

Early New Zealand Eatwell History

This document comes from John and Brad Eatwell, and provides some interesting insight into the life here in early New Zealand.

Chapter One: Family History

Eatwells were known as Etveldt some hundred's of years ago. They left Luvaine in Flanders at the request of King Edward the III of England in 1678 [\[1\]](#) . This was before the Huguenots [\[2\]](#) fled to England, as thousands had been put to death before being granted religious freedom in 1598. The King thought it a good idea to invite those with skills to come to England and live. So they accepted and I understand went by their hundreds over to England, weaving cloth and had many other skills. So started the colossal trade in wool and weaving that took over in later years. Even (in Petone, New Zealand) Uncle Walter Ramsden was manager of the woollen mills (just an off-shoot). His uncle, cousins, and even his own son Albert went to learn the trade and skills at Bradbury before he took over management from his father, who had died suddenly.

There was in England a medieval town of Cranbrook in Kent, lived in by Flemish weavers of Luviane. On one occasion Queen Elizabeth the 1st was going to visit the place so they wove one mile of broadcloth for her to walk on, afterwards selling it piece meal for suits, and it sold very quickly too. There is a village in England called 'Eatwell' some of our present generation have seen it. Actually great grandfathers family came from Berkshire and they farmed there. It seems all Eatwells had their own business' whether it be shops, skills, or farms.

For some reason (they were not assisted emigrants, but came over for a betterment in another country as things were not too good in England at that time) Great Grandfather Eatwell decided to come and settle in New Zealand (from Berkshire England), so they set out in 1875 on the *Mat aura*

with five daughters, Nellie (later Mrs Walter Ramsden), Anne (later Mrs John Ninnes), Rose (later Mrs Jim Spencer), Emily (later Mrs Jim Rodley), Jenny (later Mrs Stephen Vosper) and one son, William John who was 14 years old. Unfortunately, the great grandfather fell on board ship and broke his hip. It was put together by an amateur doctor and it set crookedly. It caused a great deal of pain until he died at the early age of 57. He was buried at Stanley Brook.

When John was 15 he went to work for Lucas's at Nelson Evening Mail but had to leave later to help on the farm his father had leased at the foot of the Maitai Valley, on what we called 'Richardson's Estate'. They milked cows for town supply. Eventually John took over and with his

sisters made a successful job of that. They were not emigrants without money. In 1885, John's father took a bush section in Stanley Brook, building a house. He always called himself a sheep farmer, as he did very little cropping and only milked cows enough for home supply - milk, cream, butter with very little over to sell. I remember, as a child of four years, running after the peacocks to make them display their lovely tails.

John (Charl's Father) married Mary Ann Jessie Vercoe in 1891 she was 23 and he was 32. They were a very devoted couple. She was killed in an accident when she went driving with some cousins in Blenheim on her way home from seeing Bert off in Wellington [\[3\]](#), leaving with Expeditionary force in January 1917. The horse vehicle was hit by a car driven by her cousin George Newman on his way home from the races (he had been drinking also) and she was thrown out on her head on the road. She lived unconscious for a week or two, Bert did not know (that his mother had been killed) until he got to England, or wherever they landed. There was no way of communicating in those days en route on troop ships. Her death was a very great blow to the family, and indeed the whole of Stanley Brook, as she was dearly loved there. Bert was wounded twice, and on one occasion was left out as dead. A Mr Fawcett said "I'm going to see if 'Eatie' is dead or alive" and he brought him in and he lived. We do not know this particular Mr Fawcett.

Obituary

Mr W.J. Eatwell

The death of Mr William John Eatwell, who arrived in Nelson from England on the Mataura in 1876, has

He came to New Zealand at the age of 15. His first employment was with the "Evening Mail", after which

Nelson Evening Mail

After old Granddad Eatwell died, Granny lived in Waimea Road all alone. One day an Eatwell turned up at her home from England. His name was Harry and he was a first cousin to John (Charles father). He wanted a job in Nelson, so took the first one offering (cleaning boots at an Hotel). He eventually disappeared and turned up in Cobden where he worked on the railway for the remainder of his working days. He had several sons (seven I think).

Harry was the son of old Robert Eatwell and brother of Kate Eatwell (later Mrs Freeguard: see Dorothy Walker's letter below). They lived in Newbury, Berkshire and old Robert had a new and second hand business for over forty years in Market Street, Newbury. He was a lay preacher in Wesleyan Methodist Church and used to travel out into the country hamlets on the weekends, preaching and doing a little buying of antiques as a side line. There was a good business for him in antiques. He was a short plump man with rosy cheeks and a friendly manner. He married twice, his first wife dying and leaving him with two sons. I think their names were Will and Charlie who were possibly born somewhere in the early 1860's or before. Robert Eatwell's second family was four boys and four girls. Harry was a soldier in India and left the Army to go to Cobden, Greymouth. Dorothy, his niece, remembers seeing a photo her mother had of him in his white uniform.

Dorothy Walker's (nee Freeguard) Letter (1961)

...My brother Frank and I were born in Southampton England. Our parents brought us out to Australia in 1911 when I was six years old and Frank ten. But we always regarded ourselves as Australians not English.

My father was Francis Freeguard. His father was in the Royal Marines and Dad was born at Woolwich not far from the Navy Arsenal. When his father's ship went across to the West Indies, my grandmother went to live in Wiltshire with her in-laws when Dad was only small. Later on they lived at Bath. Grandfather Freeguard fought in the Crimea and was invalided out and went to live at Bath until he died.

My father learnt carpentry, studied building and construction and architecture, and went to Newbury, Berkshire to work. There he met my mother Kate Eatwell. Her father was Robert Eatwell, who had a new and second hand furniture business. The people who came to visit at Highclere Castle just outside the town, knew Robert Eatwell and he did quite a lot of collecting for them, even going up to the big London sales for them. Old Robert may have had brothers as I heard my mother talk of cousins named Eatwell. There were also Slocombes (I am not sure of the spelling) and Salts who went out to New Zealand so it is quite likely that the Eatwells went too. The original Eatwells were thought to have been named Etveldt and came from Flanders or thereabouts. They came across to England as artisans or weavers.

Harry (Robert Eatwell's son) was a soldier in India then left the army to go to Greymouth on the railway. He had a lot of sons. One year he contacted Sydney Radio and broadcast a message to my mother. She wrote to him and he sent her illustrated magazines for years, one dealing with a big earthquake which occurred in or around Greymouth when I was only a schoolgirl... Harry had very dark eyes and hair... in his youth, was very handsome. We have a photo of him in his white uniform.

Eatwell Coat of Arms

The Coat of Arms was issued by a reigning monarch but when we do not know. It is of some military significance as the lions are rampant.

Now the Eatwell family were a gentle kindly folk. I'm sure that came about by Granddad John marrying Jessie Vercoe (a very gentle lady). Their family tree certainly goes back a few hundred years but I cannot see that piece of history has contributed much to the families later on. One good thing that happened was that one of the great grandmothers married into Isaac Watts family tree, and that was a good Christian influence. Although he did not marry himself. There were two branches in the Eatwell family way back. One Christian and one plain heathen, and granddad refused to have anything to do with the Cobden family as he said they were rough and tough and ungodly. As we also found out later, they seemed to live and die that way. Some could have changed, as Owen's family had Brethren affiliations.

[1] King Edward III ruled between 1327 and 1377. Charles II ruled in 1678. Both had considerable interest in France, Charles II spent nine years there before regaining the throne from Oliver Cromwell and Edward III started the hundred year war over disputed territories on the continent.

[2] The Huguenots were members of the Calvinist French Protestants c. 1560, who were involved in almost continuous civil war with the Catholic majority and were a disruptive element even after full freedom of worship was granted by the Edict of Nantes (1598). When the edict was revoked in 1685 many Huguenots were forced to apostatize or flee from France.

[3] On 7 February 1917 I was called by Mr Newman to grove Road. I was driven by him in his car to the scene of an accident. At the intersection of Grove Road and Warwick Street I found the deceased sitting in a car with her head bandaged. She reported to have suffered scalp wounds, and was quite able to discuss her own condition when I saw her. She was assisted from the car she was seated in to Mr Newmans car and he personally, at my suggestion, drove her to the hospital. Seeing her in hospital that night she had lapsed into a semi-conscious condition, and I judged that she was bleeding into the brain. I immediately trephined the head on the right hand side of a lacerated wound, which was found extended down to the bone. This wound was over the frontal and temporal bones of the right side of the skull. It was found immediately but there was a stellate fracture of the above named bones, radiating deeply into the base of the skull. On trephining she was found to be bleeding into the brain from the anterior

branch of the meningeal artery. That was stopped and she was replaced in bed. She recovered consciousness in the course of five or six days and was able to discuss with comparative amount of freedom her movements up to the time she reached Blenheim. She was never able to give any idea of what she had done during any portion of her time prior to the accident. About the accident itself she knew absolutely nothing. This continued for a period of about three weeks and it seemed she was doing very well indeed.

I went to Wellington on February 27 and returned in March and found that in the intervening period remote complications set in and I immediately determined that it would be necessary to re-open the head. I found that an abscess had begun to form in the lacerated brain tissue of the frontal lobe and in the blood clot, which had resulted. She died 36 hours later without recovering consciousness.

Dr G. Bennett

Vercoe

I know very little of this ancestor of the Eatwell family. I believe Vercoes were some who fled with the Huguenots to England. I did know Granny Vercoe. She was a Newman (perhaps Mary Ann) and I believe Newmans came out (three boys and one girl) in 1842 and arrived on 19 March. They could have sailed on the *Bolton* to Nelson at the same time as the Rowlings [\[1\]](#) and the Newports. I have just read in 'Footprints' by Geoff Newport that the Newports came out to Nelson 1842, but on the *Sir Charles Forbes* boat.