at the time of his father's death in 1911. The fate of Frank Sanderson and his mother is unknown but it is clear that they were never charged with George's murder.

When, in 1887 and 1892, human remains were found in the sandhills, the subject of George Vennell's disappearance again came to public attention. Ex-policeman and asylum warden Edward William Seager, muddied the waters. As imaginative as his granddaughter, the novelist Ngaio Marsh, he stated that the bones were those of Captain Cook's doctor who, it was supposed, had been buried at Pegasus Bay. Museum curator F W Hutton placed this hypothesis before Dunedin bibliophile and historian T M Hocken. Examination of east-of-Christchurch human tissue showed that it belonged neither to the murdered man nor to the spectacled skeleton of Seager's fancy, but rather, was evidence of an ancient Maori presence in the area.

Those aware of the Vennell drama can find a memento when, on 'an early summer morning [with] a gentle warm breeze just perceptible', they visit 'the most English-looking God's Acre in Canterbury', Avonside churchyard. Near the entrance, to the left of the lych-gate, a small plain cross bears the name of Mary, the first Mrs Vennell.

Mary Vennell's grave, Avonside parish churchyard

In 1895, an oarsman commented that the £250 reward was still available. As late as 1980, nonagenarian Reg Bellamy stated that, in childhood, he and his friends were sent from New Brighton to Wainoni to search for Vennell's remains. The reward money long remained in the public consciousness but it has never been claimed.

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The City of Christchurch Coat of Arms

Frederick Richardson Fuller (1830 – 1876)

In the 1860s Canterbury Provincial Geologist Julius Haast (later Sir Julius von Haast) strove to broaden the minds of the Christchurch citizenry by establishing a substantial museum in its midst. For a decade, his key subordinate was Frederick Richardson Fuller.

Born in Suffolk, England about 1830, Frederick Fuller was the son of Sarah Richardson and her husband, Frederick Fuller, a gentleman. At some stage Frederick junior trained as a taxidermist. On 10 February 1849, on the barque *Candahar*, he arrived in Adelaide, South Australia, subsequently working at Beautiful Valley near Mount Remarkable as a farmer and hotelkeeper. On 10 December 1859, Frederick Fuller, 29, married Mary McGrath, 18, at Well Hut, Pekona, probably the residence of the bride's father, Matthew McGrath. The McGraths appear to have been Irish Catholics of humble station. The bride wrote her name but the witnesses, Bridget Ryan and Patrick McGrath, a shepherd, were illiterate, signing with their mark 'X'.

In 1862, Frederick gave up the licence of the Roundwood Inn in Beautiful Valley. Soon after the family moved to Otago, Frederick describing himself as a miner. On 5 May 1863 he bought, for £60, a 'dwelling-house and land' in Maclaggan Street, Mornington, Dunedin. According to Julius Haast, Frederick 'set up the collection of New Zealand birds for the Otago Government'. This was probably part of the 'botanical, ornithological and conchological' material of Dr James Hector, which was displayed at the beginning of 1865 at the International Exhibition in Dunedin.

Frederick sold his property on 6 March 1865 for the sum which it had cost him[1], and, with a renewed interest in the profession for which he was trained, offered his services to Haast. He had a very uncertain contract – on 3 August the provincial government provided Haast with the measly sum of £25 for salary and equipment – and laboured in cramped quarters in the north-eastern corner of the provincial council chambers. These rooms housed an embryonic museum which included not only the natural history offerings of local enthusiasts but also the skins of rare birds which Haast had gathered when exploring remote areas.

By Christmas Frederick had set up 130 specimens. Further public funds became available and Haast's creation, the Philosophical Institute of Canterbury[2], also chipped in. Frederick was to state publicly that, without the institute's support, he would have been forced to seek employment in other provinces.

The taxidermist accompanied Haast on expeditions to the province's north-eastern portion, Mount Cook and the head-waters of the Rakaia, his mission to retrieve examples of the province's previously neglected common bird life, including nests and eggs. Haast was able to proclaim: 'With a few exceptions, all the birds inhabiting this part of New Zealand are now represented in the collection by good stuffed specimens'. In April 1866 Haast made his first major overseas exchange, sending bird skins to famed naturalist Professor Louis Agassiz, whose museum was at Cambridge, Massachussetts.

From December 1866 the Glenmark swamp yielded a mighty deposit of moa bones. Landowner George Henry Moore loaned his workmen and, under Haast's direction, the first portion of the haul was excavated and brought to Christchurch on a large American four-horse wagon. When moa bones had been discovered elsewhere in the country, they had been sent to museums at London and Oxford. Haast determined that, in return for examples of the wildlife of America and Europe, he would send much of the new find to museums in these regions.

Julius Haast (sitting) and Frederick Fuller in Dr A C Barker's garden.
Barker Collection, Canterbury Museum

‘In 1870, the great animal, vegetable and mineral collection was made readily accessible to the public in the purpose-built stone museum in Rolleston Avenue. The staff consisted of ‘a director [Haast] ... taxidermist [Frederick] and a boy on a temporary engagement’.’

Glenmark moa skeletons articulated by F R Fuller. *Weekly press, December 1900, p27*

The taxidermist and his superior found that, often, 25 to 30 moa specimens were so closely packed together that the whole formed one mass. Nevertheless, the pair sat on the bank of the Avon, sorting the bones into different sub-species and then into individuals. It soon became obvious that, for the find to be shown off to best effect, new quarters would be required. Haast succeeded in taking over for museum purposes an attractive provincial council room on the first floor of ‘Bellamy’s’, the stone structure in the provincial council complex which stands adjacent to the Great Hall and looks over the river. The museum headquarters, commonly known as the ‘coffee room’, would one day become the Superintendent’s office. The adjacent room – small and with a fine bow window – was Frederick’s work space. Using the contents of the original four-horse wagon and working in the ‘coffee room’, the taxidermist articulated Canterbury’s first seven moa skeletons. When, in December 1867, the museum was opened to the public, these became a source of wonderment to the populace. For years they were ‘admitted to be the finest representative collection in the world’.

In 1870, the great animal, vegetable and mineral collection was made readily accessible to the public in the purpose-built stone museum in Rolleston Avenue. The staff consisted of ‘a director [Haast] ... taxidermist [Frederick] and a boy on a temporary engagement’. For a time trustees ran the museum, after which management was handed to the Board of Governors of Canterbury University College. From 1874, Frederick’s name was included, along with that of the director, in the annual *Southern provinces almanac*. The taxidermist also figured prominently in photographs on show at the museum. In one image he appeared with bushy beard, moustache and long soft flowing hair, a ‘figure out of the Ober-Ammergau passion play in mufti’. In another, he stood inside a whale skeleton. In awe did a child ask: ‘Mama, is that Jonah in the whale’s belly?’ More importantly, Frederick received the respectable salary of £200 per year.

Frederick undertook a variety of tasks. When Haast was ill, he secured the skeleton of a stranded whale and made the necessary observations as to its dimensions, form, sex and age. When runholder and conservationist Thomas Henry Potts discovered a new species of gull, Frederick, hot on his heels, found specimens near the mouth of the Waimakariri. At Little Rakaia, Frederick and Haast examined the cooking places and kitchen midden of the moa hunters. Frederick excavated in and about the ancient Maori encampment at Moa-bone Point, Sumner, transferring to the museum, articulating

‘Bellamy’s’, Canterbury Provincial Council complex. The room with the bow window was Frederick Fuller’s work space.

and putting on display a human skeleton which was found at the site.

Frederick's major achievement was the discovery and identification of harpagornis, the New Zealand eagle. On Sunday 26 March 1871, at Glenmark, the taxidermist was supervising an excavation five to six feet below the swamp. There, over an area of 30 feet square and among a quantity of moa remains, were found, in an excellent state of preservation, a few smaller bones. These – a femur, rib and two claws – Frederick at once deduced to be from a giant bird which preyed on and died with a swamp-stuck moa. Some time later, further bones from the same skeleton were discovered.

Newspapers – practical organs giving voice to work-a-day issues – made passing reference to the discovery. However, Haast wrote it up in an article in the *Transactions of the New Zealand Institute*. Fearing that a vessel might be lost on the voyage to England, the museum director stated that he would depart from the practice of sending the bones to an overseas anatomical expert. Instead, he would honour the Glenmark landowner by calling the bird *harpagornis moorei* and have Frederick Fuller articulate his find.

Haast, impressed with the enormous strength of the feathered moa hunter, commented that, of contemporary carnivorous mammals, only the lion and tiger possessed stronger claw bones. Research has shown that harpagornis dwelt in the South Island's shrub land and forest. It scooped up unsuspecting geese, and struck down 250 kilogram adult moa, the tallest bird ever to have existed. Not only was harpagornis the top carnivore in the early New Zealand food chain, it was also the world's largest eagle and the largest bird of prey, bigger even than its cousins, the Philippine eagle and Andean condor. He reigned supreme for thousands of years prior to the coming of the Maori. In vestigial Polynesian legend he was 'te hokioi', the name being based on his cry, 'Hokioi, hokioi, hu', which was feared as a portent of war. However, he lacked adaptability, becoming extinct a few centuries after man's arrival when the common food supply, the moa, was wiped out.

Frederick Fuller was a family man. Children were born to Mary and Frederick in South Australia, Otago and Christchurch; eventually there were five sons and two daughters. Some of the children – Frederick and John, for example – were baptised in both Catholic and Anglican churches. However, after settling in Avonside, the family became associated with Holy Trinity Anglican church. John, Thomas and Mary were baptised there in 1869, followed two years later by Sarah.

Although but a skilled servant, Frederick moved easily among the intellectuals of the colonial gentry. Haast often acknowledged his technical skill and immense loyalty. Early on he stated: 'We could not find a more hardworking or useful man than Mr Fuller who has hitherto performed his duties to everybody's satisfaction'. He informed his superiors: 'I cannot dismiss Mr Fuller who has worked day and night indefatiguably [sic]...' Much later he mentioned the taxidermist's 'perseverance... assiduity... [and] real enthusiasm'; and how 'Mr F R Fuller... has continued to labour with the same energy as for years past'.

Alas, Frederick was subject to depression and over-fond of alcohol; a son was to state that he got intoxicated once or twice a week. He drank on the job and, eventually, in July 1876, the usually kind-hearted Haast fired him. Seeking an investigation into the causes of his dismissal, Frederick addressed a mildly worded 'appeal to the public of Christchurch' but the newspapers refused to publish it. In 'a low state of mind' the unfortunate man entered the workshop behind his home and there consumed arsenic which he had used in his employment. An unco-operative patient, he frustrated a doctor's attempts to pump the poison from his body. On 28 July he died.

Frederick left 'a wife and five young children very poorly provided for'. By five votes to four and with the chairman abstaining, the Canterbury College Board of Governors carried a motion that Mary should be granted two months of her husband's salary. It was necessary that the amount be

Harpagornis atop a slain moa.
From Richard Holdaway's *Terror of the forests*, *New Zealand geographic*, October/December 1989, p56

taken from the first money accruing to the museum 'as the balance to the credit of that institution at present amounts to the magnificent sum of five shillings and three pence.' Haast collected funds for the family of his deceased subordinate. As well, he completed formalities which gave Mary secure title to land in Haast Street, part of Rural Section 29, for which Frederick had paid 300 pounds in 1873. The property was a small part of the museum director's estate, 'Gluckauf'.

Frederick Richardson Fuller lies in the Avonside churchyard with his son, Thomas. Mary Fuller died in 1918. She and her unmarried daughters, Mary and Sarah, were true to their faith. They are buried in the Roman Catholic portion of the Linwood Cemetery.

Despite the praise of Julius Haast, people forgot Frederick's work. Even museum staff long recounted a mangled version of how the taxidermist died, suggesting that he had hanged himself in the museum tower and that, ever after, his ghost haunted the older parts of the building.

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[1] Jane Smallfield conducted an extensive search in Otago documents. This revealed nothing on Frederick's work. However, the Canterbury Provincial Government archives contain statements by Julius Haast about Frederick having articulated the bird collection of the Otago province.

[2] This body of prosperous men with intellectual tastes was an ancestor of the Royal Society of New Zealand.

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James Speight (1837 – 1912)

Unwarily James Speight, headmaster of St Albans School, told his pupils that his name meant 'woodpecker; henceforth 'Woodpecker' was his name. He did not, however, tell the youngsters how his mother, the genteel but headstrong Mary Hall, had eloped to Gretna Green to marry his father, also James Speight, who was 15 years her senior and a mere exciseman.

When James junior was born at Broughton-in-Furness, Lancashire on 8 June 1837, illiteracy was widespread. Thus the limited formal education which the youngster received was sufficient to gain him employment as a schoolteacher at the Union Workhouse, Stockton, Durham. Years later, the New Zealand Department of Education would introduce a system of teachers' certificates with letters from A to E denoting examination qualifications and numbers from 1 to 5 denoting teaching prowess. The highest possible certificate was A1, the lowest E5. Initially the holder of an E1 certificate, James would, through taking departmental examinations, gain D1 status. This modest qualification was common among headmasters of large 19th century primary schools.

All this was in the future. At 22, James married Ellen Swaine, his parents lamenting that their son should undertake this step when not yet well established. The couple's son, Robert, was born at Garbutt Street, Stockton, on 2 October 1867. Soon after, when James emigrated to Canterbury, he left his wife and son in his parents' care. In 1868 James was labouring in the Cumberland Saw Mills at Duvauchelles Bay, Banks Peninsula. Although falling trees, runaway trolleys and exposed mill machinery caused many injuries, James thrived in this environment and built his own house. He would later describe himself as an 'old bushman' who 'never wondered that Mr Gladstone and others were fond of cutting down trees.' Missing his wife and conscious that he could not see the 'very good sign' of Robert 'getting... mischievous', he arranged for mother and son to emigrate. The provincial government assisted to a modest extent but James paid the bulk of the passage money. In January 1870 the newcomers arrived on the small vessel, *Celaeno*.

Several Speight offspring were born at Banks Peninsula. In a small plot at Chorlton, a hilly area between Little Akaloa and Stoney Bay, lie Edith and Mabel Speight. Their tombstone states that they were 'children of schoolmaster James Speight'. The births of Hubert and Bertha, children other than Robert who were destined to outlive their parents, were registered in 1870 and 1873 respectively.

With a long black beard, strong build and forceful personality, James was soon a community leader. He was treasurer of the Banks Peninsula Agricultural and Pastoral Association in 1870. Two years later, as school committee chairman, he pushed for the building of the Duvauchelles Bay school and then for the rating of residents so that the structure might be paid for. He was teaching at Wainui in 1873, and, a year later, as headmaster of the Little Akaloa school, demanded that there be erected a building which would comfortably seat the pupils. A new school, opened in 1875, was to serve the community for 50 years. James was also the postmaster, although Ellen probably did the bulk of the work.

The passing of the 1877 Education Act led to the establishment of a Department of Education and 12 geographically based education boards. James became the servant of the South Canterbury and then of the North Canterbury boards. Boards inherited schools from the recently deceased provinces, set up others, maintained them, employed teachers and sent inspectors out to test pupils and assess teachers. Each year the householders of a particular area elected a committee which, in cooperation with the headmaster, had day-to-day charge of the local school.

James Speight at Christchurch Anglican Synod, 1907: Christchurch Anglican Diocesan Archives

The existence of free secular primary school education did not mean that all parents made their offspring avail themselves of it. Inspectors saw children 'toiling like beasts of burden' before and during school hours and too tired to learn should they make it to class. Worse, youngsters were spotted 'revelling in the dirt of the creek... [and] gutter for the greater part of the day... and... becoming habituated to idleness – the parent of vice, the foster parent of evil instincts'.

Children who did attend school found themselves in large classes and promoted from one standard to the next only when they had passed examinations. Each school had substantial grounds with, down the middle, a dividing fence. Thus was play encouraged but the sexes segregated outside the classroom.

James Speight and pupils at Tai Tapu School, about 1880
Tai Tapu School (Consolidated) centennial celebrations, 1867–1967, p11

Experienced teachers managed some classes, while others were taught by pupil teachers. These were 'youths of either sex, between 14 and 17 years of age', who had passed the sixth standard and were 'of good character... good constitution and free from any bodily or other defect or infirmity detrimental to usefulness or efficiency as a teacher'. Before or after school the headmaster gave them instruction, the sum he received for this varying according to the number of his students. At Tai Tapu, James had an assistant and one or two pupil teachers. At St Albans he had a staff of about 13, of whom over a half were pupil teachers. Should the adolescents survive a regime of small remuneration, large pupil numbers and rigorous testing, they were eventually entitled to enter the Christchurch Normal School to train as teachers. However, only a minority could afford this luxury. Most of those who could manage it went straight into positions as assistants or sole teachers.

Corporal punishment was widely used. The North Canterbury Education Board's 1894 regulations on the subject stated that both boys and girls could be thus disciplined. Neither head nor neck could be touched and canes and sticks were banned in favour of a regulation strap. This was to be at least one and a half inches in breadth and could be no more than 25 inches in length, a quarter of an inch in thickness and four and three quarter ounces in weight.

James moved to Kakahu, South Canterbury in 1877, becoming headmaster at Tai Tapu two years later. Then, in 1887, the board sacked the headmaster of a large Christchurch school, St Albans, and James was put in charge.

A fundamental problem at St Albans was the poverty and consequent ill-health of pupils which caused a high level of absenteeism. This was exacerbated by the parental attitudes already described. A committee member commented that, in the street, he frequently met girls who were quite unknown to him. At an age when they should have been at school, they were instead wheeling perambulators and, as nurse girls, helping to supplement their families' meagre incomes. As well, the population tended to be nomadic rather than stable and manageable. A draft report commented on the 'curse peculiar to the... school... the number of small tenements on the church property in the neighbourhood... [which] afford facilities for poor people to remain an uncertain but usually a short time in the district'.

James raised money by renting out the school buildings to George Hart and Edward William Seager for their popular illustrated talks on Canterbury history. James' son, Robert,

married Seager's daughter, Ruth, in 1899. Other money came from James' own salary, concerts and donations from prosperous residents. The awarding of prizes to all academically successful children kept one group in school. The less academic were encouraged to plant flowers in small plots in the playground, the well-kept gardens adding to the beauty of the area and 'affording wholesome occupation to the children'. When gardening prizes were introduced, the list of achievers became as all-inclusive as possible. A complaint in the school's 1890 annual report that the financial outlay 'was a strain almost too great to bear' merely encouraged the headmaster to look further for potential donors. Eventually children were told that, to qualify for a prize, they must attend regularly and be well-behaved as well as pass their examinations.

There was, in those days, a widespread hostility towards the employment of married women teachers. However, Ellen had, at Kakahu, been a staff member. At St Albans James had as his senior colleague, Ada Wells. As a pupil teacher, Ada had acquired practical classroom skills. At St Albans, she and her husband, the organist Harry Wells, mounted concerts in aid of the school prize fund. In 1892, Ada, pregnant, sought two months' leave of absence. The school committee demanded her resignation but the education board would not agree to this until, in a long letter, James recounted 'the delinquencies of Mrs Wells'. Perhaps headmaster and committee were jealous of this bright, young, university-educated woman. A prominent figure in the women's suffrage movement, Ada would later become the first female Christchurch City councillor.

Although firm in the Wells' case, the alliance of committee and headmaster was often fragile. The committee overrode James' objections to the appointment of a pupil teacher and James had the bitter satisfaction of seeing the young woman fail her examinations and be forced to resign. Believing the St Albans side school – now Elmwood – over-staffed, James sought to bring it under his sway. A public meeting praised the headmistress, Sarah Smith, demanded the retention of the status quo, and emphasised that it represented the views of parents 'of all children attending the... school with but one exception'. Frustrated, James by-passed his committee and sought approval from the education board for the transfer of a pupil teacher from the side to the main school. Beaten but unrepentant, he told the committee that he had done what was right. These disputes meant ill-will long subsisted between the headmaster and committee members such as Charles Edward Salter. Nevertheless, James remained adamant that he had taken 'a large school in a very low condition and... left it one of the best schools in Christchurch'.

James, who had learned his craft in the harsh conditions of a Victorian workhouse, was best remembered as a 'flogging' headmaster. In 1896 the committee wondered whether his harsh disciplining of the pupils gave the school a bad name. Four years earlier it had concluded that the corporal punishment meted out by the headmaster had been 'not only too severe but unmerited'. There were stories of unnatural penalties. A child who talked at the wrong time was, apparently, attached to the mantelpiece by his tongue. However, inspectors' reports emphasised that the staff exhibited zeal and industry and that good order and attention prevailed throughout the school. Thus did James survive criticism.

The primary teachers' union, the New Zealand Educational Institute, was founded in 1883. James, a member, attended annual general meetings at Christchurch in 1892 and Nelson in 1894. He took part in association activities in Christchurch but held no position on the national body.

At a playground farewell on James' retirement in 1897, Ellen was given a fruit dish 'in recognition of... many acts of kindness', while James received a gold watch chain and two volumes of books. The occasion ended with 'three ringing cheers... for Mr and Mrs Speight', while the committee hoped that James would long enjoy 'the well-earned rest which... retirement from the active duties of a public school teacher

‘ James, who had learned his craft in the harsh conditions of a Victorian workhouse, was best remembered as a ‘flogging’ headmaster. ’

James Speight (right) and staff of St Albans School, 1893
Diamond jubilee of St Albans school, 1873–1933, p20

will afford.' There being, as yet, no Teachers' Superannuation Scheme, James found it necessary to farm, on a small scale, at Coopers Road, Shirley. Eventually he moved to Bottle Lake (now Burwood) Road. A keen Anglican who had played the organ at St Paul's church, Tai Tapu, James was a lay reader from 1901 until 1910 and vestryman at All Saints' church, Burwood from 1897 – 1912. From 1907 until 1910 he was parish representative at the Christchurch Synod: 'His words, if few, were always weighty.'

In 1908 a royal commission investigated alleged abuses at Te Oranga, a home for delinquent girls at Burwood. As an interested outsider James appeared before the assembled dignitaries, his old adversary Charles Salter among them, and defended forcible hair-cutting which brought a miscreant shame but no physical pain. Recalling his bush-felling days, he supported the practice whereby girls were set to work cutting down small trees.

James considered that the good relationship between staff and inmates was shown by the conduct of the latter in church. Their singing, originally coarse, was now 'refined', their behaviour 'positively ladylike... and reverent', indeed much better than that of the general population. Reluctantly James accepted that physical punishment of a recalcitrant inmate aged 20 years might have a brutalising effect.

When Ellen fell ill, James drove her round his paddock to see whether she was fit enough to make the trip to Christchurch Hospital. She died on 24 February 1909.

James then made his will, arranged that 'a suitable tombstone' be erected over his grave and divided his property among his children. Hubert had been James' pupil teacher at St Albans. Robert, assistant curator at Canterbury Museum and lecturer at Canterbury University College, would become Professor of Geology, contribute to the *Natural history of Canterbury* and have a mountain named in his honour. James Speight, 'gentleman', of Burwood, died of heart disease on 6 March 1912 and was buried with Ellen in the Burwood Anglican churchyard.

In *Farewell speech*, a descendant of Ada Wells pictures James as a pedagogue who, with 'loathsome nasal voice', drummed 'dry facts into reluctant heads'. In contrast, the archival record describes an excellent teacher of singing and one of a handful of headmasters who inculcated into their pupils a knowledge of elementary science. Inspectors' reports on James' period at Tai Tapu include the following statements:

'One of the best taught [schools] in the district... The general proficiency will bear most favourable comparison with that of any other district school... [The] school has a good tone and is [a] pleasure to examine.'

Further evidence that James was held in high regard appears in the 1924 newspaper descriptions of a Tai Tapu school re-union. An ex-pupil described James as 'one man he could not forget' and as a school master 'who turned out men and women'. Indeed, so much was said about James that Robert Speight was called upon to speak. He 'expressed appreciation of the kind references to his… father…' and attributed his success in life to 'hard work and the training he had received from the Tai Tapu School'.

A former St Albans pupil, David Florance, described his old dominie:

'He certainly put the fear of lung cancer into my breast when he sniffed through my pockets for the evil smelly weed. I must confess now that I have not smoked half a dozen cigarettes in a lifetime...

It was during my time at St Albans School that the strap replaced the cane. Mr Speight saw possibilities here. He attached a dog-collar to the sawn-off leg of a chair. I was quickly given the opportunity of testing the efficacy of the new horror. I received the allotted number of strokes and Mr Speight left the room but in a flash popped his head back again just as I was beaming at my classmates; it was a short-lived triumph for me.

It was his business to detect crime and he did it very effectively by standing on a form outside so that, unnoticed, he could watch us through a window.'

Yet David Florance considered that he had no cause for complaint. James encouraged the children in gardening, swimming and drill, took them for reading in the shade of an oak tree, and taught music 'using the correct method of striking the tuning fork on his knee'. Using Ganot's *Physics*, he taught the mysteries of mirrors, lenses and prisms, and, for the annual concert, was his own choirmaster.

A *Church news* obituary said of James:

'Whatever his hand found to do, he did it with all his might, never sparing himself, and having as his ideal 'thoroughness' in all his undertakings... Not only did he respond cheerfully to any call upon his time and energies, but was always ready to suggest that more work might be allotted to him... [He showed] untiring zeal... readiness to give of his best... fearless defence of the right... and... readiness to face unpopularity rather than countenance a wrong.'

In another section of the same periodical James was described as a member of Synod and 'a valued lay reader for the Parochial District of Burwood'.

Charles Salter said of James: 'He had the reputation of being fond of the strap'. In contrast, throughout a long life, David Florance treasured James' obituary. He commented, passionately but illogically, about his bearded headmaster: 'The bewhiskered young people of today have nothing on him'.

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Augustus Florance (1847 – 1897)

Born at Portland, Dorset, on 28 May 1847, Augustus Florance was the son of Jane Angell Stone and her husband, also Augustus, a doctor. Dr Florance, a 'cribbage... [and] chess player, a man interested in natural philosophy, a reader of Shakespeare... Cervantes... [and] Desiderus Erasmus', was a social reformer, endeavouring 'to accomplish the Sisyphean task of bringing temperance to the delinquents of Portland'.

Augustus junior and his contemporaries inherited this antipathy to the drink trade. A cousin, who emigrated to the USA, wrote, in 1886:

'I hope he (Augustus junior) adheres to his temperance sympathies. Tell him he has all my sympathy on that question. I belong to the Women's Christian Temperance Union... We all hope and pray that the curse of strong drink will be removed from our republic, which will come in God's own time.'

When his wife died, Dr Florance left his family in the care of relatives and sailed for New Zealand. He lived at the Hutt, near Wellington, produced 'primitive' paintings of the area (now held in the Alexander Turnbull Library), married a second time, went back to England and emigrated to Lyttelton as ship's doctor on the *Mersey* in 1862.

Dr and Mrs Florance settled in St Albans, Christchurch, the narrow blind lane up to their home being where Ranfurly Street now runs off Caledonian Road. The doctor, a popular general practitioner, dressed in silk dust coat and top hat, cultivated medicinal herbs, supported the Total Abstinence and St Albans Mutual Improvement societies, and died in 1879, 'a poor man with an honoured name'. His widow, Elizabeth, lived on at the property till her death, at 91, in 1906.

In England, Augustus junior dwelt in a loving Christian environment. The cousin who settled in America noted: 'I used to get Gussie to sleep many a time in Portland'. Augustus himself wrote that, at 10, he was 'converted to know and believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, by earnestly reading the New Testament at school…' He emigrated to Canterbury on the *Captain Cook* , arriving in September 1863. Although he was assisted by the provincial government, Dr Florance paid the greater part of his passage money.

Augustus junior, a *Lyttelton times* compositor, was, with his father, involved in a flax-milling concern on Ferry Road. He owned a property on the south side of the lane which led to the doctor's residence, his tall, two-storey house on Caledonian Road being built close to the fence-line. Deeply interested in natural history, the younger Augustus wrote letters to newspapers and graphically described Canterbury's insect pests. The currant bush fly he saw as elegant and destructive, its beauty 'but the difference between the splendidly coloured wasp and the plain hard-working bee'.

Augustus studied nature from the viewpoint of one who wanted to see improved use of the land. He envisaged belts of pines, blue gums and wattles criss-crossing the bleak Canterbury Plain, reducing the force of the winds and providing nesting places for falcons and owls. These he saw as decimating the 'sparrows, larks and other vermin' which were gorging themselves on the produce of the orchard, garden and corn field. Should people wish to grow fruit 'fit to grace the best markets of the world', they should, argued Augustus, plant trees in the most crowded parts of the metropolis; experience proved that pests sought the quiet of the suburbs and bush country rather than 'the busy haunts of men'. The compositor lamented how 'strong net-weaving spiders', potential allies in the war on insects, were often carelessly swept to destruction.

Augustus Florance senior and wife, Elizabeth, about 1870

Augustus Florance junior and wife, Elizabeth née Hamilton, about 1875

Augustus edited a threepenny temperance monthly, the *Christian labourer* , the contents of which were 'in harmony with the teachings of the law of God, science and experience'. In Volume 1, No 1, dated September 1877, the editor defended total abstinence:

'It is from the moderate use of intoxicating liquors that all the drunkenness of the world springs, and, unless we at once arise and close for ever this broad road to hell, our sons and daughters will be had to supply the mad-house and gaol, and to double the number of drunkards who are rushing over the dark precipice of ruin.'

The periodical also featured an article, 'Smoking as an accessory to drinking', wherein social, economic and medical problems – including cancer – were attributed to the inhalation of tobacco smoke. In later issues, Augustus stated that he wanted to 'increase the spread of knowledge, the arts of peace and universal Christian brotherhood'.

By 1877 Augustus was a husband and father. On 13 October 1872, at St Luke's, Christchurch, he had married Elizabeth Hamilton, the mother of a five-year-old ex-nuptial daughter, Ada. The couple's own brood, Elizabeth, Augustus, Robert and David were born in 1874, 1878, 1881 and 1884 respectively. A nephew, Walter Kerr, thought Elizabeth stern and houseproud. During a bout of fever, in childhood, Augustus had lost his sense of hearing, and, although this meant that communication with his offspring was limited, the youngsters held him in great respect.

Elizabeth's father, pioneer New Brighton settler David Wilson Hamilton, owned a house, 'the Grange', and was proprietor of a coach service, the precursor of the tramway system, which ran from Sharlands Corner via Stanmore, Shirley and the New Brighton roads to the New Brighton Hotel in Seaview Road where he was 'mine host'. Elizabeth Florance inherited 50 acres of low-lying land, some fertile, some less so where Mairehau Road, Frosts Road and Beach Road meet. Perhaps it was this family link with the seaside area which led Augustus to purchase, in 1879, Rural Section 16034 of 20 acres on the north-east corner of the intersection of the Beach Road and Frees Road (the latter to become Racecourse Road and, finally, Bower Avenue). Augustus' land-holding is commemorated in the name Florance Street.

On their property the Florances established a week-end and holiday home; bluegums stood at the gate. There being no road into the area, Augustus walked behind his horse as it trudged through the wastes where Bassett Street is now situated and across the Travis Swamp. On either side of the horse were panniers and in these perched the children. Eventually, the Avon Road Board formed Frees Road as a rough track. After work on Saturday night, Augustus would borrow a horse and dray and bring stores to his holding. To the Florance boys, the holiday home was an idyllic spot. When they wanted to bathe, they stripped naked at the house and clambered through the sand-dunes to the sea a mile off. There the silence was broken 'only by the call of the sea-gull and the restless varied music of the surging surf'. When hungry, the children dug for pipis.

Augustus, more conscious of the problems associated with seaside living, saw that the native vegetation did little to hold down the sand-dunes and that, whipped up by 'an old-man nor-wester', these would move inland and spread over more productive land. Believing that every day should be 'a Christian Sabbath of good works', that the desert should 'blossom as the rose' and that there should spring forth 'two blades of grass... where none grew before', he inaugurated a programme of sand-dune stabilisation.

After unwisely experimenting with twitch, Augustus obtained lupin seed from Victoria's government botanist, Baron Ferdinand von Mueller. This he sowed at some distance inland where clumps of stunted shrub afforded shelter. In two years the well-established plants were scattering their seed in all directions and there was a shoreward advance.

Lupins could not be relied upon close to the beach where pools of salt water gathered in winter. However, Augustus learned of the 'celebrated English marine grass' or marram grass. With its 'thick, strong, creeping, perennial roots, with many tubers the size of a pea', it could withstand attack from winds and waves, 'thus forming a barrier against the encroachment of the ocean'. Baron von Mueller had introduced marram grass to Victoria and successful experiments with the plant were carried out on the shifting sands at Port Fairy. It was from this locality that Augustus obtained the seed that he sowed at New Brighton.

Augustus planted soil-binding species over wide stretches of North New Brighton. His efforts were not always appreciated by the Avon Road Board which demanded that he cut a track to allow neighbours to his north easy access to their land. Augustus remained obstinant, telling the board: 'It is easy to drive a horse and cart through a road covered with growing lupins. In fact, it is a pleasure'.

On another occasion, Augustus reminisced about the situation which would once have faced the person walking along the road to the beach on a windy day. That person would have found himself on a 'naked waste of... sand' which was 'blowing... with the force of a rushing alpine river'. There had now been a 'glorious transformation of the scene', the traveller being able to walk along a well-grassed sheltered road. Only when he reached the beach would he realise that the wind was blowing.

Others soon followed Augustus' lead in planting sand-binding species. One of these was George Thomas Hawker who was skilful at making his achievements known and outlived his contemporaries. In 1924, aged 84, he was to see placed on the sea wall to the east of the pier, a plaque which honoured him as 'Father of New Brighton'. In the 1870s Hawker purchased two four-roomed cottages which had stood on Worcester Street where the Canterbury University College site was planned. One he bought, in sections, across the Bower Bridge. About this week-end dwelling, the first house in Seaview Road, he planted gorse in an attempt to shelter it from the frequent sandstorms. Augustus cheerfully gave him lupin seed. When the plants were flourishing, Hawker cancelled his sons' fishing expeditions and sent them forth scattering seed.

Christchurch first celebrated Arbor Day on 4 August 1892. Senior boys from the East Christchurch School came by tram to New Brighton, trekked to Rawhiti Domain, and, under the supervision of Canterbury Agricultural and Pastoral Association spokesman Michael Murphy, planted 300 trees. New Brighton School children and staff toiled in George Street (now Oram Avenue), others participated as well and, altogether, more than 3000 trees were planted. In a *Canterbury times* article, Augustus waxed lyrical and advised on how Arbor Day might be even more successfully observed in the future.

Although Elizabeth Florance was disgruntled at her husband spending his time and limited capital on temperance activities, Augustus persisted. In the *Christian labourer* of August 1896 he wrote on Scripture reading in schools, the Pleiades and Orion stars, and unemployment. On the last subject, he related how a Wesleyan editor had rejected his plan to have capitalists loan idle land so that the needy might cultivate and harvest crops. He considered that, by rejecting his scheme, one of the churches which administered the marriage laws was failing to promote the prosperity of contracting parties.

A multi-talented man, Augustus advertised 'Florance's Cough Cure', a 'soothing, safe and natural remedy for coughs, sore throats, itching or painful wounds and eruptions, earaches, toothaches, burns [and] scalds'. However, by now disease was already attacking Augustus' own central nervous system. He died on 8 November 1897 and was buried in the Linwood Cemetery. His wife, Elizabeth, died in 1925.

In the 1960s David Florance commented:

'When I first took note of my surroundings, the lupins were completely out of control – perhaps not altogether because

George Thomas Hawker, 'Father of New Brighton'.
George W Walsh, *New Brighton: a regional history, 1852 – 1970*, p24

my father used them to protect the young blue gums, the weeping willows, the poplars, quince and apple trees, to say nothing of the variety of vegetables.'

On his father's personality he wrote: '...He was not born to be a cow-spanker, a sheep-farmer or one hankering after the fleshpots of Christchurch. He was first and foremost an idealist'. With a tree-girt home in Glen Road, Kelburn, the retired Victoria University professor was, he thought, rather like his father. A verse came into his mind:

> The world is full of honey bees,
> the world is full of roses,
> and all the world's a garden
> with summer to and fro.

Use Florance's Cough Cure.

A THERAPEUTIC AGENT OF GREAT VALUE.

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The City of Christchurch Coat of Arms

Allan Hopkins (1857 – 1933)

In Christchurch, Allan Hopkins had a career which took him from the shadows to riches and, after a spectacular crash, back into obscurity.

When his children asked him about his origins, Allan replied airily that he was born at 'Knock Castle', was 'the seventh son of a seventh son and born on New Year's Day'. In reality, William Allan Hopkins was born at Cheadle, Staffordshire, England, on 31 December 1857, the son of John Hopkins and Mary Hopkins née Allan. He was baptised at St Giles' Catholic church, Cheadle, which had been designed by famed architect Augustus Pugin. Despite this and the fact that he would describe his father as a contractor, he was nothing more than the second to youngest in a large struggling Irish family; a family indistinguishable from many others which, both before and after the potato famine, emigrated to England in search of work. Early on, the younger Hopkins jettisoned the 'William' and adopted the Irish custom of using, as his Christian name, his mother's maiden name. Throughout his life, he was known as Allan Hopkins.

In youth, Allan may have lived the harsh life of a ship's cabin boy. Certainly, in 1881, he emigrated to Canterbury on the *Lady Jocelyn*. Boldly, the Catholic lad made himself known to a fellow passenger, a 17-year-old Wesleyan girl, Sarah Ann Roebuck, who was on a tour with her father and step-mother. William Roebuck, a woollen manufacturer, consented to his daughter's engagement and, on 11 February 1882, at the Durham Street Methodist church, the young couple were married. In May, in an attempt to secure his daughter's future, William purchased property in association with his new son-in-law. Over a period of 16 years, seven children were born to Sarah and Allan: Serena or Scyrena, Luther, Daisy, Gertrude, Millicent, Dora and Allan junior.

Allan dwelt at Madras Street and Office Road and worked as a builder, contractor and commission agent. By 1892 he was a 'House, Land and Estate Agent, Valuator and Land Broker' in Cathedral Square Chambers, a small rectangular building at 8 Cathedral Square. He was also at 133 Hereford Street. Adjacent to Allan's business was the Bank of New Zealand. Allan leased but never owned this central city property.

The Staffordshire lad enjoyed the trappings of status, including membership of the Masonic Lodge and, from about 1912, the position of Justice of the Peace. It is surprising therefore that, in August 1889, he purchased 27 acres of sandy country in remote North New Brighton. Some of the land was on the south side of Travis Road in the area of the modern Wattle Drive but the larger block was to the north-east of the present Bower Avenue roundabout. This was considered 'not... a safe... but [rather]... a speculative district [with] neither beauty nor attraction'. The homestead,'Saltaire', on five acres to the north of Allan's initial purchase, became 'a showplace in the desert'. A land valuer would one day write that Allan's improvements would 'to most people… be money spent without discretion'. However, even he had to concede: 'The grounds, certainly, are artistic'.

In the early days, visitors knew they were nearing 'Saltaire' when, at the corner of Racecourse Road (Bower Avenue) and Marriotts Road, they came upon a lamp stand which Allan had taken it upon himself to erect. When the original wooden structure was vandalised, Allan replaced it with a concrete stand. Throughout the years that the Hopkins family was domiciled at 'Saltaire', there lived with them Sarah's maternal uncle, Matthew Henry Elam. For some time, it was Matthew's job to light the lamp. A long asphalt drive wound up to the red pine rusticated weatherboard house which stood on a three

Sarah and Allan Hopkins

'Saltaire', North New Brighton

foot rise and, over time, expanded from a modest to a substantial dwelling. There were six chimneys, a fireplace in each of the 10 big rooms, a washbasin in every bedroom and a large reception hall.

At 'Saltaire', a 450 feet deep artesian well brought up water which was pumped into three 400 gallon tanks. Several thousand feet of piping ran to all parts of the grounds, 'taps being everywhere'. 'Saltaire' had a double septic tank and conveniences inside and out. At that time the nightcart came to most houses; one unfortunate young man, Willie Harper, was killed by a runaway vehicle. The property included a bee farm, tennis court, fern grotto, rockeries, flag pole and pond or swimming pool. Substantial brick outbuildings included a dairy, washhouse, storeroom, fruit house and dwellings for the gardener and Matthew Elam; the latter was banished from the main dwelling because he smoked. There were motor garages, cars and a chauffeur. Allan, who did not drive, bullied his daughter, Millicent, into learning. She thus became an early and enthusiastic exponent of what was considered a male skill.

On the Racecourse Road frontage there was a macrocarpa hedge which grew thick, wide and high and served as a very effective windbreak. A great quantity of soil was laid on the developed land. This, and the fact that there was an excellent drainage system, meant that there could be established lawns, summer houses, strawberry beds, choice flowers and a kitchen garden. Orchards, a feature of 'Saltaire', produced walnuts, cherries, pears, peaches, Japanese plums and apples. The fruit was appreciated not only by the Hopkins family but also by the denizens of the humble dwellings beyond the estate. Mothers had but to whisper 'It's apple-jelly time' and their offspring would be off clambering into the trees at 'Saltaire' and plundering large amounts of fruit.

A word on the naming of the property. Sir Titus Salt, wool stapler, had discovered how to manufacture alpaca from the wool of the long-haired South American cameloid. Outside Bradford, in Yorkshire's West Riding, he found a valley where the river Aire flowed at the foot of great hills and there established the 'ugly solid town of Saltaire with its huge mill overshadowing all... chapel, library and hospital'. However, with excellent housing and a drainage system which militated against the scourges of cholera and typhoid, Saltaire was, for its time, a model work-place. Allan Hopkins may have laboured at Saltaire. Alternately, the name may have been chosen because Sarah had been born near 'the happiest… healthiest working community in the world' and because her father, like Titus Salt, was in the textile industry.

Allan was ebullient and possessed of a sense of humour. He once came home and held his wife's friends spellbound with an account of his experiences that day. It was all quite fanciful but 'they all looked so miserable I thought I would cheer them up'.

Despite an explosive temper, he was a loving husband and father; Dora, the beauty of the family, was his favourite. Quick to make use of new technology, he installed electric lighting in the house and outbuildings and became the first private telephone subscriber in North New Brighton. Not for him the public telephone which was installed in Bowhill Road in 1916, nor the party line which six small-time businessmen had linked to their houses three years later. The budding magnate was a cheerful supporter of good causes, including, in his own area, the North Beach Surf Club. Should he see a barefoot boy, he would take him to a shop and fit him out with boots.

If Allan played the squire, Sarah was very much his lady. Quiet, dignified and elegantly dressed, she was also educated, rigidly honest, a regular churchgoer and a good housekeeper and cook. In the words of a granddaughter, she had 'not a great sense of humour, perhaps, but one can't have everything'. As in other big houses, local girls acted as servants

and were called to their duties through a system of buzzers. When courting, the servants would bring their young men to be approved by their mistress.

Allan was keen to be involved in the development of his area. In 1887 the New Brighton Tramway Company established a direct route from the city to the pier site via what is now Pages Road. The following year Allan was elected to a committee which aimed 'to secure the opening up of the roads in North New Brighton'. Later he promoted a financially shaky competitor to the New Brighton tramway venture, the City and Suburban Tramway Company, whose line left Manchester Street, meandered through Richmond, Burwood and North New Brighton and then ran down the Esplanade (Marine Parade) to the pier. So eager were the directors to grasp monies from available sources that they tried to persuade the Avon Road Board clerk to look for faults in the construction of the line not from his trap but from the back of a moving tram. Said the clerk: 'I... will be able to see all the defects in your line quite as well from my gig as from your tram'.

It was Allan who introduced to the under-capitalised venture prominent contractor John Brightling. Brightling completed the horse tramway in 1894 and bought it the following year. Nevertheless, the journey, 'tiresome, tedious, long and lumbering' and including 'a climb over great sandhills', remained 'one to be taken only by the most robust'. On the Esplanade, lupin and marram grass did not yet keep back the sea or stabilise the sand. Saltwater encroached on to the track and wind-blown sand covered the rails to a foot overnight. Thus did the driver have to carry two shovels and, with willing passengers, clear the way to the pier.

In 1906 the Christchurch Tramway Board purchased the line and, on economic grounds, abandoned the section beyond Burwood. Allan chaired an indignation meeting at the New Brighton Racecourse and led a deputation to the board. North New Brighton residents were, he said, suffering 'complete isolation ... and the virtual confiscation of a large amount of their property'. This protest was a failure.

In January 1908, Allan led a deputation to the New Brighton Borough Council concerning a tramway stopping place, 'Brooklyn' on Racecourse Road. The name honoured Harry Mace who had died in 1902 and whose 'Brooklyn Lodge' had been at the New Brighton Racecourse (now Queen Elizabeth II Park). The deputation wanted the erstwhile stopping place given a name which was a variant of the name of Allan's property – 'Saltair'. It also wanted the eastern end of Bowhill Road to be styled 'Saltair Beach'. Neither name has survived. A by-way, Saltaire Street, still exists.

In October 1910 the area was threatened. A huge fire sprang up at North New Brighton. Fanned by 'one of the strongest nor'west winds ever experienced in Canterbury', the inferno 'raged through the dry grass and undergrowth, sweeping away everything in front of it'. At 'Saltaire', Dora Hopkins fled the house with her most treasured possession, a blue velvet evening cloak. The fernery, trees and shrubs were engulfed but the abundance of water, use of a manual machine and the presence of over 500 volunteers in the area meant that the house could be saved. The fire moved on through Rawhiti Domain and, though it was there checked, many of the residents of central Brighton evacuated their houses. A journalist wrote:

'...The scene in Lonsdale Street was a weird one... the atmosphere... yellow, vast clouds rendered everything indistinct, and everywhere were heaped piles of furniture thrown pell-mell into the road. Pianos jostled pots and pans and everywhere there was confusion.'

Gradually a working class and petit bourgeois settlement was established in North New Brighton. A journalist enthused about how on each side of Bowhill Road could be seen 'dwellings nestling amongst shrubs and trees... the gardens in the sand producing flowers and vegetables... of surpassing excellence'. On the beach Amy Alley gathered driftwood, built a fire and fed her numerous nieces and nephews, the famous

Dora Hopkins

‘Allan Hopkins was a prominent Christchurch personality. To many he was a businessman of excellent reputation; was there not on his office wall the poem which began, ‘I shall pass this way but once’?’

Rewi among them. When not thus engaged, she laid broom on her section, irrigated it and saw her sandhill blossom with ice plants and geraniums. Meanwhile future Mayor of New Brighton Ernest Leaver[1] was establishing the North New Brighton Burgesses’ Association at ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’, a shop and tea-rooms which, like ‘Saltaire’, had been threatened by the 1910 fire. The bourgeois pressure group succeeded where the squire had failed. The board extended the tramline to the beach and, in September 1914, electrified the route all the way to the pier.

To Allan and Sarah, the possession of a beautiful home, status and a measure of clout were as nothing when compared with the family tragedies which they experienced. In 1893 their daughter, Daisy, aged eight, succumbed to a chest abscess, while Serena, 29, died of tubercular meningitis in 1912. Dora, 26, ‘a pretty girl but never far from her bed’, died of pulmonary tuberculosis, in 1920. The trio lie in the Burwood Anglican churchyard. Another daughter, Gertrude Gresham, was to outlive her father by but four years, dying in 1937. Outstanding among the siblings was Allan junior, ‘a man of gay and happy disposition’, a skilled surgeon, and, moreover, ‘tactful and agreeable in his dealings with patients and nurses’. In 1931, aged 34, he fell victim to diphtheria in the institution at which he was surgeon and medical superintendent, Westland Hospital, Hokitika.

Allan Hopkins was a prominent Christchurch personality. To many he was a businessman of excellent reputation; was there not on his office wall the poem which began, ‘I shall pass this way but once’? People entrusted to him the management of their affairs. He financed some into homes, demanding only small deposits and advancing money on first and second mortgages. To speculators, he was the promoter of companies. Among them were the Imperial Oilskin, British Distillate and Rangitoto Estate companies, the last being involved with the leasing of North Island Maori land.

Allan took his wife and daughters on sea voyages to Europe in 1911 and 1914; Millicent was delighted to hear the tenor Caruso, and see the dancer Nijinsky. Then came crises. The older son, Luther, a lawyer, was honorary treasurer of the Canterbury Rowing Club and a member of the New Brighton Trotting Club. However, in his father’s absence, he proved a poor manager of the real estate agency. There was a rash of law suits and back-sliding mortgagees, deposits were withdrawn and bank support denied.

In February 1921, with his health deteriorating, Allan executed a private deed of assignment over the whole of his property for the benefit of his creditors. One trustee, George Thomas Booth of the agricultural machinery firm Booth Macdonald, was the father-in-law of Millicent Hopkins. However, on 22 April a determined old woman, Mary Anne Edwards, had Allan adjudged bankrupt and his property came under the control of the Official Assignee. Finding life at ‘Saltaire’ intolerable, Sarah Hopkins joined her Gresham daughter and son-in-law in Wellington. An anecdote has Allan walking the streets of Christchurch, accompanied by an Airedale dog, and being pursued by his creditors. Certainly he entered Sunnyside Asylum as a voluntary boarder before joining his family in the capital.

The bankruptcy focused public attention on the details of Allan’s activities. At Awamonga near Balclutha, the land agent had shown bad judgment. Tenants who harvested ‘one of the best crops of oats it was possible to grow’ were harshly treated and abandoned to idleness potentially ‘tip-top sheep country’. On other occasions there had been criminality. Allan had used the account of the Imperial Oilskin Company as his own; thus was the business sent into liquidation. Matthew Elam had acted as Allan’s nominee, allowing the land agent to hide his involvement in various concerns; he would ‘simply sign anything put before him’. With Allan’s bankruptcy, the old man shook off his lethargy and turned over to the Official Assignee all the properties and shares which were nominally his.

In October 1921 Allan awaited sentence in the Supreme Court. The Crown Prosecutor stated that the defalcations

amounted to £22,000 though the Official Assignee would one day put the debts at £46,000. Nevertheless, Allan pleaded guilty to but four charges of failing to account for sums involving some £1700.

Invoking Section 142 of the Crimes Act, the judge imposed a sentence of four years' hard labour on each charge, the sentences to be served concurrently.

The mainstream media gave extensive coverage to the case. *New Zealand truth*, journal of the groundlings, exulted over the fall of the 'Holy City' land broker who, with his 'big private establishment and… big office in the city… did things – and his clients – in a big way'. Creditors who were 'aggrieved [and] vindictive' sought household items large and small which they believed to have been carried off by the family. With her usual quiet dignity, Sarah Hopkins told the Official Assignee that a large heavy box which had been removed from the North New Brighton property 'contained the belongings of my two girls who are dead'; that family deaths and marriages meant that most blankets were 'over 20 years old... much worn and not numerous'; and that her china and silver presents would be useful 'if ever I can have a little house of my own again'.

In 1925 Matthew Elam died at 'Tuarangi' or, as it was more starkly described, the Old Men's Home, Ashburton. Allan was released from Paparua Prison on 15 November 1923 and returned to Wellington. In August 1933, he suffered a stroke while sitting at his desk. The stroke, and arteriosclerosis, brought about his death, on 15 August, at Brougham Street Hospital; there was no obituary. Allan was buried in the Karori Cemetery.

Sarah accompanied her Booth daughter and son-in-law to Sydney where, in World War II, she knitted hundreds of pairs of khaki socks and showed less skilled women how to turn a heel. In 1949 the family moved to London where Sarah died, at 90, in 1954.

Allan Hopkins had a fresh complexion, blue eyes and was of average height. Of abstemious habits, he led an exemplary home life. Nevertheless, the 'helpless... ignorant' working people who had entrusted their life savings to him remembered his fraud – especially when, in 1939 and 1952, they received their pay-out, the total dividend being 7 29/80 of a penny in the pound. For years the grand house reminded them of the defalcations. Even when Redemptorist priests had it demolished, the homestead property remained. In the year 2000 the fathers are planning to move out. Should the land be subdivided, the chief evidence of North New Brighton's flawed magnate will disappear.

[1] Ernest Leaver was the younger brother of Richard Leaver junior. Richard married Hannah, daughter of Maria Vennell.

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Sali Mahomet (1866 – 1943)

From a cart outside the Bank of New Zealand in the south-east corner of Cathedral Square, Sali Mahomet, or 'Ice-cream Charlie', sold his product to passing foot and cycle traffic. When he operated, in the first half of the 20th century, 'central Christchurch had many one-person businesses', the owners of which became local characters with no equivalent in a later 'chrome and plastic world'. What distinguished Sali was the fact that, in an overwhelmingly European and Christian city, he was a dark-skinned Moslem from Asia.

Little is known about the origins of Sali or 'Saleh' (pronounced 'Sah-ley' and meaning 'pious'). Family tradition states that he was born Mohammed Khan, about 1866. Tales persist of a childhood residence in a Russian city, Ashkhabad, of the clan being harassed by Cossacks, and of the female members dying of exposure. On his marriage certificate, Sali gave his birthplace as Ceylon and, elsewhere, he said that he was a Punjabi. He may have decided that, when living in a country which was proud to be part of the British Empire, it was best to claim that one had been born within the bounds of that empire. Sali's mother may have had the forename Addul or Adil. His father, Sultan, was a hawker and the son of a hawker, Razzak or Razzaq. This name, meaning 'Provider', can refer to God but is also popular as a forename and surname.

On leaving Asia, Sali and his father travelled through Australia, arriving in New Zealand about 1894. Here 'Saleh' became 'Sally', 'Solly' and, eventually, 'Sali'. Using Dunedin as their base and travelling on horseback, the pair hawked their household wares over rural Otago, Canterbury and Westland. A riding accident left Sali with a limp which he minimised through having one shoe built up. Perhaps it was this experience which caused him to seek a less demanding occupation.

Sali decided to become an ice-cream seller in Christchurch and, about 1903, had a cart built and painted white and bright red. On the red there were decorative gold patterns. Having purchased a recipe, Sali sold his product from outside the Bank of New Zealand. Near the end of his career, he moved round the corner into Hereford Street. At first, Sali rented a dwelling in Brightlings Lane in the Avon Loop. A working-class blind street which has since been built over, it intersected with Oxford Terrace and lay between Willow and Hurley Streets.

On 15 December 1905, while staying at the Brightlings Lane property (probably in preparation for Sali's wedding), Sultan died of a stroke.

In a town where generations of European women married within their own racial group, 19-year-old domestic servant Florence Henrietta Johnstone dared to be different. On 5 January 1906, at the Registrar's Office, Christchurch, she wed Sali Mahomet. To make it appear as if there were but a few years between the spouses, Sali gave his age as 27 (he was about 40).

If there was gossip about the marriage, the four daughters of the union were of more enduring interest. As youngsters they had the soft attractive features common to Eurasian children. In adulthood their dark complexions, then rarely seen in Christchurch, marked them out as notable beauties. In naming his children, Sali showed familiarity with several languages and cultures. 'Rahona' or 'Rahanie', an Islamic word for the herb basil is also the name of a flower. 'Rupee' refers to the currency of Imperial India. Although 'Tulah' is Hindi for 'weighing scale', Sali pronounced the word 'Tilla' and told his daughter that she had been named after a place he knew: the mosque Tilla, in Samarkand, means 'golden'. Christchurch has often showed hostility to those who are different. It is

Sali Mahomet in his dairy

Mrs Mahomet (left), her daughters and fur trader, Mrs Singh

pleasant, therefore, to note that at least one pupil at St Albans School envied Tulah Mahomet her 'romantic' name. More prosaically, 'Florence' was named after her mother.

Such was the success of the ice-cream business that, in 1907, Sali was able to purchase land at 69 Caledonian Road and erect a single storey dwelling. Built of kauri, the structure had a bay window, decorative woodwork in the hall and ornate rose patterns in the ceiling. Sali's house was, and remains, a desirable residence. At a time when electricity reached only as far as Bealey Avenue, Sali had a lead extended to a large wooden outhouse, the 'dairy,' where, with fastidious cleanliness, he made his ice-cream. At first a horse and cart and, later, a truck brought one hundred weight blocks of ice from the Canterbury Frozen Meat Company. Slabs were packed about the product in the 'dairy' and Sali undertook the onerous task of breaking up ice with a mallet so that chips could be used to keep the product cool as it was being transported to the Square. A youthful neighbour caught the horse which pulled Sali's cart into town. Afterwards it was towed in by a Blue Star taxi.

Sali dispensed his wares between August of one year and the April that followed, commenting that, during the other months, 'you can keep cool without an ice-cream'. However, he was such a feature of the landscape that there developed a belief that his was a year-round business. On one occasion a man rang him to settle a bet – whether he was on his stand in June and July. Locals regarded him as part of the scenery when the weather was warm and, with poetic licence, described the 'appearance of Mr Mahomet and his ice-cream... as the official beginning of summer'. It might, more appropriately, have been called the first hint of spring.

Wholesale druggist H F Stevens made 'Ice-cream Charlie's' pineapple, strawberry, raspberry and orange flavoured syrups and also his vanilla essence which came from beans imported by Sali and roasted at home in his coal range oven. Other ingredients included eggs, cornflour, milk and cream, the two latter being provided by the Tai Tapu Dairy Company. The ice-cream was made before dawn, at first in a hand-operated churn and, later, in an American import, a Westinghouse machine which could produce four separate batches at once.

Vanilla ice-cream was sold in tub-shaped cones. Essence-flavoured sundaes came in glass dishes with silver spoons (these were washed and re-used). There were also small and large take-home packs. At the end of a long day in town, many a small but well-behaved child was rewarded with one of the ice-cream seller's products. Sali's wares cost between one penny and one shilling.

Cartoon of Sali Mahomet, *Press*, 28 January 1939

Most locals smiled on the exotic intruders. On special occasions they would call with a billy or preserving jar to purchase ice-cream. At Christmas, St Albans people, orphanages and the lunatic asylum were treated to copious amounts of Sali's product.

On one occasion a neighbour's house caught fire. Sali and Florence gave up their large bed and installed therein the dazed wife and her two children.

Sometimes Sali suffered racial attack, being labelled a 'Turk' during World War I. At other times he would try to manoeuvre his bulk out of his cart and give chase to youths who shouted 'Ching Chong, Indian'. The delinquents were too nimble for him.

Short, rotund and swarthy, with round face, black moustache, white coat and a tie, Sali was a cheery helpful individual who regularly loaned locks to the boys who cycled into the Square to attend the picture theatres which abounded in that locality. He usually worked alone but, in the late 1930s, employed an orphan lad who soon went off to and was killed during World War II. A sad ice-cream seller received the young man's personal possessions.

In 1939 cartoonist Sid Scales drew the ice-cream seller's picture and, in a rare comment about his past, Sali said: 'You know Sid, I told you I was not an Indian'. At the same time a journalist described life at the cart:

'Ice-cream Charlie's stall... is a rendezvous for children and for boys, youths and young men, mainly on bicycles, who, while hurrying through the town on errands, can only spend a few minutes for refreshment. Parents passing the stall find it difficult to resist the persuasions of their children and often join them in having an ice-cream.'

Although he did not practise his faith, neither did Sali repudiate it. He kept a copy of the Koran, avoided pork, bacon, sausages and alcohol but made no attempt to encourage his family to study Islam. His passion was trotting and, with 'Trooper Dillon' and 'Will o' the Wisp', he entered the ranks of owners. At his cart he made many friends, the Singhs, prosperous Auckland fur traders, among them. On one occasion he came to Caledonian Road with an entire hockey team, most members being Moslems; the bringing home of guests, without warning, was his major domestic vice.

In some ways Sali was a forward-thinking man. He cultivated the right people – trade unionist and politician Jock Mathison among them. His knowledge of Asian languages led the courts to seek him out as an interpreter when foreigners, often seamen, were brought before them. Keen to know about local and world events, he would get his daughters to read the paper to him; though he had an excellent command of spoken English, he could not read it. He never drove a car but was happy to ride in one should the opportunity arise. He enjoyed the cinema and picnics, dressed well and had a telephone when such an item was a luxury – his number was 3420. He was devoted to his wife who has been described as 'a very nice woman'. Loving and indulgent to his daughters, he also encouraged them to gain as much as possible from their education. They were to remember him with affection.

Yet 'Ice-cream Charlie' was also locked into the past. He dealt in cash, had no dealings with banks and secreted his money in a chest in his 'dairy'. Perhaps this was the reason why friends of the younger Mahomets, who were cheerfully invited to the house, were told never to enter the building – though the prohibition ostensibly related to its being the hiding place of the ice-cream recipe. Sali made generous loans but left no paper trail showing where his money had gone. In 1942 he was struck down by a stroke, defrauded by a legal firm and the family found it necessary to sell their beloved home and move to a modest property at 55 Ward Street, Addington. In April 1943 Sali entered the Old Men's Home, Ashburton, and there, on 7 October, succumbed to a second stroke. He was buried, with Sultan, in the Linwood Cemetery. Over a considerable time Sali's wife and daughters managed to save something of the family fortunes. Florence died in 1969. A competitor, Vernon Wilkinson took to himself the title, 'Ice-cream Charlie'. The ice-cream cart is now at Ferrymead Historic Park.

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Richard Bedward Owen (1873 – 1948)

In newspaper reports and official documents Richard Bedward Owen was styled 'Mr R B Owen'. Unofficially he was 'River Bank' Owen and, sometimes, 'the River Banker'. To some he was a conservationist, to others an old-fashioned philanthropist, while his enemies styled him a busybody.

Richard Bedward Owen was born at Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, on 3 December 1873, the son of Rebecca Bedward Blower and her husband, Richard Owen, a master miller. The younger Richard trained as a tailor and, at 29, in South Africa, married Alice Mary White. The couple soon emigrated to Christchurch, New Zealand, where they set up house at 117 Rossall Street, Fendalton. They had four children, Gwendoline, Marjorie, Gethin and Garth.

At first a cutter in the Farmers' Co-operative Trading Company, Richard went on to establish his own tailoring business in a shop in Hereford Street at the back of the Strand Theatre. He was later in the Triangle – the area bound by Colombo, Cashel and High streets – and in the dome of the Regent Theatre building in the north-east corner of Cathedral Square. Eventually he bought Fletcher Brothers' tailoring business at 751 Colombo Street and therein established his own highly successful enterprise, Owen's Ltd.

After World War I, Richard became immersed in public affairs. Deeply interested in music, he was President of the Woolston Brass Band. He arranged concerts and collected funds for the purchase of uniforms and instruments and to enable bandsmen to attend national contests. As honorary secretary and then director of the Royal Christchurch Musical Society, he organised performances of *Elijah*, the *Creation* and the *Messiah*. Newspapers lauded the fact that there was brought to the management of musical organisations the 'initiative and … exertion' of a 'thorough businessman'.

As director, Richard argued that all children should have a love of and ability to play music and lamented that, in one high school, the subject was sidelined so that girls could be subject to the 'boring intricacies of botany and geometry'. In Richard's opinion, music was an excellent means of social control. Criminals became such in their free time 'when the discipline of an occupation was absent'. A child who knew music would, as an adult, profitably occupy his leisure hours.

Richard retired as director in 1922, intending to push for the expansion of school music programmes. Instead, he devoted himself to improving the appearance of the city by joining the Christchurch Beautifying Association.

In the brass band Richard had worked with well-known personality, R J Estall; in the musical society his colleague was famed cathedral organist and choirmaster, Dr John Christopher Bradshaw. In the Christchurch Beautifying Association, Richard rubbed shoulders with such grandees as Arthur Dudley Dobson, George Harper, Samuel Hurst Seager, Charles Chilton, Harry Ell and Ernest Andrews. A committee member from 1923, Richard was President from 1933 – 36.

The association conducted a campaign against air pollution caused by hospital and factory chimneys and by the city council's Manchester Street rubbish destructor. Large advertising hoardings – especially those of the Railways Department – were condemned as 'screaming ugly glaring daubs of colour'. There was a push to have electricity run underground so that the city might be rid of 'thousands of unsightly poles and overhead wire entanglements'. Bureaucrats were not alone in being wedded to error. Richard said of home owners that their 'high hedges and fences were usually very unsightly'.

Alas, the residents looked askance at the preferred model, the open garden, even when the association ran competitions

Unveiling the memorial at the 'Bricks', December 1926. Left to right: Sir Arthur Dudley Dobson; the Rev J K Archer, Mayor of Christchurch (in bowler hat); John Deans III, R B Owen.
Hocken Library

> Richard's men strove to turn into reality the ideal of 'making Christchurch beautiful'. They worked in the vicinity of Avon bridges within the city and, at Colombo Street, replaced decayed structures with shrubs, a miniature waterfall and steps which gave access to the river.

for the most artistic garden as seen from the street. Richard looked wistfully to the time when Christchurch would realise 'what a great cash asset there is in civic beauty'.

Richard was active in other beautifying projects. Justice Department officials allowed him to convert into a flower-begirt fountain an artesian spring near the court buildings. Richard told Charles Chilton: 'This is making quite a nice little display and interesting many people'. Just upstream were the provincial council buildings which the government returned to local control in 1928. Richard sought to keep the city council from infiltrating into the Gothic masterpiece and perhaps blotting the extensive river banks with ill-considered extensions. He encouraged tree-planting in the grounds and added the 'bright array of flowers and verdant lawn' which make up the rock work garden about the Armagh and Durham Street section of the complex. Then, in 1934, the elderly R E Green came forward with his statue of Canterbury's first Superintendent, James Edward FitzGerald. Richard was eager that the association accept a structure which the city council had declined and have it erected on the provincial council lawn. The association executive failed to appreciate that this was a tainted gift – the Greens were accusing their father of divesting himself of his assets so that there would be little left for those who had a claim against his estate. In 1939, after Green had died and Richard curtailed his public activities, the statue was erected on Christchurch Domains Board land on the periphery of the Botanic Gardens opposite Cashel Street.

Although Richard worked with other committee members – and transcended their parochialism by establishing the Canterbury Roadside Beautifying Association – his particular interest was the improvement of the Avon River and its environs. The town of his birth had the Severn on three sides; his father's business was water-powered. He enthused about the weirs and locks of the well-managed English boating rivers and admitted that 'a delusion and a snare' had brought him to Christchurch – a booklet containing a picture of a four-oared boat on the Avon. On arrival, he scanned the river but could not find the vessel.

Soon after World War I, Richard imported a canoe from Canada. At the bottom of Rossall Street, he launched the craft, and, with the help of a member of his staff, paddled it to Pleasant Point, a recently developed picnic site on the lower Avon. There the Owen family spent several Christmases under canvas.

In the area where Richard launched his boat there was a one acre wilderness bounded by a 10 foot iron fence. This adjoined and was usually thought part of the property of the Helmore family. On searching the title, however, Richard found that, in 1917, it had become public land. With the approval of the Waimairi County Council, he set to work, cleared the undergrowth, and, as he did so often, spent his own money on a project which was for the public good. Beautifying Association luminary Charles Chilton opened Millbrook Reserve to the masses on 26 January 1924. Four years later a photographer, Carl Beken, presented Richard with an album which showed how the area had been developed from 'little more than a rubbish dump' to 'one of the city's most attractive beauty spots'.

When, in 1922, the 'Creeping Depression' came to Christchurch, Richard established the River Improvement Fund. Business people and local government gave money, and men employed on public works were paid not a pittance but the award rate, a principle being established to which the city council would adhere even in the depths of the 1930s' Depression. The committee was to the fore when distress returned in 1926, eventually becoming the River Improvement and Unemployment Fund. Richard also organised the Citizens' Unemployment Committee which collected money and provided work. At depots, the committee gave relief rations to those for whom work could not be found. At workers' meetings Richard learned of the men's needs. His middle class biases showed through only on the subject of communism. At Trades Hall he thought he was 'in Russia for an hour or so' when he found Sidney Fournier distributing goods to the needy – 'dishing out bread and jam… and making

communistic sandwiches out of them'. He threatened to resign and thus pushed into the background this most colourful Marxist.

Richard's men strove to turn into reality the ideal of 'making Christchurch beautiful'. They worked in the vicinity of Avon bridges within the city, and at Colombo Street replaced decayed structures with shrubs, a miniature waterfall and steps which gave access to the river. The masses admired the improvements when they attended free riverside entertainments which featured music, illuminated water displays and cleverly arranged silent movie shows.

Because Richard advocated the resumption of Avon River traffic, it was important to him that he see established a monument at the 'Bricks', the spot above Barbadoes Street which was the highest point reached by such traffic in the 1850s. He worked vigorously on the task and was present when an architecturally-designed cairn was unveiled in 1926.

Even as Richard laboured on these endeavours, there was developing in his mind a plan 'to take in hand the river and make up for past neglect'. After much consideration, he presented his ideas to the Beautifying Association in December 1925, 75 years after the arrival of the First Four Ships. His scheme was, he said, unlike 'the festivities of the present days [which] would end in smoke'. Moreover, it would have appealed to the pioneers.

Richard envisaged weirs being introduced to beautify the stream. The waterway beside Park Terrace would be a carnival area, while the Burwood-Dallington district would be blessed with a municipal golf course, zoological gardens and, below Kerrs Reach, one of the 'finest regatta courses in the world'. A weir from the Spit to Shag Rock would maintain water in the Avon-Heathcote Estuary and in this aquatic playground would be found accommodation for rowboats, speedboats and seaplanes. In pioneer times, coastal craft had frequented the river; with debris removed and the channel deepened, launches and perhaps even yachts would come again. However, the best-known feature of the scheme was the proposed wide tree-lined riverside boulevard stretching from the Carlton Bridge to New Brighton.

An alarming increase in the number of out-of-work men in the late 1920s led the city council to borrow money and provide employment on ventures such as the boulevard. The implementation of Richard's brainchild began without ostentation at 7.30am on 26 June 1928. Men wielding picks, grubbers and shovels engaged in 'a massed eager attack on a line of ancient macrocarpa trees' which stood opposite Dallington Terrace. Work was done on both sides of the Avon between the Swanns Road and Dallington bridges. Houses were moved back and their occupants looked onto a roadway and an extensive area of neatly-grassed river bank reserve. In a ceremony on 1 September 1929, politicians local and national planted 53 lime trees on the north bank between the Swanns Road bridge and Medway Street. Today the river reserves and the mature trees which overlook the water form mute testament to Richard and his navvies.

In the 1920s, bicycles, cars and electric trams jostled one another at the Seaview Road bridge, a narrow structure opened in 1887 to accommodate the city-to-surf horse trams. In 1923 the Governor-General issued the New Brighton Borough Council with a warrant allowing it to erect a new concrete structure. However, the clearance at high tide was, like that of the old structure, to be four feet six inches and, in 1926, the Attorney-General gave the 'River Banker' permission to use his name in a court case. Richard's lawyers, Duncan Cotterill and Co, argued that, in deciding the height of the bridge, the council must 'make provision for the right of the members of the public using or likely to use the river for navigation purposes'.

Duncan Cotterill's junior lawyer, Leonard Hensley, visited ancients such as Burwood's riverside-dwelling postmistress, Amelia Frances Rogers, and gathered information on the past glories of Avon commerce. Richard stated that the Christchurch Drainage Board's current policy of using R T Stewart's river sweeper to clear the stream of debris was

R B Owen's navvies working on the banks of the Avon, 1920s.
Hocken Library

effecting a 'wonderful transformation' and converting the river once more into 'an easily negotiated water highway'. Within a few years, motor boats would be journeying up and down the river and launch excursions to Banks Peninsula would become popular. However, a new bridge with a low clearance would 'throttle the entrance to the river…'

Avon Member of Parliament D G Sullivan assured the local authority that for Richard to triumph would be a 'miracle'. Councillors claimed that the idea of the 'river as a waterway had gone to the dogs' and that Richard held to 'the wild dream of visionaries'. Counsel for the 'River Banker', A F Wright, put the case so well that it was accepted by Mr Justice Stringer. Then, even as a personal dispute broke out between New Brighton's mayor and counsel, A W Owles and J A Flesher, the Court of Appeal adjudicated in favour of the local body. The impressive dissenting decision of Mr Justice McGregor, however, proved sufficient to persuade Richard to take the fight to the Privy Council.

The case did not reach the Law Lords. Christchurch Mayor, J K Archer, seeking to have Richard given the substance of what he asked, was told by recalcitrant beach dwellers that 'Mr. Owen had been able to get the city council at his beck and call'. Two Cabinet ministers mediated, one being Reform Party luminary, Sir Francis Dillon Bell. Even then councillor and carrier E L Smith stated, 'I am going to have this matter held up for as long as I can'.

New Brighton diehards hoped for a more sympathetic Minister of Marine after the 1928 election. A new government and minister did, indeed, come to power but, more importantly, the 1929 local body elections produced seaside councillors who wished to compromise. A bridge with a six foot six inch clearance was built, New Brighton being excused from having to contribute towards the increased height of the structure. Alas, those who gave Richard moral support were reluctant to contribute substantially towards the legal bills. Moreover, boats have not come sailing with the tide, the noticeable climb to the top of the bridge being all that remains to remind one of the great battle. A disgruntled New Brighton councillor commented, 'More people went over the bridge in two hours than went under it in a year'. He has been proved substantially correct.

The 'River Banker' knew failure. In 1929 he stated that riverside reserves were needed 'as a lung right in the heart of our busy city', that the old fire brigade station in Chester Street (now Oxford Terrace East) should be demolished and the land returned to the public domain. Although in failing health, Charles Chilton wrote to J K Archer opposing this view. A deputation including Richard, Ell, civic benefactor T J Edmonds and E J Howard MP attended a council meeting and found that Archer wanted the Plunket Society to use the building. The Mayor stated that no conservation scheme was as significant as the work of the society; indeed, 'it was possible to overdo the question of reserves until it became a mere fad'. Archer's view prevailed.

There were other setbacks. Richard had an artist, James FitzGerald, paint pictures of the proposed Kerrs Reach regatta course. In the artist's impression, the banks were neatly grassed, boulevard drives ran along either side of the river and four boats, each containing eight occupants, were travelling upstream. The tailor attended city council meetings with his paintings fixed to blackboards but was told that his schemes were too futuristic to be considered.

In the 1940s, the idea of a regatta on the Avon was revived. The channel was diverted and a long straight course made ready for rowing contests which were to be part of the 1950 Christchurch Centennial Games. The old bend in the river – whose Maori name 'Wainoni' Professor A W Bickerton had taken for his property – became but a backwater snaking around the modern Porritt Park. Richard did not live to see the partial success of his plan for Burwood and Dallington.

Richard's relationships with other public men were often acrimonious. Certainly H T J Thacker hoped that 'once having got a taste of the boulevard atmosphere', the citizens would carry the roadway down to the sea on both sides of

the river, while, to celebrate his 50 years in Christchurch, T J Edmonds 'set another jewel along the Avon' with his generous gift of the Cambridge Terrace band rotunda which bears his name. However, the 'River Banker' and Beautifying Association had several disagreements. In 1929 the association would reimburse only a fraction of Richard's Millbrook Reserve costs. In 1936 Richard presented plans for a simple durable weir in the river but stated that he would not allow his timber to be used for the rival drainage board scheme which would 'not be a thing of beauty'. The association vacillated over which proposal it should adopt and Richard had to be restrained from leaving the meeting. He soon ceased to participate in association activities.

Richard had a particularly tortuous relationship with the Christchurch Domains Board which administered the Botanic Gardens and Hagley Park. In the first half of the 1920s, he sought in vain to have a proposed Bandsmen's Memorial Rotunda erected in the Botanic Gardens rather than on an obscure site in Hagley Park. Time has proved Richard correct; the rotunda, 'a great sight among the daffodils in spring', has been neglected by bandsmen but used by 'the great unwashed for sundry protests about issues political and social…'

In 1926 Richard became a government appointee to the domains board. In 1931, trees which he had donated were planted about Victoria Lake and down the river bank from the tea kiosk to Rolleston Avenue. This was one of the few occasions when his actions were greeted with approbation. He was often at odds with his fellows though he argued that, through publicising alleged irregularities, he had 'saved the board many thousands of pounds'.

At a special meeting in 1936 Richard claimed that, by giving choice blooms to visiting nurserymen, the Curator of the Botanic Gardens was 'trafficking in plants'. Moreover, these businessman 'would raid the glasshouse… to such an extent that the girls and women in charge would weep'. The chairman, Henry Kitson, stated that legitimate exchange with nurserymen had taken place. The tall, well-fleshed City Councillor M E Lyons, ironically nicknamed 'Tiny', subjected Richard to a savage attack, accusing him of conducting a vendetta against former curator James Young and of driving him 'to an early grave'; Young had died at 72. Lyons claimed that Richard was 'a political accident... appointed by a government that never had the confidence of the country'. Yet when, in 1925, the same government, Reform, had won a landslide victory, Lyons had been one of its candidates. Lyons threatened to ask the Labour administration to remove Richard from office 'on the grounds that he has gone sufficiently far to dissipate any confidence that we have had in him'. Accepting that his presence on the board was not welcome, Richard resigned: 'That ends my work for the city of Christchurch – a city truly hard to serve'.

Richard remained as warden of Millbrook Reserve. He had assistants to ensure the best displays in season and one of his last innovations was to arrange the illumination of some of the more colourful shrubs at night. Yet old foes still dogged him. A reference to Waimairi County Council assistance with this work caused Councillor Henry Kitson to declare: 'It doesn't want lighting at night. It's ridiculous.'

In 1943 Richard made a will in favour of his wife and children. Gethin was left in charge of Owen's Ltd though Garth was later to take over. Richard's auditor, Russell De Renzy Mitchell, and gardener, Charles Hack, were each left £20.

'Riverbank' Owen's end was sad. He died at Sunnyside Asylum on 18 November 1948, the immediate causes of death being arteriosclerosis and congestive heart failure. Alice Mary Owen died in 1949.

Gethin Owen thought his father 'forgotten by most' and lamented that 'not even a representative of the city council deemed it proper to pay [his] last respects'. He summed up his father's strengths and weaknesses thus:

'He was a man with tremendous organising ability, a man of great vision. He could not suffer fools and one of his great

Millbrook Reserve, 1920s
Christchurch City Libraries

faults was that he eventually fell out and had many rows with men, some in high places, who could not see his point of view, and, as a result, made many enemies.'

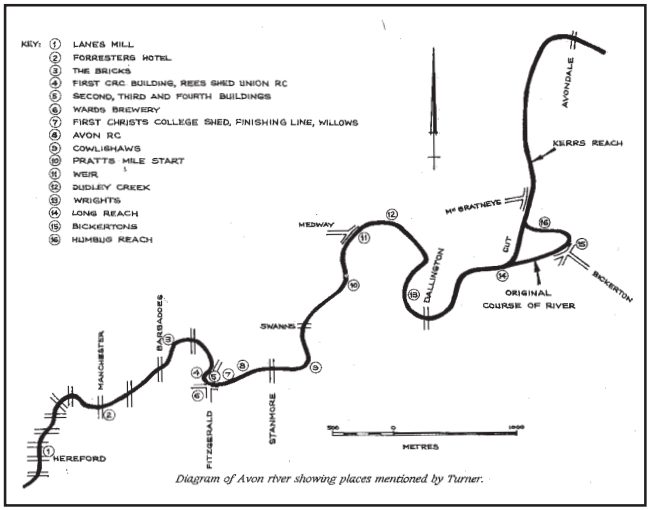

Diagram of Avon river showing places mentioned by Turner.

The Avon River

The 'Bricks' memorial is on the town side of the river just above the Barbadoes Street bridge. The Swanns Road-Dallington bridge area is the site of the Boulevard. The cut in the Avon at Dallington was Richard Owen's idea but implemented after his death.

The illustration also relates to the chapter on 'George Vennell and other Avon personalities'. The area between the Dallington bridge and McBratneys Road is the site of 'Broome Farm' which became 'De Troy's'. Pioneer Peter Kerr settled at Kerrs Reach. The area where Bickerton Street comes down to the original course of the river Dallington is the site of 'Vennell's' and the murder of the Victorian gardener.

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Richard's conflict with the New Brighton Borough Council brought forth the following piece of verse which appeared in the *Star* of 1 October 1927:

The councillors of Brighton,
by the Nine Gods they swore
they'd build a bridge full four feet high
but not a damned inch more.
By the Nine Gods they swore it
and coolly went their way,
and called for tenders for the job
and fixed up who would pay.

Then out spake R B Owen,
the River Banker bold:
'Your proposition's a disgrace.
The people's rights you've sold.
In perpetuity I claim the right of navigation.
Now who will put in my right hand
the costs of litigation?'

The privy purse was duly lined
and lawyers were engaged.
The issue long remained in doubt
while Wright and Flesher raged.
The Court below to RBO
awarded its decision;
but on appeal his argument
was treated with derision.

'Oh, Avon, Mother Avon',
cried Owen in distraction,
'His Majesty in Council
shall adjudicate this action.
Five hundred quids as nothing,
and we'll see this matter through
unless you folks agree to raise
this bridge a foot or two.'

And so the bridge remains unbuilt,
and contest's still unended;
and Owen's owin' more and more
for costs and fees expended;
while Captain Owles irately howls
that JAF's uncivil,
and JAF consigns the worthy captain
to the Devil.

But R B Owen's sure to win
for Wright is on his side;
and when, in days to come, the boats
come sailing with the tide,
and pass with ease beneath the span,
then will the tale be told
how valiantly he raised the bridge
in the brave days of old.

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