

**Introduction to the articles by Helen Leach and Brent George:
'Uncertain Boundaries in a Canterbury Rural Section of the 1850s'; and
'Pre-emptive Rights and Wrongs'**

For many years, descendants of John Pavitt celebrated his life and that of his family at both the Akaroa Cemetery and the picturesque cottage in Robinson's Bay that we have always known as the Pavitt Cottage. Local understanding of its history in both Robinson's Bay and Akaroa never gave us reason to doubt its origins. As well as reading and re-reading Gordon Ogilvie's books on Banks Peninsula, we relied especially on Jessie Mould's personal knowledge and research, set out in her 1991 book *The Old Water Wheel*. We imagined the Pavitt family in residence beside the mill and wondered how they all fitted in. But were our pictures of the past securely underpinned by historical facts?

Until 2007 we knew that the cottage had been occupied by numerous families and that in terms of length of tenure there was just as good a reason to call it the Williams Cottage. However we were satisfied that it had been built by the Pavitts, a belief confirmed by Orville Williams whom we visited while he was still living in the cottage. Then Christchurch resident Jack Tregear revealed that in the course of researching his ancestor Thomas Jackson Hughes, he had discovered that the cottage was built on a block of land whose first owner was Tom's son Richard Jackson Hughes. Furthermore Tom's daughter Mary Ann, when interviewed at the age of 91, said that her father had built the cottage and the mill on Sawmill Road.

It was time for the Pavitt descendants to research their own history in as much depth as Jack Tregear was examining his. We needed to establish a firm chronology of the Pavitt's activities in Robinson's Bay, to understand the history of their land title and that of the surrounding blocks, to determine where they built their original homestead, and after its destruction by fire in 1856, the three dwellings that replaced it. It was also important to gain enough knowledge of the conditions in which the Pavitts conducted their business in the 1850s and early 1860s, to make sense of their transactions and decision to pull out of timber milling before the trees in Robinson's Bay had been cut out.

The first phase of our research saw Brent George (who married John Pavitt's great-great-great granddaughter Jacqui Browne) investigate the history of the land titles owned by the Pavitts and the Hughes in Robinson's Bay, a task complicated by the issuing of new titles in the 1890s. Brent, a registered surveyor, confirmed that the Pavitt Cottage had indeed been built outside the Pavitt's block. Then Mary Browne and Helen Leach (whose great-grandmother was John Pavitt's youngest daughter Elizabeth Ellen) prepared an initial response to Jack Tregear's interpretations of the documents he had found in the Christchurch Regional Office of Archives New Zealand. This was published in the *Pavitt Cottage Press* in May 2008. Our overall conclusion was that there was no definite evidence of the cottage's construction, but that it had occurred some time between 1857 and 1861.

Jack Tregear kindly shared digital photographs of many of the documents he had studied in the Christchurch archives, and this inspired Helen Leach to use some of her retirement to make further progress with the questions that remained unanswered. With Mary, Helen examined additional material in the archives, and on visits to Robinson's Bay, various family members recorded measurements and archaeological features as well as visiting current landowners in the valley. Helen used the newly available digitized run of the *Lyttelton Times* on Papers Past, and located relevant material in the Hocken Collections in Dunedin. Then with Brent she prepared the two papers that follow. There is still no answer to the million dollar question 'who built the cottage?', but we now know how insecure land boundaries were in the 1850s, and the likelihood of mistaken views of their position. We have also unraveled the complexities of the land regulations that affected the Pavitt and Hughes families in their tenure at Robinson's Bay, and probably made the final years of both John Pavitt and Thomas Hughes frustrating and financially unrewarding.

Of course there is always more to learn, and we intend to continue to add to our knowledge of this fascinating period. In the meantime, we hope that the two papers will be of value to everyone interested in the history of these two hard-working families, of a beautiful bay in Akaroa Harbour, and of the era when our forebears became New Zealanders.

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