

CHAPTER 10

Mary ('Maria')

Even at this distance of time it is clear that Mary Fantham (nee McWilliam) was an outstanding person. She married a remarkable man, as will shortly be shown. Her eleven children, or most of them, seem to have been notable people.

She was born on 10 April 1842. The copy of the Entry of her Death shows the place of birth as England. If this certificate is correct in this particular and it means what it says, and not Britain (which could include Ireland), it comes as a surprise. Her brother William was born less than two years later (17 January 1844) in Ireland as was another sister, Emily, in 1849. Unless Rebecca, Mary's mother, had journeyed over from Ireland specially for the birth, it establishes that John McWilliam and his wife were still living in England (or conceivably Scotland). It could be that they were in transit, but were yet to reach Roscommon. Remembering Mary's mother Rebecca, was born at Stony Stratford, Bedfordshire, it is entirely possible that Rebecca went back to stay with her mother (also Rebecca - nee Grace) in that part of England for the arrival of her first-born.

Another surprise about Mary Fantham is that, like her mother, there is some uncertainty about her given name. Her granddaughter, Honor Tetzner (formerly Bretherton, nee Sim), writes (March 1984):-

I met for the first time (last week) a second cousin - her grandmother was AA Fantham's sister - and she is very knowledgeable about the family history. She told me that my grandmother was named Mary, not Martha, as I had thought. Whether Martha was a name my mother used for her, I don't know, but my grandmother was definitely christened Mary.

Later (January 1985) Honor Tetzner writes:-

The mystery of Martha/Mary Fantham still continues. In my mother's (ie May Sim, nee Fantham) birthday book is the entry on July 11 "Martha Fantham" and it is not in my mother's handwriting. It is an oldfashioned handwriting. Perhaps my grandmother didn't like Mary and used a name she liked - Martha.

Incidentally Mary Fantham was born on 10 April, not 11 July. Maybe the entry in the birthday book referred to some other Fantham. As recounted earlier, her brother, William, in his old age, certainly often referred to her as Maria. (See page 35). It has already been pointed out that Maria is the latinised form of Mary, consequently there is little need to stretch the imagination in equating Mary and Maria. The really convincing piece of evidence is the entry on Mary's Death Certificate. It unequivocally shows MARY FANTHAM. It seems, too, that she had May as a family 'pet' name.

Perhaps even more convincing is the wording on a remembrance card produced following her husband's death. Its wording, shown on the next page, removes all doubt.

One more mystery re Mary. There is a suggestion that her husband located her in Canada and brought her out to New Zealand, but no evidence to support this contention can be found. Indeed, for this fact to be the case, it would have required Arthur Fantham to have travelled to Canada from New Zealand to collect her and return. He

In Loving Remembrance
of
Arthur Albert Fantham
Beloved Husband of Mary Fantham
who died at Hawera
January 16th, 1904
aged 61 years

may have made the long journey by sea, but it seems simpler to assume that Mary came out to New Zealand with her mother and other members of her family about the year 1865. It is, however, just credible that Mary and her mother and family voyaged to New Zealand via Canada, residing in that country a little time.

What can be confidently asserted is that Mary McWilliam married Arthur Albert Fantham on the Queen's birthday (24 May) at Christchurch*, New Zealand, in the year 1865. These facts are well attested, the Death Certificate showing place of marriage.

It is the intention of this history to concentrate on the lives of the descendants of John and Rebecca McWilliam, rather than on the details of their spouses. Apart from any other considerations, restrictions of space dictate this procedure. The case of Arthur Albert Fantham is, however, rather different, for he was a famous figure and clearly merits more than just a listing of the bare facts about him. Most of the other spouses of such descendants will rate little more than dates and places of birth and death, and occupation, but AA Fantham is unique.

First, a further quotation from the letter of Honor Tetzner written 30 March 1984:-

Last week my husband and I went down to Hawera (on the south-west coast of the North Island - South Taranaki Bight), in Taranaki Province, on a sentimental journey really, to visit once again the fine monument of my grandfather which was erected for his being an "enterprising settler". It stands just inside the entrance to King Edward Gardens.

A memorial in the form of a statue is indeed a signal honour. He had the further distinction of having three streets named after him. AA Fantham's pioneering work for the Colony of New Zealand was clearly recognised by his contemporaries as being outstanding. His Obituary in the newspaper of Monday, January 18, 1904 records:-

Born in 1842 (20 May, actually), he with the rest of a pretty numerous family (nine altogether) was brought to New Zealand in October 1852. His mother (Eliza, nee Walker, b. 1814, d. 5.6.1903)... died only a short time ago in this district... The boat which the Fanthams came out in was the Duke of Portland, 553 tons... in charge of Captain Alexander and in due time she landed her passengers, 106 of them at Port Lyttelton... Splendid as (the district's) position is today, at that time it presented discouraging features to colonists who had come from thickly populated England with all the advantages of long years of progress... Indeed, he (AA Fantham) has more than once related in the hearing of the writer, when proudly speaking (of) the grit of his mother in those early days, that the only time he knew her to shed a tear was on the first day in New Zealand, when

* In St Michael's Church, it is reported.

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the family was landed on the Lyttelton beach and she had to start to make a tent in the fern amid rain, with the "household goods" as yet unlanded. However, in a short time these discomforts were overcome and practically forgotten in the work that had to be done...

Young Fantham made an early start for himself, and at the commencement of the sixties and for forty years he was a hard worker.... Comparatively early in his career he began to make for himself a name as a breeder of pure-bred stock (Shorthorn). It is said he began very much by way of accident, securing without any very definite intention one or two well bred animals, and gradually working up from them. He had no special training or education for the work, but he was keen in observation and extremely fond of animals and he could manage them and doctor them as few men without special training could. In later life he had acquired most valuable practical experience and his veterinary knowledge was most extensive which at all times and seasons was freely at the service of neighbours. After spending a good many years in Canterbury, the Waikato, which in the seventies was being "boomed", proved attractive for him and he acquired a property, we think, from Mr Henry Reynolds. This was known as the model farm of the Waikato... it was a really beautiful place. Here Mr Fantham went in pretty extensively for stud breeding, and brought to a great state of perfection the herd which he possessed for many years and was only dispersed the other day, when he had become too unwell to look after it. During his stay in the Waikato there was an outbreak of pleuropneumonia among the cattle, and there was a great scare. A man of Mr Fantham's knowledge was invaluable at that time, and the farmers' appreciation of his services was warmly expressed by the presentation of an address and the gift of a very fine piano. Subscriptions were made practically from all over the province. About 1882 or 1883 Mr Fantham tired of the Waikato and came to Taranaki. He purchased from Mr JI Perry the Egmont View Farm. His stud cattle were brought down, and he also went on with the work of general farming. Some years later he established the Egmont Farmers' Union, with which he remained actively associated until illness laid him aside. He was also active in many ways, and among other positions filled that of President of the Agricultural and Pastoral Association...

Additional glimpses of AA Fantham are given in a historical memo by his great-grandson, Alaric ('Ric') Havyatt. Arthur's parents were Joseph and Eliza and his paternal grandparents were William (born 1772) and Mary (born 1783) from Wendover, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire. Arthur was born in Buckinghamshire too. Arriving in NZ aged 10 he was educated at the Christchurch Boys High School and at the old Commercial School in that City. The Cyclopaedia of NZ goes on:-

Mr Fantham first entered into farm life close to Christchurch, where, until 1877, he possessed a property, on which he started his well-known pedigree herd of Shorthorn cattle, descendants of which are found all over NZ, and with which he was very successful at prize-taking in the principal Canterbury shows. He next took up a farm near Cambridge, Waikato... Early in 1882 he removed to Hawera, where he took up his residence. When the Egmont Farmers' Union was inaugurated, he was offered the position of manager and auctioneer, and was connected with that institution in that capacity for many years... Whilst in Canterbury he was for many years a member of the Spreydon Road Board and Canterbury Agricultural and Pastoral Association, and in the Waikato he was on local road boards and cattle boards, where his expert knowledge was of great service. He was chairman of the Hawera Road Board before that body was merged into the Hawera



Mary ('Maria', 'May') Fantham (nec McWilliam), born 1842 and her husband Arthur Albert Fantham (b.1842).

Below: Mary and Arthur with their eleven children, Hawera 1900.

L to R: Back: (Violet) May, Bert (Arthur Albert II), Lucy, Ella (Mary Ellinor).

Seated: Dick (Richard Angus Gwynne), Fanny (Frances Louisa), 'Pa' Fantham, 'Ma' Fantham, Emily.

In front: Frederick Charles, Walter George. Insets: David Edward ('Ted'), Harry (Joseph Henry).





Above: Lucy Kennard, one of the daughters of John & Rebecca McWilliam, and sister of Mary, William, Emily, Maggie and the rest.



Above: One of Fanny Bayly's grandsons, Miles Havyatt, son of Zaida. Born 1921.

Below: Four generations. Left to right: Patricia Bignell (nee Bayly) aged 21, Mary ('Maria') Fantham 75, Fanny Bayly 51, Betty Blair (nee Bignell) 3 mths.



County Council and was a member of the Egmont Agricultural and Pastoral Society. He was a member of the Masonic Order for a great many years. Mr Fantham married a daughter of the late Mr John McWilliam, of Canterbury.

Arthur Albert Fantham was the first farmer to export shorthorn stud cattle from New Zealand; he used to exhibit these animals at the Christchurch shows. He was reputed to be a man of considerable energy and great personal charm. He obviously gave a great sense of confidence to the people with whom he was associated. He hosted the Waikato Racing Club, the Hunt Club, ploughing matches and took a leading role in a local farmers' club - for but eleven months, only to relocate in Hawera and do the same thing all over again. Part of the Cambridge farm is now St Peters Preparatory School for boys. In addition to his farming interests he has also been described as a businessman. He was a town councillor. The marble statue in his honour and memory was erected in King Edward Park, Hawera, in 1922. The inscription in the granite plinth reads:- "ARTHUR ALBERT FANTHAM. Erected by the people of Hawera and surrounding districts in memory of an energetic and enterprising settler." Arthur Fantham died on 16 January 1904 in his sixty-second year. His wife, Mary, was left a widow for fifteen years.

Of a total of eleven, only six of her children survived Mary, according to her Death Certificate. Barbara Golder (nee Levick) recalls that when she was a very little girl she remembers a very old lady visiting her parents' family in Melbourne. She was told that the lady was her 'great-aunt Maria'. This would undoubtedly have been Mary ('Maria') Fantham, who would probably have been aged 76 at the time and in the last twelve months of her life.