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THE ELEGANT ENDURANCE OF BURNSIDE:

John Reid and the legacy of Elderslie estate,


By SIÁN REDWOOD

A thesis submitted for the degree of
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This thesis discusses the rise and fall of the Reid family and their large-scale nineteenth-century farming estate called Elderslie, which was situated near the small community of Enfield, in Oamaru. This discussion is instigated via an initial investigation of the only significant surviving relic of that estate, in the form of a sprawling Victorian bay villa known as Burnside homestead. Burnside continues to function today in near original condition as a private residence for Bruce and Alison Albiston, who purchased the property in the 1970s. However, very little has been written about the history of the homestead, the estate it was built on, or the original owners, despite the fact that Burnside was awarded a Category One distinction from the New Zealand Historic Places Trust in 1998, due to its architectural uniqueness. This thesis attempts uncover who the family was that commissioned Burnside, how they lived, how they fitted in with New Zealand society at the time and why the homestead is worthy of being regarded today as having an important historic link with the past, particularly with the former Elderslie estate.

The thesis begins by documenting the current condition of Burnside and all that the Albistons have done to restore their Victorian villa to its former glory. The next section then takes the reader back to the late 1890s, when the original owner, John Forrester Reid, began to prepare the site of his future home. John F. Reid’s life at Burnside was a direct result of his father’s ambition, wealth and social status. Therefore it is necessary to investigate how his father managed to become one of the most affluent and influential men in North Otago. Chapter Two goes back to the very beginning of the Reid family saga with the arrival of young John Reid in Dunedin in the 1860s. Subsequent chapters then discuss his accumulation of land, the building of his own luxurious homestead at Elderslie, his other business interests, social ambitions and children. Chapter five documents the demise of the Elderslie estate and the changes which led to its eventual dispersal in the early twentieth century. The final section arrives at the conclusion that Burnside homestead, as a glorious survivor of the former Elderslie estate, should be regarded as an important testimony to the luxurious, but isolated lifestyle that one wealthy family afforded, as members of New Zealand’s early farming elite.
Acknowledgements

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Dedication

This thesis is lovingly dedicated to the memory of my grandparents:

Herb & Grace Billington and Ron & Caroline Redwood.

—Liber et audax, lumen servimus antique—
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .................................................................................................................. .ii  
Preface .................................................................................................................. .iii.  
Table of contents ................................................................................................... .iv.  
List of photographs ................................................................................................. v.  
Timeline of important dates ................................................................................... vi.  

Elderslie estate: An introduction.............................................................................. 1.  

**CHAPTER ONE: BURNSIDE HOMESTEAD** ..................................................... 5.  
i. Burnside today ................................................................................................ 5.  
ii. The early development of Burnside ................................................................. 8.  
v. The Reid family and New Zealand society after 1900 .................................... 26.  

**CHAPTER TWO: A HOME AWAY FROM 'HOME'** ....................................... 31.  
i. The colonial South Island .............................................................................. 31.  
ii. John Reid and the creation of Elderslie estate ............................................. 40.  
iii. Life as an estate labourer ............................................................................. 43.  
iv. Farming the great estates ............................................................................. 46.  

**CHAPTER THREE: ELDERSLIE HOMESTEAD** ............................................. .49.  
i. Establishing a new home away from 'Home' .............................................. 49.  
ii. The glory of Elderslie homestead ................................................................. 52.  
iii. Life as a domestic servant ........................................................................... 59.  

**CHAPTER FOUR: ASSERTING THEIR PRIVILEGES** .................................. 68.  
i. Playing the role of colonial 'gentleman' ....................................................... 68.  
ii. Gentry sports and leisure .............................................................................. 72.  
iii. Reid's political and business interests .......................................................... 76.  
iv. John Reid's children ..................................................................................... 83.  
v. Marriage and inheritance .............................................................................. 88.  

**CHAPTER FIVE: CHANGES** ......................................................................... 94.  
i. Oamaru in the 1880s and 1890s ................................................................ 94.  
ii. The end of the golden reign ........................................................................ 97.  
iii. The demise of Elderslie homestead ............................................................. 101.  

Elderslie and Burnside: A final word ................................................................. 104.  

Endnotes .............................................................................................................. 107.  
Bibliography and resources ................................................................................. 114.
LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS


FIGURE 2. Servants’ back entrance to Burnside homestead, leading to the laundry. Collection of the author.

FIGURE 3. The three kitchen areas at Burnside. Collection of the author.

FIGURE 4. Gas light fixture hangs from an elaborate ceiling vent in the dining room, Burnside homestead.

FIGURE 5. The Great Hall, Burnside.

FIGURE 6. Burnside homestead today, nestled amongst its one-hundred-year-old garden setting.

FIGURE 7. John Reid (centre, with arms behind back) stands among his shearers, busy shearing his sheep at a woolshed on Elderslie estate. The photograph also highlights the great discrepancies in appearance and lifestyle between wealthy landowners and their hard-working farm labourers. North Otago Museum archives, Oamaru.


FIGURE 12. Elderslie homestead interior.

FIGURE 13. Elderslie homestead front passageway


FIGURE 16. S.S. Elderslie, commissioned by John Reid in 1884 to carry frozen lamb and mutton from Oamaru to London direct. North Otago Museum archives, Oamaru.

FIGURE 17. John and Agnes Reid (centre) with daughter Connie and son Douglas enjoy afternoon tea in the Elderslie gardens, c.1900. North Otago Museum archives.

vi.

TIMELINE OF IMPORTANT DATES, 1835-2001

1835  John Reid born 24 March, Stirling, Scotland
1855  Reid marries Agnes Humphries of Paisley, Scotland
1859  Reid's first son, John Forrester, born 1 May, Australia
1860  Reid’s first daughter, Margarite Isabella, born, Australia
1861  Reid’s second son, James Bennie, born, Australia
1863  John, Agnes & family established in Dunedin, New Zealand
1865  John Reid’s first land purchase near Enfield, Oamaru, current site of Burnside
      Reid’s third son, Charles William, born in Dunedin
1867  Reid’s second daughter, Annie, born
1868  John Reid made a Justice of the Peace
      Reid serves in the Otago Waste Lands Board committee (until 1872)
1869  Reid’s third daughter, Agnes Jane, born 19 August, Elderslie property
1870  Reid’s fourth son, Stuart Bathgate, born, 21 September, Dunedin
      John Reid begins planning, planting and landscaping of Elderslie homestead grounds
1872  Reid’s fourth daughter, Constance Mary, born
1873  Reid’s fifth son, Douglas Harold, born 30 December
1874  John Reid moves his growing family into newly-constructed Elderslie homestead
1875  Reid’s sixth son, Egerton Humphries, born 17 June, Elderslie homestead
1876  Reid’s son, Stanley Gordon, & daughter, Florence Ellen (twins) b. 18 Aug. Elderslie
1877  John Reid donates land for the Enfield Presbyterian Church, opened 11 Aug, 1878
1879  John Reid purchases ‘Bulruddery’ estate, increasing his land holdings to 32,181 acres
      John Reid begins to exhibit his pedigree Vermont Merino sheep
1880  John Reid contests the Oamaru parliamentary seat, but loses
      Reid becomes local Railway Commissioner
1881  John Reid contests the Waitaki parliamentary seat, but loses
      Reid becomes director of Oamaru Woollen Manufacturing Factory Company
1883  Reid commissions his S.S Elderslie refrigerated steamer to be built by Turnbull Martin & Company of Glasgow. Ship arrives in Oamaru 24 August, 1884

1886  John Reid becomes chairman of Waitaki Boys’ High School Board of Governors

1887  John Reid hosts Elderlie’s great public open day and gala celebrations, 23 March. Reid contests Waitaki parliamentary seat and once again looses

1896  South Seas Exhibition in Christchurch; Burnside’s black oak furniture exhibited

1898  Burnside homestead completed for John Forrester Reid.

1900  John Forrester Reid marries Evelyn McLean, 6 June, Knox church, Dunedin
John Reid sells 11,497 acres of his estate to the govt. as Elderlie Settlement No.1

1903  Joan Reid, (daughter of J. F. Reid) born at Burnside homestead, 12 April

1904  John McLean Reid, (son of J. F. Reid) born at Burnside homestead, 29 June

1912  Elderlie Settlement No.2 sold to the government, 29 April. End of Elderlie estate
John Reid dies, 15 August, aged 77. Leaves personal wealth of £98,000

1924  Agnes Reid dies, 11 February, aged 85

1929  Ken Austin takes over remaining Elderlie estate homestead block
John Forrester Reid dies, aged 70

1930  Burnside homestead sold to Hudson family of Dunedin

1939  Permanent source of electricity arrives at Burnside for first time

1944  Jim Rutherford buys Elderlie homestead block

1947  Elderlie summerhouse gifted to Oamaru Public Gardens by Connie Gillies

1950  Mrs Ferguson buys Elderlie homestead, converts it to a rest home

1957  Mr & Mrs G. Coxhead buy Elderlie homestead, convert it to a cabaret
Elderlie homestead completely destroyed by fire, evening of 14 November

1960  Agnes J. Reid dies, (last remaining of original Reid family) 28 March, aged 91.

1971  Original Elderlie stone pillars relocated to Centennial Park by Oamaru Lions Club

1974  Burnside homestead bought by Bruce & Alison Albiston. Renovations begin.

1988  NZ Historic Places’ Trust donate $1000 to restoration of Elderlie summerhouse

1995  Burnside homestead opened to the public for home-stays & tours by the Albistons

1998  NZ Historic Places’ Trust registers Burnside as Category One homestead

2001  Burnside homestead featured in Bridge the World international travel guide
ELDERSLIE ESTATE: AN INTRODUCTION

The small community of Enfield, situated fifteen kilometres northwest of the Southern township of Oamaru, is geographically ‘off the beaten track’ but is close to the location that this thesis is primarily concerned with. The land here forms part of the rolling Waiareka Valley district, utilised today for sheep and beef farming, cropping and, most recently, dairy farming ventures. It was once a vast frontier of bush, tussock and scrub. The pivotal task of clearing and cultivating this land fell to the hundreds of pioneers, new settlers and labourers who came here, in the nineteenth century, in search of a promising future. Time has largely erased the remnants of their histories, though the occasional dilapidated hayshed can still be spotted, quietly exhausted by its former glory, alongside these sleepy back roads. Few out-of-town travellers would today be aware that an authentic example of Victoriana still exists in this isolated rural area, in the form of a sprawling corner-angled, bay villa homestead known as ‘Burnside’ (see FIGURE 1). Even fewer travellers would know that both Burnside and the community of Enfield once played neighbour to some of the largest and most profitable farming estates in nineteenth-century New Zealand history.

This thesis is largely concerned with the formation and plight of one such estate, known as Elderslie, which, at its peak in the 1880s, encompassed no less than 34,000 acres of prime Waiareka Valley real estate. Elderslie provided a hefty income for its owners, the Reid family, as well as a home and place of work for hundreds of local farm labourers. As such, the Reid family was elevated to the highest rank in Oamaru society, as near-aristocratic members of the landholding elite. Their estate served as a regional showpiece and a community focal-point, mostly due to the splendour and mystic associated with the Reids and their life in the double-storeyed, verandah-swept family mansion at Elderslie. Burnside homestead, also situated on the Elderslie property, is now the only significant remainder of this fascinating episode in North Otago’s past.
The thesis is initially an investigation of two magnificent homesteads; Elderslie and Burnside, as well as the circumstances that led to their creation, and the story of one family who inhabited them from 1874 to 1929. An investigation into the creation and architectural significance of the houses will be necessary to instigate a further discussion of who the Reids were. A look into their living spaces will shed light on how they became so wealthy; how they maintain their wealth and status; how they lived; why they built such luxurious houses; how they fitted in with the rest of society in Oamaru; how they were treated and viewed by the public; how their presence affected the rest of the community, what happened to their farming empire, why they should be regarded as an important, albeit largely forgotten, part of North Otago’s history, and why Burnside homestead should continue to be preserved for the future. Many other questions will, no doubt, be raised during the course of this investigation. Much attention will also be given to the actions of one individual, John Reid, as the head of the Reid family, and the man solely responsible for the creation and success of the Elderslie homestead and the great farming estate that it was situated on. It is perhaps remarkable to learn that John Reid came to New Zealand, via Australia, as a young Scottish engineer, with no farming experience, but with a great deal of ambition. Though he was a man who, in every way, appeared to be endowed with the graces and sensibilities of a seemingly aristocratic birth, in reality he had no affiliation with the British or Scottish upper classes. How, then, did he rise to become one of North Otago’s most affluent and influential citizens? The thesis will also briefly look at the social and financial conditions that enabled a small minority of new arrivals, like John Reid, to acquire enough money and land to be categorized as authentic colonial ‘gentlemen’.

The enormity of the Elderslie estate homestead certainly reflected the Reid family’s considerable wealth and prestige. John Reid was one of just over one thousand individuals in Canterbury and Otago who left a fortune of at least £10,000, roughly the equivalent of one million dollars.¹ Reid left a personal legacy of £98,000, approximately to $9.8 million today.
This impressive amount is testimony, not only to Reid’s keen entrepreneur skills in building up such a fortune, but also to his shrewd and careful judgement in retaining his fortune until his death. Reid’s immediate neighbour, Edward Menlove, did not have the same success with his Windsor Park estate. He died leaving land valued at £19,513, but still owing a mortgage of £12,750. In fact, wealthy freehold farmers were far less numerous in Otago than they were in Canterbury, because the former province relied more heavily on commerce, trade and manufacturing, than on agriculture. Between 1860 and 1914 only seven Otago farmers left fortunes of £100,000 or more in their wills, compared to twenty-eight known farmers in Canterbury. As such, the majority of large country mansions and sprawling homesteads were more likely to be found in Canterbury and in areas close to Christchurch. This makes both Elderslie and Burnside homestead, in terms of their sheer scale, their overwhelming extravagance and geographic position, rather unique homesteads for the Otago region.

Certainly few, if any, landowners’ homes, regardless of the financial position of their owners, were built during the nineteenth century which could compete with Elderslie’s size or splendour. Its unique design elements and lavish opulence made the enormous homestead one of the most impressive private residences in colonial New Zealand. Sadly, however, Elderslie homestead was destroyed in the late 1950s, after nearly a century of elegance. Burnside homestead, built as a wedding gift for John Reid’s eldest son John Forrester Reid, was commissioned a mere twenty-four years or so after the Elderslie homestead was completed, and is indicative of the luxurious life that Reid’s eldest son and his family experienced.

Remarkably, Burnside has been maintained in near-original condition, largely thanks to the considerable foresight and motivation of the homestead’s current owners, Bruce and Alison Albiston. Burnside was sited on the first part of Elderslie estate to be purchased by John Reid in the 1860s. Therefore it is quite appropriate to begin the story of Elderslie estate with the one building that remains today as a homage to this grand farming legacy.
Chapter one will begin with the sale of Burnside to the Albistons and the various restoration tasks they have carried out during their time at Burnside, which have contributed to the homestead’s present condition, as a glorious example of Victorian opulence and the New Zealand corner-angled bay villa.
CHAPTER ONE: BURNSIDE HOMESTEAD

i.

Burnside today

In the early 1970s Bruce and Alison Albiston drove up from Dunedin to look at an Oamaru property described as ‘a nineteenth century homestead in an English park-like setting.’ They were particularly curious because it was on the market for just $40,000. Although run down, the sheer size and elegance of Burnside homestead made an immediate impact on the Albistons and they were adamant that the homestead be returned to its former glory and preserved. It was this attitude, along with their desire to make Burnside a family home, which finally swayed the vendors their way. Other interested parties had wanted to use Burnside for various commercial purposes, including a racing stud and a motor camp. The homestead was immediately repainted, requiring a team of eleven painters and a crane. The job took six weeks to do the outside and the roof of the house.

In the following years the Albistons continued to slowly restore Burnside, while creating a wonderfully nostalgic home for their three young daughters to grow up in. Alison Albiston carefully restored two large kauri Welsh dressers, one of which she had found in two parts. The lower section had been whitewashed and used as cupboards in the laundry. The top was nailed to the back of the tool shed wall and covered with farm gear. Both were stripped and quickly reinstated in the main kitchen from where they first originated. The dressers now display many plates and old bottles found intact on the Burnside property. This was just one of a multitude of tasks that Bruce and Alison had to complete in order to bring Burnside up to the standard of its heyday. However eleven years after they moved in, the Albistons left Burnside ‘with huge reluctance’ to pursue career opportunities and family concerns in Auckland.
They returned in the mid 1990s and devoted themselves ‘with new eyes and new energy’ to further restoration of their historic homestead.⁶

Throughout the entire restoration process, Mr and Mrs Albiston have tried their best to remain loyal to the atmosphere and era of the house. Bruce commented in a recent newspaper article that they ‘wanted to stay close to the original lifestyle, although the insulation and [diesel] heating system we added have made a big difference.’⁷ The former servants quarters were converted into a self-contained flat, initially to accommodate Alison’s mother. Existing attic space has been utilised to create private quarters for the Albistons, which is accessed by stairs in the servants’ area. This was achieved without further alterations to the shape of the homestead. Inside, the original gas light fittings in the Great Hall had been removed in the Hudson years, but these too were replaced by a similar set, purchased by Mr Albiston in Dunedin. Mrs Albiston also restored some iron-framed beds she had found in the area and used them in a few of the bedrooms. The most recent improvements at Burnside have included additional en suite facilities in several of the guest bedrooms. Again, these have been created using existing cupboard and room space, so that the homestead retains an air of nostalgia and authenticity.

Burnside has been open for public viewing and home-stay accommodation since 1995, when Bruce and Alison held a series of open days to entice the local community to view their gracious home. To mark this event, the grandchildren of John and Evelyn Reid donated an original dinner set and family Bible to the Albistons, which is still on display today in the dining room at Burnside. The dinner set is an English-made white Booths set, with a rich Jacobean boarder and John F. Reid’s initials scrolled in blue. It was the Reid family’s everyday china. The original full set was estimated to have been a 12-place, 144-piece setting, but it has now been reduced to just 30 pieces. The Bible was reportedly given to Evelyn McLean at the time of her marriage to John F. Reid in 1900.

Since opening in 1995 Burnside has played host to a variety of community and group activities, including Victorian garden parties, church group meetings, Victorian heritage balls, vintage car rallies, small musical recitals and weddings.
The large spacious country kitchen at Burnside was even used in a Mini-Wheats television commercial during 1995. More attention was lavished on the homestead after the New Zealand Historic Places Trust registered Burnside as a Category One property in 1998. The grand homestead was deemed ‘visually and aesthetically outstanding’ with ‘no equal from the same period’.8 A further accolade occurred in February 2001 when Burnside became one of just 18 South Island homesteads, bed & breakfasts, and lodges to feature in the latest Bridge the World international travel guide. The publication informs readers that Burnside provides ‘more than accommodation…it offers a real insight into life as it was at the beginning of last century’.9

Bruce and Alison Albiston have been delighted with the attention and accolades that their sprawling Victorian villa has received. It has taken them many years and a considerable amount of money to successfully preserve Burnside as a functioning turn-of-the-century New Zealand homestead. It appears that the Albistons would not have had it any other way: ‘It loses its point unless it’s being used,’ comments Alison, ‘I believe that we were meant for Burnside…We’re here to care for it and to share it’.10 This certainly appears to be true, but what of the original owners? Who was the family that Burnside was originally intended and built for? The following sections take us back to the very beginning of Burnside’s creation, starting in the late 1870s. The design, style and particular exterior and interior features of this unique New Zealand house will then be looked at. This will be an attempt to gain a greater understanding of the way in which the Reid family lived, their attitude towards society in general, and towards the people who lived with them and served them at Burnside.
The early development of Burnside

John Forrester Reid, eldest son of John Reid, was given the opportunity to select a site on the vast Elderslie estate, where his future homestead was to be built, while he was still a teenager in the late 1870s. This was not an uncommon practise among the eldest sons of the New Zealand colonial elite. Much was expected of, and granted to, eldest sons as the immediate heirs to their fathers’ business empires and the family fortune. Over the next few decades Reid’s ideal site was slowly but carefully developed and landscaped in preparation for this event. The Burnside section was developed in much the same way as the Elderslie homestead had been some years earlier. Woodlots were created and many varieties of specimen trees, mostly brought out from England and Scotland, were planted so that they would be well developed by the time the homestead was ready to be built. John F. Reid chose to name his site ‘Burnside’ because it was situated on the side of a stream which ran through the Elderslie property. The name made reference to the Scottish word for a stream.

By the early 1890s John F. Reid was ready to commission an architectural design for his future homestead. He chose a uniquely Scottish concept for the design of the house. The octagonal shape, which forms the basis for the street plan of Edinburgh, and was also used as a central characteristic of Dunedin city, inspired Burnside’s design. The plans were initially drawn up in Scotland. However the difference in climate between the two hemispheres was certainly taken into account and these plans were later given to an architect in Dunedin, who redrew the outside of the house and added verandahs. As a result, the outside of Burnside remains typically colonial in style, while the inside of the building is noticeably different with an essentially Scottish ambiance. What makes the architecture of Burnside even more interesting is that it would have been far too outrageous to have been built in Scotland during the 1880s or 1890s, and therefore, it has a unique blend of Scottish and New Zealand heritage; old world and new world influences.
Initially there was considerable controversy over the building of Burnside. The elder John Reid did not approve of the first plans that his son had commissioned. The house was considered too large and far too ostentatious, with its elaborate verandah fretwork and green and cream colour scheme. However by this stage John Forrester Reid had reached his late thirties and he was perhaps more than a little willing to go against the wishes of his domineering and patriarchal father. He had been courting his future wife, Evelyn McLean, for almost ten years and was determined to marry her. Local legend has it that John F. Reid was only able to convince Evelyn to marry him by having her initial ‘E’ carved in an italicised form into the fretwork of Burnside’s veranda. This is one of the most immediately striking aspects of Burnside’s extensive ornamentation. It is debatable whether this unique motif actually stands for ‘Evelyn’ or for the ‘Elderslie’ estate on which Burnside was built, however the same motif is repeated throughout the architecture and the stained-glass windows which flank the front entranceway. Despite the controversy, building began on the extended bay villa-styled house in 1895. Burnside homestead was finally completed in 1898 and consisted of twenty-five rooms, which covered some 7500 square feet or 700 square metres. The elder John Reid was away on business in Scotland when the large house was completed, and he was reportedly outraged when he returned to find that his son had explicitly gone against his wishes and continued with the very plans he had disapproved of.

John Forrester Reid was certainly not alone in wanting to build a house with such an exuberant and initially outrageous design. Times had changed since the 1870s when his father had commissioned the family home at Elderslie. A boom in house building during the decades before and just after the turn of the twentieth century, coincided with a ‘virtual frenzy of stylistm — a drive to design buildings in styles which were historically based, engagingly up to date, adaptations and just plain mixtures.’ Architectural designs and construction techniques were now derived from Tutor England, the Byzantine era, French Neoclassicism, Renaissance Italy, the modern Arts and Craft movement and from the United States.
However the bay villa soon rose to prominence and became the preferred stylistic basis for domestic housing in both urban and rural New Zealand communities. It was a particularly favoured style during the 1890s because it could be developed into a huge range of variations, including different roof shapes, verandah styles, fretwork, balconies and door and window trims. Most bay villas were built of wood, which offered endless possibilities for Victorian ornamentation. It was also deemed a suitable style for both small cottages and large, sprawling homesteads. Above all, the bay villa suggested ‘solidity and dependability’ and remained a constant source of inspiration to architects until the First World War, when it was surpassed by the new Californian bungalow and the English cottage style.14

Burnside has a highly developed and complex corner-angled bay villa design, but it is also significant for a variety of other reasons. There are few, if any, bay villas that would even come close to the scale on which Burnside was built. It is, in fact, rumoured to be New Zealand’s largest single-storeyed house.15 However there is no official documentation, other than the occasional enthusiastic newspaper article, to support this suggestion. The New Zealand Historic Places Trust have 373 registered houses, built between 1880-1915, of which 25 per cent are regarded as true bay villas in style.16 The majority of these bay villas are located in the North Island, particularly in the far north down to the Waikato. Valmai Rest Home, built 1895-1901, and Villa Mandeno, built 1910, are both classed as Category II historic homes. Both are considered outstanding Waikato examples of the bay villa style, and are particularly noteworthy for their architectural originality and fine detailing.17 However there are very few quality examples like these in the South. Burnside is certainly unusual by South Island standards. Only four wooden bay villas have been registered in the Otago and North Otago district. Ten others are recorded as being built of either brick and plaster or stone. Therefore Burnside has a greater affinity with the North Island bay villas which were almost exclusively built out of timber. According to Wayne Nelson, who assessed Burnside homestead in 1998 on behalf of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust, none of the local or regional examples ‘are anywhere near comparable in architectural quality with Burnside.’18
Toka-rahi Station Homestead, also in the Waitaki district, is considered to be a bay villa, although part of it was built in 1876 in another style. It was given a Category II classification. Other historically significant houses in the district include Pen’y’brn, built in 1888-1912 in the Elizabethan Domestic Revival style, Robert Campbell House at Otekaieke, a fine example of Scottish Baronial architecture, built 1876-1879, and the 1903 Queen Anne-influenced Redcastle, at St. Kevin’s College in Oamaru.19 None of these, however, are wooden bay villas. Burnside homestead remains an outstanding and unique South Island example of the complex, corner-angled bay villa style.

The exterior indicators of this style are plentiful at Burnside. The enlarged villa has a variety of roof shapes including hipped, ridged and valley forms. The roof is made of corrugated iron cladding, designed around a central gutter where rain water is collected and drained to the rear of the house. This type of roofing system replaced the simple gabled roof during the 1880s and it allowed the bay villa to be developed and enlarged without the need to change the basic roof layout. The centre gutter was the most common form in the 1880s and 1890s but it fell from favour after 1909 because the internal gutters often failed and caused water damage inside the ceilings and walls.20 Boxed eaves, where the roof rafters sit on boards extended beyond the side of the house, also came into being during the 1880s and are very typical of the late Victorian bay villa style. Burnside’s boxed eaves have highly decorative brackets, another Victorian tendency. The homestead displays hipped and gabled bay projections with tied gable-end barge boards which also have elaborate decorative fretwork.21 This form of fretwork was of considerable importance to the late Victorians. It was mostly found on verandahs and gable ends where a barge board was used to finish off the roof line. This barge board could be left plain or decorated in any way which appealed to the owners. The gable end was the most important part of the house exterior because it was usually the first part seen from a distance. As such, the decoration on it had to be attractive and bold in outline. Any small or fine details would be lost from a distance.22

The visitor to Burnside was (and still is) greeted by an exceptionally grand homestead which was particularly fashionable for its era.
Burnside features rusticated weatherboarding, first introduced to New Zealand houses by the Wellington architect Julius Toxward in the 1860s. By the late 1880s it had become an extremely popular construction technique for exterior walls. The finished product showed pronounced grooves which resembled the highly respected channel-jointed stonework. The architects of Burnside have taken this idea of imitating stone construction even further by placing false quoins of wood with moulded edges on each of the homestead's corners. This gives Burnside an overwhelming sense of stability and sophistication which would not have met with the approval of critics had the house been built earlier in the nineteenth century. Henry Hudson Holly was one such critic who wrote of his disdain for poor taste in 1863. He urged homeowners and builders to 'not carve stone details out of wood...falsehood and imitation give indisputable evidence of vulgarity of taste.' To the late Victorians, 'good taste' manifested itself in decadent, often riotous decoration and bold colour schemes. House colours during the 1860s and 1870s had been quiet and restrained affairs, usually consisting of white, cream or soft earth tones. However after the 1880s, when paint became more readily available, and scientific colour relationships were being explored by theorists like Christopher Dresser, New Zealand houses displayed a new fashion for adventurous, strong colour contrasts. Highly fashionable colours of the 1890s included maroon, olive green or chocolate for the trims with darker, richer colours for the weatherboards. Burnside, with its cream weatherboards and fret work, forest-green roof, verandah posts, window trims and eaves brackets, and its burgundy verandah floor, French doors and back window boxes, is a striking and authentic tribute to these fashions. The huge bay villa was last painted during 1994 at a cost of nearly $40,000. The exterior and roof required 400 litres of paint, which was enough to cover five average-sized houses.

Burnside has equally impressive interior dimensions and details which would have enabled visitors and the young Reid family, to live in considerable comfort and elegance. These features will now be examined in greater depth.
iii.

Burnside’s interior delights

Visitors at Burnside’s projected front entrance were no doubt impressed by the four Art Nouveau-influenced stained glass windows and a colourful fan light which frames the front door. Stained glass was a popular decorative device in the late Victorian era. However Burnside’s stained glass is of particular interest because it denotes an aspect of the Reid family history, in the form of a large, colourful Scottish thistle within the fanlight of the doorway. This motif corresponds with the hand-crafted music board of the Bernstein piano that stood directly parallel to it in the grand hall. This piano was specifically commissioned in Germany for the Burnside homestead and was imported in 1903 for Evelyn Reid, who was quite an accomplished and passionate musician. The unique music board features both the italicised ‘E’ motif echoed in the verandah fretwork, as well as the Scottish thistle emblem in miniature.

Once through the front door, Victorian callers would have been led into the two smallest rooms in the homestead, situated just inside the vestibule or main entranceway. The ladies entry room was on the left and the gentlemen were shown to the right. These rooms were commonly used by visitors who would remove their coats, hats and excess baggage before being lead by a maid through the connecting door into the drawing room. It was in this room that visitors, particularly ladies, were greeted by female members of the Reid family. The drawing room was the most carefully finished room in any late Victorian home. It was essentially a lady’s room so it tended to reflect feminine tastes, with soft pink hues and plenty of lace. Gentlemen usually only remained in the drawing room for the sake of polite conversation. Today the drawing room at Burnside remains the second most original room in this 105-year-old homestead. A majority of the curtains, drapes, wallpaper, pictures, carpet and furniture in this room were selected by the Reids before they took up residence in 1900. A few other items have been added by the current owners, the Albistons, but remain in keeping with original Victorian tastes.
The gentlemen’s entry room is now used as a small guest bedroom, and the ladies entry room is now an office.

The most intriguing aspect of Burnside’s interior design is its centrally-located, octagonal-shaped Great Hall, into which guests enter if they were to bypass the two entry rooms and walk directly through from the front door entranceway. The Great Hall covers 70 square metres and comprises almost ten per cent of the entire house. It has an elevated, concaved ceiling which is nearly seven and a half metres high and features 24 ruby-coloured clerestory windows (see FIGURE 5.). Hand-pressed steel and zinc panels, consisting of various patterns, were commissioned and brought out from the United Kingdom to cover the lofty hall ceiling. The white-washed plaster walls have been left untouched since the turn of the century, though they show evidence of withstanding a heavy earthquake during the 1920s. The Great Hall was originally designed as an entertainment area. The hall floor was spring-loaded for holding popular Victorian dances but had to be repaired as early as the 1930s. It was furnished with a huge Turkish rug, which is still in use, though it has now been flipped to the reverse side to prevent further wear on the pile.

Burnside’s Great Hall is one particularly interesting departure from the standard New Zealand bay villa style. Its shape is believed to have been inspired by the street plan of Edinburgh, and Edinburgh castle, which was also the inspiration for Dunedin’s central octagon. The Great Hall stands as the central axis of the house, around which all of the other rooms are arranged. The New Zealand Historic Places Trust has likened the plan of Burnside to ‘a great wheel revolving around the Great Hall’, although the plan is not entirely symmetrical, with the servants quarters having been added at right angles to the rear. More importantly, the Great Hall is unique to Burnside and is not found in any of the Trust’s registered historic villas. Burnside was given a Category I classification by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust in 1998, as a result of its physical significance.

A glance around the Great Hall at Burnside reveals an eclectic assortment of architectural features. Five kauri doors, and two classical archways, lead off the rimu-lined hall to other parts of the house.
These doors were specially hand grained to resemble oak or walnut, which were considered more desirable than native timbers at the time. The carved triangular mantels over the doors in the Great Hall have been influenced by the Classical Italianate style but they also display various Scottish symbols, including an equidistant cross within a circle. The Classical Italianate influence can also be seen in the coffered ceiling, the treatment of the panels on the doors, and the two segmented archways which are to be found on each side of the Great Hall. These arches are supported by plastered Corinthian columns and display decorative classical corbels. Burnside’s interior décor has also been greatly influenced by the British designer Charles Eastlake. His pivotal 1868 book *Hints on Household Taste*, had a profound influence on domestic architecture both in Britain and later in New Zealand, towards the end of the nineteenth century. Eastlake was insistent on dividing interior walls, particularly within more formal rooms, into three zones. This kind of treatment is quite evident at Burnside, where the lower zone includes the skirting boards and dado, the middle zone incorporates the treatment of the doors, and the upper zone consists of a frieze, entablature, cornice and the various decorated ceilings.

The rooms leading off the Great Hall have been arranged with convenience in mind. Moving in a clockwise fashion from the front entrance foyer, the first door on the left of the Great Hall leads into the ladies drawing room. Next to this, a classical archway marks the entrance to guest room one and two. These rooms have always been used as guest rooms and they both lead out onto the back conservatory. Behind the next door off the Great Hall was the original master bedroom, which now functions as a comfortable billiard room. This room also opens out onto the conservatory, which, in the time of the Reid family, was used as a sitting bay. The Reid children often played or talked with their parents in this sitting bay, without having to enter the master bedroom. For many years Joan Reid, the daughter born at Burnside, used the sunlit room to sleep in, most likely as a precaution after the tuberculosis scare of 1905. The Albistons had 14 folding French doors constructed to fit the opening of this sitting bay and they converted it into a full conservatory in 1994.
On the opposite side of the former master bedroom to the right is another door connecting to another guest bedroom, which was originally used as John F. Reid’s dressing room. Victorian etiquette required gentlemen to dress in a room away from their wives. This former dressing room opens out on the far left into the main bathroom, a toilet and small laundry area, which is also accessible via the second classical archway off the Great Hall. The spacious bathroom features the Reid’s original bathtub, now reconditioned.

Baths were being built in private New Zealand homes from the early 1870s and by 1900 some homes had bathrooms adjoining the bedrooms. However guests at Burnside in the late Victorian era probably would not have used this main bathroom. Instead, each guest room would have been fitted with a slipper bath where the guest would sit and the maids would bring in jugs of hot water for bathing. In the mornings the maids would bring in more hot water to enable guests to wash in the portable wash basins located in their rooms. These wash basins were set in a wash-stand, an elaborate piece of furniture, which was the forerunner of today’s vanity units. Each wash stand usually held a large bowl or basin, a soap dish, toothbrush and shaving mug. Chamber pots were kept on the lower shelf.34 Burnside has three early pull-chain toilets, with ‘The Boreas Washout Closet’ proudly stamped on the inner rims. Guests would have also used chamber pots or lidded portable commodes in their rooms over night. Maids were required to empty these chamber pots in a discreet fashion. They were not carried blatantly through the house but were emptied into a lidded slop-bucket, then rinsed with water from a can kept for the purpose.35

Continuing in the Great Hall, the door adjacent to the main bathroom leads into another bedroom, which is now used and known as the master bedroom. Next to this, another door accesses the long passage which leads to the very back of the house, where the servants’ quarters, and working areas, such as the kitchen and scullery are located. The door which completes the full circular tour of the Great Hall is the dining room, also accessible to the kitchen and servants’ quarters through a door at the rear left of the room.
Therefore the house has been designed so that the servants could eat, sleep and go about their daily chores without ever needing to cross the Great Hall or venture into the more formal rooms where the Reid family may have been entertaining guests. It is in fact quite interesting that the Reid’s former master bedroom and the drawing room have been placed as far away as possible from the service areas where the ‘hired help’ would have worked, thus maintaining the strict social hierarchy that John F. Reid had been accustomed to all his life. Food and household supplies would have been discreetly delivered to the rear of the homestead, where the servants’ back entrance was to be found (see FIGURE 2.).

The dining room was usually the only room, in most wealthy households, where the domestic staff came into contact with their employers, during the serving and clearing away of food at mealtimes. At Burnside however, the butler was the only person who attended to the Reid family during their meals. All other staff had responsibilities in the kitchen, scullery and elsewhere. The maids did not normally enter the dining room when guests were eating. A screen was usually placed between the doorway of the butler’s kitchen and the useful side table, known as a ‘dumb waiter’, in the dining room. This screen ensured an element of privacy for the family and their guests, as well as enabling a smooth transaction between courses. It was essentially a visible barrier and reminder of the social differences between the Reid family and those who worked for them. The butler was able to bring out new dishes and drinks from the kitchen and leave them ready on the ‘dumb waiter’ until they were required at the dining table.

However, the formal layout of Burnside’s dining room is more a reflection of the changing economic and social situation at the time the house was built, than as a tribute to the old values. One of the main architectural features of the complex villa form during the turn of the twentieth century, ‘was the increased size and prominence allocated to the dining room as a formal space.’36 In the case of Burnside, a circular bay projection was built at the rear of the room which contained seven elongated, double sash windows.
This unusual architectural feature gives the dining room a distinct sense of dignity, as well as a greater source of natural light, which generously spills onto the family dining table during the daytime. The windows are framed by the original rich velvet-red drapes, which are still vibrant despite their age. Burnside’s dining room boasts a large and magnificently carved black oak table with eight matching chairs, a dresser and side boards. This dining table was always fully extended and set for the next meal. It is an impressive 10.3 metres long by 6 metres wide and can seat up to twenty people. Mr Reid always sat at the far end of the table, closest to the kitchen, and Mrs Reid always sat at the other end, closest to the door. This appears to have been the case even when they were alone. It is also interesting that they never ate breakfast in the dining room, choosing instead to take it in their bedroom or on the verandah. The dining room’s exquisite black oak furniture was brought out from Scotland by the Reid family, and subsequently exhibited at the 1896 South Seas Exhibition in Christchurch. Each piece is unique and features an authentically Scottish flavour, with ornately carved lion-head cupboard door handles. The top of each piece is crowned by the bust of the Scottish hero William Wallace, who was born in the town of Elderslie, near Stirling, Scotland. The ‘dumb waiter’ piece is particularly interesting for its blend of Scottish and Polynesian culture in the form of a hybrid head motif and protruding tongue. The curious carved faces display distinct Polynesian facial features as well as Prince Albert-styled moustaches. It is possible that this highly original furniture was carved in Britain and perhaps inspired from a visit by New Zealand Maori to the Queen after the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. The stunning black oak furniture perfectly offsets the dining room’s silent dignity. This would have been in complete opposition to the bustling hive of activity in the kitchen next door.

The kitchen was always the most important part of the house for the domestic staff, throughout the day. The stoves were lit in the early hours of each morning and, from then on, breakfast, morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea, dinner and supper were prepared in quick succession. The kitchen usually closed for the evening around eleven p.m.
However on special occasions or during dinner parties, the kitchen and its staff often worked into the early hours of the following morning. Burnside was designed with a three-kitchen system (see FIGURE 3). The scullery is the furthest from the dining room. It is a plain, compacted room with a lower-than-average bench and a lowered ceiling. The scullery was where vegetables were scrubbed, peeled and chopped and other messy chores were carried out. The room was small because the Reid family usually employed young girls, about the age of thirteen or fourteen, to do these menial chores. The cook’s kitchen is situated next to the scullery. It is an inviting and comfortably-spaced working area, very typical of a contemporary country kitchen, with all the modern conveniences, including a bell system, which was accessible throughout the house. The bell was wired to the cook’s kitchen so that when the Reid family rang for assistance, the maids would know which room they were required in. The cook’s kitchen also featured a variety of other modern appliances, which will be discussed in greater depth during the next section. Alongside the cook’s kitchen, and closest to the dining room, was a segregated space known as the butler’s kitchen or servery. This was generally a plain room with ample bench space for placing prepared dishes before they were served in the dining room. It was also where the family china and table accessories were stored away when not in use.

A tour of the remainder of Burnside homestead again reveals the differences in the social position of the domestic staff, compared with their employers. A long, narrow passageway leads from the kitchen and scullery area to the back of the house, where the former servants’ sleeping quarters and the laundry are situated. The servants at Burnside had their own bedrooms but shared a small kitchen, bathroom and sitting room off the main laundry area. Domestic staff working in a strictly-run Victorian home like Burnside were never allowed to dine or mix socially with their employers. Their prime purpose was to serve their wealthy employers and perform all of the duties that were deemed unworthy of genteel ladies. The servants’ rooms were comfortable but sparsely decorated, and devoid of the kinds of indulgent luxuries that the Reid family took for granted.

Money was of little consequence when it came to owning the latest technological sensation.
Burnside, as a result, featured items and accessories that were highly fashionable at the time the house was built. The next section will investigate the kinds of household appliances, innovations and accessories that were installed at Burnside homestead during the early years of the twentieth century.
The period between 1890 and 1910 saw a huge variety of household inventions and innovations that promised to make life in the new century just that little bit more comfortable. The late Victorians, in particular, were completely fascinated by gadgets and mechanical devices of all descriptions. This fascination was fuelled by several factors. Firstly, international breakthroughs came to excite people here in New Zealand. One such innovation occurred during the 1880s when Thomas A. Edison set up the first power station to supply electric current for lighting in New York City. By 1890 New Zealand was also preparing to follow suit.\(^{39}\) However, a regular and reliable source of electricity was not readily available to all New Zealand households, particularly those in rural areas. Electricity did not arrive at Burnside homestead until 1939, largely because of its geographic isolation. Before this, the Reid family and their servants relied on acetylene gas lighting, as well as candles and kerosene lamps. Some original examples of early twentieth-century light fittings still hang in the Great Hall, kitchen, dining and drawing rooms at Burnside (see FIGURE 4.). The giant bay villa was kept warm by the heat of all eleven fireplaces. In the early 1920s the Reid family employed two teenage boys, during the winter months, whose essential task was to kept all of those fires stoked and roaring. It was quite an undertaking to keep a house the size of Burnside warm. This task was achieved with a series of specially designed vents, which were placed on either side of the hearth in the drawing room, and in the wall near the ceiling, to help expel the heat so that it warmed the entire house. Three of the rare and finely detailed fire grates at Burnside are from Larnach Castle and were bought by the Reid family after Larnach committed suicide in 1906.\(^{40}\)

New ideas and gadgets were also brought in by visitors and young settlers. The majority of new immigrants to New Zealand carried with them a variety of different inventions that had never been seen outside their homelands.
The Scotch girdle or griddle, for example, was used for making girdle scones and could be found in a great number of Scottish and northern English homes. Scottish settlers brought the heavy, round, flat piece of cast iron with them to New Zealand so that they could continue making scones and cakes which reminded them of ‘Home.’41 One such girdle was used in Burnside’s kitchen during the early years of the twentieth century, and today a similar example still hangs above the coal range.

There were, in fact, endless gadgets for preparing and cooking food in the late Victorian and early Edwardian home, many of which were used at Burnside. Various boiling pots and stewing pans were available, as well as more sophisticated items such as the pestle and mortar. These were deemed essential for anyone who wanted to grind up fresh herbs and spices for their cooking. Popular seasonings at the time included ‘knotted or sweet marjoram, lemon thyme, lemon peel cut thinly and dried, sweet basil, dried parsley and mint.’42 Many gadgets also existed for cutting vegetables and pastries into fancy shapes. Desserts, such as jelly, could be formed with elaborate tin or copper moulds. There were also special tins for making small fruit tarts, mince pies and Yorkshire puddings. Egg whisks, cork screws and lemon squeezers were becoming very fashionable by the turn of the century. Early cake mixers also caused great excitement when they arrived in New Zealand during the 1890s, via the United States. They were basic but effective, manually-operated machines. The mixer was clamped firmly to the table when in use. A bar extended across the top of the mixing bowl, supporting the gear wheel and the two beaters, which were turned in opposite directions by a handle on the side.43

The third reason for an influx of inventions around the turn of the century was due to the growth and success of several New Zealand companies. Some settlers, who had arrived in the mid nineteenth century to start their own business ventures, had by the 1890s earned a respectable name and reputation for their quality products. This was particularly important when it came to producing items that were specifically designed to work in our own conditions. One such case involved the importation of American and British cast-iron cooking ranges.
These were brought to New Zealand in the 1860s and 1870s and instantly revolutionised the way people cooked their food. Before this, settlers had to cope with the basic colonial ovens, over which hung a heavy black cast-iron pot where one item of food was cooked at a time. The new cooking ranges enabled multiple dishes to be prepared together. However the American and British models were not hugely successful here because they were designed to burn bituminous coal rather than the lignite coal which was abundant in New Zealand.  

Henry Ely Shacklock was one settler who sort to rectify this problem, when he set up his South End foundry in Dunedin in 1871. Shacklock discovered that New Zealand cooking ranges needed a fire which would draw well. With this in mind, he designed several stoves which corrected the faults in the American and British imports, by relocating the fire-box near the top of the range and constructing the flues around the ovens so that the flames would travel further.  

This was an important innovation and within a few years Shacklock ovens were being installed in homes throughout New Zealand, under the trade name ‘Orion.’ The cook’s kitchen at Burnside features a rare and original Shacklock Orion double oven coal range, which has now been restored. It is fully functional and is capable of heating 80 gallons of water. Most coal ranges were singles and Burnside’s double range is one of only a handful still in working condition in New Zealand.

Despite the many and various gadgets available at the turn of the twentieth century, technology was, in some ways, still relatively primitive compared with today’s standards. For example, it was still a novelty to have a system of running water in the average New Zealand household at this time. Most families relied on a water supply from pumps or a well located outside their home. The carrying of water inside was a labour-intensive but essential daily chore, one which enabled people to wash, and clothes and dishes to be kept clean. The ‘copper’ was used to heat water for use in the laundry. It was an extra large copper boiling tub, continuously fuelled by a fire lit below it. Once lit, the copper was used all day, every day, enabling clothes to be washed, irons to be prepared and heated, and, on occasion, wrapped food to be cooked.
Burnside’s laundry still features an original and substantial copper boiling tub, with a heavy wooden lid, which is still used on occasion by the current owners.

Other items of interest in Burnside’s laundry include an old corner iron stand, displaying various examples of clothes irons, a wooden domestic carpet sweeper, an early Singer sewing machine with an elaborate stand, a few wooden buckets and an early twentieth century water-driven washing machine. This was one of the first machines to use a mechanical agitator-type action. The principle of an agitator action was the basis for all modern washing machines until very recently. The laundry room at Burnside was certainly a room designed for working in humid conditions. The floor, walls and ceiling are completely lined with bare wooden boards. A large window on one side of the room allows plenty of light in. It was a functional and much visited working area during the Reid family’s inhabitancy. The farm hands, for example, always kept their winter leather coats hung up in the laundry. The staff at Burnside would also walk from the laundry, across the small courtyard at the back of the house and down the servants passage to gain quick access to the Grand Hall and the other main rooms.

Life at Burnside was a mixture of routine and pleasure, comfort and labour. The very design of the house signifies the kind of social class groupings, and the resulting quality of life, that the Reid family and their employees expected to adhere to. The front of the house, which was used almost exclusively by the Reid family and their guests, was excessively showy and elaborately decorated to impress visitors. The decorations became less elaborate the further one travelled through the house until the servants quarters and laundry were reached. Only the servants frequented this area of the house so there was no need to impress anyone with unnecessary and expensive decoration.

Although times had changed since the bursting of the great farming estates, (an event which will be discussed in greater depth during chapter five), the sons of the former landed elite still staved to live like gentlemen themselves. They still considered themselves a ‘cut above’ the average man in the street, and certainly superior to the people they employed to do the everyday menial and dirty tasks.
The following section briefly looks at the structure of New Zealand society after the turn of the twentieth century and the impact this had on the Reid family of Burnside homestead.
v.

The Reid family and New Zealand society after 1900.

When John F. Reid married Evelyn Clare McLean in June 1900, the structure of New Zealand’s society and the distribution of its population was changing. Early twentieth-century New Zealand was still a very British-orientated nation, as it had been in the 1880s, but there were now equal numbers of New Zealand-born citizens and British-born residents. The non-Maori population had climbed to three-quarters of a million, and by 1911 New Zealand had just over one million European inhabitants. The demise of the gold rush era also signalled a significant drop in population numbers for the South Island. Greater opportunities in the large cities of the North attracted more new immigrants and young families. White settlers in the South were now only 44.3 per cent of the total population, numbering just 414,410 by 1906. The South, once overrun with new immigrants and settlers, would never again have a higher number of inhabitants than the North Island.

The structure of New Zealand’s society was also shifting. About half of the total population were labourers and manual workers, whose greatest asset was still their manpower. At the upper end of the social hierarchy there had emerged three small, but often intersecting, social groupings. They included the property-owning professionals, the commercial elites, and the land-owning gentry. This tiny class, which included the Reid family of Burnside, was still at the very top of the farming establishment, despite the fact that their land holdings were nowhere near the size of the former great estates. There were also three emerging and significantly larger groups among the middle classes; namely, the ‘new’ educated middle class of clerks and other white-collar workers, small business proprietors and, a significant increase in small and family-run farms. These farms essentially owed their emergence to the breakdown and subsequent subdivision of the great estates. Members of the upper-middle class and above were able to enjoy a very high standard of material success and comfort, similar to that of their British counterparts.
The barriers between town and country were also changing. 48 per cent of the population now lived in urban centres of more than 2500 persons.\textsuperscript{50} Children, the middle-aged and the very old were far more noticeable in the population.\textsuperscript{51} The Census of 1911 indicated that 41 per cent of New Zealand's white inhabitants were under 20 years of age.\textsuperscript{52} Four-fifths of these young people received a substantial primary school education. However most working-class children left secondary school to start earning a living as soon as they were legally able to. Child labour was still essential to the survival of most working-class and rural families. This was further exacerbated by the commonly held belief that 'hard work made children into better, more worthy people'.\textsuperscript{53} Children of upper-class families often did nothing to contribute to the family income or household. However, on occasion these children were instructed by their mothers to learn to do some of the household chores for themselves. This usually included simple tasks such as making one's own bed, drying the dishes or setting the dinner table, always under the watchful eye of the parlour maid. Girls in particular were taught how to manage a house and to cook, on the presumption that they would have to manage their own household and servants one day.\textsuperscript{54} Early twentieth-century New Zealand children were generally required to be far more self-reliant and responsible than previous generations had been. They also ate better, lived healthier and communicated more readily with adults than their cousins back in Britain.\textsuperscript{55}

Adult women in New Zealand were still largely bound to the role of 'wife, mother, homemaker and guardian of society's morals', a notion supported by the fact that they had won the right to vote for Members of Parliament in 1893. At this time paid work for women of any class was widely regarded as an interlude between school and marriage. Even in the mid 1920s, the proportion of married women in the workforce was just 3.5 per cent.\textsuperscript{56} In the upper and elite classes of New Zealand society, it was considered rather shameful for women to take on paid employment because it implied that their husbands and fathers could not provide for them adequately.\textsuperscript{57} Women were required to manage the household staff and look after the needs of their husbands and children.
During the early years of the twentieth century, a woman’s place really was thought to be ‘in the home’, or at least not too far away from it. Education for women was favoured more as a ‘desirable attribute’, than as necessary training for a career. Upper-class girls were essentially taught to uphold the ideals of feminine grace, virtue and modesty, so cherished by the British aristocracy at this time. ‘Better things’ were expected of these privileged daughters. They were usually taught to play the piano and other ladylike arts, in the hopes of someday becoming the wives of prominent businessmen, urban professionals or other prosperous farmers. These types of ladylike accomplishments were also desirable attributes for girls in bourgeois urban families to attain. Tertiary education was seen as a respectable alternative to remaining at home after secondary school. Attending university was also believed to enhance the chances of finding a highly-sort-after and distinguished marriage partner.

While gentry wives managed the household staff, their husbands managed the farm employees and their own businesses or careers. In most families the household division of labour remained as rigid as it had been in the 1870s. Men were simply not expected to do any household-related tasks. Fathers were certainly not obliged to pay close attention to the emotional needs of their children; ‘children were their parents’ chattels, as wives were the chattels of their husbands, at least in law…demonstrations of affection at the time were not required or expected.’ However, upper-class fathers generally kept a very close eye on their daughters’ social networks. They made sure that their daughters were always surrounded by respectable and socially aspiring confidants. The gentleman of the house essentially contributed to the family by providing money and security. Having done this, he was free to do as he wished. A ‘good’ husband and father was a good breadwinner. It was not uncommon that a husband or father’s reputation in the local community depended on a wife and daughters who seemed to be ‘leisured ladies’. The less work they did, the more he was applauded as a ‘good provider’, the essential quality of a decent and real man in this era.

It was still considered appropriate, in the early years of the twentieth century, for the upper classes to be quite ‘useless’ when it came to manual labour and daily chores.
Servants were still being employed to do all the dirty, menial tasks in most wealthy households. Some middle-class families were also able to afford at least one maid to help out with the housework. The adult sons and daughters of the former landed elite certainly continued to live their lives in considerable comfort and luxury.

John Forrester Reid is known to have employed no less than seven permanent servants to run Burnside homestead. These included a cook, a butler, two maids, a chauffer, a gardener, and a ‘boy’ to do odd jobs and care for the family dairy cows and chickens. Other seasonal or semi-permanent positions were held by the family nurse, later the governess, two teenage wood-chopping boys, and one or two extra young kitchen girls, who worked scrubbing vegetables and dishes during busy dinner parties or special celebrations. All of the staff had their own private quarters. The butler slept in a loft off the back verandah and the chauffer lived in a room above the car in the garage. The governess had a private sleeping area, concealed with a curtain around one corner of the children’s school room.

The Reid family reportedly lived in the strict style of the Scottish aristocracy throughout their time at Burnside. They are representative of only a handful of wealthy and elite farming families who shared a relatively leisured, but isolated existence in New Zealand at the turn of the twentieth century. On 12 April, 1903, a daughter, Evelyn Agnes Babel Joan Reid, was born to John and his wife Evelyn at Burnside homestead. The baby girl, known as Joan, was soon followed by a son, John McLean Reid, on 29 June, 1904. The two Reid children were looked after and tutored initially by their nanny, and later by their governess. They maintained a much more formal distance from both of their parents than would be expected today. At meal times, for example, Joan and John were only permitted to eat lunch or dinner with their parents if they were specifically invited to do so. In addition they were always accompanied by their nanny, or as they grew older, their governess, who was solely responsible for taking care of the children’s needs and manners at the dinner table. It was not deemed appropriate for parents of the upper classes to teach or correct their children in such matters.
Detailed accounts of the children’s daily routines at Burnside remain lost in time. However, growing up at Burnside was believed to have been a very lonely experience particularly for young Joan Reid. Like most daughters of gentlemen, Joan was never permitted to attend any public schools and her social contacts were strictly observed and limited by her parents. As the Reid children grew older, their paths into adulthood were shaped by the strict gender roles each was expected to adhere. Thus John, who was a year younger than his sister, was nevertheless given far greater freedom and social opportunities than Joan. The young John was encouraged to join his father on hunting expeditions, at sporting events, and special club meetings. Joan remained largely confined to the domestic realm. However she was finally permitted to be involved with the local girl guide troupe and this became her one favoured outlet. When Joan married in 1928, she rejected the tradition of a bridesmaid and chose instead to include an entire company of girl guides, dressed in full uniform, as her wedding attendants. Her wedding photo still hangs in the dining room at Burnside. Joan married a doctor and took residence in Oamaru.

John Forrester Reid died on 17 August, 1929, still retaining ownership of the Burnside property and the family homestead that he had had specially commissioned. Evelyn Reid remained there until 1930, when it was sold to the Hudson family of Cadbury-Fry-Hudson fame in Dunedin.

J. F. Reid’s attitude towards life and his lifestyle at Burnside had been greatly influenced by his youth spent at his parents’ Elderslie estate homestead. In fact his financial position and status within the community was almost entirely the result of his father’s hard work and good fortune. John Reid senior was a shrewd businessman who also wanted to give his children a better standard of education and greater opportunities in life than what his family in Scotland had offered him. Chapter two takes us back even further to the beginning of the Reid family saga in New Zealand. John Reid’s arrival in New Zealand, during the early 1860s, coincided with a mass migration of new settlers and gold-rush followers, all seeking fortune and glory in the thriving new colony.
CHAPTER TWO: A HOME AWAY FROM ‘HOME.’

i.
The Colonial South Island.

The South Island of New Zealand, in the second half of the nineteenth century, was a vast miscellany of new challenges, new opportunities and new people. By 1860 there were 75,000 settlers in New Zealand, the majority of whom were of British or European origin. Most had chosen to brave the long ocean voyage in the hopes of securing a better standard of living for themselves and their families. This kind of mass migration was largely provoked by the discovery of gold, first in Otago and then on the West Coast, in 1861. In fact the international phenomenon of the gold rush came to be seen as the most dramatic and influential event of the era. It had started in California, gained enormous momentum in Australia and then spilled over into Otago during the early 1860s. The first discovery of gold in New Zealand caused a good deal of social upheaval, as well as growth, in the relatively quiet Southern settlements. Permanent villages and towns had been established in the South since the arrival of the first settlers in the 1840s. Subsequent new arrivals also tended to settle in the South where there was more opportunity and less chance of racial confrontations with local Maori tribes.

The initial excitement and whirlwind of gold fever caused the population of Otago to double within six months. The early 1860s saw enormous crowds of enthusiastic young single men pouring into Dunedin, Tuapeka, the Clutha and the surrounding mining camps. Between 1864 and 1865 thousands of Britons flocked to the young colony in search of a quick fortune. The majority of these migrants were single young men from Scotland and Cornwall. Here in New Zealand they ran free, worked hard and played even harder. They ‘drank and swore, marched and worked on the Sabbath’ and generally behaved in a manner that most ‘respectable’ citizens disapproved of.
Those who struck gold and who laboured to get it out of the mines often did not hold it long enough to prosper. Lucky strikes were frequently blown away in binges of hard drinking. Anyone who received a large pay out was expected to shout his mates and associates plenty of drinks at the local pub. The temptation to drink and gamble away one’s earnings was almost irresistible to some because good times were scarce and living conditions in the goldfields and shantytowns were extremely harsh. The miners brought with them a ‘supporting cast of camp-followers’ in the form of ‘storekeepers, entertainers, professional gamblers, dancing girls, medical quacks, journalists, lawyers and bankers’. 67 It was these people who stood to gain the most secure profits from the mining camps and their labourers.

The flood of miners and their custom caused Dunedin to develop rapidly into a permanent town and burgeoning metropolis. Various shops, businesses, warehouses and domestic residences were quickly erected. Public buildings, handsome schools, churches and other amenities were soon under construction. ‘Three banks, two theatres, forty-two hotels, a mechanics’ institute, and public gardens’ were established. The streets were paved and lit by gas, and four new wharves were built to cope with the rush of trade and traffic.68 One quarter of the colony’s settlers lived in Dunedin by the beginning of the 1870s. Gold and the stimulus that it gave to the city’s commercial infrastructure, had pushed Dunedin’s growth far ahead of Christchurch’s. For this reason Dunedin became the major point of entry for South Island-bound immigrants during the 1870s.69 By the late 1860s Dunedin was also the largest city in the South with a permanent population of 14,000. Christchurch had 13,000 and Nelson, the third largest, had 6,000 people.70 Between these cities the most substantial towns included Invercargill, Oamaru, Timaru, Port Chalmers and Lyttelton. Small villages and hamlets sprung up between towns and most settlements were soon linked by rough roads, rivers and railways by the 1870s. Horse-drawn stage coaches travelled between many towns and, by 1866, one coach line proudly boasted an unprecedented ‘Christchurch to Timaru in one day’ service.71 However, New Zealand at this time was still very much a provincial society with the majority of the population living in rural, as opposed to urban, areas.
As such, economic and social patterns were arranged into complex regional settlements, where the ‘typical’ Southern businessman was still an artisan or shopkeeper in a small town, rather than an entrepreneur socialising at the Dunedin Club. Progress in the South was obvious. The Southern cities developed into industrial centres much faster than those in the North Island, which were hampered by racial tensions and impending Maori land wars. By the end of 1869 the South Island had 368 factories to the North’s 161. Ironworks, potteries and breweries were numerous. The Water of Leith brewery, founded in Dunedin in 1862, was already exporting its products to Honolulu, Fiji and the eastern colonies of Australia.

The early establishment of these particular industries reflected the emphasis that colonial society placed on the dominance of men. Pubs, brothels, gambling houses and men’s contests of physical strength, skill and speed were common sights in colonial New Zealand. Strength, youth and vitality were highly regarded as a necessity in any pioneering society because work was tough and survival even tougher. ‘The colonists admired strong men who got things done. They respected those who could rough it without complaint, could work hard, and assert their rights’. The gold rushes had attracted far more men to the colony than women. An imbalance in the sex ratio was considered a great disadvantage to any burgeoning society. The ‘family’ which, in the nineteenth century was narrowly defined as a husband, his wife and their children, was believed to be the key to social order and decency. The lack of female immigrants meant that such families were not being formed in as great a number as the young New Zealand government had hoped. Various organisations were established in Britain to promote female emigration and provinces throughout New Zealand did what they could to attract women to the colony. In 1862 Otago, which was overwhelmed by miners, offered free passages for single females to come and live in the province, and 1350 young women took up the opportunity. Canterbury also offered financial help to any young single women willing to travel to New Zealand.

Immigrant ships were carefully scrutinised by anxious colonists to ensure the virtuous character of the newcomers.
Prostitution had become more visible with the gold rushes and many settlers feared that the colony would become corrupt and polluted if it was left unchecked. The vast majority of immigrants, however, hailed from humble but respectable families in London, Cornwall and parts of Ireland. More than sixty per cent of these women listed their occupations as general domestic servants, and they were able to find plenty of work once in New Zealand. Colonial servants were renowned for their independence. If they disliked a job or a certain employer they could easily move on to find more work. However, it was hoped that they would eventually marry. Some of course left Otago and Canterbury to go back to Britain or across to Australia. However 11 per cent of those who stayed were married before they turned twenty, and 75 per cent were married by their twenty-sixth birthday. These women generally had very large families, an average of 9.3 children, with one born every 21.5 months, until they gave birth to their last child about the time of their fortieth birthday.\textsuperscript{76}

A childhood spent in the new colony was considerably more relaxed than one spent in Britain. New Zealand children during the 1860s and 1870s were also given far greater opportunities for education. However very few went beyond the primary school level. Those that did generally had parents with a higher standard of education. Otago opened a boys' high school in 1863 and a girls' equivalent in 1871. Canterbury quickly followed suit. In 1877 the government proclaimed that all children between the ages of seven and thirteen, who lived within two miles of a public school, now had to attend 'for at least one half of the period in each year during which the school is usually opened.'\textsuperscript{77} Before and after school children had to help their parents. In their spare time they roamed freely and played various games, including traditional British ones like marbles, spinning tops and dolls. Treasure hunts, hide and seek, visiting circuses and fairs provided more entertainment. Some boys' games were extremely rough and very violent, involving considerable cruelty to animals. However society itself was rougher and more cruel than in later standards.

The 1870s saw even greater growth in New Zealand. A rush of immigration occurred during 1874 and 1875 due to increasing hardships in Britain.
Wages for British labourers and the working classes were being cut at this time and many faced unemployment. However, although living conditions were worsening, many Britons still viewed emigration as a fearful leap into the unknown. During the early 1870s New Zealand agents successfully re-educated a good portion of the British population via leaflets, posters, organised meetings and information counters. Positive news, information and true success stories about life in New Zealand were freely distributed to anyone willing to emigrate. The New Zealand government was particularly interested in attracting settlers who were eager to work hard to develop the colony. Potential emigrants were selected for free passage to New Zealand based on their personal skills and qualities. These included a ‘capacity for hard work, thrift, honesty, and a certain kind of independence and desire to better themselves’.  

Agricultural labourers were badly needed to develop the New Zealand rural sector and many were eager to venture forth to create a new life in the colony. Stories of those who had ‘made a go of it’ in the young colony were widely circulated back ‘Home’. New Zealand was soon rumoured to be the ‘working man’s paradise’; a place where hard working people could achieve a far greater level of independence, and a better standard of living, than anywhere in Britain or Europe. Work was guaranteed and wages were high. Boys in New Zealand could earn more than adult males in England. ‘With careful living, a family could save enough to buy land, own their own fruit trees and animals, and build a house.’ Women in the colony had a far better chance of securing a ‘good’ marriage partner than if they stayed in Britain with its declining marriage rate. Many young women took the plunge during the 1870s, when depression reduced the attraction to settle in the United States. Most arrived in New Zealand to work initially as domestic servants. A good proportion of these were Irish servant girls. However the Irish were considered less desirable immigrants because of the extreme poverty and conditions of their homeland. New Zealand emigration agents were far more enthusiastic about the prospect of securing Scottish colonists. The Scots were considered ideal settlers because they were said to be ‘healthy, industrious, thrifty…possess[ing] exactly the skills which were needed in a new country’.
Furthermore, bad weather, poor prices, competition for land and epidemics of sheep and cattle diseases affected many Scottish farmers in the early 1870s. It was these push factors, along with the opportunity of a free passage to a new life, which gave many Scots the incentive to start anew. Interestingly, the Scottish were considered the most land-hungry of all the immigrant groups in New Zealand. It is not entirely coincidental then that the vast majority of the large estate owners in Otago were originally of Scottish decent.

Although the majority of new settlers were from Great Britain, agents also went to Europe to recruit potential colonists. Small but significant groups from Scandinavia, Germany and Italy were soon sent out to the new colony. Most were rural workers who, like the British labourers, had been forced to endure harsh workings conditions, poor pay and limited opportunities for promotion. Most young Germans preferred to go to America but when that destination was temporarily closed during the 1870s, a number of them came to New Zealand. They were generally welcomed immigrants, having a similar reputation as the Scots for being 'sober, industrious, patient, persevering and orderly'.

Nineteenth-century New Zealand did not generally celebrate diversity. Chinese immigrants, for example, were particularly unwelcomed. A £10 poll tax was imposed in 1881 to limit the number of Asian immigrants and to 'protect New Zealand's European identity'. The Chinese were particularly feared in the South Island, especially on the Otago goldfields and in Dunedin where they ran market gardens, laundries, and fruit shops. The poll tax was soon raised to £100 and anti-Chinese sentiment became almost hysterical in the late 1880s. ‘Larrikins’ assaulted them, stole from their shops, and verbally abused them. Many working-class men and women saw the Chinese as a menace to the colonial standard of living, and were determined to exclude them from society as much as possible.

Those colonists already ensconced in the settlements of Canterbury and Otago generally viewed all newcomers with suspicion. They also considered Auckland to be little more than an outpost of Sydney, and largely populated with ‘convict settlements’. 
In fact references to the colonies in Australia, particularly New South Wales, was often taken as a negative one to the settlers here in New Zealand. ‘The convict origins and the great inequalities in wealth were considered undesirable.’ It has been suggested that New Zealand settlers and political reformers tried to learn from the ‘mistakes’ made during the colonisation of Australia, by imposing stricter land and social policies. However the Australian influence was unavoidable in colonial New Zealand society. Firstly, a large portion of the population had ‘crossed the ditch’ to create a new life in the goldfields of New Zealand. Most of the banks were Australian owned and even the valued merino sheep had originally come to our shores via Australia.  

The colonists of the 1860s and 1870s also measured the success of their new society against that of Britain. Most new arrivals were of British, Scottish, Irish or European origin, and British Anglo-Saxon settlers, in particular, held firm that they were of a superior breed and civilisation. As a result, new settlements did much to rival each other in their claims to be English. Colonists in Christchurch were particularly proud of their new ‘English’ town. Streets and squares had been planned out with distinctly English names around the cathedral, and English trees were planted along the Avon river and in the northern suburbs. However most migrants of the 1870s did not want to recreate the social hierarchy of Britain. ‘In particular, they hoped to create a society where land and opportunity were widely distributed.’ The looming arguments about land monopoly during the 1860s and 1870s reflected this desire to avoid the rigid social system of rural England.  

It was inevitable, though, that a hierarchy of a sorts did exist within the rural sector of colonial New Zealand. While professionals, merchants, tradespeople and shopkeepers were among those who came to the new urban centres, the majority of the South Island’s immigrant population hailed from the working classes and lived out their lives in rural communities. By 1871 about seventy per cent of all adult males were identified as ‘country dwellers’. A few were small pastoralists or family farmers who owned one or two hundred acres where they grew cash crops or grazed a few hundred sheep.
This somewhat independent group had a little capital, and were reasonably better-off both financially and socially than farm labourers. However some of these small-scale farmers were barely able to earn a good income on their own because they simply could not compete with the enormity of the wealthy landowners’ vast estates. These estates dominated the best land, produced the healthiest animals and, of course, created most of the wealth. This seemingly disproportional share of the wealth would become the instigator of widespread discontent during the 1890s but in the decades preceding this it was more or less accepted as a fact of life. Below the wealthy estate owners and the small scale farmers were thousands of labourers, itinerant workers and working class families who were almost completely dependent on their employers for housing, food and equipment. The large majority of these workers were employed on farming estates, and they were sometimes indistinguishable with small-scale farmers, since many farmers did occasional work for wages and a few estate servants owned tiny blocks of land which they farmed to the best of their ability.

The basic labour units on large farming estates consisted of shepherds, domestic workers, and farm labourers who all lived on the property but maintained formal and distant relations with the wealthy estate owners and their families. Managers, overseers and foremen were employed to supervise these workers and they also acted as mediators between the ‘master’ and his ‘servants’. Below managers there was a descending hierarchy of workers, ranging from head shepherds to farm cadets and, at the very bottom, unskilled labourers. Very little personal information has been gathered about these numerous workers or what they thought about their lot in life, ‘existing anonymously and dying without a mark’, as Steven Eldred-Grigg has described them. Even less is known about the thousands of impoverished and poor people who roamed the country roads during the turbulent depression years of the 1880s. Nowhere in nineteenth-century New Zealand was the class distinction more immediate than in the South Island. This has been largely attributed to the emergence of one specific social group, the New Zealand ‘colonial elite.’
John Reid was among the few who came to the new colony with a good deal of capital, which was soon invested in banking, business and pastoral ventures. This group of immigrants came to be established as the so-called New Zealand ‘colonial elite’, or Southern ‘gentry’, phrases that tend to vex some contemporary social historians, since it is now believed that the majority of them were not ‘true’ gentlemen. There were certainly a very small percentage of new landowners who were aristocratic by birth, but the majority of them did not hail from old British gentry families. This is perhaps why, as some historians have hypothesised, they emigrated to a new colony instead of trying to break into the impenetrable social hierarchy at ‘Home’. Most members of the New Zealand colonial ‘gentry’ were of English or Scottish middle, or upper-middle class origin and they had settled here only after some business dealings or experience in Australia. However, despite their relatively humble beginnings, all of these large estate owners identified with, and aspired to cultivate, particular aristocratic qualities once they had settled in New Zealand. The wealthy varied in age and educational background, but above all, they were enterprising individuals who commanded a certain level of status and respect, particularly within the New Zealand nineteenth-century rural community. The following section will look at the journey of John Reid, a young man who hailed from a modest Scottish family but became one of North Otago’s wealthiest and most influential landowners.
ii.

**John Reid and the creation of Elderslie estate.**

The path that John Reid took was not entirely unusual for a young man of his means. Reid had been born into a comfortably well-off, middle-class family in Stirling, Scotland, on 24 March, 1835. Details about his early life are limited but he did gain some experience in commerce in Glasgow before travelling to Victoria, Australia at the age of about eighteen. Here Reid is believed to have worked as an engineer for ten years at the Mount Egerton goldmines near Ballarat. The type of work he actually performed is unknown since the term ‘engineer’ was a rather ambiguous one in the nineteenth century. It was in Australia that Reid, like many of his peers, accumulated his initial wealth, rather than from his British occupation or connections. In 1855, at the relatively young age of twenty, John Reid married seventeen-year-old Agnes Humphries, the youngest daughter of a middle-class Scottish businessman, James Humphries, from Paisley. It is not known where the marriage took place but it is likely that Reid had travelled back to his homeland for the event. Agnes then joined her new husband in Australia. By 1863 the young couple and their first three infant children had established themselves in Dunedin, where Reid worked as a representative of various English and Australian trading companies. Reid was a particularly enterprising man and he was quickly induced to invest his increasing capital in property. Having wealth in nineteenth-century New Zealand equated to owning land of 5000 acres or more. Initially land was both abundant and relatively easy to acquire for those who were a little better-off than most. The going rate was usually just over one pound an acre. Most of the large estate owners who came to dominate the South Island economy during the 1870s were those who had bought, sold, bargained and speculated various quantities of land in the 1850s and 1860s, enabling their capital to grow. Historians have estimated that by the late 1860s 14,500,000 acres of the South Island were in private hands. Most of this land was monopolised by the 225 estate owners across Otago and Southland who had acquired at least 5000 acres each. There were also 180 similar sized estates in Canterbury.
Reid’s decision to secure land in Oamaru was probably influenced by both circumstance and ambition. Otago estates were the largest of all the regions in the South Island, the average being 42,000 acres, with many pastoralists owning more than 100,000 acres. Southern sheep were reportedly ‘bigger, healthier, and prettier than their rivals everywhere.’ By this time North Otago was being established as a significant agricultural region, with Oamaru and its seaport developing as an important service centre for this substantial rural community. John Reid began to accumulate his extensive land holdings here in 1865 when he purchased a sizable section of land directly from the Crown at Enfield, fifteen kilometres north-west of Oamaru township. He named his new property ‘Elderslie’, reportedly after the birthplace of the Scottish hero, Sir William Wallace. On 21 November, 1865, Reid added another 3000 acres to this property when he purchased part of D.K. Murray’s estate, at nearby Clifton Falls. Initially John Reid’s interest appears to have been solely from an investor’s point of view. However some time after 1865 he must have had a change of heart when he decided to give up commercial life in Dunedin and settle permanently at his Waiareka Valley property. Further land purchases from a Mr Atkinson, who had been forced to foreclose in the late 1860s, quickly increased Elderslie’s size to an impressive 17,000 acres.

Reid’s considerably rapid land accumulation was certainly due in part to good judgement and to luck. In 1867 a sudden rush of land speculation pushed prices up to new heights. However a slump in 1869 caused wool prices to fall and credit contracted. This, combined with other bad luck, poor judgement or weak management, forced a few landowners into bankruptcy. High living and excessive greed also occasionally took its toll since gambling in the South ‘was rife... Fortunes were won and lost over the card tables of Dunedin.’ For most estate holders though, the 1870s was a decade of great affluence. By the end of 1879 Reid had doubled his acreage with the purchase of ‘Bulruddery’, an adjoining 17,868 acre hill country estate owned by the late Dr. G. M. Webster, who had died the previous November. Webster’s trustees had persuaded Reid to take over Bulruddery as a going concern for thirty thousand pounds. This gave Reid a total land holding of 32,181 acres, valued in 1882 at £146,773.
Reid’s estate became the largest private estate in North Otago at that time. Other freehold estate owners within the Waitaki county included John Mclean with 20,700 acres, W.H. Teschemaker’s 20,676 acres, Alexander McMaster with 17,338 acres, and Reid’s immediate neighbour Edward Menlove, whose ‘Windsor Park’ estate totalled 14,343 acres in 1882, at a value of £103,596. All of these men, including John Reid, owned property in other parts of New Zealand as well. Mathew Holmes, another prominent North Otago landowner, held just 4,527 acres at Waitaki, but owned estates elsewhere which totalled 60,355 acres.

It was these men, their peers, and their families, who constituted the New Zealand colonial elite in the 1870s and 1880s. As a social group they all ‘attempted to evolve a distinctive lifestyle which distanced them from the rest of rural society.’ However, in order to further contrast the extreme differences in the standard of living between those at opposite ends of nineteenth-century New Zealand society, the following section will now look at the general lives of estate labourers. These were the men whose physical labour generated the wealth that elevated individuals like John Reid to the top of the rural hierarchy.

It was inevitable that such large-scale farming operations required plenty of manpower to be at all productive. Most of the wage-earning male servants at Elderslie worked outside on the land, the traditional male realm. They wore basic, sometimes ragged farm wear and working clothes, going about their duties often unheard and unnoticed. The men who worked on Reid’s estate were among thousands of itinerant labourers in the South Island, who lived out harsh but largely undocumented lives. They were the silent, unknown masses who became essential to the running and success of these great farming estates.
iii.

Life as an estate labourer

The attitude and status of South Island farm labourers during the late nineteenth century can only be surmised by contemporary historians. Very a few written documents were produced by this largely anonymous social group, due in part to their high levels of illiteracy. Their living situations also probably varied from person to person, estate to estate and county to county. However the majority of the rural population endured a difficult existence.

Shepherds and labourers led especially tedious lives, labouring from sunrise to sunset, six days a week. They were expected to be loyal and hardworking employees. Workers were housed in wooden barracks and slept in rows of bunk beds. They ate together, often having to share utensils and cutlery, which were still of the most rudimentary kind. By the 1880s food became cheaper and estate owners grew more conscientious about their workers’ welfare, though nutritional values were not of great concern. There was plenty of food provided but it was often monotonous and lacking in sufficient vitamins. Labourers dined on ‘mostly spuds and mutton, bread and dripping.’ Vegetables and fruit appeared only on special occasions. The estate owners usually provided bulk rations of tea, sugar and flour but the quality was often second-rate and it quickly deteriorated in the storerooms. Sugar usually came in the form of treacle and milk was not always available. Consequently, ill health was a regular factor in a typical labourer’s life. In extreme cases the occasional shepherd was said to have gone mad from loneliness or food poisoning on the more isolated estates.

The situation became even bleaker for most of the South Island’s rural population during the long depression of the 1880s and 1890s. Unemployment rose to new extremes and wages fell dramatically. Farm labourers who had previously commanded an annual income of £60, were now forced to accept £45 a year. If they worked hard or were well regarded by the estate owner, these labourers might have eventually risen through the ranks to field foreman or head shepherd and earned £70 a year.
In rare cases they might have even reached the level of overseer or manager. Historians are unable to tell how many workers improved their income through such promotion, but it was common for most labourers to spend year after year without ever getting beyond the lowest level. Wages were not only small, they were also insecure and liable to be reduced at any stage. Some Otago estate owners were paying their servants as little as £18 a year. This of course created an environment of anxiety and uncertainly on the large estates, where class divisions grew even more rigid; ‘Landowners were playing croquet, and soup kitchens were being set up in the towns.’

Nearby townships were full of spinsters and wives whose husbands had left them to find work in the countryside. Most of these men were seasonal shearers, harvesters, semi-skilled labourers and itinerant poor, who roamed the dusty Southern roads looking for employment. Those that did not find work risked becoming beggars or drifters. Others were able to be employed on a casual basis on the large farming estates, where they supplemented the permanent staff during the busiest seasons, such as harvest or haymaking time. Wealthy land owners were the main employers of this large floating workforce and it is at this time that the swagger phenomenon came into being.

Life as a farm labourer did have some compensations. Workers were always housed and fed by the landowner. They gained a sense of belonging and felt a certain amount of loyalty and attachment to the estate. The manager, foreman, blacksmith, head shepherd and the coachmen all enjoyed positions of respect and authority. Farm managers, in particular, were highly valued by their wealthy employers and were treated as near equals in social status. Sometimes they were classed as gentlemen, and if so, they lived in a similar style to their employers. They earned good incomes, usually between £400 and £1000 a year, which enabled them to keep one or two domestic servants and a carriage. Managers were treated as trusted and loyal friends who were almost part of the landowner’s family. They were, on occasion, invited to be included in family social activities. It was also quite common for managers to be the sons of the large landowners, as in the case of John Reid’s sons.
However the majority of lower-order farm labourers lived hard and unfree lives. Wealthy estate owners gave security at the price of freedom, ensuring that their men would have little choice but continue to turn up for work each morning. This was especially true on pay-days or days off when many workers would head for the nearest inn and sometimes drank their whole earnings away in one night. Landowners usually complained about this kind of behaviour but they also knew it almost guaranteed that their labourers would always come back to them, because they needed the financial security that only the farming estate could provide. It is not possible to know the exact amount that John Reid paid his labourers on the Elderslie estate. However the surviving diaries of his neighbour and future son-in-law A. A. McMaster, gives an indication of what it was likely to have been. The average labourer on the McMaster estate was paid between £60 and £65 a year. The McMasters were certainly generous employers but they did expect their labourers to work long hours, from seven a.m. to five p.m., six days a week, with only one or two days off a year for leisure activities.

The exact number of people who worked for John Reid is yet to be established. However it has been estimated that there were at least twenty farm labourers, four gardeners, a carpenter, a groom, and an odd-job man working on the land. Reid’s head gardener and head shepherd were held in high regard and had cottages on the estate. The single men usually lived in quarters there and the other married men returned each night to the neighbouring villages of Enfield or Windsor. During harvests and hay-making Reid also employed extra gangs of workers to supplement his permanent male staff (see FIGURE 7.). The following section will discuss how the Elderslie estate was initially farmed and what agricultural practises were used by Reid to create a profit.
iv.
Farming the great estates

Farming these large estates initially took a good deal of trial-and-error as well as manpower. Bush and scrub was cleared away and burned. Outbuildings, such as workers' barracks, shepherds' cottages, storehouses, woolsheds, dairy and horse stables, dog kennels and poultry houses, were built of white-washed wood in clusters on the large estates, and fences were erected to specify boundaries. Most of the fences on the Elderslie estate consisted of gorse hedging, seventy miles of which was kept trim and tidy by contractors, such as the Clydesdale family, 'experts who trimmed forty chains a day at sixpence a chain.' Reid employed gangs of these contractors for nearly six months of every year, simply to keep his Elderslie property looking tidy. Other gangs were also contracted to cut and harvest hay (see FIGURE 8). Elderslie was equipped with its own train stop so travelling to and from the estate was very easy. It is interesting that John Reid never used this railway to transport his own wool to the Oamaru town markets, preferring instead to send it by road.

Initially Reid stocked his land with Merino sheep. However, when the native tussock was replaced with the cultivation of better pastures, Reid turned to the heavier breeds, particularly the Border Leicester. He was first recorded in the provincial returns in 1870, where he was listed as the owner of 6,500 sheep. By 1882 this flock had steadily increased to 9,500 on the Elderslie property, with a further 20,000 head being run on the former Bulruddery section of the estate. Reid also maintained a select flock of pure Vermont Merinos, whose pedigree reportedly dated from 1822. He began exhibiting these pedigree sheep in 1879 and over the years collected an impressive array of accolades. John Reid certainly ran more sheep than his neighbour Edward Menlove or any other local estate owners. However his flock paled in numbers compared with the largest of the Southern sheep-station owners, the Hon. Robert Campbell, who owned no fewer than 170,000 sheep on his various properties.
Almost every estate owner followed the same agricultural practices, despite the size of their land or number of stock on it. In particular it was common for sheep farmers to cultivate a large portion of their land in English and exotic grasses for pasture. John Reid certainly followed this trend. However Reid did very little cropping himself, preferring instead to lease paddocks to share-croppers, who ploughed and readied the land for sowing in grass or a green crop, after their own harvest. In this way the pasture was renewed every ten to fifteen years, a practise which was called long ley farming. The figures for the whole of Elderslie estate in 1876 included 4500 acres in crops, half in wheat, five hundred acres in oats, and seven hundred acres in barley (see FIGURE 9.). This had been repeated the year before and was an unusually small amount of crops on so large an area of land. According to W. H. Scotter it does not reflect the bonanza period of the great wheat farms at the time, due to the change over from native to exotic grasses. ‘The wheat grown was either Californian Red, Velvet, or Californian White. Yields of fifty to sixty bushels were usual; on Elderslie they ranged from thirty to forty-six bushels to the acre. Oats reached seventy-eight bushels, although a rare 126 bushels occurred on one section in 1900, and barley yielded as much as fifty-five bushels.’

Farming certainly had its share of highs and lows during this time. Severe snowstorms in 1867 and 1895 caused 700,000 sheep and stock to be lost at a value of £210,000. In 1878 the City of Glasgow Bank collapsed, causing financial panic throughout the rural industry, particularly for those who had paid excessive prices for land just a few years earlier. Decreasing prices for farm produce continued throughout the depression years of the 1880s and early 1890s. However John Reid and most of his North Otago estate-owning peers were able to weather these storms. They remained ‘extremely and continuously wealthy’ even after the demise of these great estates during the early twentieth century. By comparison the very wealthiest estate owners were John McLean and Robert Campbell. In 1882 Campbell owned 98,132 acres valued at £246,028. His income in the late 1870s was calculated by Trevor Burnard at £35,000. Historian Jim McAloon estimated that a fortune of £10,000 before 1914 was equivalent in worth to about one million dollars at the time of his publication in 1992.
Therefore Campbell’s fortune would equate to roughly $24,602,800 in assets, with an annual income of at least $3,500,000 in today’s economy. John Reid’s fortune was also in the upper bracket of the farming elite, though still considerably less than Campbell’s immense wealth. By 1882 Reid owned 32,181 acres valued at £146,773. In addition to his estates, he held a further 176 acres elsewhere, valued at £550. Reid’s income was derived from various sources. The breeding and sale of valuable stud stock, particularly Border Leicester sheep, shorthorn cattle, Clydesdales and thoroughbred horses at Elderslie created both profit and prestige for the estate. At one of Reid’s annual dispersal sales one hundred horses sold for twenty thousand pounds. The best of these were exported to Australia. Other sources of income also realised considerable profits. Reid received rent from his sharecroppers at the going rate of one payment of rent for every four or five bushels of crop harvested. Reid’s potential income for 1880 can be estimated from a letter he wrote to the *Otago Witness* in the middle of that year. In Reid’s opinion ‘a man could make a net return of £1,200 from a 500 acre farm if he had land of good quality which was near a market or port, if he was free of debt and if he had capital of £3 per acre to stock the land with.’ Reid clearly had all these requirements on his estate and he felt that a £14 per acre return was a reasonable profit to aim for. If a farmer with a 500 acre farm could expect to make £1,200 per annum, then an estimate of £10,000 net profit from Reid’s 32,181 acres would seem very conservative. ‘Using Reid’s letter as a guide, he appears to have achieved at least ten per cent return on his capital, even at the beginning of the Long Depression. A ten per cent return would have given him a yearly income of at least £14,677’ or about one and a half million in today’s money. Such a sudden accumulation of wealth in the developing colony naturally imposed an immediate gulf between the landed elite and the masses of working-class citizens, particularly with regards to lifestyle. The type of housing one lived in was one of the most blatantly obvious signs of a high or lower living standard. The following chapter explores the impact of Elderslie homestead’s creation on all who saw her.
CHAPTER THREE: ELDERSLIE HOMESTEAD

i.

Establishing a new home away from ‘Home.’

Nineteenth-century New Zealanders maintained the attitude that the size and splendour of a person’s house indicated his or her affluence and standing within the community. With this in mind, each of the North Otago landowners spent enormous sums of money building extravagant, and often ostentatious mansions, carefully segregated from the barracks and cottages of their estate labourers by extensive plantations and English park-like grounds. John Reid’s mansion was a particularly striking example. Reid employed four gardeners to establish Elderslie’s extensive gardens two years before the lavish homestead was built. They followed a plan created by the famous English landscape gardener, Sir Joseph Paxton. By 1872 the gardens boasted ‘velvety-smooth, green lawns’, a sunken rose garden, an imposing avenue of trees marking the entrance to the homestead, an ornamental bridge spanning the Waiareka stream, two wineries, and over fifty acres of shrubs and trees. The grandeur of the estate promoted a series of newspaper articles where the Elderslie mansion and gardens attracted special attention. In 1870 the North Otago Times reported that John Reid ‘recognised the value of arboriculture’ when he planted forty to fifty acres of ‘English forest trees, sycamores, elms, oaks, beeches, poplars’, which generally looked ‘strong and healthy.’ The Times also commented on the ‘beautifully laid out, well-kept lawns, intersected by paths of white quartz gravel from the bed of the Waiareka, and set off by parterres of flowers, among which petunias, scarlet geraniums, pansies, and verbenas’ made ‘a very beautiful picture.’ Garden borders at Elderslie were planted with ‘choice shrubs and herbaceous plants...fringed with well-trimmed edgings of the dwarf veronica.’ The trees on the lawns and along the carriage drive were reported as ‘perhaps the finest collection of pines [and] cypresses in the Province, there being nearly one hundred distinct species.’
The head gardener at the time, Mr I. Stemson, was credited with the beauty of the Elderslie grounds, praised as ‘one of the most attractive and beautiful places in the Colony.’ The esteemed Handbook for Travellers in New Zealand also eagerly described Elderslie as ‘one of the most magnificent residences in Australasia.

There was certainly no expense spared with the building of the mansion at Elderslie. The two-storeyed double verandah-swept homestead consisted of twenty-one rooms and four bathrooms (see FIGURE 10). It was built of the best limestone blocks cut from the local Weston quarries, and roofed with the finest slate tiles from the Otepopo quarries. The Reid family, which by this time consisted of John, Agnes and their first eight (of twelve) children, finally took up residence in 1874. Some rebuilding and extension work also took place in the early 1880s, after an earthquake damaged part of the house. John Reid also ordered the formation of a lake to complement the gardens and homestead at Elderslie (see FIGURE 11). This was created by damning up the Waireka stream, at a cost of £3000, to form a series of miniature lakes and waterfalls near the front entrance to the mansion. These waterways comprised an area of about ten acres, which moved the North Otago Times to remark that it was ‘decidedly the most imposing sheet of water in the district.’ The Elderslie lakes were a source of immense pleasure to the Reid family. They held both public and private swimming events and regular boating parties. Two large swans, named Solomon and Sheba, were specially imported to add a touch of old world elegance to the waterways.

The Reid family was certainly not unique in wanting to create an extravagant country residence. Most colonial families did all they could to recreate an immediate environment which mirrored their beloved homelands, particularly that of the English countryside. They did this by importing strictly observed social customs, English trees and plants, animals, and in particular, game birds. Trevor Burnard believes that these estate owners were not trying to adjust to the alien environment but instead attempted to ‘transcend their surroundings...their houses, in effect, strove to be an oasis of English countryside in a strange new land.'
It is interesting to note however, that some wealthy estate owners chose local Maori references as names for their country houses and estates, including Tokarahi estate, owned by A.A McMaster, M. Holmes’ Awamoa estate, the Campbell’s Otekaike, and Waitangi station, owned by Edmund Gibson. This may have indicated a certain level of affection and commitment towards their new homeland, but on the whole the New Zealand gentry still looked to Britain for both moral and social leadership. Most colonial New Zealanders continued to regard Britain as the undisputed and supreme epicentre of Western civilisation.\footnote{144}

John Reid was no exception. His desire to create and build a colonial homestead (or perhaps more correctly, a family mansion), which at one glance illustrated wealth, prestige, and dominance over the surrounding landscape, was certainly aligned with the pomposity of the British upper classes. In fact it is sometimes difficult to remember that in reality Reid was not aristocratic by birth. He was, however, a member of a vaguely-defined minority class of colonial New Zealanders who chose to live in the manner of the British aristocracy. The most salient representation of that grandiose lifestyle was in the creation and furnishing of the estate family homestead. John Reid certainly took this architectural ambition to the extreme, provoking both admiration and envy from his local community when he chose to build his Elderslie estate homestead.\footnote{145} It was undoubtedly one of the largest and most impressive private residences to be seen in colonial New Zealand, and as such commanded a great deal of attention from locals and visitors at the time. The building and features of the Elderslie homestead, its impact on the local community, as well as the social and financial aspirations it symbolically represented, will be the principle focus of the following section.
ii.

The glory of Elderslie homestead

Elderslie homestead stood as an immediate and imposing status symbol, grand enough to strike envy and awe in any passer-by. It was undoubtedly the show-piece of the district, and as such, the homestead continued to generate considerable public interest throughout its ninety-year life span. Elderslie homestead’s architect has been lost to history but contemporary newspaper articles and photographs of the building reveal features that would have been rather novel for its time. The use of concrete, for anything other than foundations, was still largely unheard of in the late 1860s. By the early 1870s the standardisation of formwork started to encourage new uses for concrete above ground level.\(^{146}\) This new use of concrete as a building material was the focus of an article about Elderslie in the *North Otago Times* during 1874:

> Crossing the Waiareka we come to the Elderslie estate, the property of John Reid, Esq. Here, again, a handsome new stone house is in course of erection; a novel feature, that of the employment of concrete for staircases, being introduced, apparently with success. This is noteworthy as, being much less expensive than the working of hard stone, concrete— if found to answer—will tend greatly to supersede mason work.\(^{147}\)

Stone had been considered the most desirable, if not the only, building material for housing since the civilisations of ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome. Settlers in nineteenth-century New Zealand were determined to incorporate this old ideology into their new environment and to them the pinnacle of culture manifested itself in correctly designed and detailed stone buildings. This attitude persisted long after a style based on the nature of timber had started to evolve. As Charles Fearnley states: ‘the influence of the stonemason can be seen in carpenter-designed buildings for a large part of our architectural history.’\(^{148}\) This is also the case at Elderslie, where Oamaru stone was used as an initial building material.
Later, when the house was renovated after an earthquake, kauri timber was carefully cut and shaped to resemble stone blocks. This was believed to minimize the risk of further earthquake damage, as well as providing a local talking point. Eye-witnesses reportedly found it difficult to note 'where the stone work ended and the wood blocks began.' Thus the prestige of the homestead was not compromised with the use of an ‘inferior’ building material.

Builders who had been bought up with this notion of stone as the best building material quickly adapted New Zealand native timbers to imitate these formal properties. It was often easier to work in wood, using the carved features of traditional stonework, than it was to actually carve these in authentic stone. Classically-styled wooden columns were built up in sections like a barrel. Window or doorway pediments were also used. Key stones, traditionally the central balancing stone protruding from a window or door archway, continued to be used as architectural features in wood, even though they were no longer necessary to the structural stability of the building. Most were nothing more than pieces of wood nailed to the centre of the archway, purely for decorative purposes. This adaptation of the formal elements of stone architecture was a major influence in the development of the New Zealand Colonial style. Elderslie homestead also showed elements of this style with its elaborate use of keystones above the front window arches, and with its Corinthian-styled capitals found on each of the ground floor and first floor verandah posts.

However, Elderslie homestead was certainly influenced by more than one architectural style. It is likely that John Reid drew on Australian examples from his ten years working as an engineer in Victoria. The sprawling rectangular shape of the homestead is certainly reminiscent of the large, often two-storeyed ‘Queenslanders’, which were designed for the warmer areas of the country. Most Australian buildings were designed to keep the sun out rather than let it in, so their verandahs were usually built right around the house. The New Zealand verandah, by contrast, was usually confined to part of the front, or around part of two sides.
The style of Elderslie’s sweeping verandah’s appears to have resembled the Australian ideal and were built around at least three sides of the homestead, though they do not appear to have been accessible as one continuous walkway. Elderslie also resembled elements of the Italianate style, which was popularised in the 1870s and 1880s by Queen Victoria’s Osborne House, built on the Isle of Wight. Illustrations of this stately home were widely reproduced in contemporary magazines. The Italianate style was derived from the form of Italian Renaissance buildings, and was a popular style for public buildings, grand town houses, country houses and villas in nineteenth-century England. It was characterised by particularly wide verandahs, round-headed windows, flat plastered walls and often a tall square tower.\(^\text{153}\) Elderslie homestead had no tower but it did feature several examples of all these other characteristics. The stately, ambitious architectural design of the homestead meant that there were very few examples comparable to it in nineteenth-century New Zealand. However it did conform to Victorian sentiments of the era which demanded ‘individualism and display’, within the context of social ‘good taste’.\(^\text{154}\)

New Zealand’s early architectural style was very much influenced by Victorian tastes and standards. One of the products that came out of the Industrial Revolution was the use of mass-produced ornamental cast-iron which became very popular in the new colony.\(^\text{155}\) The tendency of the Victorians to ‘decorate every possible surface’\(^\text{156}\) resulted in the verandah becoming the main decorative feature of the New Zealand colonial home. It could also, by its decorative character, make an all-important statement about the house and the status of its owners. Both the upstairs and downstairs verandahs of the Elderslie homestead were edged with ornamental cast-iron scrollwork.\(^\text{157}\) The lower verandah, in particular, sported an especially elegant and distinctive spiral motif, which was originally patented by Walter MacFarlane & Co. at their Saracen foundry in Glasgow, Scotland, about 1874. Macfarlane’s foundry became one of the largest producers of decorative cast-iron work in the world and they exported widely throughout the British Empire.\(^\text{158}\)
It is not known whether the pattern of the cast-iron verandah at Elderslie was specifically commissioned by John Reid, while under licence in Scotland, or whether it was pirated illegally in New Zealand. However an original and authentic example of this exact motif can be seen today in the form of a bandstand rotunda which stands beside the Torrens river in Elder Park, Adelaide, Australia. This rotunda was indeed fabricated by Macfarlane’s Saracen foundry then sent out to Australia to be erected by Charles Farr in 1882. It is likely that John Reid also requested this same motif directly from the manufacturers while on one of his many trips back to Scotland. It is interesting that the second-storey verandah and the various balcony balustrades at Elderslie were rather plainly decorated, perhaps in order to maintain the somewhat grandiose air of ‘restrained dignity’ that the homestead was said to impart.

Elderslie was certainly a ‘creation of dignity and beauty’ both outside and within. The small and elegant rooms boasted delicate chandeliers and intricate ceiling designs made in pressed zinc, which carefully concealed the ceiling ventilators. These designs were most likely to have been made by Wunderlich of Australia, who specialised in pressed metal sheeting for both ceilings and dados around the base of interior walls. Various patterns were pressed into the surface of the metal in low relief, which made them ideal for use in typical small-scale Victorian rooms. The four bathrooms at Elderslie were lit via huge frosted skylights, as windows in a bathroom setting were considered immodest at the time. In the cluttered drawing room, to the left of the piano, there stood another visual testament to Reid’s wealth, in the form of an intricately carved white marble fireplace and mantel imported directly from Italy. The fireplace archway was supported by a central keystone in the form of a reversed scroll and classical acanthus leaf, a fashionable motif in the nineteenth century. Most fire surrounds and mantels in New Zealand at the time were made of wood. The main bedrooms upstairs all had tall, elaborately carved archways adorning their walk-in dressing rooms. However very little furniture was built into the typical Victorian house. Moveable furniture like wardrobes, dressers, chest of drawers and sideboards were far more popular items because they could be used for both storage and display purposes.
Victorians tended to prefer their possessions around them rather than hidden or stored out of sight. Every available space in every room was generally cluttered with family photographs, ornaments, pot plants, vases, pictures and paintings, memories, painted glass screens and personal mementos. The rooms inside Elderslie homestead certainly followed this trend. Each of the four surviving interior photographs, which depict different areas inside the homestead, reveal a multitude of family possessions and ornaments. Pot plants, particularly ferns and lilies-of-the-valley, reportedly Mrs Reid’s favourite flowers, adorned the dainty corner tables of the drawing room, hallway and reception area (see FIGURE 12). Various oil paintings and watercolours decorated the walls and dainty Queen Anne-styled chairs lined the perimeters of each room. Elaborate and often frantic designs on the wallpaper and carpet enclosed the living space to give it an even greater sense of intimacy. Elderslie homestead boasted wallpaper of the most fashionable kind, with ornately embossed golden vines spreading vigorously amongst giant chrysanthemums and delicate roses. Wallpaper friezes above the picture rail were a common Victorian decorative feature and Elderslie’s friezes displayed giant swirling leaf motifs which created an immediate sense of momentum in the rooms. The large, heavy drapes, which customarily hung each side of every door archway, also represented an excuse for decoration, besides functioning as a way of keeping out winter draughts. The entire hallway and reception area, which presumably led from the front door into the central part of the house, was decorated in this highly flamboyant manner (see FIGURE 13 & 14).

Most large New Zealand houses in the late nineteenth century were generally organised in the same way. The front of the house was used as an area for welcoming guests while the back of the house was kept for ordinary, everyday activities. The downstairs almost always included the living areas while the upstairs was for sleeping.163 This was a tradition brought out from the Motherland, though not as stringently adhered to in New Zealand. Author Jim Franklin writes that all British houses built between 1835 and 1914 were strict monuments to an exact social order. The British aristocracy were exceedingly wealthy and privileged.
They were ‘so helplessly dependent on a host of domestic servants, yet divided from them by an absolutely unbridgeable gulf.’ This gulf was further implemented by the planning of their sprawling country mansions, which revealed ‘the architectural… handling of space and also the hierarchical groupings within the household, the attitude to children and the importance given to entertaining.’

Victorians were particularly concerned with creating ‘good’ first impressions and they used porches, front doors and archways to welcome and impress their visitors. The front entrance was usually very elaborate and immediately recognisable by its architectural importance. However Elderslie homestead’s front door does not seem as extravagant as one might expect; in fact it is almost strikingly plain. The only known photograph of the front door entrance shows John Reid’s young granddaughter, Joan, wearing a miniature wedding gown and veil while standing in a rather solum pose on the doorstep. Behind her the darkened interior is highlighted by an oval shaped mirror on the far wall, the reflection of which also gives a hint of a fanlight above the unseen arch of the doorway. To either side of twelve-year-old Joan are two matching door panels, each displaying dainty Art Nouveau-styled floral motifs on clouded, or possibly coloured, glass panes. Joan stands on a typical woven doormat and to her left a brush box for cleaning dirty shoes sits on the verandah near the doorstep. Each of these small details could have been found in all but the most basic of nineteenth century New Zealand homes. Side panels and fanlights were first added to the front door in the 1860s to brighten up the hallway, and by 1880 they were commonplace. Elderslie’s side panels would have most likely been a mixture of bright blue, red, and orange coloured glasses, according to the tastes of the 1870s and 1880s.

It is unfortunate that the architect and interior designer of Elderslie homestead have remained anonymous. Contemporary newspaper reporters neglected to name, or perhaps were unable to find out, who was responsible for the design and building of the house. It is possible that John Reid and his family did not want to disclose the architect of Elderslie so that their home would remain a largely unique example in New Zealand.
Speculations have naturally been linked to the various architects who were living and working in Oamaru during the 1870s, when the homestead was first built, and in the 1880s, when renovations were carried out. David Miller was a local stonemason and contractor who died of cancer in 1888. Before his untimely death he had shown a great deal of business enterprise and was a large employer of labour. 166 William Mason and R.A. Lawson were architects active in the 1880s and were largely responsible for creating many of the heritage buildings that still stand in Oamaru township today. Forrester and Lemon was another architectural partnership who might have had an influence on Elderslie’s redesign. They built Meek’s bulk grain store in 1883. There was also Francis William Petre, who built Oamaru’s impressive St. Patrick’s Basilica in 1894. He was especially renowned for using concrete as an alternative building material and thus coined the nickname of “Lord Concrete” during the last decade of the nineteenth century. 167

Each of these individuals could have played an important part in the creation of Elderslie. However, none of them have been specifically linked to the building of the homestead. The lack of a known architect was just one of many elements which contributed to the fascination and curiosity held by many Oamaru citizens towards this grandest of houses. Many locals found the sight of servants working at the homestead a particularly intriguing aspect of daily life at Elderslie. Servants, both domestic and farm orientated, differentiated estate owners from the rest of the community in New Zealand, though they did not have the large domestic establishments which their equivalents in wealth had in Britain. 168 The lives, responsibilities and routines of the typical New Zealand domestic servant will now be explored in an attempt to shed light on the kinds of duties that would have been carried out at Elderslie homestead each day.
iii.

Life as a domestic servant

New Zealand domestic servants were largely bound in service to the gentry family who employed them. They were both a necessity to the running of the large estate homesteads, and a tradition brought out from the Motherland. Initially there was a scarcity of ‘good’ domestic help in the new colony and magazines such as the New Zealand Free Lance, the Observer, and the New Zealand Graphic, were full of so-called ‘horror stories’ from upper-class ladies who had to endure doing some of their own housework. These are highly likely to have been melodramatic exaggerations though, as gentry ladies were always sheltered from the rougher side of farming and estate life. They certainly did very little hard housework; that was left to chars, maids, cooks, and washerwomen. Agencies, such as the Female Middle Class Emigration Society, soon began to recruit bourgeois English girls to serve the wealthy landowners and colonial elite in New Zealand. Servants employed at Elderslie most likely found work through the former Vivian Doran House, in Tees Street, Oamaru, which was built in the 1870s and used initially as a ‘registry office for servants.’ About ten per cent of all women over fifteen years of age in the South Island worked as wage-earning domestic servants in 1871, which was about the same percentage as in Britain. Every estate homestead had a basic staff of at least three or four servants, usually two maids, a cook and a groom. Extra staff might include nannies, nurses, governesses, and chauffeurs. When good laundry maids were initially scarce, some gentry families went to the extreme of sending their dirty washing 150 kilometres or more to be cleaned in commercial premises in town or the city, rather than deal with it themselves. The clean laundry could then take up to a week to be returned by rail.

Domestic servants’ lives were tough but they were also able to put more demands on their employers because of their scarcity. The Official Year Book of 1898 reveals that 33 per cent of working women were employed as domestic staff. They each expected their uniforms to be supplied, as well as reasonable food and accommodation.
By 1907 a move was made to unionise servants, allowing them a set sixty-eight hour working week with Sundays off and a half day on Wednesdays or Thursdays. The average wage of a general servant at the time was fifteen shillings a week. However, domestic servants, like farm labours, were governed by a strict and well modulated hierarchy, and were paid according to their positions and responsibilities.

The butler was the unquestionable head of the domestic hierarchy. John Reid reportedly hired a well-paid butler to run his enormous mansion. However there were very few butlers employed in New Zealand households during the nineteenth century because they were regarded as an expensive and unnecessary staff member. The cook, therefore, tended to hold the highest permanent position amongst domestic staff in New Zealand. The cook was generally an older woman and she was always addressed by her married name as a mark of respect. She was given the best wage, the largest room and was usually held in the highest regard by the mistress of the house. The cook was often invited to join the gentry family on holidays, day-outings and sometimes overseas vacations, as in the case of the Reid family. While at work the cook had the largest responsibility, overseeing the smooth running of the kitchen, which was regarded as the ‘heart’ of any great household. All the other domestic servants took their orders from the cook’s system of organisation.

Other miscellaneous female staff, who were also highly regarded by the family, included the nurse, the governess, the music tutor and the seamstress. These women were usually only hired for certain lengths of time and they performed specific and highly trained tasks. Some of the wealthier colonial families employed both a day and a night nurse to take full responsibility for their children’s needs. Gentry children who were under the age of five usually spent most of the day with their nurse. Older children were looked after by their governess. It was a frequent custom for gentry children to eat their meals in the nursery with their governess. They were only permitted to eat dinner with their parents when specifically invited to do so. When this occurred the governess always accompanied the children to the dinner table where she remained in charge of them.
The governess took sole responsibility for correcting the children’s manners and instructing in proper dinner table etiquette. As a result many gentry children grew up with a greater emotional attachment to their governesses than to their own mother and father. Gentry parents, particularly fathers, were sometimes regarded as emotionally distant and rather staunch figures in their children’s lives.

The parlour maid was another important member of the traditional gentry household. She was usually a little younger than the cook and may or may not have been a married woman. The parlour maid was required to answer the front door and to wait at tables during meal times. Victorian dining etiquette was strict and precise, and the parlour maid was specially trained to know which side to serve food on and which side to clear the plates from. She was mostly responsible for the dining room, its cutlery, flower arrangements, table settings and other small but significant details. Her uniform was the immediately recognisable long black dress, with its white-bodiced apron and a small white cap with short tails at the back. There were numerous uniformed maids and servants in service at the Elderslie estate homestead, however their identities remain anonymous.

Below the parlour maid was the housemaid or maidservant. Her duties revolved around the cleaning of the house and the comfort of the guests. Housemaids usually did not stay in the one household for very long, because their duties were dull, the hours were long and the possibility of promotion bleak. Lower still were the general maids, laundry maids, char girls and apprentice servants whose young lives were spent in hard labour. These girls were sometimes barely in their teens. They worked in the scullery scrubbing vegetables, in the kitchen washing dishes, cleaning ovens, emptying out fireplaces, and in the laundry washing and ironing clothes. Their hours were very long, their pay was often miniscule and their jobs were dirty.

Victorian domestic servants usually followed a strict weekly work schedule. Mondays were generally wash days, the time to boil the copper for the clothes that had been set to soak on the previous Saturday. The following day was usually set aside for ironing.
Wednesdays and Thursdays could be time for cleaning, one room at a time, including the floors and bedroom china. Fridays were often occupied with baking cakes, biscuits and other savouries. Saturday mornings could include more scrubbing. There was strictly no work done on Sundays, and the Scottish families of the South were known to be the most faithful keepers of the Sabbath.\textsuperscript{177}

Housework took a greater length of time to complete in the Victorian era because ready-made cleaning products were not as readily available as they are today. During the 1860s and early 1870s laundry maids were required to make their own soap, which was a lengthy, tiring and messy task. The process involved boiling then straining lye with fat. The lye was any strong alkaline solution which could neutralise grease.\textsuperscript{178} By 1880 Hudson’s Extract of Soap greatly reduced the amount of hard work involved in making soap. This product claimed to clean ‘absolutely everything’, but laundry days still required a labour-intensive routine. A typical washing mixture included adding a small amount of Hudson’s powder formula to boiling water along with a few tablespoons of kerosene. Soiled clothes were boiled for at least half an hour, then pressed through a wringer into cold water. They were then wrung again into blued water and finally wrung once more before being hung out to dry.\textsuperscript{179}

Fabrics such as lace, which required delicate handling, were carefully washed by hand in a mixture of turpentine, ammonia and yellow soap. The item was supposed to be left soaking in this liquid for half an hour, after which ‘the lace was pressed gently with the knuckles but never rubbed. It was then rinsed several times in tepid water with as little handling as possible and then gently patted on to a linen cloth to dry.’\textsuperscript{180} Other items also needed special attention. Whites, such as collars, petticoats, cuffs, table-cloths, embroidered pillowcases and serviettes, all had to be starched. This was also a lengthy process which involved dipping the items in a thick starch mixture, drying them, then dipping them again into a cold starch made of raw starch powder and gum-arabic water. Sheets and towels were usually put through the clothes mangle, which had a heavy metal frame with wooden rollers and a draining board.\textsuperscript{181}
Washing machines, consisting of a round wooden tub with a closely fitting lid, came into use about 1900. They helped to reduce the amount of work required to get clothes clean. Inside the lid was a set of wooden paddles which rotated in a two-way action when the large handle on the side of the tub was turned. This concept was the forerunner of the modern-day washing machine mechanism. The first electric washing machine was invented in the United States by Alva Fisher in 1910. However it remained a highly expensive luxury item that most New Zealand households could not afford at the time.\(^{182}\)

After all the garments were cleaned and dried, the maids turned their attention to making sure that every crease was thoroughly removed. There were several varieties of irons used for this task during the late Victorian era. Flat irons needed to be heated on the coal range or fire, then rubbed across a feather pillow before use to ensure they did not dirty the clothes. They were useful for flat surfaces but when it came to frills or crimped edges a goffering iron was necessary. This was a hollow iron pipe or rod which stood on a stand and was heated by inserting a hot bolt at one end. The frilled material was then slowly pulled over the pipe to smooth out any creases. There was also a similar-looking collar iron, which had a specially rounded edge.\(^{183}\) Other commonly used irons of the era included the large, and rather clumsy, charcoal irons. They had hinged lids and a hollow base where charcoal and red hot embers were placed for heat. These appliances were not terribly clean and had a chimney on top of the lid so fumes could escape. There were also sad-irons which used asbestos tops that could be interchanged to keep the irons hot. The most hazardous irons were undoubtedly petrol irons. They were required to be pumped by a valve at the back all the time they were being used and the risk of an explosion was considerable. Pott's irons were commonly used before the advent of electric irons. They were small but solid irons which were also heated on the range. A detachable handle was clipped on to the top of the iron so it could be carried from the coal range to the ironing table.\(^{184}\) If the handle clip became weak or was not attached correctly the iron quickly dropped to the floor and could seriously injure a person's foot.
Most domestic servants spent a great deal of their working lives cleaning and polishing. Kitchen utensils had to be regularly polished before the advent of stainless steel blades. Forks and spoons which became discoloured by egg were cleaned with a smooth paste of Spanish whiting and water. After the paste had dried on the cutlery it was rubbed off with a dry flannel cloth. Other surfaces, including the copper bed warming pan and the brass knobs on the iron headboards, were also polished to a brilliant shine. Indoor plants were wiped with milk to give their leaves a healthy glow. Spring cleaning was a strictly observed custom brought out from Britain. Every room was thoroughly cleaned. Curtains were taken down and washed, ceilings and walls were swept for cobwebs, books and paintings were dusted and ornaments were carefully wiped over. Cupboards were inspected and all shelves were washed with a solution of salty water. The Victorians held firm to the notion that fleas and other pests ‘would not take up residence in a well salted house’. Floors were also scrubbed with a saltwater mixture. Spring cleaning a house the size of Elderslie could take weeks to complete, particularly when other daily chores were still required to be carried out.

Exhausted Victorian servants usually looked forward to a warm bath and a soft bed at the end of a hard day’s work. Colonial pillows and mattresses were considerably comfortable and were stuffed with the soft down of poultry. Bed sheets were sold in a variety of textures including unbleached or the more expensive grass-bleached, grey sheeting, calico sheeting, Welsh flannel and twilled sheeting from the United States. Blankets could also be purchased in New Zealand stores but some servants found time to knit their own from home-spun wool. They also made their own patchwork quilts, which was a popular evening pastime. In winter, brass warming-pans were filled with hot embers and used to iron and warm the bed sheets. They were conveniently kept next to the kitchen fireplace. Hot water bottles made of stoneware were also a great comfort and were an early forerunner to the modern rubber types of today.

Carpets certainly added to the warmth of a house but they were very expensive in the late Victorian era. As a result, carpets were only found in the more affluent households, and Elderslie was no exception to this.
Keeping carpets clean, however, was a difficult task for any domestic servant. Before the 1870s carpets were periodically lifted and dragged outside to be beaten with a bamboo carpet beater. This was the only practical way of removing dust and dirt, until the appearance of carpet sweepers in the 1880s. These simple cleaners had revolving brushes underneath their square dust-box body which drew the dust up from the surface of the carpet when the machine was pushed over it by a long handle. Electric vacuum cleaners became a common sight in New Zealand houses during the early years of the twentieth century. When labour-saving devices like electric stoves, refrigerators and household appliances began to make their appearances at the turn of the century, lower-order maids and servants soon became unnecessary and were the first to be dismissed.

Outdoor domestic servants remained vital to the upkeep of the large homestead. The head gardener was usually highly trained and he was responsible for the appearance and maintenance of the entire garden and its features. This included the upkeep of fountains, summer houses and gazebos, walkways and waterways, as well as flowerbeds, shrubs, trees and lawns. The head gardener was highly regarded and lived in his own quarters away from the main house. He ate his meals with the other staff and was also responsible for supervising secondary and apprentice gardeners, who usually tended the lawns and vegetable patch. Gardeners at Elderslie certainly had a great deal of work to get through. The driveway from the house was more than a quarter of a mile long and it was required to remain in perfect condition for family and guests. L. F. Elliot was the head gardener at Elderslie during the 1890s. He remained in Oamaru until his death in 1957, at the age of ninety-nine.

Chauffeurs were also particularly valued employees. Most gentry families treated their chauffeurs as loyal, trustworthy and well-deserving members of staff. Many chauffeurs had previously been coachmen in the days of horse-drawn vehicles and their driving experience was a great comfort, particularly to female members of the gentry class. The chauffeur was required to be on call at all times and was often needed to stay up very late to drive a group of young people home after a ball or fancy-dress party.
Other stories have been documented of the chauffeurs who warmed travelling rugs over the bonnet of an idling engine while waiting for their passengers to return. The Reid's chauffeur was Alf Bullock, who was also a former coachman. He drove the family vehicle, an early Darroq automobile, and was remembered as an impressive sight, in his 'black coat with silver buttons, with corduroy knickerbockers and a tall black topper on his head.'

Vehicles had always been an important aspect of any large house in the nineteenth century. The first carriages in New Zealand had been introduced to the South Island in the 1840s from the United States. They were initially rough but sturdy working vehicles designed to cross deep waterways and bumpy pioneer roads. By the late 1860s wealthier New Zealanders had imported proper state carriages, buggies, wagonettes and gigs which made travelling a far more comfortable experience. City elites maintained expensive landaus, barouques and broughams, which were large cushioned vehicles with glass windows and a box for grooms. Motorised vehicles were available in New Zealand towards the turn of the century. Reid's Darroq car can be seen in FIGURE 15.

John Reid and his family were among the small minority of privileged New Zealanders who could afford such luxuries as chauffeur-driven transportation and the employment of domestic servants to take care of their ostentatious homes. There is no doubt that the Reid family was socially and financially set apart from the local community because of their great wealth. John Reid went to a lot of time and excessive expense over minor but elaborate architectural details, in order to create an extremely lavish and unique home for his large family of twelve. As a result, Elderslie homestead was viewed by many in the same light as the Reid family who inhabited it; both were visibly ostentatious but ominously aloof. The family and the house they lived in commanded respect from the locals but at the same time remained largely indifferent to them. Elderslie homestead was a visual reminder of the great chasm that existed between those who had money in nineteenth-century New Zealand and those who did not.
At the upper levels of the South Island social hierarchy were the wealthy estate owners, like John Reid, most of whom had arrived in the new colony with some money and a great deal of ambition to acquire more. At the lower end of the social spectrum were the unskilled labourers and working class folk who endured a hard life, relying almost entirely on these wealthy men for their food, housing and income. Naturally there was a certain amount of envy and growing animosity towards those who seemed to have it all. Chapter four will provide further discussion on the impact of, and expectations associated with, having such wealth in early New Zealand society. John Reid’s attempt to become a colonial ‘gentleman’ will be looked at first, which will lead into a discussion of the various leisure activities of the gentry classes. Reid’s public persona, his other business interests and the importance of his children will also be reviewed. Each of these avenues provided great opportunities for John Reid, and his peers, to demonstrate and to expand both their community prestige and their influential wealth.
PHOTOGRAPHS

FIGURE 2. Servants’ back entrance to Burnside homestead, leading to the laundry. Collection of the author.
FIGURE 7. John Reid (centre, with arms behind back) stands among his shearsers, busy shearing his sheep at a woolshed on Elderslie estate. The photograph also highlights the great discrepancies in appearance and lifestyle between wealthy landowners and their hard-working farm labourers.

North Otago Museum archives, Oamaru.


FIGURE 12. Elderslie homestead interior.

FIGURE 13. Elderslie homestead front passageway.


FIGURE 16. S.S. Elderslie, commissioned by John Reid in 1884 to carry frozen lamb and mutton from Oamaru to London direct. North Otago Museum archives, Oamaru.
FIGURE 17. John and Agnes Reid (centre) with daughter Connie and son Douglas enjoy afternoon tea in the Elderslie gardens, c.1900. North Otago Museum archives, Oamaru.

CHAPTER FOUR: ASSERTING THEIR PRIVILEDGE

i.

Playing the role of colonial ‘gentleman.’

The grandeur of the Elderslie estate homestead certainly helped to create and perpetuate the assumption that John Reid and his family were indeed of aristocratic blood. The homestead could be viewed as an outward expression of the way the Reid family was seen in society. In short, it was a large, dominant and rather ostentatious house. The impact of the homestead and the ambience it created had a considerable impact on the local community. For years the Enfield locals reportedly stared in silent awe at the dignified figures of Mr and Mrs Reid being leisurely driven around the countryside in one of their many carriages. Reid made an immediate impression on all who saw him and it is quite probable that he wished to assume and perpetuate the role of being a ‘colonial gentleman,’ though in reality he had come from rather humble, middle-class origins. The Reid family’s presence in the community certainly added a touch of mystery, colour and elegance to an otherwise isolated and monotonous country existence. However wealthy estate owners continuously walked a fine line between overindulgence, self-promotion and community expectation. They were certainly accused of holding up the progress of the community by monopolising its resources. Charity was a means by which the colonial elites ‘compensated’ for their wealth and success. It was a very important topic in nineteenth-century New Zealand. Like his peers, Reid felt it was the duty of the wealthy and the privileged to set the example of leadership by becoming involved in charitable events, social and political committees and other worthy public causes. Working class people also expected that the wealthy would share a good deal of their profits with the wider community. They applauded such efforts while remaining largely indifferent to those who believed themselves above all others.
Servants who could no longer work were often supported by the farming estates during their illness or old age. Though Reid was of the ‘old school’, a highly respected and dignified gentleman, he was also known to be a fair, often kind man. He genuinely regarded his elevated role of ‘country squire’ as one which also brought great social obligation and responsibility. The depression of the 1880s forced Reid to dismiss some of his workers and others had to accept a pay reduction of two-and-six a week. However his second head gardener, a widower named Harry Dennis, continued to receive his full wages and a weekly leg of lamb to feed his six young children.197 This kind of generosity and charity had a two-fold effect. It smoothed social relations between the wealthy and the working classes, while continuing to enhance the status of the landed gentry in the local community. ‘Landowners were looked up to, and sometimes loved.’198

John Reid and his family were regularly forthcoming in their efforts to provide the local community with a good deal of charity. In 1877 Reid donated a small section of his Elderslie estate land for the building of the Enfield Presbyterian church. Both the Reid and Menlove families worked hard over the next few months to raise funds for the new church. Various public events, including a church bazaar, were organised in Oamaru where ‘wax and paper flowers and fruit under glass shades’ made by Mrs. Menlove, and ‘armchairs, cushions and other articles collected by John Reid’ were sold.199 The new church was officially opened on 11 August 1878. It was made of the finest Oamaru stone and had a slate roof. Renovations occurred during the 1960s and a Sunday School hall was later opened in 1964. The church remains today and commands a prominent hilltop position in full view from the former site of the Elderslie homestead.

The addition of this new church would have added to the prestige of the Reid family. However most large estate owners were not as committed to attending church as one might have expected. Nineteenth-century South Island religion was a rather formal, dry experience. It did not matter whether one believed in a god but it was still most important, as a sign of good moral behaviour, to be associated with a religion and a local church. Historians have long argued over the extent to which New Zealand churches were patronised by the wealthy.
Steven Eldred-Grigg believes that the landed gentry enhanced their status by acting as church patrons, since those who governed churches were held in commensurate esteem by the community. However Trevor Burnard strongly disagrees with this sentiment. He believes that North Otago estate holders, unlike the British, did not gain power or even prestige through their patronage of local churches. No single church dominated New Zealand society as much as the Church of England did in Britain, therefore religion could not be made a unifying force in rural society. This represents, in Burnard’s opinion, a most significant difference between the English gentry and the New Zealand rural elite. The wealthy in both countries, however, did share a commitment to supporting local charitable events. On special occasions, the Reid family of Elderslie were particularly proud to open their private estate for worthy and just causes.

Elderslie estate’s most celebrated open day occurred on 23 March 1887 when a huge public carnival was held to celebrate both the 50th year of queen Victoria’s reign, and the 39th anniversary of the founding of the Province of Otago. It was said to be one of New Zealand’s grandest celebrations ever to be held in private grounds. The event was an exciting and unique opportunity for most of the town folk to experience the luxuries that the landed gentry took for granted. Over 4000 locals came to explore Elderslie that day ‘in trains, in traps, wagonettes and buggies, in drays and carts, on horseback and on foot.’ Most people arrived by scheduled trains, which posed a problem for the Railways Department in securing enough carriage space for the extra crowds. As a result, two minor accidents occurred en route. However this did little to detract from the excitement of the day.

Once at Elderslie locals were able to mingle with such distinguished guests as Sir William F. D. Jervois, the appointed Governor of New Zealand. A variety of activities were also arranged for the occasion by the local Caledonian Society. These included athletics, ball games, aquatics on the Elderslie lakes, side shows, and a shooting gallery. Professor Kowhumplouskiz was supposed to perform a routine of legerdemain, or sleight-of-hand deception, but at the last moment fell seriously ill, so a Mr J. Moss had to replace him.
Other planned events were also abandoned as the crowds of visitors chose instead to enjoy the natural surroundings of the Elderslie estate. However it was the mock battle scene that appeared to draw the most attention. This started off with a grand march, the reception of addresses, and the planting of a jubilee oak tree. Here Reid and Governor Jervois drove in Reid’s own barouche to review the local militia troops and accept an address to the Queen by the local citizens of North Otago. Then suddenly there was a flurry of artillery fire as the battle commenced. Both sides were dressed in stunning military uniforms and performed a series of flanking movements, advances and retreats, as well as the attacking of a bridge over one of Elderslie’s ornamental lakes. No alcohol was allowed at the event, but there were plenty of other refreshments. However it was reported that the lemonade was ‘full of flies and dirt’. Lunch cost one shilling, and it was threepence for a cup of tea with a sandwich. All of the funds raised went to the local hospital and benevolent societies and John Reid was applauded by the locals for his family’s great hospitality and generosity.

Through the years the Reid family also allowed their elegant home to be used for other social events. Teaneraki School, which was opened in 1876, had an annual picnic where teachers, children and parents were transported in wagons and drays to Elderslie. There they spent the day involved in a variety of activities, races, games, and boating. Elderslie also played host to a variety of distinguished guests during the Reid family’s reign. People such as Lord Kitchener and Lord Glasgow came to the grand homestead to enjoy the warm hospitality and splendour of a New Zealand country estate.

Wealthy men in particular, quite often took part in various sporting and ‘gentlemanly’ activities, designed to demonstrate their polished skills and both their physical and mental superiority. The following section further investigates gentry life by examining the kinds of sporting and leisure activities that occupied and entertained the North Otago landowners during their spare time.
Gentry sports and leisure

The lifestyles of the wealthy and of the poor in nineteenth-century New Zealand were largely differentiated by one significant characteristic; having money meant having the ability to afford a life of both luxury and leisure. While working-class families struggled to make ends meet, the rich enjoyed and played to their hearts’ content. Sports clubs and societies were the major occupations of their leisure time. These quickly grew in the Waitaki district during the 1870s and 1880s, and participation in such clubs contributed significantly to the status of local landowners. Their membership, however, was select and generally confined to pursuits of a ‘gentlemanly’ or prestigious nature, namely, trophy hunting, horse racing and competitive farming-orientated shows. Estate owners dominated prizes at the annual Northern (later North Otago) Agricultural & Pastoral Society show. John Reid and his sons were regular and enthusiastic competitors. Reid was also elected president of the North Otago Agricultural and Pastoral Association twice. He had a great deal of success showing his pure Vermont Merino sheep, winning a total of seventy-two championship awards, 315 first, 256 second, and seventy-one third place prizes over the years. However, the competition was largely biased. Estate owners often competed only between themselves in these local shows, as ordinary farmers were not daring enough to enter their animals because of the quality and reputation of the estate owners’ animals.

The South Seas Exhibition of 1889 was one of the most prestigious shows to be held in New Zealand at that time. It too was enthusiastically supported by many of the North Otago estate owners, including John Reid, Edward Menlove, and Alexander McMaster, all of whom appeared in the official catalogue as members of the Oamaru branch committee. The South Seas Exhibition was held in Dunedin to celebrate the jubilee of the founding of the colony. The idea had risen from similar overseas exhibitions, particularly the Adelaide Centennial Exhibition of November 1887 and the equally successful Melbourne Centennial Exhibition held in July 1889.
The New Zealand version was a celebration and showcase of national pride, produce and manufacturing. Manufacturers, businesses, farmers and tradesmen were invited to exhibit their skills and produce while competing for distinguished national prizes. Exhibits were classed by category and region. The Reid family were prominent among the exhibitors under the Oamaru section. ‘J. Reid of Elderslie’ displayed ‘works of art’ in Class 18, and ‘grain and wool’ in Class 24, along side his neighbour E. Menlove. Annie Reid exhibited ferns and ‘forestry products’ in Class 23. Both J. Reid and A. Reid are also named as members of the official South Seas Exhibition choir. The gentry thrived on such opportunities to display their pedigree produce and acquired skills but they were usually missing from many of the hometown clubs which were popular with ordinary working folk. In North Otago the gentry were conspicuously absent from organisations such as the Oamaru Choral Society, the Rocket Brigade and the Oamaru Rugby Club.

One of the main sporting events for the Oamaru elite was the big shooting parties which assembled at both Windsor Park and the Elderslie estate. British-styled hunting parties did not feature in North Otago but most gentlemen proudly wore English sporting clothes for the occasion. The South Island was plentiful in duck, quail and wild pig, and gentry parties often went out to shoot them. Run holders formed acclimatisation societies to import English game. John Reid was a foundation president of the local Waitaki Acclimatisation Society. By the early 1870s rabbits were beginning to be a serious problem, causing great damage to pastures. Marlborough, Southland and Otago estate owners paid servants and larger gangs of men to shoot as many of these farming pests as possible. This of course cost a good deal of extra expense. In one documented account, men at the Teviot estate killed 1,250,000 rabbits in four years at a cost of £6000. Most male members of the gentry also belonged to hunting fraternities, such the North Otago Coursing Club, which was formed in 1878. Reid and his sons were eager and active members.

The landed elite were equally enthusiastic about horses, and they were generally very accomplished riders. Horse racing was a particularly favoured pastime of the gentry and many had private race courses laid out on their estates.
When they ran their horses the whole community was usually invited to attend. John Reid’s second son, James Bennie Reid, became a well known racehorse owner and trainer. His horses raced locally as well as internationally in Australia and England. Three of his most successful included Gladsome, Wolverine and Skirmisher. James later became a director of the National Bank of New Zealand.

Horse racing was a popular event during Victorian public holidays. Most New Zealanders celebrated the birthday of ‘Her Most Gracious Majesty’, Queen Victoria, on 24 May each year. The gentry usually held private fancy dress balls for the event. A great deal of time was always needed to prepare for such an occasion. ‘Carpets were lifted, floors were polished and the furniture moved to allow for dancing. The piano was dragged into a suitable position and those that could play were high on the guest list.’ Guests travelled several kilometres to attend these dances. However ladies were not expected to make the journey in their best ball gowns. Instead they carried their dresses in a kit and on arrival got to work with hot irons to get the creases out. Welcoming rooms were set aside to allow these ladies to dress in their best before rejoining the gentlemen in the parlour or ballroom. Servants were always kept very busy during these social events.

When it came to leisure, the gentry generally enjoyed much of the same activities as the ordinary working classes, though perhaps on a slightly grander scale. Spare-time activities included playing cards, reading, painting and sketching, women’s handicrafts, going to shows, and listening to music. Musical gatherings were usually organised for Sunday evenings. Invited guests would gather around the piano to sing or recite poetry. Sometimes these evenings would follow afternoon picnics, where groups of people would venture out in buggies or on horse back to the beach or bush. Here they feasted on ‘jellies, trifles…and pigeon pies…cakes and sandwiches were made in abundance.’ Picnics were particularly popular with the rural wealthy. Another important form of social contact in the country was the ‘call.’ Estate owners and their wives called on one another frequently. Calls were often extended into ‘visits’, or overnight stays.
Ladies would turn up at neighbouring estates in carriages accompanied by their grooms, children and maidservants and would stay for weeks on end. During these visits people would amuse themselves with talk, playing croquet, music, and gambling. The wealthy would make bets on anything, even the most insignificant of details. ‘And there was gossip. Everybody gossiped. Men talked about sheep and politics, ladies about servants and charity, and they all talked about one another.’

North Otago estate owners were the most mobile group in the rural South Island. They kept strong associations with the elite in other parts of New Zealand and took great pleasure in taking trips to the city. Most owned a house or property in Dunedin, the largest South Island city at that time. All kinds of entertainment, from brothels to opera theatres, were frequented by wealthy estate owners. Metropolitan gentlemen’s clubs were particularly popular at this time. The Dunedin Club and the Otago Club were two such examples in Dunedin. In 1890 twelve estate owners and their sons were members, and it was an important centre of Dunedin high society life with club balls, drinking, gambling and card games. Most importantly these venues provided ‘a comfortable watering hole where a gentleman could meet other gentlemen.’ Thus eliminating the requirement to mix with those outside the gentry class.

Members of the landed elite, although privileged, were not idle in seizing the opportunity to expand their wealthy empires or business interests. Gentry leisure activities also functioned to form and strengthen friendships between potential business partners and allies. Involvement in politics was another particularly effective way for the upper classes to address issues that affected their entire communities, while gently swaying the public to see things in a way that greatly benefited the business interests of these wealthy individuals. John Reid, in particular, was an outspoken and passionate political and business figure in Oamaru during the late nineteenth century. The expansion of his public persona will now be investigated.
iii.

Reid’s political and business interests.

John Reid was certainly an eminent public figure. From an early stage he had taken an active interest in local and public affairs. He believed that this was an expected extension of his prominent role as a colonial ‘gentleman.’ Involvement in political and business interests allowed Reid to exercise his influence in what he considered important matters, those that concerned all facets of Oamaru society. It also enabled wealthy estate owners, like Reid, to guide colonial society into conforming to the values that they held in high regard, namely, self-reliance, self-discipline, thrift, and the moral supremacy of the British. Colonial law, for example, was largely placed in the hands of the gentry. Landowners were commonly appointed as justices of the peace and they exercised far greater power than today. They presided over courts of petty sessions and dealt with most of the South’s day to day law enforcement. Justices had the power to fine, imprison and order whippings. In country districts like Waitaki, almost every justice was a large landowner. Reid was made a Justice of the Peace in 1868. He also took his public role further by contesting the Oamaru parliamentary seat in 1880 and the Waitaki parliamentary seat in both 1881 and 1887. However he lost by a small margin on all three occasions.

Reid’s parliamentary failure was due in part to human nature and to the attitudes held by locals towards these wealthy estate owners. As early as 1875 a number of North Otago electors had approached Reid to ask that he come forward as a candidate for one of the Waitaki seats, so long as his political views were in accordance with the views of the electors. Reid refused to do this but the episode demonstrates the types of qualities looked for in a politician in rural nineteenth-century New Zealand. The political views of the candidate were deemed less important than his personality. Candidates won or lost elections according to their status, or lack of status, in the community.
John Reid certainly commanded status but in spite of his local prestige, he was seen by some as being too closely identified with the increasingly unpopular ideals of the large landholders; those who seemed intent on seeking a certain status through political success. Reid was described as a pleasant and fluent speaker. However his outlook was overwhelmingly conservative and he made no attempt to conceal views which held little public appeal. In a speech given in 1880 on the then-controversial topic of Members of Parliament being paid for their service, Reid sternly rebutted: ‘I at once admit it to be my opinion that those who cannot afford to enter the House without the honorarium ought not to be there.’ Naturally this kind of statement instinctively irritated some lower-income voters. Reid certainly did not help his campaign when he repeatedly reminded electors ‘that he had a large stake in the district’, which was supposed to guarantee his intentions to do what was ‘right’. He believed the electorate ‘should support men of position who would not be likely to sanction the squandering of public money.’ On the surface John Reid appeared perfect for parliament. He had lived in the district for many years, he was economically independent, reasonably well-educated, prominent in the community and acknowledged to be a man of the utmost ‘integrity and honour.’ However Reid was perhaps too successful for his own good, as the North Otago Times commented, stating that his political defeat was the result of ‘his good fortune privately and bad fortune politically to be a large landowner.’

Newspapers were highly effective tools of propaganda during these political battles. The Oamaru Mail conducted a relentless campaign against John Reid and several correspondents of the North Otago Times portrayed him rather unjustly as a ‘grasping land shark.’ Interestingly it was a Mr. G. Jones, the editor and proprietor of the Oamaru Mail newspaper, who defeated both John Reid and W.H.S. Roberts in the local by-election for Oamaru’s parliamentary seat in 1880. Reid’s political failures were certainly disappointing but they did not deter him from becoming involved in other aspects of public life.

From 1868 to 1872 Reid served on the committee of the Otago Waste Lands Board.
He also acted as one of the local Railway Commissioners in 1880, worked on the Windsor and Waiareka Road Boards, and acted as a member of the Oamaru Harbour Board. Road Boards played a significant role in local government in the colonial era since the control over the placement of roads and bridges was of considerable value, especially to people with large estates. Membership of a harbour board could also be personally advantageous, since harbour boards controlled to a certain extent shipping and freight rates. In 1881 Reid became chairman of the Waitaki Boys’ High School Board of Governors and director of the local Oamaru Woollen Manufacturing Factory Company. However one of Reid's greatest accomplishments was as a local director of the New Zealand Refrigerating Company.

The possibility of exporting frozen meat to Britain had been a hot topic for a number of years prior to its realisation. In fact the advent of refrigerated sailing ships, which enabled the growth of the frozen meat trade, is considered by some historians to be the single greatest innovation in the history of the New Zealand economy. Before refrigeration, people had relied on a variety of preserving techniques. A few small businesses tried salting and canning sheep meat for export in the 1860s. However their efforts were generally unsuccessful and certainly no substitute for fresh meat. This was an ongoing problem around the world. However, in 1877 the dream of refrigerated exports was realised when the 1120 ton steamer Paraguay successfully transported 5500 carcasses of mutton from Argentina to France. The ship had been fitted with an ammonia compression machine, first invented by French chemist Ferdinand Carre in 1838. The news of this successful shipment soon reached Australia and New Zealand where various companies, including the New Zealand and Australia Land Company, were soon formed to cash in on this new kind of business venture. The first New Zealand shipment of frozen meat left Port Chalmers, Dunedin, bound for London, England, on 15 February, 1882. The sailing ship, appropriately named Dunedin, had been fitted with a refrigerating machine made by the Glasgow engineers Bell & Coleman, to enable it to carry a full cargo of 4909 sheep and lamb carcasses. They reportedly arrived in very good condition 98 days later.
The immediate implications of this successful crossing were quickly realised by industrious New Zealand farmers and businessmen. Our population in the 1880s was only 490,000, with the majority of people relying solely on agriculture for a living. The country’s 12.5 million sheep had, until this time, been raised to produce wool and when they were no longer wanted they were sent to boiling down factories to produce tallow and pelts. On top of this, the world economy was experiencing a recession during the early 1880s, where the value of sheep, wool, tallow and hides had plummeted. A new market had to be realised, since New Zealand essentially raised far more meat than required by such a small population. Britain on the other hand, was in desperate need of more meat. The population had exploded from 28.2 million in 1860 to 35.6 million in 1882. Live cows and sheep had to be imported to top up Britain’s lagging domestic production. It was these factors that essentially promoted and encouraged the early rapid growth of the New Zealand meat export industry. 120,893 mutton and lamb carcasses from New Zealand were exported to Britain in 1883. By 1899 this number had swelled to five million.238

John Reid was more than reasonably confident about the success of exporting frozen meat to Britain and he was quick to partake in this exciting new business venture. In 1883 he took his wife Agnes to England to better her health, and it was then that he seized the opportunity to promote the young and flourishing Port of Oamaru.239 While in Britain Reid also inquired about the possibility of having a new steam ship specially designed. He arranged with Turnbull Martin & Company, of Glasgow, to build this special steamer which was equipped with the latest refrigerating machinery. The ship was christened the S.S Elderslie and was to trade primarily with the Oamaru port under the direction of the newly formed New Zealand Refrigerating Company (see FIGURE 16).

The S.S. Elderslie was the largest ship to berth at Oamaru harbour at that time. The steamer also carried the first export cargo from the Eveline freezing works. The S.S Elderslie arrived in Oamaru on 24 August, 1884, berthing at the Sumpter wharf, which had been quickly and specifically built to provide for the ship’s enormous size.
It was actually a mighty effort to get the new harbour wharf finished on time ready for the 1884 exporting season. The S.S Dunedin had been the first New Zealand ship to carry frozen carcasses to Britain in 1882, and it was also the ship that came to pick up the first of Oamaru’s frozen meat cargo in 1884. However, the importance of this event was completely overshadowed seven days later when the new steamer, the S.S. Elderslie arrived in port under the command of Captain Hewatt. At 315 feet long, 40 feet in beam and drawing 26 and a half feet, the Elderslie was a most impressive ship for her day, and her special machinery aroused considerable comment from both newspapers and the general public. The decks of the vessel were insulated with charcoal and the ship boasted four huge freezing engines, with chambers large enough to carry 25 000 carcases of mutton. Both the S.S. Elderslie and Reid himself were continuously praised over the next few days by the people of Oamaru, who were reportedly overwhelmed at Reid’s initiative.

On 2 September, 1884 a grand banquet was held in Oamaru’s Athenaum Hall in honour of John Reid and his success in establishing the frozen meat trade from the Port of Oamaru direct to Britain. On the day prior to the first sailing, 14 October, 1884, Reid was presented with a silver salver from his ‘Oamaru friends’ whilst on board the S.S. Elderslie. This exquisite tray weighed in at 69.5 ozs and was inscribed with the following: ‘Presented to John Reid, Esq., in recognition of his enterprise in bringing S.S. “Elderslie” to load frozen meat at Oamaru for London direct, 1884.’ Reid was also presented with a testimonial signed by representatives of the harbour board, the borough council, and the roads board. The signature of the Waitaki County Council was, however, noticeably missing. One reporter for the North Otago Times went so far as to call Reid ‘the Napoleon of the meat freezing industry.’ It was an understandable accolade for the township as Oamaru now had something over the other ports of the colony. McLean elaborates: ‘When the Elderslie pulled away from the wharf the following day she was carrying all the hopes of the district as well as 22,291 carcases’ of frozen meat.
The S.S. *Elderslie* left Oamaru for London on 15 October, 1884, reportedly carrying the following cargo: ‘3097 sacks of wheat, 172 bales of wool, 73 bales of sheepskins, one package of rabbit skins, 74 sacks of turnip seed, three boxes of honey, 50 casks of tallow, 22,291 carcases of frozen mutton, 14 lambs.’ The mutton sold in London at prices which ranged from 4.5d to 5.5d per pound. The S.S. *Elderslie* was initially a major success for the Oamaru township. When a series of poor harvests affected the output of North Otago grain during 1889 and 1892, the frozen meat trade still continued mostly unaffected, and the S.S *Elderslie* visited Oamaru harbour twice during this period. However the novelty of the steamer eventually waned. Reid’s fellow North Otago estate owners did not support him as he had expected, and he was forced to supply nearly all of the carcasses of the first three voyages himself. The prices he received for the meat certainly did not bypass the capital he had outlaid on the project. Reid became very disappointed with the lack of support he received from other local landowners and it soon proved impossible to confine the S.S *Elderslie*’s trade to Oamaru.

It is interesting to note that there was also a schooner named *Elderslie*, operating about ten years before the arrival of the S. S. *Elderslie*, in Oamaru harbour. The schooner was owned by James Grave but as yet there is no evidence to suggest that it had any ties at all to John Reid or to the Elderslie estate. The three-masted schooner was destroyed on 8 May, 1875, when it ran aground near the future sight of the Sumpter Wharf, due to heavy swells and strong north-easterly winds. McLean also mentions the existence of the schooner named *Martha Reid*, owned by John & Thomas Reid from 1876-1877. It is also unknown whether this was indeed the John Reid of Elderslie estate. There is no mention of a Thomas or a Martha Reid in the immediate Reid family of Elderslie.

Involvement in politics and other aspects of the public arena was largely instigated by the desire to create more wealth and prestige for the gentry. However, accumulating such wealth was itself motivated by the desire to hand the heft family fortune on to the next generation. Children were particularly important assets in the lives of the landed elite, as they represented the future of the family’s social standing and wealth.
The Reid family of Elderslie estate eventually swelled to include twelve children: five daughters and seven sons, all of whom grew up accustomed to the privileged life that their father John had long strived to achieve. It would be John Reid’s children, as well as the other sons and daughters of these wealthy estate owners, who were truly in a position to call themselves the New Zealand gentry. The next section discusses the privileges, opportunities and expectations placed on John Reid’s children, as members of the second generation of North Otago wealthy elites.
iv.

**John Reid’s children**

John Reid, as mentioned in chapter three, was only twenty at the time of his marriage to Agnes Humphries in 1855. This was considerably younger than his neighbouring estate owners, who did not marry until their thirties, forties, and occasionally not at all. Together John and Agnes raised a large, closely-knit family. John Forrester, born 1 May 1859; Margarite Isabella, born c.1860, and James Bennie, born c.1861, were all born while Reid was working in Australia. The rest of the children were New Zealand born citizens and consisted of: Charles William, born in Dunedin in 1865; Annie, born c.1867; Agnes Jane, born 19 August 1869; Stuart Bathgate, born at Harriot Row, Dunedin, on 21 Sept 1870; Constance Mary (Connie), born c.1872; Douglas Harold, born 30 December 1873; Egerton Humphries, born 17 June 1875; and twins Stanley Gorden and Florence Ellen (Nellie), born 18 August 1876. Agnes, Egerton, Stanley and Nellie were all born on the Elderslie property. Large families were a common feature of New Zealand society in this era and, like their peers, the Reid children enjoyed a privileged and somewhat sheltered upbringing. Little is known of their early life but it appears that all of the Reid children were taught by private tutors before going to private schools in Oamaru and elsewhere. This was a common practise among the upper classes. Most wealthy landowners employed governesses and tutors. Governesses were young, ‘refined’ ladies, usually in reduced circumstances, who were shipped out from England or secured by registry offices in Christchurch, Dunedin and Nelson. Tutors were more select. They were usually better educated than governesses and were paid higher salaries.

Emphasis was placed on educating the sons of the colonial elite, particularly eldest sons. Education for boys was considered essential to shape them into polished gentlemen, who were able to interact in the highest ranks of both New Zealand and British society. Educated sons of the wealthy estate owners were also able to keep their status well after their fathers’ land had diminished or been sold completely.
The British gentry relied on land holdings to maintain their status but here estate owners’ sons were able to be ‘landed gentlemen’ without the acquisition of land as an economic base. Secondary education was certainly a rare privilege in nineteenth century New Zealand. In 1871 only 59 per cent of South Islanders were able to read and write. The elder Reid boys began their public schooling at the state-supported Otago Boys’ High School. It had been opened in 1864 and was modelled on the Scottish secondary school system. Otago Boys’ High attempted to be as prestigious as the already established Christs’ College in Christchurch, considered New Zealand’s nearest equivalent to a British public school. However the ideal was still to finish training in Great Britain and large numbers of gentry children were sent ‘Home’ to complete their education.

John Reid also desired that his sons obtain a more gentlemanly education than the brief commercial training that he had received in Scotland. The distinctive school of the period for North Otago was Waitaki Boys’ High School, opened in 1883. Reid took an active interest in the new school and became chairman of the board of governors in 1886. It was hoped that this public school would provide top education for some of the more well-to-do sons. It was to give ‘instruction...similar to that of a first-grade English school.’ Teachers were also selected on the basis of this English ideal, with most having been educated at Eton, Cambridge, and King’s College. Nineteen boys attended on the first day, including Stuart Reid. He was the first Waitakian to graduate and proceed to Cambridge. Stanley Gordon Reid and two of Edward Menlove’s sons were also featured in the school lists of 1883-1891. However the provision of an English education for the sons of the large estate owners was an offence in the eyes of the less well-to-do, and in 1891 the total roll numbered only forty-seven students.

The daughters of the colonial elite were usually granted less formal training. It was believed that the sole purpose of educating girls in the nineteenth century was so they could find suitable marriage partners and be able to give suitable guidance as mothers. There were many types of academies, seminaries and grammar schools to be found throughout the South Island which were deemed suitable for such purposes. Each promised the ‘best English education’ in the country.
It is likely that at least one of John Reid’s daughters attended ‘Miss Anderson’s Ladies’ Seminary’ in Oamaru. This flourishing establishment educated young ladies for £12 each in a course of music, needlework, and writing. The seminary also took ‘young gentlemen’ under the age of ten. In Dunedin, Littlebourne House was established for young Otago ladies and cost the enormous sum of £80 a year. Littlebourne offered courses in ‘Plain and Fancy Work…French, Music, [and] Drawing.’ After some formal training it was common for these young ladies to complete their education with extensive overseas travel, where foreign languages could be learned and perfected.  

It is not known how well educated John Reid’s daughters were. Little written documentation can be found about them. However the vast collection of Reid family photographs held in the archives of the North Otago Museum in Oamaru, give an indication that they were indeed very refined, exquisitely dressed and seemingly well-cultured young ladies. In short, they appeared all that they were expected to be, as a result of their privileged upbringing. However a few stories can still be heard about their individual characters. Annie, the second eldest daughter, was described by author Robert Pinney as possessing a ‘charming vagueness’ even as an adult. One day a bank manager returned her cheque because of an overdrawn account and Anne reportedly wrote out another cheque to put it right. Her father quietly paid the bank and his daughter apparently never knew otherwise. Enfield locals also tell tales about one of Reid’s sons, quite possibly Douglas, who was a very active pyromaniac. It was said that when Douglas grew older John Reid had to hire a man to accompany his son wherever he went, to ensure that he refrained from burning anything down.

Reid family photographs also indicate the kind of life the children may have led. The photographs were largely taken by one of Reid’s daughters who had a great interest in the new medium. John Reid had a small darkroom built especially for her behind the Elderslie homestead so that she could practise developing her own films. It appears the Reid children were even more socially distanced from the rest of society than their parents had been. They mixed almost exclusively with other wealthy landowners’ children and amused themselves with their own family games.
The rehearsal and production of amateur dramatics dominates the Reid photographic collection, as well as the outdoor pursuits of picnicking, hunting and boating on the Elderslie lakes. One documented account tells of young Agnes J. Reid who was once marooned by her brothers on one of the tiny islands in the Elderslie lake. They later returned for her but in the scuffle she was tipped into the lake. Agnes recalled the excessive dye running out of her red flannel dress and the scolding that her brothers received when they got home. Other tales tell of the children and their friends who used the frozen lake in winter as a rink for their homemade sledges and ice skates. The Reid children also would have been privileged enough to have had the use of the latest entertainment technology.

A magic lantern was one particularly popular children’s toy in the late nineteenth century. It threw out magnified images of glass pictures onto a white screen in a darkened room. The stereoscope was another viewing device which became extremely popular during this time and it was the forerunner of the modern-day viewfinder. Stereographs were specially-made twin photographs, taken from slightly different angles, that were slotted into either the desk-top, or later, the hand-held stereoscope to produce a sense of three-dimensionality in the depicted scene. A huge variety of stereograph subjects were available to purchase, including images of famous buildings, natural wonders, war scenes, animals, and comedy routines. The phonograph, which was invented by Thomas A. Edison in 1877, also became a fun and polite form of entertainment. By 1887 the German inventor Emile Berliner, had developed a disc phonograph record and patented a machine to play it, which he called a ‘Gramophone.’ By 1893 Edison had patented his latest invention, the kinetoscope, which was an exciting new form of entertainment and the early forerunner of the modern television.

The Reid children, and their peers, would have been given the financial security to enjoy these new but expensive novelties. However, their privileged upbringing coincided with a greater emphasis being placed on appropriate behaviour, moral and social expectations.
The following section reviews these notions and looks at the social activities and etiquette associated with marriage and inheritance among the children of New Zealand’s colonial elite.
v.

Marriage and inheritance

As the Reid children grew older they were invited to more social events, both formal and informal, in the aim of attracting suitable marriage partners. These social events were modelled on the leisure activities of the adult gentry. Afternoon teas were more informal and popular occasions for socialising, and they often had a theme. Teas sometimes involved meeting honoured guests, listening to small recitals from visiting musicians, viewing artworks, playing cards, and wishing friends well before going overseas. New inventions, such as the gramophone or the telephone, were often introduced and discussed with friends at afternoon teas.\(^{265}\) Formal balls and the less-formal private dances were also frequented by sons and daughters of the colonial elite. Débutante balls were usually extravagant events held for the ‘coming out’ of privileged daughters. These were strictly governed affairs and almost always attracted the same social group of attendees. They were specifically designed to introduce the young lady into ‘polite society’ and to announce that she was now ready for courting and eventual marriage. Other formal occasions, such as garden parties and banquets, were often referred to as ‘At Homes’. These could be indoors or out, night or day, and could be attended by several hundred people at a time. There were various reasons for holding such celebrations and they usually revolved around visiting sports teams, celebrities, royalty, near-royalty and high-ranking military personnel. Charity events were often organised as a part of these ‘At Homes’.\(^{266}\)

Private social calls were also frequent between the young adult children of the landed elite. The Tokarahi Station diaries of A.A. McMaster show various entries between 1885 and 1889 where members of the Reid family were reported as regular visitors. Alexander McMaster in turn visited both Windsor Park and Elderslie estate often. These were sometimes overnight stops, but quite often stays of a longer duration. In 1885 McMaster entertained ‘Miss Annie Reid and a Miss Webster’ throughout October and part of November.
It was soon after reported that he was taking Miss Reid to the races.\textsuperscript{267} It is perhaps not surprising that a good deal of intermarriage between the wealthy families of the South resulted from this constant contact with the same social circles. The range of potential marriage partners of the second generation was certainly smaller. If there were no landowning families they looked to the sons and daughters of the urban elite and the military.\textsuperscript{268} Annie Reid married Alexander McMaster, the second son of A.A. McMaster of Waikaura, on 30 April, 1889 at St. Luke’s church in Oamaru. McMaster was later promoted to army Lieutenant and the couple were stationed in London for some length of time. As a newlywed, Annie was known to have run McMaster’s Tokahahi homestead in the tradition of the large English country houses that she had been accustomed to all her life.\textsuperscript{269}

Like any family, the Reid family of Elderslie took great delight in celebrating the marriage of one of their own. Most gentry marriages were performed in churches, however it was not unusual to have them performed in the drawing room, garden or in a specially-built chapel. The wedding cake was a major feature of a society wedding. Most involved intricate icing and several layers, often as large as six feet high. It was expected that the most notable of society wedding cakes were to be imported from Sydney.\textsuperscript{270} Margarite, the eldest of the daughters, was the first of John Reid’s children to tie the knot. She married Thomas C. Dennison, son of a neighbouring estate owner, on 23 April, 1879, at the Waiareka church.\textsuperscript{271} The event was a private but lavish affair.

The marriage of Reid’s eldest son, John Forrester Reid, was an even greater social event and it prompted a lengthy article in the society column of the \textit{Oamaru Mail}. John Forrester married Evelyn Clare McLean, the youngest daughter of The Hon. G. McLean, in Dunedin’s Knox Church on 6 June 1900. It is interesting, though perhaps not surprising, that Evelyn was also the granddaughter of The Hon. Mathew Holmes of Wellington, whose youngest son Mathew Stuart Holmes had married Reid’s youngest daughter Nellie on 14 April 1898 at Enfield.\textsuperscript{272} This again demonstrates the tightly interwoven nature of the New Zealand colonial gentry. John and Evelyn’s wedding was a grand social event attended by several hundred friends and family.
Every minor detail of the ceremony was enthusiastically written up in the society columns the following day. The church was ‘tastefully decorated’ though the ceremony itself was deemed ‘ordinary’ by the newspaper reporter. The expensive wedding gifts were a particular talking point and once again illustrate the rather ostentatious attitude of the colonial elite. The gifts included ‘a silver bonbon basket from Lady Ranfurly, a silver ink stand from Captain Alexander, a diamond ring from the Dunedin Jockey Club, and a case of fish knives and forks from the North Otago Jockey Club.’ It was reported that the bridegroom gave the bride ‘a pearl necklace and pendent, and a fan of ostrich feathers and mother-o’-pearl’. The bride’s present to the bridegroom included ‘a silver-mounted travelling bag’. Members of the upper classes expected nothing short of quality and these gifts were considered quite appropriate for such a momentous social occasion. Gentry weddings were celebrated with great exuberance and at great expense.

All of the Reid children, except Agnes, managed to marry partners from within their social class. Agnes Reid did not marry at all. If no suitable partners were found locally, then marriages could be contracted in nearby districts or elsewhere, as in the case of Egerton Reid who married Nina, a daughter of Edmund Gibson of Waitangi Station, in July 1901. Stuart Reid, a graduate of Cambridge university and perhaps the most academically gifted of the Reid children, recruited his bride from the old country. Stuart married Ethel Mary Connell, the fifth daughter of John Connell of Busley Down, London, on 23 May 1900. The private service was conducted by Rev. James Stranding in the local Enfield church, formally part of the Elderslie estate. Stuart later moved his family to Auckland to continue his medical practice.

Four of Reid’s daughters married into other prominent families and moved away, as to be expected, to raise children of their own. However this did not prevent them from visiting their parents at Elderslie when possible, as seen in FIGURE 17. Both Annie and Margarite lived with their new husbands in London for short periods of time. Constance moved to a large farming estate in Taranaki, while Nellie went to live in Dunedin. Agnes continued to live at the Elderslie homestead until the death of her eighty-five year old mother on 11 February, 1924.
One noticeable difference in the lives of the second generation, was that they did not have large families of their own. Annie Reid, for example, became the mother of Alex, Jack and Adair (known as Algie) McMaster. Margarite Reid gave birth to Tom, Allan, Kenneth, Daisy and Violet Dennison.\textsuperscript{276}

This pattern was equally noticeable within the families of Reid's sons. Charles Reid and his wife Theodora raised only one child, a son named George, born 2 May, 1895. A second son was born in the following year but he did not survive infancy. Charles had become manager of the pastoral department of the Elderslie estate in 1887. In 1901 Angus Polson, the manager of the Balruddery section of the estate since its purchase in 1879, died. Charles assumed the management of the property and continued to farm it until its dispersal few years later. Charles then moved his family to Christchurch. Egerton Reid also began farming his share of the Elderslie estate in 1898, where he named his land Ammore. Egerton's wife Nina gave birth to a daughter, Valerie, in 1906. After the dispersal of the Elderslie estate Egerton moved his family to Timaru, where he had an early death, at the age of 40, on 26 January 1916.\textsuperscript{277} John Reid's eldest son, John Forrester, lived with his wife and two children on a large section of the Elderslie estate, which was named Burnside. His own homestead and family life will be explored in greater detail during chapter six. Unlike his older brothers, Stanley Reid, the youngest son, did not farm his father's estate. He remained a clerk in Oamaru where he and his wife Ruth lived at number seven Tweed Street. There they raised two sons, born in 1911 and 1916.\textsuperscript{278}

The marriage and family patterns of the Reid children were relatively typical of the population as a whole during the final decades of the nineteenth century. Marriage was not universal in New Zealand at this time. In 1891, 90 per cent of males aged twenty-one to twenty-five were still unmarried, and 62 per cent of men between the ages of twenty-five to thirty remained bachelors.\textsuperscript{279} Unmarried sons or daughters, like Agnes, often took care of other family members, including their elderly parents. Marriage was often considered a practical arrangement between two people, which was based on commonsense, rather than emotion or matters of the heart.
Each partner within the marriage had distinctly different roles. Men, as head of the household, were expected to be good providers; women were required to manage the household efficiently and to see to the needs of the children. Marriage was increasingly delayed, towards the turn of the twentieth century, until the participants were several years older than their parents had been. The financial cost of setting up a new household was one contributing factor in this trend. Another was the matter of birth control; an older bride would not be able to produce as many children during her married life.

New Zealand women generally had larger families than their relatives back in Britain. An average non-Maori family had six or seven children, one of whom possibly died before its first birthday, and another might not reach age fifteen. Women largely accepted the fact that they would spend much of their adult lives bearing and rearing children. However the 1880s saw the beginning of a declining birth rate which would continue until the 1930s. ‘The number of births per thousand married women between the ages of fifteen and forty-four dropped from 315 in 1881 to 246 in 1901.’ Women who first married in 1880 had an average of six or seven children, but those marrying in 1890 had an average of four or five. Effects of the depression and marriages later in life may have contributed to the declining birth rate. However the infant mortality rate also dropped, due to great improvements in public health services. By 1913 the average New Zealand family consisted of just three children, which declined even further in 1925 to just two children on average.

It is interesting that five out of seven of Reid’s sons earned an income from the land on their father’s estate. As previously mentioned, Stuart Reid, the middle son, chose an urban profession as a medical doctor and Stanley, the youngest, worked in town as a clerk. This pattern was certainly not unusual for wealthy families on these large farming estates, where one generation commonly set up the next while both were still living. Wealthy estate owners continued to buy more land to divide amongst their heirs, once the heirs had reached a certain age. Titles to such land, however, always remained with the father until his death. It was the father, respected as the head of the household, who ultimately decided how assets would be divided up.
Exclusion from his will could occur at his discretion and was sometimes based on trivial disagreements over religion, bad behaviour or even 'ingratitude'. Sons almost always inherited land and other property, whereas daughters were often left money in the form of 'life-only trusts'. These trusts were meant to guarantee that sons of daughters would receive a share of their grandfather's estate. The wealthier landowners left an average estate of about £62,000, or more than six million dollars.

Wealth and assets were clearly accumulated for the family, not the individual. They were attained in order to hand on a comfortable living to the next generation, and in doing so, continue the prestige of the family name. However, the future of the large farming estates were becoming ever more uncertain. It was now more than twenty years since the first of North Otago's great estates had been established. In that time the people and the township of Oamaru had evolved. Attitudes towards the wealthy landowners were souring, resulting in frequent expressions of violence. Inevitably, the superiority and dominance of the great farming estates were coming to an end. Reid's public generosity and good intentions could not cool the brewing resentment held by some working-class locals and new immigrants. In fact, it could be said that Reid's desire to booster his prestige by helping his local community, also contributed to the eventual demise of his financial base; Elderslie estate. The differences in lifestyle must have been considerably alarming to many of the less-fortunate who took the opportunity to visit Elderslie on one of the public open days. Witnesses would have seen first hand the kind of luxury that was attainable when one owned good land and good stock. It was perhaps inevitable that others also wanted their piece of the New Zealand pie.

Wealthy landowners, like John Reid and his neighbours, were increasingly blamed for halting Oamaru's economic and social development, due to their overwhelming dominance of the prime lands and markets. Public outrage over land monopolisation finally reached boiling point in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Chapter five investigates this increasing unrest and its eventual outcome.
CHAPTER FIVE: CHANGES

i.

Oamaru in the 1880s and 1890s

By the 1880s, Oamaru had grown from a crude frontier settlement into a town of strategic importance. It was now a vital supply centre for the surrounding hinterland and various rural communities, and it provided an important stopping point in the line of communication which ran up and down the east coast. Oamaru was in close communication with Dunedin, by sea at first, and then by rail link which had opened on 6 September 1878. It was also forging new ties with Christchurch, particularly with the opening of a direct rail service on 1 February, 1887. The population of the town was growing and by 1881 Oamaru had surpassed both Thames and Napier to become the seventh largest settlement in the colony, behind Dunedin, Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Nelson and Sydenham. By 1891 Oamaru had a permanent population of 5621, consisting of 2784 males and 2837 females. The character of the town was also changing. It was no longer considered a harsh male-dominated frontier settlement. Instead the township began to show a more stable demographic structure. Oamaru was now believed to be a respectable place ‘to which it was felt that women could come and settle in reasonable numbers.’ This increasing push for a sense of permanence in the town led to a construction and industry boom. More schools were built to accommodate the children of new settlers, other services such as postal offices, the local judiciary and local government branches were founded. Churches were erected and helped to give Oamaru citizens a genuine sense of permanence and security. The town generally became more urban in appearance; ‘paddocks became sections and muddy trails became slightly less muddy streets.'
Historian Peter Read goes so far as to state that Oamaru managed to establish amenities during the 1880s, which it could claim were equal or better than many of the great cities of the world, or at least among the best found anywhere in New Zealand. 

However Oamaru’s initial blossoming in the early part of the 1880s became hampered by the delayed effects of depression towards the end of the decade. Progress slowed, unemployment rose, and the population started to decline for the first time since the town’s establishment. The late 1880s and early 1890s was a troubling time for Oamaru. Unemployed men with idle hands and frequent hangovers become a noticeable sight in the town. ‘Larrikinism’ was an ever-present threat and caused many citizens a great deal of concern. The destruction of public and private property became an increasingly frequent phenomenon. Troublemakers were particularly commented to tampering with the gas taps on the town’s street lamps so that an excess of gas occasionally caused a sudden and unexpected explosion. Acts of delinquency were not only confined to urban areas. Out in the countryside lawlessness increased as the depression advanced and the gentry were quickly targeted as symbols of unfair wealth and triumphant greed.

The land reform campaigns which had been quietly simmering in Otago since the 1860s now gained enormous public approval. Most of the poor believed that their salvation lay in the destruction of the great estates. Large farming estates, like Elderslie, were identified as the enemy of social justice and the cause of the so-called recent decline in society’s standards. Local newspapers and radical politicians blamed ‘land monopoly’ for the lingering effects of the depression. Many citizens believed that the estates were holding up progress by preventing the average working man and his family from acquiring enough land to settle permanently in the district. Rural discontent grew rapidly and protest took the forms of poaching, theft and fire-raising. Poor people illicitly killed landowners’ game to supplement their diets. They also did it to annoy and harass the gentry. Poaching had become an ‘epidemic’ by 1890. Sheep and cattle theft also grew to the proportions of a ‘disease.’ Arson became increasingly widespread in the late 1880s and wheat fields everywhere frequently went up in flames.
By the end of the decade even farm buildings were being torched.\textsuperscript{295} The gentry reportedly reacted with near hysteria. Social revolution was now inevitable.

The following section will continue to document the demise of the great farming estates in North Otago and the effect this had upon Oamaru’s society.
The availability and acquisition of good farming land was a major issue facing new immigrants and settlers in nineteenth-century Oamaru. Land became desperately sort after during the late 1880s and 1890s because farming was the only plausible way of making a living for many families. However, most were not able to compete with the scale and wealth of the large estate owners. Despite increasing protests and pressure, affluent landowners were still very reluctant to part with what they considered their power base.

The Liberal government came to power in 1890 and named Sir John McKenzie as Minister of Lands. By the end of the following year he had successfully passed legislation which enticed large estate owners to start subdividing and selling off much of their land. The standard property tax was replaced in 1891 with a tax on all land worth over £500, and this gradually increased with land worth more than £5000. Land values were already high and continued to rise throughout this period. Estate owners began to assess their options and a series of public meetings were held to discuss possible outcomes. John Reid spoke publicly in June 1892 about the nature of the rising land values. He reportedly offered 12,000 acres to the local government to test just how genuine it was about repurchasing land at valuation prices. There is no evidence of the local government’s response to Reid’s gesture so presumably the deal did not go ahead at this early stage.

However a Land for Settlement Act was passed by the Liberal government by the end of 1892, to enable the government to buy back land in order to create smaller farming units for new families to make a living off. Faced with mounting public pressure, increasing taxes and a generous offer from the government, some estate owners could not resist the opportunity to sell. Cheviot became the first estate to ‘burst’ when its 84,000 acres of rolling land was cut up into 150 farms and farmlets, with a huge dispersal sale held in 1893.
The great success of this subdivision caused the government to draft new regulations into the 1894 amendment of the Land for Settlement Act, which empowered the state to buy more properties for subdivision, and to use force if necessary. New tactics were put into practise to place pressure on the landed elite to sell. Government inspectors started to visit estates to check the living standards for servants' quarters. Estate owners were reprimanded for inadequate barracks and were sometimes ordered to have them rebuilt. Government pressure enticed a few estate owners to relinquish their assets but most vendors sold willingly and not out of necessity. The scheme was a rather popular one and the government received over 200 offers to sell between 1892 and 1894. Some offers were subsequently turned down due to the poor quality of the land or too high a price wanted by the seller. Other offers were deemed too small to sustain the required division of 320 acre units. Altogether, a total of 49,887 acres of land in the Waitaki district was bought by the government for subdivision between 1892 and 1912. It was this Liberal land administration that brought about the immediate disappearance of the large farming estates of the areas surrounding Elderslie.

By the middle of the 1890s John Reid had divided up a considerable section of his Elderslie estate and the former Balruddery estate between his sons. Egerton Reid, the sixth son, began to farm the 898 acres of land near Ngapara in 1898. At the time it was considered a large and desirable section of land to own. He finally sold the property in 1903 to T.J.W. Shand from Riccarton, and later it too was passed to the government as a separate subdivision. Charles W. Reid, the third son of John Reid, was also a tenant on one of the former Elderslie estate farms and in 1901 he took over the management of the former Balruddery estate. In 1906 he also sold his two sections near the Five Folks hall and school to T.K. Johnston for £1,500. John Reid offered 11,497 acres of his remaining Elderslie estate to the government in 1900 for £79,758. This was criticised by some as being too high a price but the Crown was willing to pay well for high quality and desperately needed farm land.
The Elderslie Settlement No.1 was divided into twenty-five farms and the land was advertised as ranging from medium to first class; 'capable of growing good average crops of roots and grain, and as stock country it is considered that there is no healthier in New Zealand.'

When the sale was opened on 20 March, 1900, there were fifty applications for the twenty-five available farms. Seven were initially unclaimed but were taken up soon afterwards. Settlement and development of the new farms was reasonably swift. Records show that 375 cattle and fifty-five pigs were recorded in 1906-7, and from seventy-two to eighty-two people now lived in twenty-four houses on the former estate. However by 1919 only four of the original purchasers still lived on the new subdivision. These included J. McMurtie, J. Bates, James Johnston, and J.G. McKay. Of these only J. McMurtie and J. Bates were still on the settlement in 1935.

Reid’s neighbour Edward Menlove created more public interest than had been shown over the Elderslie farms, when he too decided to sell his property for government subdivision in 1902. James Bennie Reid, the second eldest son of John Reid, was able to purchase the Windsor Park homestead and four sections of the former estate, totalling 2453 acres in 1908. 1662 acres of this went to the government and formed part of the Elderslie Settlement No.2. The former Balruddery estate was sold off and subdivided into thirteen lots. On 29 April, 1912 what was left of Elderslie estate, which totalled 1,671 acres, was finally sold for resettlement in fourteen sections. The government paid over eighteen pounds an acre for land that was valued for taxation purposes at under eight pounds. This was undoubtedly the highest price paid by the Crown for any of the former North Otago estates. The sale price resulted in rents that initially discouraged applicants. However the following year saw the settlement well established and the new settlers were believed to be making ‘medium progress’ on the land. Opportunity was now ripe for new settlers and their families to ‘make a go of it’ on their own accord, and Oamaru continued to experience an increase in both population and production towards the twentieth century.

John Reid, the man responsible for both the rise and fall of the splendid Elderslie estate, finally succumbed to his own demise on 15 August, 1912.
At his death, Reid left a legacy valued at £98,000. The average yearly wage for an early twentieth-century New Zealand male was just £151, so Reid's large scale farming, and his other business interests, were certainly extremely profitable. Reid's death marked the symbolic end of this once vast farming establishment. There was by this time no holding over 1000 acres on the entire Elderslie estate property. The largest section was just 454 acres and included the Elderslie homestead.

However life at the homestead would never return to its former splendour after John Reid's death. The following section briefly explains the subsequent history of the Elderslie homestead block, as well as documenting the course of events which led to its eventual and complete destruction in 1957.
iii.

The demise of Elderslie homestead.

Mrs Reid and two of her unmarried children, Agnes and Douglas, continued to live at the Elderslie homestead until her death in 1924. In 1929 Ken Austin, a business associate of Reid’s sons, took over the property for the Elderslie Stud Company, which had been formed during the 1890s by Austin and James Bennie Reid. The two had built up a successful horse racing stud at Elderslie and its showpiece was the elaborately designed stables which boasted over 50 horse boxes. Annual dispersal sales had attracted great interest from around the country. Phar Lap, one of the most famous racehorses in Australasia, was conceived at the Elderslie stables, with the mating of the stallion Night Raid to a mare named Entreaty. As recently as March 2000 there have been calls to restore and protect the now dilapidated stables at Elderslie specifically because of this famous association. 308

Ken Austin eventually dispersed the stud and Jim Rutherford bought the Elderslie homestead block to farm in 1944. The huge mansion was of little use to him, so it quietly stood dormant for a number of years before being sold to a Mrs Ferguson in 1950. She converted the old Elderslie mansion into a rest home and lived on the property herself in the recently converted coach house. By this time Elderslie’s famous park-like grounds were a mere shadow of their former glory. The gardens had become far too expensive to keep and had fallen into ruins. A flood had caused the Waiareka stream to retreat to its former path, leaving the once lovely Elderslie lakes as mere depressions in the ground. 309

In 1957 a young couple, Mr and Mrs G. Coxhead, bought the former Elderslie homestead and spent some time converting it into a cabaret. However it was only used once for that purpose before it was completely destroyed. The most outstanding symbol of Elderslie estate’s former extravagance was finally destroyed on the night of 14 November, 1957, in a roaring fire which was reportedly witnessed from Oamaru’s town centre (see FIGURE 18).
Mr M. Ferguson, a neighbour and former Elderslie section owner, had first raised the alarm around 8:40 pm. He had noticed flames shooting out of the first floor north-west corner of the house, where the fire was later believed to have started, due to an electrical fault. Ferguson immediately phoned the Oamaru Volunteer Fire Brigade, the Waitaki Electric Power Board and the Oamaru Opera House, where the Coxheads were attending an operatic production. It was the first and only time that the couple had left the old mansion since purchasing it several months earlier.

The sight of this grand old homestead in flames attracted a great many eyewitnesses. Within minutes a huge crowd of onlookers had quickly gathered at the blaze and some broke through the heavily built and locked front entrance door in the hope of saving some of the Coxhead’s possessions or grabbing personal souvenirs of the event. Local legend has it that scores of priceless articles and several pieces of antique furniture were saved from destruction by being thrown out of the windows as the fire raged, only to be grappled over by the greedy crowd and quickly whisked away to unknown locations. Other reports indicate that the saved furniture and items were stored in a shed, which was later broken into and the entire contents stolen. It was inevitable, however, that Mr and Mrs Coxhead were to lose all of their possessions as a direct result of the fire. The large crowd had also restricted the ability of the Oamaru Fire Brigade to gain access to the inferno. Further efforts were hindered by what can only be described as a severe lack of both water and competence. A lead pipe was spread from a creek more than 200 yards away, but the volume of water was insufficient to have any effect on the flames. The old house was engulfed very quickly. The rooms were lined with tongue and groove kauri, and the cavities between the walls were filled with sawdust. No loss of life occurred but the damaged caused by the blaze was estimated at £12,000, or 1.2 million dollars. There was little left after the fire had subsided; only the blackened stonework and the ghostly cast of the iron trellis around the verandas remained. The official cause was of the fire was deemed an electrical fault but the echoes of rumours still linger in the Enfield community today which suggest that the fire was intentionally lite for the insurance money.
Whatever the cause, the remnants of the former Elderslie estate were now lost forever. Just four months before the vicious fire that finally destroyed Elderslie, V.L. Monteath reported on the condition of the once grand property. The author wrote that a few mahogany chairs and tables were among only a few remaining original furnishings left in the house. One large ‘gardrobe’, a maple wardrobe consisting of three parts, was particularly intriguing. It was partially lined with a soft blue, floral satin and pale pink binding, evidence of the sheer luxury that the Reid daughters lived in. Agnes Jane Reid, the middle daughter of John and Agnes Reid, was the only member of the original family still alive to witness the destruction of her childhood home. She never married and died at the age of ninety-one on 28 March, 1960.

Today very little remains of this once grand estate. Only a few stone steps and a garden wall now mark the perimeter of the Elderslie homestead. The glorious front gates and ornamental stone pillars, which cost John Reid the exorbitant price of £300 in the 1870s, were resited by members of the Oamaru Lions Club on 6 March, 1971. They were presented to ‘the Town of Oamaru’ and can be seen today as marking the entrance to Oamaru’s Centennial Park. The fair held in conjunction with this event raised $1000 for the Oamaru division of the Crippled Children Society. The Elderslie gazebo or summerhouse, which stood on an island in one of the homestead’s lakes, was gifted to the Oamaru Public Gardens by Reid’s fourth daughter Connie Gillies in 1947. In 1988 the New Zealand Historic Places Trust donated $1000 towards the restoration of the summerhouse. This work included fixing broken and missing slates, repairing lead flashing in the roof, replacing rotten timber and coloured glass, and restoring the seats. The original sporting scenes on the walls were painted by Ken Austin while a guest at Elderslie. They have now been preserved behind perspex. The former Elderslie lake boathouse was later converted to a garage on one of the subdivided farms. The coach house and the jockeys’ quarters are still used today as private houses and the stables can still be seen, though in a rather derelict condition now.
ELDERSLIE AND BURNSIDE: A FINAL WORD

There can be little doubt that Burnside homestead should be regarded as having an important and historic link with the former farming estate called Elderslie. The homestead owes its very creation and design to the wealthy, and somewhat defiant, son of a colonial New Zealand family, who managed to yield a considerable fortune off the land which forms part of the Waiareka Valley near Oamaru. Both Burnside homestead and its predecessor Elderslie, were products of a unique era in New Zealand’s past, the likes of which we will never see again. At the time of Elderslie’s creation in the 1870s, the thriving young colony was a place of considerable opportunity, where great fortunes could be created, or lost, in just a few short years. John Reid’s initial success was due in part to a combination of good luck, opportunistic circumstances and an ambitious and shrewd business sense. His rapid accumulation of then reasonably-priced farming land enabled him to build on his investments and at the same time, increase both his income and status within the local community. Reid’s status was reinforced by, and reflected in, the size and luxury of the Elderslie homestead. This imposing house presided over the surrounding landscape as an unmistakable symbol of colonial success and excess, reminding locals and visitors alike that someone very wealthy (and therefore important), resided there. This rather superficial display created an immediate impression that John Reid and his family were of aristocratic origins, which was a common misapprehension in the rural South Island at that time. As a result the local community developed a love-hate relationship with these wealthy landowners. On one hand, they were applauded and admired for their financial resourcefulness, in cultivating the land, giving to charity and establishing new amenities in the district. On the other hand, they were resented and despised for monopolising the top pastures, dominating local politics, markets, clubs and societies, and for being just too rich for their own good. They certainly did not fit in with the regular man on the street, nor did they aspire to do so.
The Reid family and their peers chose instead to create their own self-imposed and rather tightly interwoven social group, in which to mix, find suitable friends, business associates and marriage partners. They aspired to live as close to the conventions of the British aristocracy as was possible in New Zealand’s young, largely egalitarian society. This was particularly true of the second generation of landowners such as John Forrester Reid who, unlike many of their fathers, were actually born into considerable wealth and status. However, in general they do not appear to have attained the same level of success as the previous generation did, due perhaps to a lack of financial and social ambition. One of John Forrester Reid’s greatest contributions to posterity was in the creation of his family home called Burnside.

Burnside homestead, as mentioned in the introduction, remains the only noteworthy and exceptionally grand relic of John Reid’s once lavish country estate. The 5000 acres which constituted the Burnside homestead and property was one of the first sections of the Elderslie estate to be purchased by John Reid senior in 1864. The men’s quarters and stables were subsequently established there. The young Reid family also lived on this part of the property for six years before moving into their newly constructed Elderslie homestead in 1874. Therefore the sale of the Burnside Victorian villa in 1930 was a decisive moment in the history of this grand old homestead. Members of the Reid family had continuously inhabited the property since the 1860s. Now the ‘golden reign’ was truly over, as Burnside passed from its original owners to a new family of admirers, the Hudsons. They had been frequent visitors and good friends of John Reid and his family at Elderslie. Initially the Hudson family used Burnside as their country weekend home. They travelled there from Dunedin most weekends accompanied by one or two personal maids. This continued until 1943 when a grandson of the original Hudson family, Reginald Hudson and his wife Joy, a notable concert pianist, took over Burnside and farmed the surrounding 580 acres of land until the 1970s. Burnside was reduced to just ten acres by the time Bruce and Alison Albiston, the current owners, took possession in 1974. The house by this time was also badly in need of some tender loving care, which the Albistons immediately set about rectifying.
Today this complex corner-angled Victorian bay villa has been fully restored but still retains much of its authenticity. The outstanding octagonal Great Hall, with elevated ceiling and ruby-coloured celestial windows, remains absolutely unique to the homestead and is not found in any other known house in New Zealand. The New Zealand Historic Places Trust recognised this factor by awarding Burnside with a Category One distinction in 1998, ensuring the continued preservation of the homestead for future generations. Other various architectural features of Burnside also indicate a considerable amount of creative foresight on the part of the original owners. Burnside is a reflection of the Reid family’s flamboyant, yet largely inaccessible lifestyle. It is a testimony to one New Zealand family’s individuality, success and demise, and as such, should continue to be regarded as an important link to an era in our history that has long since passed.
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