Eliza White

HER LIFE & LEGACY

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Eliza White Charitable Trust

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By Seán Brosnahan

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Contents

Foreword 7

Introduction 9

The Bakers of Kington Langley 15

Orphaned? 21

Per *Zealandia* to Canterbury with the Taunton boys 31

'Alf' 43

Establishing 'A. J. White' 53

Family and business life, 1864–1879 63

Family and business life, 1880–1895 75

'Property of Mrs A. J. White': prosperity and pain, 1896–1909 91

Last Will and Testament 111

The Eliza White Trust, 1909–2002 127

Honouring the past, adapting to the present: the Eliza White Trust, 2003–2023 145

Afterword 161

Foreword

All families have their characters. People who are notable in the family's history for various reasons – perhaps the humorous uncle, or the eccentric aunt, or a stalwart grandmother. Our family has Eliza White.

As you will read through the pages of this book, Eliza was courageous, determined, faithful, and generous. She was self-made, forging her own future in the newly forming city of Christchurch. Tenaciously, she rose to the challenges her life served her – through motherhood, losing her husband, and in running a business and investments as a woman who was indeed pioneering.

It has been tremendous to learn more about Eliza through the commissioning of this work, undertaken by Seán Brosnahan. Our thanks to you, Seán, for your skill and your commitment to this project.

I acknowledge, too, the current Trustees of the Eliza White Trust, for their support in seeing this book come to fruition – Jill Lamb, Joanne Hope, Mark O'Reilly, and Bishop Michael Gielen.

Since 1936, the Eliza White Trust has had the privilege of continuing to fulfil Eliza's wishes by supporting children in the Canterbury region who are particularly deserving of assistance. How the Trust has chosen to work has been shaped by the community need of the day, so has taken many forms. In its current expression, we partner with a range of organisations to enable their work, and it is a great honour to be able to contribute to a number of worthy causes.

This book is indeed a celebration of Eliza across many roles – as a character in our family, and as a hardworking, outward-focused, and generous citizen of Christchurch.

Perhaps you are reading this book as a descendant of Eliza. Maybe you have benefitted in some way through her bequest. Or, perhaps your interest is in her story. Whatever your vantage point is as you read this book, we thank you for joining us in celebrating Eliza White – her life and her legacy.

Chris Morkane
Chairperson, Eliza White Trust
Great Grandson of Eliza White

Introduction

This is the story of Eliza White, née Baker, a woman who began life in very humble circumstances in rural England in 1842, emigrated to New Zealand in 1863 and prospered mightily in colonial Christchurch, ending her days as the veritable 'Queen' of Catholic society in the Garden City of Christchurch. What's more, she was determined to share the considerable wealth that she had amassed over little more than four decades in the colony with those who were not so fortunate in material circumstances. Through her will, she set up the Eliza White Trust, with a mandate to fund orphanages for abandoned children. Over 110 years later, that Trust continues to operate, maintaining Eliza's tight focus on the welfare of children in the very different social and economic circumstances of the 21st century. Moreover, throughout that long century of philanthropic endeavour, a line of Eliza's direct descendants have loyally served the Trust to keep faith with their family matriarch's great act of benevolence.

It's a remarkable story and one that is little known beyond a relatively narrow circle of people; mostly those who have helped the Trust achieve Eliza's aims or those who have benefitted from her largesse. A valuable overview of the Trust's history was compiled by John Fletcher and published in 2002 as *Faithful to Their Trust: the Eliza White Board of Management 1909–2002*. This present work seeks to complement that earlier publication by focusing more specifically on Eliza White herself. Who was this remarkable woman and what was it that motivated her to commit so much of her hard-earned fortune to the care of orphans? In contrast to what has previously been written about her, Eliza was not herself an 'orphan' but does seem to have experienced personal challenges as a young woman that made her unusually sensitive to the plight of abandoned children. Her life was then transformed by her relationship with Alfred Joseph White, beginning with a romance that blossomed on their shared voyage to New Zealand in 1863, and was followed almost immediately by their marriage in Christchurch in April 1864.

Eliza and Alf were to be partners in life as well as partners in business. Theirs was a shared prosperity, created via the firm of A. J. White, which they developed into Christchurch's leading home furnishing business by the 1870s, and the profits of which were astutely invested in land and buildings. Eliza played a key role in the firm during Alf's lifetime and then took over as its principal following his untimely death in 1895. Thenceforward she directed its affairs with great acumen, earning widespread respect and continued financial success. She became one of colonial Christchurch's wealthiest women and probably its foremost female entrepreneur. Those who knew her well compared her (favourably) to Queen Victoria, recognising both a physical resemblance to the Imperial monarch as she appeared in innumerable public images in the 1890s as well as a touch of imperiousness in Eliza's quietly determined personality that tended to have its way, come what may.

Alf White's other great gift to his wife was his devotion to his Catholic faith, an unusual characteristic in a 19th-century English immigrant to New Zealand. Within a year of their marriage, the at-least nominally Anglican Eliza had committed herself to joining Alf's church and thereafter was both devout in her practice and devoted to the Christchurch Catholic Church's institutional wellbeing. The couple happened to be in England on business when the newly created Christchurch diocese's first Bishop, John Joseph Grimes, was consecrated for his new role at London's Spitalfields Church of St Anne in July 1887.

Thereafter they developed a strong relationship with the Bishop, becoming both close confidantes and primary benefactors of his ecclesiastical endeavours. It was a remarkable connection for a poor girl from Kington Langley whose rural English background would have been steeped in antipathy to the 'Church of Rome' and its 'Papist' adherents.

Alf and Eliza White also had a large family together; one son and seven daughters who survived to adulthood. Their children's various life experiences as they grew to maturity brought heartache and worry as well as joy and pride. Something of those vicissitudes will also be covered here, although the primary focus will remain Eliza and her relationship with her children (and theirs with her). The White girls and their mother, for example, were leading figures in social and philanthropic activity within the Christchurch Catholic community in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Eliza, in fact, seems to have been a sort of *eminence grise,* almost always a background figure but regularly noted in the newspapers for this or that act of philanthropy. She was a woman whose advice was sought by many and whose expressions of favour were highly valued.

When she died in 1909, Eliza White was a very wealthy and influential woman, among the wealthiest females in a male-dominated Edwardian society and certainly outstanding among New Zealanders of her sex as an active businesswoman and entrepreneur. She lived in 'Compton', a gracious mansion in Opawa, complete with a retinue of faithful servants, and had just built another impressive stone house, 'Rock Villa', in Sumner that she offered to the Bishop for his episcopal residence. Her years of trading in land and buildings, some of it inherited from Alf but much of it entirely from her own endeavours, had left her with a substantial portfolio of commercial property in central Christchurch as well. It was all a world away from the humble cottage in rural Wiltshire where she had been born sixty-seven years earlier and represented tremendous success from a material point of view.

In death, however, Eliza took steps to give concrete expression to her spiritual values and thereby revealed the deep imprint that her religious faith had made upon her since her conversion to Catholicism in 1864. Her acts of mercy had been legion during her later life and now, through a very detailed set of instructions, she laid out a series of bequests that would provide for her loved ones, including some special people back in England, while devoting the bulk of her substantial wealth to a cause that was obviously dear to her heart: the care of orphans. In what a later Bishop of Christchurch (Matthew Brodie, 13 May 1930) would describe as "*the most munificent bequest for orphanages ever made in the history of the Church in the Southern Hemisphere*", she set aside most of her estate to fund the construction and maintenance of two orphanages, the first for girls, and a second for boys.

How the Eliza White Trust, constituted by her 1909 Will, fulfilled those final instructions and how it continues to do so in the very different circumstances of the 21st century will be the focus of the later parts of this history.

Sources and Methods

Charting and illuminating someone's life is a particularly challenging form of history. Unless the subject committed their innermost thoughts and feelings to paper via a journal or kept diaries, how can we ever understand how they experienced their life from within? The best we can hope for often is to document accurately the major experiences that punctuate a life and glean something of what made a person tick from the evidence of what they did with their time and abilities. Evidence is the key variable. It takes little reflection to appreciate that most of what we do in life never makes any impression on the sort of sources that will endure to provide such evidence in the future. Most of our lives – for all of us – are no more than 'dust in the wind', brief flashes of temporal existence that sparkle for a moment and are gone, beyond recall.

In approaching someone like Eliza White, it is fortunate that she made more impression on the surviving record than most, especially in the last years of her life. Because she was wealthy and influential, an active businesswoman playing some key roles in Christchurch society, her name frequently appeared in the newspapers. It is also a bonus that she was English and so came from a country that during her lifetime was the wealthiest and most developed nation on earth. This meant, among other things, that it created bureaucracies and kept official records; of births, marriages and deaths, a census at ten-yearly intervals from 1841 onwards, as well as newspapers, business directories, electoral rolls and so on. New Zealand, as part of Britain's Imperial possessions and with expanding colonial societies like the Canterbury settlement being developed along British lines, likewise kept such records from the outset.

Many of these records survive and can be searched for references to Eliza, Alfred, their friends and acquaintances, families and business. The digital revolution in archives over recent years even means that a New Zealand-based researcher can now roam (virtually) through the surviving English records and discover biographical details that earlier generations of researchers could only dream of accessing without expensive trips to Britain or by paying heavy fees for local agents to do that for them. Such digital research underpins the story that follows. It has been curated from hundreds of data points, each of which reveals some discreet aspect of Eliza's life or the context of the times and places in which she lived it. Those sources are supplemented by family stories handed down that add other details. I am also very grateful to Eliza's descendant, Peter Inkson, for access to the treasure trove of original White family documents that he allowed me to access, and the support and assistance of fellow descendants Jo Coffey, Nick White and Chris Morkane.

Sometimes, very frequently in fact, there are conflicts between these different types of information, particularly between family stories and the details discovered in the documentary record. Reconciling these differences can be challenging. Most often, I have preferred information derived from a contemporary documentary record over stories handed down, but have always tried to 'triangulate' any details from one such source against those found in others. A great example is the family tradition that Eliza was an 'orphan' and that it was this personal experience in childhood that later motivated her to bequeath her legacy to set up orphanages in Christchurch. Records of her parents' deaths, however, confirm that Eliza was eleven when her father died and sixteen when her mother followed. Yet in mid-Victorian Britain (the 1850s) when these deaths occurred, a sixteen-year-old girl of Eliza's class would already have been making her own way in the world. Therefore, it is hard to see how she could have been classed as an 'orphan'.

Another family story describes Alfred White's exceedingly humble start in the furniture trade in Christchurch involving weekly trips to Lyttelton, climbing the Bridal Path over the Port Hills while carrying on his back items of furniture he had made to sell there. There must be some kernel of truth to it but let's just break that tale down into its component parts for a moment. It presupposes that Alf White started his business from nothing (which he didn't), and that a furniture maker would physically carry goods (intrinsically heavy pieces of furniture) in person over the steep hill route between Christchurch and Lyttelton as late as 1864, a date by which there were well-established transport services between the two places and a very different infrastructural context than the primeval conditions of the pioneer settlers of 1850 to whose experiences such a tale harks back.

For now, let me just frame my research strategy as constituting a deep dive for factually variable details, linked by contextual analysis of time and place to trace stories. That inevitably involves a certain amount of speculation: adducing significance and connections between facts that may not always end up being as concretely accurate as I would like. So to mitigate the risks involved, I will try and be clear when I am speculating and acknowledge doubts, gaps, and the possibility of erroneous conclusions. Further verifiable details might subsequently emerge that support – or contradict – my interpretations. This methodology allows for such correction and does not treat fact and speculation as of equal weight. In what follows, I will try and make sense of a myriad of details to tell the life story of Eliza White née Baker and of the Trust that she established.

CHAPTER 1

The Bakers of Kington Langley

Eliza Baker was born on 6 March 1842 and baptised on the following 15 May in the parish church of Kington St Michael in Wiltshire, England. The village of Kington St Michael is five kilometres from the centre of Chippenham, the closest market town and the third largest urban centre in Wiltshire. In the mid-19th century that sort of distance represented a solid hour's walk and would have been considered a major outing from the village. Eliza's family lived in the eastern part of the parish, an area that would subsequently become a parish in its own right as Kington Langley. The markings noting Eliza's birth in faded ink, carefully recorded in the baptismal register of the centuries-old stone church at Kington St Michael (which is still standing), offer a useful starting point to any consideration of Eliza Baker's life. Other entries in the parish registers tell us that her parents and siblings were also born there and that she was descended from families – the Gingells and the Wallops – with deep roots in the area – both being distinctive Wiltshire names.

St Michael's church itself was about seven hundred years old when Eliza was christened. In fact, people had been living in this part of Wiltshire for thousands of years. A Neolithic tomb nearby has been dated to around 3000 BC and when William the Conqueror made his comprehensive survey of his new English possessions in 1086 both Kington St Michael and Kington Langley were listed as existing settlements. The 'Kington' part of their names indicates a royal link; these were farming settlements that had been granted by a Saxon King to the Benedictine Abbey of Glastonbury in the 10th century.

The two hamlets' fortunes thereafter waxed and waned with those of the famous Abbey. They were devastated by the Black Death in the 14th century but, unlike some nearby villages, neither place disappeared altogether despite the huge number of deaths. As the population recovered and prosperity returned over the next two centuries, another decisive blow was the dissolution of the English monasteries by King Henry VIII in 1543. When Glastonbury Abbey was destroyed, its Kington lands were bought by their agent in residence there, Nicholas Snell. He promptly dispossessed the Abbey's former tenants of their right to graze animals on the villages' common lands, which he then began to enclose for his exclusive use. They also lost their traditional right to fish in ponds around the local manor house.

Life for ordinary people, the farming folk of Kington St Michael who earned their living from the land and by the sweat of their brows, would never have been easy in any case. They were largely powerless in the face of the big events that impinged upon their lives, whether it was plague and pestilence or the encroachment on their traditional rights by those above them in the social hierarchy. They had no real say in social arrangements either; no vote to give them a stake in political affairs, and no opportunity to better their positions through education or economic advancement. Nonetheless, there was gradual progress in the area and, incrementally, daily life for the ordinary inhabitants improved. The English rural population grew steadily as fertility levels outpaced child mortality, and advances in agricultural practice saw crop yields gradually boosted. This meant a more secure food supply and less chance of famine and starvation.

Another significant change was the abandonment of the tithing system, the ancient practice requiring one tenth of the produce of the land to be given to the local church. Since the Reformation, these 'payments in kind' had been due to the secular landowners who had taken over possession of the land from the church. In the 1830s, however, all remaining tithes were converted from actual produce to rental fees to be paid in cash. This conversion process generated records and detailed maps. One such map, the tithe map of Wiltshire that was created in December 1840 as part of this big change, gives us a geographical fix on the Bakers in Kington Langley. Not for David and Sarah (Eliza's parents), unfortunately, who don't seem to have had any tithe obligations. David's parents (Eliza's grandparents), Thomas and Hannah Baker, however, did. Thomas Baker's name appears against Section 64 on the map of the parish, with 0.1.17. – henceforward to be paid to their landlord, a Mr Isaac Salter, for their share (along with four other occupants) of the four houses and gardens that stood on that piece of land. They adjoined the manor house at Upper Draycot, a beautiful stone farmhouse built around 1700 and which is still standing. It can be found just to the northeast of Kington Langley hamlet and on Kington Langley's boundary with the neighbouring parish of Draycot Cerne.

Just six months later, on 6 June 1841, the first modern census of England was taken. This is our next solid piece of documentary evidence as it recorded David and Sarah Baker's household among the inhabitants of Kington Langley (as well as Thomas and Hannah's). David is listed as an agricultural labourer, as were his father and brothers. This confirms that the Bakers were from the lowest ranks in Kington St Michael's carefully defined social hierarchy. David and Sarah's children are listed in the census as sisters Elizabeth (9), Jane (10) and Mary (7), and brothers John (6), Solomon (5) and Edwin (1). The Bakers lived in, "*That portion of the Parish lying North of the Road from the Plough Inn to the Chippenham Road and west to the end of the Parish.*" Since the returns included the spot where Thomas Baker's tithe due had been assessed not long before, this probably gives us a reasonable fix on where both families were living. It is clear from the census enumeration of their neighbours' houses that the Baker families were part of a dense population of labouring folk, who lived along the roads that linked the farms where they earned their livings, no doubt in fairly humble dwellings.

A decade later, in 1851, the next census tabulations for the same district included nine-year-old Eliza as the youngest member of David and Sarah Baker's household. Of her siblings, only brothers Solomon (15) and Edwin (11) remained at home by that stage. The teenage Solomon's occupation was listed, like his father and grandfather, as an 'agricultural labourer'. So was the next oldest Baker, John (16), who was living not far away – he is listed as one of the five live-in labourers of Charles Sloper, a 'yeoman farmer' in the neighbourhood, who worked a smallholding of 186 acres with their help. Eliza's older sisters, meanwhile, were working as domestic servants in other people's homes. The eldest, 21-year-old Jane, was one of three servants employed in the household of a doctor in Chippenham. Elizabeth Baker (20) was also in Chippenham, one of three servants in the home of an innkeeper. I couldn't track down Mary Ann (18) but it seems likely she was similarly employed.

Neither Edwin nor Eliza had any 'occupation' listed on the 1851 census schedule but a number of other children in the parish of comparable ages were in fact denoted as 'scholar' and the enumeration recorded both a school master and a school mistress as resident in Kington Langley. The 1885 Ordnance Survey map referred to above also depicts a school building, only metres from where Thomas Baker's abode had been in 1840. These are indications of new educational opportunities developing in Kington Langley during Eliza's childhood. Since we know that she could read and write by the time she came to New Zealand, we can presume that she learnt those skills as a girl in this or some other school.

This was a big step up from the educational attainments of her parents. David Baker and Sarah Gingell had married at Kington St Michael church in 1830, both signing the parish register with an 'X', indicating that neither could write. Nor could their witnesses. The next wedding recorded there just four days later was for another Gingell, William, who had as his witness Isaac Gingell. It seems likely that they would be Sarah's relatives. Both these men signed the register with their own 'X'. It's worth noting too that Sarah was already pregnant at the time of her marriage to David Baker. When their first child, Jane, was born six months later, she was baptised at St Andrews church in Chippenham rather than at St Michaels, perhaps to cover the embarrassment of what in Scotland Presbyterian records would have been noted as 'antenuptial fornication'. Their residence was noted as being at 'Kington Langley' in the baptismal register nonetheless.

As noted above, both David and Sarah Baker had also been born at Kington St Michael. His baptism in 1809 recorded that he was the son of Thomas Baker and Hannah Wallop. Sarah Gingell was born nine years earlier in 1800 and recorded as 'the base-born daughter of Hannah Gingel'. In other words, she was illegitimate, no man being identified or willing to stand by Hannah Gingell and be acknowledged as Sarah's father. Quite apart from the social stigma of her illegitimacy, this background hints at economic disadvantages for Hannah Gingell's early life. Being from the agricultural labouring class meant a life of limited opportunities anyway. It's no great surprise then that neither David nor Hannah attained even the barest level of literacy. It is unlikely that they received any formal education at all. Hunger and want would have been an ever present backdrop to their family lives, even in good years. And there were many years as the family of David and Sarah grew to adulthood and then had children of their own that were not good ones.

Rural England in the 19th century was a class-based society with three tiers: landlord, farmer and landless labourers. Most of the productive land was owned by the gentry class, rented by the farming class, but worked by the landless labourers – people like Eliza Baker's family. This rigidly hierarchical system had evolved over centuries but it had become more stratified in the decades before Eliza's birth, a period that saw a steady decline in the position of those on the lowest social rank: people like Eliza's family. Part of this was from the ongoing enclosure of the open fields, commons and wastes, the publicly accessible spaces in the countryside which had formerly given the agricultural labourers resource rights that were vital to their hardscrabble existence. Social and economic changes like this had progressively reduced the majority of village labourers into servile, demoralised men since the mid-18th century. Many of their families were reduced to accepting soup kitchen charity or faced the degradation of receiving 'poor relief' (the primitive social welfare of the day) every winter.

The famous English social historian Eric Hobsbawm wrote of the agricultural labourers in this period: "*It is difficult to find words for the degradation which the coming of industrial society* *brought to the English country labourer; the men who had been a 'bold peasantry, a country's pride', the sturdy and energetic 'peasantry' whom 18th century writers had so readily contrasted with the starveling Frenchmen, were to be described by a visiting American in the 1840s as 'servile, broken-spirited and severely straitened in their means of living'…"*[1] Bad harvests and government-imposed tariffs on imported wheat to protect home producers (the gentry and farmers) had also pushed up the cost of food such that these years became known as the 'hungry '40s'. Labourers' wages, meanwhile, were generally at the barest subsistence level and lagging behind the rising cost of living.

This is the challenging environment into which Eliza Baker was born in 1842.[2] A Royal Commission the following year heard evidence from the land agent on an estate neighbouring Kington Langley that local people ate *"bread, potatoes, with a very small quantity of bacon; sometimes cabbages from their allotments."* Butchers meat was *"rarely eaten; hardly ever, unless it is given to them."* This diet, however, was supposed to sustain labourers who worked from six in the morning until six at night. Children in Eliza's situation would very likely have been malnourished for much of their formative years. High levels of distress led to agitation against the Corn Laws (as the food import tariffs were known) in many neighbouring villages to Kington Langley in 1843–1846. Newspaper reports of the speeches made at such demonstrations, including accounts from the wives of local labourers, provide pitiful evidence of the agricultural labourers' living conditions.

We might take as one example the speech delivered by one Jacob Baker to a protest meeting in Swindon, Wiltshire, in February 1850. The Baker surname here is a coincidence – there is no suggestion that Jacob was related to David Baker and his family – but Jacob's background was otherwise remarkably similar to David's and his experience typical of a Wiltshire agricultural labourer at this period. Jacob was just over forty, the same age as David. Like David he had married very young, and with a child already on the way. By 1850 he had nine children and was struggling to feed them through the winter, when he had neither work nor a regular income. Here are his own words to the Swindon meeting: *"And you, gentlemen, must know that our case is very bad, and that we have not near victuals enough. How would you like to sit down with your wife and young children four days in the*

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[1] This quote is taken from Professor Rollo Arnold's classic account of rural English migrants to New Zealand and their background, *The Farthest Promised Land: English Villagers, New Zealand Immigrants of the 1870s*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 1981, p. 20.

[2] I am grateful to Dr Louise Ryland-Epton, Visiting Fellow, History School of Arts and Humanities, The Open University, England, who is researching Kington Langley for the Wiltshire Victoria County History Trust, for her advice on conditions in Kington Langley in Eliza's childhood. This section is largely based on Dr Ryland-Epton's suggestions and Professor Arnold's account.

week and not have bread and potatoes enough, and the other three days not have enough boiled swedes, and but with little fire to cook them with?"[3]

Two decades earlier, in 1830–1831 when David and Jacob Baker were newly married, similar levels of distress had seen riots break out across the countryside of southern and eastern England. These were mainly directed against the new technology of threshing machines, whose introduction was depriving the labourers of their vital winter labour. These became known as the 'Swing' riots from the anonymous letters many gentry landlords received, poorly written but demanding higher wages and a return to human labour signed 'Captain Swing'. This pseudonym had a double meaning, referencing the old method of threshing by 'swinging' a flail but also implying a threat of hanging recalcitrant landlords and seeing their corpses 'swing'. There was little real threat, of course, resistance being localised and disorganised. But with memories of the French Revolution fresh in the mind of England's ruling class, the reaction was swift and severe. The riots were crushed by troops and harsh punishments dealt out: twenty rioters were executed and some 500 transported to Australia.

A Special Commission in response to the 1830–1831 riots followed in Wiltshire. Two of the rioters there were executed and 105 transported, including a 'David Baker' who received a sentence of seven years for 'feloniously destroying a threshing machine'. This is obviously not Eliza's father, who was the father of a new-born child in January 1831 rather than on a convict ship to Australia, but it gives us a striking reminder of the social and economic context in which the Kington Langley Bakers, including Eliza, would be born over the succeeding years. It is also worth noting a connection between this rural discord and the founding of the Canterbury settlement later in the century. The Swing riots in East Anglia were closely observed by Edward Gibbon Wakefield who wrote a pamphlet about them called *Swing Unmasked*. Wakefield's ongoing ruminations about England's social problems eventually saw him develop a theory of planned emigration as the answer to the simmering discontent in rural England. The founding of Canterbury in 1850 was a direct result and one of an number of specific attempts to put Wakefield's theory into practice in New Zealand. Eliza Baker's subsequent amazing success in the colony could be framed as a striking vindication of Wakefield's ideas.

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[3] Jacob Baker emigrated to South Australia in 1852 and prospered there, writing home to Wiltshire that "This is the country my boys…" These details taken *from Aspects of the Life of the Wiltshire Agricultural Labourer, c.1850* by Mark Baker, 1981, reproduced on the Wiltshire Online Parish Clerks Project, 2016, https://wiltshire-opc.org.uk.

CHAPTER 2

Orphaned?

According to the various short accounts of Eliza's life that have been written, she was 'orphaned' at the age of eleven. It was this experience, so it might be concluded, that gave her the particular empathy for the fate of abandoned children that motivated her extraordinary bequest in 1909. The earliest source I can find for this detail is a three-page typescript that was prepared as the Eliza White Trust was building the long-promised orphanage in November 1934: *"The late Mrs White was born near the ancient town of Chippenham in England. Her father was a farmer. Being left an orphan at the age of eleven she went to live at Chippenham with an elder sister. When only fourteen she went to live in London where she remained unto she was twenty-one, earning her living. The lady she lived with was a friend of an old Canterbury family, the Godleys, and it was from her that Mrs White first heard of New Zealand. Feeling attracted to the distant and then little known Colony, she returned to Chippenham and sought the advice of an uncle and aunt before emigrating."*[4]

Clearly, the source for these details must have been some of Eliza's adult daughters, recounting tales told within the family before their mother's death twenty years earlier. Not surprisingly given its close family lineage, the key details in this statement were repeated with little modification in subsequent accounts of Eliza's life written by Stella Robins in 1991, Jill Preston in 1999, John Fletcher in 2002 and Mike Crean in 2020. Access to records of deaths and burials at Kington Langley, however, reveal that the central detail of Eliza's being orphaned at the age of eleven is not quite true. Or at least that 'orphan' is not a strictly accurate description of Eliza's status as an eleven year old in 1853.

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[4] The resulting article, with additional details on the orphanage construction, appeared in *The Press* on 3 November, 1934.

While this is indeed the year that her father David Baker died, Eliza's mother Sarah survived him by seven years. It was only therefore on her death in July 1858, when Eliza was sixteen years old, that she technically became an 'orphan'.

How do we make sense of this discrepancy? It seems a key issue to resolve given the centrality of orphans to Eliza's enduring legacy. Surely that had to have its roots in some sort of personal trauma of abandonment, a sense of being 'orphaned'. So let's examine more closely the context of Eliza's family life in Kington Langley in the 1850s. We have already seen how the Baker family were part of a social class that was typically really struggling to make ends meet through her childhood years. The Bakers would likely have lived in a cottage provided by the tenant farmer or farmers for whom they worked. These cottages varied in quality but were usually small, often overcrowded, and frequently badly built. They did, however, generally come with just enough attached land to sow potatoes and other vegetables to subsist on. Subsistence is nonetheless the best description for the life they contained: in the 1850s nearly half of all such rural cottages had only one bedroom, and some had only one room. In many, the floors were clay which became sodden when it rained.

The other aspect of the low quality housing typical of the agricultural labourer's lot was its poor sanitation. Water generally came from a well in the garden and sanitary arrangements were also out of doors, a privy being regarded as something of a luxury. Many cottages also swarmed with vermin. It doesn't take much for a modern reader, well aware of the links between water contaminated by human and animal waste, as well as the role of vermin in the spread of many diseases, to see how such conditions were a recipe for sickness and death on a regular basis. Typhus, typhoid and cholera in particular were a scourge of squalid, overcrowded and insanitary housing of this sort and epidemics of these and other lice or water-borne diseases regularly tore through 19th-century English towns and villages. In 1849, for example, 192 people died from cholera in two months in Salisbury, Wiltshire's only city, killing one in forty-five of its inhabitants.

It was indeed illness, described as 'continued fever' on his death certificate, that killed Eliza's father. David Baker, labourer, died in Kington St Michael on 20 May 1853 aged forty-five. He was buried in the parish churchyard four days later. Where did this leave his family, and especially his widow, Sarah, who was actually nine years older than him and at a stage of life where full-time work would have likely been becoming a physical challenge? Perhaps the saving grace for Sarah would have been that her children, including Eliza, the youngest at eleven, were now capable of earning incomes of their own and perhaps even supporting her into old age. Sarah Baker had already given birth to seven babies by the time Eliza was born in 1842. The first, Jane, conceived before their formal marriage, was born in 1830. Elizabeth arrived in 1831, Mary Ann in 1833, John in 1834, Solomon in 1835, Sarah in 1837 and Edwin in 1839. Remarkably, all but Sarah (who died at three weeks) were to survive to adulthood, a very high infant survival rate at a time when most families could have expected to lose a number of children at an early age. Eliza was in fact followed by one last child, Henry, born in 1847 but he presumably also died in infancy, not being noted with the family in the census of 1851.

Large families had traditionally been a strength for the agricultural labourer class in England. Children were put to work at an early age and their incomes provided extra insurance to help the family cope with the vagaries of seasonal employment and the subsistence wages of their fathers or indeed their premature deaths. We have already noted from the 1851 census details that every one of Eliza's siblings over the age of fifteen had already left home and found a position in someone else's household at the time of that census. Such economic independence was a natural part of the lifecycle of an agricultural labourer's children at this time. None of them had ventured far though (except perhaps for Mary Ann who I could not locate) so would likely have still been closely connected to the parental household in 1853. Jane and Elizabeth were both working as house servants in middle-class homes in nearby Chippenham, while John was an agricultural labourer in Kington Langley itself, living in his yeoman farmer employer's house along with three other teenagers also in the farmer's employ.

If these seem rather modest achievements for Eliza's siblings, there would have been few alternative options available to them (or her) in rural Wiltshire at the time. Agricultural labour for boys and domestic service for girls were pretty much it. Clever boys might go on to learn a trade, and girls could soon expect to be running households of their own, but aspirations to move up more decisively in the social scale were virtually nil. Education offered a small window of opportunity, of course, and by the 1840s there was some rudimentary education available at Kington Langley. There were, for example, some so-called 'dame' schools in the area; privately organised schools for the children of the poor where a local woman (the 'dame') would provide elementary education for a small fee, or from funding provided by local gentry as a form of charity. It probably did not extend much beyond basic reading, writing, learning the Catechism and perhaps (for girls) some needlework.

There was also a rather unusual school for girls at nearby East Tytherton (3.9 miles from Kington Langley) that was run by the Moravian church (an evangelical Protestant sect) who apparently had a somewhat more 'progressive approach' to girls' education.[5] This school admitted children from Moravian and non-Moravian families alike and children

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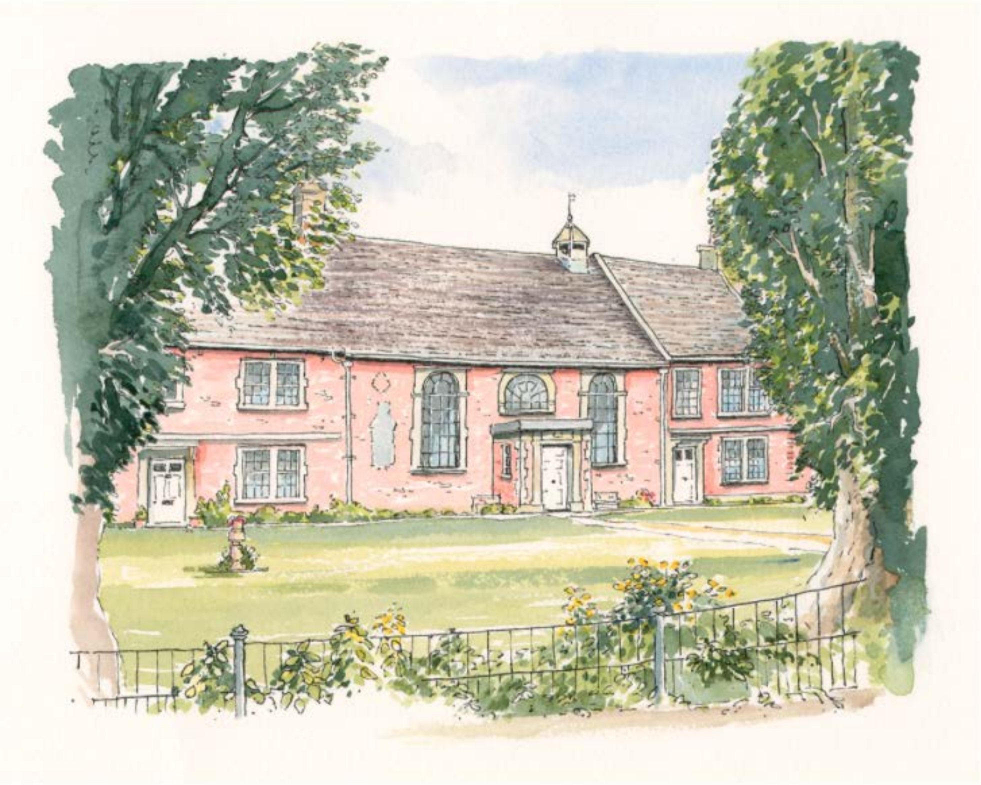
[5] All details on the Moravian school at East Tytherton kindly provided by Dr Louise Ryland-Epton.

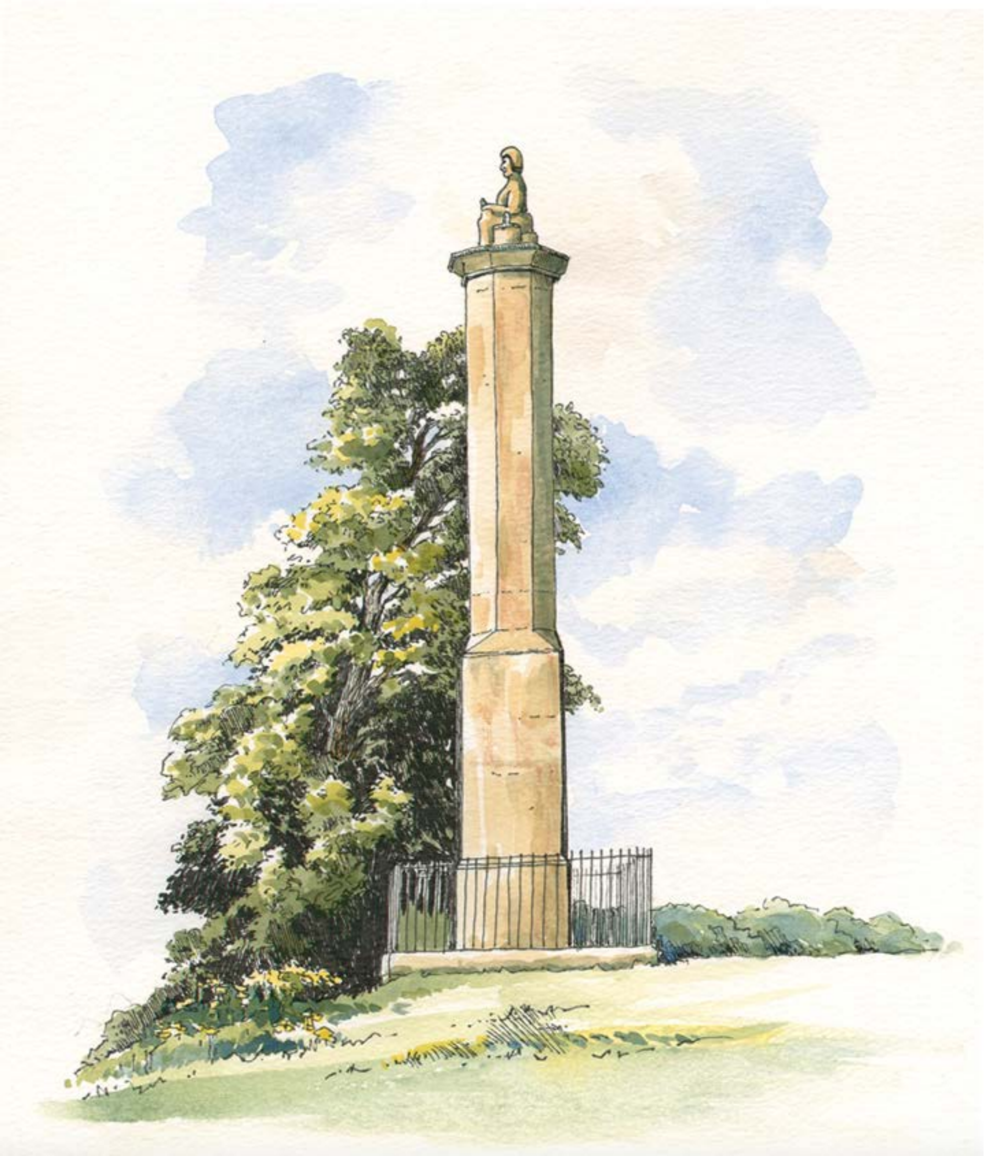


The Moravian School, East Tytherton.

https://bremhillparishhistory.com/article/maud-heaths-causeway/

are known to have travelled from as far as Kington St Michael and Kington Langley to go there. Given the importance of education within the Moravian church compared to the lower aspirations for pupils in what other schools existed in the wider area, this Moravian-run day-school is likely to have been an attractive option for many local families. In 1859, just a bit later than the period where Eliza Baker might have been getting her education, a government report stated, *"At the hamlet of East Tytherton there is a Moravian Settlement, and about 20 to 30 children are taught in a nice little thatched room with a wooden floor, by a mistress of the Moravian persuasion."*

Unfortunately it's not possible to determine which, if any, of these opportunities was taken advantage of by the Baker children. There is one strong clue, however, that Eliza might well have attended the Moravian school at East Tytherton. It consists of her fascination for, and later emulation of, the story of Maud Heath, as recounted in some promotional material released at the time the orphanage she had funded was about to be



The Maud Heath statue atop Wick Hill.

https://bremhillparishhistory.com/article/maud-heaths-causeway/

built in Christchurch circa 1930: *"Inspired by the example of Maud Heath, who provided a dry causeway over the marshes from Wick Hill to Chippenham, Mrs White had a constant desire to leave behind her some work of enduring benefit."* So who was Maud Heath? She was in fact a widow who had lived in the Wiltshire countryside near Eliza's home during the 15th century. When she died, she left her properties to a trust fund whose income was to pay for the construction of a causeway to make it easier for local people to walk across the boggy fields in the area. Its four-and-a-half mile length includes precisely the route which a young Eliza would have taken from near her home at Kington Langley to reach the school at East Tytherton.

All along the Maud Heath causeway are markers and memorials to this local folk heroine whose largesse had benefitted the local population for hundreds of years by the time Eliza was born. One consisting of a statue of Maud atop an imposing column had been erected just four years before Eliza's birth. Other impressive marker stones with inscriptions memorialising Maud are place at the beginning, middle point and end of the causeway, which also encompasses a bridge and a 64-span raised stone platform called the Kellaways Arches. Little wonder that a grateful school girl following this footpath day after day would have formed a strong sense of appreciation of the long-dead benefactress. It is also worth noting, as we will see later in this history, that Eliza was very attached to the name 'Maud'. When her first child was born in 1865, she named her 'Edith Maud'. That child died in infancy but Eliza then recycled the name for her seventh child, born ten years later, who she named 'Maud Magdalen'.

Her older siblings may not have been so fortunate in their educations. When he married at Kington St Michael in 1857, Eliza's elder brother John was unable to sign the parish register and nor could his wife Anne Maria Hancock. Both left their 'X'; the mark of the illiterate. Her sister Elizabeth, on the other hand, was able to sign her name when she married William Lawes there in 1854. It is a very scratchy signature, not conveying the confidence of someone used to wielding a pen, but it is a signature nonetheless and Elizabeth can therefore be classed as functionally literate. As the baby of the family (notwithstanding the short-lived Henry), Eliza might well have benefitted from educational progress in the parish, and perhaps greater parental indulgence, to get more of a crack at schooling than her older siblings. This remains pure speculation but she was certainly able to sign her name when she married Alf White in Christchurch in 1864 and it is clear that as a mature woman she was both literate and numerate. Her business success was predicted on mastery of such essential skills.

Another factor to bear in mind in considering Eliza's Kington Langley background and the 'orphan' story, is the impact that premarital sex and its unintended consequences might have on the prospects of young women in that society. We have already noted that Eliza's mother was 'base-born' and that she entered her marriage with David Baker already pregnant. This seems to have been relatively common at the time and it was not unusual for a pregnancy to be the precursor to young couples getting married. While this might have been frowned on by the local gentry and clergy – a regrettable aspect of the lives of the lower orders as it were – it may not have been such a big deal for the social circle in which the Bakers lived. Attitudes may have been tightening up in the 1840s however. With the young Queen Victoria's accession to the throne in 1837 a new era in British life had begun and this included a decline in tolerance for social deviancy, including premarital sex. After all, we don't associate the 'Victorian era' with greater prudery for nothing.

How does this relate to Eliza White's early life? Remember her two oldest sisters, Jane and Elizabeth, the young women working in middle class homes in Chippenham in the 1851 census records. Not long after that rare documentation of their locations and positions, both of them had experienced premarital pregnancies. In both cases they seem to have been left to face the consequences alone, i.e. without any man taking responsibility for paternity. Elizabeth's came first. In December 1853 her daughter, Sarah Jane Baker, was baptised at Kington St Michael – 'privately, illegitimate' as noted in the register. No father was recorded and Elizabeth's occupation was listed as 'servant'. The following year (1854), or perhaps the one after, her elder sister Jane had a matching experience. Her daughter Alice is recorded in a number of online family trees as being born in either 1854 or 1855 at Langley Fitzhurst in Wiltshire, though I haven't been able to find any contemporary documentary confirmation of this. In May 1859, however, Alice Baker, daughter of Jane, was baptised at Kington Langley (now separated off as an independent parish from Kington St Michael). The register has 'aged – years' noted underneath Alice's entry, as if the minister had meant to check the child's age but forgot to enter the detail. In any case she was clearly not an infant. Though the birth was not listed as 'illegitimate', it seems clear from the lack of a listed father that this was the case.

There is one further detail to note regarding Alice Baker's baptism in 1859. On that same day, 8 May, there were four other 'retrospective' baptisms recorded at Kington Langley. They were all for the children of John and Hannah Baker, aged variously from fourteen years down to eleven months. Another child of John and Hannah's who had been baptised 'privately' in 1856 was 'received into the church' on this day as well. This is almost certainly the family of David Baker's younger brother John, and therefore the uncle of Jane, who had married Hannah Daniels at Kington St Michael in 1840. The combined baptism/reception of six Baker children suggests some sort of reconciliation or return to the church that is impossible to explain from this distance in time. Might there have been some earlier fall-out locally from the Baker girls' illegitimate births? It is tantalising to consider the close family relationships that this combined ceremony suggests as well.

Added to that, of course, is that reference in Stella Robins' account of Eliza going 'to live with an elder sister at Chippenham' from when she was eleven to fourteen. That period coincides loosely both with her father's death and with her elder sisters' unmarried pregnancies, which we can imagine would have been a challenging time for the family unit however things played out. Would a Victorian employer, for example, tolerate an unmarried servant girl remaining in his household with her bastard child? It's possible but seems unlikely, especially if the 'master' of the house had been taking advantage of the young woman himself. The result of her 'sin' would have been an embarrassing reminder of his own. That is pure speculation, of course, but you have to wonder how a single lower class woman of few resources would have coped in these circumstances. Falling back on family seems an obvious strategy and if parents were not able or available to help, extended family networks would also come into play.

However she managed it, big sister Elizabeth made good her dishonour reasonably quickly by marrying a Kington St Michael gardener called William Lawes at the end of 1854, by which time her baby was fourteen months old. Elizabeth and William were to be together for fifty-six years and have seven more children together. Sometime before 1861 they also took in her sister Jane Baker's illegitimate daughter Alice. She is listed in their household in Kington St Michael in the census of that year, aged six and recorded as 'niece', alongside Elizabeth's own seven-year-old daughter (Sarah) Jane and two more little girls she had had with William. All three of them were recorded with the surname 'Lawes' so William had clearly adopted Sarah Jane as his own. Alice Baker, like the two older Lawes girls, was recorded by the census enumerators as a 'scholar', confirming the educational progress that was seeing public schooling established across England in this period.

Where was Alice's mother though? Jane Baker seems to have disappeared from her life. She may be the 'Jane W. Baker, servant, nurse' who was working for the family of a barrister in the London borough of Marylebone in the 1861 census, not far from where Eliza would later work (as we shall see). I'm not sure where the middle initial 'W' came from but this woman lists her birthplace as 'Kington Langley' and is exactly the same age as our Jane Baker so I'm reasonably confident this is Eliza's older sister. Ten years later she is in Bath, Somersetshire, and recorded in the 1871 census as the wife of Luke Doyle, a grocer's porter, and native of that city. Some family trees online suggest a marriage in Bath in 1870 but I haven't been able to find any official record confirming that. The couple appear together on the 1881 and 1891 census records for Bath (as a married couple) so theirs was an enduring relationship, whether it was formally contracted or not. They don't appear to have had any further children and nor does Alice Baker ever appear as a member of their household. Luke Doyle's occupation progresses from 'Grocer's Porter' in 1871, to 'Messenger' in 1881 and 'Grocer' in 1891 but the couple remained in Bath until Jane's apparent death there in 1896. If she is the Marylebone servant in 1861, Jane Baker pushed further out from the family's Kington Langley roots than any other member of

Eliza's family appears to have done. But she still ended up no further away than Somerset, the next county to Wiltshire, and just 25 kilometres away from Kington Langley.

One more piece of evidence needs to be added to the mix here. Eliza White's 1909 will contains two bequests for family back in England, the only references in that document to her wider family. In each case it was a sizeable annuity, an annual sum of £100 that would provide income for the two recipients each year for the rest of their lives. The first beneficiary of this largesse was 'my sister Elizabeth Lawes of Chippenham Wiltshire in England' and the second was 'my niece Mrs Alice Harvey of Swindon Wiltshire in England', this being the married name of Alice Baker. In a codicil to the will, dated March 1907, Eliza added an immediate gift of £100 to both Elizabeth and Alice to be given as soon as possible after her death in addition to the two annuities. Elizabeth Lawes was by then seventy-eight. The English census two years later reveals that she and William, a retired groundskeeper at the Cricket Club, were living in modest circumstances at Lowden Hill in Chippenham, with one unmarried 40-year-old daughter who worked from home as a laundress. Three of their children had predeceased them, including Sarah Jane Baker who died in London shortly before Eliza's death in 1909. Elizabeth Lawes died in Chippenham in 1914, the last five years of her life no doubt made greatly more comfortable by her younger sister's testamentary generosity.

Alice Baker, meanwhile, had emerged from her childhood in Kington Langley to become a draper before she married Edwin Harvey, a builder, at Bath in Somerset in 1878. Her bridesmaid on that occasion had been none other than her cousin, and fellow illegitimate Baker daughter, Sarah Jane Lawes. Edwin and Alice subsequently settled at Swindon, Wiltshire's largest town about 30 kilometres northeast of Kington Langley. They eventually had six children, all of whom were still alive in 1911 when the closest census to Eliza's benefaction listed them as living in a ten-room house in Swindon. Four of their children were still at home, all in their twenties and three of them in White collar occupations (their youngest daughter a primary school teacher and part-time student). These circumstances suggest that Alice was perhaps less in need of Eliza's financial gift than her Aunt Elizabeth but the money would undoubtedly have made a big difference to her quality of life. Alice enjoyed Eliza's munificence for eight years. She died in Swindon in 1917 aged sixty-three.

What else do we know about the Baker family in Kington Langley? Stella Robins' 1991 account describes how when Eliza was working in London but contemplating emigration to New Zealand in 1863 'she went back to her home town to ask her aunt and uncle's advice …'. Now there may well have been any number of aunts and uncles on both sides of her family back in Kington Langley so it is speculative to suppose that it was Uncle John and Aunt Hannah that she turned to. However, it is noteworthy that when her father David

Baker had died in 1853, his death registration was officially filed by 'Hannah Baker present at the death' rather than by his wife Sarah. This 'Hannah Baker' witnessed her statement with an 'X' (just as Hannah Baker née Daniels had done on her marriage registration) on which basis I suggest that this was probably David's sister-in-law, John Baker's wife. If so it is another pointer to a close connection between these families.

That leaves just one loose end to tie down. Where was Eliza's mother during her early teenage years? Unfortunately it's impossible to say but one fact is clear and certain: she was still alive. It also seems most likely that she remained in Kington Langley. But with no modern social welfare system in place, an impoverished widow unable to support herself or her children could end up in the local workhouse. These were the only institutions providing relief to the poor in mid-Victorian Britain but they were dreadful institutions, loathed and feared by the class of people who might end up in them. Once admitted to the workhouse, inmates were required to work, usually without pay, in return for their board and lodging. Conditions were intended to be as off-putting as possible to discourage able-bodied paupers. The food was basic and monotonous, inmates had to wear a rough uniform and sleep in communal dormitories, and parents were only permitted to have limited contact with their children, as little as an hour or so a week on Sunday afternoons. Kington Langley was part of the Chippenham Poor Law Union in 1853, so its paupers were housed in a workhouse in Chippenham itself. No records survive of its inmates in this period so there is no way of determining if this was indeed Sarah Baker's fate in any of the years after her husband's death.

What we can know with certainty is that Sarah Baker died at 'Langley Kington St Michael' on 17 July 1858. Her death was registered three days later by Jane Cole who had been 'present at the death' and recorded an 'X' as the mark of her witnessing to these facts. The 1861 English census records Cole as one of the most common surnames in Kington Langley and there are any number of 'Janes'. Presumably, she was a neighbour or family friend, perhaps someone who had supported Sarah in her final days. The death registration records that Sarah was the 'widow of David Baker Agricultural Labourer' and was aged fifty-eight years. These details align fairly closely with everything else we know about Eliza's mother and there is little doubt that this is her. Sarah's cause of death is recorded as 'Cancer of the Breast 2 years certified', which I presume means a doctor had confirmed the causation. Her burial in the Kington St Michael churchyard on 21 July is recorded separately in parish records, which give her age as '56'. As for previous family burials there is no surviving headstone to mark the spot; probably there was never one erected. Sarah's death nonetheless provides an end point to the Kington Langley phase of Eliza's life. From 17 July 1858 she really was an orphan.

CHAPTER 3

Per *Zealandia* to Canterbury with the Taunton boys

Beyond the family tradition of periods spent living with an elder sister and then working 'to earn her living' in Swindon, we have no means of fixing Eliza Baker's location or situation between her mother's death in 1858 and the next English census in 1861. That vital stocktake of the English population, however, pinpoints Eliza's residential location as a smart address in the London borough of Marylebone; 5 Sunderland Terrace, Bayswater. This was one of the rather fine terrace housing complexes constructed in the 19th century to house professional men and their families. The building is still standing, and still (or perhaps once again) a desirable address in London's West End, just east of Notting Hill and north of Kensington Gardens, but now subdivided into apartments. That would have been quite a shift in circumstances for Eliza from her Kington Langley roots.

She was, however, no more than a domestic servant in someone else's household, and in fact, as the census records, the most junior member of staff. Her employer was George Train, a 61-year-old retired actuary (insurance agent) formerly with the Equitable Insurance Company. His wife, Grace Babington, was a Scot but born in India where her Scottish father had worked for the East India Company, with its lucrative trade monopolies in East Asia. George was almost twenty years older than his wife and had married late but he and Grace had four children at the time of the census, two boys and two girls aged from twelve down to four. To look after them, they employed a governess and three female house servants. Two of the latter were in their forties so we can assume that Eliza at twenty-one years of age was very much the bottom of the pecking order 'downstairs' in this classic middle-class Victorian English household.

It was nonetheless quite a step from Kington Langley, via Chippenham and Swindon – all locations of gradually increasing size in provincial Wiltshire – to the great metropolis of London. This was a significant move and you have to wonder how she managed it. Was it a gradual progression from domestic service in one household to another, earning good references and perhaps 'trading up' in the very limited scope for progression that was possible in this most mundane of occupations. It is perhaps significant that her oldest sister Jane may also have been working not far away in London (assuming the 'Jane W. Baker' in the 1861 census is indeed her). They were just four kilometres apart, no more than an hour's walk, but to make anything more of this proximity would be pure speculation. At the same time, their presence so relatively close to each other in London at the same time is not a coincidence to be ignored.

Getting to the 'Big Smoke' of London, the greatest city on earth in the mid-19th century and the centre of a worldwide Empire, is surely a sign that the young Eliza Baker was ambitious. She clearly wanted more out of life than was possible in rural Wiltshire, where the rest of her siblings seem to have stayed. But, however ambitious, there were limits to how far she could go as a domestic servant in the rigidly stratified class system of Victorian Britain. Somehow, in the next couple of years she became aware of the possibilities that emigration to the colonies might open up. More specifically, she was given the option of travelling to Canterbury New Zealand as a domestic servant accompanying a well-to-do person taking passage there. This was a 'free ticket' literally to a new life. It would change Eliza's fortunes dramatically and definitively.

How exactly Eliza came to have this opportunity is a little harder to delineate. Stella Robins 1991 account states that, *"at 21 she heard of New Zealand from the lady she was living with – she went back to her home town to ask her aunt and uncle's advice – they sent her to an old man who read the stars and [he] told her to go New Zealand – she would be successful."* The 1930 Trust version of Eliza's life referred to earlier adds an extra detail: *"The lady she lived with was a friend of an old Canterbury family, the Godleys, and it was from her that Mrs White first heard of New Zealand."* It was this connection – the Godleys – which would duly see Eliza take a ship for Canterbury, New Zealand, in 1863. It exemplifies a key characteristic noted by historian Charlotte Macdonald in her classic 1990 study of single female emigration to New Zealand, *A Woman of Good Character* (which focused mainly on Canterbury in the 1860s). Immigrant recruitment in these years, she wrote, was *"idiosyncratic and relied to a considerable extent on personal connections."*

So who were ‘the Godleys’, and why might a personal connection with them have been the critical element in Eliza’s decision both to emigrate and to make Canterbury her choice as a colonial destination? John Robert Godley was basically the founder of the Canterbury settlement and the leader of the settlers in Christchurch for its first two years (1850–1852). He was a highly principled man, born in County Leitrim Ireland and part of the Anglo-Irish establishment in that country. After completing his education at Oxford University, where he was a member of Christ Church College (from which he later took the name of Canterbury’s capital), Godley had returned to Ireland to a leadership role as High Sheriff of County Leitrim. He was just in time for the misery and chaos brought about by the beginning of the Great Irish Famine in 1845. Two years later, as the situation in Ireland reached its most dire point, Godley came up with the idea of a relief scheme to support the mass migration of starving Irish Catholics to Ontario in Canada, with public funding to pay the costs.

The British Government considered this ‘Godley scheme’ as a way to deal with the crisis in Leitrim but wasn’t prepared to fund it. His innovative thinking, however, drew Godley to the attention of Edward Gibbon Wakefield, an English social theorist who had been promoting emigration schemes to the Australasian colonies for some years. Wakefield’s schemes had already included a proposal for a Church of England settlement in New Zealand, akin to the one for Scottish Presbyterians in Otago that drew heavily on Wakefield’s emigration theories and was about to be realised with the first pioneers heading towards what would become Dunedin in late 1847. So far, however, nothing had come of the similar concept for an English and Anglican scheme. Now though, after a weekend-long meeting between Wakefield and Godley, the idea of another settlement in southern New Zealand along these lines was revived.

In early 1848 the Canterbury Association was formed to promote and organise a scheme to purchase 300,000 acres in the South Island of New Zealand. It would then send out a carefully selected group of colonists to develop the land. Ideally, they were to be members of the Church of England and represent a cross-section of the very best of English society. Canterbury was in fact conceived of as a ‘new and better Britain in the South Seas’. The concept called for a balance of the sexes among the colonists from the outset and a pioneer contingent that would include wealthy members of the gentry class, middle class professionals, farmers and tradesmen, and working class labourers and agriculturalists. The wealthy settlers would have the resources to buy land, employ labour and act as a leadership cadre. The others would all find their place in a neat social hierarchy modelled on England’s that would give the settlement stability, while the embryonic social order would be anchored by churches and schools providing the social glue that would bind the colonists together.

It was all very idealistic and Godley was just the man to be its figurehead. He was a deeply religious man of unimpeachable integrity and very well connected socially. He was also clever, articulate and a convincing advocate. Under his leadership, the Canterbury Association attracted an impressive array of backers who were a real who's who of church and state in mid-century England. It has, in fact, been described as *"the most eminent colonisation society ever formed"*.[6] Godley went on to New Zealand ahead of his first group of settlers, arriving in Port Cooper (soon to be renamed Lyttelton) with his wife Charlotte and an infant son in April 1850. Work was already under way surveying the port town and the main settlement over the hills with a basic 'bridle track' linking the two under construction. He was there to greet the fleet of four ships that brought the pioneer party of Canterbury colonists in December 1850. For the next two years Godley was Resident Chief Agent for the Canterbury Association and the undisputed leader of the settlers.

There were many problems to be faced; principally a lack of land sales that undermined the financial viability of the scheme. Political and other disputes also divided the infant Canterbury community, with Godley navigating his way through it all to keep the settlement focused on its high-minded original concepts. He stayed until December 1852 when news arrived of a Constitution Act for New Zealand and the creation of a system of provincial governments, including one for Canterbury. Its leadership – a well-paid position as Provincial Superintendent – was his for the taking but Godley decided instead to return to England. It was a decision he was to regret for the rest of his short life. Back in Britain, he did a short stint as the Commissioner for Income Tax in Ireland, and then another in the Inland Revenue Department in London. His final role was as an Assistant Under Secretary in the British War Office. Alongside these official roles, however, he remained a committed advocate of Canterbury, pushing its cause in print and in person.

John and Charlotte Godley lived in a house in Grosvenor Place, Marylebone, which they had let out during their time in New Zealand. As their family grew, however, they shifted to a larger one in the same street. This was only a short distance from the Train house where Eliza was working in 1861. The Godleys were a very social couple and dined out frequently with political and civil service friends, while also keeping a warm welcome for any visitor from Canterbury, with whose affairs they kept in close touch. It is not hard to imagine a scenario where Charlotte Godley, ever ready to advocate for Canterbury within her wide circle of friends, could have come into contact with the servant Eliza Baker. Any expression of interest by Eliza to her employer (whether it was Grace Train or someone else) of an interest in emigration would no doubt have been passed on, and followed up. Charlotte Godley knew that one of the biggest challenges for women of her class in the colony was finding domestic servants to assist in their households. Indeed, she had written home in one of her letters in 1850 that *"the whole subject of maid-servants [is] one of the great miseries of human life in N.Z."*[7], and little had changed since.

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[6] Gerald Hensley in his biography of J R Godley, *Te Ara*.

Charlotte Godley is undoubtedly the link since John Godley had died in November 1861 from a long standing ailment of the throat. He was just forty-seven and his widow survived him by forty years, living all that time in their home in Grosvenor Place. She remained "*keenly interested in New Zealand to the end*"[8] and no doubt influenced many to try their luck in the colony. We can probably number Eliza among those who opted to go to Canterbury due to Charlotte Godley's influence. It's fair to say though that this was an unusual choice for a young English woman at that time. Despite the Godleys' enthusiasm, Canterbury was still a small and rather insignificant British colony on the other side of the world. In 1863 it had been in existence for a mere 13 years. Most English emigrants still followed the much more common path to long-established settlements in America. Going to New Zealand took much longer and was a lot more expensive. As the 'new kids on the block', it was a real challenge for any New Zealand settlement to attract emigrants from Britain against the competition of much larger and better known places like the United States, Canada, and even Australia.

One thing that did tilt the options just a little in favour of the Australasian colonies in the early 1860s was the great Civil War that had been raging in America between the United States and the breakaway rebel Confederate States since 1861. This did give many Britons contemplating emigration there pause, and perhaps prompted some to consider the alternatives a little more closely (though there was also of course an armed conflict with Maori under way in the North Island of New Zealand). However, if a potential New Zealand destination was in the public mind in Britain in 1862–1863, it was much more likely to be Canterbury's southern neighbour and fierce competitor, Otago. The discovery of gold there in 1861 had made the previously little heard of Scottish settlement at the bottom of New Zealand something of a media darling back in Britain. Stories of the fabulous wealth that ordinary working men were winning from the gold-rich rivers of Otago's rugged interior had made it the New Zealand destination of choice.

British women were also being actively recruited by the Otago provincial authorities. Young, single women were needed there, even more than in all the other New Zealand settlements, to balance up the huge influx of unattached young men that the gold rushes had attracted. Girls who could work as domestic servants in Otago households were preferred.

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[7] Charlotte Godley, *Letters from Early New Zealand*, 1936, p. 53.

[8] Beryl Hughes. 'Godley, Charlotte', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, first published in 1990.

It was expected that they would soon marry, thereby taming the wild young men on the diggings into well-behaved citizens while also becoming the mothers of a new home-grown generation of Otago settlers. Heavily subsidised passages were therefore on offer to women who met these criteria, with £5,000 of the enormous gold-driven wealth of the southern province being devoted to expanding its immigrant recruitment programme for young women from Scotland and England. Within a short time the Otago authorities changed this to entirely free passages to secure the young women they wanted. From late 1862 fourteen immigrant ships delivered over 1,300 single female assisted immigrants to Dunedin.

This successful initiative by its southern neighbour naturally made things harder for Canterbury's recruiting efforts. Of all emigrants, single women were by far the hardest to attract, and none more so than English women. This was despite the fact that the 1841 and 1851 censuses had revealed that England's population had a significant surplus of women over men. All of her colonies, meanwhile, had exactly the opposite problem – too many men, and not enough women. Sending eligible young women to Britain's colonies therefore looked like a very neat solution to this contrasting imbalance. But, unlike Scottish and especially Irish women, single English women proved persistently reluctant to take up the challenge of emigration. Canterbury's emigration agent in London, John Marshman, was forthright about the challenge he faced when he wrote back to Christchurch in early 1862, *"this single women question presents greater difficulty than any other connected with Emigration."*[9]

To push Canterbury's cause, Marshman published a promotional booklet in London, *Canterbury New Zealand in 1862*, costing sixpence. It seems reasonable to suppose that Eliza Baker might have obtained a copy as she contemplated such a move herself. Marshman's pamphlet was full of detail about Canterbury's great progress and the prospects there for the right sort of emigrant, noting in particular the huge demand for female domestic servants and the likelihood that any girl who came would be married within the year to a man with much better prospects than she might attract in England. It also laid out the incentives on offer from the Canterbury Provincial Government to reduce the financial burden of the £17 fare (almost a year's wages for a domestic servant in London at the time) to Christchurch. While single men had to pay at least £5 up front, and repay the balance later, *"single women or families, consisting chiefly of daughters, are taken, if necessary, for a smaller present payment than any other description of persons …"*, sometimes in fact for no upfront payment.

Despite these efforts, however, Marshman's yield of single women for Canterbury's assisted immigration programme in the 1863/64 financial year was to be modest. Of a total of 2,590

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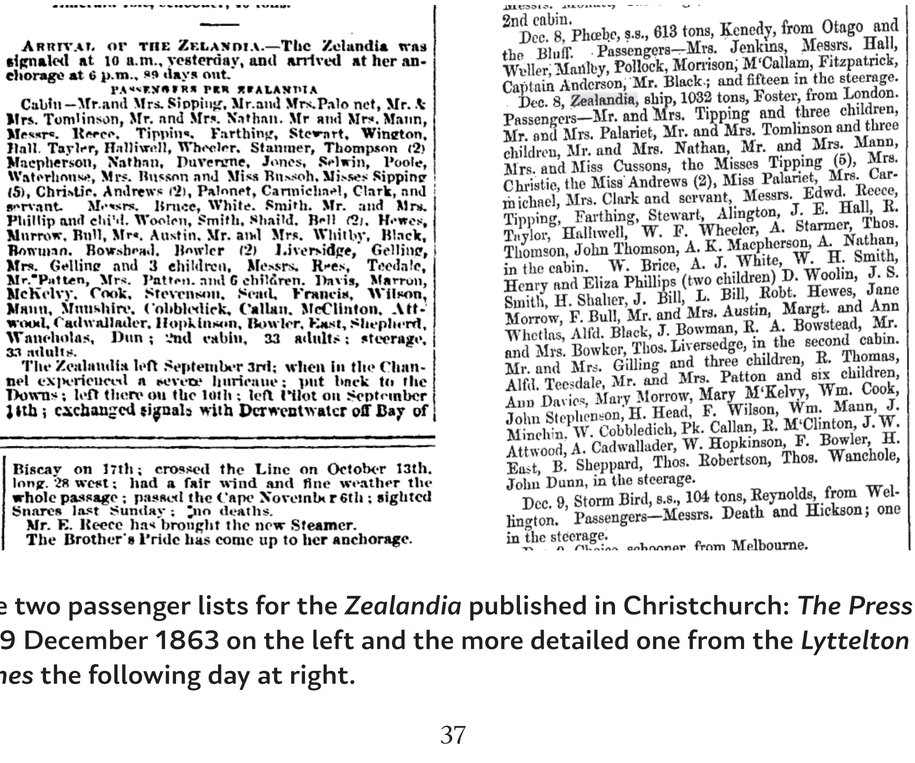
[9] Quoted in WOGC, p. 27.

'statute adults' carried to Lyttelton on ten immigrant ships in that period, just 349 of them were female domestic servants. Eliza Baker was not among their number either, having found a better deal than even this subsidised provincial government fare. She came instead as a servant to a first-class passenger on an independent vessel, the *Zealandia,* that sailed for Canterbury from London on 10 September 1863 with just 104 passengers aboard. This was a much smaller number than the complement on any of the official shipments of immigrants that year, which mostly carried between 200 and 400 passengers. It was also much smaller than the *Zealandia*'s usual capacity, perhaps because of the cargo she was carrying, which included the frame and fittings for a new steamship . The ship had made three previous voyages to Canterbury with emigrants, first in 1858 with about 400, then in 1869 with over 300 and finally in 1862 with some 280 passengers.

The smaller number aboard the *Zealandia* is important to our story. But the fact that Eliza was not an assisted immigrant means unfortunately that there is no surviving official record of her passage. Canterbury's archives have a marvellous holding of passenger details for all the immigrants the province assisted during the period where it controlled its own immigration programme, perhaps the most complete of any of the New Zealand provinces. Vessels where the shipping company arranged a completely commercial passage, which is what the *Zealandia's* voyage in 1863 was, leave no such official record. Or none that has survived in any case. There are, however, two separate lists of her passengers published in the Christchurch newspapers after arrival, one in *The Press* and the other in the *Lyttelton Times.*



ARRIVAL OF THE ZELANDIA.—The Zelandia was signaled at 10 a.m., yesterday, and arrived at her anchorage at 6 p.m., 89 days out.

PASSENGERS PER ZEALANDIA

Cabin—Mr.and Mrs. Sipping, Mr.and Mrs.Palo net, Mr. & Mrs. Tomlinson, Mr. and Mrs. Nathan. Mr and Mrs. Mann, Messrs. Reece, Tippins, Farthing, Stewart, Wington, Hall. Tayler, Halliwell, Wheeler, Stanmer, Thompson (2) Macpherson, Nathan, Duvergne, Jones, Selwin, Poole, Waterhouse, Mrs. Busson and Miss Bussoh, Misses Sipping (5), Christie, Andrews (2), Palonet, Carmichael, Clark, and servant. Messrs. Bruce, White, Smith. Mr. and Mrs. Phillip and child. Woolen, Smith, Shaild, Bell (2), Hewes, Murrow, Bull, Mrs. Austin, Mr. and Mrs. Whitby, Black, Bowman, Bowshead, Bowler (2) Liversidge, Gelling, Mrs. Gelling and 3 children, Messrs. Rees, Teedale, Mr. Patten, Mrs. Patten, and 6 children. Davis, Marron, McKelvy, Cook, Stevenson, Sead, Francis, Wilson, Mann, Munshire, Cobbledick, Callan, McClinton, Attwood, Cadwallader, Hopkinson, Bowler, East, Shepherd, Wancholas, Dun; 2nd cabin, 33 adults; steerage, 33 adults.

The Zealandia left September 3rd; when in the Channel experienced a severe huricane; put back to the Downs; left there on the 10th; left Pilot on September 14th; exchanged signals with Derwentwater off Bay of Biscay on 17th; crossed the Line on October 13th, long. 28 west; had a fair wind and fine weather the whole passage; passed the Cape November 6th; sighted Snares last Sunday; no deaths.

Mr. E. Reece has brought the new Steamer.

The Brother's Pride has come up to her anchorage.

2nd cabin.

Dec. 8, Phœbe, s.s., 613 tons, Kenedy, from Otago and the Bluff. Passengers—Mrs. Jenkins, Messrs. Hall, Weller, Manley, Pollock, Morrison, M'Callam, Fitzpatrick, Captain Anderson, Mr. Black; and fifteen in the steerage.

Dec. 8, Zealandia, ship, 1032 tons, Foster, from London. Passengers—Mr. and Mrs. Tipping and three children, Mr. and Mrs. Palariet, Mr. and Mrs. Tomlinson and three children, Mr. and Mrs. Nathan, Mr. and Mrs. Mann, Mrs. and Miss Cussons, the Misses Tipping (5), Mrs. Christie, the Miss Andrews (2), Miss Palariet, Mrs. Carmichael, Mrs. Clark and servant, Messrs. Edwd. Reece, Tipping, Farthing, Stewart, Alington, J. E. Hall, R. Taylor, Halliwell, W. F. Wheeler, A. Starmer, Thos. Thomson, John Thomson, A. K. Macpherson, A. Nathan, in the cabin. W. Brice, A. J. White, W. H. Smith, Henry and Eliza Phillips (two children) D. Woolin, J. S. Smith, H. Shaller, J. Bill, L. Bill, Robt. Hewes, Jane Morrow, F. Bull, Mr. and Mrs. Austin, Margt. and Ann Whetlas, Alfd. Black, J. Bowman, R. A. Bowstead, Mr. and Mrs. Bowker, Thos. Liversedge, in the second cabin. Mr. and Mrs. Gilling and three children, R. Thomas, Alfd. Teesdale, Mr. and Mrs. Patton and six children, Ann Davies, Mary Morrow, Mary M'Kelvy, Wm. Cook, John Stephenson, H. Head, F. Wilson, Wm. Mann, J. Minchin, W. Cobbledich, Pk. Callan, R. M'Clinton, J. W. Attwood, A. Cadwallader, W. Hopkinson, F. Bowler, H. East, B. Sheppard, Thos. Robertson, Thos. Wanchole, John Dunn, in the steerage.

Dec. 9, Storm Bird, s.s., 104 tons, Reynolds, from Wellington. Passengers—Messrs. Death and Hickson; one in the steerage.

Choice, schooner, from Melbourne.

The two passenger lists for the *Zealandia* published in Christchurch: *The Press* on 9 December 1863 on the left and the more detailed one from the *Lyttelton Times* the following day at right.

Eliza's name is not listed in either. We know that she was aboard, however, so these two lists are our only source to resolve another mystery. Who exactly was "*the well-off emigrating family who employed her*".[10]

According to G R Macdonald's *Dictionary of Canterbury Biography* Eliza came "*as a nurse girl with the Nathans*", a Jewish couple who were cabin passengers on the ship and appear on both lists. Stella Robins, however, states that *"she came out as a nurse girl for the Malhauses"*. Jill Preston repeats this as, "*working as a nurse girl for the family Malhaus."* John Fletcher and Mike Crean also reference the 'nursemaid' and 'nursegirl' status in their respective descriptions of Eliza's *Zealandia* passage without naming her employer. But as you can see above, there was nobody named 'Malhaus' aboard the ship[11] nor any name that looks like a reporter's misspelling of this name. A Victorian-era 'nursegirl/nursemaid' is clearly a role that involved the care of children but it's also evident from these lists that there were not many children aboard the *Zealandia*. The Provincial Government kept official statistics of incoming passengers (but not who they were) and this records only ten children among the 104 people aboard the *Zealandia* in 1863.

Three of them were younger members of the Patton family from County Down but they were in steerage class so they can be ruled out immediately. So probably can the two Phillips in the second cabin who are also described as'children'. Of the first-class cabin passengers only the Tippings and the Tomlinsons are recorded by the newspaper with 'children'; three each. That already comes to a total of eleven, a discrepancy from the official statistics that may reflect the way that 'children' were classified in the assisted passage programme (as those under twelve). But in any case, the Nathans definitely don't appear to have any. There is, however, one 'servant' listed among the first-class passengers, and only one. She is attached to a 'Mrs Clark' on both lists and I think we'd have to assume that this is none other than Eliza. Unfortunately I have been unable to determine who Mrs Clark might have been. With such a common surname and no other details to provide triangulation, it seems unlikely her identity can be recovered any further.

So, if this is correct, then Eliza was not a 'nurse maid' to children but a 'servant' to a married woman travelling alone (probably a widow), and her name was neither 'Nathan' nor 'Malhaus' but Clark. This meant that she travelled to New Zealand in some comfort, in the first-class cabin, and though she would have had to work for this privilege, supporting Mrs Clark in whatever way a domestic servant would have done so at that time, it would have been a lot more pleasant than travelling steerage on her own account. Moreover, during the roughly 96-day passage she would have had numerous opportunities to mix and mingle with her fellow passengers, including those from the second class cabin, and even those from steerage. This was often the case on immigrant ships but especially so on a passage like this where the numbers were relatively small. Fortunately, there are two first-hand accounts of the voyage from *Zealandia* passengers that have survived. Both were written by young men travelling in the second cabin, which as it turns out was also particularly relevant to Eliza's future.

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[10] John Fletcher.

[11] In fact, I can find no record of anybody named 'Malhaus' settling in New Zealand in the 19th century.

The first version of events takes the form of a daily diary and was written by Alfred Bluck, a 19-year-old from Leominster in Herefordshire. He wrote brief entries each day, from which we learn that the ship was almost afflicted by the very worst fate that could befall an immigrant ship – a fire at sea. During a storm off the Azores on 23–24 September the stove in the ship's galley set fire to the planking that it rested on. There followed a desperate struggle through the night to raise the stove to get at the burning wood and prevent it spreading down to the hold below where there was a quantity of sulphur in barrels. "*Some people very much frightened*" records Bluck's laconic entry, rather an understatement considering how disastrous an explosive fire at sea would have been. His friend 'Bob' also gets several mentions, mostly for drinking sessions or 'sprees' as Bluck describes them, and on one occasion being hauled before the Captain for 'writing love letters'. Who to?

There seems to have been rather a lot of drinking and associated high jinks among the couple of dozen young men in the *Zealandia's* second cabin. Fights were not uncommon either, including one stoush between the ship's doctor and one of the first-class passengers, which left the doctor with a black eye. More positively, there were also dances and musical entertainments, and competitive performances. One Saturday night some of the second cabin lads dressed up as what used to be called 'black and White minstrels' (something that would be totally unacceptable today) to entertain their fellow passengers. The captain was so impressed he sent them down a bottle of gin as a reward, possibly not the wisest move as a drunken night ensued and *"only a few made their appearance at [Sunday] service this morning"*. Another drunken prank a few weeks later, when Bluck threw another passenger's eating utensils overboard, however, saw sales of spirits being stopped altogether.

Amidst further accounts of fighting, feasting, fishing and shooting sea birds, and an all-night card session in the second cabin, Bluck fails to mention any of the women aboard the ship by name. He does, however, reference several of his fellow single men in the second cabin. Just a day before reaching New Zealand this included the exploit of an enterprising fellow by the name of 'A. J. White' who organised a couple of auctions for his fellow second cabin passengers to sell unwanted items before landing that apparently included such extraordinary things as "*revolvers, jewellery, rifles, pipes, books, scarfs, Spanish knives etc*

etc, and sold them cheap." Bluck himself acquired "*2 scarfs, 5 books, Waterproof hat and Cape cheap."* A surveyor by profession, young Bluck was unsuccessful in finding work in his field on arrival in Canterbury. Or perhaps he was just impatient and eager for adventure. Within a fortnight in Christchurch he had enlisted in the Taranaki Volunteers and spent Christmas Day 1863 on a schooner heading north to the war. He spent the first years of the 1860s shooting at, and being shot at, by rebel Maori in the North Island.[12]

The second first-hand account of the *Zealandia's* 1863 voyage takes the form of a long letter sent home by another second-class cabin passenger, John Needes Bowerman a 25-year-old chemist originally from Devon but who had been living in Taunton in Somerset before emigrating. Unfortunately the first eight pages of the sixteen-page missive have been lost and the story of the journey is only picked up the night before the ship was due to cross the Equator in mid-October. It is a very chatty letter, however, with lots of in-group references to family matters that are impossible to decipher but it seems to have been written to his sister 'Carrie', a 20-year-old draper's assistant back at the family home in Tiverton, Devon. It offers much fuller descriptions of many of the same events as described by Alfred Bluck, including the second cabin lads' "nigger *concert"* and the gin-soaked sequel in which Bowerman made rather a fool of himself and had to spend the next two days in bed recuperating.

Bowerman waxes lyrical about the magnificent sights of life on the vast ocean, with "*grand sunsets with such a glorious coloured sky and sea"* and exotic birds and fish so different to what English people were used to. He also reflects nostalgically on a trip to Ireland he had made with Carrie just before his departure, staying at Bantry in County Cork where their sister Mary had recently became a Sister of Mercy. In fact Mary and John Bowerman were converts to the Catholic Church, the only members of their Anglican family to make this very significant move, which would have marked them out as quite unusual members of English society and attracted more than a little opprobrium. Bowerman had company on the *Zealandia*, however, as Alfred White was also an English Catholic and actually a fellow parishioner of Bowerman's at their church in Taunton. Another cabin mate was William Brice, a 23-year-old hairdresser also from Taunton. In fact these three men had lived within a few blocks of each other in the Somersetshire town and must surely have decided on the plan to emigrate together.

On board ship, Bowerman, Brice and White shared cabin 3A. All the hi-jinks, drinking, and fighting amongst the second cabin fellows that Bluck described are corroborated by Bowerman's account. He adds more specific details too: *"Now, it so happened that Brice, White and I were up later that night on deck chatting to two of the 1st [Cabin] fellows and we were lamenting the want of some grog (which is not allowed to us, only to the Saloon). I had been having a glass of grog in the Hospital with the Dr in the evening so as I happened to have a key in my pocket I ran down and 'boned' the Whiskey bottle and we came down to our place and had supper of cold pork & pickles (all boned, likewise)."* Two passengers, an unpleasant pair of brothers who they had not been getting along with, reported them to the Captain, however, "*so there was an awful row*".

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[12] Bluck survived his military adventures and was joined in New Zealand by his parents in 1866. He became farmer and then a railway stationmaster, dying in Auckland in 1919 aged seventy-six.

The ship's Captain seems to have taken a reasonably indulgent approach to the group's 'practical joking' as he characterised it, perhaps reflecting the valuable role that Bowerman was playing by providing his medical skills to assist the ship's doctor. This involved keeping watch on sick passengers through the night, which is why he had had privileged access to the hospital quarters. This seems to have made for a disrupted routine for his cabin mates: *"We live most irregular lives. We go to bed by day very often & stay up all night, i.e. White and I & Brice. We make water boil over the lamp which is hung in the hatchway and have coffee at midnight. After this we either turn in until next day or go on the poop with the watch officer till 8 bells (4 o'clock) or perhaps all night. Anything to pass the time."*

There was one more Taunton native in the second cabin, Edmund Seaman Leversedge, who surprisingly isn't mentioned by John Bowerman at all. Leversedge was another 23-year-old surveyor and appears in John Bluck's diary when he 'caught and stuffed a storm petrel'. One imagines it would have been a different story if Alfred White had kept a diary. Because while Bluck and Bowerman seem to have had little interest in the women aboard the *Zealandia*, both White and Leversedge were quietly pursuing romances with two young ladies from either end of the ship's socially stratified company. That stratification was physical as well as class-based. John Bowerman describes, for example, how access to the ship's poop deck was generally restricted to the saloon or first-class passengers. *"We are not allowed there except when the Saloon Passengers are at their meals, but when they are in bed I get on my Galoshes so that I may make no noise and walk about with the 2nd mate who is a very nice fellow."*

The same sort of restricted access would also have applied to the ship's steerage compartment. Yet somehow, young people will generally find a way to circumvent such regulations when romantic attraction is involved. From the two accounts, it seems that all the passengers joined together on occasion for the night-time entertainments and dances on deck. In any case, Alfred White found his match in Eliza Baker, the young maid in saloon class, while Edmund Leversedge fixed his eye on a young Irish Protestant in steerage, Mary Eliza Patton. A Presbyterian from County Down, she was emigrating with her large family, and at twenty-one was the oldest of five daughters and one son who were going to the colony with their parents. We can only imagine how they managed their respective romances through the voyage but John Bowerman, skulking about at night in his galoshes, and Alfred Bluck, so fixated on boozing up with his mates, seem to have missed this drama entirely.

Shipboard romances, of course, don't always last the distance. In this case, however, marriages followed swiftly once ashore. Within months of their arrival, both Edmund Leversedge and Mary Ann Patton and Alfred White and Eliza Baker tied their respective knots. The first wedding was in the 'Scotch Church' (St Andrew's Presbyterian) in Christchurch on 2 March 1864 where Edmund and Mary Ann were the bride and groom, supported by their former shipmates, Alfred and Eliza, as their witnesses. Exactly two weeks later, on 16 March, the positions were reversed, with Alfred and Eliza being married by Father Chataigner in the Catholic chapel. It was an unusual example of ecumenical tolerance; an Anglican groom marrying in his bride's Presbyterian church but supported by a Catholic and an Anglican; with the same mix of faiths rearranged for the second wedding.

Crossing the vast expanses of ocean between Britain and New Zealand has often been described as a liminal space, where all the old world certainties began to fall away, and the new possibilities of life in the colony were foreshadowed. The surviving accounts tell us nothing specific about Eliza Baker's experiences aboard the ship, though family tradition has it that she struggled with the challenges of life at sea and that at journey's end she was unimpressed with Lyttelton.[13] Another version has it that she "*thought her heart would break … and if the boat had been returning then and there, she would have gone back to the old country.*"[14] I rather doubt this myself.[15] Though the journey had been sometimes rough – the heavy cargo seems to have made the ship roll uncomfortably – it was actually the fastest passage of the year and one of the safest.[16] Her heart was not broken so much as captured. Life ahead would be spent with the soulmate she had found on the ocean waves.

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[13] Stella Robins, p. 11.

[14] Jill Preston.

[15] A source quoting Eliza directly may yet prove me wrong on this.

[16] Bowerman notes that six ships that set off ahead of the *Zealandia* and arrived after it, and two of those vessels had high death rates from fever while the *Zealandia* had not a single case and landed all its passengers in excellent health.

CHAPTER 4

'Alf'

Who exactly was Alfred Joseph White, the entrepreneurial passenger in the second-class cabin who first captured Eliza's attention and then her hand in the three-month voyage to New Zealand? He was born in Taunton in Somerset on Christmas Eve 1836 and baptised at the Catholic chapel of St George there on New Year's Day 1837. His parents were Thomas White and Sarah Foote. They had married in 1833 in St Mary Magdalen (Church of England) parish church in Taunton, with Thomas's occupation being recorded as 'baker'. Thomas's parents were likely Joseph and Ann (also known as Nancy) White. Joseph White was a builder and he lived in Upper High Street, Taunton, which is likely the property later known as 'Ivy Green Cottage' that would pass first to Thomas and Sarah White, and then to Alfred's sister, their youngest surviving daughter Agnes.

Thomas and Sarah's wedding in 1833 being celebrated as a Church of England ceremony makes the history of the White family's Catholicism a little hazy to decipher. The Catholic records for baptism, marriages and burials in Taunton have not yet been made available online, so it is not presently possible to interrogate them closely for indications of the Whites' (or was it in fact the Foots'?) Catholic history but it is known that while the baptismal records begin in 1806, Catholic marriages only began to be celebrated there from 1838. An indexed transcription to the baptisms is available and it records Thomas and Sarah's first child as 'Alaria Fousa Sarah White' in a baptism celebrated at Taunton's St George's (Catholic) chapel in 1834. This is probably a misreading of 'Maria Teresa Sarah', which is the name she went by in later life. Other sources from earlier in her life just identify her as 'Therza' or 'Tereza'. The baptisms of the Whites' subsequent four children are also listed: Alfred as noted in 1837, sisters Agnes Angelica (born 1841) and Emily Anna (born 1844) in what must have been a double baptismal ceremony in 1844, and younger brother George Thomas White in 1847. 'Emily' appears elsewhere as 'Amelia'.

Whatever might be the nature of the White family's Catholicism, what we can say is that the period from Alfred's baptism in Taunton in 1837 until his departure for New Zealand in 1863 were very significant years for the English Catholic Church. After centuries of suppression, and active oppression, major changes were afoot for Catholicism in England. Some of the official penalties for Catholic affiliation and practice had been removed by law changes in 1778 and 1791, though many others remained. There followed a gradual relaxation of Catholic exclusion from public life in England and a steady increase in Catholic numbers and activity, boosted first by French Catholic refugees from the bloody revolution taking place across the Channel, and later by an influx of Irish Catholics that would swell markedly from mid-century. In 1829, after fifty years of agitation by English Catholic leaders came the Emancipation Act. It gave Catholic men (or at least those wealthy enough to qualify) the right to vote and to hold public office.

This period, beginning in the 1830s, also saw a movement back towards Catholic elements of the liturgy within the Anglican Church, a development that led to what became known as 'High Church Anglicanism'. It grew out of a spiritual revival at Oxford University, particularly the publication of a series of pamphlets *Tracts for the Times* between 1833 and 1841 that argued for the reinstatement of older Christian traditions in Anglican practice and advanced the notion that the Church of England was (along with Eastern Orthodoxy) one of three branches of the historic Catholic Church. Many leading 'Tractarians' as they were called, later transferred their allegiance to Catholicism, however, most notably John Henry Newman (now canonised as a saint) and Edward Pusey. The path they forged 'Romewards' would be followed by thousands of devout Anglicans over succeeding decades, adding both numbers and vigour to the ranks of the English Catholic

Church. This included numerous high-born Anglican women who became Catholic nuns (such as John Bowerman's sister) and even founded Catholic religious orders.

None of these developments were without controversy. The Relief Acts of the late 18th century sparked massive anti-Catholic agitation in London, the so-called Gordon Riots, where in several days of violence Catholic houses were attacked and chapels and churches and foreign embassies of Catholic countries were wrecked. 'No-Popery' remained a clarion call across Britain for much of the 19th century, stimulated by the growing numbers of poor Irish Catholics in the slums of all the large British cities, which dramatically increased England's Catholic population, and reacting negatively to each and every step along the way to greater Catholic freedoms. There was another surge of violence, for instance, in 1850 when the Pope re-established the official church hierarchy in England, appointing bishops and creating dioceses to replace the 'apostolic vicariates' that had been the basis of church organisation during the centuries of persecution. Anti-Catholicism was, in fact, a pervasive theme of public life in England throughout Alf White's early life. Being a Catholic attracted the same sort of opprobrium then that might be attached to being a Muslim in parts of Britain today.

Somerset was not a traditional area of Catholic strength. Yet Taunton, in the new diocese of Clifton, was nonetheless a fertile field of struggle around these issues through these years. The Taunton newspaper has many references to the sectarian controversies of the day in its pages through the 1840s and 50s. One of the few female writers of the Oxford Movement's *Tracts* was Augusta Drane, whose family were very hostile to her work. In 1850, however, she converted to Catholicism and was formally received into the Catholic Church at Taunton, an event we can imagine that thirteen-year-old Alfred and his siblings might well have witnessed. Augusta subsequently became a Dominican nun as Sister Frances Raphael and rose to be the Dominican congregational leader in England. Another Anglican convert with both Taunton and New Zealand connections was Alfred Luck whose seven children included Francis and John, both of whom were later priests in Auckland and the latter in fact becoming the fourth Bishop of Auckland diocese. Their three sisters were boarders at the Franciscan convent in Taunton (established in 1807 by Belgian nuns fleeing the French Terror) and two of them subsequently became nuns there.

The Luck children were almost exact contemporaries of Alf and his siblings. I can't establish whether any of the three White sisters were educated at the Taunton Franciscan convent but it is certainly possible, and even reasonably likely given their family's means. One Taunton Catholic that the Whites would definitely have known was their long-time parish priest, Canon John Mitchell. He took charge of St George's Catholic chapel in central Taunton in 1853, at which time the congregation was at least 300 strong and growing.

Seven years later he opened a brand new church of the same name only a few blocks from the various addresses where White family members are recorded as living. Canon Mitchell remained at Taunton until his death in 1899, by which time he had been ordained for sixty-two years and was the oldest priest in the Clifton diocese. He would certainly have been Alf's pastor during his adolescence, a critical time in the formation of a mature faith. We get some sense of his qualities from the tributes paid to Canon Mitchell on his death. This included acknowledgements from both the Somerset Congregational Union and the Taunton Free Church Council, two Protestant religious bodies that might have been expected to disdain the work of a Catholic priest. Instead an obituary noted that his "*long residence of the Canon in the town, and his association with public movements will cause him to be missed among all classes and creeds.*"[17]

Taunton itself is the county town of Somerset and was a modest-sized market town when Alf grew up there, with a population of just over 14,000 in 1851. Taunton's hinterland lies within a broad, sheltered valley around the River Tone, from which the town derives its name. This area contains rich agricultural land, intensively farmed since time immemorial and the basis of Taunton's economic importance historically. It is also the meeting point of various nodes of transport and communication, ideal for trade. There has been human settlement there since neolithic times, remains of numerous Roman sites, and continuous occupation since at least the 3rd century AD. One of its mediaeval manors was part of the estates of Glastonbury Abbey – as remember was Eliza Baker's village of Kington Langton – but the town itself belonged to the Bishops of Winchester. It was the site of significant battles in a number of English conflicts, including the Wars of the Roses and the English Civil War. In fact it was besieged several times between 1643–1645 and much of the east side of the town was destroyed in these years as a result.

Taunton prospered from the cloth trade from the 13th century onwards and became one of the largest and wealthiest towns in Somerset, third in importance behind only Bath and Bristol. The textile industry went into decline somewhat in the second half of the 18th century due to competition from mechanised mills in the north of England but this was balanced by the emergence of new silk mills and better communication networks. Notable developments in Alf's lifetime was the Great Western Canal reaching Taunton in 1839 and then the arrival of the railway in 1842. This improved transport access fostered a considerable amount of industrial and trade development in the town, including brewing and iron founding. And, like any mid-century English urban centre, it had the usual suite of trades and retailers providing goods and services to its residents, a sphere of economic activity in which at least three generation of Whites participated.

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[17] *New Zealand Tablet*, 23 November, 1899.

Let’s see then what the extant records reveal about the White family’s place in this scheme of things. Our first firm fix on them comes with the 1841 census. It reveals that Thomas White the baker had segued into Thomas White ‘confectioner’, living in East Street in central Taunton with his wife Sarah, both of them aged twenty-five (rounded to the closest five years), and their four young children: ‘Therza’ aged six, Alfred four, George three, and Agnes two months. They had a female servant and twenty-year-old Ann Foot also lived with them – possibly Sarah’s sister and almost certainly a close relative if not. The household seems to have also included two Irish women of ‘independent means’, a 50-year old female whose first name isn’t stated ‘ --- Sweetman’ and 20-year-old Margaret Sweetman, possibly lodgers. This census also asked a birthplace question that revealed that neither Sarah nor her sister had been born in Somerset, though where exactly they originated was not recorded. It seems fair to assume from these details that the Whites in Taunton were higher in the socioeconomic scale than the Bakers in their rural Wiltshire village.

When we jump ten years later to the 1851 census, we find the White family living at more or less the same address (still in East Street anyway). Alf’s grandparents also now appear in nearby Upper High Street, Joseph White being described as a ‘master mason’ who employed two men. Another Joseph White, a generation younger so potentially Alf’s uncle, is listed as a ‘journeyman carpenter’ in the same street. By this time, Alf’s father was also a ‘master’ in his confectionery business, and likewise had two employees, one an ‘assistant’ and the other as an ‘apprentice’, both men living with their master’s family. Forty-year-old Sarah is now revealed as having been born in Wiltshire, but where exactly is no more precisely identified than that. The girl ‘Therza’ from 1841 is now recorded as ‘Teresa’ and her age as seventeen, no occupation being recorded against her name. Ten-year-old Agnes and seven-year-old Amelia, meanwhile, are both recorded as ‘scholar’, while four-year-old George was evidently yet to begin any schooling. The family still employed the services of a live-in female servant but she was a teenager, and a different girl to the servant from ten years earlier. There is, however, no sign of Alfred in the Taunton household.

In fact, 14-year-old Alfred was far away in London, living (or maybe just staying) with an aunt and uncle. William and Sarah Richards lived in Bedford Row, in St Mary’s parish, Islington (renamed since 1964 as part of Barnsbury Street) just a couple of blocks north of the 18th-century church of St Mary the Virgin. William Richards was an ‘artificer’ (a skilled craftsman) at the Royal Mint, then based near the Tower of London not far away. The couple were childless and Alfred is described on the form as their ‘nephew’. I am presuming that Sarah Williams must therefore have been Thomas White’s sister, since his wife Sarah Foot would be unlikely to have a sister also called Sarah. The Richards were both born in Taunton which adds weight to that interpretation of the relationship since we know the Foots were originally from Wiltshire. I have not been able to find a marriage record for this couple so their personal religious affiliation remains unknown. One wonders, however, why Thomas and Sarah White might have sent their eldest son to their care in his teenage years.

Alfred could just have been visiting on the night of the census, of course, but if that were the case we might expect his name to have the annotation ‘visitor’ in the entry. It seems more likely that something like education or trade training might have been behind Alfred’s relocation to the metropolis. This must remain purely speculative until such time as a firm piece of evidence can be found to explain his presence in Islington. A local history written in 1854, however, suggests that the district was relatively rich in educational institutions, including a Proprietary Grammar School just along the street from the Richards’ home. It is intriguing to find that local history’s author, Samuel Lewis junior, was emphatic on his anti-Catholic principles, explaining that one of his chief motivations in writing his pamphlet was to counteract *“The aggressions of Rome, throughout the length and breadth of the land”* albeit, *“with love and pity for the souls of poor Romanists around us.”*

He goes on to describe a number of institutions in this small area of London whose primary purpose was to win Catholics away from the depravity of their church. This defensive response reflected the rapid growth in Catholic numbers in Islington, mostly from an influx of poor Irish immigrants, which had boosted numbers to the point that the Catholic congregation threatened to become one of the largest in the suburb. Lewis’s history notes the arrival of the first two resident Catholic priests in 1839 and their consecration of a new church, St John the Evangelist, *“with all the pomp of the Romish ritual”* in June 1843. He writes more approvingly of the formation of the Islington Protestant Institute three years later, *“to awaken the attention of Protestants to the progress of Popery; to call forth and unite their energies in opposing it … and to aim at the conversion of Romanists to the truth and liberty of the Gospel.”*

Not surprisingly in such a sectarian environment the restitution of the Catholic hierarchy in 1850 saw demonstrations outside the Catholic Church in Islington, with effigies of the Pope paraded past it on Guy Fawkes Day on their way to the bonfires. A newly arrived parish priest, Father Frederick Oakley, who was a friend of the Oxford Movement’s leader, John Henry Newman and himself a convert from Anglicanism, watched these anti-Catholic demonstrations from the windows of his house.[18] Perhaps Alfred White did too. His aunt’s home was only a kilometre or so from the church along some of Islington’s main thoroughfares. That presupposes he was already in Islington in 1850, of course, something we have no means of confirming. Likewise, there are no available records of Islington's various schools, which included a Catholic school attached to the church there, to establish whether Alfred spent time in any of them. He clearly got a reasonable education somewhere; his fine penmanship and business mastery all attest to that. On the other hand his writing style is less than fluent and his grammar a bit hit and miss. So a solid basic education was probably his lot, whether in London or back in Taunton, or a bit of both.

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[18] [https://parish.rcdow.org.uk/islington/about-the-parish/]

Our next fixed point of reference for Alfred is an advertisement in the *Taunton Courier* in February 1860 for "*A. J. White, Wholesale and Retail Currier and Leather-seller, Paul-Street, Taunton*". A currier was someone who cured or tanned hides, producing leather. In Alf's case, his sales pitch was targeted at "*Shoemakers and Harness Makers*" and his advert promised that the business "*has always in Stock a First-Class Show of Goods, at the Lowest Market Prices*." As a sideline, he was also an agent for the Sovereign Life Assurance Office. Not bad for a 23 year old, who had clearly completed an apprenticeship and qualified to practice this key Victorian era craft as a qualified tradesman. It is also another indication of the Whites as a family having a decent amount of capital that he had been able to set up in business on his own account at such a young age. We get another indication of this from the 1861 British census, held just a year later on the night of 7 April. This records Alfred as the head of his own household – the business premises in Paul Street, Taunton – with a 17-year-old apprentice, Walter Freeman, living with him there. It also records that he had a 'visitor' staying with him on census night, none other than his aunt, Sarah Richards, down from London.

The senior Whites, Thomas and Sarah, were recorded once again at (*No. 3*) East Street, Thomas now described as a 'pastrycook and confectioner'. Sarah White's birthplace is recorded this time as being 'Somerset, Wrantage', which is different to what she had given ten years earlier and a village just eight kilometres (five miles) from Taunton. There were two workers living with Thomas and Sarah, a 19-year-old journeyman pastrycook and a 17-year-old apprentice. There was also an older woman, Mrs Pidgeon a widow and retired innkeeper living in the house separately as a lodger. Any servants must have had the night off. None of the other White children were at home either. They were instead at their grandmother's home in nearby Upper High Street. It's a curious census entry however. Teresa White, the 24-year-old spinster who was the eldest member of Alf's family is listed as the 'Head' of the household and originally had 'Housekeeper' entered in the occupation column. This has been crossed out, however, and 'no occ' entered alongside it. Meanwhile her siblings, 19-year-old Agnes and 13-year-old George are both listed as 'scholar'.

That seems rather remarkable in Agnes's case; at a time when young women did not have the opportunity to pursue tertiary studies, nineteen is a fairly advanced age to still be classed as a 'scholar'. Missing altogether is Amelia White. She had died in 1851 aged seven from scarletina, shortly after the previous census. Their grandmother, Nancy (earlier recorded as Ann) White, was now seventy-nine years old, a widow, and 'Living on proceeds of ppty [property]'. Her birthplace is recorded as Brompton Ralph, a village in Devonshire. Also in the house in Upper High Street was an 18-year-old general servant and two lodgers, a 24-year-old Lieutenant in the army and a 74-year-old widower who was a retired fellmonger. You'd have to wonder why the White children were living at their grandmother's but perhaps they were simply staying with her. More striking is the fact that Nancy White died only days after the census enumeration, so perhaps they were looking after her in a final illness. She was buried in the Church of England burial ground of St Mary Magdalene parish church on 16 April, only days after the census details had been recorded on 7 April. Her address is recorded in the burial register as 'Shuttern', the name for the section of Upper High Street south of the Shuttern Bridge.

This may be a valuable clue to the location of 'Ivy Green Cottage' (or Ivy Green House), which is the name of the White family residence in Taunton that is referenced in New Zealand family accounts of their history. It is often stated as the place where Alf White was born but this seems to me to be a misapprehension. It is, however, where his parents and siblings would live after his grandmother's death in 1861, the property only passing out of the family's hands with the death of Alf's younger sister Agnes (who never married) in 1919. It is given the street number '29' in the next census in 1871, at which point Thomas, Sarah, George and Agnes were all recorded as living there. Thomas at fifty-five years old seems to have retired from business by then, having 'no occupation' entered on the census record. Sarah's birthplace is again recorded as 'Wiltshire'. Teresa had married by this time and was living with her husband Robert Mannings, a Post Office clerk in Exeter. Younger brother 23-year-old George was now a 'silversmith' and Agnes's occupation is left blank.

Alf was by then, of course in far-off New Zealand, married to Eliza and with children of his own. The reason I have set out the White family's circumstances in this level of detail is to show that he and Eliza came from contrasting segments of English society, as well as different religious backgrounds. And, likewise, that both of those factors were of real significance given England's rigidly stratified class system and its pervasive culture of anti-Catholicism. Taking that analysis a little further, the next English census in 1881 – the last one that would feature Alf's father Thomas (who would die in 1895) – records Thomas White's occupation by then as 'farmer', though he was still living at Ivy Green House in the middle of Taunton. This designation, of course, did not indicate someone who was busy sowing crops or tending to animals the way it might in New Zealand. Rather, he was someone who owned land and rented it out to others lower in the social scale (like the Bakers) who did that practical work.

Turning our attention back to Alfred, he seems to have been prosperous enough in his business (able to take on an apprentice for instance) but was clearly not satisfied with his long-term prospects in England. We have no information as to why he decided to come to New Zealand but it is possible to set that decision against the regular appearances in the *Taunton Courier* (and other newspapers published in Somerset) of information about the various Antipodean colonies. Just a few weeks after Alfred's advertisement for his currier operations in early 1860, for example, there was a recruitment notice in the paper for farm labourers to come to Canterbury, with generous assistance packages from the Canterbury Provincial Government. For anyone interested, there were no shortage of pamphlets, circulars and posters extolling the attractions of colonial destinations, including John Marshman's *Canterbury New Zealand in 1862*, already mentioned in relation to Eliza's decision to emigrate.

Marshman posed a question in his pamphlet: *"what sort of people ought to emigrate?"*. His answer was that *"anybody who has to make his way in the world by his own exertions may do it better in a new country than an old one if he has health and strength, as well as self-reliance enough to determine upon a pursuit, and energy enough to stick to it …"* To young men champing at the bit, in a tightly circumscribed society like mid-century England, this must have seemed like a clarion call. All of Alf's friends and future cabin mates on the *Zealandia* – John Needes Bowerman, William Brice, and Edmund Leversedge – were in their early twenties and actively pursuing a trade or profession that they might reasonably have assumed would be in demand in a developing colony. Bowerman was an assistant pharmacist, Brice a hairdresser, and Leversedge a surveyor's clerk. They all lived within a few blocks of Alf. Bowerman was a fellow Catholic, worshipping alongside him at St George's. With means enough to pay their own way, and conscious enough of their relative class privilege to stump up for second cabin passages rather than travel in steerage with the assisted immigrants, it was no random chance that saw these four Taunton lads on the make set off for New Zealand together.

Shutting down his business or selling it off, Alf has left one last breadcrumb for us to follow in assessing his life and circumstances in Taunton before his departure. In July 1863, just a couple of months before the *Zealandia* was due to set sail from Gravesend for Lyttelton, an auctioneer in East Street began advertising a sale of Alf's household furniture. On offer were a *"Pianoforte, Pictures, Books and other Effects, the property of A. J. White who is about to emigrate."* This is a fascinating snapshot of the young leatherworker's personal interests. You'd have to wonder how many other young men in Taunton owned their own pianoforte. The ‘Pictures’ and ‘Books’ also attest to a level of education and cultural attainments that would mark him off from the lion’s share of working-class emigrants struggling to get their passage money together to make the long journey south. What, we might wonder, had Eliza had to dispose of?

CHAPTER 5

Establishing 'A. J. White'

We now have Eliza and Alf, the two principal actors in our story, duly transferred from England to Canterbury where they would spend the rest of their lives. Fellow *Zealandia* passenger John Bowerman's letter home, quoted extensively in an earlier chapter, provides a few discreet glimpses of Alf White in a final section written after their landing at Lyttelton. He begins by asking his sister to *"see Canon Mitchell* [the priest at St George's church in Taunton where he and Alf had worshipped]*... letting him know ... that I am alright. I wish we had him over here. The people want a little training. Will you also call at Mrs White's and say that Alf is all right, and will send his letter by the next mail. He has partly written it but by some mistake it was left on board ship. He is gone there today, but will not be back in time to post tonight."* The letter then finishes with a postscript note that, *"White has sent a [news]paper home."*

Earlier histories of the Whites have left some brief references to this immediate arrival period that need to be considered at this point. We've already noted that Eliza is reputed to have been far from impressed with Lyttelton on first seeing it in December 1863. The 1930 Trust profile states that, "*she arrived at Lyttelton, a very lonely and homesick girl*". Mike Crean's account (2020) suggests that she almost wept in despair and apparently quotes Eliza directly, "*She wrote that she 'thought her head [heart?] would break' and that 'if the boat had been returning then and there (she) would have gone back to the old country."* This is taken directly (save for the head/heart typo) from Jill Preston's 1999 profile of Eliza. The Preston account then goes on to describe the foundation of the business that would be the life's work of Alfred and Eliza in Christchurch:

> ***"A.J.'s parents had an antiques shop in Taunton in England and it was there that he had learned his craft of furniture making. On his arrival in Christchurch he started his***

> *business of buying and selling used furniture. He would walk to Lyttelton with a pack on his back selling goods and would bring goods back to Christchurch to sell."*

Stella Robins' earlier version of the story has many of the same details though studded with some very precise facts scattered amongst some rather dubious generalisations about Canterbury at this time:

> *"Alfred had inherited an appreciation of beautiful antique furniture from his father and uncle for* ***they were dealers in used and antique furniture****. Ivy Green House in its latter years was turned into an antique shop – while the land behind the old homestead where Thomas White ran some cows was turned into a park. Refer letter to G. R. McDonald from Maud White, prior to 1960.)*
>
> *On the long journey by sailing ship Alfred decided there wasn't any great scope for his skill in leather in the new country* ***and had sold his tools before landing****. He had been taught the trade of a currier in England …*
>
> *From the tussock-clad hills which formed the crest of the Bridle Path, Christchurch in 1863, presented the appearance of a tiny country township.* ***A small cluster of buildings set in isolation amidst an almost endless vista of raupo swamp and native bush.*** *This was the first view 28 year-old A. J. White had of the place he had chosen to spend the rest of his life.*
>
> *Those pioneering days when things had to be done the hard way, he set up shop in a warehouse (Bethel Wares in High Street) buying and selling secondhand furniture, but* ***once a week he would walk over the Bridle Path with a pack on his back laden with things he had to sell to customers at Lyttelton as it was the population and commercial centre of the new province at that time. The same day he would make the return trip.*** *Turnover was small at the beginning, first year takings were 546 pounds – his reputation for honesty, integrity and the quality of the things he sold, business grew fast – 5 years on turnover had increased to 3,000 pounds…*
>
> ***About a year after he arrived in New Zealand*** *Alfred Joseph White married Miss Eliza Baker, a young Englishwoman. In her he found not only a devoted wife but as well, an astute helpmate in his business."*

That Maud White was the likely source of many of these details is clear from an article on the White company published in *The Retailer of New Zealand* magazine in 1953 to mark its 90th anniversary. This account is clearly the common source of both Jill Preston's and Stella Robins' version of events, which repeat its key statements. The 1953 article acknowledged that, *"the information concerning the early history of the firm was obtained in conversation with Miss Maud M. White, the founder's daughter, who is chairman of directors …"*. Precise details, such as the '546 pounds' given as Alf's turnover in his first year of business, could only have come from someone like Maud intimately involved in the firm and with access to its records. You would also have to assume that Maud White would be one of the best sources for information on her parents, presumably having heard such stories from them directly.

Yet when these stories assume the form they do here but contemporary historical records flat out contradict key details, it’s hard to know what we can safely accept as fact. I would cite a reflection on the same issue by an American historian discussing some of the apocryphal stories associated with someone as famous as George Washington: “*A tradition may grow and flower surprisingly; but it doesn’t grow like a kind of historical orchid. It must have its root in something definite. Very few traditions associated with a given location spring from nothing at all.*”[19] Likewise with family stories handed down as these have been; there is undoubtedly some definite fact at their root. They have just been twisted and turned somewhat in their transmission, slipping a little askew from the concrete details they attempt to pass on. It’s an inevitable weakness of oral tradition as a source of history.

Running through some obvious misapprehensions in Stella’s account above (repeated more briefly in Jill Preston’s version), for example, I can find no evidence at all that Alf White’s father and uncle were ever in business as auctioneers or second-hand/antique furniture dealers in Taunton. And in fact, the 1953 article actually states that Alf had “*inherited a love of antiques, the* hobby *of his father and his uncle.*” [my emphasis]. This is rather different to running an antiques business, though an understandable exaggeration. Alf White clearly did have a highly attuned feel for, and evident knowledge of antique furniture, as his later role in furnishing public events and theatrical performances was to make clear. His sense of taste and style in furnishing was to be a major asset to his business and to the whole Christchurch community.

As we have seen, however, the census records show that Thomas White was actually a baker and confectioner, and evidently reasonably successful in that line of business. He appears to have inherited Ivy Green House at 29 Upper High Street after his widowed mother died in 1861. At no point do the English records of this property that I have been able to find, suggest any later use of the house for business purposes. Thomas’s own father Joseph, and possibly a brother of the same name, were respectively a mason and a builder, crafts that take us close to that of the furniture-maker but still quite distinct from it. And while there is an extensive area of park and some farm land reasonably close to where Ivy Green House was located (and I think it is still there) they are not directly behind it and I’m not sure that Thomas would have been able to run cows there in the mid-19th century. He did however have some sort of farm – Alf refers to it in a letter home from

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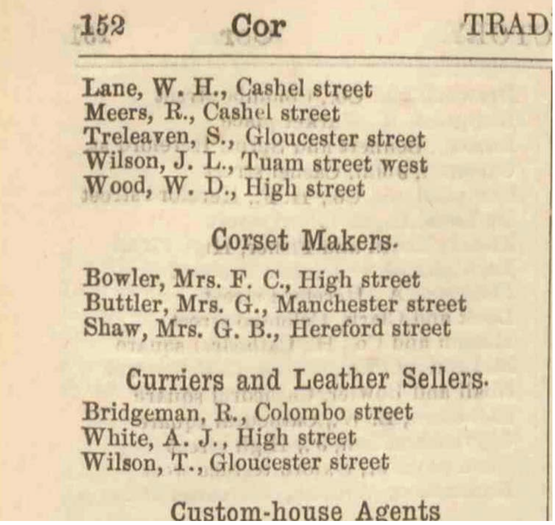
[19] Samuel Batchelder, quoted by Nathaniel Philbrick in *Travels with George: in search of Washington and his legacy,* 2010, p. 84.

Christchurch in 1893 describing his own acquisition of a small farming property as a hobby; “*but like poor old Dad, I find it not a very profitable affair*”.

It also seems a little unlikely that Alf would have sold off his tools of the trade en route to Christchurch, even if he was developing plans to try something else. He was after all on his way to a new colony, a place dependant on horse-power to an enormous degree and where working folk would need solid leather footwear on a regular basis. The skills of a currier, especially one like him that specialised in making leather for ‘shoemakers and harness makers’ as per his Taunton advertisement, would surely be in demand. On the other hand, perhaps he had had enough of that trade and going to Canterbury was his chance at a fresh start and re-inventing himself. Yet when he married Eliza – a scant three months after their arrival rather than ‘about a year’ later – his occupation on the marriage registration is listed as ‘currier’. Or is it ‘carrier’ as the transcribed version of the marriage register has it? Looking at the original register in the Catholic Archives, you can see that Father Chataigner, the French priest who married them, has made a real mess of this word in filling out the form. It actually looks like ‘corrier’, with an ‘o’ superimposed on an ‘a’ or ‘u’ underneath, so could be read either way. It possibly tells us how the word used by Alf to describe his occupation might have sounded when pronounced in a Somerset accent to a Frenchman understanding English as a second language.

It is also worth noting that the transcript of the St Andrew’s Presbyterian marriage register for the Leversedge wedding also gives Alf’s occupation as ‘carrier’ but this could also easily be a misreading of the original entry (which I have not seen). So, ‘currier’ or ‘carrier’? A key piece of evidence pointing to the former is an entry in a New Zealand trades directory by Stevens and Bartholomew for 1866–1867. By that time Alf had established his trading enterprise in High Street and duly appears in the list of Christchurch businesses as ‘White, A. J., general dealer, High street’. There is a second entry, however, as though for a discreet business on the same street and this one clearly states: ‘White, A. J. currier &c., High street.’ The businesses are both also listed separately in the Trades section of the directory with the latter one under ‘Curriers and Leather Sellers’. This leaves little doubt that Alf White



152 Cor TRAD

Lane, W. H., Cashel street
Meers, R., Cashel street
Treleaven, S., Gloucester street
Wilson, J. L., Tuam street west
Wood, W. D., High street

Corset Makers.

Bowler, Mrs. F. C., High street
Buttler, Mrs. G., Manchester street
Shaw, Mrs. G. B., Hereford street

Curriers and Leather Sellers.

Bridgeman, R., Colombo street
White, A. J., High street
Wilson, T., Gloucester street

Custom-house Agents

was keeping his hand in as a 'currier' through his first few years in Christchurch even as he transitioned to a new role as a 'General Dealer'.

The accounts of the Christchurch and Lyttelton contexts that Alf and Eliza came off the *Zealandia* to confront are also quite anachronistic. They read more like a description of the primitive settlements in both spots in the early 1850s when the Canterbury colony was just getting established. Things had moved on considerably by 1864. We only need to consult the same pamphlet that Eliza and Alf may well have read before deciding to migrate, John Marshman's *Canterbury in 1862*, to get an idea of the scale of the progress that had been achieved. Lyttelton, for example, had over 1,000 inhabitants by 1862 and its buildings included "*the custom house, banks, post office, gaol, hospital, police office, &c & c. There are also merchants' warehouses and offices, wharves, several hotels and plenty of retail shops.*" Christchurch had double the population (Lyttelton was not the commercial or population centre), and many more and grander buildings than its port.

Marshman, for example, notes:

> *"the provincial government offices, the council chamber, the land and survey offices, and others, forming together an extensive and imposing range of buildings; the supreme court, immigration barracks, banks, the club-house – one of the most handsome buildings in the town – the college, the Bishop's residence, &c &c. All the merchants have offices and warehouses here; and there is a weekly market. There are also hotels, boarding houses, livery stables, stores, and tradesmen's shops of every description; lawyers, doctors, and other professionals; an iron foundry, attached to which is an agricultural implement manufactory; a malt-house, several breweries, most of which brew indifferent beer; a pottery, which promises to be a highly useful institution; several extensive nursery gardens; flour mills both in the town and in the neighbourhood. Altogether its progress has been remarkable …"*

This was all in place two years before the Whites arrived. Lots more had developed in the meantime. So it was all very different from the "*small cluster of buildings set in isolation amidst an almost endless vista of raupo swamp and native bush*" that Christchurch's real pioneers would have confronted a decade earlier. Transport options between Lyttelton and Christchurch had also proliferated. The Sumner Road over the Port Hills for wheeled traffic opened in 1857. The main medium for the cartage of goods, however, was by boat using the Avon and Heathcote rivers to penetrate into the town site. There was a regular steamer service from Lyttelton to Ferrymead on the lower Heathcote River from 1858, and just days before Alf and Eliza's ship berthed at the port, on 3 December 1863, a railway line – the first in New Zealand – had opened from the wharf at Ferrymead to central Christchurch. It offered six journeys per day in each direction, with first-class tickets for

1s 6d and second-class for 1s 3d. From Lyttelton, goods and passengers would travel on small boats of various kinds over the dangerous Sumner Bar, and then tranship to this historic first railway at the Ferrymead wharf. Work was also under way on a tunnel beneath the Port Hills that would subsequently connect the Christchurch railway directly to the port – it would open in 1867.

How did Alf and Eliza make the journey from Lyttelton that first time? It's pretty hard to imagine them walking over the hills via the Bridle Path like the Canterbury pilgrims had had to do in 1850. Eliza's employer would certainly have arranged a more comfortable means of travel for herself and her servant. Alf and his friends likely took the river route, transporting their luggage for a new life in the colony with them via boat and then perhaps riding the new railway into Christchurch itself. The following year, when his second-hand furniture business was up and running, he would surely have used the same option to transport goods between Christchurch and Lyttelton. The idea that "*once a week he would walk over the Bridle Path with a pack on his back laden with things he had to sell to customers at Lyttelton*" strains credulity. Quite apart from how inefficient that would have been, what scale of furniture wares could have fitted into a pack on his back (or even on a cart) and returned sufficient profit to justify such an arduous trek?

Where precisely they went on arrival in Christchurch remains a mystery. Eliza presumably followed her employer to wherever she found accommodation and continued in her role as a domestic servant, at least for a time. Alf and his friends could have taken lodgings in any number of places in the rapidly expanding town. They were following a well-worn path for new arrivals to the burgeoning colonial settlement but unlike the hundreds of assisted immigrants who had arrived in Lyttelton on the *D G Fleming* in the same week, they had to shift for themselves from the outset. The immigrants had shelter and sustenance provided for them at the immigration barracks in Lincoln Road by the Provincial Government as part of their assisted passages until they got their start. The Taunton lads – Alf White, John Brice, John Bowerman and Edmund Leversedge – having paid their own fares to Canterbury and travelled in second-class cabins rather than steerage, had both higher aspirations and greater means to achieve them.

Our first firm fix on Alf and Eliza in Christchurch is from their witnessing Edward Leversedge and Mary Patton's wedding on 2 March 1864. The transcript of the St Andrew's marriage register has 'Alfred J. White, High Street, carrier' [likely a transcription error for 'currier' as noted above] and 'Eliza Baker, High Street, spinster'. Their own marriage details a fortnight later have no location details for either party. They do, however, have the twin declarations required for a 'mixed marriage' like theirs to be celebrated in a Catholic ceremony at that time. Alf made his oath, promising in the French priest's rather awkwardly phrased

English, *"in the presence of God and witnessed never to depart from my religion which is the Catholic, to see that our family, if God grants be reared up in the same faith and to which if can lead my wife to it."* Eliza ('Lysa' in Father Chataigner's version) likewise promised *"in presence of God and witnessed never to oppose my husband to live according to the Catholic faith and have our offspring reared up in the same."* Ironically, Alf's witness to this oath was the Anglican Edmund Leversedge, while Eliza's was the Ulster Presbyterian Mary Patton.

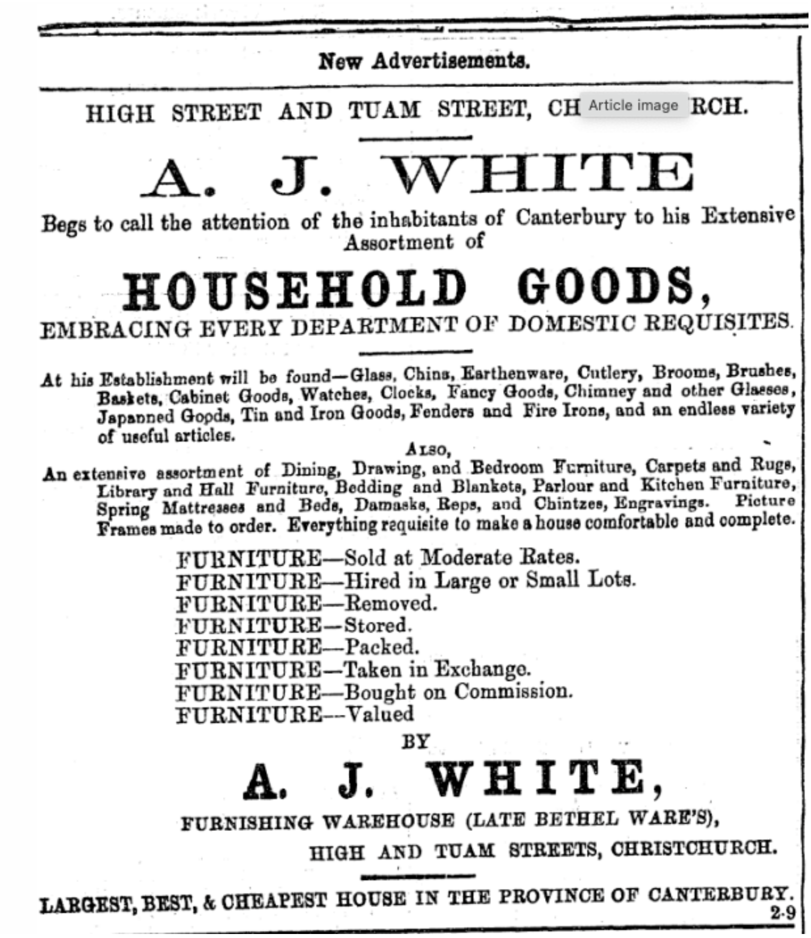
The family tradition of Alf selling off his trade tools on the ship out, whether accurate or not, does foreshadow an early inclination on his part to change up his career options. Perhaps we can see in his auction activities in the last phase of the voyage the direction he wanted to take in making a new life in the colony. There may even have been an uncle in the furniture trade back in England too that I have not been able to identify where he might have gleaned some relevant experience. However it played out, and whatever Alf's inspiration was, it was not many months into 1864 before the first seeds of this new business were being planted. Maud White's anecdote about the small first-year turnover seems too precise a detail not to be rooted in fact. A Christchurch trade directory, published by Doyle and Jackson in August 1864, provides confirmation. It lists 'White, A. J., general dealer, High Street', and locates the business on the first block of High Street from its juncture with Ferry Road and St Asaph Street, the first address on the 'left hand side going north'. It was the beginning of a long association with this central city area.

In September 1864 Alf placed a series of advertisements in the *Lyttelton Times* newspaper describing himself as a 'Broker, &c., Near Barrett's Hotel' (which was on St Asaph Street near Ferry Road) and offering for sale *"A first-class piano, by Broadwood and Sons, the late property of J. Hamilton Ward Esq."*. Hamilton Ward was one of the original Canterbury settlers. He had come out on the *Charlotte Jane*, one of the famous 'first four ships' of 1850, at the age of 17, the youngest of three brothers from an Anglo-Irish family from Killinchy in County Down on the ship. When his two older brothers drowned in 1851, Hamilton lived for a time with the Godleys. In other words, he was a very well-connected young man and also one of the wealthier Canterbury pilgrims. By 1864 he had a strong track record of success in various Canterbury ventures, including land development at Rangiora and establishing Christchurch's first brewery. He then decided to make a journey to England to buy sheep, hence his 'selling up' and disposing of the piano in September 1864.

It may be a rather long bow to draw, but I wonder whether Alf's obtaining this important commission – one that would have marked him out to class-conscious Cantabrians – might have had something to do with his friendship with the Leversedges. You see Mary Eliza Leversedge's family, the Pattons, were also from Killinchy in County Down, as were a very significant number of early Canterbury settlers in fact. Whether these shared Irish origins were sufficient to cross the class and religious divides (the Wards were gentry and Church of Ireland, the Pattons tenant farmers and Presbyterians) in the colony is hard to say. But there was another more definite Leversedge connection to the Whites' early business venture. The Leversedge family history records a story handed down *"that A. J. White established his first business with £50 borrowed from Edmund [Leversedge]."* Edmund had funded his migration with a bequest from his grandfather and is thought to have had more than £200 with him on arrival. This was a considerable sum of money at a time when wage rates for farm servants, ploughmen and shepherds in Canterbury were £50–£60 per year.

Having some additional capital to draw on would certainly have been a help. But Alf undoubtedly also had resources of his own. He had, after all, already run his own business back in Taunton and you would imagine that he might well have also enjoyed some financial backing from his parents. It seems clear in any case that he was a man of considerable business acumen and someone whose personal integrity was obvious to all. According to Stella Robins' account, within five years turnover had grown to £3,000 per annum, an almost fivefold growth in that short period. Newspaper reports regularly mention shipping consignments through the 1860s for 'A. J. White', including bales of leather (for the currier business presumably) and drapery as well as items of furniture, an indication that he early moved on from trading second-hand goods to selling new material sourced from around New Zealand and abroad. He also involved himself in civic affairs and politics; not as a politician himself but rather as someone putting his name and reputation behind others via public 'requisitions' for electoral candidates, a common practice in this period.

Things stepped up a gear in early 1870 when the Whites moved further along High Street and took over a two-storey wooden warehouse on the Tuam Street corner. Formerly Bethel Ware's drapery, clothing and furniture store, his widow had sold out running the store for a few years after Bethel's death in 1865. Moving into these much larger premises represented a substantial expansion of the Whites' business and indicate considerable ambition for its future. You can see in the advertisement below, from the *Lyttelton Times* on 9 February 1870, something of the scale of their new enterprise and the breadth of its wares. The claim to be the 'Largest, Best, & Cheapest House in the Province of Canterbury' was probably at this stage more an aspiration than a reality. In due course, A. J. White's would become better known for the quality of its stock than for the cheapness of its prices. It would, however, substantially achieve the goal to be the 'largest' and 'best' home furnishing store in Canterbury. It would also become a renowned manufacturer of locally produced furniture. All that lay in the future. For now though, moving into the large new corner site must have been something of a gamble.



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2·9

This is not the history of A. J. White Limited, however, but of Eliza White. So where did she fit into all this? You’d have to think it must have been a whirlwind of change and excitement for her as she was swept up in Alf’s new endeavours, supporting him as best she could and no doubt absorbing a host of things that were altogether new to her. Setting up a small trading enterprise in pioneer Christchurch was a world away from her humble family background in rural Kington Langley or life ‘below stairs’ in the bustling metropolis of Victorian London. As they made their first home together above the rented business premises in High Street, she also had another aspect of Alf’s worldview to come to terms with. He had proven true to his oath before Father Chataigner to try and lead Eliza to embrace his Catholic faith. On 10 December 1864, in a ceremony that was again conducted by the French priest (no doubt also responsible for Eliza’s catechesis), she was formally ‘received into the church’. The couple were now one in mind and body.

CHAPTER 6

Family and business life, 1864–1879

The Whites lived on site, at the corner of Tuam and High Streets, 'above the shop' as it were and fronting Tuam Street, for a considerable period from the time of their marriage. Electoral rolls give the leasehold section there as Alf's place of abode right up until 1880. From 1873, however, the rolls also record him as the freehold owner of a house and land at Sumner. It was the beginning of a long association for the Whites with that seaside suburb and from 1880 Sumner was given as Alf's place of residence. Whether they actually lived there for all that time is far from clear, however. Alf was advertising a house at Sumner for rent in 1875, and appealing for the return of a cow lost from 'Barbadoes Street' in another advertisement in 1876 so they may have periods when they lived elsewhere, especially during building work at High Street. This uncertainty about where the Whites even lived is a good indication of how difficult it is to pin down basic details of their lives.

Notwithstanding that Alf's business, church and civic activity very quickly made him a figure of note in Christchurch – and led to hundreds and hundreds of reference to those activities in the Christchurch newspapers – the nitty gritty of his and Eliza's domestic lives remains very hard to recapture. Eliza appears occasionally in the newspapers in her own right too, usually for some philanthropic or church activity, but she remains a very shadowy figure nonetheless. For a biographer, capturing the essence of anyone's life is challenging. Fleshing out the private life of a 19th-century woman is almost impossible, especially one who left behind no personal letters or diaries (or none that I have been able to locate).

The two incontrovertible features that would surely have shaped Eliza's daily life in this period more than any other were pregnancy and motherhood. She would in fact spend exactly half of the fifteen years between 1864 and 1879 pregnant; approximately 90 of the 180 months of that period for ten known pregnancies. Eliza gave birth to her first live baby on 5 February 1865, a respectable eleven months after their wedding. The child, a daughter, was baptised by Father Chataigner on 7 March and recorded in his baptismal register as 'Edath Maud'. The civil registration of the birth corrects this to 'Edith Maude' but what happened to the child thereafter is unknown. She does not appear in subsequent records of the family so presumably died in infancy, though there is no official death registration for her or any record of her burial.

Further babies followed at regular intervals thereafter, and all recorded in the baptismal registers: 'Cecily Magdalen Sarah', born on 26 February 1866 was next and survived to adulthood to become the oldest member of the family as it is remembered. One interesting detail for Cecily was that Alfred and Eliza placed a birth notice for her in the Christchurch *Press* and this helpfully recorded that she had been born 'at High Street'. If only they had continued this practice for all the subsequent babies, we would have a solid fix on the family's residential location throughout the period. Alas, this is the only such notice I can find. Eighteen months passed before Mary was born, on 8 September 1867, then about the same period until the only son of the family appeared, Alfred Thomas, born on 29 April 1869. He was followed by Catherine, on 14 December 1870, and Francis Josephine on 21 September 1872.

That makes six babies in just seven years, rather a hectic schedule by any standard. It's worth remembering too that infant mortality rates at that time, and even more significantly for our story, the rate of maternal mortality in childbirth, were very different to what they are in our time. Losing a child in infancy was absolutely to be expected in the 1860s, regardless of a woman's material circumstances. Indeed, losing a few was not at all unusual. One in eleven Pakeha babies died before their first birthday in New Zealand between 1861 and 1899.[20] It was also common for mothers to die in childbirth, with medical understanding of the dangers of infection only just gaining ground. As historian Alison Clarke has written in her study of 19th-century childbirth in New Zealand: "*This was an era before the registration of midwives, before hospital birth became the norm, before 'safe' Caesarean sections, before antibiotics, before the Plunket Society, before proven infant formulas and before effective contraception.*"[21]

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[20] Alison Clarke, *Born to a Changing World: childbirth in nineteenth-century New Zealand*, 2012, p. 215.

[21] Ibid., p. 9.

Every time a 19th-century woman went through a pregnancy therefore, she was in fact taking her life in her hands and exposing both herself and her baby to considerable risk. A comparison with modern New Zealand statistics suggests that the risk of death in childbirth were over fifty times more likely then than now. Most colonial Pakeha women were attended by a midwife for the birth, though as the Whites became increasingly prosperous they might have been among the better-off class who used the services of a doctor. There were a few medical men in Christchurch advertising their services as 'surgeon and accoucheur' in this period, the latter term indicating their expertise in delivering babies. Whether by midwife or doctor, however, delivery usually happened at home. It was followed by an extended period of bedrest or 'lying in' as it was called during their 'confinement', usually for a week or so after the birth.

For those who could afford it, and I expect that included the Whites, the services of a 'monthly nurse' was employed to provide support for the first few weeks as well. Her services would have supplemented the household domestic staff that the Whites employed from an early point. We know, for example, that Miss Catherine Glazer, was Eliza's servant from about 1867 and remained in her household until she died at 'Compton' (the White's grand house in Opawa) at the age of seventy in October 1907. That remarkable period of forty years' service suggests that Eliza was probably a pretty good employer. Perhaps her own early years as a servant in other people's homes gave her a degree of empathy for her employees as people. Alfred seems to have had a similar quality, judging by the many reports in the Christchurch newspapers over the years of employees in his business who had been with him for many, many years.

Catherine Glazer was probably from County Kerry in Ireland, and though born a Protestant, had also become a Catholic 'in early life' according to an obituary notice in the *Tablet* newspaper. She must have become very close to the White family. When Eliza made her will in March 1907, she left Catherine an annuity of £100 – the same amount she left to her sister, and her niece in England. Since Catherine died seven months later, she never received her bequest from Eliza. However in her own will, made just before she passed away, Catherine left the considerable sum of £300 herself to the Bishop of Christchurch to reduce the debt on the new Christchurch Cathedral. In this she was obviously hand in glove with her mistress who made a similar bequest. Her status as virtually a member of the family is also suggested by the fact that Catherine chose Maud White to be her sole executrix in 1907 and left it to Maud to distribute all her clothes 'to the poor as she may deem fit'.

Despite having the assistance of servants, looking after her babies, and then her growing brood of children, would undoubtedly have been her main focus in this period.

It is worth noting too that, as Dr Clarke points out, pregnancy was kept as a private matter in 19th-century colonial New Zealand. There are very few photographs of pregnant women from that time and women who were visibly pregnant avoided appearing as such in public. Euphemisms such as 'in the family way' were used to refer to pregnancy in letters and diaries, which seems to have been seen as a state that was somehow 'ugly' and offensive to the eye. "*Pregnancy provided clear evidence that a woman was a sexual being. Furthermore, 'respectable' women, from the highly fertile Queen Victoria to her colonial subjects, sometimes felt that frequent pregnancy revealed the animal nature of a woman; she was like a breeding cow or dog.*"[22]

Eliza did very well then to come through her early childbearing years apparently safe and well. By the end of 1872, she was looking after five children under the age of seven. Sadly, she did in fact lose one more; the new baby Francis Josephine died on 7 January 1873, aged just three months. A death notice in the *Lyttelton Times* described her as the White's 'youngest daughter'. This wasn't the end of Eliza's pregnancies but there were no more babies for a two-and-a-half year period after Francis's death. That might not seem like much of a gap but it does match up with a significant period of change in the family's life. Because in 1873 they decided to sell up the store in High Street. Family accounts suggest there was a plan to relocate to Wellington. I can't find evidence that they actually moved to Wellington at any point but the sale of the business was a very public event and easily documented.

In its first eight years, A. J. White's had gone from strength to strength and expanded its range of wares considerably. In October 1871 a large advertisement appeared in *The Press* acknowledging the support received from Christchurch customers to date and detailing the comprehensive array of products now on offer, from carpets and flooring, through beds, chairs and every type of furniture, to china, cutlery and brushware. Having just purchased the entire stock of one of his business competitors, Alf was touting his store as "*one of the most complete furnishing marts to be found in the colony, the stock being so extensive that purchasers may at once select any article they can possibly require, suitable for any class of house.*"[23]

This was no idle boast. Alf had proven adept at sourcing stock, mostly imported from abroad, and even better at promoting his personal sense of taste and style. He did this by generously 'furnishing' public events with his stock, a practice he would continue for years and which brought him regular publicity of the most desirable type. In the early years, it was principally philanthropic and community events that got the benefit of Alf's superb decorating skills. Later he would do the same for theatrical productions, receptions for V.I.P visitors to Christchurch and for new builds, especially hotels (Cokers and Warners among them). The flow-on benefit to his business from the public acclaim this attracted – frequently reported in newspaper descriptions of these settings – no doubt brought a steady stream of customers through the doors at High Street. It created a profile of a very public-spirited businessman, undoubtedly a genuine reflection of Alf's character but also a rather canny promotional strategy.

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[22] Ibid., p. 18.

[23] *The Press*, 4 October, 1871.

An article in the *Retailer of New Zealand* in 1953 records some of Maud White's memories of her parents' business and includes the detail that 'takings' had increased from that first year sum of just £546 to a little over £3,000 in 1868 and £4,264 in 1869. That steady upward trajectory must have continued to the point where Alf White decided he'd made enough money to enable a change of tack. In July 1873 he sold the business as a going concern to his friend and fellow Christchurch businessman Isaac Sheath. Like Alf, Sheath was English, and a Catholic. He had in fact 'stood in' for Father Chervier as the godfather of Alf and Eliza's only son Alfred Thomas when he was baptised in 1869 (the French priest performing the ceremony so unable to play the second part). The two men were both prominent among the small leadership cadre of Canterbury's lay Catholics and undoubtedly close acquaintances.

Sheath already had a business making clay pipes in central Christchurch, his yard further along Tuam Street on its junction with Colombo Street. He likewise had a business as a wool scourer and fellmonger at Heathcote and had also invested in coal mines at land in Malvern. The *Macdonald Dictionary of Canterbury Biography* reveals that Sheath was a partner in a well-known firm of gunmakers in Birmingham and had emigrated to Christchurch in 1861 with his wife and family, and "*brought a good deal of capital out with him which he lost bit by bit*". He seems to have been a very decent sort of fellow but pretty abysmal at business. The coal venture, for example, was a complete bust, the coal seam at Malvern never proving of a quality good enough for commercial purposes. In buying A. J. White's in June 1873, Sheath opted to carry it on under the name 'A. J. White & Co.' and requested in advertising that its customers continue the support they had given the firm hitherto.

You would have to assume that in selling the business, the Whites had to move out of their on-site accommodation, if they were still living above the shop. Where they might have moved to is not clear but Alf had probably already begun the acquisition of properties in the central city that would become a major engine of his accumulation of wealth later on. There were no doubt any number of residential options for the Whites in Christchurch.

In any case, freed from his commitment to run the store, Alf decided to make a trip back to England, presumably his first return there since emigrating ten years earlier. Eliza opted not to go according to the family stories, though the challenges of taking five small children – Cecily the eldest was just seven and the Catherine the youngest only two and a half – half way across the world by sea must have made a pretty compelling case for her to remain in Christchurch anyway.

The family histories offer a couple of different versions of this episode. Stella Robins wrote, "*Having sold the business [in 1875] Eliza White decided not to go to England and A. J. White went on his own for 18 months collecting while he was there 300 pounds worth of debts owing to him. On his return he and Eliza went to Wellington with the idea of setting up in the wholesale trade.*" Jill Preston had a slightly different account. "*In 1875, the business was doing very well and the Whites decided to sell. Following this, A.J. went back to England for a visit. Eliza didn't want to go so she stayed home and collected bad debts owing to them. She collected over three hundred pounds. When A.J. returned they went to live in Wellington.*" The 1875 date, Alf's 18-month long sojourn in England and the £300 sum of debts recovered there are all details that originally appear in Maud White's 1953 interview for A. J. White's 90th anniversary.

Contemporary records enable us to correct some of these details. The firm's sale was actually in June 1873. Advertisements in the Christchurch newspapers requested settlement of accounts owing for several months thereafter. It's impossible to say whether it was Eliza or Alf who managed to recover the £300 that was passed down in family memory but it seems more logical that the money was recouped from Christchurch customers rather than English suppliers. On 10 October 1873, 'Mr A. J. White' was aboard the Royal Mail Steamship *China* when it left Melbourne bound for Brindisi. His fellow cabin passengers included Bishop James Goold of Melbourne, on his way to Rome to organise the creation of new dioceses in Australia and where he would soon be raised to the status of Archbishop of Melbourne. No doubt they would have had lots to talk about on Catholic affairs in the colonies to pass the time at sea (somewhat different to the chat of the young bachelor's previous ocean voyage with his pals from Taunton). Seven months later, on 7 April 1874, another passenger list records Alf's return from Melbourne on the steamship *Otago* bound for Lyttelton. This time he was accompanied by his younger brother George.

We can only guess how Alf had passed the months back in England bookmarked by these two journeys. The focus, presumably, was personal rather than commercial since he was no longer in business. Having said that, his plans for the future might well have led to a circuit of visits to suppliers in Britain to cement relationships built up from a distance over the previous decade. Personal connections would add to the potential of future trade opportunities. Alf also had money in hand and might well have looked for opportunities to invest some of it in England (his will would later reference 'my freehold leasehold and copyhold estates situated in England'). Back home in Taunton, however, there was family to visit and no doubt it was something of a triumphal return. Ten years on from his departure for the Canterbury settlement, Alf was returning as a highly successful colonist, wealthier than he could ever have expected to become as a currier in Taunton, a man of substance in his adopted home, his life enriched by a wife and growing family to boot.

Gathered at Ivy Green House on Upper High Street, Taunton, would have been his ageing parents Thomas and Sarah, single brother George, and their unmarried younger sister Agnes. Older sister Teresa undoubtedly came from her home in Exeter with her husband Robert Mannings and their four young children for a reunion and introductions. Alf would have had much to tell. News of his wife and family obviously. But also a proud account of how he had established his business and prospered so dramatically in the years he had been away. For 24-year-old George, a trained silversmith working as a jeweller in Taunton, Alf's testimony of the opportunities available in Christchurch must have been compelling. At a time when New Zealand's economy was booming thanks to the stimulation of Julius Vogel's ambitious public works and immigration programme, more people were following the call to emigrate to the colony than ever before. He decided to join them.

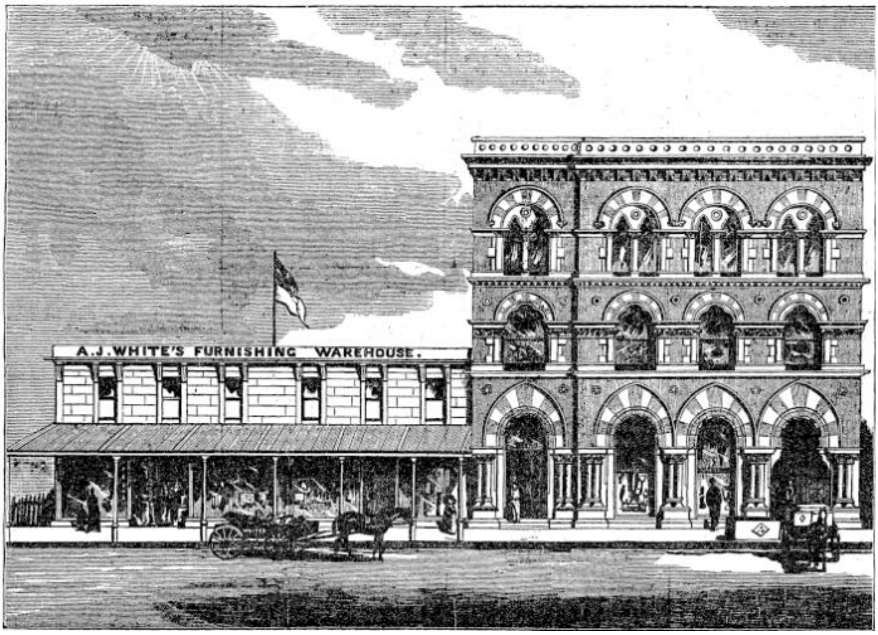
Not for the White brothers, however, the long journey south on one of the New Zealand Government-sponsored sailing ships. Every one of the several journeys that Alf would make to and from Britain for the rest of his life would be in comfort and at speed; cabin class on steamships via Australia. It is interesting, by way of contrast, that none of Eliza's extended family seem to have followed her to New Zealand. As English agricultural labourers, domestic servants and the like, the Bakers were exactly the sort of immigrants that Vogel's assisted passage scheme was all about attracting to the country in the 1870s. A 'nomination' from Eliza in Christchurch for subsidised fares would likely have been rubber-stamped by the New Zealand recruiters in England. Or, she could simply have paid their fares. Either way, her success in the colony ought surely to have made further Baker family emigration at least a consideration.

There are lots of possible reasons why that never happened. One is that the other Bakers were quite happy where they were; as noted previously none of them seem to have moved very far from their native Wiltshire. Emigration remained an ambitious undertaking in the 1870s, an option for the adventurous or the desperate, and not something that the majority of English people ever contemplated, despite the thousands who left. It could also be that Eliza was not that keen on her siblings or their children joining her in Christchurch. After all, she had taken a big step up the social ladder in marrying Alfred White and had become an upwardly mobile middle-class woman on her way to becoming someone of note in a very class-conscious Canterbury settlement. Memories of Kington Langley and her humble origins there might have been something Mrs White did not really care to emphasise, or be reminded of by other members of her extended family joining her in New Zealand.

Be that as it may, Alf's return to Christchurch in mid-1874 was followed fairly quickly by Eliza falling pregnant again. It was the beginning of another 'run' of pregnancies and childbirths in quick succession. Maud Magdalen White was born on 26 March 1875. Rose Eliza White followed in 1876 (her baptismal record contains no precise date of birth), Beatrice Joseph on 2 April 1878 and the final child, Martha Mabel, on 2 October 1879. These additions to the family no doubt account for most of Eliza's time and energy for the rest of the 1870s and beyond. Alf meanwhile was quickly back behind the reigns at White's Furniture Warehouse. Isaac Sheath had taken less than eight months to run the business into the ground and declared bankruptcy in February 1874. The Whites didn't have much time to explore any move to Wellington, if they ever contemplated such. Sheath apparently approached them to see if they wanted to buy the business back pretty much as soon as Alf was back in Christchurch.

The Whites responded with an absurdly low offer and were surprised when it was accepted. At the end of May 1874 a notice appeared in the Christchurch newspapers announcing that A. J. White was back in charge, had purchased all the warehouse stock from Sheath's trustees and was about to hold a big clearing sale. It set the scene for a relaunch that set up a second and even more successful phase for the Whites' furniture business. The following year, in February 1875, the freehold for the warehouse site on the High/Tuam Street corner (Section 1152) also came up for sale. Alf purchased it for £2,500. He had also made the big call to add furniture manufacturing to his business, and established a steam-powered factory in Manchester Street for the purpose. Brother George, meanwhile, announced his launch of a jewellery business in Colombo Street in March 1876, the beginning of another successful family enterprise that would eventually expand to have a branch in Wellington and pass on to George's sons after his death in 1925.

Meanwhile, Alf White's reputation as a leading Christchurch businessman and philanthropist, and a prominent Catholic, continued to grow. He was appointed as one of the directors of a new Canterbury Building Society in December 1877, was characteristically the most generous lay subscriber toward the cost of a new Catholic Presbytery in Barbadoes Street in late 1878, and at a mass meeting of Christchurch Catholics in July 1879 to protest the injustice of the new education system (which excluded Catholic schools from any state support) Alf volunteered to represent his co-religionists at a national gathering to follow in Dunedin. Alongside these extracurricular activities, business was booming, such that


A.J. WHITE'S FURNISHING WAREHOUSE.

A drawing of the new building (at right) and the old warehouse.
***The Press* 24 June 1882.**

in late 1878 a plan to completely rebuild the High Street premises was unveiled. Then, on 9 January 1879, nine-year-old Alfred junior was given the ceremonial role of laying the foundation stone. His father laid on a celebratory champagne supper for all his employees and invited guests, who toasted Alf and Eliza with understandable enthusiasm.

The new premises were designed by prominent Christchurch architect Alfred William Simpson, who also designed a number of other significant buildings in the central business district in this period. This is the building at 236 Tuam Street that was demolished under emergency provisions in the wake of the Christchurch earthquakes of 2010–2011 despite its Category 1 heritage listing. It was rather a beautiful edifice, three storeys in height, constructed of red brick with an ornamental lower portion of stone from Cass's Peak and Coal Creek. Its rich decoration, with columns, parapet and carved and moulded cornices added considerable charm to the Tuam streetscape and its destruction after over 130 years was a significant loss to Christchurch's architectural heritage. For our purposes its construction is a symbol of Alf's ambitions for his store and a concrete expression of how far the Whites had come in the sixteen years since their arrival.

It was probably the disruption from the 1879 rebuild that prompted the Whites to move out to Sumner. Construction began with half of the old building being demolished while the business continued to operate in the other half. Once it was completed, the second half of the old building came down and the remainder of Simpson's design erected. It was projected to take about nine months, with work getting under way in October 1878. If it was finished on time, it would have been a shiny new addition to Tuam Street just in time for a significant outbreak of civic disorder one block further along High Street at John Barrett's hotel over Christmastime 1879. The sectarian ill-feeling which was at the heart of this incident, the 'Boxing Day riot' must have given Alf and Eliza something of a shock, and for Alf, at least, taken him back to the anti-popery demonstrations of his teenage years in London.

The trouble arose due to the plans of Canterbury's Orange lodges to march in procession on 26 December 1879 in Christchurch and Timaru, carrying banners and wearing regalia. Such processions were notorious around the British Empire for inciting counter responses from Irish Catholics that had often become violent. It was an importation of old tribal grievances from the Old Country and not the first time sectarian ill-feeling had emerged in the colony. On this occasion the police had been forewarned of trouble in Timaru, with South Canterbury an area of significant Irish-Catholic settlement, and most of the Christchurch force had been sent south on an early train as reinforcements. This had not gone unnoticed by a large group of Irish navvies in town from the Waipara railway works for the Christmas break and putting up at John Barrett's Borough Hotel on the corner of High and Manchester Streets. The police party's route to the railway station took them right past the hotel. So, unfortunately, did the Orange procession later in the day.

As they made their way down High Street, the Orangemen came under attack from the Borough Hotel's guests, armed with pick handles, who laid into the Protestant group and caused injuries to a few that were serious enough to put them in hospital. It was what happened next, however, that might have caused considerable angst to Alf and Eliza, though they were more likely with the 'respectable Catholics' of the town, holding a Boxing Day event of their own at the racecourse. This was the annual Catholic schools' picnic, and the children and families, having assembled at the church in Ferry Road at mid-morning, had processed together to the railway station accompanied by the Hibernian Society's brass band to take their trains to Addington. That was also the mode of transport for the Orangemen to get to their picnic at Prebbleton. Those who had survived the attack on High Street, would have arrived at the station about an hour after the Catholic schoolchildren.

The fracas outside the Borough Hotel hadn't lasted long and those police still in Christchurch were quickly on the scene, although they needed the intervention of Father Ginaty to calm the rioters. As rumours spread that one of the Orangemen had been killed, however, an angry crowd began to assemble, swelling by day's end to several thousands. The hotel had been closed at 2pm and 250 special constables were sworn in by the Mayor to counter further disorder. In a Protestant majority town, this was inevitably going to turn on the Catholics. As darkness fell on High Street, stones began to rain down on the Borough Hotel, which was ringed by police and special constables to protect its inhabitants. The sound of breaking glass continued into the night. Next day was more of the same and it wasn't until Sunday that the specials were dismissed and things began to return to normal.

There are no reports of any damage to A. J. Whites. You'd have to wonder though. Uppity Irish Catholics were the focus of the mob that gathered around the Borough Hotel. It wouldn't have taken much in the White-heat of sectarian fever that prevailed on 26 December for the focus to broaden, as it had in England during the Gordon Riots in London in 1780 or the anger that met the restitution of the English Catholic hierarchy there in 1850. Alf had potentially witnessed the latter in person in Islington and was in any case fully alive to the strength of anti-Catholic feeling in his home town of Taunton. As one of the most prominent Catholic laymen in Christchurch, his big new store, literally a stone's throw from John Barrett's Borough Hotel, would have made a tempting target with its lovely ground floor ten-and-a-half-feet tall plate glass windows if things had gotten any more out of hand on Boxing Day 1879.

As 1879 drew to a close then, the Whites may well have breathed a sigh of relief. The completion of their grand new premises signalled a step up in the pretensions of the business; a physical representation of Alf's ambition for it to become the leading home furnishing retailer and furniture manufacturer in Christchurch, and perhaps in all of New Zealand. Moving to Sumner, meanwhile, would have provided a more family-friendly environment for their growing brood of children than the family quarters above the store in the central city. For Eliza, whether she knew it or not, her latest baby, Martha Mabel, born that October, represented the end of her child-bearing years. Many challenges lay ahead for the Whites but with Eliza less tied to the home by the physical debilitation of regular pregnancies, she could gradually pursue her apprenticeship in business under Alf's experienced tutelage. There would be an increasing profile in social and philanthropic activities, a number of trips abroad, and the beginnings of her passion – shared with Alf – for acquiring and developing property.

CHAPTER 7

Family and business life, 1880–1895

As the new decade got under way in January 1880, Eliza's children ranged in age from the eldest, Cecily, now nearly fourteen down to two-month old Martha (known as Mabel). In between, Mary was twelve, Alfred was ten, Catherine nine, Maud four, Rose three, and Beatrice nearly two. The gap in the middle between Catherine and Maud made for a clear division within the family into four older children and four younger ones. I imagine that made for some interesting family dynamics. Living now at Sumner, there must have been a daily commute into town for Alfred. Through the 1880s there were plans to build a railway line along this route and Alf was one of the directors of a company formed to construct it. Ultimately the plans did not come to pass but from 1888 there was a Christchurch-Sumner tramway that ran from outside his house in Sumner directly to the store on the corner of Tuam and High Streets.

In June 1881 a Christchurch reporter wrote an extensive description of A. J. White's that gives us a good stocktake on the business's progress after a decade and a half of development.

> *"The showrooms themselves are now of such a character as to form a collective display of no mean interest, the products of almost every country in the world being represented; and in addition there is the extensive range of workshops, wherein all the various operations in connection with the manufacture of furniture are being carried on."*

Alf had some seventy hands in his direct employment, according to this report, plus a number of others contracting to supply him with a range of goods. His range of wares had expanded such that,

> *"... each department constitutes a business within a business, the principal divisions being as follows:- ironmongery, crockery and china, glassware, ornaments, bedsteads, carpets and upholstery, dining and drawing room furniture, chairs. There are besides, extensive store rooms wherein special 'lines' are kept in readiness for any demand ..."*

To illustrate the scale of business, the reporter cited the fact that the firm had sold 1,500 iron bedsteads in the previous year, noting that this included sales to many hotels and other institutions, which White's seemed to have cornered the market for. Alf was also producing desks and seats for schools, both public and private. Pushing the claims of colonial manufacturers against imported material, Alf White was also a strong advocate of design education. He had recommended to a recent Royal Commission the establishment of Schools of Art in all the main centres; "*If we take the Mother Country for our guide, we must all admit what good they have done in promoting taste for all that is lovely in Nature, and bringing out ideas which would not have been developed had it not been for schools of this class.*" True to his word, Alf White would be a major benefactor of the Christchurch School of Art when it was established the following year, providing prizes to its top students. Design education remained dear to his heart for the rest of his life.

Alf's own personal sense of taste and design was much admired and must have been one of key drivers to his business's success. As well as the regular contribution of furniture to decorate public events and theatrical productions that had been his practice for years, A. J. White's was also heavily committed to exhibiting at the various trade shows and international exhibitions that were all the rage in the late 19th century. These events attracted a lot of public attention, being mass entertainment events as well as showcases for industrial production. The fun fairs and musical programmes that enlivened any exhibition worth its salt, drew large crowds of spectators who were equally attracted to the wide ranges of local, national and international products that were on display in the various display 'courts'. There was stiff competition between businesses to put on the best show and these contests were formalised with the award of medals and certificates to those judged to be 'best in show'.

Alf White excelled in this competitive commercial environment. Whether it was the Industrial Exhibitions held in Christchurch in 1880 and 1882, a similar event in Dunedin in 1881, or the New Zealand Industrial Exhibition held in Wellington in 1885, A. J. White's displays were widely praised and consistently took out top awards. These efforts also pushed the business onwards; a carpet department had been added after displaying a range of carpets that were in Christchurch en route to the Sydney International Exhibition in 1879 and for the 1885 Wellington exhibition the firm took on the construction of an organ. It was *"by far the largest yet built in this colony"* according to a report on the White works during its construction, and was made almost entirely from New Zealand woods. This sort of innovative venture likewise had strong promotional value for the firm, a demonstration of the significant craft capability contained within its skilled colonial workforce.

The White-produced organ duly made it to Wellington where it played a starring role in the 1885 Exhibition. It then came back to the Christchurch warehouse as a dramatic display item before being moved to Christchurch's Palace Skating Rink in December 1888 where it was played as part of a grand theatrical performance of the *Messiah* involving hundreds of performers. The following year it was enlarged for exhibition at the highly prestigious New Zealand and South Seas Exhibition held in Dunedin, taking pride of place in an Exhibition concert hall where it accompanied a rich programme of musical entertainments throughout the 125 days of the event, during which over 600,000 paying customers passed through. Alf's generous gesture in supplying the impressive musical instrument gratis was well publicised. So too was his similar benefaction of free furnishing for a reception room in the Canterbury Court of the Exhibition's trade displays.

After its highly successful contribution to the Dunedin Exhibition, Alf's organ returned to Christchurch just in time to be installed in the new St Mary's Church in Manchester Street, which opened in August 1890. In the previous five years it had been *"probably the most viewed [musical] instrument in New Zealand"*, according to an article detailing its history. It now took its place as a permanent feature of the Pro-Cathedral, which also benefitted from a rimu pulpit supplied by A. J. White's. When the 1890 building was replaced by a new St Mary's on the same site in 1957, the White organ was rebuilt with some additions. There have been subsequent alterations too, including some rebuilding consequent on damage sustained in the Christchurch earthquakes of 2010–2011. Alf's organ remains at St Mary's nonetheless, still giving service to the Catholic community nearly 140 years after it was first built.

By 1890, if not before, A. J. White's was one of New Zealand's largest manufacturers of local furniture (though lots of other firms made similar claims). Its closest rival through the 1880s had been the Dunedin firm of Guthrie and Larnach, whose Iron and Woodware Company had similarly extensive furniture production facilities and output in the southern city. The two companies competed fiercely for the top awards at the successive trade exhibitions, with White's often coming out ahead. When the Dunedin Iron and Woodware Company's manufactory was destroyed by fire in 1887, however, the southern firm went out of business.

Alf subsequently swooped in and purchased its retail outlet in the Octagon along with all its surviving stock. He then arranged a grand fire sale and disposed of the lot at discount prices within a few months in August and September 1888. Clearly, he was a man with an eye to the main chance.

This remarkable business performance needs to be set against the turbulent economic times in which the Whites were operating in the 1880s. After the boom years of the 1870s, with their huge infrastructural spending and masses of new immigrants arriving from Britain and Europe on subsidised passages (all needing furniture and homewares) there had come a great crash. The collapse of the City Bank of Glasgow in 1878 led to an international financial crisis and the end of easy credit for New Zealand's colonial government. Without that credit, the country's economy was exposed as on very shaky ground and hard times came with a vengeance. Assisted migration was suspended in 1887. In place of more new arrivals, thousands now crossed the Tasman to escape the Long Depression that set in through the 1880s.

Christchurch was particularly impacted, so much of its wealth being tied up in the land speculations of the wool lords who dominated its society and its economy. In 1881, for example, there were 359 bankruptcies filed in Christchurch, constituting 41 per cent of all New Zealand bankruptcies that year from a city that held only 4.8 per cent of the national population.[24] Yet, as in all economic fluctuations, there were always opportunities for those with the resources to seize them. Alf and Eliza seem to have been among those who had the finance to make acquisitions in the dire conditions confronting so many business and land owners. We have already seen how Alf had been steadily acquiring property whenever it became available, including purchasing the freeholds of his own business sites and becoming an early landholder in the seaside suburb of Sumner.

It seems that this penchant for property acquisition was a shared interest for the Whites. The minutiae of their property portfolio would be too challenging to navigate in detail through the 19th-century land records. But there is a useful snapshot of their holdings at the beginning of the 1880s, thanks to a one-off tabulation of all freeholders in New Zealand that was published by the government in 1882. This lists in one alphabetical sequence every freeholder in the country, along with details of their acreage and valuation broken down by urban and rural location. Alf White's entry reveals that he already owned over £20,000 of freehold property by October 1882. His holdings were split 40/60 between rural and urban land; 111 acres in Selwyn County being worth £8,340 and 17 acres in Waimate county £340. His town and borough holdings were spread across Ashburton, Christchurch, Sydenham and Woolston but the bulk of it was in Christchurch (probably the store freehold) and valued at £11,400. In 2023 values this was approximately $4.3 million, no mean sum to accumulate over a not-quite-twenty-year colonial career.[25]

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[24] Trevor Burnard, 'An Artisanal Town – The Economic Sinews of Christchurch' in *Southern Capital: Christchurch towards a city biography 1850–2000*, edited by John Cookson and Graeme Dunstall, Canterbury University Press, 2000, p. 131.

Perhaps more surprising is that Eliza White has a separate entry in the *Freeholders List*. Her freehold property portfolio was considerably more modest than Alf's, consisting entirely of land in Sumner, valued at £2,200 ($463,000 in 2023 values). This may well have included the family home there. Clearly, however, Eliza was already on the property ladder. Her future wealth would be very much predicated on the skill she developed in land acquisition and property development. In Alfred, she was learning from someone with a real gift for this type of trading and with a sure sense of value for money. Comparison of the freehold property portfolio reflected in this 1882 snapshot with the vastly expanded holdings detailed in his will thirteen years later is testimony to that. As well as which, the slate of mortgages and loans that Alfred held on behalf of others (including members of the clergy and religious orders) at the time of his death makes it clear that he was someone who others trusted for investment advice and as a source of finance.

Despite this initial foray into the property market, and her reputedly expanding role at A. J. White's, Eliza's focus in these years would nonetheless have still been principally the upbringing of their children. Their education must have been a central concern. Neither Alfred nor Eliza had experienced the level of education that they probably aspired to for their children. If Eliza had attended the Moravian School at East Tytherton as suggested earlier, it would have only been to receive a core curriculum – the three Rs – at what we would call primary level. Likewise, if Alfred's letters are anything to go by, his education was also somewhat limited – definitely not the sort of classical education that a wealthy colonist might hope to provide for his offspring. Religious identity added a complication to this picture, however. The infrastructure of Catholic education in Canterbury (and New Zealand) was still in the early stages of development. Opportunities to acquire an excellent and **Catholic** education would have been somewhat limited, especially at higher levels.

It is likely that the White girls undertook their primary education as pupils of the Sisters of Notre Dame Des Missions. These French Sisters had arrived in Christchurch in 1868 and opened the first Catholic school for girls in the city from a small convent on the corner of Barbadoes Street and Ferry Road. Alf White was a major benefactor from the outset, supplying the Sisters with beds and other furniture for their convent. Their school grew rapidly from having just sixty pupils in that first year. In 1871 it had been Alf and Eliza White who helped the Sisters secure land nearby for a new and larger convent. Presumably this means the Whites bought it for them. By 1878 numbers at the Sisters' school had grown to over three hundred and the need for a new building became urgent. Construction of a grand new Convent got under way in 1880 and the parish priest, Father Ginaty, insisted it be built in brick, which considerably increased the cost. According to a Convent jubilee booklet from 1928, the priest, "*prevailed upon Mrs A. J. White to stand guarantor for the big expense that had to be incurred ...*"

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[25] This based on the Reserve Bank inflation calculator for CPI, using Q4 1882 £20,295 calculated to Q1 2023 = $4,274,453. https://www.rbnz.govt.nz/monetary-policy/about-monetary-policy/inflation-calculator

This approach to Eliza as a financial backer of the Mission Sisters' new building rather suggests she was considered to have some personal stake in the enterprise and perhaps points to her daughters' attendance at the Sisters' school. Like all Catholic schools operated by religious Sisters in New Zealand at that time, the Notre Dame Sisters helped fund the operational costs of their institutions by offering 'select schools' for the better off. These parents paid substantial fees that helped underwrite a more basic level of education for the mass of poorer Catholics in separate 'parish schools'. In opening their new Convent in January 1882, the Mission Sister also commenced a secondary level Sacred Heart High School for girls, catering for both day pupils and boarders. The older White girls might have been expected to be among its founding pupils. By now, however, the Mission Sisters had some competition.

Another order of French origin had recently arrived in Canterbury, the Sacre Coeur Sisters. In the informal hierarchy of Catholic religious orders the Sacre Coeur Sisters trumped the Mission Sisters by virtue of seniority and numbers. They had been founded in Paris in the early 1800s and by the time the Mission Sisters were established in Lyon in the south of France in 1861, the Sacre Coeur Order already had an international network of convents and schools staffed by almost three thousand Sisters. This gave them quite some cachet in the Catholic world and their educational offerings moreover were generally considered to be first class. So it came as quite a coup when a party of Sacre Coeur Sisters arrived in Timaru from the United States at the end of 1879 to build a convent – their first in Australasia – and open a school. Sacre Coeur College opened at the beginning of the 1880 school year in temporary premises while an impressive new convent building was under construction.

A detailed description of the plans in the local newspaper gives some idea of just what an imposing structure the new convent was to be:

> *"The buildings when completed will form the largest and most imposing structure in*

> *South Canterbury. It will be of two lofty storeys, the height from the ground line to the ridge of the roof being 49ft 6in. The main facade, presented to the east, is 121 ft long and the lateral facades of the two wings are each 134 ft long. The style may be described as Italian-Gothic or Anglo-Italian, and the material to be used, blue stone with White stone dressings, will lend itself readily to the production of a good effect. The front facade is rendered handsome and symmetrical by the gables of the wings being run out six feet beyond the general line of the front, and by a Gothic portico over the main entrance.*
>
> *Above the portico is a balcony on which a window opens, and this is surmounted by a handsome pediment, in the tympanum of which are disposed the symbolic Sacred Hearts, surrounded by a floral wreath. The lateral facades, each 131 ft long, are alike in appearance, and are each relieved by two projecting gables at one-third from the angles of the building. The windows are square, with pediments, except in the gable walls of the lateral facades, where they are of different, forms in order to give still further variety to these elevations. The pediment over the main entrance and the various gables are surmounted by crosses, and the ridge of the roof is crowned by an ornamental cast-iron cresting."*[26]

No money was spared in the Timaru convent's construction and when it came time to furnish their new building, the Sacre Coeur Sisters entrusted the job to Christchurch's leading furniture manufacturer (and Catholic) Alfred Joseph White. This no doubt involved significant contact with the Sisters as the various options were considered and costed. Alf's close encounter would have had the added benefit of the Whites being able to assess the educational opportunities the new Convent school might offer their daughters. According to advertisements, this encompassed, *"Board and Tuition, comprising an English Education in all its branches, £40 per annum. Day Pupils, Select. School, £10 per annum. Music, and use of Instrument, £10 per annum. The French or German Language, if desired, taught free of charge."* These were hefty sums at a time when a farm manager's annual income was £80–£100 and a shepherd's just £65. Since most local Catholics worked in these or similar capacities in an urban setting, it was an open question as to who would be able to afford to send their daughters to the Sacre Coeur Convent.

The boarding establishment was on a modest scale to begin with – just a small number of girls living with the Sisters, something like a 'finishing school'. This probably appealed to Alf and Eliza. In any case, all of their daughters would be sent south to Timaru in sequence to complete their educations. Cecily arrived first, being recorded in the Sacre Coeur register as being admitted on 10 May 1881 when she was fifteen. There are no entries in the register for Mary or Catherine (Dolly) but they are known to have also attended the school. A surviving letter from Alf to Mary just before her nineteenth birthday in 1886 confirms that both she and Dolly were in Timaru at that point, while Cecily was by then back home in Christchurch along with the younger children. Maud, Rose, Beatrice and Mabel would go to Sacre Coeur the following year. Maud and Rose were old enough to attend the secondary school by that time, being twelve and eleven respectively. Beatrice and Mabel, on the other hand, were just nine and eight. Their despatch to the nuns' care at such a young age coincided with Alf and Eliza's 1887 trip to England, of which more below.

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[26] *Timaru Herald*, 2 February, 1880.

Alf and Eliza were obviously happy to pay whatever was required to secure the best education available for their children, even if it meant sending them away to boarding school. What then did they do about their only son, Alfred Thomas? An Irish lay teacher, Edward O'Connor, ran the first Catholic boys' school in Christchurch. It opened in 1865 on Barbadoes Street and was called St Joseph's. Originally it catered for both boys and girls but the latter moved off to the Sisters' school when the nuns arrived in 1868. St Joseph's School is likely where Alfred Thomas White received his primary education. He might then have gone on to a new 'select' St Leo's High School which opened in 1880 when Alfred was ten and which was also run to begin with by Edward O'Connor. St Leo's doesn't seem to have been a very successful enterprise – as the diocesan historian Father O'Meeghan recorded, "*it never seemed to grow beyond a one teacher school with about twenty boys being taught at different levels.*"

At the beginning of 1883, however, just before his fourteenth birthday Alfred junior was enrolled at Christ's College where he would spend the next two years. Christchurch Boys' High School was also operating by then, opening in 1881 on a site in the present Art Centre, just across the road from Christ's. Alfred would have had to walk past Boys' High to get to the College so it must have been a definite choice on his parents' part. The year following his departure from Christ's College a Catholic alternative became available when the Marist Fathers established St Patrick's College in Wellington, New Zealand's first substantial secondary school for Catholic boys. The new College, with provision for boarders, was seen as having a national catchment and subscriptions toward its construction had been solicited from Catholic families all across the country. Unsurprisingly, Alf White had been the biggest single donor from Christchurch, his £50 contribution recorded in the published subscription list being double that of any of his lay peers in the city. Despite this, Alfred Thomas White was not among the new College's twelve founding boarders in 1885 and is not listed on its register of past pupils.[27]

At some point, however, at least according to family tradition, Alf received personal tuition. Another source suggests that his later education took place in England. Mrs Margaret

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[27] *Roll, St Patrick's College, Wellington 1885–1984*: https://shadowsoftime.co.nz/school11.html

O'Reilly, who was the White's cook and laundress referred in a memoir to Alfred Thomas *"finishing his education in England"*. And again, *"They took their son with them [in 1887] to finish his education in England"*.[28] This makes sense. A successful English colonial couple like the Whites, who could be termed nouveau riche, might have considered colonial educational institutions, such as they were in the 1880s, as not being quite good enough for their only son. Alternatively, it's possible that Alfred junior had made a mess of things at school. If so, the attempt to remedy matters by taking him to England for 'finishing' seems to have backfired. The late John White, a grandson of Alfred Thomas (through his eldest son Alfred Joseph), described "*traits in his character that I understand were created by a private tutor he was left in the hands of at an early age. The tutor apparently taught him to drink, gamble and womanize – or in simpler terms ruined is life.*"[29]

We'll be looking briefly at Alfred junior's struggles as an adult later, along with those of his siblings. For the moment this reference to his 1887 trip to Britain with his parents serves as a segue from a discussion of Alfred and Eliza Whites' focus on their children's education to a consideration of their various travels. The Whites were quite unusual among their generation of English immigrants – those who came to New Zealand in the sailing ship era – for the number of trips they made back to England later in life, as well as their apparently frequent jaunts to Australia. This was of course a by-product of their success and the wealth which that generated and that made international travel a realistic possibility for them. Most of their peers among the immigrants of the 1860s never went 'home'. For them emigration to the colony was always going to be a one-way trip. Return visits to England and travel to Australia also reflected the drivers of Alfred's business, which involved keeping in touch with home furnishing trends in Britain as well as fostering contacts with his commercial suppliers there and in the Australian colonies, especially Sydney and Melbourne.

We have already noted Alfred's first recorded trip home in October 1873 when he went there on his own but returned seven months later with his younger brother George. The next overseas jaunt that I can locate a record of was in March 1880 when Alf arrived in Sydney, probably in connection with the Sydney International Exhibition which had opened the previous September. A. J. White's don't appear among the contributors to its displays in the official catalogue of the Exhibition but they had exhibited a range of carpets in the Christchurch store that were en route to the Sydney event the previous July.[30] The big show wrapped up on 20 April 1880 and we can imagine Alf taking a very close look at it with a view to future business possibilities. He was back in Australia a year later, this time bringing Eliza with him to Melbourne and undoubtedly drawn there by the final few weeks of the Melbourne International Exhibition. This significant event was the first of the Australasian trade shows to be recognised as a genuine International Exhibition and was the place to be during its run from October 1880 to the end of April 1881.

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[28] Mike Crean's 2021 biographical piece on Eliza White makes several references to Mrs O'Reilly's memoir. Much to my and his frustration, Mike was unable to provide the location of this important source and I have not been able to find it independently. The quotations have not therefore been verified.

[29] This quote comes from a letter to Monsignor James Harrington in 2003 in which John White states that these traits were subsequently aggravated by the significant wealth that his grandfather inherited on his father's death.

The 1881 trip to Melbourne may have been their first shared journey overseas since their experience aboard the *Zealandia* in 1863. It was not to be their last. They travelled on the Union Steam Ship Company vessel *Te Anau* calling at Hobart on the way. Enjoying the comfort of saloon class accommodation the Whites are listed on the passenger manifest as 'Gentleman' and 'Lady' respectively, an acknowledgment of how far they had risen socially in the preceding two decades. They didn't stay in Melbourne long, however, returning after less than a fortnight, perhaps because the children who weren't at the Convent in Timaru were still so young; from 11-year-old Alfred down to two-year-old Mabel. Who looked after them in their absence? Whoever it was must have satisfied Eliza with their care because just four years later she left the children again to make her first return trip to England. She took one of her daughters (presumably Cecily) with her. I haven't found a record of their departure from New Zealand but there is a listing for their return to Canterbury on the s.s. *Rimutaka* from London on 21 May 1885.

Two years later, in 1887, Alf and Eliza headed to Britain together, this time taking Alfred junior with them. This was probably the journey during which their only son received that 'personal tuition' that various sources suggest had such a deleterious effect on his subsequent life. Unfortunately those New Zealand shipping records that do survive for this period are not comprehensively indexed and the Whites' departure doesn't seem to have been recorded by the newspapers on this occasion either. That makes it impossible to determine when exactly they departed and therefore how long they were away for. Other references to Alf in the newspapers would suggest that it had to be after February 1887 and we also know that they were definitely in England by September because they attended the consecration of Christchurch's first Catholic bishop, John Joseph Grimes, in London on the sixth of that month. They arrived back in New Zealand at the beginning of December, ironically travelling on a vessel called *Zealandia* (the same name as the sailing ship that had brought them together twenty-four years earlier) but this time it was a steamship and the Whites enjoyed the relative luxury of a first-class cabin.

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[30] This seems to have been from M. Whittall and Co. of Kidderminster, a notable centre of carpet manufacture in England. Its Melbourne interests were looked after by a son of the firm's principal, George Whittall, who would subsequently marry Alf's eldest daughter Cecily.

The length of this 1887 journey to Britain is relevant to our story because their likely date of departure coincides approximately with the date that their eldest daughter Cecily got married in Christchurch. Was it before she married, or after? On the face of it, it would seem very odd if Alf and Eliza (and Alf junior) had set off for a big overseas trip only to miss such a significant event as their eldest daughter's wedding. But there are reasons to believe the marriage was not one that they approved of, at least initially. The mysterious memoir of the White's cook, Mrs Margaret O'Reilly, apparently lends some weight to this interpretation. According to Mike Crean's account,

> *"In her memoirs O'Reilly claims the reason for the couple's journey [in 1887] was to be reconciled to eldest daughter, Cissie, and her husband, a Mr Withell [sic]. O'Reilly says the Englishmen Withell had become a friend of the family and visited them often. He had fallen in love with Cissie and she loved him. Withell proposed marriage but Cissie's parents opposed this as Withell was 10 to 15 years older than her. However, when Cissie was 21 the enamoured pair married 'quietly' just before Withell was due to return to England, They then departed as husband and wife. Harsh words and hurt feelings must have stricken the Whites with remorse enough to seek reconciliation."*

Cecily's husband, George Whittall, was actually twenty years older than her, aged forty-one at the time of their wedding on 10 May 1887. His relationship with the family had begun some years earlier as a business one. A. J. White's had been selling carpet from his family firm in England for some years and George was their antipodean representative, based in Melbourne. Cissie turned twenty-one on 26 February 1887 so no longer needed her father's permission to marry from that date. The wedding was celebrated at the Church of the Blessed Sacrament in Christchurch and by the White's usual pastor (and family friend) Father Lawrence Ginaty. George wasn't a Catholic so the couple had to sign the customary oaths involved in a 'mixed marriage'. The marriage register records only a solitary witness at the wedding ceremony, and it wasn't one of Cecily's sisters or friends but her Uncle George, Alf's younger brother. Were the rest of the family shunning the event, or had Alf and Eliza actually already left for England? Another unusual aspect to the marriage record is that both George and Cecily list their 'present residence' as 'travelling', hardly a customary description of a residence of any sort.

According to Stella Robins' family history, "*Their honeymoon was a tour of the North Island and then on to Canada, travelling on the Canadian Pacific Railway.*" I haven't been able to confirm those details but one week after the wedding, George Whittall's father died back in England and he had a memorial notice published in the newspapers in Melbourne, his usual place of residence. In due course, however, the Whittalls returned to live in Kidderminster in England where the family carpet works was based and George managed the business with his brothers.[31] However Alf and Eliza felt about the marriage initially, and whether they boycotted the ceremony or Cecily had simply waited until after they had left the country, letters from Alf to Cecily in 1893 suggest they eventually got over it. They were clearly doting grandparents once Cecily began producing a series of babies, their first grandchildren.

The surviving letterbook of Alf's from 1892–1893 has duplicate copies of a mixture of business and personal correspondence, including letters to Cecily (who he addresses as 'Cis') in Kidderminster in England with George Whittall and their young children. George had pioneered the carpet trade in Australia as a representative of his family firm, and it seems that the Whittalls still had business interests there in 1892 which were causing them some challenges. Alf's advice to them makes it clear that he was very familiar with the Melbourne and Sydney commercial scene and keen to help them sort out their commercial problems in the depressed conditions then prevailing in Australia. In fact he and Eliza were just back from another trip to Melbourne and Sydney in December 1892 when he composed a letter to Cis, his first letter in the letterbook:

> *"Home again and glad to get, we had lovely weather in Melbourne but Sydney we found rather warm but not any more so than we are getting in Christchurch.... we are not so bad as Melbourne. You can form no idea of the trade their [sic], a complete collapse. You must not expect many orders home for some time to come. Sydney seems better, stock are heavy and no chance of doing much."*

He and Eliza travelled to Melbourne and Sydney again in November 1893, Alf writing two letters to his daughters, the first from aboard the steamship *Arawa* while it was 'Just off Sydney'. It sounds like this journey at least was purely a holiday:

> *"We have had a most delightful trip, not sick & the sea like the proverbial mill pond. The steamer is certainly a very fine one & the stewards all that one could desire, only two other passengers on their way to England ... Mama is looking blooming with nothing to do & no turkeys to feed & her mind at rest. I need not say the weather is getting warm & would say if it continues only a grease spot will be left of her."*

Frequent travel across the Tasman had seemingly been an essential part of his expanding business but also a source of rest and recreation for he and Eliza in their personal lives.

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[31] This partnership was dissolved, possibly acrimoniously, in 1890 and two rival Whittall carpet businesses were established. *Birmingham Evening Post*, 25 and 29 July, 1890.

In fact there are many newspaper references to 'A. J. White' in newspaper shipping lists in Australia and New Zealand in the 1880s. Not all of them will be Alfred Joseph White of Christchurch, of course, but many of them undoubtedly are.

There had also been at least one more trip to England in 1889 as well, this time with a 20-year-old daughter, most likely Catherine (Dolly). On that occasion there are surviving records of their departure in May as well as their return in October, which probably gives a rough gauge as to the duration of a return trip to England in this steamship age. This journey may have been prompted by the death of Alf's father, Thomas White, who passed away at his home Ivy Green House in Upper High Street Taunton on 25 April 1889. He was seventy-nine years old, 'of independent means' according to his death certificate and had died from 'natural decay'. Alf's mother thereafter lived with her single daughter Agnes, although it was Alf's older sister Mary Teresa Manning who witnessed the death certificate, having been 'present at the death'. Judging by the 1893 letterbook, Alf corresponded with his mother and Agnes regularly and may have also provided financial support to them. There was no mention in any of these letters of Teresa, however, though she was at Ivy Green House when she died herself in January 1894.

There are some other useful references in the 1893 letterbook that are worth including here. The first is from a letter to Cis Whittall in February 1893 in which Alf records that the family had 'settled down in our nice home & like it much'. Presumably this is a reference to 'Compton', the grand mansion at Opawa overlooking the Heathcote River that they had purchased. Set on 19 acres laid out in ornamental shrubberies and lawns, with a vinery, garden, orchard and paddocks, its centrepiece was a two-storey 'gentleman's residence' of 20 rooms along with commodious stables and carriage accommodation, and with separate houses for a groom and a gardener on the property. It would have been a fabulous family home and that is the other aspect of Alf's letters that I want to note. In letters to his daughters he comes across as a warm and loving father, always sending 'love and kisses', signing off as 'your affect[ionate] Pater', and invariably enclosing a cheque.

One final overseas trip by the White family was being planned in February 1895. Unfortunately it was not to be. The Christchurch newspapers reported in February, *"Mr A. J. White, who intended to pay a visit to Europe with his family by the Ionic, has been prevented by severe illness from carrying out his intention."*[32] Four months later, on 7 June 1895, Alfred died at Compton, aged just fifty-eight. The family tradition is that he had been injured eighteen months earlier in a fall while disembarking from a ship at Bluff after returning from another overseas voyage. This may well be true, though I can find

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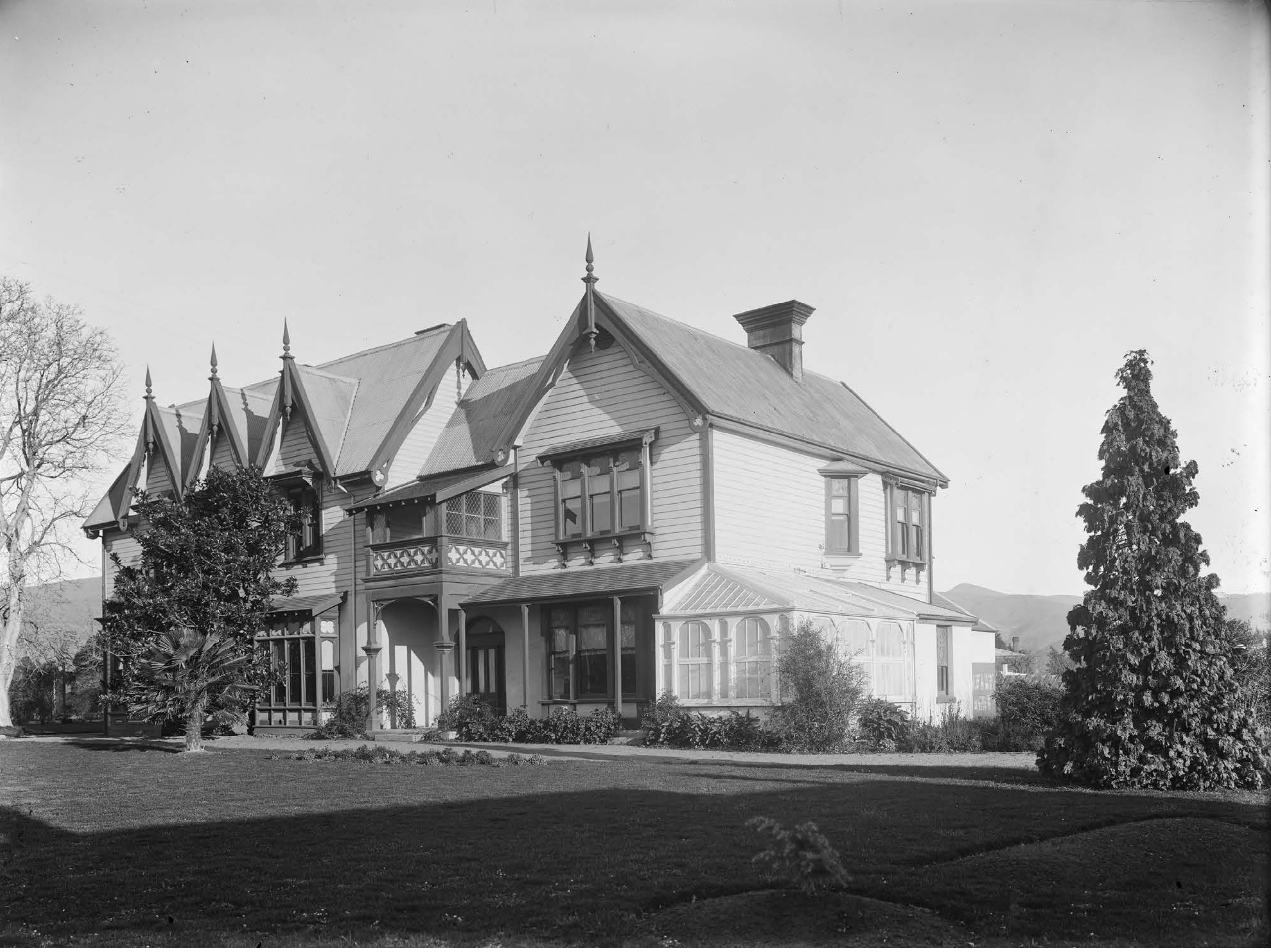
[32] *The Press*, 26 February, 1895.



'Compton' in Opawa.

no public record of any such accident. Obituaries confirm the eighteen-month period of debility but refer rather to 'a somewhat protracted illness' and note that the proposed trip to England had in fact been to seek medical advice before the severity of his condition made that impossible. The final months saw him confined to his home and suffering 'acutely'. The official cause of death is recorded as 'Papilloma "abdominal", Uraemia'; essentially Alf died of kidney failure.

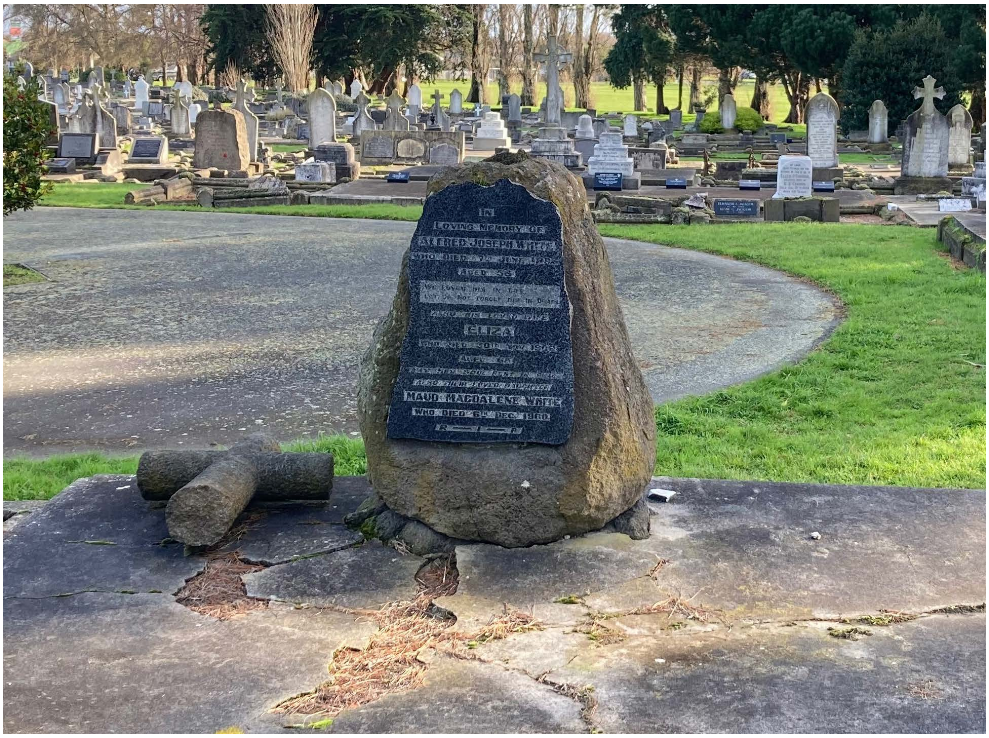
Though not a shock, this must have been a devastating blow for Eliza. She and Alf had been together since she was twenty-one and he had proven a wonderfully supportive husband and partner. Not every Victorian husband would have welcomed his wife's active involvement in his business affairs but Alf seems to have encouraged Eliza into this part of his life and mentored her both in running the business and in generating wealth from property investments. They had travelled extensively together, and risen from relatively humble beginnings to become prominent, wealthy and respected figures in Christchurch society. They had formed close relationships with the Bishop, leading clergy, and all the religious orders of the diocese such that they were among the most influential lay people in the Catholic community in Christchurch. Their large family would have been a source of mutual satisfaction, as well as heartbreak and worry (especially perhaps Alfred junior's travails). Henceforward, however, Eliza was on her own.

CHAPTER 8

‘Property of Mrs A. J. White’: prosperity and pain, 1896–1909

Alf White’s death was a blow to the wider Christchurch community as well as his immediate family. He had been such a generous donor to so many causes and a supporter of so many business, philanthropic and social initiatives in the city that his passing was widely mourned. This extended far beyond the Catholic community but his funeral at the Pro-Cathedral was in the grandest Roman style, a Pontifical High Mass in ancient Gregorian plainsong celebrated by Bishop Grimes and a full set of the city’s priests. Following a morning Requiem Mass the body lay in the church until 2pm in a solid oak coffin covered with floral wreaths and crosses. The funeral cortege was then formed, with the children from the Convent and from the Marist Brothers’ school marching in front of the hearse, and the family and chief mourners following it. Alf’s employees were in their wake, some of them acting as pall bearers. Then, after the Bishop and priests in their full vestments, came over a hundred carriages and a vast crowd on foot as the procession made its way to the Linwood Cemetery.

As the newspaper report recorded, *“The streets were lined with people, and the procession, which was fully three-quarters of a mile long took twenty minutes to pass a given spot. At the cemetery there were quite two thousand people assembled.”* The long list of notables in attendance include the Mayor of Christchurch, representatives of all the major Protestant churches (a real pointer to Alf’s ecumenical support for charities and events beyond his



The grave of Alfred, Eliza and Maud, Linwood Cemetery.

own faith community in this very sectarian age), and a who's who of movers and shakers in the city from a broad range of sectors. It was a wonderful tribute to Alf's status as *"a most estimable citizen"* and a "*prominent and deservedly respected"* Catholic, as the *Tablet* obituary described him. No doubt, this public acclaim would have been some consolation to Eliza and the children, though undoubtedly rather overwhelming in their time of grief as well. Subsequently a rather unusual stone memorial was erected over Alf's grave at Linwood, a bespoke headstone by the looks of it and possible crafted out of stone from Sumner, the beachside suburb that was so important to Alf and Eliza.

Once the funeral was over, the next challenge would have been to sort out business and financial arrangements for the future. Given his long illness, Eliza had stepped up to a management role at A. J. White's some time before Alf's death. She was in fact officially co-manager with John Coles, the faithful and trusted manager who had already worked there for twenty-seven years. Eliza was paid a salary of £156 per year in this role. Meanwhile, probate for Alf's estate was granted in the Supreme Court on 21 June 1895, administered by his long time solicitor and friend Henry Loughnan. The will was an extremely detailed document, reflecting the complexity of Alf's many business and property interests. The estate was valued at £99,480, most of it in land and property, a quite stupendous sum when you think back to Alf's modest resources on arrival in Christchurch in 1863, or indeed the £20,000 value of his land holdings only thirteen years earlier. This made Alf the second-richest Catholic in an academic study of the wealthy of colonial Otago and Canterbury.[33]

Rather than simply leaving everything to Eliza though, Alf had set up a Trust which directed most of his wealth towards his children but did so in a way that protected the capital and distributed a share of the income on an annual basis. This Trust endured until the 1960s, with an annual distribution of very significant amounts of money to (almost) all of Alf's descendants on a gradually diminishing scale as their numbers went up and the estate reduced. Eliza was well provided for all the same and clearly already had the basis of her own fortune to play with and steadily develop over the remaining years of her life. Like Alf, and undoubtedly well-schooled in investment strategies by him, her accumulation of substantial wealth would mainly come from her growing property portfolio. "*Property of Mrs A. J. White*" was a phrase that had already begun to appear regularly in real estate notices in the Christchurch newspapers. Henceforward it would recur with increasing frequency.

There are hundreds of pages in the file on Alfred White's estate in National Archives. While interesting in its own right, the details need not concern us here as they impacted more on his children and their descendants than Eliza. She received an annual sum of £500 from the Trust, which was subsequently boosted by an extra £210 when she claimed it was inadequate for her support.[34] She received another £150 per year as a trustee of Alfred's estate and when added to her management fee at A. J. White's gave Eliza an annual income of £1,160. For the right to continue living at 'Compton', Eliza had to pay the Trust £100 per year plus pay the rates. The four children who lived with her there – Maud, Rose, Beatrice and Mabel – each paid their mother £40 per year and another £50 towards household expenses, an arrangement that endured until Mabel got married in 1905. The remaining three daughters stayed with their mother at 'Compton' under this arrangement until her death in 1909.

According to Maud White in 1911, Eliza had claimed to her children that she did not have enough money *"to keep everything going"* after Alf's death, hence her appeal for the additional sums. She had also told her children that *"they would get it all back"* when she died, according to Maud. Because her younger daughters were still minors, Eliza received their share of the annual distribution from the estate until they turned twenty-one. On top of that she received the income from a rental property on Lincoln Road that Alf had settled on the three youngest girls – Rose, Beatrice and Mabel – for the same period. Together this amounted to another £4,864 that came to Eliza from her children, with no legal obligation for her to subsequently pass it on or repay to the girls. When all these sums were tallied up, Maud estimated that her mother had received approximately £26,000 in income over the last thirteen years of her life. In 1895 she owned two properties at New Brighton, land at Sumner – including a large house 'Rock Villa' that Alf had given her – and shares to the value of £1,400. Thereafter she acquired several properties and parlayed her own estate to a value approaching £73,000 by the time of her death.

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[33] Jim McAloon, *No Idle Rich: The wealthy in Canterbury & Otago 1840–1914*, University of Otago Press, 2002, p. 157. Eliza White's estate of £72,962 made her the third wealthiest Catholic in the study when she died in 1909. Their friend and sometime business associate Martin Kennedy was the wealthiest.

[34] These details are laid out in a legal document prepared for Maud White in 1911 when she and her siblings were considering a legal challenge to their mother's will. Copy in the Inkson Papers.

Using the Reserve Bank's inflation calculator to adjust Eliza's income figure by changes in the Consumer Price Index over time, a sum of £26,000 in 1909 would approximate to just over $5.2 million at the time of writing in 2023. By any standards, that's a fortune. Can Maud's figures be relied upon as an accurate record of her mother's financial position? Given the general inaccuracy of almost all of the family stories that have been examined in this history when set against contemporary records, this is a reasonable question to ask. The source, however, is not a vague tradition passed down within the family. It is a firm statement of facts contained within a legal brief from 1911, a date very proximate to the details it records. Moreover, the source of the data was Maud, who stands out among Alf and Eliza's children as the 'money girl', the daughter who never married and who would emerge as a businesswoman of note in her own right. Maud would also take a leading role as a director of A. J. White's (and a trustee of the Eliza White Trust) until her own death in 1960 aged eighty-six.

It seems likely then that these very detailed figures are likely an accurate accounting of Eliza's financial position during her widowhood. That really does raise an interesting question as to Eliza's psychological state and the general sense of insecurity that she seems to have carried with her from her adolescence in Kington Langley. Whatever had happened there in her early teen years, after the death of her father and before that of her mother, must have traumatised her in some lasting way, imprinting on her psyche a feeling of abandonment and being alone in the world. Or in other words, a feeling of being like an 'orphan' even before she could technically be classed as one. Whether those insecurities persisted through her years of marriage is impossible to say; perhaps Alf had been able to provide a stable and comforting presence that compensated for those youthful losses. His premature death at fifty-eight, however, might well have triggered their resurgence.

As the matriarch to her large family, Eliza faced a number of challenging situations with her children after Alf’s death. We have already touched briefly on family stories relating to the only boy in the family, Alfred Thomas. Young Alfred did not feature in his father’s surviving correspondence from 1893; no letters were addressed to him, likely because he was living in Christchurch near his parents. The 1893 electoral roll records Alfred Thomas as a ‘merchant’, living at ‘High and Tuam streets’, details which suggest he was working in the family business and living on site or nearby. There is a solitary reference to Alfred junior in a letter that his father wrote to the White sisters boarding at the Sacred Heart convent in Timaru in December 1893. Referring to a forthcoming Mission at their local church, Alf senior urges his daughters to, *“offer up a prayer now & then that we may all receive the Grace & blessing of the Mission especially not forgetting* ***Alfred*** *write to him before you return home.”*

What else young Alfred was up to in the early 1890s is hard to say. He was in his early 20s and if he was ‘living it up’ or ‘sewing his wild oats’, none of that activity brought him into conflict with the law, or saw his activities recorded for posterity. One newspaper reference in May 1891 notes that an attempt had been made to revive golf in Christchurch, with a trial game being played on the ‘North Park’ (Hagley Park) to test its suitability as a course. *“Mr White, jun., of the firm of A. J. White, has imported all the necessary material for the game and was among the players on Saturday …”.* The experiment was a success and Alfred was an active player and committee member of the revived Christchurch Golf Club subsequently. He was also in the Polo Club and a Vice-President of the Lancaster Park Swimming Club as well. After his father’s death in 1895, Alfred stepped up to a leadership role in Catholic circles too, singing in the choir at St Mary’s, and speaking on the family’s behalf at a welcome home for Father Cummings at Leeston. He was even elected to the Sumner Borough Council in 1897.

All of these activities would surely have made Eliza proud. Alfred was following in the footsteps of his father, contributing to Christchurch society in a variety of areas. Then, in 1896, he got married. His bride, Edith Tait, the Australian-born daughter of a Scottish father and an Irish mother, was an Anglican but she became a Catholic in time for their wedding to be celebrated as a Nuptial Mass at the Pro-Cathedral on 17 June 1896. Eliza was the sole sponsor at Edith’s ‘baptism’ a couple of weeks before the wedding, one convert from Anglicanism thereby supporting another as part of her entry into the White family circle. Edith Tait was the only girl in her family and chose Alfred’s sister Dolly (Catherine) as her bridesmaid while Alfred chose Henry Loughnan, the family’s lawyer, as his best man. The wedding was described as ‘very quiet’ by the *New Zealand Graphic* but the *Tablet* report refers to a wedding breakfast at ‘Compton’ with the young couple then leaving for their home, “*a property situated in Sumner and one that was purchased by the late Mr A. T. White [sic].”*

Young Alfred and Edith had their first baby, Dorothy Beatrice, at Sumner in April 1897. A second daughter, Frances Winifred, followed in April 1898, and was the first baby to be baptised in the Catholic parish of Sumner. This must have been a great joy to Eliza, the first grandchildren that she would have had ready access to (Cecily's being far away in England), albeit briefly. If Alfred had had a difficult period as a teenager, in these years he seemed to be finding his way in adulthood and embracing the sort of respectable, responsible life that his father had modelled so successfully. In 1898, he took another big step to emulate his father by moving to Wanganui and establishing a furniture business there. Reading newspaper reports from Wanganui, it seems to have been an immediate success. Alfred followed his father's business playbook by generous support of local causes, including providing furnishings for local musical performances and community events, and attracted lots of positive publicity (as well as paying for advertising) for his business.

He seemed to be on the up and up. In 1900 Alfred was elected to the Wanganui Chamber of Commerce, another indication of his growing standing in the town. He suffered something of a setback that year as well when his business premises burnt down in February, shortly after he'd decided to reduce his insurance cover to save money on the premiums. Nonetheless, Alfred quickly rebuilt on the same site and his new store was open for business again by mid-September. A newspaper reporter visited the following March to give an account of an extensive stock-taking sale and provides an intriguing description of the business, and of Alfred:

> *"'Oh, yes; a sale in a big place like this is a fairly large undertaking,' was the answering remark with which Mr A. T. White greeted a representative of this paper yesterday, when the latter dropped in to see how the sale had opened up. 'But you see,' he added, with that genial smile of his, 'the rush is only for twenty-one days, and we really must make a clearance before stock-taking.' Looking at the steady stream of people moving about on the various departments, the pressman ventured the suggestion that twenty-one days' business at the rate at which it was then being done ought to make a big hole in the stock, whereupon he received an invitation to look more closely at the size of the field in which buyers had to dig, or, in other words, to obtain a clearer comprehension of the magnitude of the stock. And there can be no doubt that it is a large, in fact a tremendous, stock.*
>
> *The shop itself is, we believe, the largest of its kind outside the four centres, and its contents are as varied as they are extensive. There is not a spare inch of space in the whole establishment, and on entering the visitor is confronted with what appears to be an endless array of general furnishings, fancy goods, crockery, and household nick-nacks. Here the humblest cottager could have his wants supplied and his dwelling appropriately furnished from the homely parlour to the modest kitchen. Here, too, the dweller in mansion or palace could find ample scope for taste in the selection of ornate and costly furnishings. ...*

> *Certain it is that a larger or finer display of the kind has not been seen in Wanganui. Breakfast, dinner and tea ware, toilet sets, oddments, novelties, ornaments, in fact everything that can be made of china, glass or earthenware is in evidence, including innumerable special lines particularly suitable for presentation purposes. The furniture embraces practically everything, from massive side-boards to humble kitchen chairs, … in short, there is everything that there should be in a large and up-to-date furnishing warehouse…”*[35]

The following year the Wanganui newspaper reported with some local pride that Alfred had just completed a contract to furnish a new hotel in Blenheim, “*The whole of the furniture was manufactured by Mr White, who had to compete with firms in Wellington and other cities.”* It all sounds as if Alfred was doing splendidly, very much in emulation of his parents’ success in Christchurch, and you’d have to think that Eliza would have been very proud.

But suddenly it all began to go awry. In February 1903 there were advertisements that Alfred, *“having purchased a farm”*, was putting up for sale his newly erected house at St Johns Hill, *“the most up-to-date residence in the district.”* According to the sale notice, it was set on 13.5 acres of land, had *“lofty ceilings, spacious halls, large rooms, plastered walls and every conceivable convenience and everything of the best quality.”* It also came with a stable, a coach-house and man’s room (“*like a pretty cottage*”). One year later, he was advertising his 154 acres of splendid land at Southern Grove (was this the farm he’d just bought?) for sale and soon thereafter the local auctioneer was advertising for sale books from the library of *“Mrs A. T. White”*. By May 1904, A. & T. White’s was also shutting down, its closing down sale big news in a provincial town like Wanganui where there weren’t many manufacturing enterprises on its scale. The accompanying advertising suggested that perhaps Alf’s business was actually some sort of branch of the main family business in Christchurch: *“Everything has got to go. That is the order from Christchurch, and the local management have slashed down the prices …”.*

In the midst of all this turmoil, Edith gave birth to the couple’s third and final child. Named Alfred Joseph White in honour of his deceased grandfather, the boy was born on 26 March 1905. But this third Alfred would grow up not knowing his father, as his parents split up soon after his birth.[36] Their formal separation began on 29 May 1905. When it was confirmed as a divorce in 1930 (at Alfred’s instigation), Ellen’s formal statement was that, *“She was induced to enter into the Deed of Separation … by the wrongful act or conduct*

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[35] *Wanganui Chronicle*, 2 March, 1901.

[36] This separation unsurprisingly seems to have left a legacy of bitterness in Alfred and Edith’s descendants. John White, grandson of this third Alfred Joseph White, refers to ‘tremendous pain and disharmony’ in the family and to the ‘shallow picture that my father painted of Alfred Joseph White and his wife Eliza for us’. See his letter to Monsignor James Harrington, 11 March, 2003, CDA 2021.3.2.6.

of the Petitioner [Alfred] to wit by the adultery and habitual cruelty and drunkenness of the Petitioner".[37] In mid-1905 advertisements appeared in the Wanganui newspapers for the sale of the White home on St Johns Hill. The sale instructions this time came from *"Mrs A. T. White"* who was selling *"her residence"*. She then moved back to Christchurch, probably staying with her mother in Lower Riccarton, where she was registered to vote in 1905. By May 1907 she was advertising for *"a small furnished house near beach, Sumner"*.

Alf moved south to Waimate where he bought a 2,500 acre property in November 1905. Then in July 1906 he took on the leases of two pastoral runs at Otematata. A month later he was selling up his dairy herd at Waimate as he was *"relinquishing dairying"* and seeking compensation from the Waimate Borough Council for some of his land taken for the borough water supply. These sudden and dramatic changes of direction suggest erratic behaviour. Heavy drinking must be suspected as per Edith's later testimony, and Alfred's subsequent life trajectory. At some point Alfred began a de facto relationship with Flora Rosa [surname unknown], a Channel Islander who had come to New Zealand with a young daughter (and without her husband) a few years earlier.[38] In 1910 their daughter Flora Mabel White was born. A son, John Clifton White, followed in 1911 and then Alphonso Joseph White in 1915. The family settled on a small farm 'The Cliffs' at Waitati, on what became known as 'White's Hill' near Doctors Point. They milked cows and sold the milk to the district. This would be Alfred's home for the rest of his life (and remained in family hands until the last of these children, Alphonso, died in 1995). There seems to have been no ongoing contact with Alfred's other two children. A history of the area records Alfred's sad decline in clear terms:

> *"[Alfred White] was an alcoholic, who terrified the Doctors Point youngsters. 'He was forever being carted to the lockup by the police in his alcoholic ravings. One of the children would be sent by Mrs White to collect the policeman to take him away ... in his gig after probably being tied down ..."*[39]

Under the terms of his father's will, Alfred had a steady income from the Estate on an annual basis, amounting to £575 in 1909 and rising to £706 in 1911.[40] Nonetheless, in 1911 his brother-in-law Ronald Duncan described Alf as being not as well off as most of his sisters, with an inference that he had suffered a financial decline.[41] It may well indicate that the end of his business in Wanganui involved more than simply a desire to go farming. The income stream from inheritances was boosted after Eliza's death as well, Alfred receiving regular payments as recorded in her Trust's annual accounts. He seems almost like the old stock figure of the 'remittance man', only he had gone south to Otago rather than to some exotic overseas destination. It was in many ways a tragic life story, and it didn't end well.

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[37] Dissolution of Marriage file, White, Alfred Thomas vs White, Edith Ellen, 1930, National Archives, Christchurch, Code R26102689.

[38] Flora's daughter Norah took the surname White as well. When she married in 1927 her marriage registration lists Alfred as her father and gives no maiden name for her mother. Likewise Flora Rosa White's death in 1957 records her as a spinster and therefore gives no maiden name.

[39] *Blueskin Days: a history of Waitati, Evansdale, Warrington and surrounding districts,* by Ian Church; with Stuart and Jean Strachan, 2007, p. 237.

[40] Letter from Izard and Loughnan (solicitors), 19 October, 1911.

In October 1933, Alfred seems to have had a row with his 'wife' and left their home with a razor. A letter he had written indicated an intention to kill himself. An anxious Flora sent their farm labourer out to look for Alfred and he found him sitting on the beach with a deep self-inflicted slash in the calf of his left leg. The wound was bandaged up and Alfred was taken home and from there to the Dunedin hospital. Two weeks later, however, on 5 November the injury turned gangrenous and Alfred's leg had to be amputated. He died two hours later due to heart failure. He was sixty-four years old. While in hospital, Alfred had made out a will – hand-written and witnessed by a couple of hospital orderlies – in which he left "*all my property … unto my children Flora, Jack and Alphonso as tenants in common in equal shares.*" This did not apparently extend to Alfred's income from his parents' two estates, from which they must presumably have been excluded by their illegitimacy.

Stella Robins refers in her family history to a 'Deed of Family Arrangement' drawn up by a Christchurch law firm around 1939 regarding a mortgage that the A. J. White Estate held over land in Otago in the names of Alfred junior's three Waitati offspring, who were described as 'remoter issue'.[42] This probably confirms that Alfred's farming exploits had been underwritten by his father's estate. And also that the illegitimate children were not recognised as beneficiaries after his death, a fact confirmed by other legal documents in which Alf senior's descendants are set out in detail but with no mention of the Waitati three. They apparently endured on the farm 'with very little money' and maintained a fairly reclusive existence, or at least 'Jack' and 'Poppy' did, seldom leaving the property. The youngest, Alphonso, was the exception. Universally known as 'Alf' he was a gregarious character, undertaking the milk run in the district, delivering mail, and making a weekly trip to Dunedin, 'immaculately dressed, bow tie and all the trimmings'.[43] None of the Waitati Whites married, living together until one by one they passed away. Alf was the last to go, in 1995. The family is remembered today by the White Reserve, a ten-acre section that Alf donated to the Waitati Beach Reserve; an act of generosity that surely recalls the character of the grandfather and namesake that he never knew.

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[41] Letter, Ronald Duncan to Maud White, 24 October, 1911.

[42] I have not been able to locate this document to confirm its contents.

[43] Quotes and details from *Blueskin Days*, pp. 238-239.

That has been quite a diversion from Eliza's story but nonetheless seems very pertinent as we consider the last years of her life, which must have been overshadowed by Alfred junior's travails. These weren't the only sorrows her children's lives caused Eliza in these years either. Over in England, Cecily's life was also upended by the suicide of her husband George Whittall in 1904. George had been suffering from significant ill health and apparently decided to end things, seizing a revolver to shoot himself. Cecily and a nurse managed to wrest the weapon from him but a highly agitated George evaded them and after locating a second revolver in another room he 'blew out his brains'.[44] Cecily came home to Christchurch for a visit at the end of 1905 and just before she set off for the return to the four children she had left behind in England in May 1906 came news that G. M. Whittall & Co, George's carpet manufacturing business in Kidderminster, had gone into liquidation.[45]

At the end of 1909, immediately following Eliza's death, Cecily brought her children back to Christchurch to live. Travelling aboard the *Corinthic* in a saloon cabin, the 43-year-old widow struck up an acquaintance with Walter Sheppard, one of the ship's stewards, who was ten years her junior. This liaison had echoes of her parents' shipboard romance a half century earlier but I somehow suspect that Eliza would not have found Walter a suitable match for her daughter. Two years later, in February 1911, Cecily and Walter were married in the Christchurch Cathedral.[46] In 1913 they set sail for England, never to return. Cecily's four children, by now young adults in their own right, remained in New Zealand and were never to see their mother again. This is Stella Robin's line of descent – through Mabel Whittall who was her mother – and it is a shame that Stella's family histories don't reveal more about her own feelings about her White family heritage.

On balance, you'd have to say that Cecily's exploits must have caused her mother considerable worry. It wasn't all smooth sailing with Alf and Eliza's second daughter, Mary, either. She had married William Inkson in Christchurch in 1897. This wedding also seems to have posed some challenges for the family. According to Stella Robins' family history, there were efforts to prevent this union, and she references Maud White's diary which apparently recorded that *"she took Mary on a trip to the United Kingdom to try to get Mary to change her mind about marrying William who was a staff member of A. J. White's."*[47] The English-born salesman was at least a Catholic; a highly regarded member of the St

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[44] *Birmingham Evening Despatch*, 13 June, 1904.

[45] Cecily apparently had six children altogether but – like her mother – lost two of them in childhood. The survivors Stanley, Mabel, Dorothea, and (Cecil) Alfred were respectively 16, 14, 13, and 11 in 1906 and quite likely at boarding schools.

[46] In the Register Cecily is spelt 'Cicily' and this seems to have been a deliberate change which also appears thereafter in English records.

[47] Unfortunately, I have not been able to locate Maud White's diary to confirm this reference.

Mary's choir in fact, where he sang alongside Alf junior at that time. It's true that he was ten years older than Mary but that was nothing like the age gap that might have been considered problematic with 21-year-old Cecily White ten years earlier. At twenty-eight Mary White was no spring chicken and in fact probably getting quite old for a spinster of the 1890s to still be considered marriageable.

So it may simply have been that he was an employee of the family business that counted against William Inkson. Despite her purported role in trying to dissuade Mary from the marriage, Maud White nonetheless acted as bridesmaid to her sister in the ceremony at St Mary's on 10 May 1897, the other witnesses being Harry Homan, a Christchurch accountant, and (once again) Uncle George White. Like most of the White family weddings this was probably a small, family-focused affair. There are no newspaper reports of it in any case, which seems somewhat surprising for as prominent a family in Christchurch as the Whites. A brief notice of the marriage did appear in both Christchurch dailies after the event but there was none of the social reportage, with descriptions of what everyone was wearing and all that sort of detail that might have been expected. Eliza seems to have been a rather private person in this respect for all her social prominence.

One other reason for this evident preference for privacy may have related to another of her daughter's fragile mental state. Catherine White (known as Dolly), the third surviving daughter in Alf and Eliza's family, suffered some sort of breakdown in the 1890s, the effects of which were long-term. A family story, passed on to me by Jo Coffey, has it that Dolly had been engaged to marry but her unidentified fiancé called off the wedding just a few days beforehand and that this was the cause of her mental unravelling. Jilted brides had a recourse under the law in this period in what were called 'breach of promise' cases. New Zealand law, as in many other places at this time, presupposed that a betrothed woman had some expectation of future material benefit from a marriage. An engagement was therefore a legally binding contract on the part of the man (but not the woman) and being abandoned before the altar could require some material compensation from the fleeing groom.

Except by locating the record of such a case, there is no way to confirm this story. The documentation that does exist points to an entirely different cause for Dolly's mental collapse. On 14 April 1908 Dolly was committed to the care of the Mount St Margaret Hospital for Nervous and Mental Diseases of Women at Ryde in Sydney, the committal papers signed by her brother-in-law Alf Inkson. This institution, established in 1894, was run by the Little Company of Mary, an order of Catholic nursing Sisters dedicated to the care of the sick and the dying. At Ryde they had developed a specialist psychiatric hospital, one of the few such Catholic institutions in Australasia. Dolly was thirty-seven years old and according to the Sisters' records was admitted with a 'sub acute' mental disorder that she had suffered continuously for twelve years and that was supposed to have been caused by the 'shock of Father's death'. An assessment at the time of her admission recorded her condition as:

> *"Childish in manner and conversation, with defective maturity and no memory as to time or place. Her remarks convey no meaning whatever. She laughs without any reliable cause. Her sister relates this has been her condition for some years gradually becoming more childish. Her bodily health is good, sleeps take food, habits clean and healthy."*

Alf Inkson's testimony also described her as being subject to delusions: *"She says that her name is Mr. Forbes. That she has been married four years and has one child ... She does not now her age which she says is 17."* The doctor who signed the form likewise referred to delusions on the same points: "*She states she is only eighteen years of age ... She also states she is married and has had two children ... She mixes up the names of places saying she is in England, whereas she is in Sydney."*[48]

In 1911 a legal proceeding was initiated in Christchurch to have Dolly formally declared a 'lunatic' so that the Public Trustee could be appointed to look after her financial affairs. Henry Loughnan, the White family solicitor provided some further background to the Court in support of the application:

> *"For several years Miss White's income has been received and dealt with in accordance with her instructions by her sister Mrs Inkson and myself under a Power of Attorney. Miss White resided with Mrs Inkson for some time up to the beginning of April 1908 and then went to Sydney with her. For some time previously she had become eccentric causing Mrs Inkson some anxiety. Whilst in Sydney Miss White was examined as to her sanity, was found to be insane, and was received into the Institution known as Mount St Margaret upon the request of her sister; she has resided in that Institution since April 14th 1908 and is there now. Her relations here are in hopes that she may be restored to normal conditions before very long – her correspondence apparently indicates a return to mental equilibrium..."*[49]

The newspaper recorded the result of the application:

> *"A jury of twelve was empanelled to decide whether Catherine White, a person outside the Dominion, was of unsound mind and incapable of managing her own affairs. Mr Izard appeared in support of the application. The matter was formal one. Mr Izard explained that the woman had considerable property here, and the proceedings were*

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[48] Christchurch Lunatics Act file – Catherine White, 1911, National Archives, Christchurch, Code R24018518.

[49] Catherine White Probate file, 1961, National Archives, Christchurch, Code R19670173.

> *taken with a view of getting the Public Trustee put in charge of her affairs. She was at present in an institution in New South Wales. Evidence taken on commission was read and further evidence was given by a local witness. The jury found that the woman was of unsound mind.”*[50]

The evidence presented at this hearing included recent medical assessments from Sydney. These again referred to Dolly’s ‘delusions’, which included that *“she has been married and has a child”* and that *“her age is 110”*.

Dolly would in fact remain at Mount St Margaret for the rest of her long life. She died there in August 1961 aged ninety the last surviving member of her family. A doctor’s assessment of her condition earlier that year had described her as *“in the same child-like state – happy and agreeable”.* The previous year she had received £4,028 as income from her parents’ estates. Her costs in Sydney (hospital fees and a personal allowance) over the preceding three years had been just £862. After decades of a similar income/expenditure ratio Dolly’s estate was valued at £102,775. This considerable fortune ($5.5 million in 2023 values) was thereafter distributed among her nieces and nephews. Yet, once again, you’d have to say that Dolly’s tragic story indicates more anxiety for Eliza in her final years. And the fact that Dolly had been living with her older sister Mary rather than at ‘Compton’ with her mother and younger sisters, suggests perhaps an inability on Eliza’s part to cope with the undoubted challenges of her care.

Was there a pulling up of the drawbridge on Eliza’s part with her youngest four children in response to these disasters with her older children? Did she keep them too close to her at ‘Compton’, or did they simply stay at home for so long because it provided a very comfortable existence. There are probably lots of other ways to interpret the big household of White women through the early 1900s and unfortunately no really personal records that might offer some insights into the family dynamics involved. In 1911, however, Maud White made some allegations against her mother in an unsubmitted legal challenge to her will that hint at a controlling environment in the household. Specifically she alleged that Eliza *“did not maintain educate and clothe her said children in a manner to which their station entitled them.”*[51] A hand-written annotation to this document, possibly by the solicitor drafting it, states further, *“Mother need[ed] income & did not provide for children. Maud W kept Rose going till she was 21 years of age. When Rose reached 21. M & W kept Miss Beatrice & Mabel.”*

Eliza’s maternal disappointments weren’t over either. In 1905 her youngest daughter,

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[50] *The Press*, 22 August, 1911.

[51] Inkson Papers, draft petition from Maud White challenging her mother’s will, 1911.

Mabel, a talented horsewoman with quite a profile in Christchurch in horse-racing and breeding circles (a hobby that her mother was also involved with), fell pregnant. She was 25 years old and one of the most prominent young Catholic 'ladies' in the city. The father seems to have been Ronald Ogilvie Duncan, a 30-year-old chartered accountant and real estate broker. Ronald's parents were Scottish Presbyterians, early Canterbury settlers who had done well, had a large family of seven sons, and prospered. His father, Andrew Duncan, had been the third Mayor of Christchurch and a popular political figure until his premature death when Ronald was five. As an adult, Ronald had become a Catholic, baptised by Bishop Grimes in 1901, and thereafter had quickly emerged as a young leader in the church. By 1905 he was in fact President of the Christchurch Catholic Men's Club. He was also active in sporting circles (especially horse-racing), and had a national profile in a number of organisations. On the face of it then, this was a pretty good match for Mabel … except for the 'shotgun' nature of their union.

This time, it wasn't a quiet 'family' wedding in Christchurch. Instead Mabel went, or was sent, to Australia, and Ronald followed her there in July 1905.[52] He arrived on the steamer *Moeraki* in mid-July and they were married in Sydney two weeks later by Father O'Haran the administrator of St Mary's Cathedral. You can imagine there might well have been some pastoral support from Bishop Grimes behind the scenes to set this up. Four months later on 29 November, still in Sydney, Mabel gave birth to a daughter, Mary Magdalene Duncan. The next month she and Ronald returned to Christchurch bringing a bunch of pedigree dogs they had purchased in Sydney – they shared a passion for dogs as well as horses – but as far as I can tell without their infant daughter. Stella Robins' family history records her understanding that "*Girlie [Mary Magdalene Duncan] was brought up by foster parents in Australia*". This has proven impossible to verify or disprove to date. Other family members may have other memories or stories to add to this question.

There are some real peculiarities about 'Girlie' Duncan's place in the extended White family however. During a legal claim related to the A. J. White Trust in 1908, all of Alf's grandchildren who had been born to that date were listed as parties to the case since they were beneficiaries under his will through their parents. Mary Duncan's name is missing from the list. Yet when Ronald Duncan enlisted for war service with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in 1917, he recorded Mary's full name and date of birth under the section of the form headed 'Children', and stated that he was married with one child under 16 on his attestation form. But then, there is no mention at all of Mary in her mother Mabel

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[52] It is difficult to pin down their movements precisely. Passenger lists show Mabel returning to Christchurch from Melbourne on the very same vessel, the *Moeraki*, (and same day, 7 July, 1905) that Ronald took passage on it to travel to Sydney. Two weeks later they were seemingly both in Sydney to get married.

Duncan’s will when she died in 1936. Whereas when Ronald died in Victoria in 1952 his will left everything to a son from his second marriage but had a clause explaining why his daughter (under her married name ‘Mary Magdalene Lyttle’) was excluded – *“Because in my opinion she has been already amply provided for under the Will of her late grandfather.”* [53]

The A. J. White Estate records would no doubt confirm this and also exactly when Mary Duncan was added to the list of beneficiaries; she is certainly included as a beneficiary in records of the wrap-up of the estate in the 1960s. She was also included (with an address in Faulconbridge, NSW) as a niece with inheritance rights in the administration of Maud White’s estate when she died without leaving a will in 1961 and likewise in the distribution of Catherine White’s estate in 1962. It was also recorded in those documents that ‘a niece’ of Catherine’s had been being paid £10 per year in travelling expenses to visit her at Mount St Margaret. This can only have been Mary, further confirmed by her sworn affidavit in the file that she had attended her Aunt Catherine’s funeral in Sydney. Jo Coffey also remembers meeting Mary around this time. *“When I was about 14, probably around 1965, Girlie holidayed in Christchurch and she took all the relatives who were secondary school and above to a dine and dance restaurant out of Christchurch. The younger members were taken to a movie and afternoon tea so she was clearly not short of money.”*

There are mixed messages then from available records as to Mary Duncan’s ongoing connection both with her own parents and with the extended White family. But she was at least recognised as part of the family and entitled to a share in the distributions from the A. J. White Trust, unlike her illegitimate cousins in Waitati. Mary Lyttle died, childless, in Australia in 1970. All of which raises the question, did Eliza know about Mabel’s pregnancy and subsequently about this additional grandchild born in Sydney in 1905? If Mary Duncan was actually fostered and left behind in Australia when her mother came back to New Zealand just after her birth, it’s possible that she did not. But, whether Eliza was involved or not, the potential scandal involved in Mabel’s marriage, which saw the wedding take place in Sydney, points to yet another family crisis that Eliza faced in her final years.

Mabel and Ronald established a very high public profile after returning to Christchurch as owners of Coldstream Lodge, a 50-acre stud farm at 169 Burnside Road in Fendalton. Both were involved but the enterprise seems to have been principally Mabel’s operation. Ronald was still practising as an accountant and estate agent and serving on numerous committees for all the organisations he was part of. Mabel seems to have been hands-on and worked full-time as a horse trainer and breeder, one of the first women to do so in the sport of trotting. You'd imagine this would have been difficult to manage if she was the mother of an infant at the same time, even with domestic help. On the other hand, horse breeding had been a passion of her father Alf's and another of his interests shared by Eliza. She was winning prizes for her horses at the Christchurch A&P Shows at this time too so no doubt took a lively interest in Mabel's achievements at Coldstream Lodge.

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[53] Probate file, R22283840 , National Archives, Christchurch. There is a whole additional fascinating story about Ronald’s son Dr (George) Ian Duncan whose murder in 1972 was a critical stimulus to homosexual law reform in South Australia, and who is still commemorated by the gay liberation movement as a martyr. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murder_of_George_Duncan

Those achievements were quite significant. A reporter visited Coldstream Lodge in 1912 and left this account of its owner:

> *"There is, perhaps, no keener judge of trotting stock in New, Zealand than Mrs Duncan. This lady is a sport in the true sense of the word, and when her horses enter the field they are invariably sent to win. Many will remember Mrs Duncan's visit to the West Coast trotting meetings, a short time ago when her team, which included 'King Cole', practically scooped the pool. The lady of 'The Lodge' made many friends by her charming manner, and the fact that she treats all with the same unfailing courtesy. It should be mentioned that her attractive home at Fendalton, Mrs Duncan is kindness in itself, and the visitor who is fortunate enough to be shown over the farm by her loses sight of nothing that is likely to prove of interest. The champions of the trotting track and even the youngsters, including the youngest foal, are handled at any time by Mrs Duncan, whose more than ordinary care for them is responsible for the horses responding at the semblance of a call from her. Mrs Duncan is known to be a splendid horsewoman, while her capabilities with the reins are also well known."*[54]

The Duncans transformed Coldstream Lodge at huge expense into a lavish stable complex and also invested heavily in their breeding stock. By 1914 Coldstream had the fastest mare and fastest stallion in Australasia on its books as well as 'Norice' New Zealand's most commercial broodmare. Eliza was dead by then so she missed the unravelling of Mabel's marriage and with it her business. In 1916 the Duncans split with some acrimony, forcing the sale of Coldstream and much of its breeding stock. Ronald moved to a homestead at Glenmark, while Mabel remained on at Burnside Road but on a much reduced scale. The auction sales that chart their breakup reveal that their lavish 10-room home there was full of top of the line furniture (from A. J. White's?) which was also put up for sale with the curious explanatory note that 'Mrs R O Duncan … [was] giving up housekeeping'. They formally divorced in 1930 when Ronald went overseas, married his 'secretary' and had a second child with her. Mary travelled with them and then lived with them in Golders Green, London for a time. Ronald ended his days in Victoria, Australia, where he died in 1952.

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[54] *West Coast Times*, 24 October, 1912.

Mabel remained at Coldstream, albeit on a reduced scale on about 13 acres of the property. Running her stud must have still been an expensive business. She seems to have burned through the substantial sums she received annually from the A. J. White Trust. She eventually had recourse to a moneylender, A. J. Whitehead, who charged her excessive interest on loans and gradually came to exercise ‘a large measure of control over her affairs generally’ including having a joint bank account with her. She also had two life insurance policies that were assigned to him. By the time she died in 1936 she was in significant debt and effectively bankrupt. Her assets were sold off, including an amazing array of ‘superior furniture and effects’ from ‘Coldstream Farm’ that were described as ‘in perfect condition, being practically new’. Even her personal jewellery was put up for sale. Mabel was, however, remembered positively for her horse racing and breeding exploits, with obituary notices appearing in newspapers all over New Zealand for her and acknowledging her as *“one of the first lady owners in the trotting sport”.*

Given all the trouble and strife that her children seemed to attract when they struck out on their own, it is perhaps understandable that Eliza kept the three remaining unmarried daughters, Maud, Rose and Beatrice, close to her at ‘Compton’ during the final years of her life, even though by the time she died in 1909 they were all in their early thirties. She also held fast to her religious faith. Together, she and the girls followed a devout lifestyle and continued to play a significant role in Catholic life in Christchurch. The Whites’ cook, Margaret O’Reilly, recalled that *“Mrs White went to Mass every morning and after breakfast a bell summoned the staff to the dining room for morning prayers.”* When a new Catholic Club opened in Barbadoes Street in 1903, Eliza and her daughters were guests of honour at its opening. Eliza continued Alfred’s generous benefactions to the Sisters of the Good Shepherd at their Mount Magdala Home, forging a strong relationship with the nuns there as well as with the other religious orders that they had supported for years.

Eliza also seems to have been a rock of support for Bishop Grimes in his financially challenging construction of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, which opened in February 1905. Eliza and her daughters subsequently donated statues and furnishings, included fitting out a chapel to the Sacred Heart at the Cathedral in 1908. Eliza also provided carpet for the Cathedral sanctuary. Among her daughters, Rose White, dedicated much of her time to the Altar Society, displaying her father’s sense of good taste in directing how its altars and sanctuary were decorated and caring for the Cathedral’s vestments and altar linen. Catholic schools and other organisations were frequently invited to hold their annual picnics on the grounds of Eliza’s home and, of course, she took a special interest on parish developments at Sumner. It was where the Whites had lived before the move to Opawa. Alf had invested heavily in Sumner land from an early point and Eliza too had owned property there for many years.

Much of the urban development at Sumner in the early 1900s was stimulated by Eliza's property portfolio there while she made generous benefactions to the township as well. In 1902, for example, at the coronation celebrations for King Edward VII, Eliza donated a strip of land for a Boer War Memorial and drinking fountain to be erected. A 40-acre block on the hill above the entrance to the township that she owned (Clifton) was cut up for housing developments in 1903. In 1907 she built the Sumner Town Hall and leased it to the Borough Council.[55] Alf had left her a large house at Sumner called 'Rock Villa' and Eliza bought and sold numerous other properties. 'Rock Villa' (which was tenanted) burnt down in 1900 but in due course Eliza had a grand new house erected on the same site. She rather hoped the Bishop would take this as his official residence, and made provision for this to happen after her death. In the event, the Bishop did not want the house and nor did any of Eliza's children to whom it was offered in turn. Eventually it was taken over by the Anglican Church and served for many years as a children's orphanage, an outcome that would no doubt have pleased Eliza immensely.[56] It was demolished after suffering severe damage in the Christchurch earthquake in 2011.

Much of Eliza's attention was still focused on the family business, A. J. White. She spent time there virtually every day and kept an eagle eye on the minutiae of its accounts until very near the end. She worked closely with Alf's long-time manager at the store, John Coles, and his accountant, Arthur Reed, who was her fellow executor in Alfred's estate. In 1908 they decided to form a limited liability company to run the firm, perhaps looking ahead to a time when Eliza would no longer be around and her children would direct its affairs. The omens for such a continuing family control can't have seemed good after Alfred junior and Cecily's business failures and the general lack of disciplined endeavour that seemed to characterise many of the next generation of Whites. This move was opposed by the children, at least by my reading of a Supreme Court summons from 1908 that names Eliza and Arthur Reed as plaintiffs and the children and grandchildren as defendants. The end result was the firm becoming A. J. White Limited in any case.

Planning got under way for a big new building addition to A. J. White Limited in 1909 so no doubt Eliza was keeping a close interest in that. She seems to have been quite driven in her attitude to work and even though she stepped back from an intensive day-by-day involvement, she refused the family's exhortations to take things easy as she reached her late sixties. She experienced some ill health during the winter of 1909 but seemed to perk up once the warmer weather came. On Tuesday 30 November she spent part of the afternoon at the A. J. White warehouse in High Street and had afternoon tea with some of the staff. Returning home she suddenly became quite ill but there was time for Father Price to be telephoned and administer the last rites before Eliza passed away just before 7pm that evening, sitting in her chair. The doctor recorded bronchitis and heart failure as the cause of death. Eliza was sixty-seven years old. Death had probably come a bit earlier than she or her family had expected. Eliza had prepared meticulously, nonetheless, leaving behind very detailed instructions in her will for the disposal of her considerable wealth. Her children were in for a rude shock.

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[55] A time capsule was found during the demolition of this building after earthquake damage in 2010–2011. It contained a calling card from 'Mrs A. J. White, Misses White, 'Compton Opawa' and two Catholic religious medals. These items were reburied subsequently in a new time capsule at the same spot in 2017. See images in https://mro.massey.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10179/15542/AdamskiMAThesis.pdf?sequence=1

[56] 'Rock Villa' was once again a private home when it was badly damaged in the Christchurch earthquakes and subsequently demolished.

CHAPTER 9

Last Will and Testament

Eliza had a good send-off, commensurate with her status in the Christchurch Catholic community, if not accompanied by quite so broad a public acclamation as for Alfred. After lying in state at 'Compton' for a couple of days, Eliza's body was moved to the Cathedral where Bishop Grimes celebrated her Requiem Mass on the morning of 2 December 1909. There were five other priests in attendance and the Cathedral was full of mourners. The Bishop delivered an eulogy in which he mentioned their long friendship, noting how she had been present at his consecration in London a quarter of a century earlier. He had always been deeply impressed, he said,

> *"by that wonderful brain and will power that she displayed. That was the keynote of her life. A stern sense of duty governed all her actions. Even when she had passed the Scriptural three score and ten years she still displayed that stern attachment to duty, and despite the protestations of her loved ones she refused to cease from work. Her sense of duty impelled her to go on to the end. Although her end was sudden, she was not unprepared. God had given her a premonitory signal some weeks ago."*[57]

The Bishop had, apparently, spoken to Eliza just the Sunday before her death when she had mentioned her hope that she would be "*spared for some time longer to accomplish the work she had in her mind.*"[58] She was, of course, sixty-seven years old rather than over seventy as the Bishop believed.

What might have been in Eliza's mind in those final days? Her devotion to work sounds a bit driven, a touch of the workaholic perhaps. Clearly A. J. White Limited remained a major focus for her and she must have been pleased with its continued profitability and the excellent reputation that had been maintained under her watch. Looking ahead, some further developments of the warehouse premises were now required. The architect's plans for a major new building on the High/Tuam Street corner are dated 10 December 1909 so Eliza died too soon to see them realised but she was obviously privy to all the planning and discussion that fed into their final configuration. Eliza was by then a very experienced property developer, with both commercial and domestic accommodation projects in her recent history. She had not long completed a significant block of commercial building along Manchester Street, as well as the new build on the 'Rock Villa' site at Sumner. Work towards the new complex for A. J. White Limited on the corner site would be her final building project.

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[57] *Tablet*, 9 December, 1909.

[58] *Lyttelton Times*, 3 December, 1909.

Construction for the A. J. White's building got under way during 1910 and it was ready for business by the end of that year. Its opening was a grand Saturday night event with thousands of happy customers coming to take a look around in October 1910. The old two-storeyed timber warehouse building had been replaced by a three-storeyed one, faced with stone and with more of the large plate glass windows that had been such a feature of their 1879 construction. Another distinguishing feature was the store's suspended veranda, the only one of its kind in Christchurch at that time. The building was designed by leading Canterbury architects, the England Brothers, and would dominate the corner site for the next century, until suffering significant damage in the 2010-2011 earthquakes. It has since been partially restored, the rear section being demolished but the elegant façade being retained for a new commercial development behind it, though unfortunately without the 'A. J. White' branding that once adorned the corner parapet.

The various houses, farms, subdivisions, and commercial and industrial premises that were the 'property of Mrs A. J. White' by 1909 represented quite a portfolio of both land and bricks and mortar all things considered. In some ways they were evidence of Eliza's driven nature and one way she had fulfilled her 'constant desire to leave behind her some work of enduring benefit'. Her great childhood inspiration Maud Heath must have been strongly in her thoughts as she contemplated what other legacy she might leave behind. Maud's great walkway across the Wiltshire countryside had created an enduring physical structure with tremendous public utility, a combination that had seen her remembered hundreds of years after her death. Eliza found herself, like Maud, the sole mistress of a significant fortune by the end of her life. That meant that it was in her gift to likewise make a difference to the society of her time that would live on and convey benefits long after her passing.

She also had eight children, of course, who in the normal course of events might have expected to inherit all that wealth. According to later testimony, their mother had promised them as much. Yet Eliza did not leave her fortune to her children. Instead she developed a

The old A. J. White Limited façade in January 2023.

complex will that specified in great detail exactly how she wanted her estate to be divided up, and laid out a very clear proposal for the bulk of her wealth to fund orphanages for abandoned children. We have already considered why the fate of such children might have resonated so strongly with Eliza, and noted her apparent self-identification of having been an 'orphan' herself, even though that wasn't technically true. That's the positive motivation for her taking such a radical step. The flip side was possibly a sense of disappointment in how some of her children had turned out. Not that she didn't love them, of course, but inevitably some of the poor choices and life options that had characterised Cecily, Alfred and Mabel's adult life, and the institutionalisation of poor Catherine, must have made their mother think twice about handing over additional large sums to complement the significant incomes they were all deriving from Alf's estate. Perhaps they already had enough.

So what exactly did Eliza's will prescribe and who were its beneficiaries? The document had first been written and witnessed (by two of Eliza's domestic servants Mary Hand and Ann Smyth) in March 1907. The executors were to be her unmarried younger daughters Maud, Rose, and Beatrice White, A. J. White Limited's long-time accountant

Arthur Clement, and family friend and the firm's solicitor Henry Loughnan. Each child was given the right to select £100 worth of Eliza's things – *"carriage horses furniture plate or other personal effects"* – the selection to proceed in succession according to seniority. Next was a gift of £300 to the Catholic Bishop of Christchurch to pay capital (but not the interest) off the debt of the Cathedral, and a further £100 for him to offer Masses for the repose of Eliza's soul. There was a gift of £50 to her groom John Hutton *"who has been in my service for many years"*. Then came a complex offer regarding the recently built 'Rock Villa' at Sumner. This was to be offered for sale first to Maud for £5,000. If she did not take up that offer within a month, the same deal was to be offered in sequence to Cecily (Whittall), Mary (Inkson), Alfred, Catherine, Rose, Beatrice, and Martha (Duncan).

It is interesting that Catherine was included in this offer. She was not yet in psychiatric care in Sydney when the will was signed in March 1907 but she was already exhibiting the problematic behaviour that would see her committed in April 1908, and had been

'Rock Villa', Sumner. Photographed pre-earthquakes.

mentally unstable for the previous twelve years. This left plenty of time for a change to be made to this provision before Eliza's death (there was a later codicil regarding other elements of the will). The 'Rock Villa' offer also advanced Maud's claim ahead of the other siblings, breaking the strict order-of-birth sequence that applied to the children everywhere else in the will. This may be a pointer to Maud's distinctive engagement with the world of business and finance that marked her out among the White siblings (excepting Alfred junior's early period with the company), characteristics that would set her apart for the rest of her long life. When it came to money matters, Maud was a girl after her mother's own heart. Perhaps she had also been closely involved with her mother in the construction of 'Rock Villa'.

Neither Maud nor any of her siblings took up the offer regarding the Sumner mansion within the two-year period specified in the will where it was to remain available to them to buy at the specified price. This activated the next instruction in Eliza's will which required 'Rock Villa' to then be offered, at the same price, to the Catholic Bishop of Christchurch. Whoever purchased the house, £2,000 of the sale price was to be passed over to the Bishop to fund the construction of a permanent church 'of stone brick or similar materials' at Sumner, thereby replacing the temporary church that had been erected on land given to the Bishop by Alf some years earlier. When the Bishop also chose not to take on 'Rock Villa' (Eliza had apparently thought it ideal to become the Bishop's residence), within three months of the two-year provision expiring, the Trustees were then instructed to take out a £2,000 mortgage on the property to provide the funding for the Sumner church. This was the way it worked out, the foundation stone of Sumner's Our Lady Star of the Church being laid on 24 March 1912, its inscription acknowledging Eliza's 'munificence'.

'Rock Villa' had been publicly offered for lease immediately after Eliza's death and the advertisement provides an excellent description of the property:

> *"'Rock Villa' is a beautiful stone residence, recently completed, and contains 8 good rooms and every modern convenience. It is undoubtedly the finest residence in this popular marine suburb, and is surrounded by beautiful lawns and shrubberies. There is also a good orchard and kitchen garden, together with ample paddock accommodation. Although on the main road, the dwelling is so surrounded by old English trees as to ensure perfect privacy, and an opportunity to rent such a delightful property is seldom met with."*[59]

Presumably the requisite mortgage was raised against it and duly passed over to the Bishop to fund the construction of the Sumner church. 'Rock Villa' was subsequently offered up for sale in 1920, and again in 1923, at which point it was purchased by the Anglican bishop of Christchurch and developed as an orphanage for infants, known as St Saviour’s Home. This institution relocated to Avonside in 1929 and the building was then sold. By 1937 it had been redeveloped into “Rock Villa’ Flats’, and was advertised as *“one of the most palatial residential flats in the Dominion …”*. It fell into decline over the succeeding 50 years but was restored by new owners in the 1980s. By 2010 it was once again a family residence.

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[59] *The Press*, 12 January, 1910.

The church funded by Eliza’s benefaction served the Sumner parish for just shy of a century, before suffering so much damage in the 2010–2011 earthquakes that it was demolished. A new building was then erected on the same site and a brass plaque from the old church has pride of place on its walls. It reads ‘In Memory of Eliza White by whose munificence this church was erected. 1913’. There is no such commemoration for ‘Rock Villa’, which suffered the same fate in the earthquakes. Its former site on Marriner Street (formerly Grafton Street), the main road into Sumner township, is now occupied by complexes of townhouses, one of which apparently has a *“homage feature wall clad in reclaimed flooring from the original ‘Rock Villa’”*.[60] Another incorporates *“hand crafted stone walls from the original ‘Rock Villa’ homestead that give a vibrant feeling to the smartly designed courtyard living”*, which apparently justifies the estate agents in touting it as “*‘Rock Villa’ Reborn … preserving the essence of the iconic ‘Rock Villa’”*.[61]

Eliza’s will directed that all of her other property was to be sold and the money raised be used to pay her funeral expenses and to fund her other legacies. There was one exception: “*my leasehold property in Christchurch known as ‘Cathedral Chambers’*” which was excluded from this provision. This was an imposing building on the corner of Gloucester and Colombo Street in The Square, now the site of the new Christchurch Public Library Tūranga. Otherwise, she wanted her Trustees to pay a number of annual annuities. First were those previously mentioned; £100 to her sister Elizabeth Lawes back in Chippenham, £100 to her niece, Alice Harvey in Swindon, and £20 to her long-time servant Catherine Glazer (who in the event died before Eliza). Another sum of £52 per year was to go to Miss Nancy Loughnan, the daughter of Henry Loughnan and presumably a close family friend. Then, finally, for each of her children there was to be an annual sum of £150.

The big surprise came in the final provision of the will. The bulk of Eliza’s considerable fortune was to be used to create a *“Trust Estate … for the purpose of founding building equipping and maintaining Two (2) Orphanages in or near Christchurch one for the reception of destitute female and the other for the reception of destitute male orphan children …”* The girls’ orphanage was to be built first, the boys’ one only to follow if there were sufficient funds.

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[60] 2/24 Marriner Street: https://raywhite.co.nz/canterbury/christchurch-city/sumner/OPA30158/ [June, 2023]

[61] https://www.nz.open2view.com/properties/343207#marker-overview [June, 2023]

Both institutions were to be placed under the management of "*some recognised religious order in the Roman Catholic Church approved of for the purpose by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Christchurch … BUT subject in all things to the control of the trustees …*" It was to be called St Joseph's Orphanage and to be *"primarily for the reception and education of children in the Catholic religion BUT no child of any other religious denomination shall for that reason alone be refused admission but every such child shall conform to the rules of the institution so far as may be possible for a non-Catholic to conform thereto."*

The next provision was to cause some difficulties in the years ahead, tying the Trustees to a close relationship with the Bishop but leaving the precise nature of that relationship rather vague. "*The Trustees shall associate with themselves the Roman Catholic Bishop … of the Diocese of Christchurch in all matters connected with the number and admission of children to the Orphanage and the general policy of management thereof."* Then came a definition of who would constitute an 'orphan', which perhaps points back to Eliza's own experience as an adolescent in Wiltshire who experienced abandonment or destitution after her father's death without technically being an 'orphan'. It stated that, "*any child whose parents are or either of whose parents is dead shall be deemed to be an orphan"* and even more broadly, *"any child who in the opinion of my trustees is deserted or has ceased to be cared for and maintained by its parents or by such one of them as is living or by the guardian of such child may be admitted …"*

This must have been something of a bombshell for Eliza's children. If they weren't already aware of these plans, they soon found out as the details of the estate were reported by the Christchurch newspapers just a week after the funeral. It must have taken quite some digesting. Meanwhile life went on. They had new homes to find, social duties to perform – as is evident from the many references to the Miss Whites' continued presence in Catholic and philanthropic news – and their mother's home and contents to disperse. 'Compton' was put up for sale or rental in January 1910, with Mabel's husband, Ronald Duncan, as the sole agent. By June, a whole slate of Eliza's properties in the Sumner central business district were on offer: the Sumner Borough Council, the Sumner Town Hall, the Club Luncheon Rooms and Bakery, 'Rock Villa' itself, a new rough cast villa, a five-room house, and a cottage next to the Club. 'Compton' was put up for auction the following year and a clearing sale held at the end of April 1911. The sale notices give some insight into Eliza and her daughters' domestic lifestyle.

'Compton' was at the terminus of the electric tramway and just one minute's walk from the Opawa Railway Station, overlooking the Heathcote River which flowed along the property's eastern boundary. The three-acres of its grounds were beautifully laid out with shrubs, lawns sloping down to the river and a large central lawn an acre in extent.

The residence was two-storeyed with 20 rooms, including a large dining room (20 feet by 60 feet) and three bay windows, a strong room for the silver, a library, breakfast room, main kitchen and back kitchen, pantries, sculleries, all downstairs. Upstairs were the bedrooms and dressing rooms, together with bathrooms and lavatories. Outside was a big stable block, complete with carriage accommodation and the groom's quarters. There was in addition a four-room cottage, a conservatory, and a vinery and melon house *"with the necessary heating apparatus"*.[62] The furniture and effects included, *"Lovely furniture, 8 horses, high-class trotting stock, cattle, motor-car, brougham, governess cart, 2 phaetons, trotting sulky."*[63] One imagines the motor car was the girls', while Eliza's love of horses is evident in the wide range of horse-drawn vehicles included in the list.

In May 1911 a beautiful stained glass window was unveiled in the Cathedral's Chapel of St Joseph, donated by the 'Misses White' in memory of their mother. It was set beside an earlier window 'in memory of the late Mr White' according to the *Tablet* report. In fact, that earlier window was in memory of Alf's father Thomas, recording his death back in Taunton on '25 April 1889, aged seventy-six years', as well perhaps as his paternal grandmother whose name is recorded below as 'Annie M. White'. This has created some confusion in later years, trying to work out who the two windows were memorialising, especially after Eliza's window was damaged and the repair added the incorrect date for her death ('13-11-1909'). A published account of the Cathedral's decorative elements later described Thomas as 'a prominent parishioner' of the Cathedral, and Eliza's husband. Both windows were produced by the famous German Zettler Studio in Munich, noted for its rich, jewel-like colours and beautifully detailed drawings. The first window depicted St Joseph and the Virgin Mary, representing the White's strong devotion to the Holy Family and St Joseph in particular. The new window added a matching design featuring St Monica and St Augustine, a bittersweet reference perhaps to Eliza's troubled relationship with her son but expressing also an enduring hope in his ultimate salvation.[64]

Meanwhile Catherine's situation in Sydney had to be regularised. Maud took this in hand, filing papers in the court, getting updated psychiatric assessments from Sydney, and having her sister formally declared insane in the Christchurch Supreme Court in August 1911. Thereafter the Public Trust would take responsibility for Catherine's considerable financial interests in Christchurch. So far, so publicly attentive did the White girls appear to their mother's last will and testament. Behind the scenes, however, they were not all quite so sanguine about being cut out of her 'munificence' in favour of the orphans of Christchurch.

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[62] *Lyttelton Times*, 25 February, 1911.

[63] Ibid., 22 April, 1911.

[64] *Tablet*, 8 June, 1911.

At some stage during 1911 Maud White began to put together detailed information on her mother's financial activity in the years following Alf's death. This is the source of that data as presented in the previous chapter, which gave such precise information on Eliza's income and expenditure from 1895–1909. The point of the exercise was to demonstrate that Eliza's will had broken promises made to the children 'that she would leave her property to them'.[65]

More than that, she had misled them as to her financial situation, prevailed upon them to allow her to draw on their income as provided by their father's estate, and most pointedly, *"the said Eliza White did not maintain educate and clothe her said children in a manner to which their station entitled them"*. Indeed, claimed Maud, in the petition, *"Had they understood that they would not receive back the moneys advanced by them to the said Eliza White they would have set up establishments for themselves which would have been better for them financially."* The legal basis to the claim was The Family Protection Act 1908, a measure that had been instituted to protect economically vulnerable women and children but which was premised on meeting the basic needs of applicants and nothing more.[66] It pretty quickly became clear that the application didn't stand a chance, especially when the Trustees of Eliza's estate (presumably excluding Maud and Beatrice White) confirmed that they would have to oppose any such claim.

As Maud's lawyer wrote to Ronald Duncan on 7 November 1911,

> *"We are still of opinion, notwithstanding the information you have given us, that the application for further provision to be made under the Family Protection Act, cannot succeed and not even in the case of Mrs Sheppard [Cecily] and Mrs Inkson [Mary], as the Court will hold that adequate provision has been made by Mrs White's will for all the children having regard to the adequate provision also made by Mr A. J. White's will for them, and which they are now in receipt of."*

Ron Duncan had already made the same assessment, although he felt that Eliza's will had been unjust since the girls *"having been brought up in a luxurious home … had been left entirely without a home"*. But after receiving a letter from the Trustee's lawyers, he wrote to Maud, *"I do not think for a moment that if these matters are gone into, the Court will sanction an increase to the beneficiaries, as apart from Alf and Mrs Sheppard, the rest of the beneficiaries in the estate must be considered as fairly well off …"* On that basis the girls' case against the Trust was evidently abandoned.

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[65] Maud White unfiled legal petition, Inkson Papers, no date.

[66] *Fortifying Family Protection: The Need for Anti-Avoidance Provisions in the Family Protection Act 1955,* Josie Te Rata, Dissertation, LLB (Hons), University of Otago, 2016, p. 3.

Meanwhile, whatever was happening with the respective parental Trusts, the White girls had various family celebrations and tragedies that we need to note. Beatrice got married at the end of November 1910 in a Nuptial Mass at the Cathedral celebrated by Bishop Grimes and with her sister Rose as her bridesmaid. Her husband, Alfred Joseph Bunz, was a brilliant musician and son of a Danish Professor of Music who had settled in Christchurch in 1868. Following in his father's footsteps as a professional musician, Alfred had a high profile in Christchurch music circles and was the conductor of the Cathedral choir. That was probably how he met Beatrice. They were to have three children in a marriage that endured until Alfred's death in 1950. John Fletcher notes that Beatrice Bunz was remembered as a devoted mother, strongly interested in the Plunket Society, and was a Trustee of Eliza's Trust until her death. As such she was 'an assiduous visitor at St Joseph's [orphanage] for many years'. Beatrice Bunz died in 1958 aged seventy-nine.

As noted above, older sister, Cecily Whittall, married Walter Sheppard in February 1911. The Bishop didn't celebrate that one, which was presumably an even quieter affair than most of the White family weddings. Her mother had not selected Cecily as a Trustee in her will. That probably simply reflects that she was living in England in Eliza's final years and her mother may have expected her to stay there. It wouldn't have been very practical for her to have a role in administering the Trust in Christchurch. On the other hand, Cecily had already lost the property that her father had settled on her by 1911 according to the Trust lawyers' response to Maud's legal challenge. As Ron Duncan had noted in his response, Cecily and Alfred were notably less well-off than their other siblings, through their own mismanagement or ill fortune. Alfred hadn't been selected as a Trustee either, though that seems self-explanatory given his dramatic fall from grace within Eliza's lifetime. He is noticeably absent from family events, as he was plagued by alcoholism and living in Otago. In any case, neither of them played any role in the Eliza White Trust before their respective deaths, Cecily's in England in 1932 and Alfred's in Dunedin in 1933.[67]

The first big tragedy for the family after Eliza's passing was the sudden death of Mary's husband, William Inkson, in 1913. William had always been a keen sportsman, involved with cricket, shooting, pigeon racing and bowls, although ill health blighted his active involvement in sport and prompted his early retirement from A. J. White Limited in his late forties. In May 1913 he went to Australia with the New Zealand rugby league team for what Jo Coffey described to me as a supporters' 'boys' trip'. The newspaper more sanguinely reported that he had gone on the journey for the benefit of his health.

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[67] Probate in 'Cicily' Sheppard's estate was granted to her ex-brother-in-law, Ronald Duncan.

He fell ill at Toowoomba in Queensland, and though he was taken to a private hospital, died there of peritonitis shortly after. He was just fifty-three and left Mary with six children aged from fourteen to four.

Ebullient Christchurch doctor and aspiring politician Dr Henry Thacker was the leader of the touring party. He was a close friend of the Inksons who seem to have named their eldest son Bernard Thacker Inkson in his honour, and their eldest daughter Monica Mary Inkson after his wife Monica. It was a friendship that would be maintained. When Dr Thacker won the Christchurch East seat for the Liberal Party at the 1914 general election, Mary was at his side at the celebrations and he paid tribute to her and his wife as 'my two best supporters'.[68] Mary's daughters were attending the Mercy Sisters' school in Colombo Street in 1913 but the next year she sent them to board at her old school the Sacred Heart Convent in Timaru. Her boys meanwhile were sent off to the Dominican Sisters' St Thomas's Academy in Oamaru. Their names appear in school prize lists fairly consistently, suggesting they were high achievers. Sadly, Monica Inkson died of appendicitis in 1917, aged just eighteen.

Mary Inkson maintained a high profile in Christchurch social circles, often in company with her sisters at philanthropic events, and frequently being noted on the 'women's page' of the newspapers. Just as an example, in the year after William's death she was a Vice-President of the A. J. White Limited Miniature Rifle Club and a member of the Canterbury Art Society. She was also heavily involved in a range of patriotic activities during WWI. Shortly after the war, in 1922, however, she sold the family home in Spreydon and moved to her son (known as Joe) Alfred's farm 'Pentland' at Waikari in rural North Canterbury. Her younger sons Paul and Bernard bought a 400-hectare farm in the Omihi Valley in the early 1930s that they called 'Taunton'. Paul later bought 'Glenmark', a similar sized farm in the top end of the Omihi Valley, which is still in family hands at the time of writing. Mary also kept up her obligations to the Eliza White Trust until the end of her life and, most importantly for this history, she held on to a wide range of documents and passed them on. Without access to those papers, kept together by the Inkson branch of the family, this account would be immeasurably the poorer. Mary died in Christchurch in 1939 aged seventy-one.

Rose White was the last of the White daughters to marry. All of the single girls who'd lived with Eliza at 'Compton' in her final years were devout in their Catholicism. Rose was particularly dedicated. She was the mainstay of the Christchurch Cathedral Altar Society and quietly funded much of its activity out of her own pocket. At nearly thirty-eight years of age, however, she looked to be heading for a life of saintly spinsterhood. Everyone was delighted therefore when she made the perfect match in 1914. Her husband to be was an up-and-coming doctor (Michael) Charles Morkane, a devout Catholic whose brother was a priest and the Rector of the Catholic Seminary in Dunedin. Eliza would undoubtedly have approved. Bishop Grimes and all the Cathedral priests certainly did, hosting a pre-wedding event for her at the Bishop's house at which she was presented with a silver coffee service and lauded for her work with the Altar Society, which the Bishop hoped she would continue in her married life.

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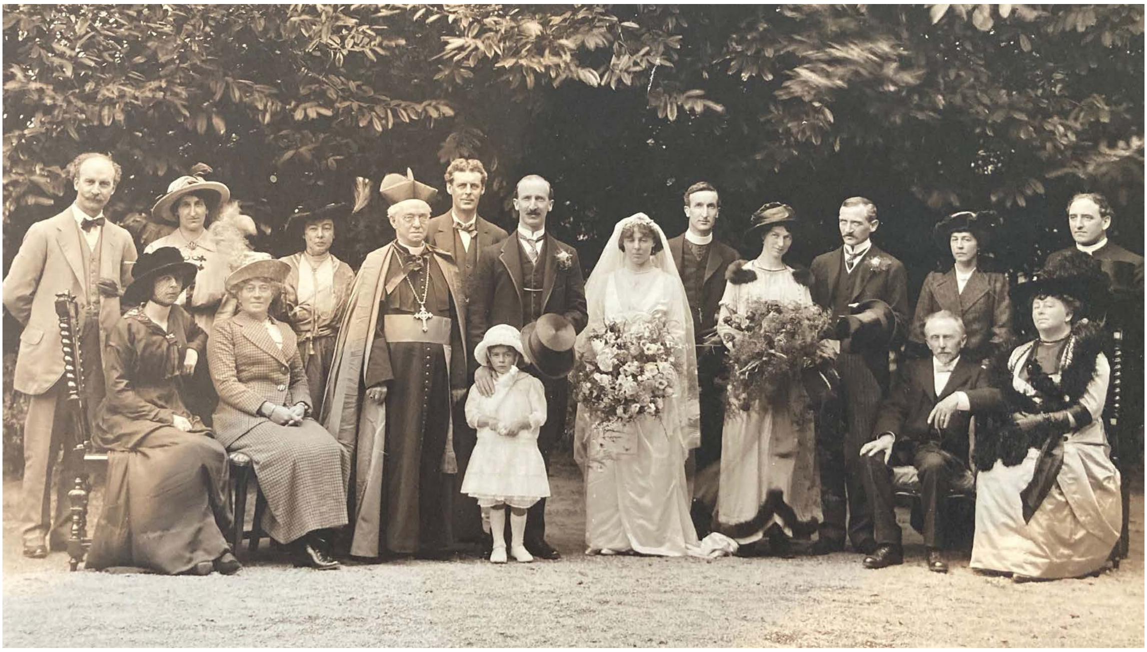
[68] *Lyttelton Times*, 11 December, 1914.

The wedding was duly celebrated, by Bishop Grimes of course, at the Cathedral on 21 April 1914. The Cathedral administrator Father Price and Father Cecil Morkane assisted at the Nuptial Mass, and there was an apostolic blessing from Pope Pius X. Rose was supported by Clara Morkane, her sister-in-law to be, 'given away' by her Uncle George White, and had her young niece Margaret (Judy) Inkson as a flower girl. The Cathedral, wrote the *Tablet, "was quite filled with friends and well-wishers, although the guest-list was limited to the immediate relatives of both parties."* This seems to have been typical of the White family. They accepted public scrutiny of their affairs as part of their elevated position in Christchurch Catholic



Standing, left to right: Alfred Bunz, unknown, Beatrice Bunz, Bishop Grimes, Ron Duncan, Judy Inkson, Charles Morkane, Rose White, Fr Cecil Morkane, Clara Morkane, Dr Han Newton, Maud White, Fr Price.
Seated, left to right: Mabel Duncan, Aunt Nellie, Uncle George, Mary Inkson.

society but did not encourage it. After the service, it was just the family and wedding party who adjourned to Mabel Duncan's home in Fendalton for a wedding breakfast. They also posed for this group wedding portrait in the grounds. Everyone is there except for Cecily, Catherine, and Alfred; in England, Sydney and Otago respectively.

It is not a very cheery looking group. That is not surprising in 19th-century portraits, when having a photograph taken was still considered a rather serious occasion and levity was the accepted pose to adopt. Perhaps that was still the custom in the 1910s as well. In any case, Rose White's wedding was the last event at which such a large gathering of the immediate family would ever be recorded for posterity. You'd have to hope that it was a joyous occasion and they enjoyed themselves. They certainly had a lavish venue to provide a backdrop in Ronald and Mabel Duncan's splendid Fendalton property. They also dressed very well. The newspaper report describes the women's various costumes with an appreciative eye. The bride, for example, wore "*a beautiful gown of White satin de soie, the softly-swathed bodice sewn with seed-pearls, and the fully-trained skirt was dropped and finished with one of the new short tunics of handsome lace. The usual coronet of orange blossoms and long veil; of tulle, beautifully embroidered, was worn, and she carried an exquisite shower bouquet.*" The lace had all been handmade for her by the Good Shepherd Sisters at Mount Magdala, who had been supported in their work by Eliza and Alfred since their arrival in Christchurch in 1886.

Aunt Nellie (George White's second wife and second from the left in the front row) *wore "a smart costume of grey tweed, small hat of purple chiffon velvet, trimmed with up-right ostrich plume and cluster of small red roses"*. Beside her sat Mabel who had *"covered her frock with a magnificent sealskin coat"* and wore a *"black velvet hat with tango mount"*. Standing behind Bishop Grimes's left was Beatrice wearing a "*soft dull shade of blue crepe de chine, effectively contrasted with a swathed waistband and collar of cerise glace, black panne velvet hat, trimmed with ostrich feather mount*". Seated at far right is Mary Inkson, likewise resplendent in *"lavender-grey charmeuse satin, touched with black applique, black panne plush hat with plumes"*. And just behind her standing is Maud in a "*deep crimson velour costume, purple satin hat, with crimson 'halo' brim*". Meanwhile, the only one of Eliza's grandchildren to feature is little Margaret Inkson, known as Judy, who "*wore a dainty frock of White muslin over a soft silk slip, and carried a bouquet of White flowers*".[69]

Later that day Charles and Rose Morkane set off for the North Island for a fortnight, the first section of their honeymoon. Then at the beginning of May it was off on an extended tour of Europe, but not alone. Alfred Bunz had just surrendered his role as organist at the Cathedral after eighteen years, suffering from nerve damage in his arm, and he and Beatrice were joining the newlyweds on the expedition to seek medical attention abroad, along with their new-born son. Mabel Duncan was tagging along as well. The women's social column in the *Star* was impressed:

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[69] *Sun*, 14 April, 1914 and *Tablet*, 30 April, 1930.

> *"It will be quite a family party consisting of three sisters and their husbands … Mr and Mrs Bunz, Mr and Mrs Ronald Duncan, Doctor and Mrs Morkane. Mrs Duncan intends to leave the big trotters behind, that with herself in a wee sulky, like a bird on the horse's tail, she has made a feature of the streets of Christchurch, but Mr and Mrs Bunz intend to take with them their particular treasure, Master Denis Alfred Haydn Bunz, a really magnificent baby that any woman would rave over."*[70]

In the event, despite the newspaper report, Ronald Duncan did not in fact go. The others sailed for London on the *Remuera*, leaving Wellington on 7 May 1914. It was an historic time to visit the continent, the last brilliant summer of an Edwardian era that had been marked by years of sustained peace, progress and prosperity across Europe. There had been ongoing friction and minor wars in the Balkans, of course, but no-one expected a political assassination in Serbia that June to spark an all-in European conflagration that would quickly develop into the First World War. Yet that is exactly what happened by the beginning of August, as a series? of great power alliances and war plans set off a chain of interlocking decisions like falling dominoes. The Morkanes, Bunzes and Mabel Duncan were all on hand to witness these historic events unfold but unfortunately have left no record of exactly where they were and how the crisis impacted on their various travel plans. Rose's wedding, however, symbolises the apogee of the Edwardian period for the White family, a last great hurrah for an era that would seem in retrospect like a golden age.

Presumably, the whole travel party made common cause of a visit to Cicily (as she was now spelling her name) and Walter Sheppard at their house 'Te Maru' at Crowthorne in Berkshire. Whether they visited their other relations, on both the White and Baker sides, is unknown. Though each member of the group received some publicity on their eventual return to New Zealand, none of these reports refers to any family visits. Mabel was the first to come home to Christchurch, arriving on 12 November 1914. She went to a race meeting that very afternoon and was immediately back into business working with her horses. The following year she would be the 'Sports' representative in Christchurch's Queen Carnival, a competitive patriotic fund-raising event which drew the following description of her credentials:

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[70] *Star*, 30 March, 1914.

> *"Mrs Duncan is a true sportswoman. To see her handling the ribbons as she drives about town in her spanking turn-out is quite sufficient guarantee of that. You sense at once that she is a lover of all good sport; you know that her horses are her friends; you are positive that she adores the exhilarating out-of-doors, and the cross-country gallop that is such a stimulating thing. And it is all true: she does."*[71]

The Bunzes and Morkanes were recorded separately in the monthly reports of New Zealanders calling at the New Zealand High Commission Office in London in July and August 1914. The Morkanes spent Christmas 1914 with Charles's relations in Cork, Ireland, and he then took up a post at a hospital in Dublin. He also offered his service to the military medical services but was rejected. He then spent time at women's hospitals in London, Edinburgh and New York before the couple returned to Christchurch via Hobart in July 1915. With that added training, Charles, who had formerly worked at Christchurch Hospital set himself up in practice as a specialist 'in the diseases of women'. The Bunzes were the last to come back, being overseas for eighteen months. They spent most of that time in London where Albert's medical condition improved under treatment and he amassed a huge collection of music to bring back with him in December 1915. He also witnessed a Zeppelin airship attack on the English capital.

Rose and Charles Morkane set up their household in the Cashmere hills, in the house that Rose had owned (and possibly built) before their marriage on Dyers Pass Road. A few months after their return from England she fell pregnant. No doubt they were delighted but she was thirty-nine, quite an advanced age in the 1910s to be having a first baby. Perhaps she was a little anxious and definitely contemplating mortality. In any case, a fortnight before her baby was born, the heavily pregnant Rose walked down to her neighbour's house with a two-page last will and testament that she had written out by hand. It is a charming document in its simplicity and as an expression of her quiet and generous personality. Nominating Charles and her sister Beatrice as her trustees, she left all of her income to her child 'if it lives', but to her husband 'if it goes to heaven'. As well her house, her furniture and money she had invested in G. T. White, which was perhaps her uncle's business. She set aside £100 for the Bishop to say Masses for her soul and asked her husband to have a Mass said for her every week as well.

Rose's jewellery and furs were also to go to her child 'if it lives', and otherwise various pieces were specifically allocated to her sisters Beatrice, Mabel and Maud, and to her sister-in-law Carrie Morkane. She wanted a chalice to be made for her brother-in-law Father Cecil Morkane, £100 and her gold pocket-watch for her maid Elsie Gleeson with a request for her to look after Rose's dog 'if it lives'. Finally there was a £50 bequest to her gardener Robinson. At the foot of the second page was the date, 7 June 1916, and the signatures of her witnesses, her neighbour Mrs Annie Mead and Mrs Mead's servant Maria Angelo Santoro. This is all seems very straightforward and absolutely clear to me. The only problem was that on 7 June Mrs Mead hadn't been home when Rose called and Maria signed on her own. A few days later Rose returned with her 'will' and got her friend Annie Mead to sign it. Annie, however, was wary, asking Rose if it wouldn't be better to have her solicitor involved. Rose's response is very revealing in the light of her experience of wills, and lawyers.

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[71] *Sun*, 27 March, 1915.

"Lawyers mix things up so and I have written out here all that I want and it is quite plain and simple." Annie suggested that Rose needed to countersign the document at this point but Rose insisted that she had already signed it twice and that would do. Unfortunately she was wrong and Annie was right, or as she later testified, *"I did not then know that Mrs Morkane's signature near the end of the said will forms part of what I now know to be the attestation clause but I am sure that Mrs Morkane intended that signature to be her signature to the will."* In a way they were both right as the lawyers did subsequently 'mix things up so'. Poor Rose died on 9 July 1916, a fortnight after giving birth to Charles Joseph Morkane. Her 'will' would subsequently be found wanting by the court which declared her to have died intestate. It took two years and lots of legal wrangling to sort out her estate. The end result was that the infant inherited property valued at £5,450, including the Cashmere house and a valuable parcel of shares in A. J. White Limited, and Dr Charles Morkane £2,724. His maiden sisters came to live with him and help bring up the boy, and he was awarded £600 per annum from the estate to support his son.

This legal imbroglio seems a somewhat ironic way to end this chapter's consideration of Eliza White's last will and testament and the ways in which it impacted in different ways on her various children in their respective life situations after her passing. There could hardly have been a sadder outcome to the wider family's shared experience than Rose Morkane's post-natal death at thirty-nine, a bitter blow especially for Dr Morkane with his medical specialisation in the 'diseases of women'. With Clare and Caroline Morkane's assistance, however, he seems to have done a good job of raising his son, who duly followed his footsteps into a medical career. After completing his education at St Kevin's College, Oamaru, and the University of Otago, the younger Charles Morkane did post-graduate training in London and became an anaesthetist. After WWII he became Christchurch's first full-time specialist in that role. He also became a director of A. J. White Limited and for thirty-nine years served on the Eliza White Trust, the establishment and development of which is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 10

The Eliza White Trust, 1909–2002

Much of the story of the Eliza White Trust has already been told in John Fletcher's 2002 book *Faithful to Their Trust: the Eliza White Board of Management 1909–2002*, to which this account has been indebted at numerous points. That debt will be even greater in this chapter of the present history, which will essentially be a precis of Fletcher's account, with some modest additions from sources that were not available to him. Otherwise, what follows is drawn heavily from the previous publication, tracking the evolution of Eliza's Trust from its initial establishment once her testamentary wishes had been discharged following her death in 1909. Having resolved their objections to their mother's generous benefaction by exploring the option of contesting her will, as outlined in the previous chapter, Maud, Beatrice and Rose White then committed themselves fully to implementing her wishes. Supported by Eliza's long-time advisers, business colleagues and, one might safely assume, friends, Henry Loughnan[72] and Arthur Reed, the hard work of bringing the Trust to fruition began.

It took a surprisingly long time before the actual business of building an orphanage commenced. This reflected the complexities of Eliza's estate, the various bequests that had to be effected, and the challenges of wrangling her extensive portfolio of property into a tidy administrative state. Henry Loughnan and Arthur Reed were ideal choices for this phase of the set-up. With Loughnan's extensive legal background and Reed's accountancy skills, they knew their way around the Christchurch commercial rental market and business sectors. That knowledge was vital to anchoring the Trust's finances to maximise returns, minimise outlay, and began the accumulation of income that would be necessary to fund a costly charitable enterprise like an orphanage. All of the Trustees were paid fees for their work – five per cent of the Trust income was set aside for the purpose – but notwithstanding that compensation, their faithfulness to the task was impressive. Loughnan was a Trustee almost until his death in 1939 aged eighty-nine. Reed served even longer, only resigning in 1948 when he was eighty-six.

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[72] The close ties between the Loughnans and the Whites are evident in their close social connections, Eliza's bequest to Henry's daughter, and also perhaps by the location of the Loughnan family grave right beside Alfred and Eliza's at the Linwood Cemetery.

There are two intriguing aspects of that initial Trustee group, which are worth emphasising. The first is an emphasis on the Catholic orientation of the Trust on the one hand, yet the contrasting directive that its work should be driven by need not religious affiliation. So, just as Eliza had specified that the orphanage should be principally for Catholic children, and operate under a Catholic aegis, she had also specified that denominational identity was not to prevent children who needed care from being accepted under its auspices. The involvement of Arthur Reed, a staunch Methodist, as a Trustee is very significant in that respect. Non-Catholic input into the Trust's affairs helped lift it above the sort of narrow sectarian vision that could blight many aspects of Church-related activity in that time. As we shall see, the value of that 'outsider' perspective would later be formally enshrined in the Trust's legal structure and has continued right up to the present.

The second distinctive element of the Trustee group was the involvement of White family members. As with the family firm, Maud White was the child who made a life's work of her connection to her parents' legacy in both business and philanthropy. Her deep commitment to the Trust continued right up to her death in 1960, surpassing even Henry Loughnan and Arthur Reed for length of service among the foundation Trustees. We will look more closely at Maud's story in the final chapter. Her younger sisters, Rose and Beatrice, were equally committed to the Trust's affairs in their time. For Rose that would prove to be tragically brief, her post-natal death in 1916 cutting short a life that had already been marked by both deep piety and devotion to philanthropic causes. Beatrice Bunz, on the other hand, maintained her involvement despite her subsequent family commitments until her death in 1958 aged seventy-nine. In both cases, the two White daughters took a very proprietorial interest in the life of the orphanage, visiting regularly and, especially in Maud's case, not holding back with 'suggestions' for the Sisters on improvements to its running.

At the outset the Trust's income base was focused on a group of commercial properties in Christchurch's central business district, mostly on the east side of Manchester Street in the block between Tuam and St Asaph Streets, and on Tuam Street itself. This part of town was largely obliterated by the 2010–2011 earthquakes, leaving few signs of its historic built heritage, but in the early 20th century it was a vibrant, thriving part of the central city. Eliza's holdings there constituted some quite notable buildings, including the J. M. Heywood building, the People's Palace Temperance Hotel (later the Railton Travel Hotel) and the E. W. Pidgeon building. All of them were relatively new in 1909 and there was no difficulty in finding and keeping commercial tenants for them (which would not always be the case). Maintaining the buildings and keeping on top of the tenancies was the principal focus of the Trust for its first couple of decades of operation. It was a task for which the 'old boys' were well fitted, and towards which Maud and Beatrice had been absorbing lessons from birth.

It was only a holding operation though. The point of Eliza's testamentary generosity was only going to be fulfilled when needy children were benefitting from her largesse. In the social context of the early 20th century that meant institutional care provided via an orphanage. Sorting out an arrangement with the Bishop and a religious order that conformed to Eliza's wishes was to prove quite challenging. Correspondence began with Matthew Brodie, who was now Bishop of Christchurch, in 1928. His preferred option was for the Trust to 'adopt' one of the existing orphanages in the diocese but the Trustees couldn't entertain that approach as the bequest required them to own the freehold of the land on which the orphanage stood. Their proposal to take over ownership of the land of one of the orphanages from a religious order was, he wrote, *"so unusual with such far-reaching consequences … that it may yet have to be submitted to the Supreme Authority of the Church, namely to the Holy See."* He foresaw a real challenge for the Trust Board to align the requirements of the civil law (Eliza's will) with the requirements of the ecclesiastical law (Canon Law).[73]

In the end, an arrangement was come to and the decision reached to develop an entirely new orphanage, though the administrative complexities of this would come back to concern a future Bishop (see below). Nonetheless, land to build on was finally purchased in Nash Road, Halswell, in the early 1930s, just over 11 acres in what was then still open countryside just outside Christchurch. The site was alongside the long-established Mount Magdala Home for 'fallen women' that had been generously supported by Alf and Eliza White since its development there in the 1880s. This location was ideal since the agreement was to see the new orphanage being operated for the Trust by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd who already ran Mount Magdala. From 1955 it would be flanked by the St John of God

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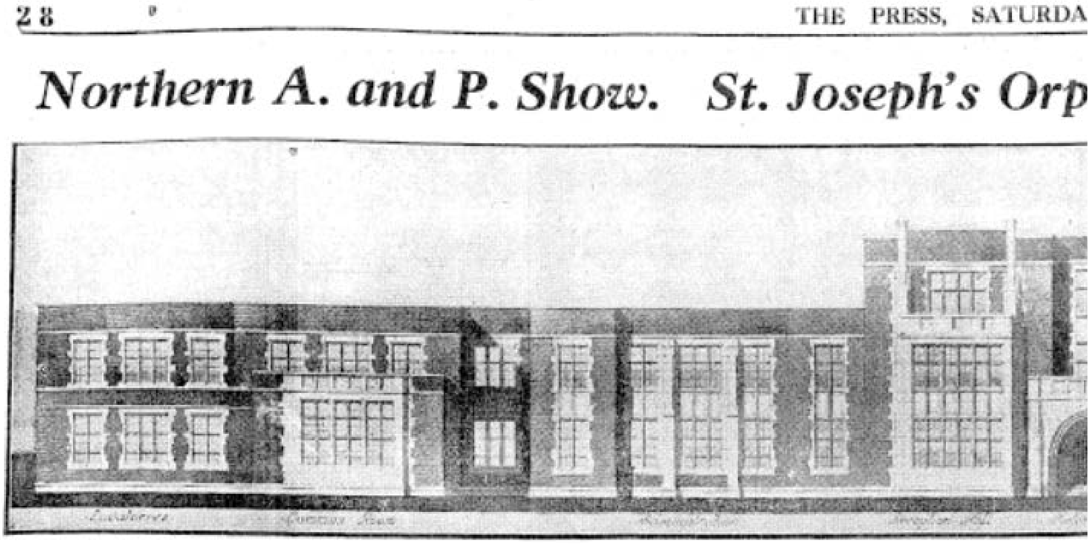
[73] Letters from Bishop Brodie to the Estate of Eliza White, 29 March, 1928 and 13 May, 1930. CDA. Also letter to Bishop Brodie from the Estate, 6 March, 1930, Inkson Papers.



28 THE PRESS, SATURDA

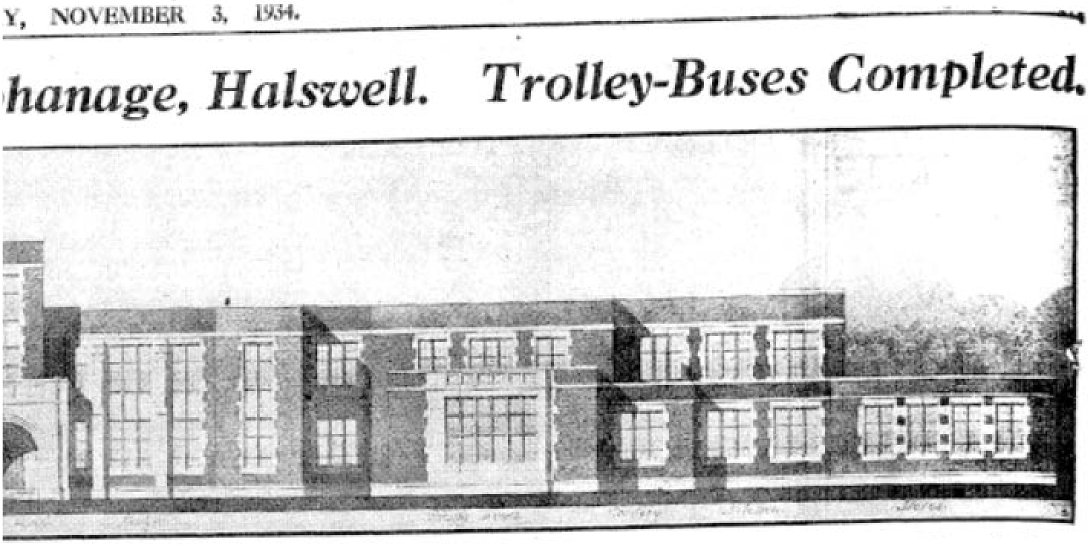
Northern A. and P. Show. St. Joseph's Orp

Brothers' Marylands Special School for boys.

The first sod for St Joseph's Orphanage was turned on 23 January 1934, with a suitable ceremony to mark the occasion. The architect was 35-year-old Allan H. Manson who went all out to create a statement building, his plans being implemented by Christchurch builders P. Graham and Sons, at a cost estimated at £40,000. This was a major construction project at a time when the Christchurch economy was still heavily impacted by the Great Depression and the work must have been welcome for all the firms who provided services. In November 1934, seven months into the build, the architect's designs were put on display in the windows of A. J. White's for Christchurch Show Week. They were also printed in the paper and even though the full design did not ultimately eventuate (the second wing depicted was never built), this contemporary record gives a good idea of the ambition of the undertaking. With no part of the complex now surviving, it also provides us with a visual reference for what it had been.

The Press provided an accompanying detailed description of what was planned, which is worth quoting in full as it showcases the level of investment the Trust was making to erect a building fit for purpose and with some significant technical innovations for the time. Eliza, with her penchant for construction, would no doubt have been pleased:

> *"Everything will be done to make it the most beautiful and up-to-date orphanage in New Zealand. As an instance of the thoroughness and completeness of the plans, it may be mentioned that a covered swimming bath will be part of the equipment ...*



Y, NOVEMBER 3, 1934.

hanage, Halswell. Trolley-Buses Completed.

Artist's rendition of Saint Joseph's Orphanage, Halswell.
Captioned: *St Joseph's Orphanage, Halswell, as it will appear when completed. Our reproduction shows the south-west elevation of the new orphanage now under construction near the Mount Magdala Home. The work being carried out under the instructions of the trustees in the estate of Mrs. A. J. White. The architect is Mr. A. H. Manson, of Christchurch.*

> *To provide the three main essentials, sun, light, and air, to the best advantage is the problem confronting the architect in the design of a modern orphanage. The design of St. Joseph's Orphanage follows the traditional style adopted for buildings of this type in England and America, and the feeling of the Early Renaissance architecture, with its long mullioned windows and projecting bays has been translated into the terms of modern construction. The building is of reinforced concrete and steel frame, with the exterior walls faced with multi-coloured unglazed tapestry bricks relieved with imitation sandstone. To obviate the disadvantage of a grouped system of planning, whereby the children have to pass from one building to another in all weathers, the 'H' type of plan has been adopted.*
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> *The central portion of the building on the ground floor is occupied by the administrative side of the orphanage, and also includes the entrance hall, reception room, parlours, library, sewing room, and kindergarten. On the ground floor of the south-east wing is the dining hall, designed to seat 120 children grouped at tables each seating eight. Attached to the dining hall is the servery and kitchen wing, which includes the vegetables room, milk room, cooler, and general store. The kitchen is provided with overhead light and ventilation, the walls being finished with glazed tiles. Attached to this wing is the laundry, drying room, and ironing room. The drying room is provided with warm-air*

> *driers to ensure the thorough drying and airing of clothes during the winter months. The ground floor of the north-east wing provides accommodation for the infants with the day and night nurseries, infants' baths, and the nurses' bedroom. This wing has its own kitchen and stores, and the babies' food will be prepared in this wing. A special feature of the nurseries is the spacious glass-enclosed verandahs and sun rooms. The sun room will be glazed with vita glass, which will enable the babies to derive the full benefit of the sun's rays.*
>
> ***Rooms for Classes***
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> *The ground floor of the north-west wing is taken up with the class rooms, common room, lavatories, and cloak rooms. The common room, which is 80 feet long by 30 feet wide, is provided with a stage and dressing rooms. Grouped round the northern aspect of the entire building on the first floor are the dormitories, sleeping porches, and bedrooms, to ensure a maximum amount of sun. All the dormitories are provided with dressing rooms, which are equipped with lockers. In an isolated position on the first floor of the south-east wing is the sick bay, complete with its own kitchen, bathroom. and nurses' quarters. Running completely through the central portion of the main block on the second floor is the playground, which is provided as a recreation room for the children during wet weather. In conjunction with the dormitories are spacious bathrooms and basin rooms equipped with the most up-to-date sanitary appliances. The lavatories and basin rooms throughout are provided with terrazzo floors. The building is heated throughout with hot-water radiation, and a calorifier is being installed to ensure an abundant supply of hot water at all times."*[74]

A blessing ceremony of the completed complex was held as part of the Mount Magdala Home's 50th Jubilee on 19 February 1936. All four New Zealand Catholic Bishops were in attendance. Much was made in the speeches about Eliza (and Alfred) and their renown in both business and philanthropy. The first girl residents processed from Mount Magdala to St Joseph's Orphanage wearing the blue veils that were the hallmark of the Children of Mary sodality. They then formed a guard of honour inside and outside the building as Archbishop O'Shea performed the blessing ritual. *Press* photographs of the day showed all four Trustees – Henry Loughnan, Arthur Reed, Beatrice Bunz and Maud White – posing with the orphans and, according to the report, they entertained the VIP guests at tea there. A formal opening followed on Sunday 23 February 1936, though the event was not open to the public, as a newspaper advertisement made clear. Somehow, this seems consistent with the Whites' characteristically public role but preference for privacy.

John Fletcher makes a point in his account that "*People familiar with the facility in its early years have commented on the contrast between what many considered the over-ornate*

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[74] *The Press*, 3 Nov, 1934.

and expensive interior features and a rather spartan interior."[75] This hardly aligns with the description of the orphanage's interior on opening, nor with the innovative heating system and other features reported in 1936. It is also worth noting that the covered swimming pool and a log cabin provided for the infant orphans to play in, were rather unusual and 'high-spec' for such institutions at that time, while the furniture provided by A. J. White's was also top quality. A comparison with the Methodist orphanage built in Harewood, the construction of which began only months before the Catholic one, provides a point of reference. It too was considered 'state-of-the-art' and modern in its design but it had none of these features. It had taken only one year to construct at half the cost of St Joseph's but was also designed to accommodate a hundred children. As the Reverend Rugby Pratt wrote on the opening of the Methodist institution, "*Everything about the building is good, but not extravagantly so."*[76]

St Joseph's Orphanage now got under way, providing full-time live-in care for up to a hundred orphaned girls. The Sisters of the Good Shepherd operated the institution with complete independence, as per their partnership agreement with the Trust and the Diocese of Christchurch. The role of the Trustees was to support them financially from the Trust income toward the maintenance of the building, providing regular grants to the Bishop for that purpose. That didn't preclude a deep personal interest from the Trustees, each of whom made it their business to keep an eye on a different aspect of the orphanage's operation. Arthur Reed, for example, made sure that the grounds were kept in good order while Maud and Beatrice regularly inspected the orphanage, and as John Fletcher noted, *"thought of it as a family concern*". This was entirely consistent with the wording of the Trust Deed, however, which specified that while the planned orphanages would be placed under the control of a religious order approved of by the Bishop, they would still be *"Subject in all things to the control of the Trustees"*.

In late 1949, Maud White for the Trustees was advised by the Mother Superior of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Melbourne that their ability to run St Joseph's alongside Mount Magdala was coming to an end. Her letter also hints at some specific behavioural issues there that were challenging. "*It is very difficult to find sufficient Sisters for the work. Whether it be the very magnificence of the place, or whatever be the cause, the children do not seem to respond as they do in other places. The great distance of the Orphanage from the Convent is another great difficulty as the Sisters must go to and for so many times a day in all weathers …"* They had therefore decided to withdraw from the arrangement negotiated in 1931 and were giving the Trustees advance notice so that they would have time to find another community of nuns to take over.[77]

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[75] Fletcher, p. 17.

[76] *The Press*, 8 November, 1934.

The timing was unfortunate. Since 1944 Christchurch diocese had been under the episcopal control of a new bishop, an Australian, Patrick Lyons. Bishop Lyons had a preference for ecclesiastical rules and regulations and found his predecessor Bishop Brodie's arrangement with the Eliza White Trust highly irregular. Bishop Lyons made it his mission to tidy things up across the diocese.

The Eliza White Trust first caught his eye in September 1948 when he became aware that Maud White and Beatrice Bunz had invited their nephew Dr Charles Morkane to join them as family Trustees, without involving Lyons in the decision. After Henry Loughnan's death in 1939, and the recent retirement of the 87-year-old accountant Arthur Reed from the Trust, Maud had also arranged for Bob Free, a non-Catholic accountant with J. W. K. Lawrence Ltd, to become the Trust's paid secretary. Lyons mistakenly assumed that this made Free an additional Trustee and seems to have been under the impression that the appointment had been made during Bishop Brodie's time *"without the Bishop's knowledge which was apparently supposed to be necessary when new trustees were appointed. The bishop [Brodie] at the time was annoyed about being ignored and spoke of his right to take legal action, but he decided to let the matter rest; he was never happy about any of the arrangements."*[78]

It's hard to know if this letter accurately reflects Bishop Brodie's attitude towards the Trust but Bishop Lyons was certainly not happy with any of the arrangements made with his predecessor. The idea of a church-related institution that was not fully and completely under episcopal control would have been anathema to a bishop of his stamp, and undeniably awkward for any bishop as has been acknowledged. The Sisters' signalling their intention to withdraw their services from St Joseph's Orphanage simply added to the pressure. Christchurch priest Father Edward Joyce was deputed to liaise with the Eliza White Trustees. A series of conversations between the Trustees and the Bishop followed. They did not go well. A letter from the Trust to Bishop Lyons on 3 October 1949 lays bare the developing tension between the two parties. Outlying the 1931 agreement with Bishop Brodie and the Good Shepherd Sisters, the Trustees contended that *"The relationships of the Order and the Trustees have been harmonious and satisfactory, and the arrangements though no doubt a loose one has enabled the work of the Order, he objects of the Trust and the wishes of the testatrix to be carried out in a satisfactory way."*

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[77] Letter, Sister Mary of the Archangels to Miss White, 25 September, 1949, Inkson Papers.

[78] Letter, Bishop Lyons to Father Joyce, 11 September, 1948, Catholic Diocese Archives.

Lyons was not one to tolerate ‘a loose arrangement’. According to the letter he had instructed that the Good Shepherd Sisters’ work at the orphanage would have to be ‘terminated’ as the ‘canonical position is unsound’. Already facing the challenge of the Sisters pulling out in the near future, this put the Trustees in a difficult position. The two White sisters and their nephew Dr Morkane didn’t want to have to fight the Bishop, and they needed his co-operation to find another religious order to take over, but at the same time their primary responsibility was to Eliza’s will, not the niceties of Canon Law. Their response to his letter was impressively forthright:

> *“We hesitate to contemplate a situation that would be brought about if the Good Shepherd Sisters give up the conduct of the Orphanage and no other Order can be found to accept the work of the Orphanage under conditions which will be approved by the Court.*
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> *The Court has already granted extended powers to the Trustees on the understanding that the Good Shepherd Sisters would manage the Orphanage when built and will therefore be entitled to be informed of the reasons why this arrangement has been terminated.”*[79]

Patrick Lyons moved back to Australia early in 1950. The conflict with Eliza’s descendants was only one of many battles he had in the Christchurch church and, as Father Ernie Simmons wrote in his history of the Catholic Church in New Zealand Lyons finally “*gave up the unequal struggle with the Diocese of Christchurch and resigned*”. The Trustees were no doubt relieved when his successor turned out to be Father Joyce, the cleric delegated by Lyons to make contact with the Trust the year before and a Christchurch local. He was therefore already well-versed in the peculiarities of its arrangement with the Diocese and the Sisters. It was just as well, as the Sisters of the Good Shepherd did indeed withdraw from their work at St Joseph’s Orphanage in 1950. Only a small number of girls were living there by then and they were transferred to Christchurch’s other Catholic girls’ orphanage, Nazareth House. It was run by the Sisters of Nazareth, as was another institution for orphan boys at Middleton, also called St Joseph’s. The Middleton premises were run-down and in need of refurbishment. It was therefore agreed to transfer the boys to Halswell and start afresh with the Nazareth Sisters there.

This timely reboot prompted a revision of the terms of Eliza’s will, which necessitated an Act of Parliament, the Eliza White Orphanage Trust Act, passed in 1951. This encapsulated the original provisions of Eliza’s will, on the one hand, but added a new set of principles on the other. These were designed to reconfigure the operation at St Joseph’s to iron out the ‘irregularities’ and give all parties clarity on the way ahead. The Bishop was now included as a Trustee (but not as chairman), and there were to be five representatives on the Trust

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[79] Letter, Trustees to Bishop Lyons, 3 October, 1949, Inkson Papers.

Board henceforward. One had to be a family member, another had to be a non-Catholic, and all new trustees had to be approved by the Bishop. Everything relating to the orphanage was now vested in the Bishop – land, buildings and chattels – to be his responsibility alone. But if it were to close, everything reverted to the Board. The Trust's other assets were their responsibility, with an obligation to "*pay the net income from the real and personal property vested in the Board to the Bishop to be applied for the purposes of the said orphanage, as provided in the said will.*" It was also decided that the second orphanage allowed for in Eliza's will would not be built. St Joseph's was now able to be used for either boys, girls, or both.

This clarified rights and responsibilities to everyone's satisfaction. Experienced Christchurch businessman (and non-Catholic) Maurice Warren joined the Trust Board as its first chairman. The new Bishop, Edward Joyce, then arranged for the Nazareth Sisters to take over the running of St Joseph's at Halswell. After a major refurbishment, the Sisters moved in early in 1952 bringing all the boys aged 12 and under from their Middleton complex, plus some small girls. There was a new policy that no children under two and no girls of school age or boys older than 12 should be accommodated, though this was altered in 1958 to allow for some girls older than five to be taken in. The Trustees now felt no need to undertake inspection visits at St Joseph's or oversee its day-to-day operations in any way. There was a real separation of governance from operations, in modern management parlance.

The Trustees' focus was on ensuring a flow of financial resources to adequately support the orphanage. That became harder and harder as the years passed. The smart modern central city buildings that the Trust had inherited as its asset base in 1909 had inevitably become somewhat worn and shabby after several decades of commercial use. What were state-of-the-art premises in the Edwardian era also became much less suited to the needs of business and other tenants by mid-century. Rentals inevitably dropped, and with them so did the Trust's income. Some of the Manchester Street buildings were also made up of lots of small spaces so that there were multiple tenants and multiple leases to be administered. It all took a lot of time and energy for the Trustees, and especially its secretary Bob Free. But even as the Trustees did their best to maintain their assets and maximise the income from which they could support the orphanage against this downward cycle, the costs of funding the orphanage itself kept rising.

The personnel on the Board gradually changed. Beatrice Bunz died in 1958. She was replaced by Harry O'Reilly, a prominent Catholic who had the ear of the Bishop as well as lots of experience in the insurance industry. Maud White died in 1960 after fifty-one years guiding the destiny of her mother's Trust (and her parents' business as chairman of directors at A. J. White's). Her place was taken by experienced land agent Dan McCormick. Bishop Joyce had proven a great friend of the Trust. He died in 1964 and was succeeded by the dynamic young Christchurch-born Brian Ashby as Bishop, and Trustee. Despite his heavy commitments to the enormous changes in the Church occasioned by the Second Vatican Council, Bishop Ashby was supportive of the Trust throughout his almost 20-year episcopacy. When Maurice Warren retired from the Board in 1965, Harry O'Reilly succeeded him as chairman and Maurice Toomer, who had valuable experience in the building industry, joined as the 'non-Catholic' member. Ill health forced Dan McCormick's retirement in 1967 and he was replaced by accountant Matt Robinson at Bishop Ashby's suggestion. Robinson became chairman of the Board in 1969.

The Board's long-time secretary, Bob Free, did sterling work managing the Trust's assets. He oversaw the routine collection of rents, the payment of rates, insurance and other property management tasks. He furnished detailed reports to the Board which met at two-monthly intervals to decide about maintenance and improvements, set rents, approved tenancies, and, crucially, decided each year how much money was available to give to the Bishop for the needs of St Joseph's Orphanage. When ill health forced Bob Free's retirement in 1966, another accountant from J. W. K. Lawrence Ltd, David Lawrence, took over as secretary. In 1978 he moved on to the Board itself, replacing Maurice Toomer as the non-Catholic member. Another partner at J. W. K Lawrence Ltd, Warwick Ainger, then took his place as secretary. When he left the business to found Ainger Tomlin in 1988, the secretaryship moved to the new firm with him.

Through all this period, the Trust Board's work, and associated challenges, remained the same. The changing social context, however, meant that there was a reducing number of children needed institutional care, and a steadily falling number of religious Sisters able to provide it at St Joseph's. Replacing them with paid lay staff pushed up costs, as did state regulated standards for orphanages. As John Fletcher noted, what had been quite an adequate sum to fund the orphanage in 1952 was increasingly falling short as the years passed. That meant that the Nazareth Sisters had to make up the shortfall, subsidising the operation from their Order's resources. By the late 1970s there were only a dozen or so children in permanent residence at Halswell and the costs of keeping St Joseph's going were overwhelming the Sisters, despite the best efforts of the Eliza White Trust. In 1979 the Nazareth Sisters withdrew and after forty-three years of operation the orphanage was closed.

This brought a whole new set of challenges to the Trust Board. In 1982 responsibility for the land and buildings reverted to the Trust, as prescribed in the 1951 Act. Efforts by Bishop Ashby to find alternative diocesan uses for the premises had proven fruitless. This meant that as well as a set of ageing inner city buildings that were producing steadily diminishing returns, the Trust now also had a large empty orphanage on the outskirts of Christchurch.

Railton Travel Hotel on the corner of Manchester Street and St Asaph Street shortly prior to demolition, 1981.

The complex's ongoing maintenance proved such as to absorb all the income generated by the Trust but without any longer delivering any form of assistance to disadvantaged children, as per the intention of Eliza's bequest. For three years in fact the Trust operated at a loss. Resolving these challenges would take a huge amount of work and innovative thinking by the Board members through the 1980s. Their first breakthrough, when efforts to sell St Joseph's failed, was to find a tenant in the New Life Centre. This Pentecostal church group wanted to open a school there, which began operations in 1983. That immediately saved the $15,000 being expended annually on maintenance and security, and in addition brought in $20,000 per annum in rent.

With Trust funds now accumulating again, the second challenge was to review the increasingly decrepit Trust building assets in Manchester Street. In 1981 a deal was reached with the Christchurch City Council to demolish the Railton Travel Hotel (the former Salvation Army People's Palace Temperance Hotel) and establish a carpark on its site for an annual rental of $14,040. The same solution was subsequently applied to the Heywood Building and its neighbours on the southeast corner of the Tuam Street-Manchester Street intersection, with an additional boost to the Trust's income stream. Federal Motors continued with their tenancy in the old Pidgeon Building and its neighbours until 1997 when they too were demolished and another carpark created. Only one Trust-owned building remained on Manchester Street by the end of the 1990s and it was both in reasonably sound condition and had a long-term tenant in the Para Rubber company.

The orphanage buildings were working well as a Christian school (its name and church affiliation changed during this period) and bringing in a decent rental. When the school applied for integration into the state system in the mid-1990s, however, the rental agreement became problematic as an integrated school is required to own its premises. The school and Trust entered into negotiations for the sale of the St Joseph's site but for various reasons these stretched out and relationships between the parties became strained. At issue was the valuation, the Trust correctly foreseeing a rise in land values in Halswell with future developments, the school naturally wanting to pay as little as possible and bidding low. After some unfortunate legal action, a sale agreement was eventually reached in 1999 and, for just under $850,000, the Eliza White Trust severed its connection with the St Joseph's Orphanage complex after sixty-eight years where it had been their primary concern.

Along the way, there had been another disagreement within the Trust over the Christian school's rental. It stemmed from the appointment of Basil Meeking in 1987. Although born in Canterbury, Meeking had long been resident in Rome, serving in the Vatican administration, which made him something of an 'outsider' when he returned home to become bishop. He was considerably more conservative in ecclesiastical matters than his immediate predecessors Brian Ashby and Denis Hanrahan (whose brief episcopate was tragically cut short by his sudden death after just two years as Bishop). Like Patrick Lyons before him, he seemed to come into the diocese with a mission to 'tighten things up.' Some people welcomed this approach, for most it was rather negative.

The new Bishop first clashed with the other Trust Board members when he objected to the fact that a rental agreement was in place with an evangelical Protestant organisation, which he felt was inappropriate for a Catholic Trust. Quite apart from the fact that the deal with the Calvary Christian School had been crucial to reversing the Trust's financial reverses of the early 1980s, this sort of sectarian exclusiveness was completely out of kilter with Eliza White's express wishes for the Trust created in her name. Right from the outset, this particular Catholic Trust had been open to Protestant and non-denomination connections, whether in providing for the needs of children regardless of their religious identity (or lack of it), or in the highly valued input of the non-Catholic members of the Board. Indeed that vital 'outsider' perspective was built into the legislation under which the Trust had been operating since 1951. The other Trust Board members were unanimous in refusing Bishop Meeking's plea to cancel the agreement.

Fortunately, as with Bishop Lyons before him, Bishop Meeking's attention was mostly focused on other battles within the diocese, where there were many points of resistance to his approach. There would be one more major clash however. As the Trust Board reprioritised its activities after the closure of St Joseph's Orphanage, it became clear that it would have to develop a new model for providing residential care for disadvantaged children in the context of late 20th-century Christchurch. After seeking expert input from Miss Anne McCormack, Director of Catholic Social Services in the diocese, it was decided to develop a residential home or homes, from which children could keep in touch with their families, and through which counselling and parenting skills could be provided to the families concerned. It was hoped to undertake this new venture in association with Catholic Social Services, with experienced and trained personnel to staff the homes and provide the requisite services.

Such an important shift in structure and methodology, however, required a variation in the Terms of Trust from the 1951 Eliza White Orphanage Trust Act. The Trust Board filed its application with the Supreme Court in June 1992 and it was heard by Justice Holland in May 1993. It came as a bit of a surprise to say the least when Bishop Meeking opposed the Trust's application before the court. So too did a couple of Eliza's descendants – their concern being that the proposed change did not sufficiently safeguard the Catholic character that had been an essential element of the orphanage. This concern was reasonably easy to mollify, as the Trust Board's intention of aligning the new homes with Catholic Social Services was in essence little different than its previous arrangements with the Catholic religious orders who had run St Joseph's. The Bishop's objections were more of a concern. Bishop Meeking was evidently miffed that he had learnt of the proposed change from an advertisement in the newspaper. He was also opposed due to his perception that the new arrangement involved a diminution of the Bishop's powers under the 1951 Act.

It soon became clear that Bishop Meeking's objections held little sway with Justice Holland. If the Bishop had not bothered to attend Trust Board meetings, or read the minutes in retrospect, he had only himself to blame for not knowing what was intended. The Bishop was expected to play a role in the management of the Trust Board according to the Act and 'if he has not done so, that is unfortunate'. The Bishop's application for an adjournment was denied. His claim of diminished episcopal powers was also dismissed. Despite his preference, "*the Board members were not supposed to 'merely be advisers to and consultants with the Bishop.' … He is clearly a member, no more and no less. In the end, the decision must be with the Board.*" The other Board members felt particularly vindicated by the judge's comment that in his long legal career *"he had rarely encountered a Trust which had so faithfully adhered to its founder's intentions over so long a period."*[80]

The Trust Board's new Terms were promulgated in July 1993. They made provision for the Board to be able to erect/purchase/lease/or manage a residential facility (or facilities) for the care and benefit of children of either sex and provide counselling and training in parenting skills for families in need due to poverty, ill health or other. Preference would be given to Catholic children, though others could be included, and there would be an emphasis on Catholic values in counselling and training. The Board should consider any proposal from the Bishop relating to these matters but the Board would make the final decision on any proposals. In terms of the finances, the Board would be able to invest funds and apply net income to any costs or expenses incurred in its affairs and accumulate funds towards its facilities, for planning etc. It was very much in line with Eliza's original specifications from 1909, just tweaked to suit the changed circumstances of the day.

It wasn't all plain sailing as the Trust Board embarked on its new mission. Using the Catholic Social Services agency to develop the houses proved unworkable. The CSS director, Anne McCormack, advised the Board to seek independent advice and recommended Maurice McGregor, who had extensive experience in childcare agencies including the Sumner School of the Deaf and St Saviour's Anglican Orphanage. Over the next three years he advised the Board and developed a model for joint operations with social service agencies. This split responsibilities between the Board, which would take care of policy, funding and selecting personnel for the role of Family Home Parents. The Contracting Agency would look after day-to-day operations, supervise and train staff, and develop protocols to meet legal requirements. Five different agencies were approached as potential partners – with the CSS first in line but unable to commit – and the decision was made to go with Cholmondeley Children's Home.

This was a neat fit, the Cholmondeley Homes organisation owing its origins to a bequest from a wealthy Canterbury farmer in the 1920s. He had gifted it to a London-based organisation the Ministering Children's League that operated homes for children across the British Empire. Its first Christchurch home had opened in 1925 and by the late 1930s was looking after over 250 children per year. It was never exactly an orphanage but more akin to a 'health camp' providing respite care for mothers or convalescent children. The organisation clearly had the sort of experience and expertise that the Eliza White Trust was looking for in implementing its new model of care. An agreement was signed early in 1996. Soon after a suitable property was purchased at 7 Albert Terrace, St Martins. It was a spacious and homely residential property in a pleasant suburb, close to both St Martins school and St Peters Catholic school. From the outset it was supported by, and close links developed with, the Beckenham parish.

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[80] John Fletcher, p. 47.

This first Eliza White Home was officially opened on 22 February 1997. Doing the honours was Chris Morkane, who had joined the Trust Board as the sole White family representative after the death of his father in 1988. In his speech he outlined the history of his great grandmother's Trust and the ten-year struggle since he had joined the Board to get to the point where this new Home could be opened. Other recent additions to the Board had also played a significant role. Barbara Brown, for instance, formerly Administration Manager for the Christchurch Diocese, had likewise joined the Board in 1988 and succeeded Matthew Robinson as its chair in 1996. That was also the year when Bishop Meeking resigned as Bishop of Christchurch. He was succeeded by Bishop John Cunneen, who proved considerably more supportive and aligned with the Trust's core purpose than his predecessor. At the end of 1998 Hugh Cottrell, a lawyer specialising in children and family matters was invited to join. He also filled the traditional 'non-Catholic' spot on the Board.

The Albert Terrace home worked well from the outset, as did the arrangement with Cholmondeley House to provide administration and oversight, especially from Marion Judge. It did not turn out quite as intended, as a place for short-term respite care, quickly developing into long-term accommodation for nine children formerly at Cholmondeley. It clearly met a need, however, so the Board members were satisfied. Trish Anderson, the Homes' long-time manager, remembers the Trust Board being 'incredibly generous with the children'. They purchased a mini-van as well as toys, sports gear and so on to maximise the children's participation in school and community life. The children had opportunities to go places they could never have expected to go. A highlight was the annual Christmas holiday at a Presbyterian/Methodist Church camp facility at Staveley. In the lee of the Southern Alps and close to the Ashburton River and remnant native forests, this provided 'an amazing time' for the children who went there most years.

When the sale of the St Joseph's Orphanage complex was effected in 1999, the resulting windfall and the success of the first Home, gave the Board confidence to develop a second Home. Working again with Cholmondeley House, this time it was determined to implement the original concept and develop a respite care facility. A suitable house was found at 160 Rose Street in Spreydon and over $500,000 was spent on its purchase, set-up and fit out, including another mini-van. This Home connected with the Hoon Hay parish community. This second Eliza White Home was opened on 7 July 2001. Chris Morkane was the speaker at the opening function and once again Bishop Cuneen performed the blessing. But this time they were joined in the ceremonials by the two oldest children from the Albert Terrace Home who also spoke. This was seen as a very promising sign of the experimental Home concept's success.

Strengthening the Board's expertise for this latest endeavour was a new Trustee, Beverley McNabb, who came from a Catholic social justice background and had worked as a social worker with the Methodist Mission. She joined in September 1999 and hoped to make a special contribution to the Board's work toward developing parenting skills among the socially disadvantaged. Unfortunately work pressure forced her withdrawal at the end of 2001. Her place was taken by Raelene Consedine. Meanwhile the connection with Cholmondeley provided a solid administrative framework, an interface with funding agencies and excellent professional support for the Trust's carers in the person of Marion Judge. She not only had years of experience to share but knew most of the children at the Homes from their previous time at Cholmondeley. She was the main point of contact for staff at the two Eliza White Homes until her retirement.

Since this is a history of Eliza White and her bequest, rather than of St Joseph's Orphanage itself, we have not detailed here what life was like for the orphans who found shelter there. It would be remiss not to acknowledge, however, that the standard of care afforded to at least some of those orphans fell far short of what Eliza would have aspired to. It has emerged in recent years that some children were subjected to extreme cruelty and abuse by some of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd and Sisters of Nazareth during their time at St Joseph's Orphanage.

It is of course a tragedy that institutions founded to provide loving care for some of the most disadvantaged children in Christchurch society have, at least some of the time, failed so badly in that mission. That it was Catholic religious who were the perpetrators of ill treatment and/or abuse is even more disappointing. People, including the Trust Board of the Eliza White Trust, put great store by the bona fides of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, the Nazareth Sisters, and the St John of God Brothers, whose Orders' individual charisms all derive from following the loving example of Jesus Christ who had very harsh things to say about those who brought harm to children.[81] This is one of the great scandals of our time and a serious blow to the prestige and credibility of the Church internationally and locally. That the Eliza White-funded orphanage's reputation has been besmirched, by association at least, is a very sad outcome, though nowhere near as important as the harm done to the children she was so keen to help.

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[81] Mark 9:42: *"But anyone who is the downfall of one of these little ones who have faith, would be better thrown into the sea with a great millstone hung round his neck."*

CHAPTER 11

Honouring the past, adapting to the present: the Eliza White Trust, 2003–2023

The first two decades of the 21st century proved to be a period of significant change in the way New Zealand society dealt with children in need. The Eliza White Trust Board faced the challenge of adapting its mode of operations to respond to this changing social context. For Christchurch too, the 2010–2011 earthquakes and the widespread devastation and dislocation they left in their wake, would prove to be watersheds in the city's history. No individual, family, or organisation avoided the impact of the earthquakes in one way or another, and that included the Eliza White Trust.

As the new millennium unfolded, the Trust was operating two suburban houses that between them provided 'family homes' and support for around a dozen children at a time, including groups of siblings. Most of the children had at least one parent so were not strictly speaking orphans and the Trust encouraged ongoing contact between the children and their families. A home on Albert Terrace provided long-term residential care , while another home on Rose Street was more for short-to-medium term care, with children then going to foster care homes. The contractual arrangements between the Trust, the government – via Child, Youth and Family Services (CYFS), the agency responsible for the care of children – and the Cholmondeley House organisation were complex and ever changing in detail.

The Trust was very well served by its staff in this era, especially Trish Anderson the manager at Albert Terrace and Anne Price at Rose Street, while long-serving employees like Wayne Edmonds also showed a real dedication to the children in their care. The numbers might have been small, compared to the old orphanage days of up to a hundred children, but the needs of children were significant and drove up the cost of running the homes, as did increasing regulatory requirements for health and safety measures. This was quite apart from the steady burden of normal maintenance on two large houses. On the other hand, there were higher rates paid for 'bed nights' for children with special needs and this was important for the ongoing calculations of how to make the Trust's two homes sustainable financially. In 2003, for example, the Trust budgeted for a deficit on its operations of over $30,000, which would not be supportable long-term, making such negotiations with government funding agencies critical to its future. Special needs children were funded for $75 per night via the Health Department, for example, while CYFS was only paying $9 a night for the children it funded.

Cholmondeley House advisers calculated at this time that the actual cost of care for a child at Rose Street was actually $110 per night. Though the Trust was successful in negotiating for an increase to its night rate to $56 per child from December 2003, the gap between available funding and actual costs was stretching out into a yawning chasm. Board members were tasked with coming up with ideas to reduce the operational deficit of Rose Street. Trust chair Barbara Brown advised that the current losses being incurred could not continue much longer. Consideration was given to finding other charitable bodies to solicit for grants and further discussions were held with CYFS and Lifelinks (an organisation contracted by the government to provide disability services) over the placements provided at Rose Street. The resulting agreements, however, provided break-even funding at best, and despite improvements in the financial position, a trajectory of gradually spiralling costs seemed unavoidable. In 2005 the decision was made to amalgamate the two Eliza White Trust homes into a single facility at Rose Street.

From its beginnings in 1909 the Trust Board essentially had two tasks. The primary one was to provide care for children, originally by establishing and maintaining St Joseph's and more recently by doing the same thing via the family homes. Underpinning this, however, was the equally important obligation to carefully husband the Trust's financial assets to ensure an ongoing income stream to fund the charitable activity. While much of the Board's attention in these early years of the 2000s was focused on the two homes and their challenges, guardianship of the Trust's income-generating assets was equally demanding of its time. The last commercial property owned by the Trust from Eliza White's original holdings along Manchester Street was still securely tenanted by the Para Rubber company's retail operation there. The two Council car parks that now occupied the sites of former buildings owned by Eliza in the same area were likewise still generating income through short-term leases, producing returns that were above market rates. In 2002 the Trust therefore decided to add to this portfolio by investing in another commercial property.

The Trust's agents, leading Christchurch real estate company Simes and Co., were instructed to find a suitable building into which the Trust could invest up to $1.5 million, with a preference for an industrial block. There were initial discussions about a property development proposal in Manchester Street but these came to nothing. Instead the Trust ended up purchasing a substantial stake in a large commercial premises at 17 Sir William Pickering Drive in the industrial zone near Christchurch airport. This building, which dated from the late 1980s, was leased at the time to the Christchurch-based computer software company Aoraki Corporation (later known as Jade Corporation) providing a secure income stream for the next few years at least. When Jade Corporation centralised its operations nearby in 2008 and moved out of 17 Sir William Pickering Drive, however, this investment became more problematic. Numerous deficiencies were identified in the building that needed to be addressed, at substantial cost, to make it attractive to new tenants.

The sale of the house at Albert Terrace was completed in mid-2006 for just under $400,000, providing a welcome boost to the Trust's funds. With the leases on the historic Manchester Street properties also coming to an end at this time, decisions had to be made on their future and Simes recommended a period of 'quiet marketing' to see if any offers for them might be attracted. At this juncture there was also an important 'changing of the guard' at the Trust. Warwick Ainger, who had guided the Trust's affairs as its secretary since 1979 and was now only working part-time at Ainger Tomlin, indicated his intention to retire completely. Mark O'Reilly, a young accountant at the firm, had been looking after the Trust's books for some time already. This made him an ideal successor to Warwick and he was officially appointed Secretary/Treasurer of the Eliza White Trust in April 2007. Six years later he would transition to Board membership, while still maintaining the secretarial function, all practical Trust matters being administered as before by Ainger Tomlin.

At this point there was a significant change of direction in the Trust's investment strategies. All of the historic property investments in Manchester Street were finally disposed of, and the assets thus realised, combined with the sale of the Albert Terrace home, created a substantial pool of funds. These were invested with ABN-AMRO, a global financial services business with a Christchurch office that would become Craigs Investment Partners a couple of years later. Their highly experienced partner, Patrick Lee, took on management of the Eliza White Trust portfolio, establishing a close relationship with the Board that has endured to the present. The funds were invested in a conservative spread of national and international assets that immediately began to provide a solid level of return, with none of the maintenance and tenanting issues of property management. Moreover, Pat Lee's regular attendance at Board meetings to provide investment advice saw him forge a very effective partnership with the Trust accountant Mark O'Reilly and Chris Morkane, with his broad international business pedigree.

These changes gradually stabilised the Trust's financial position and slowly began to turn around the years of deficits and rebuild its financial resources to new levels. This obviously had implications for the other side of the Trust's guardianship: how best to utilise the Trust's income to provide for the care of needy children. For the moment that remained focused on running a family home. The transition to a single home at Rose Street was achieved reasonably smoothly in early 2006, the experienced Trish Anderson remaining as manager of the facility. The house was now looking after six children, two of high school age and the rest at primary school, and including two sets of siblings. Some of these children had significant special needs and a contract had been secured with CYFS at rates that were more sustainable. Oversight and administration was still being provided by the Cholmondeley organisation but the Board members began to think about registering the Trust as a CYFS provider in its own right.

Unsurprisingly, this proved to be a complex process and it prompted a more general rethink of the Trust's care strategy, as well as a reconsideration of its ongoing relationship with Cholmondeley. The latter was engaged in its own strategic review, and with the Trust's Rose Street complex so thoroughly entwined in Cholmondeley operations, there were numerous meetings with its representatives to discuss future options. Long-term institutional care, even when configured as a 'family home' setting, was increasingly out-of-favour by the 2000s, and CYFS and Cholmondeley House were evolving a system orientated towards finding foster care placements as its primary focus. Despite the acknowledged high quality of care being provided at Rose Street, Cholmondeley's recommendation was that 'a programme needs to be developed so that each child ends up with a family as soon as possible'.[82] Their own home, and Eliza White's, were now seen as just temporary stages in the process of matching children with suitable foster families.

Meanwhile, maintenance issues at Rose Street prompted questions about its ongoing fitness for purpose, as it was proving increasingly expensive to operate there. Simes were asked to provide a real estate valuation of the building and came back with not just a valuation figure but a matching offer to purchase. After some negotiation this was accepted, and the search began for new premises, with consideration also briefly given to constructing a purpose-built house. In the end a large house was found at 245 Styx Road in Halswell and a move was made in early 2010. 'Rose Cottage', as it was called, was a warm, modern building with fewer maintenance issues, albeit 20 minutes from the central city.

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[82] Eliza White Trust Board Minutes, 7 October, 2008.

Amidst these developments there had been changes in personnel on the Board. In 2007 John Cunneen retired as Bishop of Christchurch and was succeeded by his coadjutor (assistant bishop) Barry Jones who also inherited the episcopal position on the Eliza White Trust Board. The following year Barbara Brown stepped down as chair after a dozen years in that role, though she continued for another year as a Board member. Experienced lawyer Hugh Cottrell (the 'non-Catholic' representative on the Board since 1998), with his valuable specialist expertise in children and family law, took over the chair. When Raelene Consedine retired from the Board in March 2009, however, a vacancy was created. The search began for a replacement, someone who would need to be a Catholic and preferably with experience in social welfare matters. Happily, Anne McCormack, the doyenne of Catholic Social Services in Christchurch and who had long provided the Trust with expert advice, accepted the invitation and joined the Board in September 2009.

When Barbara Brown stood down from the Board altogether in April 2010, Anne McCormack recommended Nicola Williamson as her replacement. She was a Christchurch Catholic, a mother of five children, with a law degree but, most importantly perhaps, she was an articulate, confident and hands-on social worker. This made her a valuable addition to the Board and she almost immediately took on the role of liaising with Trish Anderson at 'Rose Cottage' on behalf of the Trust Board. With three new members on the Board, as well as a new chair, and with significant changes at Cholmondeley House too, fresh eyes were brought to bear on the relationship between the two organisations. Cholmondeley was concerned at this time about the level of liability its supervisory role over 'Rose Cottage' exposed it to. Shane Murdoch, a new manager at Cholmondeley, suggested the Eliza White home had developed to a stage where the relationship between the two organisations should be one of mutual support rather than Cholmondeley monitoring the 'Rose Cottage' operation. He recommended the Trust put together its own funding application to CYFS and become autonomous while maintaining a non-contractual relationship with his organisation.

The Eliza White Board were not averse to becoming independent of their long-term partner but recognised they would still need some external agency to help it maintain appropriate standards. This review of the relationship with Cholmondeley in turn generated reflection by the Board on the terms of the Eliza White Trust, last updated with the legal action in

1993, and whether it needed another revision to meet the changing circumstances the Board was facing. Before embarking on the complex legal process that this would involve, however, the Trust needed to achieve clarity on its future direction. Would it continue to offer residential care at 'Rose Cottage', and if so, on what basis?

It would take quite some time for the Trust to resolve these strategic issues. They were in any case hostages to changing government policy on the best (or perhaps cheapest) way to provide such children with long term homes. The National Government's 'Home for Life' policy announced in August 2010 prioritised permanent homes for children with whānau or foster families. The Eliza White Homes were a real success story, in terms of the outcomes for their children, but the high quality of accommodation and care provided were expensive. This change in government policy signalled that the Trust would soon have to find a new way to fulfil its mandate. Updating its Trust Deed accordingly would involve a long-winded legal process that couldn't be hurried. Meantime, Christchurch entered a shocking new phase of its 160-year history when a massive earthquake struck at 4.35am on 4 September 2010. At 7.1 on the Richter scale this was the largest earthquake to strike a major urban area in New Zealand since the Hawke's Bay earthquake in 1931. It caused extensive damage to buildings in Christchurch, as well as north and west of the city toward the quake's epicentre near Darfield.

Aftershocks rumbled on for months afterwards but it still came as an awful shock when another huge earthquake struck Christchurch on Tuesday 22 February 2011, causing even more damage and, this time, significant loss of life. Technically an aftershock of the September quake, the second quake was centred near Lyttelton. Its powerful shaking motion, measuring 6.3 on Richter's scale, rolled through Christchurch's central business district to devastating effect. So many structures were damaged that a quarter of the buildings in the central city would eventually be demolished in the years of clean-up that followed. Many precious heritage buildings, including the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament and the Anglican cathedral in the Square, were among those damaged or destroyed. So too were most of the buildings along Manchester Street that had been Eliza White's favoured spot for property investments. The historic A. J. White's retail premises at the corner of Tuam and High Street were also among the casualties. Worst of all, however, was the toll in human lives; 185 people were killed and thousands were seriously injured.

The Eliza White Trust had been engaged in a significant renovation of Aoraki House, its last remaining property investment. The building sustained a degree of damage in the earthquakes that originally seemed relatively minor. The shortage of commercial rental space that followed in the earthquake's wake on the other hand, made it much easier to let than before. A short-term lease was secured from the insurance company AMI for the bulk of the building in late 2011. Like everybody else who had to engage with their insurers and the Earthquake Commission (EQC), the process of resolving repairs at Aoraki House would be a tortuous one, dragging on for several years. With closer inspection, the earthquake damage also began to look rather more serious. As repair and insurance matters dragged on and on, the Trust finally decided to cut its losses and disposed of its stake in the building in 2014. This involved a loss – at settlement in October 2015 the Trust only got back 80 per cent of its investment. Nonetheless, the windfall from the insurance payment and sale of the land was immediately invested in the Trust's portfolio with Craig's which by late 2016 had a market value of well over $7 million, and growing.

'Rose Cottage' came through the earthquakes relatively unscathed, with just minor damage to the house and the children coping admirably with the trauma. Some were indeed no longer 'children' but reaching an age where the transition to adulthood and independent living would have to be negotiated. Driving lessons and plans for future study now became part of the Trust's deliberations, with Trish Anderson providing regular updates on the care plans in place for each child in the house. The move to Halswell had not provided the savings in running costs that had been anticipated and these continued to rise, working out to about $100,000 per child per year, prompting the increasing reluctance from the government funding agencies to continue supporting this style of care. As the Board deliberated about how best to serve the needs of derived children in Christchurch, the relativities of spending so much on a small handful of children now had to be considered against other ways that the Trust's income might serve more children in different ways.

The Board chair, Hugh Cottrell, initiated a review of the Trust's deed in anticipation of a probable change of direction. Unfortunately he died suddenly in December 2011 while playing tennis, the first Trust Board chair to die 'in office' in its hundred-year history. Nicola Williamson then stepped in to take over as chair and also took a lead on rethinking the Board's future strategy. She had previously suggested a role for 'Rose Cottage' as a therapeutic transitional home for children that were difficult to place in foster homes. A key question, however, was whether the government (through CYFS) would be interested in such a service and be prepared to fund it adequately? Without that sort of surety, the future prospects for the 'Rose Cottage' style of care looked increasingly uncertain. In the event, the Board made the decision to close 'Rose Cottage' in February 2013. It decided to earmark around $250,000 per year from its investment income to support an alternative 'suitable project' that would fulfil Eliza White's intentions in another way than providing residential care.

A formal change in the Trust Deed was now an absolute necessity since the legal framework only allowed for residential care as the focus of Trust funding. After Hugh Cottrell's unexpected death there was a vacancy on the Board and it was suggested that Mark O'Reilly might now become a member rather than secretary to the Board. This foundered on the requirement for the Board to include at least one non-Catholic – the spot that Hugh had occupied – and someone else would have to be found. Nicola Williamson then took up a professional role with CYFS and was unable to reconcile the potential conflict of interest involved with her role as chair of the Eliza White Trust. Her resignation opened up a 'Catholic' place on the Board and Mark O'Reilly was duly approved as a full member of the Trust Board in June 2013. That still left the 'non-Catholic' role vacant and the Board one short of its statutory five-strong membership. The search for another member was deferred for the time being, however, pending resolution of the Trust's new strategic direction.

Shane Murdoch from Cholmondeley was commissioned to develop a strategic plan for the Trust's immediate future. Unsurprisingly his recommendations were orientated toward maintaining ongoing close co-operation with that organisation, which was embarking on a major redevelopment of its own. It was keen to find funding partners for the construction of a new Cholmondeley Children's Centre to provide short-term respite care for children aged three to twelve, and an outreach support service to families in the community. The Centre eventually opened in its purpose-built complex in Governors Bay on Banks Peninsula in 2015, with financial contributions from the Trust among a broadly based group of sponsors. For several years thereafter, substantial donations to the Cholmondeley Children's Foundation constituted the Eliza White Trust's main annual beneficiary.

The closure of 'Rose Cottage' was completed satisfactorily by the end of 2013. It had been winding down for some time as older teenagers moved on from the Home and alternative places were found for the few children who remained. The staff were compensated for the end of their employment by the Trust, house assets, principally the vehicles, were disposed of and the building itself was rented to CYFS. This short-term arrangement eventually extended for four years before the final sale of the property in late 2016. The Trust's 'family homes' had not existed for long, less than 20 years in total, and had only accommodated a small number of children throughout their existence. But there was no doubt that they had provided a high level of care, and made a big difference to the lives of those who lived there. The Board was gratified at its final meeting in 2022 to receive a presentation from Trish Anderson about the progress of her former charges at 'Rose Cottage' in the ten years since its closure. With one exception the news was very positive, the rest having thrived and taken their place in society as well adjusted adults.

Bishop Barry Jones had suffered a decline in health and stopped attending Board meetings at the end of 2013. He died in February 2016. This left the Board with only three active members for an extended period, at a time when it was no longer operating 'Rose Cottage' and still working through the legal process of revising its Trust Deed. In this hiatus period, support for Cholmondeley was a simple way of allocating the annual distribution of funds, while the conservative management of its investments with Craig's quietly built up its asset base. In mid-2016 the Board finally found its new 'non-Catholic' member when Anne McCormack invited Jill Lamb, a former police officer and experienced nurse who was a member of the Anglican Church, to join. She was attracted by the Eliza White Trust's focus on children and her prior professional relationship with Anne McCormack who was in Jill's opinion 'a wise old owl' with a great track record in social work. Jill had no interest in the financial side of the Trust's work but nor did she need to – Chris Morkane, Mark O'Reilly and Craig's adviser Pat Lee had that well in hand.

Instead, with the reconfiguration of the Trust Deed, already well in hand with a legal firm by this time, there were exciting new possibilities for the Trust to make a difference to children's causes in Christchurch. A significant period would elapse before a new Bishop would be appointed to Christchurch Diocese but in the meantime the diocesan administrator, Father Rick Loughnan, stepped up to take the episcopal spot on the Board. He would prove a regular attendee at Board meetings (not always the case with the bishops) and make a valuable contribution to establishing a new direction for its work. By the beginning of 2017 Chris Morkane had officially taken on the role of chair, having fulfilled this role in a de facto capacity for some time. It was the first time since the Board structure had been created in the *1951 Eliza White Orphanage Trust Act* that a descendant of Eliza's had occupied this position. It was quite a commitment given Chris was actually resident in Sydney, his participation in Board affairs having to be fitted around his regular business trips to Christchurch or by his phoning in to meetings.[83]

The changes to the Trust Deed had been signed off now and would slowly make their way through the requisite government channels in Wellington, finally being confirmed in law in February 2019. The new version confirmed that the Board could shift its focus away from providing 'residential accommodation', the only purpose to which it had been permitted to devote its funds under the terms of the 1993 revision of the Trust deed. Instead, those funds could now be devoted to:

> *"any charitable purpose or purposes promoting the education, health, welfare, wellbeing, recreation and benefit of any child or children and their families or whānau residing or*

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[83] Chris and his wife Leonie returned to Christchurch permanently four days before the first pandemic lockdown in March, 2020.

> *located in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Christchurch whom the Board considers are in need of care, support or assistance due to poverty, ill health or other circumstances as the trustees in their absolute discretion shall determine."*[84]

It was hard to argue with this as an effective modern re-interpretation of Eliza's intentions in the changed circumstances of 21st-century Christchurch, where 'orphanages' or 'residential accommodation', however configured, were no longer seen as an effective way to assist children without parental support or in other deprived circumstances. As required by the law, however, the new definition accorded closely with Eliza's original purpose for the Trust, and this was also buttressed by the retention of her requirement that beneficiaries of the Trust should, as a matter of preference (but not as an absolute requirement), be Catholic. This was redefined as, *"a preference to members of the Roman Catholic Church or organisations, trusts, companies or other legal entities which have a connection with the Roman Catholic Church."*[85] This formulation likewise gave the Board much more flexibility in determining how its donations might be applied to benefit children, and Catholic children specifically, without imposing narrow definitions to constrain its benefactions.

By the end of 2017 the Trust's investment assets stood at a healthy $8,212,789, producing an annual return that easily supported the disbursement of the agreed sum of $250,000–$300,000 per year from interest and dividends while continuing to build the fund through capital gains. That side of the Trust Board's duties was working well, Craig's Investments now providing a 'full custodial service' and Ainger Tomlin an administrative role. This simplified things considerably and only involved Board members in final decisions on investment advice at their occasional meetings (about four per year). The connection the with Cholmondeley Foundation also made for a simple annual benefaction to an organisation described by Mark O'Reilly in 2015 as *"the most prominent charity in Canterbury doing work for children which was the essence of what Eliza White was about"*. It was not a Catholic organisation, however, and in fact there were very few Trusts in Christchurch diocese with the Catholic character of the Eliza White Trust. There was no shortage of need among Catholic children in the diocese, especially with the lingering psychological impact of the earthquakes on Canterbury people. The next phase of the Board's activity would see it exploring ways to match its potential to support with those needs.

To begin with, the Board carried on making large annual donations to the Cholmondeley Foundation while looking for other worthy recipient organisations that aligned with Eliza's criteria for assistance. It was a more complex task than perhaps anticipated. Vetting the background and track record of applicant entities took time and knowledge that the Board members did not necessarily have easy access to. In December 2017 Father Rick made the breakthrough suggestion that the Trust consider using the services of a young woman who was making assessments like this for another charitable fund administered by the Christchurch diocese. It was his final contribution to the Board, with Paul Martin being appointed Bishop of Christchurch the same month and taking up his place on the Trust Board from the next meeting in February 2018. At that same meeting the Board members interviewed Father Rick's recommended advisor, Charlotte Cummings.

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[84] *Judgement of Justice Gendall re Eliza White Board of Management [2019],* New Zealand High Court 181, 15 February, 2019.

[85] Ibid.

Charlotte Cummings was a West Coast born Catholic and a former pupil at the Sisters of Mercy-founded Villa Maria College in Yaldhurst. She had gone on to develop a career in counselling and mental health services, building strong networks in the charitable sector across Christchurch. Her role with the Christchurch diocese's Hoatu Fund, however, was most akin to what the Eliza White Trust was looking for. That fund had been created from the sale of the Mount Magdala property (the site of the institution for 'fallen women' which had been heavily supported by Alf and Eliza White from its foundation in Halswell in 1888 and that had been the closest neighbour to the St Joseph's Orphanage until its closure in 1966). Money from that sale had originally been taken out of the diocese when the Mount Magdala operators, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, withdrew from Christchurch but a legal settlement in 2016 had seen the $8 million involved taken back into diocesan control.

The Hoatu Fund (formerly the Mount Magdala Fund) was then established as a Trust of the Bishop of Christchurch to help vulnerable women, children, and families in need. With funding to dispense from the Tindall Foundation also, the diocese had employed Charlotte to assess applicants for both and provide strategic advice on how best to dispense its annual allocation of funding. This aligned with what the Eliza White Trust now needed to do and it seemed a perfect fit. Charlotte Cummings was engaged as a contracted advisor to the Board to identify and recommend suitable recipients for an annual distribution of up to $350,000. At the same meeting a final grant of $150,000 to Cholmondeley was approved but the Board noted that henceforward Cholmondeley would simply become one of the organisations that the new advisor would assess for future funding.

In fact, this marked the effective end of the long collaboration with Cholmondeley. Its focus on respite care to give parents and grandparents a break, while entirely worthy, lacked evidence of long-term impact in the new adviser's view. The Cholmondeley Foundation had also done a fabulous job of building its capital base from insurance claims post-earthquakes and was also well supported by a wide array of Christchurch business and other sponsors.

There were other potential recipients whose need seemed greater and whose work was deemed more effective in benefitting vulnerable children. The Eliza White Trust's relative small annual benefaction might make more of a difference elsewhere. Six recipients were identified for the first distribution under this new model in late 2018. The largest grant went to the St Vincent de Paul Society; $100,000 towards it planned development of social housing for young parents in central Christchurch.

Five other organisations were selected for assistance, all involved in one way another with children in need, and the rest of the annual allocation was divided between them in May 2018. All were invited to give a presentation to the Board at year's end on how they had made use of that money and make a case for a second tranche from the Trust for 2019. This set a benchmark for funding decisions being predicated on evidence-based evaluations of the benefits of the funded activities.

In March 2019 Anne McCormack announced her resignation from the Board. A product of the Catholic Youth Movement in the early 1960s, she had been hand-picked by Bishop Brian Ashby to develop Catholic Social Services in Christchurch and had dedicated her life to it, training as a social worker and leading that organisation for more than thirty years. It had been Anne who the Eliza White Trust turned to for advice on setting up its family homes in the 1990s, and Anne who had provided advice on suitable candidates for the Board in after years. When she joined the Board herself in 2009, she brought invaluable expertise in the social welfare sector and as a talent spotter for other suitable candidates, like Jill Lamb. While age and ill health were now catching up with her at eighty, her final contribution to the Trust was to convince Joanne Hope to replace her as a Board member.

It was very much a like-for-like substitution. Joanne was another born-and-bred Christchurch Catholic, having grown up in Sydenham and lived most of her adult life in Beckenham. After an early career in teaching, followed by time as a mother to five children, she had become involved in parish pastoral work and been recruited by Anne McCormack to develop a programme for Catholic women during the Suffrage Centennial Year in 1993. This led on to professional training in social work and a long stint working for the St John of God Brothers' youth service as a social worker with parents. Anne had been her supervisor during her latter years as mission manager with St John of God and had often spoken to her about the Eliza White Trust and its work. Her parents had also been part of a parish network supporting St Joseph's Orphanage in the 1960s and had taken children from the orphanage into the family home for holiday breaks when Joanne was a child.

The Trust had now developed a very slick operational model that was proving simple, direct and effective. On the money side, the investment portfolio was ticking over, investment recommendations from Pat Lee being tweaked by Chris Morkane and Mark O'Reilly between meetings and requiring simple confirmation when the full Board came together quarterly. A conservative approach, with a good spread of investments, was producing steady returns and quietly building the Trust's asset base, even through economic downturns. On the charitable grant side, the discernment process was much simplified by Charlotte Cummings' well-informed assessments and recommendations. Money was coming in, money was going out, and feedback from the beneficiary organisations provided solid evidence of the efficacy of the gifting. It was surely a business-like system that would have received Eliza White's stamp of approval.

Discerning Eliza's attitude to funding was very much front-of-mind for Board members when several projects were considered that involved buildings. There had been little doubt about the St Vincent de Paul project, which came to fruition in March 2023 with the opening of seven new fully-furnished housing units for young families at risk of homelessness at Pavitt Street in central Christchurch.

Another building-related project offered a more innovative use of Trust funds to support organisations delivering services to children. Originally this proposal contemplated buying a shared office space for a number of such organisations on a site in Bealey Avenue. The Trust was prepared to contribute \$3.5–\$4 million to this if the feasibility study could demonstrate sufficient benefits as a result. The new build did not proceed in the end but funding was provided to the Open Home Foundation and Parenting Place, two organisations that were major beneficiaries of the Trust in 2020 and "*very closely aligned with the core purpose of the Eliza White Trust*", to pay for a shared office space.

Moreover, forging links with the Catholic schools, especially the primary schools in the poorer eastern parts of the city was a key part of a developing strategy to reinvigorate the Trust's relationship with the diocese. In many ways, this had atrophied since Bishop Meeking's legal challenge in 1993 which seemed to some like an attempt to wrest control of the Trust into episcopal hands. Better relationships had been established with his successors but a degree of wariness remained.

Restoring a closer connection with Catholic agencies was very much part of Charlotte Cummings' strategic thinking in relation to Eliza White. Promoting the story of this amazing pioneer Catholic figure, virtually unknown to most 21st-century Christchurch Catholics was part of that, but more fundamental was an outreach to Catholic school principals for the best way Trust funding might help them with the pressing needs of children in their care. In 2021 the Board approved funding to provide a psychologist and counselling services in Catholic schools via its existing connection with Parenting Place. This signalled a new strategic focus for the Trust, providing early intervention with children's problems. The feedback from the school principals in the first year of funding was 'resoundingly positive'. Almost 30 children had been supported, one third from the secondary and two thirds from the primary sector, and in eleven different schools.

As Trust chair Chris Morkane told me:

> *"We're giving money to schools specifically, paying for a psychologist. To be honest we're not so worried about how it works out. Once the money leaves us, then it's up to them. We do measure results. We ask for the organisations to report back every year on what they have achieved. We don't want a return on the money, we want a return in social outcomes."*

This, and other programmes for Catholic schools, looks likely to be the direction Trust funding initiatives will take in the immediate future. It represents a big shift from the original focus on an orphanage, which was essentially about helping children survive at the most elemental level. A century and more later, when a social welfare net exists to make sure every child has their basic life requirements met (however deficient that might sometimes be), it seems appropriate to look at new ways in which modern children might struggle. Psychological challenges now seem as impactful on life outcomes as the threat of starvation or homelessness once did for a large number of young children. Especially after the city's earthquakes, Christchurch children may be especially vulnerable to trauma-induced problems. Whether it is anxiety, grief and loss, eating disorders, autism, regulating emotions or even suicide ideation – all issues dealt with by the Eliza White Trust-funded psychologist and counsellor in its first year of funding this service – there is strong evidence that early intervention can be critical to supporting children through these difficulties in their formative years.

Life has changed dramatically since the Trust was formed, but the focus on helping vulnerable children remains clear. It has been important that the Board keeps abreast of the changes in the community, and through their continual adaptations they have been able to carry the legacy of Eliza White forward.

Through the creation of the Eliza White Trust, Eliza ensured that her wealth would continue to serve others long after her death. Today, the Trust's ongoing work serves as a reminder of her vision for a city where there would be special care taken of children in need.

Her story is not just one of personal achievement, but of how one person's faith inspired generosity can ripple through generations, and have a positive impact on people and communities over many decades.

Afterword

It is both an honour and a privilege to write this Afterword, reflecting on the extraordinary legacy of Eliza, a person of truly heroic faith.

Her story is one that has moved me deeply, particularly her unwavering dedication to the needs of vulnerable children. Jesus calls us to care for the vulnerable. He reminds us, *"Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."* (Matthew 25:40). Eliza responded to that call with boundless generosity, embodying the love and care to which we are all called. Her example serves as a profound reminder that faith is not just a private devotion but a lived commitment to others, especially those in greatest need.

This book challenges and inspires its readers to do the same. Eliza's life was a testament to what it means to live out faith in action. Through her mission, she left a legacy that continues to inspire and serve, not only throughout her lifetime but also beyond her passing. It is a privilege to know that her charitable Trust endures as a steward of her vision, ensuring that her impact resonates with future generations. This remarkable aspect of her life has inspired me to reflect on my own generosity and faith, challenging me to live with greater purpose and compassion.

Eliza's vocation as a wife and mother is a central part of her story. She was a formidable partner to her husband Alf, and her path as a businesswoman and mother to eight children was nothing short of extraordinary. In a time when such a balance was uncommon, Eliza embraced the challenges with tenacity, weaving her faith into every aspect of her life. Her experience of motherhood left a lasting legacy, inspiring deep commitment and faith in her family, which remains a testament to her influence. Her life was not without grief and difficulty. Yet, through it all, Eliza faced her challenges with unshakable faith and strength of spirit. Her journey was one of remarkable courage, generosity, and resilience, qualities that continue to shine through her story.

We all need encouragement in our journey of life and faith, and this book provides exactly that. In its pages, we celebrate Eliza's life, honour her legacy, and give thanks for the enduring impact of her faith. May her story inspire each of us to respond generously to the needs of others and to live with the same spirit of charity and service that she exemplified so beautifully.

+ Michael Gielen

Bishop of Christchurch

Eliza White was a remarkable woman.

She was born to very humble circumstances in rural England in 1842, later emigrating to New Zealand. By the time of her death in 1909, she was one of the wealthiest and most influential women in Christchurch. Eliza's concern for those less fortunate has left an enduring legacy, which continues to benefit children across Canterbury. This book celebrates the life and legacy of Eliza White.

Eliza White Charitable Trust

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