

Edward Salter: From Hook Norton to New Zealand

A brief notice in *Jackson's Oxford Journal* of 2nd January 1892 announced the death on 22nd October 1891 at St Albans, New Zealand, of 68-year-old Edward Salter, formerly of Hook Norton.

Edward was born in September 1824 in Hook Norton, the sixth child of seven, and both his parents are buried in St Peter's churchyard. His father, Edward Salter, was a carpenter in the village, and young Edward would follow in his footsteps.

In 1846 Edward married Mary Harwood, a 26-year-old bonnet maker from Charlbury, who was four years his elder. Ten years later the family was still living in Hook Norton, with five children: Maria (born in 1848), Ann Frances (1849), Charles Edward (1851), Walter (1852) and Mary Ann (1854). At the time of the 1851 census, the household also included Jane Harrison, Edward's 14-year-old niece from Charlbury, whose occupation was listed as "improver", and 17-year-old William Fox, an apprentice, who had also been born in the village. The family appeared well settled in the village, and Edward must have had sufficient work if he could employ an apprentice.

By 1858, however, the family had decided to emigrate to New Zealand, which had become a British colony in 1841. The original vehicle for promoting colonisation there was the New Zealand Company, but in 1845 it encountered financial difficulties from which it never recovered. By 1854 the various provincial governments in the fledgling country had been given responsibility for immigration, and they copied the policies of the New Zealand Company, which was finally wound up in 1858. They used agents to put a positive spin on the colony and offered free or assisted passages. Typically, the province paid half the fare and the immigrant or sponsor paid the balance. Canterbury on the South Island was the most ambitious province and attracted a fifth of all immigrants between 1858 and 1870, of whom two thirds were assisted. The Salter family took advantage of this offer, paying half of the £76.10s which was the total cost of their voyage.

On 2nd August 1858 they sailed from Gravesend on the *Indiana*, bound for Lyttelton near Christchurch, the capital of Canterbury province. Captain McKirdy was the master of the *Indiana*, which was a barque of 852 tons built in Quebec in 1856 by Thomas C Lee. The ship was 160 feet long, with a 34-foot beam and drew 21 feet of water. In 1857 it was sold to R. Shankland & Co, a Greenock-based shipping company, and its working life seems to have been spent sailing between the UK and Australia and New Zealand.

Life on board was hazardous, the journey to Lyttelton took 109 days. There was no Suez Canal until 1869 and the route went round the Cape of Good Hope. Inevitably, there were several deaths as well as births during the voyage. One of the passengers kept a diary which included information about the health of his wife, Charlotte, and their baby daughter. His entry for 26th August, three weeks out from Gravesend, says:

we got her (Charlotte) up on deck in the afternoon. Not up long. Faints away. I carry her down and she faints twice, I stay with her. Take babe in with me and it is very ill at night.

From the passenger list, it appears that the diarist was probably James Jenkins, a 30-year- old carpenter from Pembrokeshire who was travelling with his 28-year-old wife, Charlotte, and their two-year-old son, James. There is no mention of the daughter on the manifest, but she must have been around nine months old when they sailed. On 10th September, about 100 miles west of the coast of Liberia, he noted that the baby

grows weaker and at 5.02am she expires at the age of twelve months short of seven days. The Captain got a nice little coffin for her and she is buried at 11am.

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The *Indiana* arrived at Lyttelton on 23rd November. The *Lyttelton Times* reported that the ship brought “to our shores another large freight of immigrants. The class of immigrants appears rather above the average, and the list included a number of tradesmen, particularly carpenters, whose arrival will be grateful to the building trade.” The manifest showed there were 317 passengers on board, 248 of whom were adults.¹

¹ *Lyttelton Times*, 24 November 1858.

Upon arrival, the Salters settled in St Albans, which is now a suburb of Christchurch. Edward made good use of his skills as a carpenter, setting up a business which also encompassed that of an undertaker. Edward also carried on the business of general storekeeper in St Albans for several years before selling the business in 1876 and then retiring. After his retirement he undertook an active role in local government, first as a councillor and then as mayor. In the mayoral elections of 1887 he defeated his rival by one vote. He was also a J.P.

Methodism was, however, the primary concern of Edward and his family, and religion may have been a major consideration in their decision to emigrate. In St Albans, Edward himself became a preacher at the local Wesleyan Church. According to his obituary in 1891, "his preaching has always met with great acceptance, and in consequence his services were very much sought after in the early days when there were no circuits". During his time in New Zealand Edward had held numerous offices under the church and was always chosen as a delegate to the annual Conference and attended when he was able to do so.²

Edward's two sons – both born in Hook Norton – inherited his faith. Charles, the elder, became a solicitor, but was a regular attender at St Albans Wesleyan Church and at one time served as its circuit steward. Walter, the younger, became a Wesleyan minister, serving in a number of different places. In 1882, at the age of thirty, he married Annie Richards in Lawrence, Otago, which had seen Otago's first gold rush, back in the 1860s. At its peak the population was around 11,500, whereas today the population of Lawrence is about 500! Later they moved to near Dunedin.

During the course of his career as a minister, Walter appears to have undertaken missionary work. In 1892 he gave a talk in Lawrence about his time on Norfolk Island, a Polynesian island about 600 miles north in the Pacific, half way between New Zealand and New Caledonia.³ In 1919-1920 Walter and his wife Annie

² Christchurch *Star*, 22 October 1891.

³ Lawrence *Tuapeka Times*, October 1892.

visited a Mission in Bengal, in the wake of India suffering more heavily from the Spanish Flu pandemic than any other part of the world. On the return journey in April 1920, the 68-year-old Walter died (apparently primarily of toxæmia), and was buried at sea in the Indian Ocean about 800 miles southwest of Jakarta.

The original adult migrants, Edward and Mary, had established a prolific and successful family. Their two sons and three daughters, born in Hook Norton, all married in New Zealand, of necessity mainly to fellow immigrants from Britain. The notable exception was the youngest daughter, Mary Anne, who in 1875 married William Scott, who had been born in New Zealand in 1851 and must have come from one of the first families to settle in the country. Edward's eldest son Charles (1851-1923) had eleven children by two wives, while Walter (1852-1920) had seven children. The three daughters had at least twenty children between them.

For a family that left Hook Norton in 1858, perhaps with some trepidation, for a life far across the world in a land some 12,000 miles away, they all seemed to have made the most of it. Their descendants continue to live in New Zealand and are spread throughout both islands.

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I am extremely grateful to Heather Burney and Danny Creech for their contributions to this article. In addition, I have made use of Papers Past, an online resource of New Zealand newspapers, at <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers>. My full genealogical account may be found in the Oxfordshire Family Historian, vol. 20, no. 3 (December 2015).