

Georgina Crowther

Our grandmother Georgina was born in Auckland on 30th October 1843. Her parents were Nathaniel and Jane Stafford. Nathaniel, son of John, was born in Oldham, Lancashire, England. His birth date is rather uncertain as his death certificate says he was 75 when he died in 1883, (born 1808?) but on arrival in Auckland both he and Jane were said, on the passenger list, to be aged 29 - which gives a birth date of 1813. His death certificate also says he was married at the age of 30! Georgina's older half sister was 8 when the family arrived in 1842, so possibly "30" should read as "20". On Georgina's birth certificate Nathaniel is described as "yeoman". He and Jane Smith were married in Manchester, (his second marriage).

Times were hard in the North in these years and Jane and Nathaniel decided to emigrate. They were offered passage as free emigrants, on the payment of £1 deposit, to be refunded on arrival in Auckland if the passengers accepted "the best offer of work". A report in a British paper of 1842 declared, *The Duchess of Argyll* is to sail from Greenock tomorrow, 11th June 1842...". "The emigrants, chiefly composed of Paisley operatives, are in high spirits." Cowan, in "The Story of Auckland", says passengers on the *Duchess of Argyll* were "splendid colonial stock". He asserts the emigrants were recruited in Glasgow "mainly from the lowland shires". Prof. R Stone says they were from Paisley, "mostly labouring people in poor circumstances". Probably both were correct. The Staffords were from Oldham and Manchester but could have been working in Scotland.

The *Duchess of Argyll*, Capt Tait, was 667 tons and 132 feet long. The smaller *Jane Gifford*, which arrived the same long year, carried 259 passengers, so presumably the *Duchess of Argyll* carried more. Four months in such cramped conditions must have put a damper on the early "high spirits". The *Jane Gifford*, which was never sighted on the voyage - made a ten day faster trip. The *Duchess of Argyll* was 14 miles ahead when she ran on to a sandbank, but moved off it the next day and anchored in Auckland on 8 October, 1842.

The only story that came down in the family about the arrival was that when Jane Stafford landed on the beach and saw what she had come to, she sat down and wept. An old Maori lady passing by put a hand on her shoulder and tried to comfort her. Auckland at this stage was largely undeveloped. There were few roads and most were impassable in wet weather (the first dray which tried to travel from Auckland to

Onehunga was bogged in Newmarket for a week). There was no butcher or baker, no milk, and butter was 4/6 a lb, when wages for the newcomers were 2/6 a day. Pork, fish, fruit and vegetables could be bought from the Maoris.

The emigrants lived for some time in free raupo huts on the beach and had the use at times of the courthouse and other buildings, until they could obtain their own houses. They were put on public works at 2/6 a day. Robert Graham, cabin passenger on the "Jane Gifford", wrote "the emigrants have been employed at levelling the streets and they don't seem to like it at all". They worked on forming Shortland Street and on scrub cutting for building a timber stockade round the goal. In such conditions it was difficult for a man without capital to improve his status. Robert Graham, who had capital, soon owned vast areas of land from Great South Road to Remuera Road and out as far as St John's lake. 100 "natives" worked on his Ellerslie estate, and he laid out and planted what later became the Ellerslie racecourse gardens. At the top of Ladies Mile, which he so named because his daughter rode there, he must have planted many of the trees which were already well grown when William Crowther bought the land in 1885. Nathaniel Stafford established homes in St Georges Bay and Mechanics Bay (1853) and when Georgina married, in 1867, the Staffords lived at Brier Villa, Parnell. He died at Salisbury Street, Parnell. He is described on documents as a "carter".

Since Georgina was born on 30th October 1843, it is likely that the family tradition that she was born in a raupo hut on the beach is actually true. She never spoke to us of the real hardships of her early years though. She once told us it was very hard to get beads for the fine work the ladies of the time used to decorate their clothes and their homes. "Mother", she said, "had to borrow a thimbleful of beads from a friend and repay her when the next boat arrived with supplies." Georgina was christened in Old St Pauls, Fort Britomart, confirmed by Bishop Selwyn at St Barnabas, Parnell, and sang in the choir at St Mary's, Parnell. The talent for music which persisted so strongly in the Crowther family must have come from her. (All these churches are now demolished.) She went to school for a time and her lifelong friendship with Emily Johnson, daughter of Capt Johnson, began there. We do not know how Georgina and William Crowther met, but as he had been dealing in horses in Auckland since 1863 he may well have met Nathaniel Stafford through their joint interest in the carrying trade.

Georgina was married to William Crowther on 2/10/1867. The Auckland newspaper noted the event

Marriage 2/10/67

"At St Mary's Church Parnell, by the Rev. R. Maunsell D.P. William Crowther esquire, late of Melbourne Victoria to Georgina second daughter of Nathaniel Stafford Esq, Brier Villa Parnell. No cards. West Coast papers please copy." (The West Coast in 1867 meant the Taranaki area).

She was 24 and he was 37. She wore a lovely frock of lilac taffeta with a stripe of deeper lilac. Her daughter Nina wore the frock, remodelled, for her wedding in 1921 and the material was so strong we in the family still have pieces of it today. The Crowthers lived in Parnell, then in Albert Street, and for many years in rooms above the livery stables in Wellesley Street. All their 9 children except Albert were born in Wellesley Street. One child, Arthur, died in infancy and is listed as "Crowther infant" on the plaque above Grafton Gully to mark the graves moved for the motorway.

Georgina and William helped her Stafford family when they could. She eventually had 3 brothers and a sister. David worked for William at the livery stables and lived in a little house above the stables. After Nathaniel died in 1883, Jane lived with the Crowthers for some years. Connie remembered she always wore a white cap with a lavender bow indoors and a black satin one out of doors and "prunella boots", with elastic sides.

It must have been difficult for Georgina to bring up 8 children in cramped rooms and a town setting. Life became much pleasanter and easier when William built their new home *Murewai* in 1891 and they all moved to the country freedom of Remuera. *Murewai*, with 3 acres around it and 25 acres of farmland just down Ladies Mile, was a happy combination of country residence and farmhouse. (Georgina always called it Rem-oo-era-, much to our amusement, but of course it was much nearer to the Maori pronunciation).

Socially, the move to the new home was not such a great step as it might seem for a girl born in a raupo hut. Since 1878 William had been a City Councillor and

Georgina had been involved in many meetings with important people, such as the Civic welcome to the Governor Lord Onslow, in 1889. In 1891 she became Lady Mayoress when William was selected Mayor for 2 successive terms. A photograph of her taken about 1864 shows she must have been beautiful, with the oval face and lovely eyes which passed on to Clara, Enid and Dene. Her attitudes were naturally Victorian. Her husband was head of the household, without question. Her first job was to care for him and support him, and bring up her children. Once a week he opened the safe in the sitting room at *Murewai* and counted into her hand as many gold sovereigns as she needed to run the house and family. She reserved time for him no matter how busy she was and when he was home and working in his study, they met there each morning at 11 to talk and drink a glass of stout, which was supposed to be a "tonic". She would not easily defy him, even when his differences with his eldest son led to Albert's departure to Australia. Georgina took Clara in the trap to visit Albert's wife, Nell, in Ponsonby, but Clara was not allowed to go into the house. Georgina could in such a case act for herself, but would not involve Clara. After William's death when Albert was dying, Georgina nursed him at *Murewai*, until his death in 1902.

William was by 1891 an extremely busy man. After 12 years in business he had plenty of money to build and furnish a fine house. But it was left to Georgina to run it. Her strong gentle personality was the guiding force in family life. Nina in particular scarcely knew her father. From the first a gardener was installed at *Murewai*, in a cottage in the garden. He and Georgina laid out the flower garden and vegetable garden, orchard, lawns and tennis court. He was also the cowman, milking and tending the cows in Ladies Mile. In the house there was always a faithful "Molly" or "Jane", Mrs Camick who came in to do the washing and Lampra who did the ironing. Georgina herself skimmed the cream from the great pans set in the dairy by the back door and churned the butter. (I can remember her there in our childhood, and still taste the wonderful butter set on the table in small rolled "pats", made on special wooden butter pats, or spread on bread which was cut wafer thin and made into tea rolls. As the Crowther girls grew older, "helping Mother with the dishes" was a never ending task, as Connie remembered, even at 90! Georgina was an excellent cook, and taught all her girls how to make featherlight scones. She spoilt the boys and Harold was her special pet - he usually sat next to her and was often given the best of the food. She called for him when she needed him so frequently that her pet parrot quickly learnt to cry "Harold!" in imitation of her voice.

Murewai soon became an attractive place to town dwellers. Hordes of young folk drove out to visit the Crowthers, play tennis or ride. When the weather was bad and they couldn't go home at night - beds were pushed together and rows of visitors slept acrosswise on them. If food was short Georgina cooked many pots of rice in milk, with raisins for flavour. William would ask, "Is there no end to this rice?" and Georgina would say calmly "I hope not, till everyone is fed". She could be very firm. If she offered a visitor his choice of custard or jelly and he said "Oh, I don't mind", she would say, "Make up your mind, young man."

Her children loved and respected her but were not overawed. Sometimes if they were very trying she said, "You'll be sorry when I'm gone" - and one of the family would say cheekily "Where are you going, Mother? Can we come too?".

Outside the house Georgina's chief interest was her church. At first - after the move to Remuera, she drove in to St Matthews, her church in Wellesley Street days. But in 1897 the Crowthers joined the 20 families who banded together to begin services in the Remuera Hall (Probert's) near Orakei Road. They all lent money free of interest for a church building. On June 29, 1905, St Aidans Church was consecrated. The church parish notes paid this tribute to Georgina when she died

Parish Notes

In Memoriam - On Saturday morning, August 6th, St. Aidan's Church and Parish lost one of its oldest members. After an illness which lasted several months, Mrs. William Crowther passed peacefully to her rest. Mrs. Crowther was born and reared in this neighbourhood, and was universally respected and beloved. She was a member of St Aidan's Church from its infancy, and for many years took a keen and active interest in everything that concerned its welfare. All acquainted with the history of our church know something of the great debt it owes to Mrs. Crowther and her family. She was a regular worshipper at St. Aidan's, a member of many of its organisations, and a supporter of them all. For years she did everything in her power to further the work of the church by her sympathy, her personal service, and financial support. She was one of the founders of the Women's Guild, and its first President. Her strong yet gentle and patient Christian character won for her many friends. To-

day we thank God for her noble life and example, and pray that His Holy Spirit may strengthen and comfort every member of her sorrowing family.

William was elected a member of the House of Representatives in 1893, and till 1900 Georgina entertained many of William's political colleagues. Connie once said, "Mr Seddon was the only visitor who was too big for the Dad's chair in the sitting room." Georgina went with William and Connie in the trap to visit "young Mr Massey" in the country. "A very promising young man", William said, as they drove home. After 1893 William was away in Wellington for months at a time. We asked Connie if Grannie ever went to Wellington and she said (very shocked!) "Oh NO! She had to look after us!" William clearly realised what a splendid job she made of managing everything when he was away. He died of cancer at *Murewai* in March 1900. Georgina had nursed him at home. In his will Georgina, with her son William, and David Goldie, were named as executors. Georgina was left the whole income from his estate, and he entrusted her with the final division of that estate between the children in her will. When William died the remaining children ranged in age from 31 to 14.

William, known as Wib, who was not a natural businessman, had now at 31 to become his Mother's right hand man in family affairs, but it was Georgina to whom we all looked as head of the family, almost till her death 21 years later. All the major family decisions were hers. When her daughters married it was to her the young men applied for permission. When Will Garrett asked for Connie, Georgina said, "Oh! Will, you don't want a sickly girl". (Connie had hay fever but she lived to 91), She organised the weddings and Crowther money which provided sections on which to build and help with the homes. True to her Victorian outlook Georgina taught her daughters to cook and sew but not how to deal with married life. When one daughter arrived home the day after her wedding shocked and distraught Georgina's solution was not a factual motherly talk. Instead she sent a younger sister to join the young couple on their honeymoon! All the Crowther girls had to ride sidesaddle, except Nina, who rode astride when she was young. When Nina was 16, "Mother said I was too old and must now get a sidesaddle". *Murewai* was "Granny's house" - in many ways the heart and centre of all our lives.

Since he died 11 years before I was born, I know nothing of my grandfather except the rather stern large photograph of him which hung on the sitting room wall next to the engraving of Bishop Selwyn, the second most important man in Georgina's

life. After William's death, Georgina wore black for the rest of her life and we never saw her in anything else. Her clothes were beautiful - heavy shining materials with long-sleeves and long skirts. Some were beaded with jet and some inset with lace. All the V necks were filled in with cream net or lace, with boned and stiffened net high round her neck. Her jewellery was black and silver, except for the lovely garnets Wib found for her - brooches, ear-rings, a bracelet, pendant and a locket surrounded by garnets. She had worn in earlier days a black gauzy bonnet, trimmed with jet, a cape made of silk ruffles, and a black silky knit shawl. These came to us when *Murewai* was sold in 1951. One photo of her shows what would seem to be Victorian pantaloons beneath her long skirt, but they were in fact part of the long woollen combinations she always wore in winter from neck to ankle. Her hair was centre parted - (Victorian style) and pinned back severely in a neat bun. She had a lovely fine skin, without any frown lines, because she seemed to be always serene. And she smelt - as a Victorian lady should - of lavender water.

Xmas at "Murewai"

On Christmas Day there was always a gathering of the family at *Murewai* in the afternoon. Grannie, in her black satin and old lace, sat on the side verandah above the tennis lawn and watched us being entertained with races and games by the Uncles. Cliff was ringmaster - gay and tireless, and we all adored him. There was a special game we played - called "egg in the cap". All I can remember is that you tossed a tennis ball in an upended hat or cap and ran furiously before the owner caught you. Then we played rounders - with an old tennis racquet with a flat top and a fish-tail handle. Uncle Wib took us down to the orchard, for strawberries and the first of the Christmas (cherry) plums, and eventually we all went indoors for Auntie Nina's party tea. On Xmas day the bread was spread with 100s and 1000s. And there was a cake, of course, with china tea from a silver pot for the grown-ups and fresh lemon drink for the children. Maybe some Christmas days were wet, but as I remember it, it was always warm and sunny, we always did the things we had done last year and would do again in 12 months - and the loving, close circle of aunts and uncles, with Grannie at the centre, seemed as unchanging as the sun in the sky.

In her early days at *Murewai*, Georgina drove a gig with high light wheels drawn by a black mare called Kit. Wib once decorated the gig and the horse with masses of flowers for a floral Fête at Ellerslie racecourse. But he was no driver and when Kit

grew overexcited with the crowds and the bands he had the greatest difficulty in controlling her. Nina said she was never so frightened in all her life! Georgina was always receptive to new ideas and had the money to carry them out. *Murewai* had a telephone and flush lavatory many years before we did in Ladies Mile. In about 1914 she bought a splendid Rover car, built very much on the lines of a carriage with brass headlamps and brass horn, sounded by squeezing a black rubber ball. It was usually open to the air but if rain was heavy enough, Nina, the driver, could rush to the back, undo many straps and haul the folding hood over her Mother's head. "Going for drives with Grannie" was always exciting. We were tucked up in rugs with fur muffs from the sitting-room cupboard on our hands. Nina and Grannie wore heavy veils to tie their hats on and extra children had hassocks on the floor when all the seats were full. It was a constant worry to Grannie that the brass door locks might open and we would fall out. Sometimes the engine would fail to start and Nina had to crank and crank but generally the Rover was more reliable than the trap. On one early expedition to Howick, Billy the pony broke free from his tether, found his way home to *Murewai* and had to be ridden out to Howick by Cliff to retrieve the picnic party.

Most of our expeditions took us only to Mission Bay or St Heliers or maybe to see the new litter of smooth-haired Fox Terrier puppies at Rose and Lil Hellaby's. At the beach Nina would spread the rug and pump up the primus to make tea for Grannie. There was a marvellous wicker hamper with cups and plates and cutlery all strapped in place, room for the primus and tins of cake. All fun for us - but for Auntie Nina - plenty of work.

In earlier days before the Rover (which actually lived in part of the stable) Georgina had a busy stable yard to supervise. There were usually 3 horses available. (In our young days the stables were empty except for the ribbons and certificates won by the Crowther men tacked on the walls). When the pans of milk set for cream gave way to a separator operated by the gardener, Georgina still watched over the butter churn. The huge orchard had all the ordinary fruits and many more exotic kinds - guavas, passion fruit, figs and Cape gooseberries. Georgina and her girls made jams and pickles and bottled fruit in the big kitchen. Georgina was quite often alone in the house when the family were at work or at school. One terrible day the cord broke in a sash window which fell and caught both her hands. She was in great pain and called for hours for help before anyone arrived to free her. Remuera Road was quite a distance from the house, below a hedge and white picket fence. Long afterwards the road was

widened and a fine stone wall was built nearer the house. A long drive led from the *Murewai* front steps with a gate across the Greenlane corner. The Crowther girls used to swing on the gate, talking to the young men from St John's College who often set off from Greenlane, the bus terminus, to walk to the College. Crusty old Mr Bent, who lived opposite, asked the girls severely, "Where's your Mother?" "Inside, getting the dinner", said cheeky Connie. "That's right" said Mr Bent, "Wear out the old ones first"! Georgina once bought a horse from him and told him what a good horse it was. But old Bent said sourly "All very well, Mrs Crowther, you've seen the horse but we ain't seen your money yet".

Georgina had great joy in her grandchildren. Enid, the first, was always special and saw more of Grannie than anyone when she was at Ladies College miles from her City Road home and went to *Murewai* for lunch. Helen Crowther often stayed at *Murewai* on visits from Cambridge. She loved her grandmother very much, most especially when Helen wanted to eat the dog biscuits, kept in a tin in the cupboard under the stairs. "The Aunts wouldn't let me, but Grannie always said I could." Because we lived in the same street and Mother helped at the old home at least one day a week, we were there a great deal. Georgina was a wonderful Grannie. She always had delicious green creme de mênthe jubes to offer us in a flat tin (imported from France). She let us hold (very carefully) marvellous French dolls, with china faces and real hair and white kid limbs. They lived in the sitting room cupboard, with the fur muffs we took out in the Rover. She was never sharp with us, except when she was on the verandah and saw us run too fast down the red scoria drive. (A tumble there could be very bloody and painful, with scoria having to be picked out with tweezers.) Then she would call anxiously, "Tek keer! Tek keer!" her family's Lancashire accent coming out under stress.

That was when she could still walk about. At some stage in the early years of the War, she had to take to the couch in the sitting room, by the big window with its view of the Harbour. A "cloakroom" was installed at the end of the hall and Georgina spent her days downstairs. Wib and Cliff, or Nina and "Hickey", her husband, would clasp hands to make a seat "carry a lady to London" style - and Georgina was carried up to her bed each night. I suppose she had heart trouble. We were never told. She sat there on her couch, one lovely Paisley shawl below, another over her knees. She knitted for her family and she did beautiful crosstitch embroidery on canvas - bedspreads and curtains for her daughters. The patterns and the wools were German, bought from the

Teutenberg's shop in Wellesley Street, opposite the Crowther stables and rented from William Crowther. Wib designed a wisteria bedspread, based on the mauve wisteria which curtained the *Murewai* stables.

Through all the years of invalidism, Georgina still held an important place in the neighbourhood. She was a much loved figure right up to her death. She couldn't go out - so everyone came to her. Many came to visit by car, and the neighbours would come in the Ladies Mile gate, visit Mrs Crowther and go off down the drive to the tram at Greenlane. I was with her one day when young Bob Finlayson from across the road rushed in (he was badly gassed in the war and had come back with his French wife, Margot). He knelt by Grannie's couch, took both her hands and said, "Oh Mrs Crowther we have a little son, and I had to tell you first". Grannie stroked his fair hair and her eyes shone. "Dear Bob", she said, "I'm so happy for you!" The war years were hard on her, with Cliff away in France. She wore his picture always in a locket edged with garnets. One marvellous day we went to visit and Grannie was smiling as she seldom did in those days. Then out from behind the door jumped Uncle Cliff - fit and well and home from the war.

Nina's friend Earnest Hickson came safely home too. They wanted to be married but he had to settle in a job and Georgina was increasingly dependent on Nina. But when they did marry, in 1921, Grannie faced the day bravely, and took her place in the Family Group photograph.

This wedding was the last great occasion at *Murewai*. The reception was held in a huge marquee on the *Murewai* tennis court decorated with flowers and ropes of smilax round the poles. The long tables held a most wonderful feast with all sorts of luxuries such as crystalised violets and marzipan fruits imported from France.

Nina was barely settled in her new home when Georgina's health grew worse. Soon, even with nurses to help, and Clara and Connie coming regularly, Nina was spending a good deal of time at "The Old Home". I once asked Auntie Nina if Grannie was a difficult patient, but she said "Oh no, she was always an angel of patience". Georgina died on August 1 1921 aged 78. Nina was with her. Georgina seemed unconscious but suddenly she opened her eyes. She looked straight at something Nina could not see, held out her arms and smiled radiantly. She died so happily, it comforted Nina for her loss.

Nobody told children coming troubles in those days. We woke one morning to find Mother's eyes red with tears and were shattered to be told Grannie had died the previous night. She lay in state in the sitting room with her coffin totally covered in flowers from people who loved her. (Wib of course arranged it all and photographed the scene, with the pictures of her husband and Bishop Selwyn on the wall behind). We did not see it nor were we allowed to go to her funeral. The service was conducted at the house by Canon C.A. Tisdall and Rev. J. Wilkinson conducted the burial service at Purewa, where her husband had been buried over 20 years earlier. We stayed at home - with Mrs Slade the "lady help".

Very gradually, life returned almost to normal again. All the Crowther women made one quick trip to town to buy black frocks, then "mourning" began and they stayed quietly at home for some weeks, seeing only close friends. I remember discussions between the sisters and decisions being taken that maybe it was time to add a white collar to the black. Later they all changed to mauve for the summer and eventually, after about 6 months, they were able to wear light colours again. Letters of sympathy in black edged envelopes poured into the house from people who had known and loved Georgina. Connie was often at her desk writing personal answers. Of all the tributes one of the most touching came from Georgina's cowman-gardener at *Murewai* - an Indian who had served her for many years. He wrote of his great respect and love for her and signed himself - "Yours in grief, Kara".

Georgina's will left the Old Home and all its contents to Wib, so that physically *Murewai* changed very little in 1921. Wib kept it going with the help of a housekeeper, and entertained many theatrical friends to parties in the drawing room. (We gained a good deal of kudos at Grammar when we were able to boast that members of the visiting English Shakespearean company were staying with our Uncle.) In the 20s, schoolgirls used to picket the stage door with autograph books to be signed by their idols, and squeal with excitement at the sight of a leading man much as later generations did over the Beatles. Cliff stayed on at home, in between long yachting trips and visits to friends. But *Murewai* without Grannie could never be the same again.

The Auckland newspaper published this obituary - with 2 errors. Her family came out on the *Duchess of Argyll* and Georgina was 78, not 76.

MRS G CROWTHER

The death occurred at her residence at Remuera on Saturday of Mrs. Georgina Crowther, aged 76. Mrs. Crowther was the widow of the late Mr. William Crowther, at one time a member of the House of Representatives, and Mayor of Auckland. Her parents arrived in New Zealand by the *Jane Gifford*, one of the earliest immigrant ships. Throughout her life she was closely associated with the work of the Church of England. Christened in the old St. Paul's Church at Fort Britomart, and confirmed by Bishop Selwyn in the old St. Barnabas' Church in Parnell, she was married in 1867 in the former St. Mary's Church, Parnell, where she was for some time a member of the choir. These churches were three of the earliest erected in Auckland, and have since been demolished. For the past 30 years she resided in Remuera, and was tireless in her efforts in the interests of the Anglican churches in that suburb. She had been in failing health for some time, and passed away peacefully in her sleep. Mrs Crowther is survived by three sons, Messrs W.J. and C.P. Crowther, of Auckland, and Mr Harold Crowther of Cambridge, and four daughters Mesdames C.B. Plummer, C.R. Keeble, W. Garrett, and T.R. Hickson, all of whom reside in Auckland. The funeral took place yesterday. Service was conducted at the residence by Canon C.A. Tisdall. The interment took place at Purewa Cemetery, the Rev. J. Wilkinson officiating at the graveside.

Crowther Family

Albert
William
Clara
Gertrude
Harold
Cliff
Constance
Nina