



MOUNT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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THE TATTERSFIELD FAMILY OF MT ALBERT

By Cunitia Wilkinson

In 1899 a young Yorkshire man named James Tattersfield left his job in his grandfather, Jeremiah Tattersfield's blanket factory and set sail to New Zealand. On arrival at Auckland he found some building work and then joined a firm, Murgatroyd's, where he learnt about New Zealand wool which was coarse, quite different from the fine English wool he was used to.

In 1903 James returned to England. He visited family and informed them of his decision to return to New Zealand to build a life there. He also met a young woman, Evelyn Abbott, who was nursing at Guy's Hospital in London. James was smitten with Evelyn and asked her to follow him to New Zealand. They married in December 1904.

They lived in Grey Lynn and established a haberdashery shop on the corner of Karangahape Road and Pitt Street. Evelyn ran the shop, and James travelled, selling linens and other fabric outside Auckland.



Tattersfield & Co, Corner of Karangahape Rd and Pitt St

In 1906 their first son Guy was born. The following year James and Evelyn decided to set up a mattress making business in Grey Lynn, and were joined in this endeavour by Evelyn's brother, Howard Abbott. A tin shed was built to house the machinery, and a house was built on land adjacent to it. Soon the shed was replaced by a substantial two-storey factory building. And as the business grew so did the family, with the births of Noel, Leo, Peter and Felix.

James decided that a larger house was required for the family, and in 1914 they purchased a substantial home (villa-style) with a considerable amount of ground around it, at 34 Allendale Road, Mt Albert. This had previously been the home of William Winstone's daughter Annie Butterworth. In 1916 John, their final child, was born at the house they named *Puriri Puke*. Now the family had room to play, and tennis and other outdoor activities could be enjoyed.

In 1919 in the wake of returning soldiers from WWI a flu epidemic swept the country. *Puriri Puke* was one of the larger homes that took in convalescent soldiers. Mt Albert had also developed a serious sewage problem which resulted in the 1922 typhoid epidemic, and some families were evacuated from their homes. For about a week *Puriri Puke* gave refuge to one of those families.

By 1920 James had started to make reversible floor rugs. These proved very popular, and many customers said they would like patterned ones - so James thought of Evelyn, sitting, when time permitted, doing tapestry work. Maybe she could do designs for the rugs? She could and she did!

Evelyn had developed a beautiful garden, was convenor of the Lyceum Club Garden Circle and had developed many contacts in the gardening fraternity. She grew plants and sold seeds and bought plants and seeds. During the Depression of the 1930s she grew vegetables to be given to the workers at Tattersfield's.

The Depression was a terrible time for James. All the effort he had made establishing and growing his business now looked like slipping into nothingness. Cutting the hours and wages of his workers were heartbreaking measures he took to stay afloat. He even considered selling his home but, as he told a granddaughter years later, he would not have got the price he had paid for it.

Nonetheless, the boys enjoyed their new home in Mt Albert, attending Gladstone Primary then either Kings College or Mt Albert Grammar School.



Children dressed as fairies on the lawn

By 1931 things seemed easier and Evelyn decided to go on a garden tour of England and the Continent. Their second son Noel had completed a law degree and accompanied her, doing the driving. On their return home Evelyn's travels

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were of great interest to many – best told in her own words about the trip made to southern France and Italy:

“It was on the Continent that she saw the iris in its glory, and from Cayeux and Velmorin she saw a great collection, with the newest varieties. The clematis also were in bloom, and she saw some of the new varieties in all shades of pink. It was when travelling with her son in the car that she saw the gardens of the south of France and Italy. They toured along the Mediterranean Coast and at night stayed at different places to look at the gardens whenever possible. At Ospardelletti she saw the carnation grown for the markets of the Continent with acres and acres of blooms in flower, and of all colours.

They were packed in a shed near her hotel, and the perfume was glorious when they came in in dray loads and went away in trucks full, as well as by aeroplane to Paris.

At Grasse she had a look at the perfume gardens where the lavender is grown for scents, and she also made mountain excursions, into the Alps of Switzerland and Italy, looking for rare bulbs. In the Gulf of Lyons Mrs Tattersfield found nine varieties of the same wild plant within a few miles, and in the Maritime Alps she discovered different kinds of Fritillias and orchids. At Oromia, which is 12,000ft high, she saw the Alpine meadows filled with beautiful wildflowers and the fields were gay with myriads of colchicums, or autumn crocus, all in different shades of mauve. At Sisteroin, in the south of France, she saw twenty different sorts of Cedum. She had seen them all before but never dreamed that she would see them all together in such profusion.”

As the boys grew and left home their parents purchased a home, Glebe House, in Sussex, England. They were probably planning to spend some time each year there and then to return to New Zealand. However, during the war years they were unable to return, and lived at Glebe House, often taking in New Zealand servicemen unable to return

home to New Zealand. The two youngest of their sons, Felix and John, were unable to join the New Zealand Navy which had too many volunteers, so they travelled to Britain and enrolled in the British Navy. Felix served in the coastal ships and in 1942 was “lost at sea” when his MTB (motor torpedo boat) blew up. John served in the Corvettes and received a “Mention in Despatches”.

Evelyn and James returned to New Zealand in early 1945 but were soon back in England in 1948, having been invited to the Royal Wedding. On their return to Mt Albert, life was now lived at a slower pace.

Evelyn made tapestry occasional tables for each of her sons and their families. She even designed some of the rugs again. James attended the mill every day, however Noel and John were closely involved in the day to day running of Tattersfield's. In 1952 once again Evelyn and James set sail for England, but a few days after leaving Evelyn collapsed and died.



When James returned to New Zealand he came back to his Mt Albert home with its memories. He died in 1961 and his service of farewell was held in the grounds of *Puriri Puke*, where his sons had played and where Evelyn had cultivated her beautiful garden.

MAHS & OTHER HERITAGE DATES TO REMEMBER

Sunday 19 April. 2–4pm. Ferndale. Lindsey Dawson will talk about her book *Poisoning on Parker Road* which is the real life story of a late 19th century mystery in Oratia, West Auckland. Copies of the book will be available at the event for \$30 cash or bank deposit.

Saturday 25 April. 9am. Mt Albert War Memorial Hall. ANZAC Service. MAHS will lay a wreath.

Saturday 13 June. 10–12am. Ferndale. Follow-up session for people who attended the 2025 Life Writing workshop. We will be contacting all participants of the 2025 session with more details privately.

Sunday 5 July. 2–4pm. Ferndale Speaker event. Save the date – details coming in the next *Newsletter*.

Sunday 13 September. 2–4pm. Ferndale. MAHS Annual General Meeting.

26 September–11 October. Auckland Heritage Festival. The theme is *Tastes of Tamaki: A Heritage Feast*.

A weekend in October – a walking tour is being planned. Details coming in the next *Newsletter*.

Sunday November 29. 2–4pm. Alberton House. 20th Anniversary of MAHS / Christmas Party

Mid December. Annual meet-up and ice creams in Alice Wylie Reserve.

Afternoon tea is provided at MAHS indoor events. \$2 donation for catering is appreciated.

EVENT REPORT

**Member Show and Tell. Saturday 7 March 2026.
Senior Citizens' Hall, Rocket Park. Theme: Crown
Lynn or Other Pottery**

We had a strong turnout for this event, with a full programme of knowledgeable, creative, and entertaining speakers. It was a very happy afternoon.

Kathryn Twort opened the afternoon, discussing two pieces of Crown Lynn from the Edendale Tennis Club kitchen. She also spoke of Patsy Laird's husband, who was a manager at Crown Lynn. Jackie Wright (photo



below) remembered a new Crown Lynn dinner service being purchased with holiday pay at Christmas each year. She told us about the last Crown Lynn potter, Christine Harris, and shared a beautiful op-shop find. Pam Mayes described how her interest in china began while attending auctions for her mother. She introduced us to some favourite Royal Doulton figurines and told the story of bringing fine china home from England in her hand luggage. Rae Edgar recounted how her husband established a china and glassware import business after the war. In 1951 he attended the Royal Worcester bicentennial alongside the Queen. When the Royal couple visited Auckland in 1977, Rae and Bill were invited to meet them and spoke with the Queen, who vividly remembered the earlier event and the coffee-set gift she had received, which was still in use at Balmoral, and admired by Prince Philip. Bill subsequently brought home a cup and saucer in that design to commemorate the occasion.

Suzanne Good spoke about the brown Crown Lynn dinner service she received as a newlywed, which she did not appreciate at the time but is now loved by her daughter-in-law. She also noted that the Queen was gifted a Crown Lynn dinner service during the 1977 visit. Irene Wan introduced the first surviving pottery cup she made in 1982, called ugly by the teacher but cherished as Irene's beautiful baby. She also showed us a later piece she made, with beautiful glazing. Jan Aldritt Miller presented a piece she described as "absolutely hideous but I love it," later revealed to be by Clarice Cliff, whose career she described. Cunitia Wilkinson (photo above) then showed two op-shop finds—matching willow pattern pieces from Crown Lynn and Kelston Ceramics—and recalled when the Queen visited the Tattersfield carpet factory in 1977, before heading to Crown Lynn.

Mary Inomata introduced her family's Tanuki sculpture, a symbol of prosperity in Japanese homes, and described the symbolism, and the challenge of bringing it back from Japan with a six-week-old baby. Anne McKenzie described her early pottery classes and later study at Art Station, sharing insights into Bronwynne Cornish's work and her own research on Ann Verdcourt. Cathie Hutchinson remembered visiting Crown Lynn as a teenager and being fascinated by the woman whose job it was to destroy flawed pieces. She also told the story of a glass vase that is her link to Shackleton's Antarctic expedition. Peter Janssen concluded with a fascinating overview of New Zealand potteries beyond Crown Lynn. He outlined how Temuka pottery started making electrical insulators in 1912, then pottery including railway cups, then Riverstone pottery in the 1970s, and now is back to making insulators. He explained Mapua ware and McSkimmings, and ended with a Noritake ashtray once used by TEAL.

Photos by Irene Wan

FILLING IN THE KNOWLEDGE GAPS

By Janet von Randow

Our Historical Society archive is a source of many stories – some we know and some we get to know through the *Newsletters* and the documents, books and other resources that members of the society have access to. The events when we all tell our stories are always active, fun and memorable. We were encouraged by Lynley at our life writing event in July last year to write and I have taken her at her word.

Sister Coyle's Nursing Home

Reading the MAHS *Newsletter* over the last few years I have filled in several gaps in my knowledge. I have always

known, for example, that I was born at Sister Coyle's nursing home in Sandringham. Because we did not have a car until I was about 9, we did not go for Sunday drives – as was the custom in the 1950s – and I never asked my parents whereabouts this place was. When I read the piece on the nursing homes in Mt Albert in the *Newsletter* Issue 57, 2022, there it was – 464 Sandringham Rd, Sister Coyle's nursing home. I set off to actually stand outside it and imagined myself coming out that door in a basket in 1943. It was a box ticked.

Smith and Caughey's

In *Newsletter* Issues 67 and 68, 2024, the references to Smith and Caughey's from Lynley and from Rae Edgar also brought back memories. For our annual trip on the tram into town, my sister Robin and I would be very well dressed, and Mother would be wearing a hat and gloves. We were off to buy new winter shoes and winter coats. However, I did not always get the coat, as being the youngest in a family of 7 with 4 older sisters I mainly had hand-me-downs.



Ladies outside Smith and Caughey's Queen St, 1952

Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections 580-00780

The shoe department had this magic machine one approached up a small flight of steps to put one's feet in so that the correct shoe size could be ascertained through a type of X-ray. I am not sure about the health and safety, but we thought it was amazing. The shoe salesperson also knew a lot about shoes and it was quite a process.

Paying for them was the next great moment. The money was placed in a small cannister popped into a tube on the wall behind the person at the till and sent zooming round this tube, round the shop to the second floor where the accounts office was and the cannister plus money was retrieved. The correct change plus the receipt would be inserted into the tube and sent hurtling through the store back to the correct till. The whole process was thrilling and I still thought of it when I was ever in Smith and Caughey's all these years later. Time marches on and that rather glamorous store, as we thought of it, is no more.

Memories of Preston Avenue

Lynley and I visited Ray Hancock at the Murray Halberg Village a couple of years ago, which we wrote about in *Newsletter* Issue 69, 2025. Ray's family were neighbours of my family in Preston Avenue, Mt Albert in the 1930s. As was usual in those days, neighbours actually knew one another and the children in the street knew friends' parents as aunty and uncle. Ray's mother, Aunty Winnie to us, and an excellent seamstress, made many of the clothes that my siblings wore, and Ray remembered babysitting Jill and Jackie, my two oldest sisters.

Ray was expecting us, and he had looked out a reference that my father had written him for his first job. It was quite

an emotional moment, looking at my father's handwriting – indecipherable to most, but so familiar to me all those years later, and Ray was so thrilled to be able to share it with me. We had a great time remembering all the neighbours who were our friends for life. The article about Ray mentioned the number of the house that my family had lived in in Preston Ave. They had moved by the time I was born and I had known which house it was years ago, but changes in the streetscape meant I was not quite sure anymore which it was. So, another trip in the car and there I was standing outside the actual house. It has a small addition but otherwise looks much the same as it did in the 1930s. My family moved round the corner to Allendale Rd in 1940 – they had really outgrown that house. The Preston Avenue boys brought out their trolleys to help with the move.

Ration Books

I thought I remembered these, but thinking of the dates of the war I wondered whether that was just from hearing about them. I could picture them exactly. When the article on rationing was published in the *Newsletter*, Issue 68, 2024 the dates meant that I should have trusted my memory. I remembered that there were certain items that the family was able to use my coupons for even though I was a baby. Of course, because we did not have a car until 1952 we were not affected by petrol rationing. I do remember rationing being a topic of conversation and I am sure it meant that our meals were very much built around what we could afford. We did have lots of fruit trees and as our Father's hobby was gardening we had all our vegetables direct from the garden. In fact, when I went flatting in 1964 I had to buy vegetables for the first time and that seemed very strange.

Oral Histories

For the MAHS oral history project we interviewed Neil Swinton just after he turned 90. His family lived in Weston Avenue and he was a friend of my brother Joe. His sister Noeline represented NZ in the British Empire Games in 1950 winning the bronze medal in the women's high jump, and in 1954 at the British Empire and Commonwealth Games she was placed 5th in this event. Neil was also an excellent sportsman playing in the senior rugby and cricket teams at school, a harrier with my brother in the group that Murray Halberg was part of, and later an excellent golfer. He and Joe went to Ōwairaka Primary together.

Another oral history that we undertook was with Sir Harold Marshall. He was very generous, lending us notes about his family and the book that his wife Shirley's family had written. When I was reading that story I turned a page to see a photo of the Lindsay family and there was our music teacher from Wesley Intermediate in 1954, Shirley Lindsay. We all loved her and could never get enough of her wonderful singing voice. I had not realised that she was Sir Harold's wife. Sir Harold was delighted when I was able to tell him this at our second visit as I returned the book. When he then talked about her as he told us his story he would add "as you know" if he was talking about her singing activities. That connection was affecting for both of us.