The Luck of the Fells

Stories about some of my ancestors

by

Lloyd Richmond Fell

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Dedicated to

All those family members who can't be called 'lucky,' their lives being cut short by war and accident, some of whom are:

Gerald Horton Fell, born 1881, son of Alfred George 'Geordie' Fell. Died June 7, 1917, in Belgium, aged 36.

Gilbert Vere Bogle, born 1884, husband of Margaret 'Margar' Cecily Richmond Bogle (*nee* Fell). Died September 17, 1916, in France, aged 32.

Nelson Fell, born 1895, son of Edward Nelson Fell. Died December 19, 1926, in Virginia, USA, in a car crash, aged 31.

Roderick Buchanan Fell, born 1910, son of Charles Richmond Fell. Died May 20, 1941, in Greece, aged 31.

Pamela Ruth Fell, born 1913, daughter of Charles Richmond Fell. Died May 7, 1942, at Mt Richmond (Nelson, NZ) in a plane crash, aged 29.

David Walton Fell, born 1915, son of Alfred Nolan Fell. Died November 13, 1942, in North Africa, aged 27.

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Foreword

It seems strange to begin a book on a sad note – especially when it contains so many positive stories – but I want to acknowledge the sadness I feel that I don't know more, at a really personal level, about my ancestors. I don't think I'm alone in this. After your grandparents and parents have died, how much do you really feel you knew about their inner lives? What kind of people were they, really?

Of course, we have the family stories that are passed down and a host of happy (sad) or poignant memories and images from the past when we reflect, but some of us still feel a need to search a little deeper into the personality and character of those who bore our name before it was passed on to us.

That is the purpose of this book: to explore the lives of a few of my ancestors in such a way that my descendants might be able to find some part of themselves, as I do, in the lives lived by our earlier generations.

So this is not really a family history – though it contains details that I hope are factual from historical records. It is my story of what I think was happening prior to the life that I have lived, which must have shaped who I am to some extent, and also the lives of my descendants. I think it is through stories that we know ourselves (our world is made of stories, not just things), but at the same time each story is personal. This is just my interpretation and I guess that means it might be as much about me as it is about the people concerned.

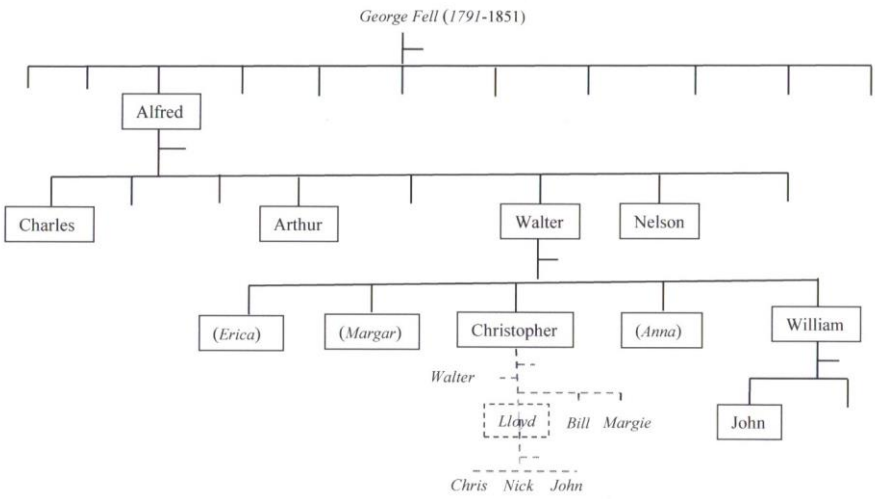
* * * * *

We all have a surname, or family name. Mine is Fell. Certainly English in origin, perhaps derived from the experience of living around the steep, high ground, rock and crags of northern Britain. In census records of recent centuries the name was most commonly found in Yorkshire and Lancashire where many Fells were listed as farmers (though not our most immediate forbears, it seems).

The ancestral story I am telling here begins in Yorkshire, from where it spread to New Zealand, Australia and the United States as well as other parts of England. We can date the lineage from John Fell (b. 1740) through his son Charles (b. 1769) and his son George (b. 1791), all from the coastal Yorkshire town of Kingston-Upon-Hull (now known as Hull).

It is with George's second son, **Alfred** Fell (born in York in 1817), that the story really begins. He left England in 1841 at the age of 24 to help establish the colony of Nelson in the South Island of New Zealand. After great success there he returned to London in 1859. Seven of his eight children were born in New Zealand, including my grandfather, **Walter**, in 1855. After education in England, Walter returned to live in New Zealand and my father, **Christopher**, was born there, in Wellington, in 1889. That is the direct lineage to me, Lloyd, born in Bellingen, Australia, in 1941.

Others whom I've included in this book are my great uncles, **Charles**, **Arthur** and **Nelson** Fell and my uncle **William**, who was also born in Wellington in 1897, though much of his life was lived in England. William's son, **John**, my first cousin, was also New Zealand born, in 1923, though he lived in England too.



To reiterate: this is not a history of the Fell family. It is written for my own children and grandchildren, primarily, so its subject matter is highly selective and its publication will be limited to my personal website[1] and a few printed copies. It is unashamedly subjective in that I have tried to make my own assessment of what kind of person each of them really was – what motivated them to do what they did.

The title I chose – *The Luck of the Fells* – will be recognisable, I hope, as a theme running through each story. The origin of this phrase is described in the first Chapter. The full import of it, however, will not be revealed until the final Chapter, when there will still be a fair amount of mystery – you will have to work out what you think really happened.

It is not primarily about enjoying good fortune or lucky escapes (though there are a few of those); it's about the attitude that these people had towards the opportunities and the problems they encountered. It is said that you make your own luck, and what one person would regard as lucky might seem unlucky to somebody else.

The opening Chapter refers to my cousin, **John Fell**, with whom I had discussed my draft of this book in England a few years before he died. It is no more than a sketch of his interesting and illustrious life. Then, my next story about his father, **William Fell**, is also brief, because so much has already been written about his many achievements.

The third Chapter concerns my father, **Christopher Fell**, and connects with my 2015 book, *The Twin Pines Story*,[2] about life on the dairy farm where my brother and sister and I grew up. It also makes mention of the sisters of Christopher and William, my New Zealand aunts.

In the fourth Chapter we go a generation further back to my grandfather, **Walter Fell**, who was one of eight children. Three of his siblings – older brothers, **Charles** and **Arthur**, and younger brother, **Nelson**, with a few members of their families, make up Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

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[1] *www.biosong.org*

[2] ISBN 9780994333209

The eighth and final Chapter is my impression of the life of their father, my great grandfather, **Alfred Fell**, who was born in Yorkshire, England, in 1817 and died in London in 1871, but who lived notably in Nelson, New Zealand, from 1842 to 1859.

Why these people? Firstly, because I could find out something about their lives and secondly because I rather liked the way they did things. Funny that! Our forebears tend to be likeable whether they were villains or heroes. It is true that history relies on facts, but it is also a creative form of writing like any other storytelling.

Whatever poetic license I may have taken in this regard, there is one anatomical feature that links me, undeniably, to many of the Fells: I have the rather prominent 'Fell nose' too (as you can see below).

My hope is that these stories of past lives might be an inspiration and a positive message for people living today. Whether you are related to them or not, you might recognise some of your own personal qualities in the attitudes and the doings of these men (and some women) whose surname was Fell.

In the larger scheme of things they were not world heroes, but I think you'll agree they led interesting lives in different ways. I also see some similarities between them that I have suggested are family characteristics.

As I enjoy this last period of my own life (in my 79th year), I reflect with some satisfaction that I am quite lucky to be a Fell.

Acknowledgements

To the family historians whose fact-getting underpins these stories I owe a great debt of gratitude. The most important of these is Alison Mildon from Palmerston North in New Zealand who has accumulated a vast amount of historical information about Fell family members and was generous in sharing so much of it with me. I have also drawn from a parallel genealogy of part of the Fell family that was compiled by a friend, Marie Mason, from Adelaide, South Australia, in 2018.

I also accessed the National Library of New Zealand in Wellington, the Nelson Museum and many books that are referenced individually. Articles by Alison Mildon (and her brother Richard), Hamish Thoms, Jamie Vans and Richard Votapka are also cited as they arise. Others who sent me additional information are acknowledged individually in footnotes.

My eldest son, Chris Fell, and my wife, Penelope Fell, helped with many editorial corrections and other good advice for which I am very grateful. Several other family members have also been kind enough to read part or all of the manuscript to help me eliminate any serious errors. I thank them sincerely for that. They are: William Varley Fell, Alison Mildon, Jamie Vans, Hamish Thoms and Richard Cobbold.

Each of those people has a large amount of additional information about the history of these and other family members. I have listed some of their resources under Further Information at the end. My book is a small part of that larger body of work. Though they helped me to understand, none of these people is responsible for the personal interpretations I have made.

Lloyd Fell Faulconbridge May 2020

Chapter 1

John Richmond Fell (1923 – 2013) [3]

Towards the end of 1941, the year I was born, my cousin John Fell was a midshipman on board *HMS Queen Elizabeth* in the port of Alexandria in Egypt where the British Mediterranean Fleet was under attack from all sides. By any young lad's reckoning it was a dangerous place to be. He was 17 when his group of Dartmouth naval trainees was dispatched from England via the Cape of Good Hope, the Indian Ocean and the Suez Canal, (a bloody long way!) to join some of the fiercest sea battles of the Second World War. Despite considerable successes, the British had lost several ships and many men.

John soon witnessed first-hand the capsize and explosion of their sister ship, *HMS Barham*, with the loss of 863 seamen including two of his naval college friends.[4] It was pure chance that he had not been assigned to *Barham* himself. Of the 17 cadets who left England together, nine were dead by June 1942.

On the day before John's 18th birthday the *Queen Elizabeth* was torpedoed and disabled at her moorings, but he was elsewhere. By then he and another Dartmouth shipmate were in Tobruk serving on naval motor launches that were helping to evacuate Allied troops from the Eighth Army that was besieged by Rommel's forces in Libya. The two boys swam together in the warm Mediterranean sea water, alongside the wrecks of British vessels already sunk by German bombing, on the evening before fate struck again.

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[3] I am indebted to William Varley Fell, the eldest son of John Fell, for most of this information and for the photo of John.

[4] You can see footage of that sinking on *YouTube* today.

They boarded separate launches next morning and the two boats headed across the harbour together. John said he saw the German tank high on the cliff above them a few moments before the launch beside him received a direct hit and was blown out of the water killing all the officers including his closest friend. John's launch, ML 355, escaped on one engine, in thick smoke and under heavy fire, picking up soldiers and sailors from the water as she went. The Commanding Officer of ML 355 was awarded the DSC for the action, but he left the ship soon after and was invalided out of the Navy.

John was no different from the other sailors and soldiers serving on the front line during wartime in that he never knew whether it would be his lot or someone else's to make the supreme sacrifice. Later, on the destroyer, *Heythrop*, which he loved for its speed and maneuverability, he survived a heavy air attack on a convoy off Malta. After submarine training and promotion to Sub-Lieutenant, he was the navigator in HM submarine, *Vox*, when it barely survived sustained depth charging. Such incidents just keep occurring in the midst of a war zone.

What we, his relatives, especially came to value about John was that he went on to raise a large family and live a long and successful life in such a way that any psychological scars from his wartime experience did not diminish the quality of his relationships, in his private life or work, as far as anyone could tell. He lost many friends and companions and freely admitted that he was often terrified. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, he retained an enormous love of life and a boyish enthusiasm well into his 90th year.

John's father, William Richmond Fell (see Chapter 2), had joined the Royal Navy aged 18 early in the First World War and served as a naval officer throughout two World Wars and beyond, so perhaps John knew some of what to expect and had learned life skills that gave him confidence in challenging wartime situations.

He inherited from his father a great love of boats and the sea and an interest in fishing and growing vegetables. Like his father, he was an engaging and often funny raconteur. From his mother, Phyllis, a talented miniaturist who was a regular exhibitor at the Royal Academy, he acquired

a keen interest in art and painting, which he practised well, and also from her, a love of dogs. Both his parents instilled in him an enduring passion for the outdoors. His mother's family had a small estate in Devon where he enjoyed spending time as a boy. He loved Dartmoor in particular and understood its ecology. He was an environmentalist before the term was coined.

John Fell was actually born in Wellington, New Zealand, on the 20th of December, 1923. Though most of his life was lived in England he retained a great love for New Zealand and visited friends and relatives in Australia and New Zealand many times. With Juliet, his wife, he came to our house in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney and we stayed with them in Surrey as well.

He married Juliet Varley in 1946 and they had six children over a period of 17 years. The eldest, William, who served with distinction in the British Foreign Office, has also visited us with his wife, Jill. Next was Josephine, who became Lady Aldenham and participated in the Centennial events in Fellsmere that are described in Chapter 7. Then came Francis (known as Frank and also as the New Zealand poet, 'Cliff Fell'), who lives with his wife, Pammy, on an organic farm, with dairy goats, in the hills near Motueka in New Zealand. Frank teaches poetry and writing at the University in nearby Nelson.[5] My wife and I stayed with them in 2012. The other offspring are Dickon, an artist, art teacher and musician, Alexandra who studied agriculture and worked in the UK Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, and Benjamin, who is a Physics master at Oundle School in Northamptonshire.

John's post-war career as a research engineer took him to the position of Manager of the Space and Guided Weapons Division in a company that was central to Britain's biggest space program. He and his large team designed the guidance systems for the Skylark rockets. On the days before he died, in his 90th year, he was writing a paper for the University of the

[5] When the Mapua inlet near where they live were rejuvenated a few years ago, a wall was built to mark the occasion and Frank's poem, evoking the natural beauty, was chosen to be inscribed on the wall. He told me this re-connects him with his roots in New Zealand.

Third Age on the way this work contributed to the subsequent design of the Hubble Space Telescope.

When you talked to him he made light of any of these achievements. He told me he became an engineer completely by accident, having entered Britannia Royal Naval College at Dartmouth at the age of 13 to follow in his father's footsteps into the navy. By the time he was 15 Britain was at war. After the war he said the most important thing that happened to him was that Juliet ('Wren' Varley) was waving from Fort Blockhouse, where she was a signaller, when his ship sailed back into Portsmouth Harbour.

When I last chatted with him about his life – he was then in his mid-eighties – in the beautiful garden he and Juliet had established at 'Bracken,' their home at Farnham in Surrey, he was as exuberant and adventurous in spirit as anyone I've ever met. Still the environmentalist, he had used his engineering skills to install ground and air heat-pumps and solar panels around the home; he never stopped experimenting. Very fine oil paintings that were his own work adorned almost every wall of their large house. He and Juliet teased one another with a keen sense of humour as we walked for several miles through the nearby woods with the dogs. Juliet remarked that she might have to give up horse-riding at the age of 86 because the horse was becoming lame.

That was when John told me it had been said of his father, William, and later of himself, that they both had 'the luck of the Fells.'

We discussed the phrase and decided that it was not really about lucky escapes, but about a certain attitude to life. Both William and John seemed to have an indefatigable spirit and a resilient frame of mind that meant they were rarely daunted for long by life's challenges – they always wanted to 'get on with the job and see it through.' Not that they escaped negativity or failure altogether; life is lived imperfectly, of course.

I believe that one of the foundations for living confidently and trusting in your luck is a profound acceptance that we can't actually control most things that happen. We like to take the credit when our plans work out as we hoped, but we know that a great many other things had to fall into place, as well, for that to happen. Sometimes they don't, which I why I have dedicated this book to those whose lives were cut short by circumstances beyond anyone's control. The fragile existence of a sailor or a soldier in wartime is a telling example.

But knowing there can be misadventure does not stop us celebrating the spirit of adventure. In fact I think it gives us all the more reason to live life to the full, taking opportunities as they arise, and enjoying our achievements – which is what the people in this book have done.

I must say that sitting in the car driven by either John or Juliet at what seemed like an alarmingly high speed around the narrow streets of Farnham helped me to remember the phrase, *luck of the Fells*, forever after!

John's self-deprecating sense of humour reminded me of other Fells I have known or read about. The people whose tales are told in this book were all adventurous in different ways and I'm sure that they, like John, would prefer any success they had to be understated. I will need to tell you about their successes, but I will try not to exaggerate.

My attempts to characterise the individuals in this book will all be compromised to some extent by over-simplification because I can only tell small portions of a much larger story in each case. Taking John as my starting point, I think I admire most his humility, coupled with a tremendous enthusiasm for life and a lifelong desire to go on learning new things.

Chapter 2

William Richmond Fell (1897 – 1981)

To me as a child, growing up on a dairy farm in Australia, my Uncle William seemed to be the most famous relative I had and, possibly, one of the more famous people in the world. Towards the end of my primary school, I was shown a photo of him standing beside King George VI, who was undoubtedly the most famous person in the world, in the British Empire around 1950.

It was my mother who kept me informed about William's doings, sharing her excitement with me. She told me how William had once rescued the beloved Queen Mother from a dangerous situation. For those who don't remember, the mother of Queen Elizabeth II was the most popular member of the Royal Family for decades; she lived to be 101. At a Palace function the Queen Mother (in a very flammable dress) was being backed into a burning candle by the playwright, Noel Coward, who was known to expound his views at some length. The story is that William reached out behind the royal back to guide Her Majesty away from the danger.

* * * * *

John Fell's father, William, amongst many other things, was a prolific and talented writer, and there are also other books written about his life, so I don't need to say too much.[6] But, after all, he was the one for whom the phrase 'luck of the Fells' was first intended, I understand, so he warrants

[6] William wrote *The Sea Surrenders* (Cassell, 1960) and *The Sea Our Shield* (Cassell, 1966). Books that included parts of his life were *Above Us the Waves* by C.E.T. Warren and James Benson (Harrap, 1953) and *The Sea Devils* by Mark Felton (Icon, 2015). *Above Us the Waves* was also a feature film (1955) and can be accessed on the Internet. Further autobiographical notes that are held by his grandson, William Varley Fell, are also expected to be published.

a special mention for that reason alone. The photo below is from the Imperial War Museum.

He was also a great letter-writer, as many people were in those days, because handwritten letters were by far the most important forms of communication. Relatives and friends would rejoice almost as if they had won the lottery when the postman delivered a long letter, answering questions asked, full of news and wordy expressions of love and affection. It was the nearest that people who lived apart could get to being 'in the moment' together. It isn't always easy to discern the handwriting scribbled this way and that over every available space on a flimsy aerogram, for example.

I have a letter that William wrote, dated June 11th 1940, that my mother used to refer to as *The Narvik Affair.*[7]

The letter began: '*Some day we will talk about this horrible five weeks but now I can only give a brief sketch . . .'*

Off the dramatically beautiful, coastal fiordland of northern Norway, William commanded a fleet of five trawlers to which was added many tiny coastal fishing boats known as 'puffers' – '*the Gubbins flotilla. We ran into snow and midnight sun and entered a deep fiord with vertical cliffs . . . watched the glittering 'sticks' of bombs leave the [German] bombers and heard for the first time the shriek as they fell. So close they passed you could see the shining vanes spinning . . . raids were at about three hours intervals and generally lasted about half an hour . . . At lovely little Bodo we landed safely but the men were still marching off when the first*

[7] You can read on the Internet about the battles between British and German forces off the northern Norway coast in 1940.

raiders came. There was NO opposition and they flew at 100 feet and machine gunned anything that stirred . . .'

' . . . from Bodo to Rognan by sea you have to pass the Saltstraumen. This pass is 50 yards wide . . . the stream runs 16 knots and as the sailing directions say no ship can pass it . . . whirlpools that suck large vessels down. His vessels got through by using the tides.[8]

Evacuating soldiers from the shore, then blowing up the piers, led to one of his worst experiences: '*All the puffers but mine had left . . . At 1.20am the whistle went and we ran for the puffer and shoved off. For two minutes I did not notice that the Ferry [his largest vessel at that time] had failed to start. There she lay alongside with 150 men in her. I was so utterly terrified by now that I could only stop and wait for the crash* . . . A sapper managed, miraculously, to avert the explosion on that pier and after the smoke had cleared they towed the Ferry to safety. '*You need very little sleep up here but 48 hours or more had gone since I'd had any and I was still so scared I shook like a jelly and remained frozen . . .'*

'Now I'm steaming south in my Strathdevon with Eldorado and Dulcie Belle astern of me and my Newhaven and Strathderry a day ahead and it's fine and clear . . . Home – what an England!

Just had a wire to tell me to report on Friday for the next job. Goodbye and don't worry. Yrs. William.

For the Narvik 'job' he was awarded the DSC.[9]

As well as illustrating the extraordinarily high level of danger that these naval personnel lived with during wartime, I think this letter reveals the exuberance for life – William's *joie de vivre* – that I have already alluded to as a Fell characteristic. He had a great sense of humour, a quick wit, and an easy ability to socialize and also to entertain people with his conversation and his storytelling. He is described in *Above Us the Waves* as a man of '*immense charm and understanding*' who '*had the gift of being able to reduce the inevitable gap between officer and rating*.'

[8] You can read about this famous maelstrom on the Internet.

[9] Distinguished Service Cross

Nobody could have enjoyed William's letters more than my Mum. If you've read my earlier book, *The Twin Pines Story*, you will know that my mother had swapped the city lights and a busy social life for an arduous, lonely, existence on a dairy farm that became our family home. She especially liked reading about his social exploits, both in quite high society and with ordinary people anywhere; for him it seemed to make no difference. His writing is packed with interesting little details.

To my mind, William was quite a romantic[10] in that he greatly appreciated the finer things in life and seemed to take such pleasure in so many little details of his life. He was easily moved by great music and beauty in art. Yet being a romantic at heart did not seem to blunt his sharp efficiency – that word was drummed into him, he said, by his father, Walter. And he certainly did not shirk dangerous or difficult work. When it was needed, his natural daring and sense of adventure seemed to come forth as easily as his charm, and his optimism mostly remained undaunted.

It was not only my mother who admired Uncle William. You can see the pride in my father's face as he stood beside his brother (with the pipe) when they met up after the war.

William came to our farm, which was the first time I met him. I guess I was a bit disappointed that he didn't seem to know where to stand and what to do to help us get some unruly dairy heifers into the holding yard for earmarking. He was not used to handling cattle. In fact he had expressed a strong disapproval of this kind of farming activity when he visited his older brother's dairy farm as a youngster. He much preferred stinging sea spray, standing knee deep in cold water with crabs nibbling his toes, than scuffing in dry straw, dirt and cow manure.

[10] The word 'gallant' is perhaps too old-fashioned, but it means courageous and charming at the same time so I think it is rather apt.

William was seven years younger than my father and I don't think they spent much time together as children because my father was mostly away at boarding school. By the time William was 17 he was on a ship bound for England (with his sister, Anna), about to begin a new life.

He was the youngest child of Dr Walter Fell and Margaret (Margie) Richmond (who were also my grandparents, of course) and he was born on the 31st of January, 1897, in Wellington, New Zealand. He married Phyllis Munday in England in 1921 and they had two sons, John William Fell (whom we met in Chapter 1) and Michael Burnard Fell, who was a country doctor in Devon. After retirement, William married Jean Dunkerly in New Zealand in 1964.

At the time he was writing the *Narvik* letter above William had already completed 21 years of service, much of it in submarines, for the Royal Navy, beginning early in the First World War. He must have become very used to the extremely cramped living conditions, sleeping in a tiny tube that passed for a bunk, working at very close quarters with so many different men, deep under the sea with only instruments to guide their way. He said he did it initially for adventure, but the companionship and feeling of unity – being part of a team – was what he came to love most about it. That was surely part of what made him a much-loved and respected leader of men. Standing only 5ft 7in tall (1.70 m), he was nicknamed 'Tiny' in the navy. In *The Sea Devils* it says that ' . . . *for those who knew him or served under him, 'Tiny' Fell was a giant of a man*.'

William's most renowned work was with the highly successful midget submarines that became a new Flotilla in their own right during the first half of the Second World War. He was unexpectedly roped in to the early development of 'human torpedoes,' astride which two divers could sneak in underneath an enemy warship and attach limpet mines onto its hull and get out again before triggering the explosives. This led to the midget submarines called X-craft, which had a crew of four. Their most successful operation was to put the biggest of all German warships, *Tirpitz*, out of action for many months in 1943. It was dangerous work and lives were lost, but as the newer XE-craft were developed, this most clandestine and close-knit of all submariner teams became remarkable for

its camaraderie. '*Distinctions of rank, education and social class, so important to the surface navy, were largely irrelevant*' wrote Mark Felton in *The Sea Devils*.

Early in 1945 Captain Fell took command of the HMS *Bonaventure* and the 14th Submarine Flotilla, just as it was despatched to the Far East, where the focus of the war had turned more towards Japan. He was 48 years old and described as '*slightly built, with a striking nose and a strong chin*.' With 92 officers and 540 men they passed through the Panama Canal and Pearl Harbour to eventually spend some time in Brisbane and Sydney, though their operations were in various south-east Asian ports, notably Hong Kong and Singapore where they inflicted significant damage to Japanese ships and undersea communication cables.

At first they were not welcomed by the U.S. Fleet Commanders because the War in the Pacific was 'owned' by the Americans who did not understand what the XE craft could achieve. It took all of William's charm and negotiating skills and considerable stubbornness and ingenuity before they became really effective. In the end an American Admiral said how much they admired the '*sheer guts of Captain Fell and his personnel*.'

This makes me think about all the different kinds of skills that are needed to be a leader of men. In *The Sea Devils* there is a description of the steel that was part of William's manner when he orders submariners whose crewmates had just lost their lives back into the water to try again. Of course, wartime is not the same as normal life and, as I write this and you read it, we can't really even imagine what it must be like to be on active military service. What strikes me is how William's character included such a romantic and beauty-loving style of being, alongside a daring and steely efficiency when that was required.

I know my mother visited William on *Bonaventure* in 1945-46 and spent some time on board, to her great delight. I was four or five at the time; it was some years later that William came to visit us at *Twin Pines*. He remained with that ship until 1947 when he took her home to England. The first stage of his retirement began soon after that; he worked for the British Admiralty for many years before returning to New Zealand in 1959.

For the record, here is an official account of my Uncle's naval service:[11]

William Richmond Fell entered the Royal Navy, 1915, and served as a Midshipman in HMS Warsprite, 1916-17, including the Battle of Jutland. He was promoted Sub-Lieutenant and appointed to the P.11, a unit of the Dover Patrol engaged in escorting Channel convoys by day and patrolling the Dover mine barrage by night, 1917-18. He joined the submarine training establishment HMS Dolphin at Portsmouth, 1918. He served in submarines, 1918-39, in the Mediterranean and on the China Station, qualifying for command in 1925. He returned to HMS Dolphin as a training officer, 1931.

On the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, he was in command of reserve submarines at Portland. He volunteered to serve with Q-Ships, or submarine decoy ships, 1940. During the Norwegian campaign, he commanded a group of five trawlers known as the Gubbins Flotilla, which was despatched to support soldiers landed in Norway under the leadership of Colonel Gubbins, April 1940. He was given command of the former Belgian cross-Channel steamer, Prince Charles, which was converted to an infantry assault ship, and led a small flotilla of similar vessels in the Vaagso raid, December 1941. He returned to submarines and set up a training base in western Scotland to work on the development of human torpedoes or 'chariots', 1942-3. He was also involved in the development of the midget submarines or X-craft, 1943, which were used in a successful attack on the Tirpitz in Altafjord, Norway, September 1943.

He was promoted Captain and commanded HMS Bonaventure in midget submarine operations in home and Pacific waters, 1945-7. After the war he joined the Boom Defence and Salvage Department at the Admiralty and organised salvage operations to clear wrecks from the coasts of the British Isles and the Mediterranean, 1948. He retired from the Navy in 1948. He was retained as a civilian by the Admiralty and continued to supervise salvage operations, 1948-60, most notably at Port Said after the Suez Crisis, 1956-7. He was awarded the DSC in 1941, CBE in 1947 and created CMG in 1957.

On the internet I found this story posted by a man called Ric Ellam who had been a radio operator on *Bonaventure*:

'Captain W R Fell CBE DSC, our skipper, was a New Zealander and a very knowledgeable submariner. What he didn't know about a submarine and X-craft was not worth knowing. All the crew admired his efficiency. When he said 'jump' we all needed to know 'How high?'

I had had an embarrassing encounter with an Admiral, accidentally blocking his way on the gangplank of another ship, and I knew I would be getting into trouble when I got back to my own ship, Bonaventure. You should have heard the crew sniggering and

[11] Extracted from The Churchill Archives Centre, London.

betting how many days stoppage of pay and privileges I was due for once I got back on board Bonaventure.

Well, Captain Fell's cabin was next door to the Radio room so I didn't have far to go when he called me to his office. 'I've received a signal from HMS Bermuda informing me that you have been waylaying Admirals on gangways Ellam!' 'Only one Admiral and one gangway Sir' was my timid retort. 'The signal states that disciplinary action must be taken'. 'Yes Sir'. He then handed me a signal sheet with 'Disciplinary action has been taken' written on it. 'Here you are Ellam. Send it to the Bermuda personally — and that's your punishment. I'm glad somebody now knows that HMS Bonaventure is in Hong Kong.'

William had left his birthplace, Wellington, New Zealand, when he was 17 and returned to live there in retirement in 1959 at the age of 62, but there was never the slightest doubt about his being a New Zealander through and through. I visited him and his wife, Jean, in Richmond Road, Eastbourne, that overlooks Mahina Bay, towards the end of his life. They still owned a yacht and a block of land on a cove in the Marlborough Sounds that was only accessible by boat, where they grew vegetables and enjoyed the summer months. I never got to ask him about 'the luck of the Fells,' but he seemed happy to speak about how fortunate he had been and how grateful he was for his life. It came to an end, after 84 years, on November 28th 1981.

Chapter 3

Christopher W. R. Fell (1889 – 1957)

William Fell's older brother – Christopher Walter Richmond Fell – was my father, the person I might be expected to know most about. Perhaps. It's a painful irony that the people who are closest to you are also the most difficult to define. They are too complex – too precious – so you feel you have to be careful they don't break in your hands. In any case, this is the longest Chapter in the book.

If you've read *The Twin Pines Story* – my book about the Fell family farm at Bellingen on the North Coast of NSW from 1936-1966 – you will know about Chris's life in Australia from age 46 to his death at 67, in 1957. That was three months before my 16th birthday. Neither of us was a chatty person by nature, so I felt there were so many things we had never discussed.

Here I have sketched out what I could learn about the years before he sailed into Sydney Harbour on his beloved yacht, *Ariel*, then surprised himself by selling her to pay for a new bit of land to begin dairy farming once again. He had left a successful farm in New Zealand (and, to his great sadness, a wife and son) and now wanted to repeat the pioneering agricultural efforts he had honed over there. In a much less favourable climate, that was never going to be easy.

But he carried with him the unflinching optimism and sense of adventure that I've been talking about in this book and perhaps even an extra layer of fortitude, because his body was quite severely crippled with rheumatoid arthritis. He walked with a pronounced limp, often seeming to drag his leg with his arm, and for all the days that I knew him, he was in and out of pain, sometimes severe pain. When he remarried a Sydney girl 17 years

younger than himself, who became my mother, she was an enormous additional source of strength for him.

With his Oxford accent and reserved New Zealand manner, Chis was an oddity amongst the local Aussies. When I researched this for the earlier book, I was struck by the fact that he seemed to be well accepted in quite a short time and respected by many locals from the start. He did bring some new skills to the district from his lifelong learning about horses (in wartime and in New Zealand) and also with ropes, from his ocean sailing. But I think it was his ability to relate to all human beings equally (even though he sounded 'posh') that was mainly responsible for his being welcomed and even regarded as an 'elder statesman' in the community. He and his brother, William, led very different lives, but I think they had a lot in common.

Risk-taking seems to be one family characteristic. For Chris, there is no obvious 'moment of survival' such as for John Fell in the Mediterranean or William Fell in the Norwegian fiords, or rather there are too many, because, in my young life on the farm, Dad seemed to have more narrow escapes than anyone I knew. These are in the earlier book, so I won't dwell on them here, but I know they affected me as I reflected later in life about the need to take risks to achieve difficult tasks and the fine art of knowing how far you can go.

He drove a log truck and a tractor on very steep hills with seeming disregard for his own safety. Even the seasoned timber workers called him reckless and a '*bit of a daredevil*' (and other things as well, I'm sure). I described the cries of panic from my mother (and I) as we watched the crawler tractor Chris was driving stand on its end as if to topple backwards, hang there for a few 'long' moments, and then flop forward safely on to the ground. The neighbours told him not to swim in the river because of sharks (being coastal, it was salt water), but he made a habit of swimming backstroke, across the river and back, every morning in his

early years on the farm. He had been a strong swimmer as a boy, but the arthritis limited his movements by then.

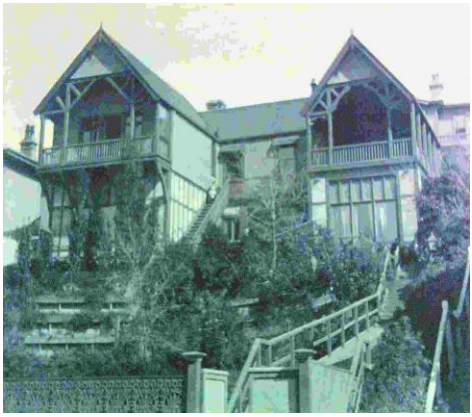
During the time I knew him (less than 16 years) he often seemed aloof and, sometimes, a bit gloomy, but it was nothing like what people call 'depression' nowadays. I don't think he was angry or bitter and he was certainly not one to complain. He loved music and played the violin well enough to be accepted for tuition at the Conservatorium for a short time (which was how he met my mother). He had always read eagerly, all kinds of classical and contemporary literature, was expert at sea navigation and enjoyed solving chess problems in newspapers and playing correspondence chess with people from all over the world. Above all he loved farming – that was his passion; working with animals (horses, cattle and dogs), the sowing and nourishing of pasture and crops and the fastidious care of the soil. The grim times for him, especially the sadness and loss in his heart when he first came to Australia, were always tempered, I believe, by his broader philosophy and a determination that you should try to make the most of your life in every way you can.

The difficulties and joys we experienced as a family on the farm are still regarded by my brother (Bill), my sister (Margie), and I, as the best possible upbringing we could have had. Each of us believes that it helped us in later life to have grown up around the farming philosophy of our father, living and working on a farm.

* * * * *

Chris was the third-born of five children in the family of Dr Walter Fell and Margaret (*nee* Richmond), known as Margie. Walter will be the subject of the next Chapter; Margie must be described here because she was such a remarkable person herself. Her family name was to be included in all their children's names and in fact is still included in my own name and that of my eldest son, who is Christopher James Richmond Fell.

Chris's arrival, at the family home in Wellington, New Zealand (Willis Street on a steep hill), on Saturday the 30th of November, 1889, must have been quite an occasion for the Fells. Well established by now after five years back in Wellington setting up his medical practice, the proud Dad, Walter, was then 34 years of age and busy Mum, Margie, was 32. Chris was their first son.



Living not far away in Wellington were his 60 year old grandmother, Emily Elizabeth Richmond (*nee* Atkinson) and grandfather, Judge Christopher William Richmond who was 68.[12] Also nearby was Mary Elizabeth Richmond, Dad's much revered Aunt Mary, who was 36 then and lived to be 96. Others who were local and could have gathered around were Walter's business partner, Dr William Collins and his family, Alice Richmond, Mabel Fell, Lil Fell and young Eva Fell (the daughter of Chris's uncle Geordie) who had been a bridesmaid at Walter and Margie's wedding in 1886.

Chris had two older sisters, Erica, who was two and a half when he was born, and Margaret (to be known as Margar), who was 14 months. The photo shows Walter and Margie on the front steps of their house with the children, Erica and Margar.

[12] The distinguished lives of the Richmond and Atkinson families are described in *The Richmond-Atkinson Papers* (NZ Government) and in *Born to New Zealand – A Biography of Jane Maria Atkinson* by Frances Porter (Allen & Unwin1989).

As the first son, it was Chris who would carry on the Fell name – a responsibility that I think weighed rather heavily during his early years.

Two more children came along after that: Anna in 1892 and William in 1897, by which time Chris was seven and a half. It must have been a very lively household, but Margie had a small number of live-in, full-time domestic staff, as was customary for people in her position. By the time Chris was 11 and at boarding school they had all moved to the new house Walter had built at Mahina Bay across the other side of Wellington harbour.

You can get some idea of the expectations for Chris's education from the fact that everyone in the generation before him had been educated in England and Europe. In fact that was the reason his grandfather, Alfred Fell, had returned to England from New Zealand when he did – to educate his children properly. Walter, after his own experience of Rugby school and Oxford University, had a very poor opinion of the education system in New Zealand, as he explained in long letters to the *Dominion* newspaper. Earlier, Walter's father, older brother Charlie and nephew Charles had played a significant part in establishing Nelson College (which has a Fell House), which I understand is still highly regarded today.

Margie Richmond had an extraordinarily busy social and community life as well as teaching at Wellington College for Girls. Being highly trained in music and theatre she often sang and acted in amateur productions, including Shakespeare, and played the piano (from a large classical repertoire) at home on many evenings. She composed the music for a play by Mary Richmond that was performed at the Opera House in Wellington. As a girl she had studied in France, Germany and Italy (and spoke those languages well) and then had been amongst the first to take advantage of the newly created Newnham Hall at Cambridge University, which was specifically for young ladies. In later life she was significantly involved in the affairs of Wellington's Victoria University and College for Girls and, with her sister, Mary Richmond, in pioneering the world-famous kindergarten schools in New Zealand.

Walter, if you can believe it, was even more of a dynamo. His early life and thoroughly English education is described in the next Chapter. Fairly

small in stature, wiry and very tough, with boundless energy, he had a zeal for life and service that sometimes overwhelmed the rest of his family. He built an enviable reputation as a doctor (both physician and surgeon), businessman and, later in life, watercolour artist and keen yachtsman. The silver bowl called the Mahina Cup that celebrates his successive race victories in his yacht of that name was passed on to me by my father and in turn to my eldest son, Chris.

The picture above shows Margie Fell and her five children at their home in Wellington in April, 1898. From the left, baby William was one, Anna was six, Margar was nine, Christopher was eight and Erica was 12. The source is a very interesting book called *Constance Astley's Visit to New Zealand (1897-1898)*[13] that is an edited version of a diary kept by a 46-year-old spinster 'Gentlewoman,' a friend of Chris's Aunt Mary, who was visiting from Scotland. I will refer to it from time to time. She said that Margie and Erica (on her birthday) danced jigs, reels and hornpipes '*with grace and perfect harmony of gesture and expression that was simply ravishing*.' Also that Anna had asthma and that William was the largest baby she had ever seen. She wrote: '*it is quite funny to see him in Dr Fell's arms, he being a small, spare man and William the most gigantic child of his age*.'

[13] Edited by Jill De Fresnes (Victoria University Press 1997).

Being the first son in a family carried a greater burden of expectation and responsibility in those days. Just think about what it might feel like to have such accomplished and successful parents. It's a hard act to follow. Chris's only brother, William, was seven and a half years younger and, as we have seen, he spent his working life living in England. They corresponded from time to time, but spent very little time in one another's company during the whole of their lives. Most dear to Chris was his older sister, Margar, who always kept in touch with him (and with my mother) and his younger sister, Anna, who also became a farmer and was very much a kindred spirit.

His eldest sister, Erica, married into the Wilson family and lived mainly at Tauranga, New Zealand, where her two sons were expert boat-builders and ocean-racing yachtsmen, amongst other things. I sailed with them on their latest catamaran in 1961 and it was a tremendous thrill.

Erica was in the crew of four when their yacht *Leda* won line honours in the second Trans-Tasman yacht race in 1953. There are many stories about that race and their arrival including the fact that the elitist Sydney yacht club that welcomed them had to suspend its membership rules because there were two women on board![14] During the voyage, the Catalina flying boat on its Trans-Tasman passenger service flew over them (by arrangement) and dropped a parcel (including newspapers and a corkscrew) into the ocean, which they retrieved.

Margar married Dr Gilbert Bogle, who was a Surgeon-Captain in the 6th New Zealand Reinforcements in Wellington in 1915. By that time Chris was already in camp with the Reinforcements in Auckland and was unable to attend the wedding. Gib Bogle was killed in action in 1916 leaving Margar a widow with a baby daughter. In *The Twin Pines Story* there are extracts from Chris's letters to her that show the deep affection they had for each other. Her daughter, known as Bindy,[15] married Philip Hector, a grandson of Sir James Hector, and their sons still live at Mahina Bay, one of them in the Mahina house that Walter had built. Bindy remained in

[14] See *The Leda Enchantment* by Brian Reid (Classic Yacht Association of Australia).

[15] See *The Bindy Bogle Ballads* by Mary Elizabeth Richmond (Athenaeum Press, 1924).

close touch by correspondence with my mother throughout my young life; in fact I lived with them at Mahina Bay for several weeks when I was five and went to Muritai school with the boys. Margar was tall and elegant and I felt very proud that she was my Godmother.

Younger sister, Anna, went to Nelson College and Victoria University. She travelled with William to England early in 1914 when she would have been 22. For several years she was with the Land Army in Dorset working on farms and eventually managing a dairy farm. In 1920 (after returning to New Zealand) she wrote a fact-filled article for the Nelson Girls Collegian about what incredibly hard physical labour that was. Most people didn't stick at it for long. Some years later, in the same Journal, she wrote a description of life on her own dairy farm in Okaihu, New Zealand, near the Bay of Islands. The physical work load she endured, day in day out, was way beyond the normal, including ploughing with draught horses in very rocky terrain, building fences, milking, and feeding animals from dawn to dusk.

She called herself Mrs Britton and they had two adopted sons, but I don't think they were ever married. Her partner had tuberculosis and was rather frail. Her farm worker mentality seems slightly ill-fitting in the context of the family, although the determined spirit is certainly not. She came to visit us at *Twin Pines* and I remember her almost ruthless energy. She drove very fast and, later in life, she had a bad car crash on the way home from the hospital after a hip replacement. She and Chris were kindred spirits alright and I think that, even though she was two years younger, Anna was something of a role model for him.

Chris attended schools in Wellington at first and I've read (from letters sourced in the NZ National Library) his mother's instructions regarding his homework (especially violin practice) and sleeping with the window open because she was concerned about his health. I think he was very pleased to get away to boarding school at quite an early age. I believe this was in Christchurch and that it led to some significant boyhood experiences with farms and horses. He told us about working behind a draught horse team that took from sunrise to sunset to get right around the perimeter of a huge wheat paddock. At some point before he was 20

an unbroken colt had rolled on him, damaging the hip that was mainly responsible for his arthritic limp in later life.

I don't think Chris was ever seriously alienated from his father because they did a lot of sailing together over many years. It is recorded in the *Constance Astley Diary* that he and Erica were ecstatic after an afternoon of sailing with their Dad. But he never really spoke to us about his father and he did confide to my mother about the difficulties in his young life. The main problem was he had no ambition to be a doctor or a lawyer – from an early age he simply wanted to be a farmer. He went on from school to attend Lincoln College, an Agricultural College (now University) near Christchurch.

There was also the matter of his front top teeth that his father had operated on early in Chris's adolescence to correct the fact that they stuck out too much. Efficiency was the watchword for everything Walter Fell did (as William alluded to earlier) and this sometimes meant putting up with some hardship. My mother told me that Chris remembered this period with a certain amount of anger and displeasure for the rest of his life. You could also say, I suppose, that it toughened him up.

One thing Chris loved about school and college was rugby (now called Rugby Union). He was the rake (now called hooker) and, though quite small, he had all his father's toughness and strength and I can imagine this position suiting him. He also rode pushbikes all over the South Island, which is mountainous, of course, and he must have been very fit. I understand that in school holidays, younger brother William thought that Chris and his friends were altogether '*too big and rough*' to be good company. In fact Chris was five feet eight and a half inches tall as an adult compared to William at five feet seven.

When Chris left College (without completing his diploma) his friends gave him a nicely bound copy of *The Poetical Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson* with a message in it to 'Doc,' which was his nickname, on account of the infamous rhyme about a Dr Fell. He left the College early because his mother, Margie, had convinced her husband to buy a large tract of land up near the Bay of Islands that was now being developed for farming. Chris became the first Manager of the Tikiponga Pastoral Company.

There had been very little farming in this part of New Zealand at that time (around 1910) and Northland was largely undeveloped and quite remote. There was no road or rail access north of Auckland, so you got there by steamship to the Bay of Islands and then horse and cart. It was very hilly and the soil was generally not as fertile as it was further south. The flatter land was mostly covered with rocks that made cultivation of the soil difficult (as Anna was to find later at her farm). There was a lot of forest on the steeper parts so clearing of trees and fencing were priorities. Chris supplied good hardwood timber (Puriri) that was used for building the dairy factory. It would take a lot of work to get a farm established. They ran some sheep and a few cattle from the start and Walter had built a modest house on the top of a hill.

Margie brought the elder girls up to visit Chris on the farm. A letter from her to Walter, who had just sent stern instructions by telegram about their return, reveals the differences between her attitude and her husband's. After a short time Erica and Margar wanted to return to Wellington, but Margie was concerned for Chris and says in the letter that he needs help. Money needs to be transferred, though she says he is managing well because of his '*decisive and determined*' business skills. She likes the neighbours, the May family, whose descendants are still there today; my brother and I met them a few years ago. She also approves of the Raikes family, whose daughter Chris was to marry years later. She thinks that women are attracted to Chris because he is both '*kind and dictatorial*.' Like her husband perhaps? She signed the letter '*Your ever loving, rather annoyed, Margaret R. Fell*.'

Although the work was physically demanding, I imagine Chris would have reveled in it, though he said he made many mistakes; there was a lot to learn at that stage of his life. His enthusiasm for dairy farming, to make the whole district more productive, was well-known to other landholders.

Then came the overwhelming demands of World War I.

* * * * *

Whereas both William and John Fell joined the navy as a career, I'm sure all that Chris wanted to do was to continue farming when he volunteered

and became Serial No 13/2183 in the NZ Expeditionary Force.[16] The New Zealand contribution to World War I had not been going well – most recently, so many lives lost at Gallipoli in late April in the valiant defeat that forged the ANZAC spirit – that reinforcements were desperately needed. Chris was part of the 6th NZ Reinforcements (like Gib Bogle), but being from Northland and a horseman, he had joined the Auckland Mounted Rifle Regiment. It was a Saturday, the 12th of June, 1915. He was single, 25 years old, five feet eight and a half, with fair complexion, blue eyes and light-brown hair, weighing 150 pounds. That's 10 stone 10 pounds or just over 68 kilograms and 1.74 metres tall.

Just think about what it would have been like. To leave your comfortable surroundings in a country not directly threatened and travel across the world to a theatre of war where you knew hundreds of your countrymen had recently been killed (including several of Chris's close friends and relatives) seems almost bizarre to those of us who have not lived through a World War. But this is what most able-bodied men did at that time. The reinforcement troops from New Zealand were all volunteers. The general feeling was that the future of the world as they knew it depended on Britain and its allies winning this Great War so they set out with glad hearts, apparently, to do just that.

I can only relate a few snippets of his war experience, drawn from the impersonal official records in the NZ Archives and also from the Internet.[17] The first thing to note is that your term of service was tersely listed as '*until the end of the war*.' For Chris that was to be four years and 99 days – a significant chunk of a young person's life. Like everyone else, he received the British War Medal, the Illuminated Certificate of Service and the Victory Medal; he was not decorated. On his Conduct Sheets (which I presume are records of misconduct) there are no entries.

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[16] We were told that 13 was his 'lucky number,' but it was not his personal serial number; it designated the Auckland Mounted Rifle Regiment.

[17] The best source for details of actual events is *The Mounted Riflemen in Sinai and Palestine* by Briscoe Moore, first published in 1919 and re-published as an E-book by the NZ Mounted Rifles Association in 2007.

After two months of training, vaccinations and farewells to friends and family, Chris sailed from Wellington on the 14th of August, 1915, bound for the Egyptian war zone. His brother, William, was in England, of course, as were his parents who had gone to live in Devon because Walter knew that, through influential friends, he could play a more active part in the war at his age (60), than he would be allowed to do in New Zealand. Everyone else was at the wharf to wave the troops goodbye. Chris was apparently on the wrong side of his ship to see most of them, but he did see Erica. I hope I haven't given the impression that Chris was in any way alienated from his family by choosing to go farming. It's clear in a letter he wrote from Egypt that he was receiving mail from every Atkinson, Richmond and Fell in the first few months after his departure.

The two ships that sailed on that date were the *Willochra* and the *Tofua* and they carried 2363 men. *Willochra* was the same ship on which William and Anna had sailed to England 18 months earlier, though she would have been refitted. The sea transport of men, horses, weapons, ammunition and feedstuffs (for both men and horses), must have been a mighty task of logistics. I don't know the number of horses they carried, but a comparison with earlier ships suggests there would have been several hundred on each ship. If they followed the same route as the earlier ships they went from Wellington via Hobart, Albany, Columbo and Aden. They arrived in Egypt on the 19th of September, a voyage of 36 days.

Zeitoun, near Cairo, was where the New Zealand troops (mostly Light Horse) were stationed and prepared for desert warfare. All other non-mounted New Zealand soldiers went to Europe to serve on the Western Front. The Reinforcements joined up with the survivors from Gallipoli, who were thrilled to be reunited with their horses. You must have a horse in the desert; it's the only way to cover any distance with reasonable speed. There was a new energy and enthusiasm as the 'veterans' and the 'new chums' got together in Zeitoun, determined that, this time, they would defeat the Turks (the Ottoman Empire and their German allies) in the Sinai Desert.

That they eventually did so was at least partly due to their superior horses and superior horsemanship. Every soldier was assessed for horse-riding

skills and allocated to Units accordingly. As Briscoe Moore says, you come to regard your horse as a part of your own body, especially when you are both in serious danger. Dad rarely talked to us about his war experience, but we did hear a story when we were young that his horse had actually been killed by an exploding shell, yet he had survived unscathed. I don't know if that was true or not, but it is surely possible.

Their active service began with the defence of the Suez Canal against Turkish attack in early 1916 and ended with the final Turkish surrender in the Jordan Valley in late 1918. The battles in between were some of the fiercest of any fighting, anywhere, in this War.

At first Chris would very likely have been holding the line 10 miles out from the Suez Canal or out on patrols to subdue the enemy who very badly wanted to control this vital waterway. Then they moved further out to Kantara and northward to Gaza with patrols and '*stunts*' of one to four days duration. They were still fairly new to it and the heat and flies were said by some to be almost unbearable. A lot of the movement was done at night. You were only allowed one small sip at a time from your water bottle (something Dad also taught us from an early age when we were working on the farm on hot days).

Between '*stunts*' there was a lot of work to be done. Care of the horses was a big part of it, of course, along with maintenance of saddles and harness, guns and ammunition belts. As well as horses there were mules that were more suitable as packhorses for carrying ammunition and supplies. Getting enough water for the animals was difficult. The longest that any horses went without a drink during all this was 84 hours – an incredible feat.

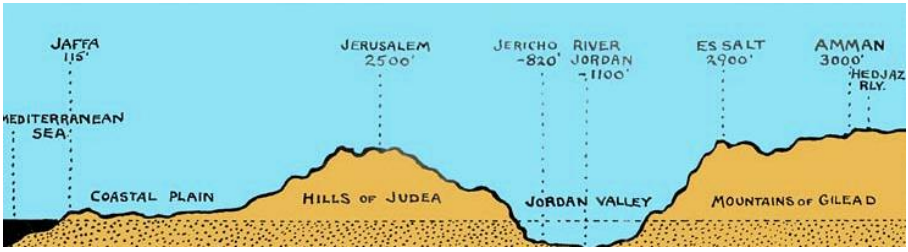
There were dozens of significant battles that I will not mention here. I believe Chris's Unit was at El Arish by the Mediterranean Sea around Christmas, 2016. He is then listed as Lance-Corporal, but later he had '*reverted to ranks at his own request*' and was transferred to the Machine Gun Squadron. Early in 1917, the machine gunners (who were described as the '*cream of the force*') lost 17 men (with 92 injured) at Rafa and were repulsed for the time being at Gaza. Chris was '*on detachment to Rest Camp, Maraket*,'

after that, but '*rejoined from Rest Camp*' just before the most decisive battle of the desert war, the attack on Beersheba in October, 1917.

The day before the main attack, the Auckland Mounted Regiment had to disable the El Saba redoubt, located in a dominant position on a hill east of the town. They completed this day-long assignment with a fixed bayonet charge. My guess is that may not have included the machine gunners who were said to have been the most potent force early in the assault. Taking out that fortress was absolutely crucial for the success of the legendary charge by the Australian and New Zealand Light Horse that is etched in ANZAC military history as perhaps the greatest victory ever.

Shortly after that, an attack by a whole Turkish Division inflicted heavy casualties on the Auckland Mounted Regiment at Ayun Kara. There were 44 NZ soldiers killed and many injured; 41 horses killed too. Their eventual victory on that day was another decisive moment in the war. They spent Christmas, 1917, in that area with a significant rest period.

In March, 1918, the Regiment forged the first crossing of the Jordan River, although Chris was not with them, being '*on detachment to School of Instruction*' – I don't know why. After he returned they spent time in the hills around Bethlehem and also Jerusalem, which are described as a pleasant countryside to ride through.



But the Jordan Valley in summer was hell – heat, scorpions, snakes, flies and the most deadly of all – malarial mosquitos. Many of the soldiers in this Regiment were to die from malaria; more than half their force went down in July, including Chris. In a weakened and feverish state, he and others had to be transported by hospital trains all the way back to Heliopolis on the outskirts of Cairo. Here, he said, they were divided into

two groups, that were to receive different treatments. The reason he told us this is because, in the other group, nobody survived!

A few weeks later, in August, 1918, Chris was certainly up and about, because he was injured – hit by an ambulance while crossing a street in Cairo. This was ruled to have happened while he was '*on duty*' and therefore he was '*not to blame.*' His injuries were considered in the official report to be not severe ('*bruised right knee and badly bruised right elbow*'). The story we heard was that he was running across the street to catch a tram when this happened.

After four years, the war was almost over for him, and as far as we know, this was the only injury he had sustained! Of a physical nature, anyway.

In December, 1918, he was detached to an Agricultural College for a while; by February, 1919, he was in England to take furlough (leave). He extended that leave until July for some unspecified '*education*' (with reduced pay) – probably something to do with farming, I should think.


No. 63589

NEW ZEALAND EXPEDITIONARY FORCE.

CERTIFICATE OF DISCHARGE.

No. 13/2188 Rank: Trooper Unit: N.Z. Machine Gun Squad

Name: Christopher Walter Richmond Fell

is discharged on the termination of his period of engagement.

Service abroad: 4 years 7 days.

DESCRIPTION OF SOLDIER ON ENLISTMENT.

Age: 26 4/12 years Height: 6 feet 8½ inches

Complexion: Fair Eyes: Blue

Hair: Light brown Trade or occupation: Farm manager

Signature: Lieut.

For Major-General, Commanding New Zealand Military Forces.

Wellington, 17th September 1919

He arrived back in Auckland on the 20th of August and was officially discharged on Wednesday, the 17th of September, 1919. The certificate has a couple of errors regarding his service period and exact age at that time, but it signifies that he can now return to his fledgling dairy farm in the beautiful Bay of Islands. Many of his friends did not return and are buried in various cemeteries across the Sinai Peninsula.

*   *   *   *   *

What a readjustment to make! Just think about your first day back on the farm after years of living in harsh and dangerous conditions, one day at a time, not knowing if you were going to survive.

Chris was not one to sit around if there was work to be done; and that is always the case on a farm. During the next 18 years, Chris developed this

dairy farm into the largest milk supplier and the leading butterfat producer in the Bay of Islands Cooperative Dairy Company.

But there were even more important arrangements to be made from the moment he returned. Joyce Raikes, the young lady that Chris's Mum had noticed on her visits to the farm, had waited, as many women did, for her man to return from the war. She and Chris were married in the lovely little church at Pakaraka on Wednesday, February the 11th, 1920, just a few months after he was discharged.

As well as readjusting to life on the farm, they were both now readjusting to married life. This may have been even more difficult for Joyce than for Chris, because his way of dealing with things was to get stuck into as much work as he thought needed to be done – even more so when you have to make up for the years that had been lost. That might not leave a lot of time for leisurely communion with others or for building the deepest possible relationship.

I believe they lived at first in the top section of a barn Chris had built on flat land at the lower end of the block (720 acres) that had been divided off for his dairy farm. On Hupara Road, it became known as *Hupara*. Then a nice house was built and dragged by a bullock team up onto the hill where there was a fast-running stream near the milking bails. I believe they milked 175 cows (twice each day) by hand for many years (with a lot of hired help, of course). Eventually, Chris had a Pelton wheel, which is a highly efficient water turbine, in this stream to generate enough electricity to run one of the newly-developed milking machines.

Farm work was not Chris's only great love; his one recreation was sailing (following very much in his father's footsteps). He and Joyce built a second house near Paihia, on the Bay itself, close to the water. After their son, Walter[18] was born on December the 23rd in 1925, they must have lived there quite a bit because Walter started school at Paihia. I did not know my half-brother well, though he came to visit us at *Twin Pines* twice when I was very young and seemed to be reconciled with our Dad. I had

[18] Walter Raikes Fell (1925 – 2015).

great respect for him and for his family, who are dedicated Mormons. They were very kind to my brother and sister and I when we attended his funeral in 2015. My closest contact has been with his eldest son, Mark Fell, who lives in Brisbane.

Walter told me that the first yacht Chris had was a 14-footer that he called *Mahina* (after his father's boat) and they always finished last in races on the Bay. Later, when he bought and refitted *Ariel* (a 36-foot cutter that he lengthened and converted to yawl rig), they could beat everybody. Walter remembers sailing with his Mum and Dad – waking up on board while they were picnicking in one of the beautiful sheltered coves that make the Bay of Islands a paradise for sailors. He also remembers how happy they all were when his Wellington grandfather, Walter, came to visit on the steamer from Auckland.

The house at Paihia was only four rooms, with a hallway down the middle, and it was situated right on Hobson's Bay where Governor Hobson had landed to sign the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. The Treaty House there is enshrined in New Zealand history because of this famous agreement between the Maori people and the Europeans. As the grounds were developed to become a cultural heritage and a major tourist attraction, the government resumed Chris's house and land and he received a letter from Lord Bledisloe, the Governor-General, thanking him for his cooperation. In 1976, my mother sent that letter to Chris's son, Walter, for his keeping.

Chris kept his yacht, *Ariel*, moored at Matauwhi Cove, near Russell, on the other side of the Bay, where it was sheltered from the Easterly gales. He often worked on the yacht and when he rowed home late at night (several miles across water that was often very choppy), Joyce would put an Aladdin lamp in the window of the little house at Hobson Bay so he could see where to come in to the shore.

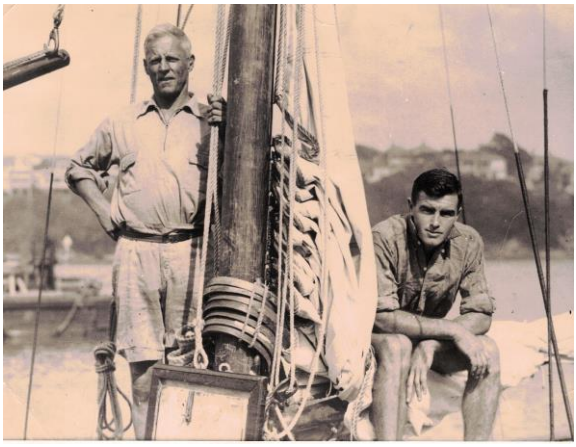
But the marriage did not last. In time Joyce and Walter left *Hupara* and moved to live on another farm near Ohaewai with a man called Wattie Barclay. I met him when I visited there in 1961 and, though he was old, I was struck by his very handsome, part-Maori, facial features and his

dignified manner. He had been an outstanding fly half in Rugby Union and was Captain of the Maori All Blacks in 1926-27.[19]

Chris spent a few months preparing *Ariel* for serious ocean sailing, finding a crewman to sail with him, and finalizing as much as he could at the farm. Then he set sail, with Sydney to be his first port of call.

* * * * *

Chris sailed into Sydney with Dick Wellington, in the late afternoon of Tuesday the 19th of May, 1936. He was 46 years of age. An article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on the 21st of May noted the boat's arrival and suggested they would '*probably remain in Sydney for a month before continuing their trip*.' There was also a photo in *The Land* newspaper where Chris was described as a '*dairyman'* from the Bay of Islands.



Those newspaper reports tell of the interest, in those days, in every new sailboat or ship that arrived in the harbour. The noteworthy thing about this arrival was the speed record they set for the passage from Lord Howe Island; it was even quicker than the regular steamship for that journey. In fact, their total sailing time from New Zealand was 18 days compared to 20 days for the winner of the Trans-Tasman yacht race four years earlier in 1932.

Ariel was a very fast, blue-water yacht. Of course, the wind speed and direction are major factors in ocean yacht racing, but I think what is important about this voyage is that there was no race; Chris just wanted

[19] Eventually Walter married Wattie Barclay's daughter, Elizabeth (known as Beth) and they had six children. I stayed with the family on their farm over Christmas in 1961 when I was 20.

to exercise his sailing skills and knowledge in a manner that was as close to perfection as possible. That was his attitude in everything he did. I remember once he built a wooden platform on which to mount an irrigation pump out of the finest hardwood timber so it would '*last forever*.' The hand sawing and drilling for the bolts was so difficult in the hardwood that it damaged his shoulder joint beyond repair.

The trip from New Zealand had not been 'plain sailing' from the start. They were blown 200 miles off-course to the north after rounding North Cape. During the gale they were 'hove to' for four days, which means that you can't rig any sail or control the direction you are going in. I remember seeing leather bags that Dad said they doused with oil and dragged beside the boat to calm the waves. He said they weren't much help. When the weather improved they made first for Norfolk Island and then Lord Howe Island, where they spent 10 days making repairs to the yacht before sailing on to Sydney.

What was Chris thinking when he first arrived and arranged his mooring in Rushcutters Bay? Did he really intend this to be a temporary stop on a longer voyage; if so, to where? The Great Barrier Reef was mentioned in the newspaper. But I know myself that circumstances can take over your life when you have been blown off course and they can help you get back to where you're meant to be.

On board he had several things that were precious to him, one of which was his violin. This turned out to be providential because it led to his meeting the girl who would, five years later, become my mother. He wouldn't have known it, but two of his uncles whom we will meet later (Arthur and Nelson) apparently each took his piano with him when he travelled overseas (if you can believe that!). Chris loved his violin and it turns out that he practised it on the yacht in the harbour after he got to hear some violin recitals at the nearby Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

Within days of his arrival (I've looked up the dates) there were two concerts that I'm fairly sure he must have attended because the violinist

was Lloyd Davies,[20] who was to become my uncle. The first concert included Alfred Hill's 'Maori' concerto and the second was a violin recital at David Jones department store where Lloyd played the Elgar violin concerto (with harp accompaniment instead of orchestra), the slow movement of which Chris apparently loved very much (my mother said). When we were children growing up on the farm, we were sadly unaware of our father's love of classical music. It wasn't played much in our farm house, that I can remember, though there was a gramophone with some '78' records. When my maternal grandfather (Uncle Lloyd's father) came to live with us near the end of his life, however, he would play long piano works by ear from his vast experience as an organist and pianist.

In *The Twin Pines Story* I've already told how Chris then went to the Conservatorium to enrol for violin lessons with Lloyd Davies, who took him home for dinner where he met Lorna Davies and he and Lorna fell in love. The book about the farm tells the story from then on.

For the rest of May, June, and into July, Chris appeared to have enjoyed sailing on Sydney harbour and he was not alone in this as the picture shows. My mother told me he was refused membership of the Royal Sydney Yacht Club for some reason (I'm not sure what) so he flew a pennant that read MOBYC – which stood for My Own Bloody Yacht Club.

The pain that was in his heart from leaving behind both his family and his farm could not possibly have been assuaged at that time, even by his love of sailing and the company of new friends. And he must also have been thinking about what he was going to do.

[20] Later, Lloyd Davies received the OBE for his services to music in Australia.

On the 18th of July, 1936, the Auckland Star newspaper reported that the *Ariel* had been '*hauled up at Capell's yard at Rushcutters Bay*' to be prepared for sale because '*Mr Fell has bought a farm outside Sydney*.' This was only two months from the day he had arrived. He was a farmer, after all.

From an early age, Chris's life had included a lot of boating and there is no doubt he had an affinity for the sea – like his brother, sisters and father. His war in the desert must have been a painful intrusion into the kind of life he most enjoyed, but at least there were horses, and that would have nourished his soul.

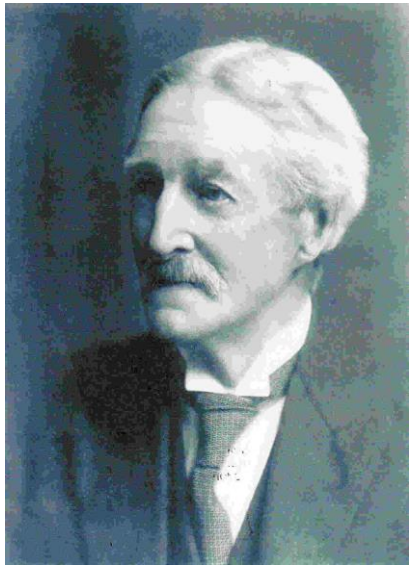
He also had an affinity for the land, perhaps befitting his Yorkshire heritage. From the Brontë sisters to this day, stories about the windswept moors and the rustic dales of Yorkshire have struck a chord with people who believe, as I do, that the land we interact with shapes who we are.

I think Chris was a man of substance who lived his life fully – 'sailing' as best he could through its different stages, while anchored, deep down, in the strength that the solid earth provides.

Chapter 4

Walter Fell (1855 – 1932)

Up to this point I've been writing about people I knew personally, but from now on that is not the case. My father was 52 when I was born and my grandfather – Walter Fell – had died nine years before that. So I only know of him, which is not quite the same. I've still tried to maintain some personal connection for this book, however; a nicely framed version of this portrait of Walter hangs in the hallway of my home (alongside my maternal grandfather, whom I did know).[21]



It had belonged to Mary E. Richmond, Dad's Aunt Mary, whose name was spoken with great respect when I was young. She presented it to my mother on the 11th of April 1941, having written on the back: '*I pass this fine picture of a good and gallant man to Christopher and Lorna Fell with love and warm good wishes for their future*.' I regret not having heard more about Walter from my father, but this picture on the wall at *Twin Pines* was an important link for us with our forebears in New Zealand, even though their existence also seemed far away.

[21] Incidentally, my mother's father, Evan Henry 'Harry' Davies, passed away in the bed next to mine at the Bellingen hospital on September 11th, 1952. During the night my bed was wheeled out onto the hospital verandah, where I heard the news next morning. I mention him in passing because he was known to over-indulge in alcohol from time to time as I did in my early years.

Walter was born in Nelson, New Zealand, on the 25th of March, 1855, the sixth child of Alfred Fell and Fanny Seymour, who had arrived in that town (on different ships, but known to each other) 13 years earlier. One year before he was born they had built a fine new house, which they called *Sunnyside*, that is still standing there today. It now has substantial additions built by subsequent owners and is called *Warwick House* – '*one of the most architecturally revered historic homes in New Zealand*' being a '*fine example of the early Victorian Gothic Revivalist style*.' You can book accommodation in the newer sections, but it was my good fortune to stay, with my wife, in the old part of the house that had actually been *Sunnyside*, in 2012.

The house is on the lower slopes of the Grampians looking over the town and close to the Brook Stream that is still a delight to walk beside. There is a *Seymour Oak* tree (with a plaque) nearby that was planted first by Fanny's father and then replanted (after a flood) by Alfred Fell in 1843. Six months before Walter was born, a bush fire from the hills above threatened to destroy the house, but it was saved with the help of inmates from the town prison, who earned a pardon, I believe.

So Walter had four older brothers (aged 11, 9, 7 and 5) and an older sister who was two and a half. But to be born into this thoroughly English Fell family was very different from what it might have been because this was a strange new land and they were amongst the first Europeans to have lived there; Alfred was a pioneering colonist and one of the founders of the town as it is today. My father Chris and uncle William, from the next generation, were very proud New Zealanders, of course, but Walter and his siblings were the very first New Zealand-born Fells. I will turn to some of the others (my great-uncles) in the next three Chapters.

When Walter was born, his mother almost died from pneumonia. There was a frantic ride over the hills to get a doctor (who couldn't ride so they brought him back a different way by boat). The children were not really aware of this until four days later when their father sat them down to tell them they had almost lost their mother and his gravity and anguish came as a shock to them. Then everyone had measles so the older boys remember this period as quite difficult.

In 1859, when Walter was four years old, they all headed back to England to live because Alfred wanted very much for his children to have the best possible education. I believe this was all the more important to him because of his own life experience (see later). In 1861 they were living in a fine Georgian home, Spencer House, at 85 Putney High Street towards the south-west of Greater London. In 1864, when Walter was nine, his mother felt they should live in France for a while and his father was not entirely happy with the school in London, so the family moved to a rented stone house called *Roche Platte* in Avranches, in Normandy. It was not unusual at that time for English families to want to bring up their children for a while in either France or Germany, to expose them to a different language and culture.

After a year there they all moved to a flat in the Hotel St James in Rue St Honoré, Paris, overlooking the Rue de Rivoli. The youngest girl, Hetty, who was 4, complained that she couldn't reach the doorknobs there, whereas Fanny, aged 6, could do so. Walter was 10 and I try to imagine what it might be like to live right in the midst of this Parisian atmosphere, for a year, at that age. In 1865 they left there to settle back in England, in a large stucco house called *Hillside* at Crooms Hill, Greenwich, which is to the south-east of London city.

Perhaps having four older brothers helped him (for they were all very active), but for whatever reason, Walter could only be described as an extraordinarily adventurous young lad with an inordinate desire to sail in boats. The Thames estuary, a large body of water connecting with the English Channel, was his starting point. There is a story that he found a semi-abandoned small boat at low tide, negotiated to buy it for five shillings, patched it up and then headed off on the water. In dense fog he ran aground on the Maplin Sands, a dangerous mud flat on the northern bank of the Thames estuary near the mouth.

He sailed in canoes and small boats in many other parts of England and his experience of yachting in the English Channel was so extensive that his knowledge was sought by others who were having difficulties with their navigation. He was once stuck upon the Goodwins, a notorious sand bar that is 10 km off the coast of Kent, where he went to sleep for a while,

and was fortuitously rescued by a Dutch tramp steamer. Waking up to the sound of a foreign language, he wondered if he might have sailed to Holland.

When Walter was 16 his father died at the age of only 54. His mother, Fanny, stayed in the house at Crooms Hill until all of her eight children were married. Then she moved to a flat in Earls Court Road, right in London, and later to Wimbledon where she died in 1901 at the age of 82.

At the time of his father's death (1871) Walter was a pupil at Rugby, a famous boarding school in Warwickshire.[22] The 350-year history of this school included major reform around that time, under Dr Arnold and then the controversial Dr Temple. To wag school was an unthinkable offence, but I believe Walter did that in his final year to watch the famous Oxford-Cambridge boat race, such was his love for the water..

He matriculated for university on October the 16th, 1873, and entered University College, Oxford, where he earned a B.A. (1877), M.A. (1879) and M.B. (1882). Then, as was the custom, after a lot more work, he was awarded his M.D. (Oxon) in 1895. The workload and living conditions were not at all easy for the students. In the census of 1881 (when he was 26) Walter was listed as a lodger/medical student) at *St John the Baptist* at 13 Vincent Square in Oxford, together with a family and one other young man.

At Oxford, Walter played tennis quite well and proved himself to be an excellent rower, which was probably the major sport. Almost half-a-century later, when he was re-visiting Oxford with some members of his family, he was addressed by a gnarled old keeper of a university barge, who asked: '*Are you not Fell, of University College*? '*I am*,' he said. Turning to the members of Walter's family, the old boatman said: '*And the prettiest bow I ever saw on the river*.' The bow rower is always small, but Walter had been only 9 stone 4 pounds or 59 kg. Despite rowing Head of the River he was deemed to be too light to get his Oxford Blue.

[22] It was at that school a few years earlier that a pupil, William Webb Ellis, was reputed to have picked up the ball and run with it, which led to the new sport we now call Rugby Union.

Meanwhile, somehow or other, his sailing exploits continued, interspersed with mountaineering experience in Europe on the Matterhorn in the Swiss Alps and on the Dolomites in Italy. He engaged himself as a cadet on the *Hornet*, a gentlemen's training ship for sailors, on a voyage to Norway. Later, as a young doctor, he made longer voyages to the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa where he enjoyed some serious rock climbing on Table Mountain. On one trip to Africa a big storm carried away part of the ship's bridge, and the captain sustained a severe injury to a thigh. This had to be dressed by Dr. Fell under the most disadvantageous conditions, but the captain's leg was saved.

Soon after that Walter decided to return to New Zealand to set up a medical practice. By then he was MRCS (member of the Royal College of Surgeons) and LCRP (licensed by the Royal College of Physicians) and had served as House Surgeon and House Physician at the very famous St. Thomas Hospital in London.

So it was in Wellington, in 1884, that he entered into partnership with Dr Collins, who was also a member of parliament.

Two years later Walter married Margaret (Margie), the third daughter of Justice C. W. Richmond and Emily Elizabeth Atkinson. I have already mentioned the rich history and influential standing of the Richmond and Atkinson families. When I was young I asked if Walter was marrying into a higher social class, but was told very definitely that was not the case. In Frances Porter's Atkinson biography[23] it is written that '*Margaret's choice gives us much satisfaction*.' Margaret herself said that '*Walter is really a person of superior qualities. I never believed I should come to this, and especially an Oxford man*.'

[23] *Born to New Zealand – A Biography of Jane Maria Atkinson* by Frances Porter (Allen and Unwin 1989).

The wedding was held at St Paul's in Wellington on Easter Monday, 1886. There was some concern from Margie's mother that the wedding dress '*gave no feeling of purity and modesty*,' though it was a magnificent gown. Her family liked the house they were going to live in, but also had some concern that Walter's ideas on furnishing are '*too colossal and he will keep adding every handsome looking article he sees until it may be hard to find room for human beings*.'

The young family, of which my father was a part, lived a little way out of town in Willis Street, which is now thoroughly built up and absorbed by the CBD. Family friend Constance Astley, visiting from Scotland, described the house as '*charming, perched up on one of the very steep hills . . with a strip of wildernessy garden between it and the road below and a lovely verandah on the first floor with a delightful view over the town and harbour*.'[24] She also had a very high opinion of Dr Fell: '*he seems to be able to do any mortal thing he chooses, or has time for; a capital oar and sailor, sketches very cleverly, likewise carves*.' Walter carved their bedheads and other wooden furniture. Constance had been promised a sail on Walter's yacht, but the wind was too strong, he said. She accepted this because she was told that '*Dr Fell does not err on the side of prudence*.'

If you go to Wellington as I did to find out more about Walter, you become aware that he left his mark in that city in various ways. One is his watercolour painting; a seascape of the mouth of Wellington Harbour that had belonged to the Governor hangs in the National Library and several others are in various collections of New Zealand Art.

Perhaps the clearest stamp he left was the founding and naming of Mahina Bay, which is on the eastern side of Wellington Harbour and reached by road through Lower Hutt. This came about because Walter first named his yacht, *Mahina*, then built a house that he called *Mahina* on some land he purchased at what had been known as Portuguese Joe's Bay. In time other relatives came to live there and it became Mahina Bay. There are streets named Fell and Richmond and several Atkinson family members

[24] *Constance Astley's Trip to New Zealand (1897-1898)* edited by Jill De Fresnes (Victoria University Press 1997).

established themselves nearby. This is where I stayed with my aunt Margar and the Hector family and attended the Muritai school when I was five.[25]

Walter's medical practice in Wellington became quite large and his eventual standing in the profession is evidenced by the fact that he was Editor of the NZ Medical Journal from 1906 to 1911. Somehow he found time for his principal recreation, which was of course, yachting. There is a boatshed and jetty at Mahina Bay. My father, Chris, must have learned a lot about sailing and rowing at that time, but being only 11 when they first moved there, he would also have played second fiddle to his older sisters, Erica and Margar, who were the main crew members on *Mahina* when they earned the silver bowl that is the Mahina Cup. Walter was also club commodore of the Royal Port Nicholson Yacht Club in 1901-3 and 1907-8.

His abiding hobby, however, was his watercolour painting. Apparently he taught himself later in life. There are many examples of Walter's work at the Mahina house in Wellington and I inherited 11 of them from my father. Actually, they were not framed until I discovered them in an old suitcase long after my parents had died. My brother, sister and three sons each have one of these and a set of six has pride of place in my own home. Various books about New Zealand Art describe Walter's work; he was on the Council of the N.Z. Academy of Fine Arts for many years and its President from 1900 to 1909.

This photo, which I obtained from the National Library of New Zealand, was taken by his eldest brother, Charles Yates Fell, in December, 1895.

[25] Peter Hector, a grandson of Walter Fell, produced a well-illustrated booklet called *MAHINA - From a Yacht to a House to a Name for a Bay* for the Eastbourne Historical Society in 2006.

Nearly 20 years later, when World War I broke out, Dr. Fell promptly offered his services, but was not surprised to be turned down because of his age; he was 60. He knew it would be different in England where he had influential friends, so he and Margie moved to live in Devon where his older brother, Henry 'Harry' Seymour Fell, was a church Rector for most of his life. Walter not only got into the British Army (through a friend), but he was passed fit for service overseas, and worked on hospital ships back and forth to the Mediterranean. After being, for a while, the oldest lieutenant in the R.A.M.C., he won promotion to the rank of Major. He was eventually the second-in-command of the huge Bethnal Green Infirmary Military Hospital in London.

Although he retired to private life after returning to New Zealand in 1919, he still took a keen interest in business and was a director of a number of companies right up to the time of his death. I believe he attended two meetings of directors on the day he was taken ill. He died on the 22nd of November, 1932, at the age of 77.

What an incredibly full life he had lived!

Margie was also seriously ill at that time and she died two months later. They were both buried in a family vault with prominent members of the Richmond and Atkinson families at Karori cemetery, Wellington. There was a substantial tree growing beside the vault when I was there in 2012.

Some members of the Fell family at *Hillside* around the time Walter (far right) was at school.[26]

(From L to R): Arthur, Frances, Alfred, Fanny, Nelson, Henrietta and Walter (Charlie, Geordie and Harry are absent).

[26] I sourced this photo from the article, *Alfred Fell*, by Hamish Thoms that is published at https://hamishthoms.wordpress.com/2020/04/01/alfred-fell.

The Fell family at *Roche Platte* in Avranches in 1865 when Walter (far right) was 10.[27]

(From L to R back row): Arthur, Geordie, Charlie, Alfred, Harry.

(From L to R front row): Henrietta, Fanny, Nelson, Frances, Walter.

[27] I am indebted to Alison Mildon for making this photo available to me from her collection.

Chapter 5

Charles Yates Fell (1844 – 1918) [28]

When I was a boy on the farm hero-worshipping my uncle William, I had never heard of my great-uncles, Sir Arthur Fell or E. Nelson Fell, (see later) who is the only family member to have a town named after him. Nor had I heard of my great-uncle Charles, who was Alfred Fell's first son – often referred to as CY or Charlie – born on the 5th of August, 1844.

To my mind, Charlie sounds like the perfect big brother for a family of mostly boys. (Frances, 'Fanny,' was the only girl of the seven children born in New Zealand; then Henrietta, 'Hettie,' was born back in England). Charles' younger brothers, two years apart, were, firstly, Henry 'Harry' Seymour Fell, who returned to New Zealand only briefly after his education and was a church minister in Devon, England, for most of his life; then Alfred George 'Geordie' Fell, [29] who (after English education) was a businessman and mayor of Blenheim and later of Picton, noted as an oarsman and patron of rowing, the hospital and education; and then Arthur, who stayed in England (see later). My grandfather, Walter, and Edward Nelson Fell were only four and 18 months when the family left New Zealand. Charlie, however, had 15 years of childhood in Nelson.

I think he was a perfect big brother because he was a natural leader throughout his life and seemed to love organising other people around

[28] For a definitive and more complete account of Charles' life please read the article *Charles Yates Fell* (https://hamishthoms.wordpress.com/2020/05/05/charles-yates-fell) written by his great grandson, Hamish Thoms..

[29] The family historian, Alison Mildon, from Palmerston North in New Zealand, is a great granddaughter of Geordie Fell. At Alison's home I met her mother, Isobel Alice Fell, when she was 97 and she remarked that I 'looked like a Fell.'

him and planning new ventures. You get a real sense of this from the 50 pages of *Autobiographical Notes* (located at the Nelson Museum) that he wrote quite late in his life. With Harry and Geordie he used to walk up along the brook to the minister's house for lessons, including music and art. They carried '*leaping poles*' for the sport they made around the brook, but were terrified of the cattle. Charlie's father was the chief importer of cattle (and everything else) for the colony. Later, friends of the Fell boys had a dairy farm at Motueka where Charles learned to ride horses and they made a cart from fallen timber for bullocks to pull, but in the end they couldn't control the bullocks. Later he rode long distances (200 miles) including an expedition over the hills to Christchurch and also the Wairau Valley where there had been lives lost in conflict between European settlers and local Maoris.

An important teams event for Charlie and friends seemed to be stone throwing, which he said they were very good at. With two others he challenged the fledgling Nelson College to a game of cricket, but they needed one boy from the College on their team because '*we found three no good at double wicket*.' He added: '*of course we won, and I think our cheek deserved no less*.' His greatest treasure was a two-bladed knife he got for his birthday – '*without a knife the world was hardly worth living in*,' he wrote.

These might not have been the skills he most needed when he was taken to live in London with his family in 1859. Mind you, the physical hardship of a sea voyage of nearly three months would have been testing, especially for the younger ones who had no cabin comforts at all. Harry, Geordie, Charlie and a few others shared a '*dark hole*' on the lowest deck next to a large number of very noisy Australian birds. They had '*rough weather to the Horn [Cape Horn on the southern tip of South America] off which we were hove to for three days in a gale, surrounded by icebergs*.' Charlie, however, said that '*it was all fun to us*.' He helped to work the sails, played the piano and, being the eldest, got to dine with the adults rather than with the children.

He attended the Kings College School both before and after they settled in Putney near Wimbledon Common in Spencer House. He wrote later that what he learned there was '*the desperate habit of work*.' The other characteristic, apart from leadership, that really strikes me about Charles

was his great application – an ability to work thoroughly and hard enough to learn whatever he needed to know. It was not easy for him to get from there to the matriculation requirements for Oxford University four years later because his schooling had been so fragmented. He learned watercolour painting, singing, and other useful things, but not too much from a formal syllabus – he says he '*didn't even know his Greek letters*,' for example. But, at that time, and throughout his life, he seemed to be very good at applying himself to the task at hand, without distraction.

He got into St John's at Oxford in 1863, to his father's great delight, even though this was not a highly regarded College within the University. He painted watercolours, one of which won a significant prize, sang in the choir, and seemed to enjoy his study far more than the drinking and card games that were the most popular activities. He had been rowing well at Kings College School and now did well at athletics, winning many middle-distance events, for which he received a handsome trophy that is still in the family in Canada.

The history of his rowing at St John's is best explained by the fact that they didn't even have a boat or crew when he arrived; he was determined to change that. He raised the funds needed to pay off the Boat Club's debts and buy a new racing boat, which had immediate success in 1864. He was the Captain and rowed stroke and he wrote that '*a fine rowing spirit*' began and grew steadily during that time.

While his family was living in France, Charles was mostly at Oxford, but he travelled to the Normandy house for the vacations. He said the younger children learnt the language quickly, while his father kept company mainly with local English people; Charles himself was always grateful to be able to read French, but he favoured his father's disdain for speaking it. His mother felt they should have more interaction with local French people so she invited the '*chief inhabitants*' of the district to a grand ball at the Town Hall to celebrate Charles 21st birthday in 1865.

The family helped Charles decide to become a lawyer so he could go back to New Zealand to practice. Accordingly he graduated and was duly admitted to the bar and to the Inner Temple where he practised law in London for a short time. He had known Edith Bainbridge while at Putney

and they were married there in 1869. By 1870 they were living in Nelson where they had five children.[30] He became a Governor of Nelson College (both the College for Boys and the College for Girls) – a far cry from his makeshift game of cricket as a young lad.

He continued the family connections of his younger brother by going into partnership with Arthur Atkinson, husband of Jane Maria, *nee* Richmond. Arthur was regarded as unusual for his intense study of the Maori language and customs, astronomy, and other subjects. His nickname was 'Spider' in his early years and he only settled down to practicing law later in life. Many of the Atkinsons were involved in politics including Sir Harry Atkinson who was the socialist-leaning Premier of New Zealand on and off in that depression-ridden period around 1880.

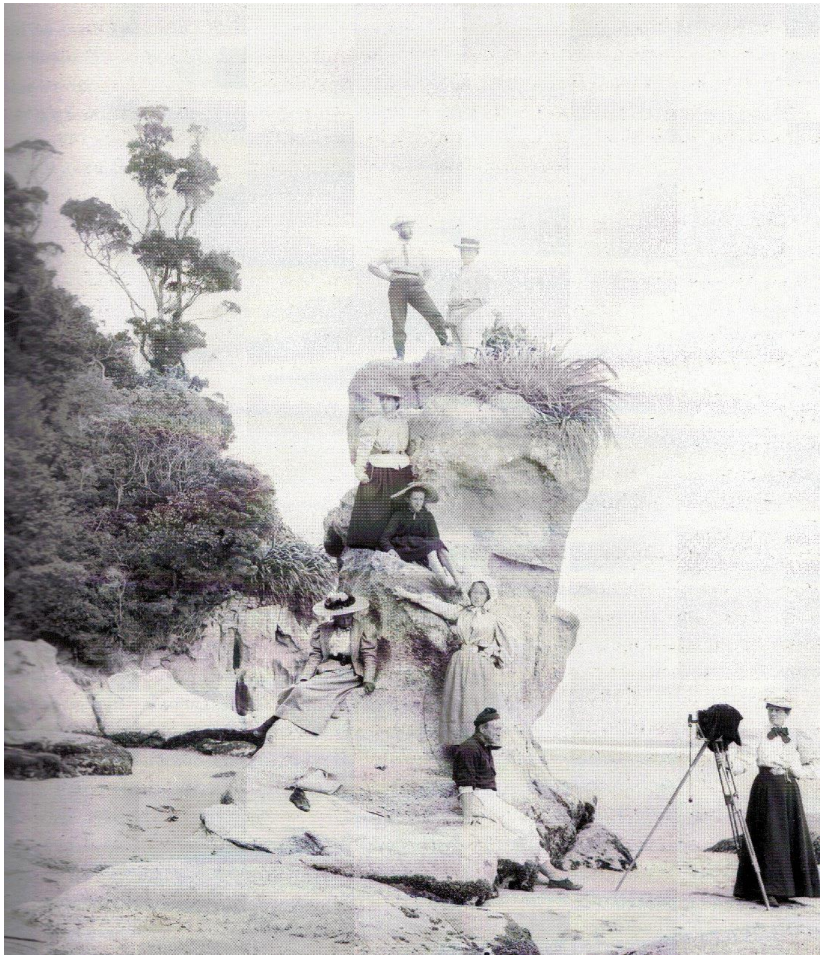
But in 1879, Charlie's wife, Edith, died, aged 34, leaving him with five children under 14. It helped that the family spent a lot of time at *Fairfield*, which was the home of Arthur and Maria Atkinson in Nelson. So it was that Charlie married again, to Edith ('Edie') Emily Atkinson, the daughter of his business partner, two years later. This was by no means as obvious as it might seem. Edie was a very strong and independent young woman who had always found '*the idea of meeting a man she would consider marrying highly unlikely*.'[31] Her family expressed surprise when she said yes to his proposal. She was 23 and he was 37.

[30] Incidentally, one of their sons, Alfred Nolan Fell, much later played rugby (on the wing) for Scotland while he was at Edinburgh University. He was said to be very fast (in fact he was an athletics champion), but not a great defender.

[31] See *Constance Astley's Trip to New Zealand (1897-1898)* edited by Jill de Fresnes (Victoria University Press 1997).

They seem to have been a perfectly suited couple for the rest of their lives. They had three more children; the eldest was Charles Richmond Fell,[32] known as 'Boy,' who eventually carried on the family business in Nelson and was also a Governor of Nelson College. Two of his three children were killed at a young age: Roderick died in battle in Greece at age 31 and Pamela was killed in a plane crash as she was flying home to her family in Nelson, when she was 29. Both are listed in the Dedication at the front of this book.

Charlie and Edie and family had notable holidays at Totaranui. Nowadays people come from all over the world to enjoy this beach in the Abel



[32] Hamish Thoms is his grandson.

Tasman National Park and walk the well-known Coastal Track. Then it was accessible only by boat. Charlie was an excellent photographer and many of his photographs are kept in the NZ National Library, including this one of his family on some unusual rocks at Totaranui.

This photo was also used on the cover of the book in which Constance Astley's diary is recorded because she was enchanted with the time she spent in that remote location in 1898. She loved the natural beauty and the relaxed social atmosphere where women could wear '*rational costume*' that enabled them to move about freely and get in the water. She wrote that Charlie was '*quite the nicest man I have ever met.*' As well as playing the piano and singing with a fine tenor voice, he could cook very well, ride and drive the horse transport with great skill, row the little boat called '*Dead Horse*' with strength and sail his yacht, *Isis*, with distinction.

Charlie became the mayor of Nelson in 1882 until 1887 and during that time he travelled to England to lobby for railroad construction in New Zealand. He was a trustee of the Bishop Suter Art Gallery (which holds two of his watercolours) from its inception until his death, and also a member of the NZ Academy of Fine Arts.

I discovered from newspaper clippings that his leadership was still highly regarded by Nelson people right to the end of his life, because he was holding public meetings to keep them informed of the progress of the First World War. He died in 1918, aged 73, and is buried at Wakapuaka Cemetery in Nelson. A memorial was erected in the memory of '*an ardent patriot and public-spirited citizen.*'[33]

In his memoirs, Charlie wrote about his grandfather, Henry Seymour. Henry was a significant shaper of this colonial outpost of the British Empire, both as Alfred Fell's business partner and in his own right as a member of parliament. Charlie thought that his mother, Fanny, received so much devoted love and support from Henry that it also flowed on to him and made him thoroughly spoilt. I mention this because of a little 'mystery' that lies ahead in this story.

[33] This described in Alison Mildon's unpublished article, *The Life and Leavings of Alfred Fell.*

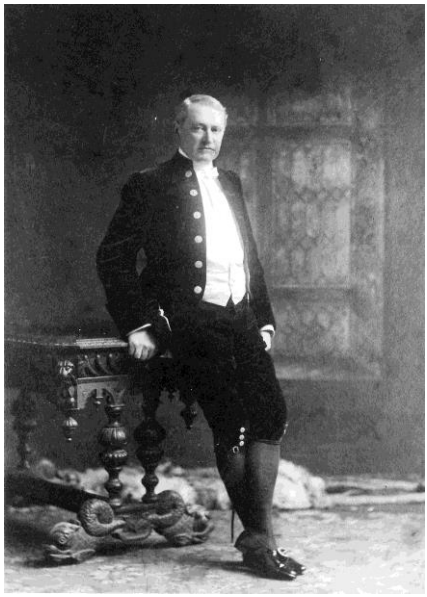
He also wrote glowingly about his own father's many attributes (see later) and also some lines that are quite telling so far as the rest of this book is concerned. Of his father, Alfred, Charlie wrote: '*He could have had no brothers and sisters, or they have all died out . . . nor was he ever troubled with relations rich or poor.*' He also wondered why his father spoke so glowingly of his own birthplace, York, and took them on many travels when they were back in England, yet he never took them to York.

Whether he ever knew more than this about the lives of his parents, there is no doubt that Charles' own life was lived with distinction, and he left his mark of quality and service on the lives of many people in Nelson and beyond.

Chapter 6

Arthur Fell (1850 – 1934) [34]

Since 1994 there has been a tunnel (actually three tunnels side by side) beneath the English Channel running from Folkestone in Kent to just near Calais in northern France – that's a distance of 50 kilometres (31 miles) and it has the longest undersea section of any tunnel in the world.



More than a century ago, in 1913, Arthur Fell, an MP in the British Government began a campaign to build such a tunnel. There was a lot of support and work began briefly at the French end, but the British parliament was never convinced. Arthur was knighted in 1918. When he left the parliament in 1922, he continued to fight for construction of the tunnel until he died in 1934.

We can only guess what difference the tunnel might have made to the course of the two World Wars and Britain's future relationship with Europe. Sir Arthur had many successes all over the world and at home, and the indications are he was a proud man, but he must have been disappointed that the tunnel didn't go ahead in his day.

[34] I am indebted to Professor Joscelyn Godwin of Colgate University in New York for sending me this photograph of Arthur and also portions of an unpublished essay by Martin Knowles of Colchester, UK, and portions of the book cited here by Tredway Sydenham-Clarke. All three are descendants of Arthur Fell.

Alfred Fell's fourth son, Arthur, was born in Nelson, New Zealand, on the 7th of August, 1850, some eight and a half years after Alfred had arrived in the colony where he had married and set up business with his wife, Fanny Seymour, and her family. Though New Zealand born, Arthur was essentially an Englishman, who became an influential solicitor, a wealthy international businessman, and a long-serving Conservative Party politician.

Arthur had some of his boyhood with older brothers, Charles and Geordie in Nelson, but he was not yet nine when the family returned to England in 1859. They lived firstly at Prestbury with his father-in-law, Henry Seymour, then rented a house near the Albany Street Barracks at Euston. With his brothers he went daily to Kings College School in The Strand, near Somerset House, in London.

By 1860 they had upgraded to Spencer House, in Putney, from which the boys continued their schooling at Kings, travelling there by horse-drawn buses which ran every ten minutes. The fare for the one hour journey was nine pence. There were also hourly trains which reached Waterloo station from Putney in half an hour. I learned about details such as these from a book called *A Family Through the Ages* by Tredway Sydenham-Clarke, who was a grandson of Arthur Fell.[35]

In 1864, when Arthur was 14, the family moved to France as has already been told. Family friendships first formed at Avranches were to lead to Arthur's marriage 13 years later into the highly prestigious von Rosenberg family and also to the marriage of his older brother, Harry, into the same family. In one incident while living there, the Fells and Rosenbergs were almost trapped and drowned in the notorious quicksands that separate the famous monastery island of Mt St Michel from the coast. They had, very unwisely, tried to take a large coach across that deceptive stretch of low-lying land that has claimed quite a few lives. They were saved by fisherman using nets and sacks. This certainly sounded more like luck than good management.

[35] Published by Marsh Winds, Aldeburgh, Suffolk, England (1996).

In 1865, they settled back in England in what was to be their main home – '*Hillside'* at Crooms Hill, Greenwich. It was in that house (which was apparently still standing in 1996) that Arthur's father, Alfred, died just a few years later. That was in 1871; Alfred was only 54 and Arthur was 21. Fanny had nursed Alfred through a long illness and remained in the house until her eight children were married, when she moved first to Earls Court Road, right in London, and later to Wimbledon in Arthur's care.

The family was well settled at Greenwich when Arthur completed his schooling, having also acquired a good command of the French language. He matriculated at age 18 in 1868 and followed his elder brother to St Johns College at Oxford University. Charles' career at Oxford had been so successful that it must have seemed like a hard act to follow for a younger brother. Arthur was somewhat delicate with asthma, but he was not one to be daunted by anything and ended up with a better degree than Charles did, as well as being a respectable oarsman. He was active in the University Union, which was the beginning of his lifelong interest in politics.

He was 21 when awarded his B.A. Seven years later he progressed to his M.A. which was not a separately earned degree in those days, but followed naturally after a period of time and upon payment of a fee. He had read Law and so qualified as a solicitor in 1874 in Bishopsgate, London, where he had offices in Queen Victoria St.

When he was 27 he felt sufficiently settled to marry the beautiful eldest daughter of Baron Otto George von Rosenberg de la Marre, whose family he had first met when living at Avranches. Her name was Baroness Annie Ottilia Eliza and she was 20. The von Rosenbergs, in the 16th century, were Princes of the Holy Roman Empire who later became Protestants, against the Hapsburgs, and were prominent in East Prussia in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Arthur and Annie lived in Earls Court Road where they had five children, though one died very young. One daughter (Phoebe) was the mother of Tredway Sydenham-Clarke, author of the book I've mentioned. Another daughter (Margaret) was the grandmother of Martin Knowles, who wrote the unpublished essay, and also Joscelyn Godwin. Joscelyn's upbringing

was rather unusual. When his parents emigrated to the USA, the children took their mother's surname, Godwin, and he was adopted by two Oxford schoolmistresses when he was just a few months old. This turned out to be providential because he had an exceptional gift for music and was a chorister at Oxford. He became a musicologist and a Professor of Music in New York and is the highly respected author of many books on ancient and esoteric music.

Arthur's male offspring were also as famous as their father. His grandson, Sir Anthony Fell, followed Arthur as the MP for Great Yarmouth. Arthur's son, David Mark Fell was also knighted, but by the King of Italy (Vittorio Emanuele III), for his services during World War I, where he earned the nickname of 'mad Mark Fell' for his great courage as a submarine commander. The details of that are still being researched by the family. He is the grandfather of another current family contact, Dick Cobbold, who lives in Ottawa, Canada, with his wife, Jeannie. There are illustrious connections with French wine-making and a famous brewer in England, centred around the beautiful countryside of Suffolk, where I was fortunate to spend a few weeks, with my wife, in 2011.

David Mark Fell was Arthur's only surviving son because his older brother died at the age of two. His life draws together two elements from earlier Chapters of this book in an unlikely combination; he was a submarine commander during wartime and a dairy farmer between the wars and in retirement.[36] His naval career began as a cadet at age 13 and he joined the submarine service of the Royal Navy in 1911, achieving his first command by 1913. At the height of World War I he commanded a sub-flotilla of submarines out of Brindisi in Southern Italy and in the narrow strait called the Dardanelles, along the Gallipoli peninsula.

After the war, with his wife and four children, Mark established a farm in New Zealand where his dairy cows must have included stud animals because he is said to have paid great attention to '*combing the tails*' of prize-winning cows. If you've read my book, *The Twines Story*, about our farm in Australia, you will know that my brother and sister also took great care in

[36] I am grateful to Dick Cobbold for providing this additional information.

preparing their Jerseys for judging at the Agricultural Shows. During the Second World War, Mark Fell was a naval commander in the British Admiralty, after which he retired to a farm in Essex in England.

The descendants of Arthur all wrote with great respect and reverence for their esteemed elder, as is only fitting. It's good that their history has been recorded in such detail, but it diverts us from the main thread of my story. What kind of man was Arthur? If you thought the Fells you've already met in this story were successful, then I can tell you that Arthur was the most successful of all. The others were moderately well off, financially, and Alfred was certainly wealthy when he returned from New Zealand, but Arthur was by far the wealthiest of them all.

He was also the closest to his father. When Alfred died, Arthur was 21 and not yet fully qualified in the law, but there is reason to believe that he was the son who was mainly responsible for managing his father's affairs from then on. I'm not suggesting that Arthur's wealth was due to any family unfairness, because the brilliance of his own business management speaks for itself, but it is noteworthy that he was the chief custodian of the family name in England. At the time of Alfred's death, Charles, the eldest son, was 27 and already back in New Zealand and Harry and Geordie were 25 and 23 and actually in transit from England back to New Zealand. Walter and Nelson were younger and were still completing their education in England.

For this story I'm telling, we owe a great debt of gratitude to Arthur because it was through his efforts that Alfred Fell's diary of his voyage to New Zealand was published in 1926.[37] Arthur wrote a Foreword which I'll come back to later. He was justifiably proud of his father's efforts and of New Zealand (mentioning the All Blacks Rugby team) and particularly of '*British genius and character at their very best.*'

Arthur's life was no picnic, however; there were obstacles and hardships. And Annie, despite the privilege implied in her family pedigree, was doing

[37] *A Colonist's Voyage to New Zealand: Under Sail in the 'Early Forties'* by the late Alfred Fell. This was published in England, but the second-hand copy I have is a reprint published by Capper Press, Christchurch, New Zealand in 1973.

it tough in those years. In 1888, with four children under the age of 10 (the youngest a baby) they moved to live at Worple Road in Wimbledon. Annie must have been sick for some time before that because she died that year of consumption (tuberculosis) at the tender age of 32. For a time their two older girls were cared for at Rosenberg estates in Europe and the younger children by Fanny at Earls Court Road, but they soon reunited at Worple Road.

There was a small old-fashioned school nearby. For a few years they endured a series of governess-housekeepers whom Arthur employed, none of whom had any *'gifts for managing children*.' A series of hard winters cause problems with freezing pipes, but also produced excellent conditions for skating on Wimbledon's many lakes and ponds. Supplies of coal, which was the only form of heating, ran out at times because the heavy coal carts could not get up the steep frozen road to Wimbledon Hill.

In 1891 Arthur employed the services of a charming Armenian lady, Matilda Dora Wortabet (1868-1958), who was nothing like the previous run of housekeepers. In fact, she and Arthur were so suited to one another that they were married in 1892. She was known as Mat (and later Lady Mat) and they were together for the next 42 years until his death in 1934. During the rather fraught period of Arthur's remarriage, his mother, Fanny, revived her adventurous spirit by sailing half-way around the world again. It amazes me the zest these people had for sea voyages!

Perhaps the secret of Arthur's international business success was that he looked further afield than most people, he travelled further afield than most people, and he was not afraid to take risks. In this respect he was treading the same path as his father, Alfred, but on a broader scale.

In Canada he rode the newly-commissioned Trans-Canada railway, stopping off at Winnipeg, where he purchased the land that was to become the city centre where many of the major city buildings now stand. This was the British Winnipeg Investment Company that continued to provide income for Lady Mat up to her death in 1958.

He also visited South Africa as a lawyer for the British Admiralty dealing with shipping salvage claims. On the voyage he met a mining engineer who planned to invest in new gold mines and gold prospecting, but Arthur's plan at that time was to acquire buildings and land that would become part of the future development of a city. He bought 30 lots that have since become the Main Street of Johannesburg. This was the African City Properties Trust.

In London he financed the completion of Whitehall Court and the Cecil Hotel after James Balfour went bankrupt. Then Arthur's interest did turn to international mining and in this regard it was of great assistance to him that his younger brother, Nelson Fell, had studied to be an engineer at the Royal School of Mines and at Heidelberg in Germany, learning the latest German mining techniques. Although Nelson was seven years younger than Arthur, they seemed to be close, sharing an appetite for world travel, hard work and bold business ventures, which eventually took Nelson to various parts of the United States, Western Canada, South America and Kazakhstan.

In 1884 Nelson Fell went to Florida (from where he had been working at Arthur's goldmine in Colorado) and, following his assessment that the swampland could be drained to provide fertile farmland, Arthur purchased nearly 5000 hectares (12,000 acres) east of Lake Tohopekaliga. Some of the land was reserved for a town site called Narcoosee where they built a fine house on a point that extended into the lake around what they called Fell's Cove. Arthur provided a cemetery, which is named after him, and the St Luke's Baptist church building. By 1888 more than 200 English immigrants had settled in Narcoosee and it was connected to the railroad, but later its growth stalled and some of the residents moved to Fellsmere, a town nearby (see later).

In 1901 Arthur called on Nelson again to travel, after planning in London, to a remote part of the Kirgiz Steppes of Siberia, which was then part of the Russian Empire. It is now northern Kazakhstan. Here Nelson purchased, on Arthur's behalf, coal mines and a very large copper mine and refinery, which he was to manage until 1908.

By 1902 Arthur's wealth enabled him to purchase one of the most notable mansions in Wimbledon, *Lauriston House*. His daughters, Phoebe, Margie and Winnie, were 21, 20 and 18, in their social prime, and the wedding receptions they were to have in the house some years later may have already been in the back of their minds, along with many other opportunities for entertaining. Matilda was now Arthur's wife of 10 years and the feeling of moving in as a family must have been one of great satisfaction. Though it was certainly achieved by great enterprise on his part, and the fortuitous arrival of Matilda in his home, Arthur must have felt himself to be a 'lucky man' at that stage of his life.

Lauriston House had already been frequented by prominent politicians for many years and this was a tradition that Arthur was to continue. It was partly this history that made the property so famous, it being '*one of Wimbledon's most historic homes*.' Martin Knowles noted that there were '*many servants*' and '*much luxury*' at *Lauriston House*. Incidentally, Dick Cobbold remembers the old house from his boyhood in London in the 1940's and Martin Knowles stayed there in 1935. My first cousin, John Richmond Fell also remembered having tea there in the 1930's and his eldest son, William Varley Fell has lived nearby in Wimbledon since 1972.

The house was on the south side of Wimbledon Common, which is a large open space – 460 ha (1150 acres) – adjoining Putney Heath in Greater London, 11 km (7 miles) to the south west of the city centre. Arthur was a powerful advocate for the preservation of the Common which itself has a colourful history. Not far away is Richmond Park, one of the largest urban walled parks in the world.

In the second half of the 18th century this house had been the residence of William Wilberforce, who with his friend, William Pitt the Younger (later Prime Minister), apparently held rather wild parties there. Both are buried at Westminster Abbey. There was a very large lawn and the mower was pulled by a horse with leather shoes on its hooves. There was also a large maple called the '*Pitt Tree*' where Pitt used to practice his speeches. The interior had magnificent murals by several famous artists including a '*priceless ceiling*' that was eventually demolished in 1957, despite protests from local historians.

Arthur continued to host dignitaries and the house became famous for musical parties at which there were two orchestras – one for the classical music and one for the dance. Arthur painted watercolour landscapes (like several other Fells) and many of these hung on the walls. I understand that some of his paintings are now in the care of Dick Cobbold in Canada.

The house continued to be a social hub for the Fell family, especially his daughters, right up to the outbreak of World War II in 1939. Martin Knowles described the 1920's as the '*golden period*' of social life at *Lauriston House*. Arthur and Matilda were always there during the summers, but in winter they were in the south of France where there were also large family gatherings from time to time.

After Arthur died his widow, Lady Mat, continued to live at the house until it was demolished, soon after which she died in 1958. There are now 21 neo-Georgian houses standing on the site as well as the adjacent Lauriston cottage. This building, also referred to as the coachhouse, has a blue plaque on its wall saying that Wilberforce had lived there.

Arthur sat in the House of Commons from 1906 to 1922 as the Conservative Party MP for Great Yarmouth. He was the Chairman of the Channel Tunnel Parliamentary Committee from 1913 until he retired. He was knighted (Knight Bachelor) in February, 1918.

A point of note for my story is that his entry into parliament in the first place was quite controversial. A well-referenced article in Wikipedia says he could have been found guilty of unfairly influencing the result of that election by bribery and the '*treating'* of voters. He won the election by only 236 votes and there was a petition lodged against him by the other candidate. In what Wikipedia described as a '*notorious legal case*' a '*biased judge*' dismissed the petition. The other judge involved said that Arthur had '*escaped by the skin of his teeth*.' It was well known that the so-called '*biased judge*' was a close friend of Arthur's. Today, we've come to accept so much corruption in politics that we are in no position to cast aspersions; perhaps, that's the kind of 'luck' you need sometimes!

Sir Arthur Fell died suddenly on the 29th of December, 1934 (a rainy Saturday morning), in the Wimbledon branch of Barclay's Bank as he was

in the process of cashing a cheque. He was 84. He is buried at Wimbledon. He left each of his four children £10,000 and bequeathed an extra month's salary to all indoor staff with lump sums for the housemaid and gardener.

His estate was valued on probate at £113,371 (net), the remainder left in trust for his widow, Matilda. At the time of Arthur's death, *Lauriston House* was valued at £35,000. When each of Arthur's daughters married he conferred property to them, mainly in the form of shares in Africa City Properties and the British Winnipeg Investment Company, which provided an annual income of £600. Later he provided £100 per annum for each of his granddaughters.

It is mainly due to the writing of Arthur's descendants, Martin Knowles and Tredway Sydenham-Clarke, that I can relate all this in my story. However, their version of the story – which tallies exactly with Arthur's own words – is not entirely correct, as we will see in the final Chapter.

They all said that Alfred was brought up by an uncle, Dr Little, because his parents had died when he was young. In fact his parents did not die when he was young. This is part of the mystery I foreshadowed at the beginning of the book.

Chapter 7

Edward Nelson Fell (1857 – 1928) [38]

The youngest of my great uncles, from the original New Zealand-born Fells, was Edward Nelson Fell, generally known as E. Nelson Fell or Nelson. I had certainly never heard of him in my younger days, nor did I realise that one of my ancestors had lived and died in the United States. Nelson also lived and worked in England, Brazil, Canada and Kazakhstan as well as Colorado, Florida and New York. The geographical diversity of his activities was truly remarkable.

Born in Nelson, New Zealand, on the 27th of August, 1857, he arrived in England with his family at 20 months of age. His childhood exposure to the culture and languages of Europe was an important part of his education, creating an interest in architecture and music, even before he, too, attended Rugby school in England. He played the piano from an early age and, remarkably, always took a piano with him on his travels in later life – even to the depths of Siberia. When the family holidayed on the Isle of Wight, the young Nelson spent time with their neighbour, Alfred Lord Tennyson, who was the Poet Laureate of England.

As already told, he became a mining engineer (having studied at the School of Mines in England and with German experts in Heidelberg) and this led to very fruitful employment and partnership with his older brother, Arthur, and to his much travelled life. In his early 20's he worked in Brazil at British-owned gold mines; then at 27 he was in the Colorado Rocky Mountains where Arthur had acquired mines and the saloons were

[38] This Chapter could not have been written without the assistance of Jamie Vans, a great grandson of Nelson Fell, and Richard Votapka, the Fellsmere historian.

'wild west' with Winchester rifles, whiskey and fights. Later he managed Arthur's gold mines in British Columbia, Canada.

After Colorado, Nelson went to Florida on Arthur's behalf where they established the Narcoosee development on Lake Tohopekaliga that I mentioned earlier. The success of that project, although it was short-lived, coincided with Nelson's marriage to Anne Mumford Palmer, the daughter of a New York judge, whose young life had been spent mostly in Europe. Their house on The Point, jutting into the lake, gave the name Fell's Cove to what I understand is still a sought after place to live to this day.

They had three children: Marian,[39] Olivia and Nelson. Two years before E. Nelson Fell died, his only son, Nelson, who had become a lawyer, was killed in a car accident – so the Fell name did not continue in that family. He was only 28, recently married to another lawyer, and was driving home from a Christmas party. His name is also in the Dedication for this book

From the time the children were young, there were two family friends, Patrick Vans Agnew and his brother, Frank, who were to play an important part in their lives. They were like older brothers and taught the Fells to swim and ride horses, amongst many other physical outdoor pursuits that proved useful to them later.

Patrick Vans Agnew became a lawyer and made a significant contribution to the further development of this part of Florida. Frank worked with Nelson Fell in the mines in British Columbia as an assayer before becoming his partner in the biggest mining adventure of Nelson's life. Frank was a colourful character whose whole life was anything but ordinary. Amongst other things he was a great horseman and also owned racehorses at one stage. He served in the First World War in the British Cavalry and later in the Tank Corps.[40]

[39] Marian and Patrick Vans Agnew were the grandparents of Jamie Vans, another current family contact living in Cardiff in Wales who has been active in researching the family history.

[40] See *Veteran Volunteer – Memoir of the Trenches, Tanks and Captivity*, edited by Jamie Vans and Peter Widdowson (Pen and Sword Books, 2014).

After many adventures (see later) during which they kept in touch, Marian Fell married Patrick Vans Agnew when she was 27 and he was 46. After Patrick died, Marian went to live near Oxford in England with her four children, where she died from breast cancer a few years later, in 1935, at the age of 48. Meanwhile, her sister, Olivia, had married Frank Vans Agnew (she was 40 and he was 60) and they rushed to England, where they took over the care of Marian's children, and settled in Cornwall.

Though Marian's life was cut quite short, it was her name in her younger days as Marian Fell that was to be stamped indelibly into the history of the city of Fellsmere in Florida that was founded by her father, Nelson Fell.

* * * * *

As already told, Nelson's brother, Arthur, had worked out that an even bigger and more profitable mining investment might lie in the depths of Siberia. He arranged for Nelson to travel, with one or two others, some 2000 miles to the Kirghiz Steppes in what is now northern Kazakhstan. After taking the Trans-Siberian Railway, the last 600 miles were on horseback. They reported back very favourably and the next step was for Nelson to manage the purchase of the Spassky Copper Mines in an extremely remote setting where he was still learning the languages and where most of the payment had to be made in cash (which was quite a dangerous business). Frank Vans Agnew was Nelson's right-hand-man throughout this extraordinary enterprise.[41]

Their purchase included coal mines, a huge copper mine and an appropriately large smelter to refine the copper. With a very small team, Nelson Alfredovitch (son of Alfred), as he was known, managed the whole operation for the next five years from 1903 to 1908. He was the *Bai*, which is the Kirghiz word for Lord or Master.

[41] Remarkably, Jamie Vans and his partner visited Kazakhstan in 2019 as part of a TV documentary about the history of mining in that region, including the contribution made by Fell and Vans Agnew. He wrote about this in *Notes on a Visit to Kazakhstan in the Footsteps of the Fell Family*. Jamie also made available a preview of the finished film, which I found fascinating for its reference to the history of civilisation generally.

He also sent for his wife and children and they lived there together, which

was a far cry from the comforts of Fell's Cove in Florida. The physical skills and strength that the children had developed as youngsters would have stood them in good stead. At first Marian (aged 19) went to study in Paris (as her mother had done), but she joined them in this outpost of the Russian Empire in 1905.

The climate was extremely hot and dry in the four months of summer and extremely cold and stormy in the seven months of winter with blizzards too extreme for anyone to go outside (60 below zero F). The only animal that can tolerate exposure to these storms is the snow camel. The one month of spring is apparently delightful and everyone is out and about with huge trading fairs held in colourful tents.

The Spassky complex was not just another mine. The business that Fell and Vans Agnew were representing was reviving a local industry of great significance in the history of human civilization that can be traced back to the transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age many centuries ago. This area is now the most important international centre of archeological research into the way that raw materials such as copper influenced the recent evolution of human culture.

They employed thousands of local people: Kirghiz carriers (camel drivers for hauling out the refined copper, horsemen, sled drivers), miners and labourers, mechanics, engineers and accountants. They also had to deal with different classes of people including Cossacks, peasants and Tchinovniks (bureaucrats), all within the social structure of the Russian Empire. Each class was different, but Nelson found a way to get to know them all. In fact he was so impressed by the people he wrote glowing accounts of their character and their admirable way of life.

With what I think was remarkable insight, Nelson seemed to perceive, through his interactions with the local people, ancient community values that he thought provided a lesson for us today. He wrote that this central Asiatic plateau '*is the ultimate birthplace of all our western modes of thought and culture and religion*.'

To get to know what sort of person Nelson Fell was you must read his book *Russian and Nomad - Tales of the Kirghiz Steppes* [42] which he says he wrote '*in grateful memory of the pleasant years*' he spent there. It is a beautifully written tale of human interactions with such well-drawn, interesting characters that it would make a great movie. There were several days of high tension when a group of miners threatened to revolt (as was happening elsewhere in Russia at that time). Nelson quelled the uprising with extraordinary aplomb. He also describes local customs and memorable characters with humour and style.

Nelson's life was not only rich in terms of travel and pioneering; there is an elusive quality in his personality that I think has to be felt through reading the *Russian and Nomad* book. He makes light of the most dire circumstances and also sees into the nobility of early human civilization with wisdom and keen observation that reflect his excellent education and innate curiosity.

Marian Fell studied the Russian language and culture and wrote a Chapter in the book called *The Turquoise Lake* about Lake Balkhash, which is 600 miles to the south of where they lived. She also wrote the poem that ends the book, called *The Eagle's Song*.

* * * * *

When Nelson and family returned to the United States in 1908 they were wealthy enough to retire to a country estate in Virginia. He did not stay retired for long because he remembered the plan to drain large areas of swamp in Florida to create rich farming land. In March, 1910, Nelson and Anne purchased 118,000 acres to establish the community of Fellsmere.

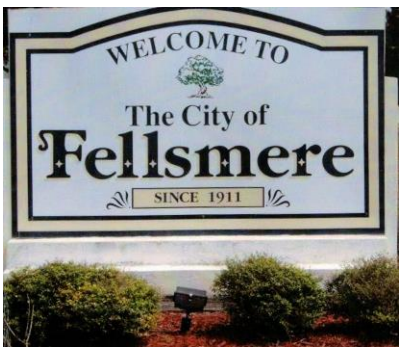
[42] It was first published by Duckworth (London) in 1916, but is available as a reprint at booksellers like Amazon because it is now in the public domain.

Patrick Vans Agnew was the legal counsel for the Fellsmere Farms Company and the first City Attorney for the town of Fellsmere.

The drainage operation was beset by a series of difficulties, especially extremely bad weather conditions during its early years. After the Great Flood of 1915 the Fellsmere Farms Company became bankrupt, but the city continues to this day.

Fellsmere is a proud little city in an agricultural area with a population of 5,500, situated an hour's drive south of Cape Canaveral (or an hour and a half drive south from Orlando) in Florida. I call it 'proud' because, for more than a century, it managed to survive floods and other economic setbacks that wiped out other towns and it was also a trailblazer in local government, being the first to introduce new ideas such as female voting (especially remarkable for a town south of the Mason-Dixon line).

I believe the character of Fellsmere might have seemed very different to us had it not been for the irrepressible historian and local identity, Richard B. Votapka and his close friend, the photographer, Clarence F. Korker, known as 'Korky'. There is an excellent *Photographic History of the City of Fellsmere*, packed with images and information, where you can read more about these two gentlemen who have done so much to preserve a crucial part of Nelson Fell's family history.[43]



Rich Votapka, just like Nelson Fell, is an engineer who plays the piano (as well as the banjo and several other instruments in Rich's case). You don't always have to emulate your founders to be a good historian, but because Rich can do that, we embrace him as an honorary member of our family who helps us see what was happening a century ago. On anniversaries and public occasions he dresses up as Nelson Fell and plays his part in

[43] Compiled and published by Clarence F. 'Korky' Korker and Richard B. Votapka to mark the Centenary of Fellsmere in 2011. Richard Votapka also wrote many articles about Fellsmere history, Nelson Fell, Marian Fell and the Vans Agnews in official publications and in local magazines.

founding the city. I would dearly love to have seen this, particularly for the centenary in 2011, which other relatives, including Richard and Jeannie Cobbold, Josephine Aldenham and Alison Mildon did attend.

In 2015 another centenary was celebrated – for the Marian Fell Library in Fellsmere. Nelson's great grandson, Jamie Vans, was the keynote speaker. In 1915 Marian had felt that the town needed a library, for which her father donated the land, saying that she would have to finance the building. Since returning from Russia in 1908, Marian had achieved widespread recognition for her translations of stories and plays by the famed Russian author, Anton Chekhov, who had died only a few years earlier. Her translation of *Uncle Vanya* was especially popular, both on the stage and in two movies. She used her royalties to pay for the construction of the library, which also contains 14 of her own watercolour paintings.[44]

So the Fell name is preserved in Florida at least as clearly as it is anywhere in the world.

When my son, Chris, who is a great, great nephew of Nelson, visited Fellsmere in 2015 and 2017 he was very warmly and graciously received by Rich and Korky. In 2017 Chris also had the opportunity to visit *Creedmoor*, which had been Nelson Fell's family estate, near Warrenton, Virginia, so he feels closely connected with this part of his family history.

Nelson died at the Virginia estate (where he is buried) on the 25th of March, 1928, aged 71.

* * * * *

[44] I am grateful to Jamie Vans for supplying this photo of Marian Fell and the earlier photo of Nelson Fell.

In writing this book I feel rather like a mining engineer myself. One is prospecting for rich veins of buried information about each person and then one has to refine this information, selecting only certain material that becomes part of the story. It always means leaving a lot of good stuff back in the ground or at the processing plant. For each Fell described so far, now including Nelson, I've only been able to hang onto a few gems from a much larger body of ore.

None of the Fells I've written about can be characterised in a single word, of course, but I have associated a particular attribute with each one to try to make them more easily identifiable as characters in your mind. I have referred to John's humility, William's gallantry, Christopher's fortitude, Walter's efficiency, Charlie's application and Arthur's acumen and wealth. How to characterise Nelson? Well, there are certain hard-to-find, underground, minerals that are very highly prized today, known as Rare Earths, without which we would not have computer screens or mobile phones. I think of Nelson as a Rare Earth.

I suppose all seven of these Fells had some of each of the qualities I've listed above. I think the strongest common element that unites them as a family in my mind is an indefatigable enthusiasm for life and a great liking for learning that portends for a good education – as a lifetime pursuit.

* * * * *

This ends the penultimate Chapter. The patriarchal – and as we shall see, enigmatic – Alfred, is the only Fell remaining to complete my story. Going back another generation creates more uncertainty; there are many gaps in the information available. Will we be able to figure out what kind of person he was and reach some conclusions about what motivated him to live his life the way he did? That will be for you to decide.[45]

His biographers and two of his children have told us, in effect, that he had no obvious parental family or siblings, whereas we know this to be

[45] In this regard we have the benefit of information shared by Alison Mildon from her decades of research and also an article (*Alfred Fell*) written by Hamish J. Thoms who lives in Canada. He does a lot of genealogical research and is a great grandson of Charles Yates Fell. His article is at https://hamishthoms.wordpress.com/2020/04/01/alfred-fell .

untrue. Arthur wrote that '*on the death of his parents he was brought up by his uncle, Dr Little*.' Charles mused about his father that '*he could have had no brothers and sisters, or they all died out . . nor was he ever troubled with relations rich or poor*.' He also wondered why his father spoke so glowingly of his birthplace, York, and took them on many travels when they were back in England, yet he never took them to York.

We can't ask Alfred, but we can try to work it out.

Chapter 8

Alfred Fell (1817 – 1871) [46]

As a storm raged outside, thirteen young men of the New Zealand Company, together with the ship's Captain, First Mate and Surgeon, are crammed into a small communal cabin called the cuddy on a sailing ship smaller than our Sydney harbour ferryboats, and they are singing lustily. The two wives in the party had retired to their cabins. Leading the singing was 24 year-old Alfred Fell, who had written the song especially for this occasion at the suggestion of his friends who, he said: were '*kind enough to say that it possessed some merit*.' They sang:

'What cared we when the tempests blew, The thunder rolled, the waves ran fast, But like glad spirits we onwards flew, And but smiled at the wildest blast.'

It was Christmas Day in 1841. The ship was a good way south of the West Australian coast heading to pass below Van Diemen's Land towards New Zealand having rounded the Cape of Good Hope and made good use of the favourable winds across the southern Indian Ocean. It was thirteen weeks since they had left the docks at Gravesend in England (September 25) and they were expecting a landing on New Zealand shores some time in February.

[46] Most of the details about Alfred's life recorded here, apart from his own diary, come from many years of research by Alison Mildon and are used with her permission. A more recent genealogy of my part of the Fell family researched by Marie Mason has also been consulted.

On Christmas Eve, Alfred's exuberant spirits had impelled him to climb to the top of the mainmast head with the Surgeon and Mr Patchett to see the sunset, after which he quoted in his diary four lines of classic poetry about '*the hue of heav'n with woolly gold*' and said he gaped, '*as a Yorkshireman would*' at its beauty. For achieving this feat, as was traditional, Alfred found himself duly lashed to a halyard by members of the crew, only to be released on the promise of providing a bottle of rum for the sailors to share.

When Alfred mused in his diary about '*Christmases past*' he referred specifically to '*the last seven years*,' which could have been from the time he went to work with Mr Yates at Cheltenham. He must have felt a long way away from his earlier life, but there is a tone of eager anticipation in everything he wrote and not the slightest sign of regret. He seemed to get on well with the other elite cabin passengers and also showed an interest in what happened amongst the 100 or so ordinary emigrants who travelled in steerage, which was amidships on the lower deck. During a storm one of the emigrants died and Alfred was very annoyed that her husband, a tailor, '*showed not the least feeling . . going about the ship with apparently the most gratified manner*.' Alfred agreed with the talk that they should tie a rope around him and give him a ducking, but the sight of sharks was a sufficient deterrent.

The 15 cabin passengers were all in their twenties except for Mr Otterson who was 44 and Mr Graham who was 31. Mr Sclanders, 25, who was listed as a Merchant, is shown here with Mr Graham and Alfred (nearest in this view) in a drawing[47] by Mr Barnicoat, who was 27 and listed as a Surveyor. Alfred was

[47] This drawing and the model of the ship are in the Museum at Nelson in New Zealand.

the youngest, and the only passenger listed in the ship's paperwork simply as '*Gentleman*.'

The Captain frowned upon any interaction between cabin passengers and the lower decks, saying that it '*lowered the dignity of the ship*.' A few times some of the working-class women and children sang hymns down below and Alfred enjoyed the '*familiar tunes that reminded me of happy days gone by*,' but he also understood that another cabin passenger was almost '*sent to Coventry by all of us*' for fraternising outside their own circle. Crossing class boundaries was not a trivial offence!

Mr Barnicoat and Alfred were co-editors of the ship's weekly newspaper – in fact they wrote most of the articles in it – and the Captain said it was the best of its kind he'd ever seen. In the first issue Alfred noted the good health of all on board, but soon after that the first death occurred in steerage of a four-year-old boy who was buried at sea with due ceremony. There were also a number of births – and only three deaths altogether. The Surgeon's pay was based on the number of live emigrants that landed in New Zealand so he was penalised if anyone died, the more so if they were over 14 years of age.

Despite the apparent tranquility in Mr Barnicoat's drawing, this *Colonist's Voyage to New Zealand*,[48] was certainly not for the faint-hearted! The worst storm of all hit them at the beginning of January, 1842, when they were well south of Australia amongst serious iceberg hazards. After the normal round of '*grog*' at 11pm, Barnicoat and Sclanders came to Alfred's cabin for a drink to see the New Year in, by which time the gale was so strong that everything not battened down rolled around wildly and they were sometimes thrown against the cabin walls. Every bit of the ship's sail had been roped in, but still the top section of the main mast blew away with all its sail and rigging and at one stage '*the carpenter held a hatchet by the mizzen mast ready to cut it free*' if that was needed to stay afloat. Remarkably, within a week it was all repaired and normal sailing speed resumed. This was in fact the third time on the voyage that part of the rigging had been blown

[48] Alfred's diary was later published in London by Sir Arthur Fell in 1926 as *A Colonist's Voyage to New Zealand – Under Sail in the Early Forties*. The secondhand copy that I have was republished by Capper Press in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 1973.

away, the first happening just off the English coast of Cornwall which was when Alfred first experienced being thrown out of his bunk during the night as the little ship was tossed about by the wild seas.

She was the *Lord Auckland*, built of teak, registered at 628 tons and she was 38 metres (125 feet) long and 10 metres (33 feet) across at the widest point.[49] She carried 220 people along with sufficient livestock, food and water to last the entire voyage of five months. Of her human cargo, 155 men and women were in steerage including 50 crew. The 15 cabin passengers had individual quarters around the poop deck, which is the upper level towards the stern of the boat.

Each berth in steerage was just under 2 metres in length and just over half a metre in width. This area was divided into sections for single men, married couples and single women. There was also a hospital area with six bunks. The Captain, senior crew and stewards were more comfortably installed up near the cabins at the stern.

The passenger's cabins were certainly not large, but Alfred's had a writing desk and his bed was almost a metre wide, which he said later was a disadvantage because a narrower bed helps to prevent your body rolling about in heavy seas. Especially in the unbearable heat of the tropics, Alfred's cabin was agreed by all to be much the best because it had a porthole on the windward side. He wrote that, in this climate, you must have a clean shirt every day and '*no one ought to undertake a voyage of this length without at least eight dozen shirts*.'

By far their greatest inconvenience was a lack of fresh water. They took 106,000 litres (95 tons) of fresh water and Alfred wrote that each of them was allowed only 600 ml (1 pint) a day for both washing and drinking, which seems remarkable. I'm sure they had other fluid with their meals. Alfred put a rope on his jug and collected sea water from out of his porthole, which he said made his skin rough. From time to time he had a '*bath*,' which consisted of standing completely naked outside the stern of

[49] The larger of our Sydney Harbour ferries are twice this length with a similar beam.

the ship, holding onto ropes, while a member of the crew threw buckets of sea water over you. He said it was very refreshing!

Their basic routine was to '*Breakfast'* at half after 8 o'clock, have '*Lunch'* (that is biscuit, cheese and '*grog*') at half after 12 and '*Dine'* at half after 3 o'clock, then '*Tea'* at 7 and '*grog*' again later. This was the official day, but it seemed that the evening period was often extended for smoking, drinking and discussion, particularly on Saturday evenings when they usually had special festivities including the singing of *God Save the Queen*. They had very good food: '*hot joints every day and poultry with soups and puddings and pies and as much wine as we want with dinner and port afterwards, but not to overstep the bounds of prudence*.' Thus the need for three stewards for the cuddy, which was a sort of communal dining area and meeting room for the cabin passengers and senior crew.

Each Sunday the Captain read prayers to the passengers in the cuddy and the Surgeon did the same for the steerage people and the crew below, where, at one point, a stray pig interrupted proceedings causing great hilarity. Alfred was very much amused by this (even though it happened on the lower deck). At the same time he was greatly impressed and comforted by the seemly '*order and regularity*' of the church procedures. He wrote elsewhere, though, that he was doubtful about the need for any formal church in these circumstances because he said '*I trust a more earnest and silent religion of the soul*.'

In the evenings the cuddy seemed to function as a sort of gentleman's club. There were only two women amongst the 15 passengers, the wives of Mr Jenkins and Mr Otterson (who had a baby with her). Although they were included in one of the organised debates in a token sort of way they are not otherwise mentioned. The men smoked and drank '*capital*' port after their dinner and organised amongst themselves regular debates and even some plays which the Captain called his '*private theatricals*.'

One play they performed was Mrs Inchbald's comedy, in two acts, *The Wedding Day*, with an all-male cast of six. Alfred played the part of Sir Adair Contest, the only knighted character, the Captain played Lord Rashland, the Surgeon and Mr Patchett had other roles, while the two female characters were played by Mr Thompson and Mr Graham.

The usual evening custom was to drink to absent friends, sweethearts and wives with the Captain in the chair, making speeches, singing songs and drinking to each other's good health. The Captain expressed himself thoroughly satisfied with the ship and its good company and Alfred saw fit to '*bear testimony*' to the Captain's '*uniform gentlemanly conduct*.' He especially approved of the absolute requirement to dress properly for dinner at six bells (3pm) and '*meet at the table in good style*.'

Alfred seemed to revel in the regular meetings of the debating society, which he said brought out '*all our oratorical powers*.' It got under way with Mr Otterson leading on the question: '*Were the Americans justified in throwing off the allegiance of the parent State*?' It was eventually carried that they were – this was a party of colonials, too! In a later debate – '*Was the British Government justified in going to war with China*?' – Alfred spoke in favour of the war, which carried the day on that issue. The two ladies were invited to join one debate, which Alfred chaired – '*Are the mental endowments of the two sexes naturally equal*?' This was decided in the affirmative by a majority of one. Alfred loved the agreeable humour of these debates. Another debate that he led considered whether the consumption of tobacco was a national evil. As a pipe and cigar smoker himself, his opening 15-minute speech proclaimed, of course, that it was not, but there was a majority of one in the end to say that it was indeed an evil habit.

They also had '*discussions*' as well as formal debates. One such was the question of whether '*the education of the working classes is beneficial to the general interests of the community*.' Alfred wrote that '*as a good Tory, I gave my opinion against education*.' He clearly enjoyed his own education, but could not see value in it for the working classes.

When they encountered magnificent birds such as the albatross, they discussed at lunch whether it was justifiable to shoot these merely for amusement when it is impossible to retrieve their bodies after they fall into the sea. Only Mr Barnicoat and Mr Otterson supported Alfred in saying that it was not justified. The rest, who called themselves '*sportsmen*,' said it was important to get practice whenever possible. So Alfred was not a '*sportsman*' in that sense.

Another topic for debate was: '*Will the colonization of New Zealand benefit the Aborigines*?' With Alfred in the chair that evening it was decided by nine votes to four that it would. He found it strange that many of the passengers feared they might be attacked by the natives, which he argued was quite the wrong way to approach it. He advocated '*kindness and confidence*' and also '*openness, candour and boldness*' rather than any kind of force, any use of weapons, or unfriendly behaviour of any sort.

As well as his contribution to the debates there was ample other evidence that Alfred was very widely read and had received the kind of education that was proper for a gentleman in those times. He described watching the doctor trying to give treacle and brimstone to the children as '*a scene from Nicholas Nickleby*,' which had been published a few years before he left England. On another occasion they discussed whether Hamlet was intended by Shakespeare to be truly mad or just feigning madness and they also had a long argument about the genius, or otherwise, of Sir Walter Scott.

Alfred's innermost feelings about the decision he had made, the life he had left behind, and the uncertainty of his future are not so easy to discern from his diary. Early on he wrote of '*a loneliness and a something with regard to the step I have taken I have never felt before*.' Many scenes from his childhood, '*both of happiness and the reverse*,' and every '*well-remembered face*' passed before his mind's eye now and then. Later in the voyage he said how much he cherished all the letters he had kept from '*dear and loved ones*' and he re-read them at times, as '*a recollection (if I needed that, but which I hope I never shall) of those who once loved me*,' but then he immediately cautioned himself firmly: '. . *a truce to this, or I shall be writing sentiment next*.' Heaven forbid – a sentimental Englishman!

But I think there is a sensitive strain to be heard within the mind and soul of this practical, forthright and socially adept young man. He loved to join other passengers and the senior crew singing songs and drinking toasts in the evening. It is interesting to reflect on how important songs and singing together were to their society in those days. Alfred often remained on the deck until 11pm or later enjoying the beautiful night sky. Sometimes,

working late on the newspaper, he joined the Surgeon on the poop after midnight for a cigar and a glass or two, before retiring to his bunk.

The amount of space to exercise one's body on board the ship seems so woefully inadequate that one wonders that he mentioned it only once in the five months of the voyage. The only walking he could do was up and down the poop deck, which was about 12 metres (40 feet) long.

On the final weekend of their journey they passed by the French settlement at Port Akaroa on the eastern side of the New Zealand South Island, but could not quite find their way into Cook Strait until a small whale boat came by and showed them the way. They saw green leaves for the first time in five months and were '*highly amused by the strange appearance*' of some local '*natives*' (Maori) before they finally went ashore in the Bay about a mile from the town of Wellington.

Ten days later (due to the fact that their crew ran away in Wellington), they tried to get across Cook Strait to Nelson, but unfavourable winds forced them to drop anchor in a sheltered cove, where Alfred and a few others took a small boat ashore to explore the countryside. They found a Wesleyan missionary who had built a little English garden in the midst of the wild bushland. It was Sunday and Alfred suddenly felt a tremendous yearning for the home he had left behind. His mind filled with vivid memories of how much he had enjoyed Sundays in places that were now nearly 30,000 km (over 18000 miles) away from here and so very different in every way from this '*strange wild country*.' He said he was '*sickened at the thought*.'

This was told in a letter he wrote three weeks after arriving at Nelson. Most of the letter, though, is about his excitement and pleasure at what he had found. '*The situation is most beautiful, at the bottom of a noble bay forty miles wide at the entrance, skirted all round . . with high hills of an alpine aspect . . the summits of the back ones capped with snow*.'

* * * * *

I've devoted seven pages to Alfred's journey on the ship because I think this diary is the most valuable resource we have for getting to know the kind of person he was, his beliefs and attitudes and habits of living. I will

describe what we know about his life before and after this voyage against the background of the person he seems to be, to me, from this diary – even though it is only a snapshot of one small part of his life. This is just my interpretation, of course, which has been evolving during the 10 years it has taken me to write this book. At first I had not accessed Alison Mildon's decades of research and was woefully ignorant; I assumed that Alfred was highly privileged in every way from birth. More recently I've also had the article, *Alfred Fell*, by Hamish Thoms that I referenced at the end of the last Chapter as further food for thought.

Writing this diary, at only 24 years of age, Alfred seems very confident and sure of himself, clearly possessing a good education, as evidenced by the depth and breadth of his reading and his ability to debate and discuss a range of issues. His skill at writing prose and songs seems to me to be above average, even amongst educated people, and he enjoys that. There are only a few fleeting moments in which the enormity of his undertaking seems to ruffle his determination to succeed. We can only guess what a mental and emotional effort it had been to get him to this position in his life. That it requires a fair amount of courage to go to the other side of the world to become a colonist in a strange new land is never mentioned.

He is very conscious of his own status and class, and unapologetic about that, but at the same time seems to notice what is happening amongst less privileged people as if he is remembering simpler times himself – familiar hymns and such. He muses that his earlier life had not always been easy and seems to focus his gratitude on the last seven years.

Hamish Thoms calls him an '*intelligent and industrious individual*' with a good '*command of the written word*' and also a '*perceptive individual*' with a '*keen sense of the human condition even at an early age*.' He thought Alfred had a '*bias toward class distinctions*' and wondered if there was '*a touch of arrogance and pretension*' in that. He also noted Alfred's '*sense of morality*' and '*strong principles from an early age*,' which fits with son, Charles' description of his '*perfect uprightness of character*.' I would add that Alfred was very inclined to be judgmental.

The *Lord Auckland* was just one of many ships taking colonists to New Zealand; in fact she was a last-minute replacement for another ship that was destroyed by fire just before the final loading. Alfred was clearly a

leader amongst its elite cabin passengers. He had privileged information that enabled him to come on board a little later than others had done. He was the youngest, but he had the best cabin. On the voyage his leading role speaks for itself. He was also wealthy enough to have with him some building materials and other goods (including liquor and tobacco), ready to begin profitable trading immediately he reached New Zealand.

As well as being very successful in his new life, Alfred became a devoted father to eight children, yet he never told them about his own family. They were led to believe that he was orphaned at a young age. He proudly used his own success to benefit his children, yet was never honest with them about where he came from. This is one of the mysteries I mentioned at the start of the book that I am leaving for you to ponder.

Hamish saw Alfred as '*a restless soul . . .*' and also *'. . a driven man, motivated by opportunity and the need to push himself constantly*.' He added that Alfred was certainly '*. . not an open book . . an unknown quantity, taciturn even to his own children*.'

But his immediate family was very proud of the Alfred they knew. When Arthur Fell published the book, copies were given to his son with the words: '*Your grandfather's diary to hand on to your eldest son and on to his*.' A copy was also sent to the highest office as evidenced by this note from 10 Downing Street, signed by Stanley Baldwin: '*My dear Fell, I shall read your father's diary with keen interest and I thank you for the kind thought which prompted you to send it*.'

I understand that Alfred's transactions regarding the voyage were made in guineas (a coin no longer minted after 1817, though it remained in circulation). A guinea was 21 shillings (or 1 pound 1 shilling) and is referred to as a 'gentleman's coin,' not used by tradesmen or shopkeepers, for example.

He thought himself to be – and was deemed to be – a Gentleman. But based on family history records, this is surprising – to say the least.

When I began writing this book, 10 years ago, its title – *The Luck of the Fells* – came from my cousin, John, and referred then to wartime events.

Now I think it is more applicable to Alfred than to any of us. He was, perhaps, the luckiest of us all – or should we say, the most enterprising?

* * * * *

Alfred's father, George Fell, was born in Kingston-Upon-Hull, in Yorkshire on the 26th of May, 1791. He lived for most of his working life in York and was registered as a China Dealer in Thursday Market, at least from 1822 to 1841. After that I understand he became partly incapacitated (by a stroke, perhaps) and moved to Bradford where he was an auctioneer's clerk until he died on the 13th of February, 1851, at the age of 59. George's father had been Charles Fell, also born in Hull in 1769 and his father had been John Fell, born in Hull in 1740.

Alfred himself was born in York on the 27th of July, 1817. It was towards the end of the Georgian era in British history. King George III had lost his mind, so much of this time was known as the Regency period because a Prince Regent stood in for the King. The long reign of Queen Victoria began in 1837. It was the time of colonial expansion of the British Empire.

It was also a time of enormous social upheaval at home stemming from the fact that millions of workers still lived in circumstances that, today, we would regard as appalling; slavery was not abolished until 1833. It was only a serious disease epidemic in 1801 that triggered the first government intervention to limit the work hours for children back to 12 hours a day including a meal and a rest period; in factories they started work at 6am and finished at 8pm. Not until 1833 did workers get some further small concessions. Millions of English men and women lived in dreadful slums with no sanitation, no water supply, no paved streets, no schools and without much law and order as we know it today.

Independent tradespeople were somewhat better off, but they were now being replaced by mechanised production lines as the industrial revolution gathered pace. Their protests were many, but always in vain. The Luddites who destroyed machinery in factories and the spinners and weavers who marched on London in protest were hanged. Later there were much larger revolts including an attempt to storm the Tower of London which earned its perpetrators a convict passage to Australia.

Living conditions, even for the quite well off, were still primitive by our standards today. Wax candles were not yet common, so lamps made from rushes dipped in fat and tallow candles provided lighting. Peat or coal was used for heating as wood became scarce. Piped water came along well after Alfred's early life and electricity much later again. However, gas lighting in the streets began in London in 1807.

Travel of any distance was mainly by a stagecoach, which also carried the mail. In London when Alfred was boarding the ship he would have travelled by horse-drawn omnibus. These continued in abundance well after the first rail travel began in the 1830s. The first trans-Atlantic crossings by steamships also occurred in the 1830s, but most sea travel was still by sailboat for many years.

What determined your living conditions was your social class and at that time there were said to be seven separate classes (plus the military).[50] The highest was for royals and peers above baronet, while the second class included knights and country squires. There were some 3,000 of the first and 230,000 of the second. The third social rank included merchants of a fairly large scale and bankers and also the more important clergy and doctors (another 100,000), while the fourth included lawyers, teachers, ship owners, lesser merchants, shopkeepers, builders and mechanics (well over a million). The fifth class was for innkeepers, publicans and lesser shopkeepers (3 million), the sixth for craftsmen and agricultural workers (9 million), and the seventh for paupers and vagrants including many criminals (many millions more).

You did not choose your class, of course; you were born into it. So where was Alfred Fell situated at the time of his birth? He was the third child and second son in a family of 11 children. His father George's occupation as an independent China Dealer would seem to place him in the fourth rank of lesser merchants at best. China merchants were quite common in Hull where his parents had lived because it was a principal shipping connection with the potteries of Europe. For some this was quite a good source of income, but the information we have about George's business

[50] *A Writer's Guide to Everyday life in Regency and Victorian England* by Kristine Hughes (Writer's Digest Books, 1998).

suggests that he was only moderately successful. Alfred's mother, Henrietta Mitchell was from Barmby, a very poor town in Yorkshire. His older brother, Charles, spent his life as a hairdresser in York. His seven sisters all married tradespeople in other Yorkshire towns. So it appears to be a family engaged in small business – certainly preferable to working in a factory, but not wealthy enough to enjoy the lifestyle of the bankers, doctors, senior clergy or larger merchants in the class above them.

The British had lost the American Revolution, but won the crucial Napoleonic wars (with the Battle of Waterloo) during Alfred's teenage years. The end of this war precipitated severe economic depression and political uncertainty in Britain with social upheaval and turmoil reaching unprecedented heights. It was certainly not a great place to be living if you did not have independent means. As the second son of a small merchant's large family in York, Alfred would seem to be in an unlikely position to have independent means.

When we read about this time in history it is mostly about the 'landed gentry' from the novels of Jane Austen (1775-1817). The most common way of becoming a Gentleman was to have inherited a large estate (buildings and land). A little later it was Charles Dickens (1812-1870) who chronicled the lives of a range of English characters so beautifully.

The fact was that education, manners and money were required to be a Gentleman. A huge proportion of the population in England was totally unschooled and could barely read; printed material was far too expensive for most people to buy. It was a sure mark of wealth to own a personal library. Yet Alfred had an extensive knowledge of classical literature, contemporary writers and current affairs by the time he was 24.

Hark back to Arthur's Foreword about Alfred that '*on the death of his parents he was brought up by his uncle, Dr Little, of Howden, Yorkshire, the author of Nesbitt's Mensuration, a standard work among surveyors*.' The first part of this is clearly incorrect because Alfred's father actually died in 1851 by which time Alfred was 34 and had been in New Zealand for nine years. His mother was still alive when he returned from New Zealand and she outlived him by three years. We can only assume that the second part of

Arthur's statement must have been a vitally important factor in Alfred's life.

William Little (1784-1861) was indeed Alfred's uncle by marriage having married Henrietta Mitchell's sister, Elizabeth. He is referred to as an Officer of Excise in the book Arthur mentioned. Why he was titled 'Dr' is unknown. He also went into the china business and bought shares in the New Zealand Company that was to implement the colonisation of New Zealand. He would have been 57 by the time Alfred sailed to New Zealand. Howden is between York and Hull and, nowadays, it is the most affluent part of Yorkshire; even around 1800 it had some very grand houses. Elizabeth Little was living there in 1841 and when she died in 1869, Alfred Fell was the executor of her estate.

Apart from that, you will have to guess how Alfred was transformed into a Gentleman. Whatever happened, he must have had an incredible appetite for education and getting ahead in life. He must also have had shrewd guidance and a very open mind to even think of travelling to the other side of the world to realise his potential. And financial backing.

He does not mention his parents or family anywhere in his diary. The end of his father's business, his illness and move to Bradford, occurred in the last year or two before Alfred left for New Zealand. By the time his father died in 1851 Alfred was married with three sons and well-established in a faraway land. Soon after that, Alfred's youngest brother, George, died at the age of 15, possibly from fibres inhaled in his work as a 'stuff packer,' but it seems Alfred would not have known about that. However, there is evidence that, after he returned to England, he visited both his Aunt Elizabeth and his mother in Bradford and then paid her a regular stipend.

We know that Alfred moved to Cheltenham, in Gloucestershire, to work with a china dealer called Yates and I am speculating that he would have been about 17 years of age. The name of his employer was significant enough for him to name his first son, Charles Yates Fell. Charles wrote later that Yates was a man of '*considerable repute and fame*' and that his father '*learned bookkeeping and business skills' while there to add to his 'shrewd Yorkshire mind*.'

No story of a young man's life would be complete without a love interest and it was a young lady in Cheltenham who, I would suggest, has won Alfred's heart. While working there Alfred met both his future business partner, Henry Seymour, and his future wife, Fanny. Subsequent events show that she was both a leader and an enthusiast like him. My idea of what might have happened is just poetic license, but it is nice for the story.

Henry Seymour was 20 years older than Alfred and was the lessee of the Pittville Pump Room, a major spa and mineral springs in England at that time. He was also involved in the affairs of the New Zealand Company, which was set up by the government for the purpose of colonizing this distant land as soon as possible, before other European countries could do so. Its headquarters were in Halifax where William Little (also a shareholder in the Company) was registered as a china dealer at that time.

When Alfred eventually sent his handwritten diary to England, it was addressed to his '*uncle in Halifax*' – obviously William Little – with further instructions to send it to '*friends in Bradford*' and then to York by post from where *Charles* (presumably his brother) *must send it by post to Mr Yates at Cheltenham*. A few other names were mentioned and then: '*afterwards send it back to my uncle in Halifax*.'

I'm sure you will appreciate by now the scope and depth of Alison Mildon's research that I am using to create this story. At this point there are gaps that she feels would need to be filled to be more certain about what really happened. Henry Seymour's background is sketchy and, while others have assumed that Fanny was his daughter, it seems we can't be absolutely sure of that. Fanny sailed to New Zealand shortly after Alfred on a different ship with Henry and Elizabeth Seymour. Alfred eagerly anticipated the arrival of '*Mr S. and family*' with whom he expected to be living. Eighteen months later, when Alfred's house had been built, he and Fanny Seymour were married, probably in a simpler ceremony, with less paperwork, than might have been possible back in England. That is purely speculation.

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Immediately after the *Lord Auckland* landed in Nelson, his fellow passengers, Barnicoat and Thompson, agreed to assist with the construction of Alfred's first house in return for his storage of their belongings while they were looking around for their own land. It was recorded later that Fell, Otterson and Sclanders brought the small colony much needed capital and that Alfred's strong-mindedness convinced the others to settle together at first for security on the flat land midway between the port and the town. It was here he established his trading facilities, which went into operation immediately because of the extra goods he had brought with him on the ship. A little later he built the first brick house in Nelson and called it *Wakatu Lodge* (Wakatu being the Maori name for Nelson).

Alfred was a happy man as this sketch (again by Barnicoat) suggests. The

town, he wrote, is '*on a perfect level, except, in the centre, a small hill or acropolis . . devoted to public purposes and called Trafalgar Square; one part of the town is a grove of trees – where the genius of romance may fix her bower – by this grove of trees runs a never-wearied stream of fresh water . .*' Alfred's poetic nature seems to rest comfortably alongside his practical, adventurous attitude and his obvious ambition. Eventually he was to build a fine house that he called *Sunnyside* on the high side of the town close to that '*never-wearied stream.*'[51] The house has been extended since then and is now a boutique lodge called *Warwick House* – as I said before, *one of New Zealand's oldest and most architecturally revered colonial houses.*[52]

The '*genius of romance*' was indeed abroad in Nelson because Alfred was soon married. He and Fanny spent the rest of his life together and she

[51] My wife and I enjoyed walking beside this stream and in Trafalgar Square in 2012 when we stayed there in what had been *Sunnyside.*

[52] There is a very informative article written by Richard Mildon (*A Story of Sunnyside/Warwick House and its Early Occupants*) available online. www.theprow.org.nz/yourstory/sunnyside-and-the-fells

bore him eight children of whom they were both immensely proud. By all reports it was a very successful marriage. On the 1862 anniversary of their wedding Alfred wrote that his 19 years with Fanny had been '*as happy a period of wedded life as ever fell to the lot of a man. .*'

He felt very comfortable amongst the people of Nelson, noting that, here '*there are but two classes of people – ourselves and the labouring class. Distinctions of rank I never hear of, or false notions of pride. We go into each other's houses and are hail fellows well met. There are no gentlemen (although some can boast of gentlemanly blood), but all are workers.*' He seemed to have found the social standing that he believed to be appropriate for himself; perhaps this could be achieved more easily in the colony than might have been possible back home.

Already on the 29th of April, 1842, just 22 days after arriving in New Zealand, Alfred could write: '*I am now fully established as a wholesale merchant. I buy a great many goods off the ships and sell them again to advantage. . My success will, I am sure, give you as much satisfaction as I can possibly have in relating it, and I need scarcely again assure you of my gratified feelings for your many kindnesses.*'

He obviously appreciated people back in England, but at the same time, he was a very assured 24-year old man in his own right. Letters came and went only according to the passage of ships between New Zealand and England. He was excited every time a ship arrived, expecting he said '*to hear from some of my friends*' – at that stage, had not heard from any '*except one letter from Yorkshire.*' He certainly had friends other than in Yorkshire, but alas, we know so little about his immediate connections that we don't even know to whom he was writing that letter.

The society in which he and his family lived was very much of his own making. It was his wife, Fanny, who took care of the children's home schooling and some educated clergy who were friends of the family provided extra tuition in subjects as diverse as singing, painting and French. Charlie, for example, could read well at the age of six. In his own memoirs he says that his father was '*. . a great reader . . loved poetry . . had a nice tenor voice and sang . . sentimental songs.*' He was '*devotedly fond of my Mother and of his eight children.*' I wonder how Alfred would have compared this family to the circumstances in which he was brought up himself, of which we know nothing at all.

His relationship with others in the colony would have been a continuation of his role on the ship coming out, where he was clearly a leader and pacesetter, while able to co-exist amicably with others of whom he approved. He functioned well within a society where he called the shots.

Regarding the Maori people, who Alfred said were very friendly, he was both perplexed and utterly condescending. He said '*they are too proud to work . . they walk stately along, perfectly naked . .' and 'look ridiculous in any European clothes*.' Then he added that he was grateful for the food they brought, saying that '*at first we might have starved without them*.' The huge gulf in understanding between those whose land has been colonized and the colonists themselves is a sad reflection on those times.

Colonisation has two parts to it, both very advantageous for the colonists. One is the acquisition and management of land, which is where Henry Seymour probably came to the fore. Alfred's son, Charles, wrote that Henry was '. . *a draftsman . . and accountant . . and knew all about land and land dealing*.' Those skills were required for managing the affairs of NZ Company shareholders who were still back in England, but had been given allocations for the purchase of land.

The other is the mercantile aspect, in which Alfred Fell was a master – he was a trader, *par excellence*. Having quite a monopoly on the goods that were needed for the colony – and so eagerly supplied by the wishes of the British government – was a very favourable position to be in. Mind you, he was certainly not backward in the business of acquiring land either.

Although Henry was 20 years older, Alfred was clearly the senior partner in the business called Fell and Seymour that flourished from 1843 to 1857. Its influence spread all over the north-east region of the South Island of New Zealand including the early layout of the town of Blenheim (with its Seymour Square). I understand that Alfred named some of the streets after his wife and children.

The ownership of land at Blenheim, together with a large tract of land known as Blind River (over 5000 acres) and his holdings around Nelson provided a substantial part of Alfred's income while he was there, and of his wealth when he sold up and returned to England in 1859.

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He had become what we would call today a multi-millionaire. In his late forties and early fifties – the last decade of his life – he might have felt as

assured and statesmanlike as any wealthy London gentleman with six sons and two daughters could be. He certainly looked the part. He was of medium height and build (about five feet eight inches or 173 centimetres tall) with a rather square face and jaw, what is now called the '*Fell nose*,' shaggy grey hair and a full beard that was partly grey in older age. He still sang occasionally and he still loved reciting poetry.

However, it seems that Alfred was never entirely comfortable during the years that followed his return from New Zealand. His children's success with education would have been very gratifying, but when his wife, Fanny, suggested that they move to live in France, he was not entirely happy with the school in London and somewhat restless. He had to return to New Zealand at that time because his agent over there had died and he was away for nine months. Living at Avranches was not really to his liking and he kept company only with English-speaking families who lived there.

Though he had been socially adept within the world he had created since first leaving England, he was now quite averse towards the society that existed in his country of birth. He described it in a letter as '*very tedious*.' Hamish Thoms wrote that Alfred had '*never been prone to social mixing, leaving that . . to his wife and Henry Seymour*,' and also that '*he was, I believe, antisocial at times, and dependent on his own self-counsel for inspiration and direction*.'

I believe Alfred tried to arrange for a family crest and coat of arms, that could be engraved on silverware and imprinted on bookplates, to be adopted as if it belonged to his family. Apparently that was fashionable and not uncommon during Victorian times and even today such things are advertised for sale on the Internet. I don't think that went very far.

As previously mentioned, Alfred seems to have been in contact with his aunt, Elizabeth Little, and with his own mother in Bradford, where he arranged to pay her a stipend for the rest of her life. I presume this was done without the knowledge of his wife and children. He was in a difficult position in that he seemed determined to conceal from them any trace of his own antecedents or life experience as a young man. They had heard of his aunt and late uncle, William Little, but could not have had any idea of how 'lucky' it probably was that they had been there.

I feel for Alfred in that his own early life might not have been easy; he was certainly not born with a 'silver spoon in his mouth' from the start. I think that whatever difficulties he experienced gave him '*a keen sense of the human condition*' as Hamish Thoms puts it, and both a belief that you must make for yourself the best life you can, and also a desire to share this with your loved ones, on your own terms.

After a while he settled, with his family, in the large stucco house called *Hillside* at Crooms Hill, Greenwich, in Kent. Perhaps there did not seem to be a lot more he could achieve. Alfred died at *Hillside* on November the 2nd 1871 and is buried at the church of St Mary the Virgin, Kempsey, in Worcestershire. He had been ill for some time before that and was nursed at home by Fanny, who, in many ways, was the unsung hero in his life story. He was only 54.

There is no doubt that Alfred was '*a devoted family man and his love and concern for his wife and children was boundless*,' as Hamish Thoms has written. Son, Charles, recalled the night of the 1848 Marlborough earthquake when his father '*rushed out of the brick cottage carrying me under one arm and my brother Harry under the other, in our nightgowns . .*' to the safety of the garden shed. I mentioned previously the boys' recollection of their father's gravity and tears as he sat them down for a talk after their mother had nearly died with pneumonia around the time that Walter was born.

Being so devoted to his children, he was no doubt very proud to have launched them into the British middle-class society that he felt was fitting for them. At the same time he chose not to be honest with them and he effectively disowned his family of origin? I feel very wary of trying to put myself in another person's shoes when we are separated in time by two centuries.

If Alfred hadn't 'got lucky' in the way that he did, the lives of all the rest of us might have been different. Each Fell person in this book could be said to have enjoyed a comfortable place within our society in which to indulge our 'indefatigable enthusiasm for life' and our 'great liking for learning.'

Hamish Thoms described Alfred as '*an eternal optimist, never dwelling on misfortune for very long . . an enigmatic individual . . a restless soul, highly introspective and relentless in the pursuit of goals just beyond his reach*.' That he strived hard for what he believed in is abundantly clear.

So I also find myself thinking of him as our earliest known 'life enthusiast' and 'eager learner' in a long line of people called Fell.

That is how he launched the legend of '*The Luck of the Fells*.'


Alfred Tell

Further Information

My email address is lloydfell77@gmail.com. My website, where a copy of this book can be obtained as a free download, is www.biosong.org. That is also the place to find my earlier book, *The Twin Pines Story*, that is about **Christopher Fell** as he established our family farm in Australia.

Christopher James Richmond Fell, my eldest son, is another contact with whom to follow up any of the information in this book. He can be reached at chrisjamesfell@gmail.com.

Alison Mildon, who is a great granddaughter of **Geordie Fell**, has accumulated a vast amount of information about this family. She can be contacted at allymiro@gmail.com. One of her longer unpublished articles is called *A Glimpse into the Life and Leavings of Alfred Fell*.

Hamish Thoms has written two, very professional, published articles: one concerning his great grandfather, **Charles Fell**, and the other concerning his great great grandfather, **Alfred Fell**. They are available at:

https://hamishthoms.wordpress.com/2020/05/05/charles-yates-fell
https://hamishthoms.wordpress.com/2020/04/01/alfred-fell

Jamie Vans, whom you can contact at mailjamievans@gmail.com, is working on a large body of correspondence from the time that his great grandfather, **Nelson Fell**, was in Kazakhstan with his great uncle, **Frank Vans Agnew**. A likely title is *Fells, Kazakhs, Copper and Vans Agnew*. His website is at https://genealogy.jvans.co.uk/intro.html.

Richard Cobbold, a great grandson of **Arthur Fell**, has much more information himself, as well as being part of the very impressive Cobbold Family History Trust, which is at https://www.cobboldfht.com.

Peter Hector (with the assistance of Belinda Hector and David Hector) – all descendants of **Walter and Margaret Fell** – produced a very well-illustrated booklet called *MAHINA – From a Yacht to a House to the Name for a Bay* for the Eastbourne Historical Society in 2006.

Joscelyn Godwin, a great grandson of **Arthur Fell**, has a treasure trove of interesting material, much of it archived in the library at Colgate University in Hamilton, New York, where he is a Professor of Music (Emeritus). There is also his compilation of his parents' papers: *The Starlight Years: Love and War at Kelmscott Manor, 1940-1948* (Stanbridge: Dovecote Press, 2015).

William Varley Fell has a large amount of additional information regarding the lives of his father, **John Fell**, and his grandfather, **William Fell**. I expect that some of this will be published in due course.

Richard Votapka, the Fellsmere historian and honorary family member, has written many articles for magazines and newspapers and official historical records, including the role of **Nelson Fell** in Florida history.

I believe that a much broader bibliographic database of writings, photographs, etc., is to be put together in due course.