



MOUNT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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STORIES FROM THAMES AVENUE, CABBAGE TREE SWAMP, SANDRINGHAM

By Neil Solomon

Cabbage Tree Swamp

Cabbage Tree Swamp (now Eden Park, Kingsland) has often been confused with Cabbage Tree Swamp (now Gribblehirst Park, Sandringham), for these two recreational facilities are in adjoining suburbs and are only about a kilometre apart. Both have their beginnings in the lava flows that emerged from Auckland's early volcanic activity. The ancestral Māori name for this combined area is Ngā Ana Wai, often referred to as Ngā Anawai, 'the watery caves'. Historically, the Ngā Ana Wai was a significant wetland, food forest, and place for gathering resources. To the early European settlers, its whole area became known as Cabbage Tree Swamp.

In 1900 the swampland which is now Eden Park was part of the farm owned by John Walters. His surname lives on in Walters Road. He first leased the Eden Park land to the Kingsland Cricket Club who began draining the swamp in 1902. Walters subsequently sold his 'still-swampland' to the Eden District Cricket Club around 1905. They on-sold it to the Auckland Cricket Association about five years later. Then, just before WWI, the Auckland Rugby Union leased the cricket ground for the winter season and some sixteen years later a formal trust was established to manage the park for both cricket and rugby.



Part of John Walters' farm, which was subsequently developed into Eden Park. Note the swampy nature of the foreground and the stones, built up into walls to restrain cattle.
Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections 968-0157

Around 2000 I was told by George Bowler (1905–2002) of Mt Albert that to develop the tramline from Kingsland to Morningside, which opened in 1912, it was necessary to

reduce the grade of the road at the top of the hill. The spoil was then transported to use as fill for the still swampy cricket ground at Eden Park, as shown in the photo. There are excavations still apparent on both sides of the road at the top of the Kingsland hill.

Gribblehirst Park also sits on land formerly known as Cabbage Tree Swamp, this area having been donated to the Mt Albert Borough Council in 1928 by the Gribble and Hirst families. Here the historical connection to 'the swamp-land' has been retained, in the street name Cabbage Tree Swamp Drive which provides the pedestrian and vehicle passageway through Gribblehirst Park.



Part of Cabbage Tree Swamp that would later become Gribblehirst Park. Note that the loose volcanic rocks have been gathered up to be used as walls etc. The sloping wall pictured is seemingly on the gradient section of the later developed Cabbage Tree Swamp Drive. James and Mary Gribble established a piggery on the higher ground around 1885.

Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections 255A-0092C

The Creation of Thames Avenue

By the beginning of 1855, a Cornish miner named James Gribble (1828–1886) had purchased around 40ha of the Cabbage Tree Swamp, this on the Sandringham side. In 1891, Samuel Luther Hirst (1851–1934), who in 1855 had married James Gribble's eldest daughter Mary Ann (1856–1941), purchased Allotment 154 and part of Allotment 155 from the Estate of his father-in-law. Hirst subdivided much of this land, with the roads of Aroha Ave, Kenneth Ave, Leslie Ave and Thames Ave being dedicated in 1906.

Thames Ave is a comparatively short cul-de-sac running from Aroha Ave into the back of what is now Gribblehirst Park (see the map on page 3), and this is where our story proper begins.

Residents of Thames Avenue

My maternal grandfather, Elias William Tinson (1875–1960) was a carpenter by trade. Known as Ernie or Ern to his family and friends, he was a very religious man. He kept a diary which records his 1907 emigration as an assisted immigrant from Bristol to New Zealand and his first two years here. He moved about widely trying to get work, so that he could be joined by his wife Annie and their four young children who had stayed behind in Bristol with Annie's mother until Ernie could support them here.

Ernie was a member of the Quaker community in Auckland, and for a time shared a whare with fellow Quaker John Bennett on Winstone's farm at Puketāpapa/Mt Roskill. After Bennet's return to England, Ernie moved in with Fred Harris, another Quaker who was also waiting to be joined by his family. This was a tough economic time, and it was a struggle to find work. Ernie wrote about this in his diary:

Well, I went back to work again some few weeks with Mr Burman, and up to the present which is June 21st (1909), have been batching with Mr Harris. We are as brothers, for he's musical with a Capital M, vocal and instrumental, and we enjoy each other's fellowship immensely. I may say from the time I went back to Mr Burman, I have been without the necessity of looking around for work until this last week, and the least said the better about the condition of the labour market generally. Joseph Ward is gone home to the conference, and there is a general slump.

Fred Harris's wife Ada and their son Gordon arrived in New Zealand in January 1910, by which time Fred had been here about eighteen months. Gordon Harris sent his father a postcard just before they left England, addressed to him at Thames Avenue. This date is significant.

Fred Harris purchased lot 8 in Thames Ave in December 1911, but Gordon's postcard shows that he was living on



Harris family home, 7 Thames Ave. c.1913

Hirst's subdivision at least two years earlier. It is likely that both Fred and Ernie reached agreements with Hirst before they were in a financial position to formally purchase the sections that they subsequently built their houses on.

In July 1912, Fred Harris took out a mortgage on his section, which enabled him to build a house. Gordon Harris remembered that Ernie Tinson helped build their two bedroomed villa, then erected his own slightly larger house next door:

The man who helped Dad was a carpenter (from Bristol) when they built our 2 roomed house. He bought 'a section' next door and when he had built, (I think) it had 3 rooms.

In Oct 1912, Ernie Tinson purchased the section next door to Fred Harris, and in February 1913 took out a mortgage to build his own house. Annie Tinson and the children had arrived in Auckland in May 1910 (ex *Corinthic* to Wellington). I was told that my mother, Winifred Ellen Tinson, had been born in the bedroom at the back of their Thames Ave house in late 1912, so the family must have been renting on Hirst's land prior to their purchase.



Tinson family home, 5 Thames Ave. c.1914
Photos almost certainly taken by Egerton Gill

Two early photos of the Harris and Tinson houses have survived, showing how the house frontages needed to be built up because of the slope of the land. The Tinson home was being built at the time the Harris house was photographed. Its bedroom at the back of the chimney can be seen, with back-to-back fireplaces as I remember from when I lived there around 1960. The two chimneys at the back of the Tinson house photo appear to identify both separate Harris and Tinson out-buildings which must have been built prior to completion of the respective houses.

When the above pictures were taken there were only four dwellings in Thames Ave, three on the south side, as can be seen in the photograph on the next page, and one at the top of the cul-de-sac on the other side of the road, occupied by Frank and John Hartley, tanners.

The third house on the southern side of Thames Avenue was the home of another Quaker family, that of Egerton

Gill who had come to New Zealand in 1907 and married Constance Smith here in 1908. He purchased the section at 1 Thames Ave in February 1911. Gill was an accountant and enthusiastic photographer.

Ernie Tinson's elder son Bill (born 1901), grew up to become an avid amateur photographer, probably with early guidance from Gill. The house at 5 Thames/Thanet Ave was inherited and lived in by various Tinson family members until the second marriage of Bill's younger brother, Art, in the 1970s.



The Thames Ave cul-de-sac showing the Harris, Tinson and Gill houses

Photo taken from Kenneth Ave, c.1917

Photo by Bill Tinson using a Kodak Box Brownie

The picture above shows the ruggedness of the volcanic flow on which the Harris and Tinson properties sat, and how badly the swamp flooded. Ōwairaka/Mt Albert is just peeping out over the top of their houses. The Gills' house is the third one in the picture, to the right. The land on the other side of the road is vacant. I was told by Bill Tinson that this apparent estuary was part of a diatomaceous earth (a kind of silica) pit that had been mined in earlier days, and that a boy had been drowned in the pond which often formed there.

In 1928 the land that is now Gribblehirst Park was gifted to the Mt Albert Borough Council by the Gribble and Hirst families. The piggery land at the back of the Harris and Tinson properties was part of the donation. The almost six hectares of parkland was developed through intensive relief work in the early years of the Great Depression, and was officially opened on 28 March 1931. The piggery area was developed into an attractive rose garden, and the rocky cliff at the end of Thames Ave was developed into a fernery.



1940 aerial photo. The Gill, Tinson and Harris houses are those below the word Thanet. Note the rose garden behind their houses.

The worst of the conditions during the Great Depression occurred between 1931 and 1933 and, often with as many as six mouths to feed, the Tinson family found themselves in 'struggle street' again. From time to time and to lessen the load, Ernie's sons Bill and Art sought work elsewhere in New Zealand and Australia; Bill subsequently going as far as England. Then, led by Bill, sometime before September 1935 the ancillary building at the back of the house was extended into a large woodworking workshop. Here they upgraded furniture obtained from deceased estates, and sold it in a rented shop called *Mums* near Airedale St at the bottom of Queen Street.

In 1938 the Mt Albert Borough Council undertook a major review of street names, the aim being to eliminate duplicate names across Auckland. It is then that Thames Ave, still a loose metalled road of only four houses, became Thanet Ave, the street I first knew in the late 1940s.

Today, there are eight houses in Thanet Ave. Numbers 3, 4, 6 and 8 were not built until after WWII; as a child I remember them being constructed. The even numbered properties backed down to the remnants of the diatomaceous earth pit, especially number 8 which, despite the formation of Gribblehirst Park, was still being used as the local 'tip' in the 1950s.

Ernie's diary is available at Auckland Libraries:

Tinson, E. W. *The Experiences of a New Chum on Ocean Travel and Life in New Zealand*. [Tinson Family?], 1984. Call number: 920 TIN [Auckland] Central City Heritage Collections - New Zealand.

All photos from the collection of Neil Solomon unless otherwise noted.

The 1940 aerial photo is from Auckland Council Geomaps service.

This story has been edited to fit the Newsletter. A complete, fully referenced version of this story is held in the Mt Albert Historical Society's archive.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL TIME.

The MAHS financial year begins on 1 July. It is now time to renew your subscription. You can do this in person at a Meeting, or by using the renewal button on the Website. \$20 for an individual, \$40 for a family, \$100 for a corporate membership. Donations are very welcome.

EVENT REPORTS

Lindsey Dawson's Presentation on her book, *Poisoning on Parker Road: One Family, Two Deaths, and all the Secrets in Between*. Sunday 19 April. Ferndale House.

Lindsey is an Auckland writer who became fascinated by the story of a murder that occurred in Oratia in 1892. She undertook wide-ranging research, even travelling to the United States to talk to family members of the murder victim, then wove together a riveting book which combines the murder, social history of Victorian Auckland, and the story of her research journey. We enjoyed being transported back into the past.

Memoir Writing Group Follow-up Meeting. Saturday 13 June. Ferndale House.



Eleven people gathered for this one-year follow-up meeting. Lynley gave a brief reminder of the key points of last year's workshop, then we settled in for a wonderful round of shared memoir writing where we each enjoyed being read to, and listened to. The group has decided to continue meeting.

A Lifetime in Song: Anne Jarman, nee Gerbic. Sunday 5 July. Ferndale House.

Anne shared her life story in music with us, sharing her passion and her beautiful voice. She started with her childhood, filled with music in a house where her mother was constantly singing, then told us of her training as a singer, how she got to London, and how, despite the struggle to make ends meet, she performed around the UK and Europe with Pavilion Opera and Diva Opera. Anne talked honestly about her decision to return to New Zealand, and how fulfilling she finds being a singing teacher and helping the next generation of young talent find their wings.



MAHS DATES TO REMEMBER

Sunday 13 September. MAHS Annual General Meeting. 2-4pm, Ferndale House. The meeting will be followed by an overview of some of the research that has been done, and projects that are underway in the Society. Afternoon tea to follow.

Tuesday 6 October. Rationing 1939-1950: The Household Experience. 2-3.30pm, Mt Albert War Memorial Hall. Lynley Stone will speak about the history of rationing in New Zealand, followed by afternoon tea. This is a public event, part of the Auckland Heritage Festival: all welcome. RSVP for catering purposes.

Saturday 24 October. Guided visit to St Luke's Anglican Church graveyard. 2-4pm. Meet on the driveway of the Church. Vicar Rev Clare Barrie, Churchwarden Adrienne Puckey and John Bustard will share information about the church and graveyard. Followed by afternoon tea.

Sunday 29 November 2020. 20th Anniversary of MAHS / Christmas Party. 2-4pm, Alberton House. Come help celebrate this milestone anniversary. More details to come.