

A Short History of Belfast, Christchurch

Written by: William Edward Brown 16th July 1949

Revised and typed by: Charlotte Gavin, Belfast Area Residents Association November 2024. Source: Christchurch Public Library

Maori's:

It is thought that there were small settlements of Maori's in the South Island so far back as the fifteenth century. There is every evidence too that they found other natives in different party even before that. The Maori's had pa's only at widely scattered points on the coastline. Except perhaps for excursions over the passes over the Alps in North Canterbury for the purpose chiefly of obtaining the much-prized greenstone at Arahua and at Terem on the West Coast, or perhaps for hunting trips, the back country was rarely visited. The coast with its sure source of food supplies and its easier access was mostly used.

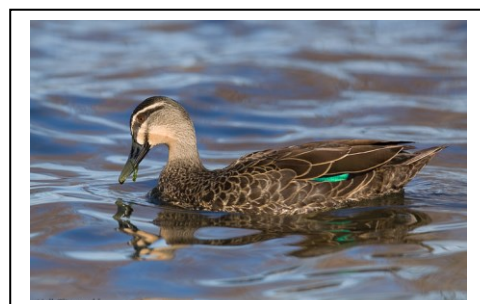
Various tribes were in turn exterminated or driven out by raiding parties from the North. First the Waitaha tribe then the Ngatimanees then from Ngai Tahu. At this stage Te Rauparaha the famous or rather infamous Chief whose home was at Kaipiti Island came down with the Ngatittoa tribe and fought the battles now recorded at Kaiapoi and Onawe and other places. And although it was claimed that he had driven out all the Ngai Tahu, it is apparently true that the Southern chief Taiaroa led back the Ngai Tahu's. At any rate the first white settlers found them supreme, and it was from them that the N.Z. Company bought all the land from Kaiapoi to Port Chalmers in 1848.

Features:

The plains were at that stage a monotonous stretch of tussocks in the higher parts brock with patches of native bush consisting chiefly of white and red pine and totara. Large swamps occupied much of the coastal plain with flax growing luxuriously. High ferns tet-toi tetu and cabbage trees and in other parts mixed with matagauri and spear grass covered the area through which swift snow felt rivers rushed at will. Native quail was abundant. The patches of bush were in season full of bird life and paradise and grey ducks and teal were common.



Brown teal | Pāteke



Grey duck | Pāpera

Whalers:

At the beginning of the eighteenth-century whalers and sealers formed shore stations at various points with bases as far away as Sydney. They were often run by ex-convicts, deserters or beachcombers but others appeared among them. As they employed Maori's and paid in goods not otherwise obtainable, the native tended to be grouped around these short stations. They were essentially a tough and determined lot. Lawlessness and quarrels and some dirty deals forced the hands of the British authorities to establish law and order. The events leading up to the Treaty of Waitangi should not need recapitulation here.

Settlement:

From various official and unofficial reports of the excellent farming prospects here the Canterbury Association agreed to buy from the N.Z. company 2,400,000 acres at 10/- an acre. This was then resold at £ 3 an acre of which 10/- was paid to the N.Z. Company allotted for survey and costs, £1 for emigration and £1 for ecclesiastical and educational purposes. This became the standard price for land purchased from the Canterbury Association. The purchasers were at first carefully elected chiefly Church of England Immigrants. This caused so much discontent with the arrival of "Shagroons" or settlers from Australia that this policy was greatly curtailed. The stocking of the runs was at first very difficult. Thus, at the end of 1851 when settlement had barely commenced only 50 horses were in Canterbury. Bullocks were then more important than the horse. Sometimes as many as 16 or 18 bullocks were hitched to one dray. Their speed was only two miles an hour but they were good in bogs or rivers as there was always a few on dry land. Sheep were rapidly increasing. Thus by 1835 although only 12,260 acres were fenced and only 6,460 acres were under crop, the total number of sheep were in the vicinity of 220,000.

The history of these early days of the province can be obtained from various books, and the story of Belfast develops from this general background.

SETTLEMENT OF THE TOWNSHIP & DISTRICT

Canterbury was at first divided up into Runs, over which the stock roamed at will. Boundaries between Runs were usually streams or other natural barriers. The area between the Waimakariri and the Styx Rivers was taken up in 1851 by Charles Turner, a butcher of Christchurch, and William Smart, a builder, also of Christchurch. In the late sixties, Smart sold his share to Turner, who subsequently took M.I. Joyce, another butcher, as a partner. The Homestead was at the bend of the Styx, near Chaney's Corner. Turner acquired the freehold of this part, and subsequently leased it to T & J Flack. Turners Road was named after this runholder, and the Homestead, or part of it, is probably comprised in a house now situated there.

Another early grant of freehold from the Canterbury Association was to John and Samuel Bealey, dated 20/11/1852. This was of the area lying to the east of Kaputone Creek and now bisected by Guthrie's Road. By a subsequent partition in 1860 Samuel Bealey acquired as his share the whole area between the bend of the Kaputone to the junction with the Styx River, comprising 242 acres.

The earlier records of any dealings in land of what is now the site of Belfast, were the original "Black" maps and grants from the Crown. The first authentic survey of the locality was by Mr C Davie about 1856/7. The first grant was dated 3rd June, 1854, and was of 100 acres to one Robert Chapman, who was described as being of Waimakariri, Stock Owners, and who lived between this River and the Ashley River. The price was the standard one of £300 i.e. £3 per acre. Later (1861) Chapman was granted the adjoining land of 96 acres. Philipp Tisch of Papanui, Farmer also purchased from the Crown two parcels of land, one of 50 acres on the 19th April, 1859, and one of 1 ½ acres in 1864. On the 9th April of the same year Tisch bought Champan's land, comprising an area 372 acres in all, and which was sold for what was then a large figure of £5580. This piece of land ran from what was afterward Belfast Road, along the easter side of North Road, to a few chains beyond the Hotel site and was bounded by Kaputone Creek on the east. The only road shown at this stage, other than the above, was a blind road running off Belfast Road beyond the Railways and which is now known as Blakes road.

This Philipp (note the spelling) Tisch was a fine type of early farmer, who is identified with the subsequent history of the Township.

On the opposite side of the North Road the Church Property Trustees held a rich and dry area. The Hotel farm was granted to a Mr Orchard in 1858, and leased by him to one Treleaven, and then later the last named (in 1867) bought the freehold.

Further north, the name Chaney first appears in the original grant from the Crown to William Chaney and Robert Wilson of the Block known as Chaney's Corner. That was 1856 and comprised a block of 50 acres commencing at a point on the North Road opposite the 7 mile peg, where the road branches off to the northeast towards the new ferry. The river was then known as the Courtenay River. Both Chaney and Wilson were described as of Kaiapoi, Yeoman. In a subsequent partition, Chaney acquired the corner site. It remained in the Chaney family until 1929.



Chaney's Corner, Belfast. Aerial view looking along Main North Road towards Chaney's Corner from Belfast looking east to the coast (1930's).

In addition to this holding in the Township, Philipp Tisch purchased from the Crown Grantees, a block on what was then Tisch's road, but which is now known as Johns Road. Later purchases of adjoining blocks on the west side of the North Road made the extensive holding of the Devondale Dairies, of Johns Brothers.

During these years, and right up in fact, until 1871, stock raising and farming were the only occupations of the inhabitants. At this early stage, the wool was the only part of the sheep that returned any income to the farmer. With no outlet for meat, apart from the local market, the Province was rapidly becoming overstocked and store sheep became unsaleable.

On one station it was reported that the unwanted culls were driven over a cliff into the sea. It was then that the boiling down of the carcasses for tallow or soap became necessary to relieve the position.

INDUSTRIES

It was to take advantage of this new industry that Mr W.H Mein, who had a small soap works in Christchurch, moved it out and re-erected it near the Railway Station at Belfast. With this, the first industry in the Township commenced.

The soap works of Mr Mein, which was on land leased from Philipp Tisch was burned down in 1878 and rebuilt in the following year. A small Railway Station at Belfast, which had been opened to cope with the rolling stock, closed down after the fire and was not re-opened until several years later when the Freezing Works opened. Mein took in as partners two other men, Mr W.J McIlroy and James McNeight Watt, and traded under the name of “N.Z Produce and Provision Co.”, and who then bought the freehold from Tisch of all adjoining lands. Within a year Watt had purchased two other interests and carried on alone. This was the famous boiling down works, the first industry, which was on the site of the Kaputone Works. Such was the plight of the Province at this stage, with no outlet for stock, that it was stated that Robert Darling buyer for Watt, was giving 6d for old Merino Ewes and 9d. to 1/- for Wethers. The tallow was then casked and sent away. But Watt, in the early eighties was in common with the rest of the community, in dire straits. He was forced to let the Bank of New Zealand take over his land, and on the 5th June, 1882, the Bank sold to the N.Z Loan & Mercantile Company. This was an area of 242 acres, part of the above. A further piece of just over 13 acres, along the east side of the railway was sold to McGregor Watt of Christchurch, Storekeeper, and was later taken over by J. McNeight Watt. The main part, however, was retained by the N.Z Loan and Mercantile Company, who proceeded to promote the formation of a Freezing Company.

BELFAST SUBDIVISION

The name of Belfast first appears on a Survey Plan lodged in the Lands and Deeds Office, Christchurch, on the 12th December, 1881. This was a sub-division into 58 Allotments, in areas varying from 2 to 19 acres. A portion of this subdivision fronting the North Road, and north of Donegal Street was further subdivided into 114 sections each of ¼ acre. This later constituted the actual township, and the names of the streets shown thereon, i.e. Donegal, York, Bedford and Howard are all names of streets in this business area of Belfast, Ireland. All these sections were put up for public auction on the 18th May, 1882. The Auctioneer was Mr E.S. Harley and the Lyttelton Times of the 16th of the same month, has a whole column extolling the desirability of the locality as a residential area. We were even told that Belfast was destined to become “the leading suburban retreat for the gentry and future nobility of Canterbury”. Belfast has never since had such a wonderful write up.

Nevertheless, the sale must have been a bit of a frost. The Lyttelton Tims of the 18th May, 1882 reports that only 17 of the farm blocks and 11 of the two sections were sold. Of the former R. Guthrie brought 4 of them at an average of 50 per acre. 8 of the 11 town sections sold faced onto the North Road, and the balance were corner sections on Howard Street. The prices paid may be of interest. The present site of the Post office at Belfast was bought by a J.A Dempsey for £42. The section on which Brown’s store is erected sold for £36 to a Mr J.T Ford who appears to have forfeited because the section

was later sold to Mr W.E Brown. The corner section, next to Brown's Store was sold to Thomas Reece for £43. By way of comparison, it is interesting to note that the Land Sales Court have recently valued vacant sections in Belfast at approximately 80. Altogether, although the sale was "largely attended", and the Hall "filled", the total of all the town sections sold amounted to £ 447 – averaging 40 each. With the farm sections added, the proceeds of the sale was £7095 / 10/ 9.

As far as the actual name of Belfast is concerned it is almost certain that it was bestowed by James McNeight Watt, who as described above owned the boiling down works, and also large blocks adjoining and although the plan was lodged and the sale of sections conducted by the N.Z Loan and Mercantile Coy., it is expressly stated to have been on behalf of the "N.Z.P & P. Coy." which was Watts trading name. It is probably that Watt was financed by the Loan Coy., who took over from the Bank. Apparently, the sale of the land was insufficient to pay his indebtedness, because the Loan & Mercantile continued to own the land and sell sections as a later date. Loan & Mercantile continued to own the land and sell sections at a later date. Both Mr Watt, and his first wife came from Belfast, Ireland. Strangely enough Mr John Cook, who was the Canterbury Manager for the Loan & Mercantile Coy., at that time, and who must have been controlling the sale, also came from Belfast. Both Mr Watt and Mr Cook therefore had great sentimental attachment to the name. In passing, it should be recalled that the Company's chartered steamer "British King" which carried the first shipment from the new Freezing Coy. Of 6198 carcasses on 8th April, 1883, was built at Belfast and was commanded by Captain Kelly of the same place.

Mr Watt, who may perhaps be described as the founder of Belfast, never actually lived in the township, but travelled up daily by train from Christchurch. He died on 18th December, 1892 at the comparatively early age of 54. He left a widow (his second wife) and 2 sons and 5 daughters, of whom the only two still remaining alive are Mr Watt of Richmond, Nelson and Mrs J.S Young of Khandallah, Wellington. It is pleasing to note that he recovered from his temporary financial trouble and died with an estate of approximately £15,000.



Aerial View of Belfast East - Aerial view looking east over Belfast with the intersection of Johns Road and North Road in the centre (1930's) Source:

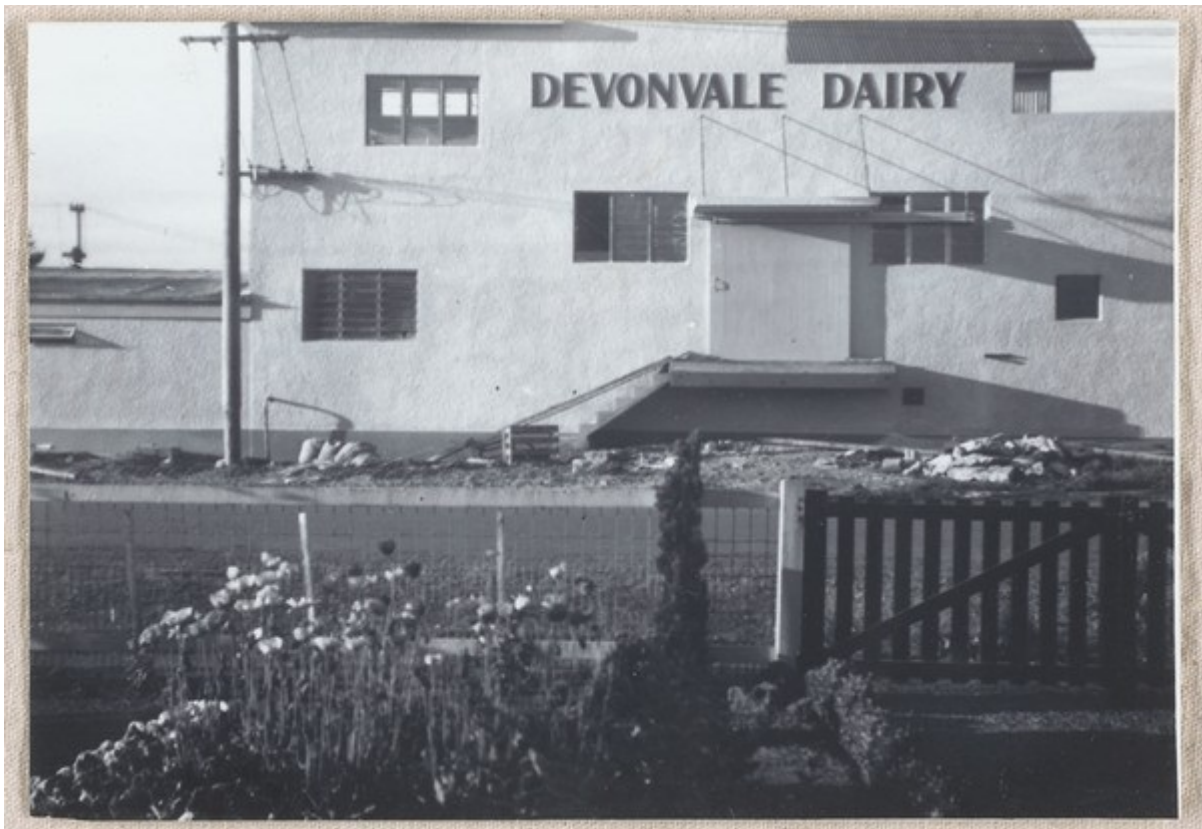
<https://canterburystories.nz/collections/community/bdmt/local-scenes-and-places/objects?page=0>

EARLY BUILDINGS

At the time of the sale of the township it is thought that the only buildings on the site of the township were a small railway station and the boiling down works. A number of farm homesteads were dotted along the inland side of the North Road. Starting from Mr W.F. Chaney's place, which was next to the site of the Midland Repair shop, the next house was the one opposite the "Seven Mile Peg". Incidentally this building is still standing and must be regarded as being the oldest in the locality. The Hotel was known as the "seven Mile Peg" because it was exactly that distance from the old Post Office in Christchurch, which was right opposite the Bowker Fountain and the Old Rink Stables in Victoria Square. Incidentally, the six-mile peg was put in at the corner of Johns Road – then Tisch's Road. It must therefore be an exact mile between these spots. Nearer the township site the Anglican Church, which was recently demolished, stood on the section immediately to the north of the present Anglican school house. On Sundays it was used for services, and during the rest of the week as a schoolhouse. Mr Foler was the first Schoolmaster, and every pupil was expected to take one shilling every Monday morning to pay for his / or her / education. The diamond panel window which were said

to have come out in the first ships in 1850, were retained and have been used in the present Sunday School room. Behind the School, or Church house, there was another small building used as a residence, which was the first home of the Browns.

Opposite the present Brown's Store was Mr Tisch's house (still standing). He was the son of the original Philipp Tisch. Between this house and the original home of Philipp was another farmhouse, nearly opposite Halligan's shop. Mr Phillip Tisch mentioned above, and who must be regarded as the first settler in the locality, used his home as a centre for the many German settlers round Christchurch area, and picnics were often held there. It stood on the spot where the Devondale Dairy at Johns Road, is today. It is authoritatively stated that later a whiskey still was operated in this building. It was then a brick dairy with an open fireplace where the still was hidden. It was subsequently raided by the Police. This part of the farm was taken over by the late James Johns (father of the present J.R.D and Felix Johns) in 1876. Mr Johns built his homestead at the corner, where it stands today. There are also a number of very old homesteads adjacent to the township, such as that of Mr Robert Guthrie on the road of the same name, which were in existence before the subdivision of the settlement.



Devondale Dairy, an early milk processing plant in Christchurch. Source: <https://canterburystories.nz/collections/community/bdmt/devondale>



Exterior of the dairy opposite Donegal Street on Main Road in Belfast on the Devondale Dairy farm with horses and drays collecting milk to be transported to the main bottling dairy in Johns Road (1910's).

Source: <https://canterburystories.nz/collections/community/bdmt/devondale/ccl-cs-80529>

CANTERBURY FROZEN MEAT COMPANY

The early history and subsequent development of the township, is so interwoven with erection of the Canterbury Frozen Meat Company's works, that its beginning is of paramount importance. It has its initial meeting on the 11th December 1881, when in response to a circular signed by the John Grigg, John McFarlane of Coldstream, and John Tinline. The company was launched with a capital of £20,000. £12,000 of this was immediately taken up in the name of Mr John Cook, who as above stated, was the first Manager of the Loan and Mercantile Company, which was largely instrumental in the initial formation. The C.F.M slaughter-house of six men, and a cooling room capable of hanging 400 carcasses of mutton, and a cool stores of a capacity of 9000 carcasses. It took six years to record 1,000,000 frozen sheep. Last year (1948) this company and Borthwicks combined put through 850,000 to 900,000 killings. The discovery of refrigeration, which first commenced in Otago in 1881, placed not merely Belfast but the whole of Canterbury on the road to prosperity, but with severe setbacks however

during periods of depressions. Among the first of these was the great slump which commenced about 1887 and lasted to the early nineties.

BACON FACTORY

With the advent of Frozen Meat, other industries to make use of the by-products sprang up. The disposal of offal, i.e. the guts of the sheep, was for many years a real problem. Henry Tisch, who was one of the thirteen children of the original Philipp Tisch, had two men with drays constantly employed carting the offal from the works to his farm, where Buddle Settlement stands today. It was spread on the paddocks for his pigs. And although it is said that he owned at one time over 1000 pigs, it was generally reckoned that the hordes of seagulls age as much as the pigs. In fact, such a pest were they that Tisch had one man employed constantly shooting them. The men employed carting the offal and shooting the seagulls were never exactly popular at the local dances. Apparently even their friends were not afraid to tell them they suffered from B.O. Tisch commenced a bacon factory at the back of his house, which was on the North Road opposite Brown's Store. The bacon factory was of brick about a few hundred yards behind the house. Both the house and the factor are still standing. The factory is now used as a milking shed by one of the Devondale herds. Incidentally, the bacon was not a success as apparently the offal and with no hard grain feed, tainted the bacon. It was Tisch that first opened up Guthrie's Road at the Buddle Settlement end. He used to close it once a year so that the public would be aware that it was a private and not a public road.

KAPUTONE WORKS

The early history of these works has been already outlined. After the first in 1878, Mr Watt rebuilt his works and went in for wool scouring, soap making, fell mongering and meat preserving. Mr William Nicholls who managed the fellmongery, purchased this department, and a Mr Walcot Wood brought out the soap department, and finally Mr Nicholls took over all the works and traded under the name "Kaputone Wool Works". Mr Walcot built another soap works in connection with manure works which had been erected and which traded under the name of "N.Z Provision and Produce Co." On the retirement of Mr Wood the works were taken over by a company and the trading name was changed to "Zealandia Soap, Candle, and Trading Co." From the time the tax was put on imported soap, this branch never looked back. It is said that the name "Silkstone" which was the name of the original soap was brought from Belfast, Ireland, where a similar name was given to a popular product.



Wool pelts out drying outside buildings at the Kaputone Wool Works in Belfast (1900's) Source: <https://canterburystories.nz/collections/community/bdmt/kaputone>



Factory and warehouse buildings of the Zealandia Soap and Candle Works at 10 Station Road in Belfast. To the right is a small steam train loaded with boxed soap and several employees and children (1930's). Source: <https://canterburystories.nz/collections/community/bdmt/zealandia-soap-and-candle-works>

OTHER INDUSTRIES

At various times other industries have sprung up. Some of them have been fostered by the parent Meat Coy and others by private enterprise. The Ollee Works with a Mr De Vies as Manager, stood where the Meat preserver stands today. Olee in its edible form is used for the manufacture of Margine. The works were bunt or closed down. The Fiddlestring Works where another by-product was used for violins etc stood at the end

of Factory road through the gate to Kaputone Creek. Mr Oppenheim was Manager at one time.

The glass Factory at Chaney's, in the corner formed by the Road and Railway and opposite the bowser (petrol station), was an experiment to use the sands of Ourhinia for commercial purposes. It was controlled by a man called Hunnibell, who was brought out from Germany for the purpose. He was assisted by the Land Brothers, who were Danes and related to Hunnibell. It was found impossible to produce clear glass. The sand apparently was not satisfactory. Large blocks of blue glass left over, were used for many years by the residents for various purposes, such as paper weights, door jams etc.

An attempt at a Starch Factory was started by a well known oddity "Cabbage Wilson" (he pushed a barrow with cabbages and other plants around the town). It was at the bottom of Johns Road. It was just an idea to use up surplus potatoes after a glut. The following year it was dropped.

It is reported that Philipp Tisch at one time had a small sawmill operating in the river bed. Timber from this was used in the first Anglican Church and School House. It was said that the children that were to use the School, burnt the timber to delay its building, and the parents had to pay. What the building timber would be, it is hard to say. The butter Factory on North Road (although much later) was for years a busy scene with the milk being carried on horse drawn carts. Many a race was fought out along the Road to be there first. Mr Jakins, who managed this, and turned out the brand of Palm Brand Butter, is still alive.

LOCAL INSTITUTIONS

TOWN HALL

In 1885 the first part of the Town Hall and Public Library was built as a result of public subscription. The section was donated by the Loan & Mercantile Coy on the condition that it could not be sold without permission. Valuable donations were given by Mr J.M Watt and by the C.F Meat Coy. The title still stands in the name of the five original trustees – all of whom are long since dead. For over 60 years this old Hall has served the cultural and social life of the community. The original inhabitants would indeed be surprised if they could see it today, with its "new look" – the Embassy Theatre – no less.

Within its wall have been held meetings of all kinds, local body elections (can any of the older generation ever forget the Nicholls v Claland contest, Lantern slides, travelling companies such as the favour family of Bell ringers, concerts by local artists, the Bioscope (the first Movies), Band of Hope concerts, smoke concerts, the balls of the eighties with their square dances – the Quadrilles, the D'Alberts, the Lancers – and their strenuous P9olkas, Barn Dances and Mazurkas, the "hot" jazz measures of the later years, the political addresses of local candidates, "tea fights", School concerts,

farewells to departing soldiers of two wars, valedictory gatherings for local residents, weddings, birthday parties, lectures, flower shows, even roller-skating. Today in its back rooms too, are still held the Lodge Meetings, and the Library (which has served three generations) still stands.



A group of Belfast School concert performers gathered outside the Belfast Town Hall on Tyrone Street in Belfast as part of Queen Carnival celebrations (1920's). Source: <https://canterburystories.nz/collections/community/bdmt/people>

HOTEL

The history of the “Seven Mile Peg” goes back to the very first days of the settlement. First as a farm from the date of its original grant from the crown to a Mr Orchard in 1858. It was leased by him the next year to Treleaven Senior, who in 1867 bought the freehold. It was because travellers from the City unable to cross the Waimakariri owing to the numerous floods, were obliged to return to Treleaven’s farm to await the fall of the waters, that an accommodation license was applied for and granted. When Samuel Treleaven purchased it in 1867, he was described as “of River Styx, Miller”. Subsequently, Treleaven purchased adjoining farms. For many years the farm with its license, was held by him. He was reputed to have been at sea for many years before, and he gave the place a nautical air. It was said that he used to locate his cows by climbing a nearby tree and spotting them by telescope and then sent his dogs out for them. His son, who had no stomach for the hotel business, refused to take it over, and on his Father’s death in 1888, the Executors sold it to Henry Smith, who at the time held the license at the Ferry Hotel at White’s Bridge. Smith could, at that date, see the possibilities of the new township. He leased the farm portion to two sons of Treleaven (John and George Henry). In 1902 David M Marshall bought the Hotel and adjoining land which then consisted of 18 acres. After being leased to M.B Edwards and then John

Barry, the freehold was purchased in later years (1923) by Kentish Smith. On the purchase by Ballin's Breweries in 1936 the area was reduced to only just over half an acre, the price had risen to £14,000.

POST OFFICE

A separate Post Office for the Township is a recent development, the present one having been opened in December 1936 with Mr J. J Crenin as first Postmaster. For many years the early residents of Belfast and Chaney's had to go right to the Styx Railway Station for mail. In those and later days the Stationmaster was Postmaster also. It was later distributed at the Township station. The first recorded Stationmaster cum Postmaster was Mr Newton, and then Mr White. The residents were getting poor service as the dual jobs did not work. The mails were arriving and being dispatched by rail. This was the very busiest time for the Stationmaster. The mail took a very secondary place in his duties. After many complaints the Post Office was taken over by Jonathan R Carey, who owned the drapery business at present J Halligans. Carey sold to Ernie Gahagan (now owner and proprietor of Hotel Nelson). Alf Kinvig took over from Gahagan. The Post Office then moved. It was run by many years by Mr Alex Brown, in conjunction with the store. From there it went to the present site. The first post boy was Arthur Marshall.

POST OFFICE WANTED.

Residents of Belfast and surrounding districts will meet on Monday night to discuss the question of having a new post office erected. The present office has been located in Messrs Brown Bros' store for the past twenty-three years, with Mr A. Brown holding the position of postmaster during that lengthy period.

It is understood that Mr Brown is relinquishing the position and is desirous of having the office transferred to other premises.

The office in Belfast does a vast amount of work, dealing with pensions, motor registrations, unemployment and radio business and general routine. It is the only Money Order Office between Papanui and Kalapoi, and therefore covers a wide area, taking in Coutts Island and all places east of the Waimakariri River to Brooklands and also Styx and part of Marshland. The amount of work done warrants a more up-to-date office.

POST OFFICE WANTED. Star (Christchurch),
Volume LXVI, Issue 20571, 23 March 1935,
Page 9

Source: <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers>

NEW POST OFFICE

Belfast Committee to Go Into Question.

A representative meeting of residents of Belfast and the surrounding districts was held last evening to discuss the question of endeavouring to secure a new permanent post office at Belfast. Mr W. T. Rogers was appointed chairman and Mr S. G. Farquhar secretary.

The chairman reported that the present postmaster (Mr A. Brown) was relinquishing the position and was desirous of having the post office shifted to other premises.

Mr Brown, who was present, endorsed the remarks, and stated that the present office had been in his store for the past twenty-three years.

After a general discussion it was unanimously agreed that a permanent post office was required in the district, and a committee was appointed consisting of Messrs J. Halligan, A. E. Clarke, S. G. Farquhar, W. T. Rogers, T. Morten, J. Cleland and J. Dunlop to go into the matter with power to act.

At a later meeting of the committee Messrs Rogers and Farquhar were appointed chairman and secretary respectively. It was decided to write to the Chief Postmaster at Christchurch to ascertain the department's opinion regarding a new post office.

CHURCHES

The Anglican Church has been referred to before. It started as a Mission Hall combined with a School. The present Church was built in 1902.



Exterior entrance to St David's Anglican Church at 831 Main North Road in Belfast (1900's). Source: <https://canterburystories.nz/collections/community/bdmt/local-scenes-and-places/objects?page=1>

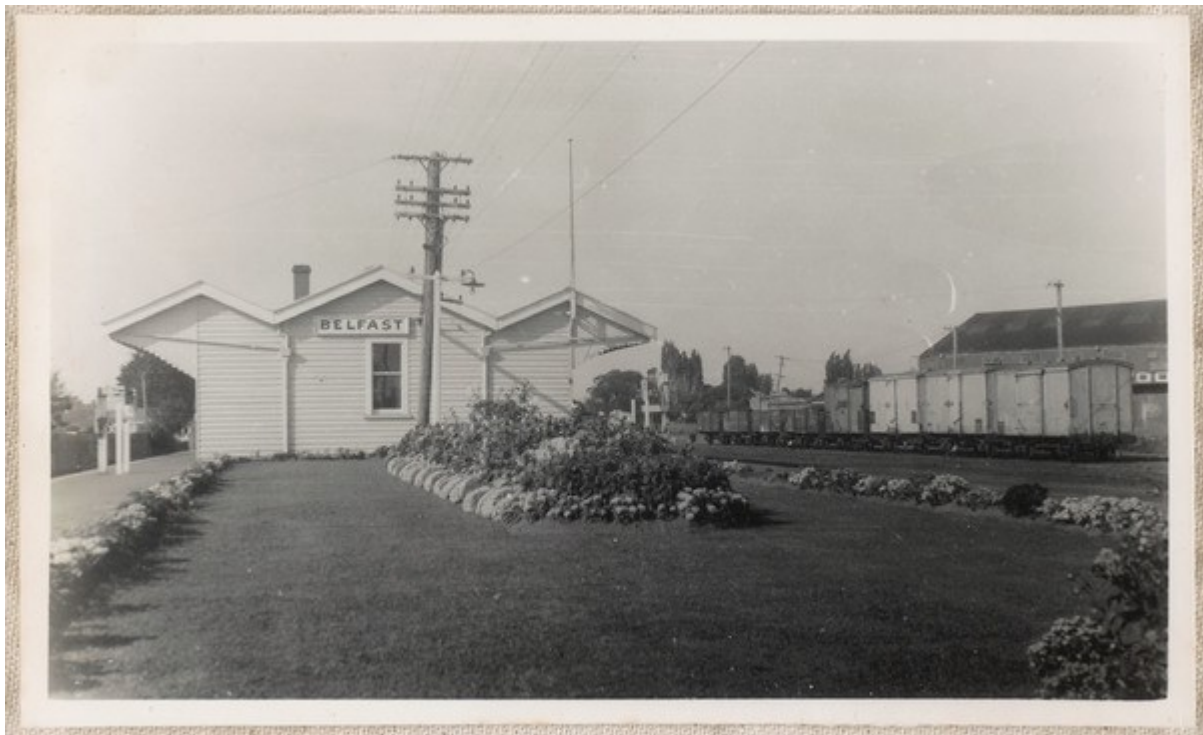


Interior of St David's Anglican Church at 831 Main North Road in Belfast.
 Donor's note: This photo of St. David's church had belonged to Miss Cock's grandmother, a Miss Ellen who played the organ in 1901. (1900's) Source: <https://canterburystories.nz/collections/community/bdmt/local-scenes-and-places/ccl-cs-80549>

A site for the Methodist and Wesleyan Church was donated first in Howard Street by it is thought, Mr Watt. In about 1890 the present Church was moved to North Road.

The Presbyterian Church was opened in 1896.

RAILWAYS AND STATION



Belfast Railway Station and gardens located between Donegal Street and Third Street in Belfast. In the background is the Kaputone Wool Works (1920) Source:

<https://canterburystories.nz/collections/community/bdmt/local-scenes-and-places>

The railway ran through Belfast much earlier than people imagine. The section Addington through Belfast to Kaiapoi, was in fact opened officially on the 29th April 1872. Shortly after, a small railway station was opened when the boiling down works were started. A railway porter named J.H. Newton was in charge. It was not until the Freezing Works opened in 1883 that it became at all busy.

The line was originally of a wide gauge of 5 ft. 3 ins. This was the width fixed by the Canterbury Association and suited to easy construction of the plains. But when a standard gauge for the whole of N.Z was adopted, Canterbury wisely decided to fall in to line. The N.Z width is 3 ft 6 ins – a considerable reduction. A remarkable performance as affected in the alteration of the gauge. The whole length altered, including sidings, a distance of 44 miles was done in one day – viz the 20th December, 1877, without the necessity of suspending either passenger or goods traffic.

A heavy flood on the 24th June, 1905 was the cause of a bad accident just beyond Chaney's. The river overflowing carried away a length of the formation and left the rails suspended. As a result the evening express turned over. Two passengers were killed and nine injured. One of the killed was Mr Alexander, the Headmaster for the Kaiapoi School, a popular man whose loss was greatly mourned.

SCHOOL

As stated above the first school was a Church or Mission one on the site of the Anglican Schoolroom. On January 1878 a new school known as the North Road School, was opened on land given by Mr Tisch. Mr Kay carried on from the old to the new until the permanent appointment of Mr Henry Wilson B.A. as Headmaster in the same year. It had a role of 38 pupils. The first Chairman of the committee was Mr R Duncan. Mr Duncan had a farm on Belfast Road, near the Kaputone Creek. The road was at that time known always as Duncan's Lane. In 1883 Mr Edward Morgan was appointed Headmaster, Miss Ellon Somerset having been appointed as Assistant two years before. Two later assistants were Miss Finney and Miss Alley. In 1887 Mr R.H Ferbuson took over as Headmaster, and a side school known as Sandhills now Spencerville – was opened. The North Road School was in the same year known as Belfast School. Thereafter in charge were, in succession, Messrs W. A Banks, W.D Beam and W Balch. The infant school which had been opened in Wilsons Road in 1897 was closed. The present open air School was opened on June 1st 1938. One interesting fact not recorded in the formal record was that an adjoining house belonging to a man called Coleman caught fire. With the assistance of the staff and pupils the fire was quenched. Mr Coleman in gratitude gave 5 to the school. It was used to take the pupils in two drags (as the horse conveyances were called) to Sumner for the day. It was a great treat in those early days.

LODGES

As was to be expected, the name of Belfast apparently attracted a number of immigrants from the North of Ireland. This quickly led to the formation of an Orange Lodge. In 1889 the first Orange Lodge No. 6 Rising Start was opened, and later in 1908 the No. 4 Ulster True Blues took over. The regalia was purchased from Briggette of Belfast, Ireland. The first master was W Rigan with Edward Thompson as Deputy Master and E. Wisson as Secretary. All the first officers came either from Country Down or Country Armagh.

The first Friendly Society was however the Ancient Order of Foresters which was opened in 1888. Chief Ranger was the same Edward Thompson who was Deputy Master of the Orange Lodge.

BROWN'S STORE

Although the section on which this store stands was, as stated above, reported in the Lyttelton Times as being purchased by Mr. J.T Ford, at the public auction it is probable that this sale fell through. At any rate Mr W.E Brown was purchased direct from the Loan Coy. for £40. The date of the transfer was 9th May, 1889, although Mr Brown had occupation before then. On it was erected the first concrete building in the district, built by the owner himself with the help of a few friends. Concrete was generally

considered to be a doubtful building material and many locals foretold that the first earthquake would bring it down. Although before the days of reinforcing, its solid workmanship has been ever since the despair of any workmen engaged to effect alterations.

It was on the 8th March, 1891, that Mr. William Edward Brown, his wife, and six young children travelled by buggy to the sea coast at the mouth of the Waimakariri River for a day's picnic. While bathing there, Charles, the eldest son, was carried away by the undertow and Mr Brown dashed to the rescue. Both were drowned. May I, the author, who bear the full name of my father, be permitted to pay here a tribute to the memory of my parents. Not merely to my father, who gave his life without hesitation in endeavouring to save his son, but particularly to my mother. Numbed by her grievous loss, and left alone on the coast with five young children, she harnessed up the horses (although unaccustomed to handling them) and found her way across the then almost trackless sandhills back to the township. There, with the generous assistance of the early settlers, she carried on the business and brought up her six children, including the writer, who at the date of the tragedy was still unborn.

BLACKSMITHS

The Blacksmith, like the Grocer and the Hotelkeeper, was indeed an institution into the days when the horse was not merely an animal that you lost money on. With the horse in use everywhere – on the farm, the road, and the factory, the shoeing forge was a communal centre. Belfast had two. One on the North Road, just north of Fleming Street, the second house from the corner. It is now an empty section. At first Bill Hillier had the Smithy. He employed a well-known blacksmith, Harry Ferguson. It then passed to the Drummond family. The father was an enormous man, possibly 18 stone. Normally a hard-working smith of sober habits, he periodically went drink mad. His bout usually ended up in the D.T.'s. In the last stages nothing would satisfy him but neat methylated spirits. Every bottle in the local store had to be hidden away from Drummond when he was in that mood. The other smithy now gone, was on the outskirts of the village inland side of the North Road, one section from the corner of Johns Road. The triangular block between these roads comprising 43 ½ acres was cut up by Henry Tisch of the Styx in 1882. It was always known by the local name of Heslington – why I cannot trace. It passed into the hands of a syndicate but was purchased by Augustine William Swift of Richmond, Wheelwright, in 1885. Swift was the wheelwright who made and mended the carts, drays, etc, but the blacksmith was Bill Bowen, who, although one-legged, could handle every horse, however wild. AW Swift sold to John William Swift in 1896. The Mc Arthur Brothers (Duncan and John) bought in June 1902, and five years later Duncan bought his brother out.

It had turned slowly over the years with the march of progress from a smithy to an adjoining garage, now owned by A.S Cannon.



Cannon & Son Belfast Motor Garage - Exterior of Cannon & Son Belfast Motor Garage on Main North Road in Belfast (1920's). Source <https://canterburystories.nz/collections/community/bdmt/local-scenes-and-places>

The smithy lay between the school and the village, and the lure of this warm and colourful shed was irresistible to the returning children.

Longfellow puts it aptly:-

*“And children coming home from school
Look in at the open door,
The love to see the flaming forge
And here the bellows road,
And catch the burning sparks that fly
Like chaff from the threshing floor”.*

Next to the smithy, almost on the corner, was a two-storied shop, the bottom half was first a store with a small post office run by a Mrs Liddell, called the Heslington PO. Afterwards for many years it was a bicycle shop run by Mr Hayes whose strong Lancashire dialect was a delight to listen to at all times.

NORTH ROAD

But the greatest change of all was in this, the main arterial road of the Island. In the fifties and sixties it was just a bog, especially where it crossed the Styx and Kaputone Creeks and neared the river. So bad was it that goods were sent and passengers used the small ships running up the hazardous waters of the North branch of the Waimakariri at Kaiapoi and the Saltwater Creek further North. With the spreading of shingle (later broken metal) the bridging of the creeks, and the cutting of side ditches, the surface slowly improved. For many years, up to twenty years ago in fact, it remained either a river bed of loose metal, a sea of mud, or raised a dust cloud with every wind. Graders were later at work continuously. The great mobs of sheep that travelled to the factory nearly always by road in those days cut up the surface, or raised storms of dust. The Traffic was always large and on Show Day from 5 a.m. streams of horsemen, buggies and carts of all kinds came from the North.

Will any of the early generation ever forget that road and the great open drains five and six feet deep that ran beside it? At night in the dimly lit streets these ditches were indeed a menace. At last on the footpath side they railed in. There was nothing the local gossips liked better than to lean on this rail and yard the hours away. At one favourite spot a local wag once chopped the holding rail away, and then slipped it back. Sure enough in fell several of the loafers. At that time Jakins Butter Factory were discharging into it.

In 1928 however, when the Main Highway Board took the road over and laid it down in solid concrete, all the preceding seventy years of discomfort were forgotten.



Cars and people gathered for the official opening of the new concreted Main Road from Styx to the Waimakariri Bridge in Belfast. (1920's). Source:

<https://canterburystories.nz/collections/community/bdmt/local-scenes-and-places/ccl-cs-80526>

TRANSPORT TO CHRISTCHURCH

Passenger services to Christchurch like the North Road, have undergone incredible changes over the span of fifty years. The first passenger transport from the early eighties was the coach, or drag, as it was often called. Drawn by two, or sometimes three horses abreast, they connected at Papanui with the horse drawn trams to the Square. It is not certain whether Wild's or Russell's ran the first coaches, but they were in competition for many years. Then Boxes started "running drag". I said "running" but his old half-starved mokes could rarely get beyond a jog trot. On one occasion even, his coach while going to Kaiapoi and drawn by three angular beasts, had a breakdown. One of the horses had dripped in the shafts – dead of starvation. It was unhitched, and on went the coach.

The small rise just on the Township side of the Styx River, was known as the Styx Hill. It was then a dreaded obstacle, and often the coaches had to be emptied of passengers to permit the horses to make the grade. At this time there were so many complaints that the Tramway Board decided to establish their own feeder service. For many years under the whip of the most popular driver, Joe Ferguson, a well-kept team carried a full complement. Later Bill Tubman, as the last dragsman, brought to an end the many years of private conveyances. In this heyday of this transport, it was unusual to see as many as seven drags, each holding between twenty and thirty passengers, leaving every Saturday night (the long night) from Brown's Store. The fare was sixpence single and ninepence return. Sometimes "specials" took picnic parties right through to Sumner from Belfast. It was necessary of course to have a change of horses at the Square and again at Redcliffs and the same returning. One shilling was the charge for these occasions. With a jolly crowd aboard and as nobody could hurry, it was great fun all the way.

For many years after there was no road transport. The horse had gone and the motor had not yet come. Then at long last Borgfeldt it is thought was the first to start a motor service. He was succeeded by Manhire's Motor Service servicing was poor in those days, the time of arrival was always uncertain. For many years Manhire carried on in the face of great difficulties and with long hours and no relief. He must be given full credit for his pioneering work.

The March of Time has brought many changes in Belfast, but in no place greater than in the transition in a half-century from the derelict drags of Boxes to the stream-lined and speedy buses of Midland Motors Limited with their efficient seven-day service.

WAIMAKARIRI FLOODS

No reference to the early days would be complete without an account of the great floods that menaced that very existence of the young settlement. To see this great river today confined within stopbanks and its every flood controlled, it is hard to visualise the fear that its many floods instilled not only to the inhabitants of Belfast but also the greater population of Christchurch. There was a bad flood in February 1859 another in October 1863 a worse one in October 1866 and then when the greatest of them on the 5th February, 1868 overflowed into the Avon, Christchurch realised that it too was menaced. At that time 2 feet of water was around the then Post office and both Oxford and Cambridge Terraces were 3 to 4 feet under water.

A report was immediately obtained from Dr James Hector the Provincial Geologist. He stated that the two danger spots to Christchurch from this river were at the Head of the Avon and the Head of the Styx. It was from his recommendations that the Groynes at Johns Road were built and the establishment of a River Board was completed.

As for Belfast, the main branch once swept less than half a mile from the North Road and parallel with it. Every flood meant watchfulness. A large one invariably covered the Road and inundated the nearest houses. This occurred again in 1878.

The tall bluegum and wattle plantation clearly visible from the North Road at the back of the farm of Mr J.R.D Johns "Devondvale" was first planted over sixty years ago solely as a protection from flooding. They were grown from seeds.

Behind Chaney's too the road and railway were often covered and the Hotel at the river bridge was frequently isolated. At one flood a boat was rowed right inside the hotel.

Apart from the flooding however the great stretch of toitoi, gorse and flax with the many backwaters and branches of the river winding between, have from the earliest days been a call to the youth of the township. It was the playground where dusky redskins waged war on scouts and settlers. Its bathing holes were rarely empty on the hot Summer days. Later the youth with shot gun, pea rifle or ferret hunted the numerous rabbits.

Sometimes too the river took its toll by drowning.

Today its rich pastures and fine dairy herds have shown indeed that the wilderness can "blossom as the rose".

WHITE'S BRIDGE

Little used today this bridge is rapidly becoming unsafe for heavy traffic. It was opened on the 28th May, 1903. It replaced however an earlier one built by Mr William White in 1864. Before the first bridge however "Joe Felton's Ferry" as it was later known

transported over the river passengers stock and goods. It is stated that as early as 1852 a ferry was operated by a Maori to transport travellers over the wild waters of the Waimakariri. It was at the end of what is or was known locally as the “green” road where the North Road turns at the Hotel.

The main road was diverted to the right at the hotel because the old “green” was low lying and always subject to flooding.

Mr William White who had had no training in the building trade, but was a man of great practical ability and great energy was said to have accepted land in part payment for his contract.

A toll gate and a toll house were erected, and a fee was charged to help pay for the bridge. A man named Harrison was said to be the first toll keeper.

At the Belfast end was situated a well known hotel which was known at different times as the Ferry Hotel – The Courtenay Arms Hotel and later the Bridge Inn. The river itself was at first called the courtenay. In 1888 Henry Smith who was then the Licensee bought the Seven Mile Peg Hotel at Belfast and afterwards let the Bridge Inn License lapse.



Exterior of the Belfast Bridge Inn, with the owner Mr Samuel Treleaven serving a customer (1870's).
Source: <https://canterburystories.nz/collections/community/bdmt/local-scenes-and-places/ccl-cs-80524>

The opening of the first bridge was a major event in the district. Kaiapoi, Rangiora, Leithfield, and North Canterbury had a last and safe overland route to Christchurch. An alternate was now provided for the cartage of goods that could compete with the small ships using the North Branch of the River and the Saltwater Creek. Cobb and Co. now

ran a line of coaches as far North from Christchurch as Huranui. It was an excellent service for Cobb and Co prided themselves on it. Later Messrs. Sansom and Lee bought them out. But with the advent of the railway to Kaiapoi in 1872 the competition proved too keen and the service from that place gradually diminished and stopped.

FENCES AND DRAINS

With farming the main source of livelihood for the residents, the fencing of the various holdings became a real problem. Wire of any kind was until 1860 unprocurable. It was not indeed until the introduction of “barded” wire in 1879 did any wiring become general, and for many years it was in short supply and costly. The wooded slat fences seen even today on the Peninsula and other parts where trees were suitable could not of course be used locally. Live hedges were and still are the cheapest form of the boundary fence. But that took time, and the need was immediate.

Sod walls were the solution. The work was slow and heavy especially in the swamp lands of the township. The usual thing was to erect the walls to a certain height put up a post rail or plant gorse on top. The remains of these walls are still visible around many parts.

To build these walls meant digging drains for the sods and these formed an extra barrier. This served a dual purpose in helping to drain the low lands. Belfast was particularly low lying. Indeed on the original “black” map of Belfast filled in the Survey Office (No. 325) and made in 1856 the site of the township is all shown as covered with surface water and raupo swamp. The North Road kept, of course, to the high ground to the west of the swamp.

LIGHTS

Mr William Nicholls while representing the District on the Road Board was responsible in having the first street lights erected on the corners of the township streets. At first they were hurricane lamps on posts. The lamp lighter was always known as “old” White. He never failed to bike round them all at dusk and again in the early morning. He was a familiar figure.

Even the feeble rays of a small lamp served to break the gloom of the otherwise unlightened streets, and saved the pedestrians from the deep gutters which otherwise could only be avoided by feeling along the hedges on the opposite side of the footpath. At any rate they showed where the street corners were.

LOCAL BODIES POLITICS

Belfast was part of the old Avon Road Board, which, on December 13, 1909, became the Waimariri County Council. The election of the local representative to this Board divided the district into rival camps in a way that has never been known since.

William Nicholls the manager of the Wool works was alleged to represent the “bosses” and the farmers, while John Cleland who worked at the works was assured a strong vote from the factory. It was in fact Capital versus Labour. The contests were fought with a bitterness that stirred the whole district. As Mr Nicholls addressed the electors from the stage of the town hall, the Labour supporters interjected from the back. John Cleland, who had a strong North of Ireland brogue, was strong in his denunciation of his rival as “a rotten sod”.

Nicholls, during one of his terms of office as Councillor, had both Youk and Bedford Streets planted with trees he had donated. They were flourishing and securely fenced off from wandering stock. At the next election, Cleland got in by a small majority. Shortly after, it was noticed that all the trees were dying. It was rumoured that Cleland induced the surfaceman who was killing weeds on the footpath to put some of the poison around the roots of the trees.

SWAGGERS

A picturesque feature of the early days now vanished was the swagger, or “sundowner,” that humped his “bluey” (coloured blankets) from place to place. It was a common sight to see them on the roads as they swung along with Billy dangling from blankets. The billy was usually a seven-pound golden syrup tin. They “worked” their way across the country, getting a shakedown and meal every evening, if possible, at various farmhouses. Some were just spongers and not to be trusted. Farmers were often scared to refuse them lest they burnt his stacks – by mistake of course. Others were genuine wanderers who felt the call of the open road with its carefree life. Better times and now Social Security have effectively banished them from the roads. The youthful weekend hitch hiker seems to have taken their place.

At one time, they were so common that station holders in the backcountry were even able to obtain small grants to cover their expenses for these itinerants.

SPORT

Organised sport as we know it today was almost unheard of until near the turn of the century. With Sunday the only day off from work, with few farming and domestic labour saving devices, with no electric power aids to heating and lighting, with no swift power driven conveyances to get about in, life became very full just sustaining creature comforts leaving little time for sport or recreation. Sunday sport was frowned upon.

Later with Saturday afternoon off football and cricket matches, mostly by factory workers and later by the village, became common.

The outlet for gambling which appears to be innate in the colonial breast appeared in local wagers and in the occasional racing gallops. Trotting was not general until 1901.

At a time when hard work called for physical fitness, feats of strength or endurance always attracted attention and often led to wagers. It is reported that once a man named Adelaide carried a sack of potatoes from Belfast to Styx Railways station for 5. And a sack those days weighed two hundredweight. Although it is not known whether it was the road or the railway that was the route, the distance must, in any case, have been about three miles. On arrival, it was said that Adelaide offered to carry it back to Belfast for the price of a new suit. Nobody took him up. Other "spud" carrying contests were reported about that time.

Horse races, sometimes with gigs or carts, along the stretches of road were common. One race between Henry Tisch and Easterbrook from White's Bridge to the Papanui Post Office created a lot of interest. Many a race to be first to the butter factory, which was a small brick building still standing opposite Donegal Street but further North, saw milk cans, drivers swaying, and horses panting.

Bicycle races, starting from the old "penny farthing," became more general as the road surface improved, and the forerunner of the modern cycle became indispensable.

Athletic contests and the inevitable road cycle races were much more common than they are today.

All these were later developments, however. The early youth of the village appeared to find "ratting" a favourite occupation. There must have been plenty around. The boiling down works was a noted spot. One old identity told me that when a straw stack near Chaney's was demolished, a party of young lads killed 125 rats.

EXCITING EVENTS:

Life appeared to move at a much quieter tempo than in these modern days of radio, cars, and pictures. Two World Wars have accustomed us to the departure of overseas of local lads. It is hard, therefore, for us to imagine the stir that was aroused when four Belfast boys, including Philipp Tisch (Junior) and Bill Blake, decided to try their luck at the Kimberly Diggings. When later they returned disillusioned, and one of them dead, another of the four married his widow. It created a little gossip when it transpired that while abroad, the deceased had confided in the mate who was to replace him that he had assigned a large life insurance policy to his wife before leaving.

Another major excitement that moved the community was the event of the "horse friends," as they were known. A number of horses, all racing ones, were stabbed in succession. It came very near home when a racehorse at a stable in Belfast Road just past Guthrie's Road was badly gashed. Australian aborigines, because of their prowess in tracking, were brought over to trace the culprits. "Black Trackers" as they were known to the locals. Although no actual arrest was made for insufficient evidence, it was

significant that when suspicion pointed strongly to a certain person, no further stabbings occurred.

The departure of a few lads to the Boer War at the turn of the century—Rough Riders, they were called—aroused local patriotic fervor to a tremendous degree. In those days, there was a glamour about that has long since been “debunked.” When one of the boys, Tubman, was mentioned in dispatches, it brought glory indeed to Belfast.

Trooper Tubman returned with a Kaffir as batman or servant. It created great interest. He was booked on with awe by the boys of the village.

As in all communities, there have been a number of incidents of a sordid nature. It is better that they should be forgotten. Belfast, of course, in common with other Canterbury towns and villages, has shared the excitements of the events of a provincial or national character, but apart from the above, little appears to have disturbed the unruffled calm of the first fifty years of existence in the township.

HOUSE - BUILDERS

To those who understand the year or decade of the building of the homes can be traced by their differing forms of architecture. Trained builders were short in the early days and only a limited number were available. Most of the first homes built that are still standing were erected by Mr Henshall and Papanui building. Others were put up by Mr Lethwick who himself lived at Belfast Road.

THE STYX

No history of the early days of Belfast would be complete without a reference to the Styx locality which played such an important part therein. As mentioned before the mail for the residents was for many years distributed at the Styx railway station. But long before that the Styx was well known.

Its very name is a link with the early days. Oday as one comes from the city the little box-like railway station is scarcely worth a glance. Coming off the overhead bridge the motorist usually slacken speed a little as a narrow bridge is crossed. To the left and right the small stream is given a fleeting glance. To the right a number of bulrushes near the stream show the low nature of the ground.

To the very early travellers the crossing of this swampy creek was a nightmare. In the fifties the way North beyond Papanui was just a Maori track along which the Natives from Kaiapoi came to work and trade. The crossing was then by a raft and flax sticks, and then the defined route was similarly indicated. The locality was invariably known as the “Sticks”. Later the spelling (it is thought by the Railway Department) was changed to Styx. This classical name is given to the mythological river one crosses after death before entering Heaven or Hell. Which of these represents Belfast, I leave to the reader

to guess. But even the Maori name of this river, i.e. Purarekanui, correctly spelt Puharakenui, means big bundle of flax, as stated elsewhere.

Just to the left of the present bridge, where a cow yard now stands, was Moir's famous four mill. The wheel of wood was for many years a landmark as it scooped up the waters of the stream. The station, too, was a busy spot at that time, with wheat constantly arriving and flour going out. But time marches on, and the speeding buses never pause for one second at this crossing where so many pioneers became bogged.

SHELDON PARK

This represents much later era and no reference to it should find place in this history. But for later generations, it should perhaps be placed on record that the Park was originally the gift of Mr William Nicholls, the proprietor of the Kaputone Wool Works, to the people of Belfast, in memory of his late wife Sarah Sheldon. The original gift was of 8 acres and was conveyed by Mr Nicholls to the Crown on the 29th March, 1912. It was formally gazetted a Park on the 21st May of the same year. It was then valued at £1,000.

One condition of the gift was that the Crown pay 400, which Mr Nicholls handed to the Board controlling the Park for grassing and general improvements.

On the death of Mr Nicholls his three sons donated a further 4 acres, 1 rood, and 18 perches at the back of the previous reserve and adjoining the railway. The transfer was formally effected on the 1st June, 1924.

When a block of land to the North adjoining was cut up by Mr J.E Alexandre and Crown claimed a further strip running parallel with the boundary. This was in 1945.

The residents of Belfast whether they play bowls, tennis, football, cricket or hockey or not, and the children at school next door, would ever remember this handsome gift of the Nicholls family.

BORTHWICKS

Although this establishment plays such an important part in the lives of residents today it is of course of much later origin than the period covered by his account. It was commenced in the first World War. The first land being purchased on the 26th October, 1915.



A large group of workers outside the Thomas Borthwick & Sons Ltd freezing works on Belfast Road.
 Source: <https://canterburystories.nz/collections/community/bdmt/thomas-borthwick-sons-ltd/ccl-cs-84242>

CONCLUSION

Nobody realizes more than the writer the many omissions in this attempt at an account of the early days of the village.

No individual tribute has been paid to the many stalwarts of the earlier generation whose sterling qualities endeared them to their fellowmen. Men such as Harry Longman who devoted their lives to helping the community. It is impossible to detail them even if all were known.

In church work in lodges in communities in working bees and in many other ways and not forgetting the name little acts of personal kindnesses, they served the community and Belfast is richer for their sacrifice.

Others too on the lighter side who sometimes unconsciously added to the laughter of the people. Many amusing incidents could be recalled, but those who know and enjoyed them are themselves in the graveyard, or are rapidly passing on.

MAORI PLACE NAMES OF BELFAST

There is no indication that the early Maori did other than merely pass through this locality. Temporary resting place or perhaps an eel hunting expedition were the extent of his occupation.

Names were however given to various natural features. Some of these were recorded by early students. Care must be taken however in applying literal translation to Maori names. Some names are in fact like European names meaningless. Others go back to early associations or similarity with the legends or history of the past.

The Waimakariri which means icy-cold water or Wintry River was of course well known and its crossing must have often been difficult and dangerous. The road crossing near the site of the present bridge was Te Tau-a-te-kaka – the nest of the brown parrot. The adjacent parts were also well known. Thus what is now Clarkville was O-rakai-a-hewa. The meaning of this is obscure but it was probably named after some early Maori whose name meant “the adornment of the deluded one”. Coutts Island too had a name O’tama-te-raki – the literal meaning of which is “place of the man who was known as the Son of the Sky”.

The spring which was situated just near the present Chaney’s crossing on the right of the present north Road was well known to the early Maori. It was Kaipari, this name was given too to the locality. Ouruhia has been renamed in later years. Uruhia was a much travelled warrior who has given his name to several other South Island and particularly Otago places.

The township site was known generally as Orawhata meaning a storing place for sails. The creeks and rivers were of course always named and well known. The native name of the Styx appears on all the early records as Purarekanui and that of Kaputone was similarly known. Both however are mis-spellings of the correct names. The correct spelling of the former Phuarakekenui which means the big bundle of Flax. This was the spelling used by a Maori who applied for a Reserve (No 892) as early as 1868. This reserve was an old eeling pa or weir.

The earliest official reference to this small river (the Styx) is on the original map of Mantell (?) in 1849 who spells it Pou-harakeke. The older Pou meant post and this New Zealand Company surveyor was forced to use flax stiels for survey pegs as all other wood was absent from the lower Styx.

The correct spelling of Kaputone is probably Kapuatohe. This name was given to a Government settlement laid out about half a mile west of the source of the Kaputone Creek – near the head of Engerfield Road. On the other hand an early Maori authority (a Mrs Beaton) spelt it Nga-putahi and as Ng was frequently used instead of K this maybe correct. The name means literally “The Junctions”.

In Maori “a” or “e” were frequently interchangeable and Pa-tuna means as eel weir and this creek (Kaputone) was known for its eels, and the name may have this association.

The vicinity of the Styx siding was known at Te Kiparo-o-iho which has all involved meaning. Literally “the headband of Iho”. Iho means the heart of a tree.

From these observations it will be appreciated how difficult it is to be at all definite in giving a precise meaning to Maori terminology.

AUTHOR'S FORWARD

This is an attempt at a short history of Belfast, Canterbury, New Zealand.

A request from an officer of the City Council, Belfast Ireland was for some facts regarding the early settlement of Belfast New Zealand was passed to me for reply. In my official position as District Land Registrar, Canterbury and more particularly as Registrar of Deeds. I have had easy access to records and surveys of all land transactions. These bare skeletons I have tried to bring to life by interviews with the few remaining Belfast residents of the second generations.

The difficulty I have encountered in compiling these sketchy notes has made me realize the necessity of recording the information I have gleaned before yet another generation passes over and the events and names recede still further into the past.

Other places have printed the pre-settlement days of the Maori, the whalers, and the explorers, and these, together with the beginning of the Canterbury Association, will doubtless be revived during the centennial year. This background canvas has been painted elsewhere by more practiced hands.

Belfast was just a raupo swamp during all this time and its history was that of another uninhabited spot on the plains.

The ownership, areas of land, and dates of sales have been verified and can be taken as authentic. The rest is compiled from research, hearsay from early settlers, and memories of my own youth.

To Mrs Harris (granddaughter of the original Philipp Tisch) and Mr Bert Chaney (grandson of the original William Francis Chaney of Chaney's Corner). Mr JRD Johns, eldest son of James Johns "Johns Road" (and all are well over 70) and the late Mr Bob Doak, I am indebted for early memories.

I wish to thank various residents and Mr Watt, son of JM Watt (who first planned Belfast), for the loan of early photos and cuttings and also the Turnbull Library, Wellington, for copying them.

I put together the section on Maori place names from reading Herries Beatties' "Maori Place names of Canterbury," which is, incidentally, difficult to follow, and from information supplied by the New Zealand Geographic Board.

W.E Brown

Lands and Deeds Office

Worcester Street, CHRISTCHURCH 16 July 1949