



# MOUNT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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## War Stories from Mt Albert

*This issue looks at what was happening in Mt Albert and to our residents during the first and second world wars. These stories were all provided by local people.*

### Home Guard – Mt Albert Battalion.

The Mt Albert Home Guard Battalion Headquarters was in our home at 20 Alexis Ave on the corner of Violet St.

My Father, Charles W Coles, had served throughout the 1914-18 War as officer in charge of the Fort on North Head and Mt Victoria at Devonport. He offered his services to the Army on the formation of the Home Guard in 1942 after Japan entered the 2nd World War and was appointed Battalion Commander with the rank of Major. He also offered the use of our large stone and timber garage (originally a stable for horses) and a room in our large villa house for an office for the 3 staff, paid by the Army, the Battalion Adjutant, Sergeant Major and Quarter Master.

So... the whole Home Guard area from the corner of New North Rd and Dominion Rd out to the Manukau Harbour and the West Coast Beaches was administered from the bedroom next to my bedroom. Their weekly planning meetings (with much cigarette smoke) were held in the dining room, the Quartermaster's stores were in the old garage on the corner of Violet St and its loft became the pigeon loft for the carrier pigeons from the Army.



*Charles Coles in WW1 uniform. He was demoted in rank from Lieutenant-Colonel to Major in order to take command of the Home Guard in WW2.*

The Adjutant's name was Wilfred, the SM's boots squeaked and the QM 'gave us the pip' (not true actually) so we called them 'Pip, Squeak and Wilfred.' I think that was a cartoon strip at the time. They worked Monday to Friday, 9-5, and on parade nights, manoeuvre weekends and officers' meeting nights. They were responsible for the care of the pigeons but I took over at the weekends. All three lived in Mt Albert.

Weekly parade nights were held at the Mt Albert Grammar School. New recruits were issued with their uniforms at the QM stores – our garage – and they tried them for fit in our dusty woodshed with its dim electric light bulb.

In the QM stores were also the rifles, hand-grenades and other military paraphernalia. I would practice the hand-grenade drill – 'pull the pin, count and lob'. Of course none of this equipment was live. Molotov cocktails were prepared in tins but without the explosives, and stored under our house – under the front lounge.

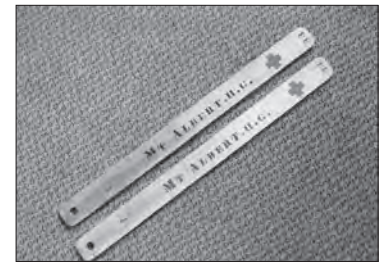
The sappers built a covered slit trench in the garden with steps down and a wooden bench in the middle.

I do not remember that the office door was ever locked. I would go in and study the aircraft identification papers on the wall showing the shapes of Japanese and NZ warplanes, hoping that

I would correctly identify that first Japanese plane.

One Easter weekend, manoeuvres were held in the Waitakere Ranges and the troops were taken out in army trucks. Pigeons were taken out and flew back to the loft with messages tied to their legs, for the HQ staff. A number of senior Mt Albert Grammar boys were used as runners and slept at our house. My Mother and I joined the troops on army rations for the weekend. They were good!

On another occasion a nesting hen pigeon was taken out by mistake. On her return she would not return to her unfledged



*Wooden splints stencilled with 'M A Homeguard' donated by Guy Marks of St John's ambulance.*

*Home Guard – Mt Albert Battalion. cont...*

chick, so I raised him and called him Rupert. Another hen suffered an injury and rather than hit her on the head I nursed her back to health. She was Sally. When the HG was disbanded the number of pigeons had multiplied vastly. The army took most back to the Army's pigeon loft but allowed me to keep a few. They became my hobby for several years and I supplied a number of Mt Albert lads with their first pigeons. Others I sold to Johnnie Walkers in Queen St.

When I see the groups of street pigeons now I wonder if they are the descendants of my brown Rupert and blue and white Sally!

As you will tell from my story I had an interesting war, right in my own home here in Mt Albert.

*Piece submitted By Marjorie Turner for April 2010 Mt Albert Historical Society Newsletter*

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## 'The surest way to prevent or frustrate an invasion is to be prepared to meet it.' (1)

In January 1941 provisional appointments to the command of the home guard battalions in Auckland were announced in the paper.<sup>2)</sup> Charles Coles was appointed Battalion Commander for Mount Albert and Mount Roskill West. The local Home Guard Committee then appointed company and platoon leaders for their unit. The Company Commander was J.B Mc Farlane and the five Platoon Leaders were Arthur Beasley, N.M Carr, R.H.N Cresswell, B.J.L Harris and D.W.Reid. Each of these men had a formidable military history and had been NCOs in the regular army or territorials.

On April 27th 1941 5,500 home guardsmen paraded in the Auckland Domain. Included in this number were men from the Mt Albert Sixth Battalion. The men who enlisted were 'too young for the last war and too old for this one,' exempt because of ill health or because they were employed in some critical service. There were three categories

of home guardsman. Class 1 was for young men of ages 16 to 18 who were eligible to serve in the armed forces but who were not yet called up. Their training syllabus was to consist of largely physical and recreational activities, drill and weaponry training with the aim of being readied for the regular forces. Class 2 were men who were reasonably fit with actual experience of war in the field or who had previously trained in the territorial force. Class 3 consisted of men who, owing to their age, could not take part in strenuous training. The duties requested of them involved guarding bridges and viaducts and helping with evacuation and field ambulance duties.

A letter written to Richard Semple on May 10th 1941 describes many of our local home guardsmen as 'men of poor and needy circumstances and their resources are always strained week by week.' (3) It was with some relief that the Town Clerk announced two months

later that he was holding a 'remittance' (4) for the Mount Albert home guard in a Council account. He had received a total of thirty four pounds. This was 'in respect' of 214 guardsmen at two shilling each for the quarter ending in December 1940 and one shilling each for 250 guardsmen for the following quarter.

The Mount Albert home guards had their weekly parades at Mt Albert Grammar School. This venue was arrived at following a great deal of negotiations with other local schools. Many of them declined the request for use of their facilities very politely and suggested other potential sites. Kowhai Intermediate promoted the 'old Mt Albert District School' in Western Springs and 'the Drill Hall in the Second Avenue, Kingsland.' All of the schools mentioned that their classrooms would be too small for training purposes and also that many of them were not 'connected with electric light.' (5)

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## 'On Guard! N.Z. Expects! Spring to it!'

The campaign recruiting home guardsmen was 'kicked off' towards the end of 1940. On April 26th 1941 100,000 guardsmen had volunteered thus meeting the original target set just a few months before. The Honourable R. Semple toured the country for several months recruiting guardsmen and said of his efforts 'I have met with a great deal of success. In that time 90,000 Home Guardsmen have been organized, in addition to the Emergency Precautions Scheme and women's organizations. This has not been done for show. I believe this country is right

in the danger zone and we should appreciate this fact and be prepared for the worst.'

The New Zealand Home Guard was designed to act as an auxiliary force assisting the regular military forces. It was recognized that each Home Guard unit would vary in age and experience and that this composition would determine the usefulness of the unit. There were also different expectations for city and rural Home Guards.

Around Auckland City the list of potential roles included helping the

combatant forces, manning observation points, warding off attacks on the forts and being part of infantry detachments holding assigned positions. Home Guards over campaigning age or unable to perform first line duties would hold positions in communications and stores.

In country areas Home Guardsmen would be assigned to scouting, observing, blocking roads, erecting obstacles to slow enemy advance, helping to maintain military services and could also be called upon to fight but in a more 'mobile character'.

## M.A.H.S Dates To Remember

**1st May (Saturday) 2pm. Ferndale House. 'Show and Tell.'** Time to tear photos out of your family album, scoop up that prefects badge, fold up your Auntie's black silk dress, lift down Grandma's tea service, snatch up the cow bell that summoned you down from the mountain...this is your chance to share a little bit of local history. Bring along any piece of ephemera and its story. Tea, coffee and light refreshments provided. Gold coin donation. Everyone welcome.

**10th July (Saturday) 2pm- 4pm. Mt Albert Methodist Church.** Visit conducted by Sir Harold Marshall. Meet at the church, followed by tour of interior and explanation of history and forthcoming renovations. Numbers are not limited.

**28th August (Saturday) 2pm. Senior Citizens Rooms.** Annual General Meeting.

**10th December (Friday) 5pm. Alberton House.** Christmas Cocktail Party.

**18th April- 8th May. Alberton House.** Dawn Matata and Qiane Corfield- Matata will show a selection of pencil drawings and photographs. Free entry to exhibit. \$5 to view the house.

**9th May (Sunday) 4pm. Alberton House.** Mothers Day Concert. A special programme featuring singers Chloe Irwen Whitney and Amanda Kirk, harpist Brydie Johnston and pianist Terry Penk. Presented by Cathie Harrop. Tickets \$20 incl sparkling wine. Bookings essential ph 479 2361 or e-mail [Alberton@historic.org.nz](mailto:Alberton@historic.org.nz)

## Diamond Wedding Anniversaries.

Arnold Turner and Marjorie Coles were married on the 21st of February, 1950. The ceremony was held in the original wooden building of the Mt Albert Baptist Church. The ceremony was conducted by Rev. Clifford Reay. The Turners celebrated with many friends and family, ten of whom had been guests at their wedding.

Janette Howard and Keith Amies were married in Melbourne on the 4th March, 1950. Their wedding service was held in the Ewing Memorial Church. The Amies have celebrated their anniversary mostly in Australia.

**18th September- 3rd October.** Auckland Heritage Festival. Coming near you! Keep your eyes out for free brochures.

**COMPETITON!!!** We have been told that there were 25 tennis courts within walking distance of the Penman's house in Lloyd Ave. How many can you remember? Answers please to [carronboswell@hotmail.com](mailto:carronboswell@hotmail.com)

**WANTED!!!** MAHS is looking for a diligent, arty and historically minded person to be in charge of the displays in our library cabinet. We have a lot of resources you could use or you could rely on your own creativity. For more information about what this entails please phone **Suzanne 845 6569** or email her at [goodco@xtra.co.nz](mailto:goodco@xtra.co.nz)

*'On Guard! N.Z. Expects! Spring to it!'*

'In short, the Guard will be asked to be 'the handy man' for the regulars.... To be able to handle a rifle, or a hand grenade, or a machine gun; to do scouting (and therefore know something of some signalling system), to be able to erect sandbag defences; or dig trenches, they will want to know how to meet the latest development in air warfare as well as how to counter the modern mechanized army methods.' (6)

1) 'On Guard' Edited by T. Walsh, 1/163 12th. Batt. Home Guard, for Auckland Area.  
2) Newspaper cutting. 'The Home Guard. Battalion Commands.' 16/01/1941 Auckland City Archives.  
3) Letter to Hon R. Semple concerning letter from Mt Albert District Home Guard Committee. 10/05/1941. Auckland City Archives.

4) Letter to Mt Albert District Home Guard from Town Clerk 22/07/1941. Auckland City Archives  
5) Letters from Mt Albert schools to Mt Albert District Home Guard Committee. Auckland City Archives  
6) 'On Guard' Edited by T. Walsh, 1/163 12th. Batt. Home Guard, for Auckland Area

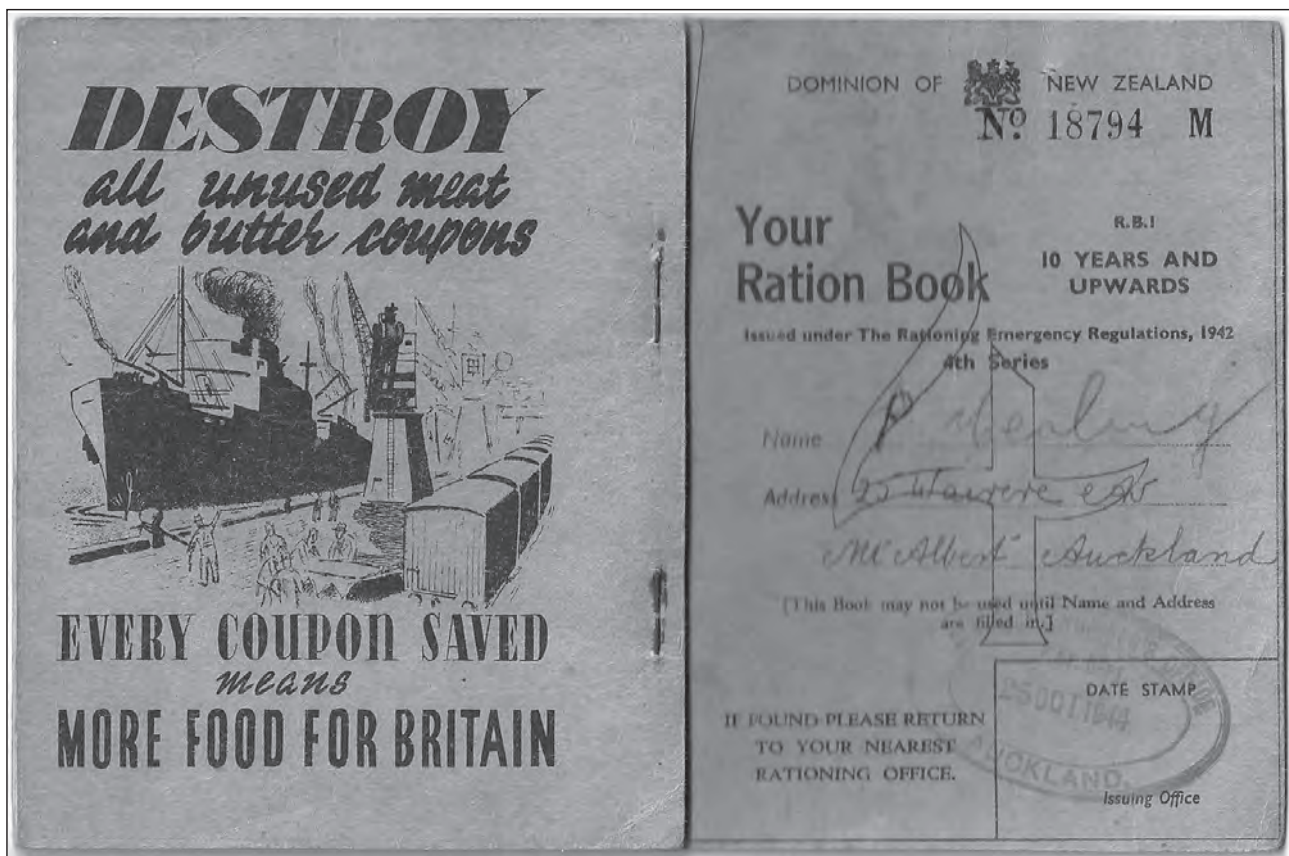
## War Efforts

*Recently we contacted the Mealing family who donated some ephemera owned by Phyllis Mealing. We found Phyllis's own description of her experiences in WW2 in 'Memories of Mt Albert.'*

'My memories of the First War are few and faint. But the Second War memories are still clear. Our young men went to war and some did not come back, but the ones at home did their best. We joined the A.R.P Air Raid Precautions, became wardens, went to lectures, and learnt to do what we could.'

'In those days we did not have fleets of trucks, most of our heavy freight was taken by rail, and it was thought the Overhead Bridge at Morningside would be a prime target, as would the Morningside Timber Mill close by. In the evenings, while ladies knitted furiously for the Patriotic Fund and found out how long a sea boot stocking was, the older men stirrup pumps in their cars, went off to learn how to help a fireman. Their hearts were willing even if their equipment could not cope.'

**Phyllis Mealing**



*Ration book for 'Macs' retailer at 53 Asquith Ave. Macs supplied butter and sugar according to the ration book. Other coupons for meat, wool, clothing, hosiery and household linen may not have been redeemed there. Does anyone know?*

# World War One Flu Epidemic in Auckland

On 12th November 1918, 16-yearold Dorothy Holt wrote to her 20-year-old brother at Trentham Camp:

*Dear Laurence,*

*I was so pleased to receive your letter yesterday. (His trip overseas had been cancelled owing to the Armistice declared on 11/11/1918, four days before he was due to sail). Dorothy went on: It so happened that I was in bed with a very slight attack of the flu. I stayed in bed in the morning only. I feel much better now. Horace is in bed now. I think he is rather bad. He is very hot. (Her brother Horace caught the flu while helping as a volunteer to take soldiers who had influenza off ships returning from overseas). You will be surprised to hear that Tom Walsh died yesterday.*

*I am wondering what you did on Friday. We heard the horns and bells going about 10 a.m. Mother was that excited she did not know what she was doing. We went to town by the 10.55 a.m. train. In town it was something awful. Although it was not official, it made no difference to the people who were more or less mad. Everyone was carrying flags. Motors were decorated with them and lorries full of people with tin cans, whistles and bells paraded up and down Queen St, making most unearthly noises.*

*Wed. I did not have time to finish this yesterday but will do so now. Horace is still in bed, but he is a little better*



Family in 1918. From left; Dorothy (seated), Horace, Frank (after returning wounded from France), Laurence, Winifred, and Eliza Holt

*now. ... We received the official news yesterday but very little noise was made on account of the epidemic. Frank said it was dead slow in town. A few shops closed but not all. Schools are all closed now indefinitely. Tech (Dorothy was a pupil at Seddon Memorial Technical College at this time) has been made into a hospital and contains over 100 patients. There have been about 10 deaths there since last Friday. I don't know when we will go back to school. It looks as if we are not to go back this year. It is impossible to study much. There is such a feeling of depression everywhere and this year seems to have been nothing but holiday.*

*We went to church last Sunday morning as usual, ten of us, but behold, no preacher turned up. So we had a few hymns and came home. There was no Sunday School and no evening service. Every meeting, concert, show and every other thing is postponed. There are several temporary hospitals about town, and chemists, doctors and nurses are run off their legs. Horace (a bacteriologist at Auckland Hospital) has been called the Village Doctor for some time up till now.*

*..... Mrs Jenks said .. about 25 funerals went past, going at a most unusual rate. Her butcher said the night before a vanload of bodies were taken out to Waikumete at midnight. The undertakers cannot make coffins fast enough. People are being buried without coffins. Bodies are stacked like carcasses on the Domain grandstand and also Victoria Park. It is really awful to think of and the good news coming in the middle of it. Sickness is about the only thing talked about. ....*

*With love from Dorothy. (One of a generation of young women whose chances of a happy marriage were depleted by deaths of so many young men caused by the First World War. Her letter is at Auckland Museum Library MS 1318 81/17).*

**End.**

**By Barbara Holt**

# Borough of Mount Albert.

At the Auckland City Archives we unearthed some blank letters which, when completed, were sent to local families from the Borough of Mount Albert. They expressed sadness at the loss of a son, husband, brother or father in WW1. Following is a transcript of one of these letters. On the back of one we found the poignant list which we have printed below. The typewriter ribbon shows when new additions were made to this tragic record.

Dear

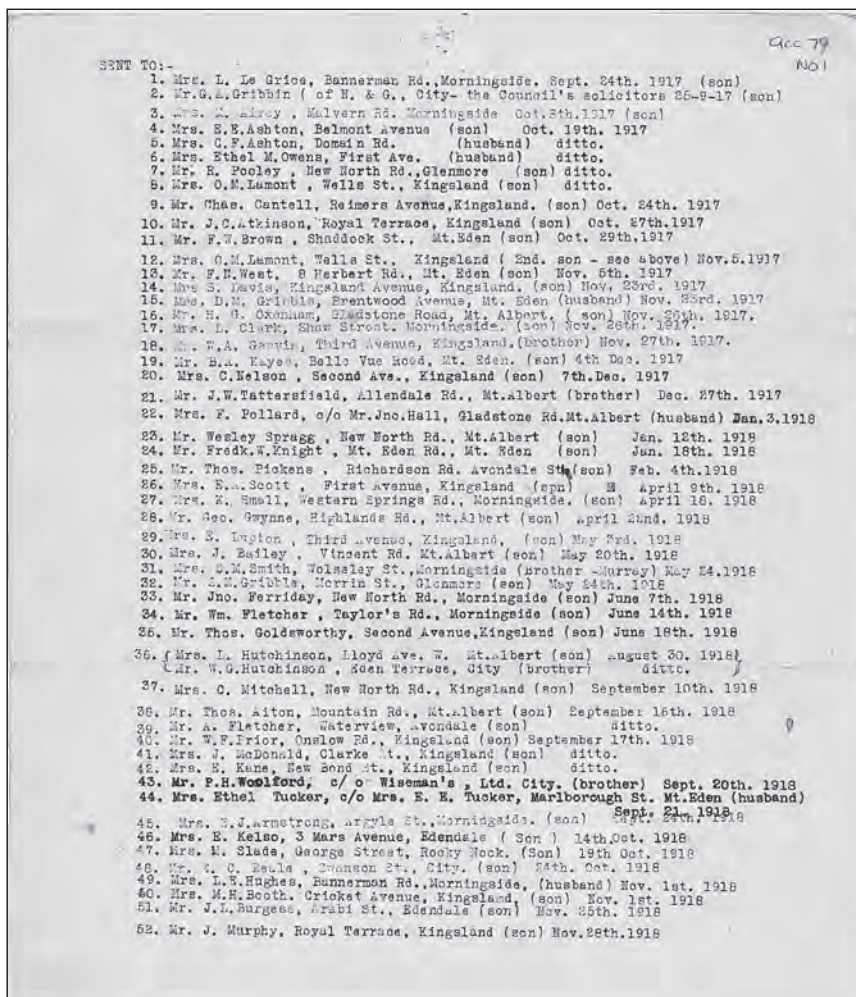
It is with deep regret that we learn of the loss of your whilst engaged in defence of the Empire. In the shadows which have fallen you will, however, have the satisfaction of knowing that he rendered the supreme sacrifice in defence of Honour, Justice, and Liberty, the priceless heritage won by our forefathers on many a battlefield.

In your sorrow may you have the abiding presence of Him who lightens the gloom of the grave with life and immortality.

Please accept our most sincere sympathy in your bereavement and convey same to the other members of your family.

On behalf of the Council,

We remain



# Our Streets

*This month we take up the story again of Allan Kerr Taylor whose 1848 letter was published in our April 2009 newsletter. There are five streets in Mt Albert whose current names and a former name are associated with Allan and his family. There are also three place-names in Mt Albert which commemorate this family, these three also being street names, although one of the streets is in Point Chevalier, not Mt Albert.*

- (1) **Taylors Road, Morningside.** This road follows the route of the very first driveway leading to the Taylor's home, Alberton, which started opposite where the old Council Offices at Morningside were later. After land was given by the family for St Lukes Church, Taylor's driveway was intersected by St Lukes Road and a new entrance to Alberton was formed. It was about where the Baptist Church is now, on the corner of Alberton Avenue and New North Road, near where Taylors Road ends. The name is likely to have been given to the road before Allan died in 1890. His middle name Kerr was added to the Taylor surname by his widow Sophia after his death.
  - (2) **Morningside Drive.** Morningside was the name of a lunatic asylum in Edinburgh, Scotland. The story goes that Allan's two older brothers who bought land on the eastern side of Auckland, gave him the nickname Morningside in 1849 as their way of saying he was crazy to buy acres of barren volcanic land in Mt Albert. Later when Allan undertook his first sub-division of 30 acres of this land in 1865 he called the area Morningside because of the family joke. Others have thought the name came from the area being on the sunny or morning side of the mountain. According to Scott's book, In Old Mt Albert, Morningside Drive was formed between 1962-83 from parts of Argyle St and Gordon Rd.
  - (3) **Alberton Avenue.** This avenue follows only part of the route taken by the original three quarter mile drive called The Avenue by the Kerr-Taylor family which led up to their home Alberton. The rest of the drive ran through what is now the grounds of Mt Albert Grammar School. Alberton Ave was formerly shown on maps as Rob Roy Road, after the famous rebel Scotsman (1671- 1734), a member of the MacGregor Clan. Between 1603 - 1661 an Act was in force in Scotland prohibiting use of the name MacGregor because of some of Rob Roy's activities. Some MacGregors then took the name Taylor. It is not yet known exactly why and when the name of this street was changed to Alberton Avenue. It appears on a 1933 map but it may have been done when the first house there was moved into by a Mr and Mrs V. Williamson in 1923 or when Mt Albert Grammar School was opened in 1922.
  - (4) **Kerr-Taylor Avenue.** This short blind street off Mt Albert Road was given its name in 1959. The first house on the right as you enter it is Alberton, now owned by the NZ Historic Places Trust. The house and land was gifted to the Trust by Allan and Sophia's daughter Muriel Hyacinth Kerr-Taylor in 1970, two years before she died, to prevent the DSIR taking it under a Public Works Act. Architects have described Alberton's wide verandahs, added in 1882, and its distinctive tower roof-lines as reminiscent of buildings in India.
  - (5) **Violet Street.** This short street between Alexis Avenue and Bennett St was originally called Victoria Avenue before being changed to Violet St. Vivienne Wilson says it was named after a daughter of Allan and Sophia Kerr-Taylor named Adeline Violet who went to live in England after her marriage in 1894 and never returned to New Zealand. She died in 1966. Her mother Sophia died in 1930 which suggests the street was probably named before that.
- Three other names of places in Mt Albert which commemorate the same family are:
- (6) **Alberton House.** This is the name Allan Kerr-Taylor gave to the farm - house he began to build in 1863 for his first wife and two children who had all died by 1864. He later expanded it to accommodate his second wife and ten children.
  - (7) **Meola Creek.** It is said that one of the springs that forms this creek starts under the well in the laundry at Alberton. From the area where the Alberton farm was, the creek flows out to the mid-Waitemata under Asquith Avenue and Meola Road in Point Chevalier. Known by Maori as Te Wai o Te Ao (the waters of the world). Meola is the name of a glacier in India, the country in which Allan Kerr Taylor was born and lived until he was aged 8.
  - (8) **The Kerr-Taylor Reserve.** Owned by the Council, this area is next to the southern boundary of Mt Albert Grammar School land. Both the reserve and the school land once were part of the Kerr-Taylor farm. The school farm is the only one available to an Auckland school to train students in farming.

*Our Streets. cont...*

William Taylor, the father of Allan Kerr Taylor, was born in 1790, married in India in 1820 and had 9 children, 6 sons and 3 daughters. His wife Barbara died in India at the age of 34 in 1836 after the birth of her youngest son John. William became a General in the East India Company's private army in India and sent his sons and daughters back to Scotland to be educated. His daughters all married Army officers in India. Between 1843 - 1851, William and his 6 sons migrated to New Zealand.

It is thought that after spending 40 years in India, William wanted to escape the severe winters of Scotland when he retired. Before coming, he bought land sight unseen at St Heliers and sent his 2 eldest sons to New Zealand to buy more land. When he came, William brought with him Indian servants. Harris's account says that Barbara Taylor nee Innes was the daughter of General James Innes and Anna Maria Mengelman whose marriage in 1798 is recorded in the India Office, London. James was a Scotsman born in 1760 who arrived in India in 1780 and died in 1818.

New information about Barbara Innes is available in a family history called 'In This Big India of Ours' recently published by some descendants of William Taylor. The authors, Kevin Wells and Robin and Graeme Bagnall, visited India in 2007. One of their purposes was to find out more about the Indian/ Scottish ancestry of Barbara Innes. These authors suggest Barbara's mother was an Indian or part Indian woman whose name her descendants have still to find. They have found evidence in James Innes's Will that Barbara was one of seven natural children and two adopted ones he brought up. They say that before 1820 many British army men lived with Indian women known as bibi or as we would call them now 'partners' whom they did not marry. By 1835 it was made illegal for British soldiers in India to marry Indian women.

Some Indian jewelry believed to have been owned by Barbara Taylor was donated by the Taylor family to the Auckland War Memorial Museum. It consists of luxurious gold earrings, necklace, and bracelet and has been recently worn by a descendant on her wedding day.

It is thought William gave each of his sons the same amount of money to invest to make their fortune. Three of them bought and developed land which became major suburbs of Auckland. The eldest William Innes Taylor bought 92 acres of Tamaki in the mid-1840's which he named Glen Innes. He also part - owned with

his brother Richard Glen Orchard now called St Heliers. William and Barbara's second son Charles stayed in India for a while before joining his 5 brothers in New Zealand in 1851. He was a NZ Member of Parliament until 1858 but went to live in London in 1876. Their third son Richard James Taylor bought and farmed part of Tamaki which he named Glendowie. Not much is known about two other sons of William and Barbara Taylor, George born 1835 and John born 1836 who came to NZ in 1850. George became a storekeeper in Whangarei, married and had 9 children and died in 1882 aged 47. John did not marry and died in London in 1890.

Allan Kerr Taylor was William's fourth son. He was born in 1832 in India, went to Scotland to be educated in 1840, came to Auckland in 1849 and by 1854 had bought over 500 acres of land in Mt Albert which stretched from the mountain to Western Springs Road. He went to England in 1860 and in 1862 married Martha Meredith there. They returned to NZ and began to build Alberton in 1863 but their first child died that year and both Martha and their second child died in 1864. In 1865 Allan married Sophia Davis who was born in Kaitaia and between 1866 and 1888 they produced ten children. Allan gave land for both a Methodist and an Anglican Church to be built in Mt Albert. Some have suggested he saw himself as the Squire of Mt Albert. By 1855 he was an elected Provincial Councillor. He became Chairman of the first Mt Albert Roads Board in 1867. He was again Chairman of it from 1871 to 1873 and from 1874 to 1885. His son Vincent (1866-1920) was Chairman from 1902-1904. Allan died in 1890 at the early age of 58 years.

## Sources:

Information in Dick Scott's *In Old Mt Albert* (1983) and in *Wikipedia* (on-line) has been corrected and updated here by a Kerr-Taylor descendant Mrs Vivienne Wilson and by Rendell McIntosh, Manager of Alberton House.

*Alberton and Its Family* by Jan Harris, published by NZ Historic Places Trust, 1999.

*"In This Big India of Ours" – an account of the Taylor and Innes Families in India, Innes Clan of Scotland and trip to India* by Kevin Wells and Robin and Graeme Bagnall in 2007.