

**THE STORY OF THOMAS WILLIAM REYNOLDS
AND OF
HIS WIFE MARIA GERTRUDES DIAS
(also known as Maria Branca)**

In the mid-1820s Thomas Reynolds of Chatham, Kent, and his wife Elizabeth Hunter left England and settled in Oporto where Thomas set up a firm of wine and general merchants (1). The couple took with them their three sons – Thomas William (b. 1811), Robert Hunter (b. 1820) and William Hunter (b. 1822); and in Oporto a daughter, Elizabeth Hunter Reynolds, was born to them and baptized in the British Chapel (now St. James's Church) in 1827. But these were troubled times in Portugal; and in 1828 the Absolutist uprising in favour of D. Miguel, Queen Maria da Gloria's uncle, "compelled the family to leave rather hurriedly for Edinburgh." (2)

The eldest boy, Thomas William, and his cousin Robert Hunter (not to be confused with his brother, Robert Hunter Reynolds) remained in Oporto, however, to look after the business. And four years later, when D. Pedro de Bragança invaded Portugal to assert his daughter's rights as legitimate Queen, and the long siege of Oporto began, Thomas William and his cousin fought on the side of the Constitutionalists.

Thomas William served as a lieutenant in the 4th Grenadier Company of the British Naval Brigade, his commanding officer describing his conduct as exemplary and praiseworthy. In a defensive action at Monte Crasto, a few miles east of Oporto, on 24 January 1833 he was severely wounded by a musket ball, and returned to England for

(1). For further details of the family and this emigration v. the Society's 8th Annual Report, pp. 26-36.

(2). Records of the Otago Early Settlers Museum, Dunedin, N.Z.



*Thomas William Reynolds (Thomas III) in his
85th year.*

medical treatment. On his return to Portugal he was examined by a panel at the Regimental Hospital at Pampulha (Lisbon), and on 28 September 1835 was awarded a money grant as compensation for his disability.

His cousin Robert Hunter was less fortunate. In a bitter and sharp action at the Serra do Pilar he was killed. In the British cemetery in Oporto there is a grave, No. 216 bearing the date 24 April 1833 and now marked as "a soldier, name unknown." There were no other burials of soldiers at that cemetery during the siege; so it is reasonable to suppose it is the grave of Robert Hunter.

The civil war between D. Pedro and D. Miguel ended with the signing of the Convention of Evoramonte on 26 May 1834, and the final exile of D. Miguel. After this the Reynolds family returned to Portugal. Now, however, the family's business interests shifted south to the great cork forests of the Alentejo. Here Thomas William and his brother Robert were now engaged in the business of buying, treating and transporting the cork. So it was that for Thomas William Reynolds, Evoramonte, with its massive castle walls dominating the country for miles around, became more than a natural landmark or the scene of recent history. For it was here that he met his future wife. She was Maria Gertrudes Dias, a native of Santiago do Escoural, but she and her parents were living at Evoramonte quite possibly as employees at the cork factory which the Reynolds brothers had there at that time.

Since both Evoramonte and Santiago do Escoural were nothing but tiny villages, isolated deep in the remote Alentejo cork forests and hills, it has been generally assumed and handed down in the family that Thomas, handsome and dashing as he was, took advantage of Maria Gertrudes and married this peasant girl of 19 to do the right thing by her and his conscience.

There seems to be some truth in this tradition, for their eldest child, another Thomas William born on 17 January 1838 at Evoramonte, is described in his baptismal record as the natural son of Thomas Reynolds and Maria Gertrudes Dias. This was therefore before their marriage which took place at Chamusca at a later date.

Chamusca is a small town on the south bank of the Tagus, some one hundred kilometres above Lisbon. It was a favourite and con-



*Maria Gertrudes Dias Reynolds in her
81st year.*

venient loading port for shipping raw cork down river to factories in and around Aldegallega (now Montijo), Barreiro and Lisbon. Thomas must have had a depot there, or even a rudimentary factory, for the region abounds in cork forests. At Chamusca the bales of cork would be loaded on to flat-bottomed lighters, filling the boats completely and bulging over the sides in huge floating masses – the lighters and their loads becoming nothing less than enormous cork rafts. These had to rely on the skill of the helmsman and on a ridiculously small area of sail and the help of the current to reach their destination.

Shortly after the birth of their eldest child, Thomas and Maria Gertrudes moved to what was then another remote and isolated village, Albuquerque in the province of Badajoz in Spain. There six other children were born to them: Maria Thomsasia in 1839, Robert in 1841, William in 1842, Edward in 1843, Marion in 1845, and Henry in 1848.

In 1849 the family left Spain and moved to Quinta do Carmo which lies about one mile from the town of Estremoz in the Alentejo. There on 16 December 1851 Charles was born and then Alfred in 1852. The tenth and last child of this fruitful union was Eliza born in 1854.

It is recorded in some scrappy notes that in 1852 Thomas “buys (sic) the cork business for 4,000 pounds sterling to (sic) 1(?) H and Co.” Did he buy or sell? And who is 1? H and Co? It would seem likely that he bought since he was already in the cork business with his brothers Robert and William. Thomas and Robert managed the business in Portugal whilst William in England dealt with the marketing there. However it could be that Thomas sold the English end of the business to Fisher Howard and Co. (the ambiguous ‘1’ might well be meant for an ‘F’). In support of this version is the fact that William had already sailed for New Zealand in 1850 taking with him, incidentally, the three eldest children of Thomas and Maria Gertrudes. Thomas was already considering emigrating to New Zealand with the rest of his family, so it would have been natural to sell the English end of the business. Fisher Howard and Co. were certainly in the cork business in England and were either agents for or were closely associated with Thomas and Robert; in fact they had a depot or factory at Bletchingley, Surrey, which, in correspondence with Robert Hunter

Reynolds, W. D. Howard refers to as “our Bletchingley Azaruja” – Azaruja being one of the Reynold’s principal factories which Howard and his partner Fisher knew well.

Thomas and Robert had factories in Santiago do Escoural, Evora-monte, Azaruja and Estremoz in Portugal; and, in Spain, in Albuquerque, Oliva, Jerez de los Caballeros and Seville. Many of these could only have been field factories of a temporary nature, set up in the region where a cork strip had been acquired. There the rough wood-like back would be scraped off the cork sheets and nothing much more would be done beyond perhaps boiling the cork in rudimentary mobile boilers and stacking it in long piles. Here the cork, being hot and moist and pliable, would flatten itself into manageable sheets; it would then be baled and moved to a more sophisticated factory for sorting, cutting into corks or for packing in sheets for shipment abroad.

Even though these factories could not all have been operative at one and the same time, they nevertheless involved for their owners unremitting travel for long hours and days on end chiefly on horseback but also in heavy springless mule carts – or, if lucky, in some sort of carriage – over miles of bad roads and forest tracks full of potholes and mud in winter and clouds of dust in the sweltering summer.

In 1853 Thomas and family moved from Quinta do Carmo and took up residence in Estremoz itself, in the long low house on the east side of Rocio, the big main square. Behind the house there were extensive grounds and it was in these that one of the main cork factories operated. The house itself is mentioned in George Borrow’s *The Bible in Spain*; it was an inn at that time. After Thomas had left Portugal for New Zealand, his brother Robert lived in the house for some fifteen or more years. On his death it passed to his eldest daughter Eliza who was to marry her first cousin William, Thomas’s son. It then passed to her descendants. It is still known as the *Casa Inglesa*.

At some time in 1849 or early 1850 Thomas and Maria Gertrudes must have discussed pulling up their roots and moving to New Zealand, though in those days of sensible and submissive wives it seems unlikely that the unfortunate Maria Gertrudes would have had much say in the matter. At all events the decision was taken to send the three eldest children to New Zealand in the care of their grandparents and their

uncle William (3). The eldest boy was only 12 and the youngest 9. What such a decision can have cost the unfortunate mother is hard to imagine, but it may be that, as she had never left her native Alentejo, New Zealand seemed to her hardly further off than Lisbon. One likes to think so. It had, of course, been Thomas Reynolds's intention to follow the rest of the family at an early date. In the event his wife was to bear him three more children, and it was a full seven years before the whole family was reunited in Dunedin, N.Z.

It is not clear at all what led to this emigration, but it may well have been that the cork business was not as successful as Thomas Reynolds had anticipated. The cork trade, almost entirely dependent as it is on the export market, suffers from sudden and wild fluctuations; and we know that Thomas and his brother had financial problems. On one occasion Thomas, writing from Lisbon to Robert in Estremoz, urged him to send down cash to meet their more pressing obligations; if necessary, he was to arrange for a *contrabandista* to smuggle hard cash from Spain.

Yet if business problems and a roving spirit were largely responsible for Thomas's decision to remove to the Antipodes, he was also undoubtedly influenced by that extraordinary and dynamic man Thomas Macandrew who had fallen in with Thomas's brother William in London. As agent for the Otago Association he was engaged in obtaining emigrants — chiefly from Scotland it would appear — to settle in the Otago province of New Zealand. He certainly fired the imagination of William Reynolds and, in an even bigger way, that of his sister Elizabeth who became his wife.

From time to time business would take Thomas William to Seville, and it is said that it was through Seville and Puerto de Santa Maria that towards the end of 1856 he and his family travelled the first stage of their long migration. Home-sickness apart, the journey to Seville and thence to Puerto de Santa Maria must have been an ordeal for Maria Gertrudes, cumbered with seven young children, four of whom were under seven years of age, and bumping along with their goods and chattels in a carriage offering not much protection from the weather or in a heavy wooden cart with iron-shod wheels and no

(3). 8th Annual Report: pp. 34-5 q.v.

springs — such as are still occasionally to be seen in the Alentejo today. In these carts a large straw mattress would normally cover almost the entire floor and on this passengers would sit or lie, one or two low chairs or stools perhaps being provided for the comparative comfort of those who preferred such a privilege. The 90 odd miles separating Seville from Puerto would have meant a three or four days' journey, and the distance from Estremoz was some 280 miles. It can have been no joyful picnic.

In June 1857 William Hunter Reynolds and his wife arrived in London from New Zealand. On 21 July of that year he wrote to his brother Robert in Lisbon that he found Thomas William and family had already sailed for Dunedin in the *John Masterman*. William estimated that the party would not reach New Zealand before mid-March 1857. In fact the arrival of the vessel was reported in the *Otago Witness* of 28 March 1857, as follows:

John Masterman (4), 608 tons, Capt. Stewart, from London via Nelson.

Passengers: Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Reynolds and family Mr. and Mrs. Every and family

Cargo: 6 cases Mustard, 6 cases Pickles, 4 cases Raspberry Vinegar, 2 cases Salad Oil, 1 case Sago, 1 case Arrowroot, 2 cases Patent Starch, 1 case Soda, 1 case Jelly Cans, 1 box Boots and Shoes, wine corks and wheelbarrows.

Soon after his arrival in New Zealand, Thomas William took up what was known as the Otara Run, granted to him by the Otago Provincial Government (5). His son Alfred recorded later:

(4). In Lloyd's Register for 1869 the *John Masterman* is described as, "John Masterman, ship (sheathed with yellow metal 62 copper or yellow metal fastened). Master: Westgarth. 602 tons, length 142', beam 28.5', depth 19.7': built in Hartlepool 1854. Owned by Liggett and Sons, registered at the Port of London. Character A.1."

(5). Runs were leased for 14 years but in practice were seldom retained for the full period, limiting factors being labour and sheep and the need for shepherds where there were no fences. There were no limits to the area which was usually between 20,000 and 100,000 acres; but the Otago Land Regulation of 1856 limited the number of sheep to 25,000. See *Run, Estate and Farm* by W. H. Scotter.

The Otara Run was taken over from James Macandrew and Co. by my father . . . in 1858

My grandfather, father, mother, three sisters and six brothers and self all went down in 1858 to take possession of our new home. It was a wattle-and-dob thatched house near Waipapa Point . . . After living some time in this primitive place it was enlarged . . . and we lived in it very happily for a couple of years; a sad occurrence being the death of my eldest brother in this our pioneering period (6) . . . The wild dogs were very plentiful and were very destructive to our sheep in those days. Wild pigs were also numerous and native game abounded . . . After . . . a couple of years or so, my father decided to build a wooden house on the north end of the run, at Rocklands . . . Woodsheds, sheep-dips and huts were also built not far from the house, with stockyards and sheep-pens close by. An orchard was planted and also some blue gums and ornamental trees . . . In or about 1862 the run was sold to Mr. Manley, and the whole family returned overland to Dunedin . . . My father finally settled on the Otago Peninsula alongside his sister Mrs. James Macandrew . . .

Thomas William was to revisit Europe twice during the thirty years of life remaining to him. His first visit was in 1867, shortly after the death of his father. Since journeys half way around the world in tiny sailing ships were not undertaken as pleasure cruises, he must have come to Portugal in connection with his business interests. He returned to New Zealand in 1868. The following year he despatched his son William, aged 27, to take charge of his interests in Portugal. This was to prove an unhappy move. William was an idealist and, according to family tradition, something of a poet, though his works have not survived. He was not, however, a business man; and money ran through his hands like water. In 1873 he married his first cousin Eliza, daughter of Robert Hunter Reynolds.

It seems likely that Thomas was not too satisfied with his son's business performance, for he visited Portugal a second time in 1875,

(6). Thomas Reynolds IV died "of general wastage" at the age of 21.

returning to Dunedin the following year. What his visits achieved we do not know, but William duly got through all his own and his wife's money very successfully.

There are no records of what Thomas William Reynolds did in New Zealand after he moved into Dunedin, and his family grew up and dispersed. Nor do we know how his wife settled down to life in a strange land among strange people.

Maria Gertrudes was undoubtedly a very brave woman. Like almost all the people born in the isolation of a tiny village buried among the hills and cork forests of the Alentejo, she had almost certainly never seen the sea before she embarked for New Zealand. Yet she steadfastly said goodbye to her native land and her parents and relatives to take a tiny ship – braving discomfort, seasickness, storms and all the terrifying perils of the ocean – and sail into the great unknown, to a far-off foreign land where nobody even understood her language. She never returned to Portugal and never saw any of her own relations again, but she successfully made a happy home for her husband and children. Her great-great-niece, Léonce Kennedy Smellie, wrote of her:

Aunt Maria was a dear sweet soul, beloved of everybody, nature's lady, who put up with a great deal from her husband. Her command of English was never perfect and she was heard to say on more than one occasion when her husband became restless and unreasonable – the result perhaps of that extra drink – "Thomas, Thomas, you will drive me to my gravy!"

Thomas William Reynolds died at Newington, Dunedin on 14 March 1898, in his 87th year. Maria Gertrudes died on 25 July 1902 at the age of 84, greatly respected and mourned by all who knew and loved her.

(This is the second article based on the Reynolds family chronicles. The Council is grateful to Dr. A. H. Reynolds for agreeing to its publication here in abbreviated form.)