ROBERT OLD

Robert Old was the second oldest son and third child of Richard and Jane Old. He was christened on the 1st January, 1820 in [St Mawgan](http://www.famnet.org.nz/docs_pages_NoReg/DocsGeneral.aspx?DOCid=9BF87871-BF1F-4DB9-B695-76B9869C169F) on Pydar, Cornwall. In 1843 he was 22 years of age when he arrived in New Plymouth and was employed clearing the bush from the land.

1. [**Slide: NP early bush clearing**](http://www.famnet.org.nz/docs_pages_NoReg/DocsGeneral.aspx?DOCid=2405F153-A8D3-4AF5-9FC0-262C58BE5C7E)

In 1841 the settlement of New Plymouth was described as "a fine country with a large quantity of flat land, but every part is covered with vegetation, fern, scrub and forest. The fern, on good land, is generally from four to six feet high."

Another observer wrote that "the forest was a tangled mass of luxuriant vegetation" and presented a formidable appearance to the English axeman.

This Water colour shows three settlers felling timber in 1857, with Mt Taranaki in the background.

Fourteen years after Robert had begun clearing bush, there was still plenty to be felled.

1. **[Slide:Te Henui Chapel](http://www.famnet.org.nz/docs_pages_NoReg/DocsGeneral.aspx?DOCid=B309B481-857A-4E00-9D2D-CC6642A0A427)**

On the 8th April, 1845, the Rev William Bolland officiated at the marriage of Robert Old and Maria Williams Wills in the Te Henui Chapel, New Plymouth. Maria was born in Devon in 1828, and had arrived on the ship 'Timandra' in February 1842 with her parents and siblings. Maria's sister Betsy married Robert's brother James Old.

Holy Trinity Church was first opened in 1845 and as such was the first established Anglican Church in Taranaki. Here’s an article from the Weekly Graphic, May 26, 1909.

“THE MOTHER CHURCH OF TARANAKi.

About one mile to the south of New Plymouth, just off the high road, prettily situated in a narrow lane leading down to the sea, stands the Church of the Holy Trinity, Te Henui, the Mother Church of Taranaki, founded by Bishop Selwyn in the year 1845. The position of the church seems a strange one, standing somewhat isolated in this narrow track, but at one time it was the centre of the early settlement of Weekstown or Te Henui, standing in the midst of a cluster of cottages built by the early settlers.

Shortly after the founding of the New Plymouth settlement, Dr. Weeks bought a large section of land, just across the Te Henui river. This he cut up into small sections or allotments, and sold or let them to some of the New Plymouth settlers. About 60 families moved out to this new settlement. When Bishop Selwyn visited Taranaki for the first time he went out to this settlement, and at once made arrangements for the building of a small church at his own cost.

The church was a simple little structure, built of untrimmed slabs of wood, and thatched with fern stalk. It has been considerably altered in appearance, but the timber of the old structure is in the present building, and the low nave and sanctuary give us a true idea of the original building. The transepts were a much later addition.

The Taranaki War caused the surroundings of the church to be much altered. The churchyard was overrun, and it is impossible now to trace where the dead are laid to rest. Part of the settlement was burned, and there is only one house standing of the original settlement. This until quite recently was occupied by a Mr. Walter Bailey who did splendid work in the war as a scout. The church itself was untouched.”

Coincidentally: Mr Walter Bailey was the son of Jane Old and the Great-Great-Grandfather of George Hawkins who have us the story of Jane Old and Henry Bailey.

1. [**Slide: Map showing Bell Block**](http://www.famnet.org.nz/docs_pages_NoReg/DocsGeneral.aspx?DOCid=2A47033A-6603-4FC0-A44D-6AA0C0BEBC15)

Robert & Maria first lived at Te Henui, then by 1845 the couple moved to Bell Block.

In a 31.1.1846 list of Houses, Cottages and Whares in the settlement of New Plymouth, Robert is listed as owning and occupying a Cottage. Robert and Maria had six children, all born in New Plymouth.

1. [**Bell Block stockade**](http://www.famnet.org.nz/docs_pages_NoReg/DocsGeneral.aspx?DOCid=08AC53FF-C46D-4FAF-9372-8B8ABF933FDE)

Robert was a bullock driver in the artillery during the Taranaki Wars. He would not carry a rifle and some of his Maori friends later told him that this was why he hadn't been shot. He had a lot of time for the Maori, spoke their language fluently, and mixed freely with them. This may have been why their property was not burned as others were around them.

1. [**Slide: Cob house where Elizabeth married James Drummond**](http://www.famnet.org.nz/docs_pages_NoReg/DocsGeneral.aspx?DOCid=EB23957A-A239-4312-AC5E-8AA17B1E87B1)

Maria and the children were evacuated to Nelson during the Taranaki Wars, living in that district until around 1864. Elizabeth Old was sixteen when she arrived in Nelson with her mother Maria, and she immediately found work at Spring Grove. Three years later she married James Drummond in the cob house pictured, which is still standing today. Elizabeth Old and James Drummond were my Great-Great-Grandparents.

In the 1855 – 56 Jurors’ List Robert is listed as a Farmer at Bell Block

In the 1858 - 61 Jurors’ Lists he is listed as a Labourer

Maria and the rest of the family later returned to New Plymouth in 1864.

1. [**Slide: Newspaper report on Bull goring incident**](http://www.famnet.org.nz/docs_pages_NoReg/DocsGeneral.aspx?DOCid=8BFC70D5-3C19-4795-8358-C1BF99A605BA)

From the Taranaki News on 18 Oct 1864: “This morning a sad accident occurred. A bullock that was being landed from the Wanganui Steamer tossed and horned an old Settler, Robert Old, injuring him so severely as to cause his life to be despaired of.”

**8.** [**Slide: Photo of Ships Inn**](http://www.famnet.org.nz/docs_pages_NoReg/DocsGeneral.aspx?DOCid=57866CE6-657B-4DC8-A3ED-830EB3A2A656)

From a New Plymouth Newspaper Report on 23 Jun 1865 entitled “Minor fight at the Ships Inn”:

On Friday evening last, 23rd instance, Robert Old came into the bar. He requested a half a pint of beer. He then said in a laughing joking manner, he would wrestle any man in the bar for fun.”

It appears he had a minor tussle with someone, which ruptured his intestines, and he died two days later on 25 June 1865.

The doctor who did a post-mortem examination reported there were no external marks on the body, but further examination revealed that a portion of the gut was ruptured and had burst.

He reported that goring by the ox eight months earlier resulted in the horn penetrating the belly about 4 inches. He had recovered after being in extreme danger for some time, however this part had been left very weak and ill supported. In the absence of any external marks of violence the Dr believed a falling forward had caused the rupture of the bowel in this instance.

1. [**Argus Fund**](http://www.famnet.org.nz/docs_pages_NoReg/DocsGeneral.aspx?DOCid=FD19926D-31BD-410C-854C-F2347BD2E6F4)

A public meeting was held in Melbourne on 7 Sept 1860, which was reported in the local newspaper.

The meeting had been called to collect subscriptions in aid of the sufferers through the rebellion of the natives of New Zealand.

Councillor King moved the first resolution, as follows:

“That in the opinion of this meeting, the privations now being endured by the volunteers, militia and their families, and the destitution of other colonists in New Plymouth, caused by the rebellion of the Maoris in that province, loudly call for prompt sympathy and aid from the inhabitants of Hotham.”

He did not think it was necessary to make a speech, as all would agree with the resolution.

Mr Watts seconded the motion, which was agreed unanimously.”

Thus the Argus Fund was established, to which several members of the Old Family made claims which were handled by Mr W. HALSE, a New Plymouth Solicitor. These were sent to Victoria, and payments made to claimants through the NZ solicitor.

Because Robert left Maria in poor circumstances, in 1867 she claimed help from the Melbourne Argus Relief Fund.

She stated that her husband was called up for military duty and could not protect their farm. She had lost 3 cattle and one foal, value £38. Subsequently her husband Robert OLD was on military duty at the landing place at the town of New Plymouth on 8 Oct 1864 when he was gored by a bullock landed from a steamer, and died on 25 June 1865, leaving 5 children unprovided for. She had done occasional day work to feed her children.

She was granted £38 on the grounds that she had lost her husband and had to sell her property.

1. [**Photo of Robert Old**](http://www.famnet.org.nz/docs_pages_NoReg/DocsGeneral.aspx?DOCid=1B89D6F3-36EA-4AAE-AE2A-B948D311D55C)

Robert was buried at Te Henui, location unknown.

On 2 September 1870 Maria was remarried to John Jasper Wilson, an Irish Storekeeper in Adelaide, South Australia.

In 1887 Maria and John Wilson were back in Taranaki, having been appointed to the charge of Patea Hospital. John’s occupation is recorded thereafter as Hospital Steward.

On 4th September 1894 Maria died of a spinal injury at Hawera, aged 68. She is buried at Te Henui Cemetery, location unknown.