Chapter One

STAFFORDSHIRE ORIGINS

Staffordshire is a county of contrasts. It contains two of the most industrially affected landscapes in England in the Potteries and the Black country. At the same time it contains, in the rural extremities of the county, some of the most attractive countryside that can be seen. The history of the Buxton family begins in the countryside and then moves to the urban heartland of the county.

The village of Ellastone is situated almost midway between Stoke-on-Trent and Derby. It is four and a half miles southwest of the picturesque town of Ashbourne and six miles north of Uttoxeter along the banks of the scenic River Dove. A few miles south of Dovedale, the area is one of rolling pastureland, stone buildings and rural tranquillity, overlooked by the Weaver Hills. Today it is largely an area of dairy farming. George Eliot set her novel *Adam Bede* in the district. Her uncle was the local builder and Hayslope, the village depicted, was Ellastone. Loamshire and Stonyshore were respectively Staffordshire and Derbyshire. The novel, which is set in the year 1799, includes the following description of the district:

"That rich undulating district of Loamshire to which Hayslope belonged, lies close to a grim outskirt of Stonyshore, overlooked by its barren hills......and in two or three hours ride the traveller might exchange a bleak treeless region, intersected by lines of cold grey stone for one where his road wound under the shelter of woods, or up swelling hills, muffed with hedgerows and long meadow grass and thick corn; and where at every turn he came upon some fine old country seat nestled in the valley or crowning the slope...." 12

The last part of the passage might well be a description of Wootton Lodge, according to Palliser the most handsome house in Staffordshire, which lies at the foot of a valley to the west of Ellastone. 13 The house is set in a large deer park which runs up towards the Weaver Hills, stopping just short of the hamlet of Ramshorn. Park Farm, Ramshorn, lies at the top end of the park looking down on Wootton Lodge. In 1841 it was tenanted by David and Ann Buxton. With them lived their daughter Ann, aged 3 and also David’s father, the previous tenant, Joseph Buxton, aged 80. The family had lived in the parish since the seventeenth century.

Five generations of descendants have been traced, all christened and buried in Ellastone, to Joseph Buxton, David Buxton’s father. 14 Thirty seven acres of the farm were pasture and twenty four acres arable, a higher proportion than in the township of Ramshorn as a whole. 15 The farm, which is at a height of some 900 feet above sea level, is located on the edge of the Staffordshire Moorlands. Caird has noted that the tenantry of Staffordshire held their land chiefly on yearly tenures, which they preferred. It was on the southern edge of his high wage grazing quadrant of England, although the average wages in the county were only equivalent to the national average. Caird attributed the higher wages in northern counties to the presence of manufacturing enterprises. 16 With the Potteries only some 14 miles away to the west and the Black Country 30 miles to the south, Ellastone was bound to be subject to urban influences, influences which had their effects on the Buxtons. However, the development of urban employment opportunities was probably only part of the explanation for the long chain of events which led to Alfred Buxton emigrating with his family to New Zealand.

In the nineteenth century the population of Ellastone grew from 1109 in 1801 to 1344 in 1831, but it remained at just over 1300 between 1821 and 1851 before it fell to the level of 1801 again by 1871. 17 The increase in population was taking place faster than additional workers could be absorbed by agriculture. In many areas urban unemployment increased and poor rates rose. The increasing proportion of the landless may have resulted from surviving younger sons with no land to inherit. 18 In areas like Ellastone it was common to find able bodied workers attracted by the better pay and employment opportunities, sometimes moving distances of 20 to 30 miles to industrial towns and villages. The Buxton family appears to fit the pattern quite well. Joseph Buxton had three other sons besides David. Benjamin, the second son died in 1821. Joseph and John, the third and fourth sons respectively, took up non-farm occupations, Joseph as a carpenter-builder and John as a saddler. The youth of both is unknown but their later lives and those of their descendants were closely intertwined. Both served apprenticeships and this vocational training suggests
that Joseph (senior) gave his sons the best opportunities available to them. By 1836 Joseph Buxton (junior) had moved to Walsall on the edge of the Black Country. John Buxton had established himself on the turnpike road to Ellastone in the hamlet of Wootton. John had married Susannah Shirley from the small neighbouring township of Waterfall. By 1841 they had five children: Anne (aged 10), Joseph (8), Mary (5), Harriet (3), and Martha (3 months). Their home was a solid stonebuilt house alongside the turnpike road at Wootton which they rented together with 10 perches of land. By 1851 Anne and Harriet had left home, Joseph had become apprenticed to his father and Martha was still at school. Two further children had been born, Elizabeth (7) and William (2). By 1861, when John was aged 54 and Susannah 53, only Martha and William remained at home, the latter still at school.

Joseph Buxton, at the age of 32, had married Lucy Hathaway (27), the daughter of a Walsall Bridlecutter, William Hathaway. Joseph had established himself as a builder in the area of Walsall known as Ryecroft. They lived in St James Street and the building business was located in Sandwell Street. Four of their children were born while resident in Ryecroft: William (b.1838), Joseph (b.1839), John (b.1841) and Ann (b.1842), but John lived only 27 days before he died of smallpox. They employed one 15 year old girl as a servant. During the intercensal period 1841-51 the family moved at least twice. In 1845, at the time of the birth of their second daughter Emma, they were living in Stafford Street, not far from their previous home. Two years later they were living in Hatherton Street for the birth of their son James, and still in 1848 for the birth of Nathaniel. Lucy's parents lived in the same street. At the 1851 Census they lived at 142 Park Street in the centre of town. Whether a central location was chosen for its availability, for reasons of trade, or for more space for the rapidly growing family is unclear. Their children were then aged from 12 years down to 14 days. The last of those, who was unnamed at the time of the Census, was Alfred Buxton, the future father of the subject of this book. As a domestic servant the family employed Ann Buxton, the eldest of John and Shirley Buxton's children from Wootton. No doubt she had her hands full helping Lucy Buxton, especially with the young Alfred. The relationship between Ann and Alfred formed at this time was to have an important bearing on Alfred William Buxton's life. In addition to Ann her younger sister Harriet (13) was also employed as a domestic by William and Ann Hathaway in Hatherton Street. Thus both were employed within the extended family. During the 1850s the Buxtons continued to live in Park Street and had two more children, Charles (b.1852) and Lucy (b.1855). However, the decade ended on a sad note for the family.
Fig 1.2 Park Farm, Ramshorn, in October 1984.

Fig 1.3 The view of Wootton Lodge from Park Farm, Ramshorn.
In November 1858 Lucy, Joseph's wife, died of meningitis. Four days later their youngest daughter, also Lucy, died from 'inflammation croup'. Lucy Buxton's death left Joseph to bring up eight children, from William aged 20 down to Charles aged 6. The two surviving daughters, Ann (16) and Emma (13), were old enough to keep house for the family and to help bring up their younger brothers. We do not know if their cousin Ann was still working for them at this stage. By 1861 the family had moved to Day Street, whether because their former home held too many unpleasant memories or was too big for the diminished family. In that year William Buxton, the eldest son, died of Psthis. Aged 23 he had been a master carpenter, probably working with his father, and a trustee of the Wesley Methodist Church in Ablewell Street. The move to Day Street brought to an end the longest period the family was to live in one place, some ten years.

What kind of town was the Walsall into which Alfred Buxton was born in 1851? White's contemporary History, Gazetteer and Directory of Staffordshire describes it in the following terms:

"Walsall, an ancient borough, and well built and thriving town, celebrated for the manufacture of saddlers ironmongery, and other hardware, saddlery etc is pleasantly seated on the crown and declivities of a bold eminence, surrounded by extensive mines of coal, iron, and limestone. During the last 20 years Walsall has been greatly enlarged and improved by the formation of new streets, the improvement of old ones, and the erection of a considerable number of handsome houses, villas, and public buildings....The great increase in the population ... is attributable to the prosperity of the staple manufactures of the town, and to the opening of several coal, iron, and limestone mines in the neighbourhood." 27

Such a picture of Walsall, however, hides the less desirable characteristics of nineteenth century industrial development described by a contemporary journalist:

"The West End of the town, the Town's-end Bank, remained a wretched and disreputable entrance from Wolverhampton, swarming in low pubs which culminated in a sink called the 'Big-Coal', having an immense block of pit coal of many tons banded up at the door by way of a sign......Invariably at midnight all the pubs disgorged the drunken company, when there was sure to be a fight and no constables to interfere. Fighting, swearing, bull baiting, were the amusements, and the bulldog their adoration. 28

The increase in the size of population led to problems of overcrowding, poor sanitation, and slums. In 1845,
while the wealthier inhabitants were living in the central part of the town, Lord Bradford's agent noted that in the areas to the northwest the 'inhabitants are nearly all poor, being for the most part miners and mechanics'. By mid century there was a substantial Irish community in the Blue Lane area, just to the west of where the Buxtons lived. The Irish were the traditional scapegoats for Walsall's fears and frustrations. With the coming of the railway in 1847 the town centre shifted westwards to Bridge and Park Streets and trade moved down from the higher part of the town. With the exception of the short period in Hatherton Street, the Buxtons always lived in the triangle of the town lying between Green Lane in the west and the railway to the east, with the apex upon Park Street and Stafford Street as the central axis. Most of the streets on either side of Stafford Street in the later 1840s and 1850s were on land leased from Lord Hatherton. In terms of health the state of the town was considered to be good. 'Typhus and ague were rare, although pulmonary disease was common'. By 1850 the central part of the town was sewered and piped water was generally available, but the Park Street area had had its supply drained away by the mines. In terms of occupation the Stafford Street area was the location of saddlery metalwork and of many leather trades and curriers.

What were the social circumstances of the Buxtons at this time? According to Geoffrey Best the problem for people in the mid nineteenth century was finding the time for some leisure, and not, as today, of finding activities to fill growing leisure time. Work dominated life to a degree that is scarcely conceivable today, and work was in turn dominated by masters (employers) who had the head most often in any bargaining over pay and conditions. The loss of employment at all levels of society was a much more fearful thing than it is today, and the early death of the principal breadwinner was equally disastrous for professional family and artisan. In all descriptions of his occupation up to 1855 Joseph Buxton called himself a builder, with occasional references to secondary and related activities of carpentry and cabinet making. According to Benson the building industry was well suited to the "penny capitalists", whom he has defined as "the working man or woman who went into business on a small scale in the hope of profit (but with the possibility of loss) and made him (or her)self responsible for every facet of the enterprise". Benson distinguishes between two types of penny capitalist: "the person who, while retaining other sources of income, tried to make a little money on the side; and the person who went into business, with the express intention, at least in the long term, of attaining independence of wage labour". While many of the latter may not have desired to move out of their class Benson claims they wanted to better themselves in it. The latter was the domain of the middle aged, skilled male artisans and other workers who had saved some money. Joseph Buxton fell into this category. He was advertising as a builder in trade directories as early as 1841 and continued to use the medium regularly until 1867. Setting up in business as a 'master' or 'jobbing builder' was not particularly difficult. The industry was essentially labour intensive and the capital costs of setting up small. It has been argued that little more than a plank and a barrow are needed for a craftsman to establish a business even today. When capital was not available from savings prospective builders could barter work in exchange for raw materials and materials, or seek loans from family, friends, local landowners or builders' merchants. Technical advice was available from building trades journals, including complete housebuilding kits, with designs and bills of quantities. With brickwork and carpentry comprising approximately 40 and 30 per cent of the work either bricklayers or carpenters could organize the construction. A firm could also be relatively easily established in Walsall where there was substantial leasehold land, and therefore practically no capital tied up in acquiring a site for development. Lord Hatherton was granting leases in the Stafford Street area while the Buxtons lived there.

While entry to the industry was easy it generally meant competition was stiff and profit margins were consequently forced down. Financial problems could also arise if a building fell behind schedule and an advance was not forthcoming to pay any employees. To borrow money to complete the job was not only costly but also risky. The financier who wished to had a number of strategies for foreclosing on a builder. In addition, builders' merchants had every incentive to press their claims for expenses on materials since they had a lesser priority than the financiers in the event of a financial collapse. Also the builder was always dependent on the weather, especially in winter, when frost and rain could severely disrupt construction. When time laid off for bad weather and between jobs is taken into account, the apparently high wages paid in the building industry in the Black Country are closer to average rates of pay.

We do not know how many helpers Joseph Buxton may have employed. His two eldest sons appear to have followed him into the business, both becoming master carpenters. As family members they may have had to forgo market rates of pay but customary hours
of work would have been unavoidable. The standard of living of a family was dependent on the stage it had reached in the family development cycle. The working class family experienced its most extreme hardship just before the eldest child left school to go to work. It was at this stage, with young children to raise, that the mother was tied to the home, and that wages were most depleted by expenses. 41 Best expresses the point slightly differently:

"The hardest phase of a married working man's life was between the first baby's arrival (which might stop his wife working and would mean another mouth to feed) and the child's becoming old enough to earn his first pennies. Thereafter, if family health held, and local economic conditions were favourable, relative riches would accrue, until the children began to marry and found homes of their own." 42

As the Buxtons had a large family and were able to afford to employ a servant at the times of both the 1841 and 1851 Censuses, we may presume that the family had raised itself above the ranks of the working class. Best again provides us with a vivid description of the significance of the domestic servant:

"Every family that could afford a domestic servant, it is safe to say, had one; the assistance of a charwoman or a pauper slavey marked a first step out of the working class; while no claim to true gentility could be substantiated without a preliminary qualification of servantry in the home - the basic minimum being three. The cheapest of pauper slaveys cost 2s a week (plus, of course, board and lodging). It is difficult to imagine any mid-Victorian employer of a servant not having some air of relative social superiority." 43

But how much they had improved their position is difficult to ascertain. One clue may be obtained from their association with the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in Ablewell Street and the type of people they associated with there. Most of the Buxton's children were christened there and a long term association between the family, the Hathaways and the Chapel culminated when part was named after a descendant. 44 In 1857 Joseph Buxton was a trustee of the Chapel, together with his father-in-law, William Hathaway. The other trustees included a lime master, an ironmaster, a currier, a saddler's ironmonger, a printer, two bookkeepers, a draper, a coal merchant, a baker, a tailor, a chemist, a saddler, and a plater. While the precise standing of these trustees cannot be determined all are clearly involved in manufacturing, trade, or commerce. The Buxton's standing was reinforced by the eldest son William being made a trustee by July 1860, soon after reaching the age of twenty one. 45 To be a Methodist in Walsall had not always been easy. Charles Wesley had been pelted by the mob when he first visited and preached in Walsall in 1743. The Ablewell Street Chapel had been built in 1828-9 but a
Sunday School had operated from 1807. In 1835 the Chapel had become the head of the new Walsall Circuit. In 1851 morning attendance at the Chapel was 260, in the afternoon 112 and in the evening 358. In 1859 a new Chapel was built on an adjoining site and became the largest place of worship in Walsall. The old building was converted to a day and Sunday School. Considering the involvement of both Joseph and William Buxton with the building of the new chapel and adapted school it appears most likely that Alfred and Charles Buxton may have spent sometime at the school. The self improvement philosophy of the Methodists, the importance of being able to read and participate intelligently in the affairs of the church, necessitated education. However, the term of their period at school would have depended on how long their father believed their education should continue. Many Walsall parents wanted their children to be earning as soon as possible. Another aspect of the Buxtons involvement with the Chapel was that it indicated a relative ‘middle class’ respectability, compared to the more radical Primitive Methodists. At the time William Buxton died the Buxtons appear to have been a well established family operating a small family building/joinery business in Central Walsall. Their Methodist background probably indicates a degree of sobriety not customarily found in the western part of Walsall and a desire for self improvement and independence. Why then should this successful and respectable family have moved to Hanley at some time between William Buxton’s death and Joseph (junior)’s marriage? If we assume that a reasonable period was required for Joseph (junior) to establish a relationship with his wife-to-be, Mary Ann Bird, a native of the Potteries, a moving date between 1st July 1861 and late 1864 is most probable.

A number of reasons for the move may be advanced. First, after three deaths in the family in a relatively short period (November 1858 - July 1861) a change of home and environment may have been desired. Certainly William’s death would have diminished the labour force in the family building business and probably necessitated some reorganisation. At the period suggested Joseph (senior) was approaching 60 years old. This was a considerable age for a working man in the nineteenth century, but in the absence of modern social security and/or personal savings, an elderly person had to keep working to provide for his or her needs. Otherwise they would be a burden on their children.

Business may not have been flourishing at the time of the move to Hanley. The best estimates of mid nineteenth century unemployment suggest that levels of unemployment, which were very low in 1860 (1.9 per cent), rose sharply in 1861 to peak in 1862 at 8.4 per cent before falling in 1863 (6.0 per cent) and bottoming out in 1865 at 2.1 per cent. The trade of the town was very bad in 1866 because orders from Australia and New Zealand had fallen seriously and the result was much suffering among the poor classes. However, building workers were not always affected by general conditions of trade in the same way as other workers and often they were working when others were not. This explanation seems unlikely as Joseph Buxton (senior) set up a new business venture in Hanley and advertised it extensively, but not until 1867. Surely it would have been easier to obtain additional business in Walsall where he was known, and where the expansion of the population must have necessitated continuous building, than to attempt to start a new business in an area in which he was unknown.

The most likely explanation, which may have been reinforced by some of the points mentioned above, is that Joseph Buxton moved to Hanley because he had family connections there, and it is possible he may have been asked to build a house for a distant relative, Benjamin Buxton. Three clues point to Benjamin Buxton as the critical link with Hanley. First, he was born at Ellastone in 1821, the son of Francis(?) and Ann Buxton of Ramsdorn in the parish of Ellastone. Unfortunately it has not been possible to establish the precise relationship with Joseph Buxton. Secondly, Benjamin Buxton was one of the witnesses signing the marriage certificate of Joseph (junior) and Mary Ann Bird in 1865; and thirdly at the time of the 1871 Census Alfred Buxton was working for him, as a farm labourer.
need to advertise for more. Certainly there was building activity in the Northwood area at about the right period and Northwood was regarded as a favoured residential district in mid century; just the kind of area a prosperous tenant farmer might decide either to retire to or in which to invest in property to provide for his old age or any unexpected eventuality. As Best puts it "nothing then seemed as safe as houses".

The period of residence in Hanley, which varied for different branches of Joseph's family, marks a number of important watersheds in the family history. First, only part of the family moved to Hanley. James, Nathaniel, and probably Charles, remained in Walsall. All were leather workers. In 1871 James and Nathaniel were resident with their maternal grandfather, William Hathaway, the bridle cutter, in Hatherton Street, Walsall. Secondly, Joseph Buxton's family dispersed. Joseph (junior), Ann and Alfred all married residents of the Potteries. Joseph (junior)'s wife, Mary Ann Bird, was the daughter of a potter and Ann Buxton married a commercial traveller in pottery, Sidney Machin. Thirdly, Joseph Buxton gave up his active working life sometime between his last trade advertisement in 1869 and the Census of 1871. By 1871 he was living with Joseph (junior) and his family at 63 West Parade, Mount Pleasant, Fenton, and is described as an unemployed carpenter aged 67.

The focus of our study now turns to the parents of our subject, Alfred William Buxton. In 1871 Alfred Buxton was working for his relative Benjamin Buxton and was resident at Birches Farm, Hanley. Alfred probably completed his schooling before the family left Walsall, when he would have been aged about 12. There is no evidence that he received any trade training as did all of his brothers. In later life his granddaughter has recalled his great affinity for horses. Perhaps he always wanted to revert to his family's traditional occupation and work the land. He married Ann Johnson on 14th October 1871 at St Luke's Parish Church in the Parish of Wellington, Hanley. At the time of marriage Alfred was aged only 20 and Ann 22. She was the daughter of William and Ann Johnson of 9 Well Street, Hanley. All her family were engaged in the pottery industry. William (senior) and William (junior) were both potters. Ann, her mother, was a burnisher and Ann herself and Sophia, her younger sister, were both paintresses. Alfred is described as a carter and resident in Edmund Street. At the 1871 Census Alfred Buxton lived with his relative at Birches Farm, one of three labourers and a boy employed. Eleven months after the wedding the Buxtons' first child, Alfred William, was born at Church Street, Hanley.

Into what type of environment was Alfred William born? The impressionistic writing of Arnold Bennett gives us a picture of the Potteries at this time and highlights one of the contradictions of the life of the future landscape gardener:

"Bursely, the ancient home of the potter, has an antiquity of a thousand years. It lies towards the northend of an extensive valley, which must have been one of the fairest spots in Alfred's England, but which is now defaced by the activities of a quarter of a million people. Five contiguous towns...united by a single winding thoroughfare some eight miles in length, have inundated the valley like a succession of great lakes. Of these Bursely 52 is the mother, Hanbridge 53 is the largest. They are mean and forbidding of aspect - sombre, hard featured, uncouth; and the vaporous poison of their ovens and chimneys has soiled and shrivelled the surrounding country till there is no village lane within a league but what offers a gaunt and ludicrous travesty of rural charms.

.....Because they seldom think, the townsmen take shame when indicted for having disfigured half a county in order to live. They have not understood that this disfigurement is merely an episode in the unending warfare of man and nature, and calls for no contrition. Here, indeed is nature repaid for some of her notorious cruelties. She imperiously bids man sustain and reproduce himself, and this is one of the places where in the very act of obedience he wounds and maltreats her. Out beyond the municipal confines, where the subsidiary industries of coal and iron prosper amid a wreck of verdure, the struggle is grim, appalling, heroic - so ruthless is his havoc of her, so indomitable her ceaseless recuperation. On the one side is a wrestling from nature's own bowels of the means to waste her; on the other an undismayed, enduring fortitude. The grass grows; though it is not green, it grows. In the very heart of the valley, hedged about with furnaces, a farm still stands, and at harvest time the sooty sheaves are gathered in." 54

The family continued to live in the area of Hanley until after the birth of their son Ernest on 3rd October 1876. Sometime between then and the birth of their first daughter, Florencce Emma, on 20th May 1879 they moved back to Walsall. Joseph (junior) and his family had moved to Wolverhampton by the middle of 1875 and were back in Walsall in time for the birth of their fifth child in September 1878. Why they should have moved back to Walsall is unclear other than for reasons of reuniting the family. Unemployment was relatively low in the mid 1870s although it was rising as 1879 approached.
Chapter Two

MIGRATION AND EMIGRATION

The Walsall Alfred Buxton and his family returned to
in the late 1870s had changed markedly from that he
had left in the 1860s. First, the population had grown
substantially and was growing rapidly. Secondly, an
area of Townend Bank with appalling housing
conditions, including part of the lower end of Stafford
Street, had been subject to slum clearance under the
provisions of the Artisans and Labourers Dwellings
Act 1875. The work would have been most apparent to
the Buxtons since they lived in Stafford Street for the
whole period between their return from Hanley and
emigration to New Zealand. 55 Joseph Buxton (senior)
had remarried and lived with his second wife at the
back of 48 Stafford Street. She had been the daughter
of William Turner, a gardener, and was a widow. The
Black Country surrounding Walsall on three sides was
experiencing a depression. By 1884 a Birmingham
journalist wrote of the area:

"Blue skies change to a reeking canopy of black
and grey smoke. The earth is one vast unsightly
heap of dead ashes and dingy refuse. Canals of
diluted coal dust teach how filthy water may be and
yet retain fluidity. Tumbledown houses, tumbledown
works, tottering black chimneys, fire
belching furnaces, squalid and blackened people."

Some idea of the density of the housing, of the
intermingling of factories, mines and housing and the
concentrated nature of the area can be seen in the aerial
photograph of the Townend Bank and Wicnmore areas
of Walsall in the early part of the twentieth century
(Fig 2.1). While some changes undoubtedly took place
in the last twenty years years of the nineteenth century
there were no other developments like the Townend
Bank slum clearance. The picture shows clearly the
western end of Park Street, the southern end of Stafford
Street, and the whole of Day Street and Lyttleton Street
West. While the Black Country as a whole was
experiencing a long depression, with marked slumps in
1878-9 and 1885-7, Walsall was reckoned not to suffer
as badly because of its diversity of trades. Only in
1885-6 did the saddlery trades experience a shrinkage
in demand. 57 By the mid 1880s some improvements
had been achieved in sanitary conditions, while
Walsall’s refuse disposal was still described as
unsatisfactory. Water supplies were ample and of good
quality. There was some overcrowding, but not
serious, and the general sanitary condition of dwellings
was described as fair. 58

What would the young Alfred William have thought of
the conditions which applied particularly in the western
part of the town? St Peter’s Parish was said, in 1886,
to be the poorest in Walsall. 59 Professor Burnett, in his
collection of autobiographical accounts of childhood,
education and family in the nineteenth century,
suggests that while writers had clear recollections of
apparently unacceptable housing conditions they
reported them:

"without resentment and even with feelings of
nostalgia....There is, of course, a sense in which
people do not miss what they have never had, and
only in later life, when some autobiographers had
achieved a much better standard of life, do they
remember their earlier material conditions as
disadvantaged." 60

The respectable working class home of the period was
distinguished by an obsession with "cleanliness and
polish, order and tidiness, both inside and outside the
house". 61

Where did Alfred Buxton stand in the occupational
hierarchy when the family returned to Walsall from
Hanley? We have noted that in 1871 he was working
as a farm labourer for a relation, and is described on his
marriage certificate as a carter. At the time the carter
was at the top of the farm workers’ hierarchy of jobs.
62 By the time of his return to Walsall Alfred Buxton
was described as a waggoner, and from 1880 onwards
he was described as a coal dealer. 63 How are we to
understand these terms in the context of the period and
location?

First, we should note that to be a coal dealer implied
self employment and probably ownership of a means
of transporting heavy goods. To be a waggoner may not
imply self employment and the ownership of the means
of production is uncertain. Samuel has described the
man who owned his own horse and cart as a ‘plebeian
independent’; a difficult person to find or identify in
censuses and directories. ‘Haggle cartmen’ made their
living by keeping horses and hiring them out for individual jobs. In his oral history Quarry Rouches he describes them in the following terms:

"The haggle cartmen worked much harder. Instead of light deliveries they were engaged in heavy haulage jobs, carrying bricks, scaffolding and timber for the building firms, manure for the allotments, coal for the hospitals and the workhouse. Their carts were heavily built, and drawn by a carthorse rather than the laundry-carrier’s fast trotting vanter. Journeys (sometimes made on foot, leading the horse from in front) were slow......At the end of the journey there might be a great deal of loading and unloading still to do." 64 According to Samuel the man with a horse and cart was often a trader in a small informal way and the nature of his trade was often in coal and coke where it could be backloaded. 65 It is not difficult to see how Alfred Buxton could have become a coal dealer once he possessed his own cart or waggon.

The chief problem Alfred Buxton would have experienced in setting himself up in business would have been the acquisition of his first horse and cart. How he did this we do not know, but by the end of the nineteenth century a horse and cart were estimated to cost £50-60, which was a huge investment for a working man. 66 Further, it was an investment which was always at risk whether from the theft of the cart, or death or injury to the horse. Finding a reliable and sound horse was always problematical and the dishonesty of horse dealers proverbial. 67 Feeding and stabling could cost about fifteen shillings a week of which two thirds went on feed and no profits were made until they were paid for. Also there was always overcompetition. Benson suggests that for many it was difficult to earn an adequate income and make provision for old age. Heavy haulage was also less remunerative than carrying people who were the best paying cargo of all. 68 None of this information helps us to establish how well Alfred Buxton was. It only gives us a clue that he must have accumulated some capital to set himself up in business. This capital
was probably to prove useful when he decided to emigrate with his family to New Zealand in the mid 1880s.

Before turning to the subject of the Buxton’s emigration it is necessary to consider the other major socializing influences on the young Alfred William Buxton prior to emigration besides home, family and parental occupation. The two major socializing forces were probably closely related: school and church. The Buxtons’ long association with Wesley Chapel in Ablewell Street suggests that Alfred William and his siblings probably attended the adjacent Wesleyan school. While all children were required to attend school by the Education Act 1871, attendance in Walsall was not exemplary. Unfortunately, no logbooks or rolls have survived from the period c.1880 to confirm whether Alfred William attended Wesley School, Ablewell Street. If we assume that he did, on the basis of the long term association with the chapel, he would have studied the following subjects: History, Geography, Poetry, Grammar and Science as well as the three Rs. Also, although the majority of Wesleyans did not approve of religious instruction in schools on an unsectarian basis, Bible and scripture lessons were given.

As a voluntary school, Wesley School was in competition with Board Schools after 1873. While fees were payable at both, Board fees could be excused in cases of indigence. In 1888 over 54 per cent of children at public schools in Walsall had been excused payment of fees. The Wesleyan schools refused admission to those without the ‘school pence’. Fees varied according to the level in the school from 3 pence per week in Standards I and II to 6 pence for Standards V and VI. However, the fees at the Board Schools were somewhat less than those at Wesley School. Payment of fees for schooling would have been a further indicator of Alfred Buxton’s financial status. However, if it was hard to pay the fees the children may not have stayed at school as long as they would otherwise. Again we have no evidence of the age of Alfred William when he left school. But as only 14 per cent of school children in inspected elementary schools were aged 12 or over in 1895 it would appear unlikely that the young Alfred continued at school beyond this age.

The curriculum described earlier gives no indication of the quality of education received. In both the logbooks of the Ablewell and Centenary Wesleyan Schools there is evidence of a continual struggle to satisfy the inspectors and obtain the maximum grant available under the ‘Payment-by-results’ system of assessment in operation at the time. Lower levels of grant were received not only because of the low level of achievement of the pupils, but also because pupil-teacher candidates failed to reach the required level of attainment. Another factor reducing the grants received was the poor level of attendance at all Walsall schools.

Children were put to work at the earliest age possible and even after compulsory education was introduced in 1871 attendance records tended to be poor. The children’s earnings more than outweighed the cost of fines for non-attendance. Besides the curriculum did not appear to be very relevant for those taking up manual occupations. Attendance was also affected by local galas and fairs, and by extreme weather conditions, whether good or bad. The irregularity of visits by the Attendance Officer to Ablewell Street to check the rolls was almost as great as that of the attendance of some of the pupils. 71

Who were the schoolmates of the young Alfred William? Liddle has suggested that there was a wide social spectrum of children in Walsall’s elementary schools. At the upper end were the children of the shopkeepers, craftsmen, and the more prosperous artisans. They were more likely to attend the Bluecoat or voluntary schools, or the newer Board schools. At the lower end were the children from the poorer areas - Townend Bank, Wisemore and Church Hill. Life for them was a battle with dirt, drunkenness, disease, destitution and violence. 72

During this period there is no evidence of Alfred Buxton acquiring any property, only the means for conducting a coal dealer/carrier’s business. By 1886 Walsall was in a marked slump in the midst of a longer term depression and the prospects of employment for Alfred Buxton’s children cannot have looked good. On the other side of the world, although contemporary trading conditions were also not looking good, the possibilities may have appeared greater, especially as messages of the chances of business success from relatives may have encouraged thoughts of emigration. Emigration as a solution to economic ills was certainly in the air. Numbers leaving British ports had reached 320,000 in 1883, or just under one per cent of the total population, the highest annual exodus in the nineteenth century. 73 The previous moves from Walsall to Hanley and from Hanley to Walsall would have shown the family that mobility was possible. To move to New Zealand was just over a much longer distance. In fact as far as one could go without beginning to come back...
again. But why did the Buxtons think of New Zealand?

The chain of events which led to Alfred and Ann Buxton taking their family to New Zealand began many years earlier. Alfred’s uncle, John Buxton of Wootton, and his immediate family, had all emigrated between 1857-1862. The first to go had been Joseph Shirley Buxton, their eldest son, and his wife Louisa, who had sailed from Gravesend on the Westminster on 13th October 1857. They had only been married a few days. Joseph, like his father and some members of his mother’s family, was by trade a saddler. He had served his apprenticeship with his father at Wootton and was 24 years old when the couple set sail. They paid their own fares, some £30, and travelled in the second cabin/steerage class. 74

Why the young couple should have chosen to emigrate is unclear. As noted earlier, the population of Ellastone had been declining since the time of the 1831 Census of Population. Historians of rural Britain have suggested the population thresholds at which certain crafts appeared in communities. From their estimates a population between 500-600 was needed to sustain a saddler. 75 Ellastone had a population of 1230 at the time of the 1861 Census, suggesting the ability to support only two saddlers. An awareness of the declining population and competition from other saddlers may have promoted searching for greener pastures. Why New Zealand should have been chosen and the Canterbury Settlement, in particular, is unknown. With the settlement only seven years old its newness and the associated extent of opportunity may have been the key attractions. The New Zealand Company had certainly advertised for agricultural mechanics, farm labourers and domestic servants. 76 Further clues may be obtained from the leader of The Lyttelton Times of 13th January 1858 which reported the arrival of the Westminster:

"The ship Westminster arrived in this port on Saturday last, the 9th instant, from London direct, 88 days out....The number of working immigrants brought by the Westminster at a time when no funds from the colony were available in assistance towards their passage money, indicates that the greatest confidence in this settlement is entertained by themselves, or by those who supplied means for their immigration. The voyage of the Westminster was remarkably fine and short, and all the passengers speak of the comfort of the voyage."

The Canterbury colony must have proved acceptable, for other members of the family followed rapidly. In September 1859 Joseph’s sisters, Ann and Harriet, who had worked in Walsall, sailed on the Roman Emperor. On the same voyage was Samuel Butler, and the Roman Emperor arrived at Lyttelton at the end of January 1860. The remainder of the family, John and Susannah, Mary, Martha, Elisabeth and William all followed on the Mermaid in late 1862, arriving at Lyttelton on 6th December. With the exception of Joseph and Louisa, all the remainder of the family benefitted from assisted passages, easily fulfilling the requirements with father as a rural craftsman and the majority of his offspring (five daughters) as prospective domestic servants and potential marriage partners for single male colonists. 77

The early years of John Buxton’s family in New Zealand, while perhaps outwardly successful, was marred by illness and death. Joseph and Louisa’s first child, Sarah Susannah, had died in March 1859 aged only 3 months. Immediately after the final contingent of the family had arrived the youngest son, William, died aged 14 years. Eighteen months later Joseph and Louisa’s second child, Emily Caroline, also died, and then in 1867, less than five years after arriving in the colony, John’s wife Susannah died at the age of 60. 78

The early years in the colony were also marked by the marriages of three of John and Susannah’s daughters. Ann, described as a dressmaker aged 32, married John Brown, a plasterer aged 31, at Geraldine on 27th December 1862. Her two sisters, Mary and Harriet were married in adouble ceremony at the Durham Street Methodist Chapel on 9th August 1864. They married respectively John Austin, a brick maker, and Benjamin Chivers, a groom. 79

The economic success of John Buxton’s family in New Zealand must be attributed to his eldest son and the first arrival, Joseph Shirley Buxton. Soon after his arrival Joseph opened a saddlery shop in Manchester Street and later he opened another in Market Square. 80 While we have no evidence to support the theory it would appear likely that the family saddlery connections in Walsall would have been useful in obtaining saddlery supplies and would have also have provided sufficient reasons for maintaining correspondence between John Buxton’s branch of the family in Christchurch and Joseph Buxton’s in Walsall. The saddlery business was maintained for 14 years, until 1872, when he bought a farm at Avonside, where he resided for two years, before moving to Casterton in the Heathcote Valley. Casterton was a well built two storey stone house at 150 Bridle Path Road, which may have brought back memories of Wootton with its
surrounding hills. (See Fig 2.2) Besides his involvement in the saddlery trade Joseph Shirley Buxton also became recognised as a successful buyer and seller of property. As a result he became acknowledged as an expert valuer and by 1882 had accumulated both farm and city property worth nearly £24,000 (See Table 2.1).

Some indication of her standing in the church and she was described as having been connected with the Wesleyan Church from her earliest years. While it would be unwise to make too much of this point, it helps to maintain the thread of Methodism through the Buxton family history with all that it implied.

Table 2.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counties</th>
<th>Value (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashley 426 acres</td>
<td>2,516</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selwyn 428 acres</td>
<td>11,155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wallace 600 acres</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boroughs</th>
<th>Value (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christchurch</td>
<td>3,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydenham</td>
<td>4,460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woolston</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 23,831

News of such financial success may well have percolated back to the relatives in Walsall and provided a model for Alfred Buxton and his family to emulate. Like their Walsall relatives, the descendants of John and Susannah Buxton were staunch Methodists. Their Methodism has facilitated tracing the family history through Methodist Church Records and is demonstrated by two pieces of evidence. On her deathbed Susannah Buxton requested her son, Joseph Shirley Buxton, to donate land for a new Methodist Church. This church was previously known as Brighton, but became known as Shirley after Mrs Buxton’s maiden name, and the district of Shirley grew up around it. The second piece of evidence comes from the obituary of Louisa Buxton following her death in 1879. The fact that she merited an obituary gives Alfred and Ann Buxton’s family would not have been going into the unknown, as Joseph Shirley and Louisa
Buxton had in 1857, when they contemplated emigration. The ease of getting to New Zealand had improved dramatically with the introduction of steamship services in 1879. Journey times had been cut in half and travelling conditions were much improved.\textsuperscript{85} What finally precipitated the move is unknown but we do know that by 26 May 1886 the family was established in New Zealand. No details of the journey have survived but we may infer from the absence of any evidence in the records of assisted emigrants that Alfred Buxton either financed the fares himself or that he was assisted by Joseph Shirley Buxton. If Alfred Buxton owned his own horse and cart for his coal dealer’s business, their sale would have realised £50-60 which should have covered the bulk of the passage money. His second cousin may have assisted, but this seems unlikely, as there is no evidence of financial assistance between the two branches of the family after they settled in New Zealand. Furthermore, such assistance might have been perceived as ‘charity’ and as such anathema to a family of sturdy Methodist independents. On the other hand to welcome the long distance travellers and provide accommodation could only be regarded as ‘hospitality’.

Family tradition holds that Alfred Buxton’s family first resided in New Zealand in the Heathcote Valley. Joseph Shirley Buxton’s residence, Casterton, on Bridle Path Road, with a view over the plains, is their most likely first base. However to outstay the welcome would have been unthinkable and by the time Joseph, Alfred and Ann’s second son, started school the family was living in Papanui Road.\textsuperscript{86} Their house was just north of the Innes Road intersection, on the opposite side of the road to the estate of John Thomas Matson.\textsuperscript{57}

\textit{Fig 2.3 Joseph Shirley Buxton (Cyclopedia of New Zealand).}
Chapter Three

EARLY YEARS IN CANTERBURY

When Alfred Buxton and his family arrived in Canterbury in 1886, the province was in the midst of the 'Long Depression', which lasted from 1879-1895. It was a period characterised by:

"low wages, unemployment, and poverty; low prices for primary exports which inhibited the progress and diversification of farming; the failure of secondary industries to keep pace with population growth; the heavy and unrelieved burden of debt repayment; (and) the loss of people to still prospering Australia...". 88

While conditions did not remain uniformly difficult they were not propitious for the new arrivals to establish themselves and find employment. There were periods when trade prospects brightened and confidence returned, but there were also times of upheaval such as the Australasian Maritime Strike of 1890. In 1886 inspite of some improvement in economic prospects as a result of rises in primary product prices, the employment situation was not improved because employers were not taking on new labour. 89 In the New Zealand Post Office Directory for 1887-8 Alfred Buxton (senior) is described just as a labourer, resident in Papanui Road. From the school records of the period we know that his second and third sons, Joseph and Ernest, attended the Normal School during the second half of 1886. In November 1886 Ernest, aged 10, was transferred to St Albans School, followed by Joseph in February 1887. Their sister Florence started her New Zealand schooling at St Albans 'Side School' and by February 1887 had joined her brothers at the main St Albans School. 90 Alfred William’s name does not appear in any of the school records and thus it appears likely that his formal education was completed in Walsall, before the family left Britain. The school records and Post Office Directories of the period also show that the family made several changes of residence during this period. When the children changed school Alfred (senior) was described as living in Chapman’s Road. The exact location of this road is unknown and it is suggested that it was an unofficial unformed road or track which may have been further away from the Normal School and closer to St Albans School. Careful searches of the minutes of meetings of St Albans Borough Council have failed to reveal any trace of it, though there is mention of the establishment of a street naming committee, but its findings were never reported.91 By 1890 the family had moved to Shirley Road where it resided at least until 1894. 92

St Albans, as a suburb of Christchurch, had become established around the main route to North Canterbury which left the city in a north westerly direction for Papanui. The area had only developed slowly after the first permanent bridge was built across the Avon in 1859, connecting North and South Colombo Streets. Physically much of it was not conducive to settlement being very swampy land covered with dense flax, bracken fern and manuka. To the north east the soils were more peaty, although littered with thousands of rotten tree stumps. Several of Christchurch’s early nurseries and market gardens were established in the area as the work proceeded. By 1875 a quite prosperous residential district had developed:

"The suburb of St Albans was perhaps typical of middling class districts. Most of its householders were in small trades as coachbuilders, grocers, contractors, shop assistants and drapers. There were also some minor professional people - school mistresses and surveyors - together with retired farmers, commission agents and, at the other extreme, several contract gardeners, milk runners, carpenters, cab drivers and a few labourers. In the western end of the suburb, houses and gardens were large and had considerable pretensions to gentility. Towards the eastern end, people had fewer claims to distinction. In the suburb as a whole, 62 per cent of households owned freehold land, and 14 per cent possessed rural property as well. The average value of their land was about £ 369." 93

Eldred-Grigg’s analysis of nineteenth century St Albans suggests that the Buxtons, by moving from west to east were moving away from ‘pretensions to gentility’ to positions of less distinction. Not every member of the family, however, intended this situation to last. The young Alfred William Buxton was apprenticed to Thomas Abbott, whom Challenger describes as the doyen of Christchurch nurserymen. 94
Abbott’s Exeter Nurseries were located on Papanui Road not far from where the Buxtons first resided in St Albans.

In fact Alfred William’s apprenticeship to Thomas Abbott may well have been the reason for the family initially locating in the area. Although Alfred (senior) had not served an apprenticeship as had all his brothers, the young Alfred William was following in a family tradition in being apprenticed which went back at least as far as his paternal grandfather’s generation. The decision to have Alfred William apprenticed may also have been reinforced by the model of economic success stemming from John and Joseph Shirley Buxton. In the 1882 Return of the freeholders of New Zealand John Buxton is described as a gardener owning land worth £160, a considerable advance on being a tenant of a stone cottage in Wootton. Whether his gardening activities had any influence on the young Alfred we do not know, but the rich peat soils of the district certainly lent themselves to plant growth, and Alfred’s family were to fall back on gardening on several occasions as a source of work over the years to the end of the century.

The importance of horticulture as a land use in nineteenth century St Albans has been demonstrated particularly by Challenger’s study of Christchurch nurserymen of that period and the location of their nurseries. Papanui Road was an important focus not only for its fertile marshland soils but also for the regular flow of traffic, and thus potential customers along it. Contemporary and former nurseries at the time of Alfred Buxton’s family’s arrival in 1886 are indicated cartographically by Challenger. Thomas Abbott (1831-1895) had succeeded William Wilson, the first Mayor of Christchurch, as the town’s leading nurseryman in 1873 and maintained that position until his death in 1895. He had been trained as a nurseryman in England, possibly at Veitch’s Nursery at Exeter, and arrived in New Zealand in January 1859. His first nursery land was located on the west side of the Brett’s Road and St Albans Street junction and he appears to have started work there in 1859 although the freehold was not acquired until the following year. By 1875 he had some 17 acres in nursery production, although as Challenger points out, he only owned just under four acres and that was mortgaged. Clearly Abbott preferred money to work and not to be locked up in land. Abbott’s nursery was known as Exeter Nursery after the principal town of his home county, Devonshire. When Alfred William became apprenticed to Abbott (c.1886) the nursery consisted of three blocks. The headquarters block on the east side of Papanui Road was opposite Church Lane, where Beverley Street is now located. Another block of six acres was located to the north east between what is now Westminster and Malvern Streets. A further block, according to Shrubsole some nine acres, was located along Shirley Road about a mile away, but Challenger has been unable to confirm this from certificates of title.
The extent of Abbott’s stock was shown by an advertisement in *The Lyttelton Times*:

- 200,000 Forest trees including coniferae
- 25,000 Fruit trees, free from blight
- 2,000 Gooseberry trees, 50 varieties
- 25,000 Rose trees
- 50,000 Hollies, extra strong, 2 years old, transplanted
- 10,000 English Laurels
- 2,000 Rhododendrons
- Many thousands Quick and Privet etc

Challenger comments that this stock of about one third of a million plants takes no account of the herbaceous and bedding plants, greenhouse and stove plants, which Abbott also raised. The range of Abbott’s activities is also shown in an advertisement in the Christchurch Horticultural Society Show Schedule where he advertised for the laying out of gardens and pleasure grounds by contract or otherwise. As a man Abbott does not appear to have taken much part in public life, although he was well known. Selwyn Bruce has described him as:

> "Abbott the nurseryman of Papanui Road, with stalwart frame and white beard - a perfect encyclopaedia of the fauna and flora of our infant colony."  

He was a regular exhibitor at shows and a keen horticulturist who was "always importing new and rare plants". But most importantly, from our point of view in reviewing the socialising influences upon the young Alfred Buxton, Abbott was involved in the laying out of gardens and pleasure grounds. As early as 1862 he had advertised in the *Southern Provinces Almanac*:

> "Ornamental Grounds and Gardens Designed and Executed".

John Joyce, a contemporary, recalled working for Abbott when he was carrying out improvements to 'Risingholme', the home of Mr William Reeves. Other contemporaries, in Challenger’s opinion, followed his model in their own advertisements for laying out or maintaining gardens or grounds.  

Whether Alfred William Buxton was apprenticed to Abbott because of his landscaping activities and prowess, or whether he acquired his taste for this field of work from Abbott we do not know. We may infer from the predilection of the nineteenth century urban Briton to travel around his locality, especially after the advent of cheap railway travel, and from the locations in which the Buxtons lived, that the young Alfred must at least have been aware of elaborate gardens and landscaping before the family’s departure from Britain.  

When the family lived in Hanley the grounds of Trentham, the Duke of Sutherland’s estate, landscaped by Lancelot Brown, Barry and Nesfield, were only a short distance away, and a popular
recreational spot for Sunday afternoon outings. In Walsall the Arboretum, which was constructed in the 1870s and became a public park in 1880, may also have had an influence. Also any visit to Ellastone, Wootton, or Ramshorn, whether to visit relatives or show the family the district they had come from, would have probably exposed the young Alfred to the beauty of Wootton Park or the amazing sights of Alton Towers. The latter was only two miles away and adjacent to the most likely railway station visitors would choose for their disembarkation. In 1867 Alton Towers had been listed first in a list of famous English gardens, and Harriet, Duchess of Sutherland, who was responsible for many of the nineteenth century changes at Trentham, was also singled out as an especially significant influence on the progress of British gardening. Thus the young Alfred William Buxton's appetite for landscaping and garden creation may have been well whetted before his family's emigration.

While Alfred William was learning his trade with Thomas Abbott his brothers and sister were continuing their education at St Albans School. Joseph left school to go to work in April 1889 aged 14½, while Ernest left one year later at 13½. Florence remained at school until she was one month short of her fourteenth birthday. All chose to leave school in April, the boys at the beginning and Florence at the end. While the timing may have no significance, it may be connected with the increased availability of work at the time of the potato harvest in nearby Marshlands. Alfred (senior)'s occupation at this time is unknown. His uncle, John Buxton, died in December 1887, leaving £237, but his second cousin Elisabeth, who had looked after her father, continued to reside in Shirley. The family appears to have continued to reside in Shirley Road until after Alfred William's apprenticeship had ended and Florence had left school.

We do not know much about the apprenticeship Alfred William would have undergone. Apprenticeships were the earliest form of formal training in horticulture and had existed in Britain since the seventeenth century. The first labour law in the new colony was the Master and Apprentice Act 1865 which was supposed to ensure apprentices received "sufficient and suitable food, clothing and bedding", and a guaranteed wage of nothing for two years, followed by £2 per year for males. Eldred-Grigg describes it as "chiefly disciplinary, ensuring that apprentices could be imprisoned if they ran away, that they could be forced to attend 'divine service' and should have their morals governed by their masters". These rules were not enforced, however, and there is substantial evidence of apprentices being employed on much worse conditions. Eldred-Grigg cites the case of an apprentice at Andersons Iron Foundry who was only to receive one pound per week in his fifth year and whose parent was responsible for providing 'good, proper and sufficient' food, clothing 'and all other necessaries'. Local manufacturers could only maintain their profits in the 'Long Depression' at the expense of the large and unorganized labour force. Wage rates fell and "...Boys came into competition with their fathers, and together with women dominated the industrial workforce. Apprenticeships were used merely as a means by which employers could get cheap labour."

Hours of work were long and conditions often bad. Whether Thomas Abbott treated his apprentices in this fashion we do not know. His attitude may have been moderated by his Christian beliefs, testified to by his baptism as an adult at the Oxford Terrace Baptist Church in 1888 at the age of 57, although he resigned three years later.
The period of apprenticeship for nurserymen was probably five years at this time. Five years was the time period adopted in the Master and Apprentice Act 1865 and in the first Christchurch Gardeners' Award in 1903. Also the Master and Apprentice Act provided that apprenticeships should end at 19 years of age. In 1881 a nursery worker supposedly received two guineas per week and the award rate in 1903 had only risen to £2:5:0. In 1903 apprentices were only to receive five shillings per week for the first six months, ten shillings per week for the second and rising by two shillings and sixpence for every six months thereafter, until the fifth year when raises increased to five shillings again. How effective the training received was is difficult to judge. After the 1903 Award was settled one correspondent to The Christchurch Press commented:

"The lax way in which gardeners are made in New Zealand is almost laughable. Now that young men and boys know, through the Arbitration Court, the simple ordeal they have to go through to blossom into full-blown 'practical gardeners', I should say there will very soon be no scarcity of applicants to fill places. But I should like to know where these talked of apprentices are going to get their training. There are no private gardeners in this colony who take apprentices. I believe that one or two nurserymen take youths into their establishments to learn the 'trade', but this is done more for the sake of mutual exchange, both parties benefitted - the one by learning a little, the other by cheap labour. But the nurseryman has the best of it, for he can dismiss the youth when he thinks fit. Then again, any youth trained in the nursery trade is of no use in a private place. The practical gardener should have experience both in nursery and private places, mostly in the latter...." 110

While the correspondent's comments are not entirely accurate insofar as they concern the ability of the master to terminate apprenticeships, a master could only do so with the consent of two Justices of the Peace, the quotation does suggest that the training offered might be quite limited. The correspondent goes on to reinforce his point about the limited nature of a gardener's training in New Zealand:

"The great drawback in New Zealand is the fact that there is no proper place to train the youths, and fit them for the responsibility they ought to be able to take. Until such a place is created there will be a lack of practical men able to take over the management of an estate, if necessary, the same as many of their English confreres do. I have never yet seen a garden in New Zealand that has shown a real sign of ability on the part of the man that laid it out. Trees are generally planted in unsuitable positions, to grow up to a certain age, than die, or to grow too big, and someone else will chop them out. There is no drainage and bad lawns. If there is a piece of water it has generally an abominably muddy bottom, choked up with weeds...." 111

Even thirty years later, in the interwar depression, the problems of apprentices in learning their trade had not disappeared. Blumhardt, in reminiscing about his youth recalls why:

"Tradesman gardeners were very reticent to pass on any of their knowledge for fear that the younger ones would beat them for their position. On one occasion on approaching journeymen potting cyclamen they immediately stopped, and when asked to be shown how it was done was immediately told to get on with the job which had been allocated to me instead of wasting time trying to talk to them.

A friend of mine once told me how, while working as an apprentice at one of New Zealand’s leading nurseries, he had to climb the fence at night and dig up root grafts his foreman had done during the day, to see how it was done...." 112

The training Alfred William Buxton received may, therefore, have been more rudimentary than apprentices receive today, and was probably provided under much harsher conditions. Alfred's nineteenth birthday and the probable end of his apprenticeship occurred in September 1891. It appears that he continued to work for Thomas Abbott after completing his time, but for how long is unclear. Abbott died on 1st October 1895, but his wife carried on the business until 12th April 1897. Whether Abbott's death precipitated Buxton going independent, or whether the latter's decision was unrelated is also unclear. However, from a comment in Buxton's first descriptive catalogue of 1899 it is clear that Thomas Abbott's son, Thomas G Abbott, must have joined Buxton prior to his mother selling the business. While such a move was unusual it was probably the result of strong religious differences within the Abbott family. 113 Completion of his apprenticeship would have permitted Alfred William Buxton to contemplate saving some of his adult earnings. The aspiration to own his own business appears to have been as strong as for his grandfather, father and other New Zealand relations. On 4th May 1893 he acquired an acre of land on the eastern side of Springfield Road, midway between Thomas Abbott's different nursery blocks. As Alfred William was still aged less than 21 he was unable to buy the land in person, but had to buy it through a trustee, Benjamin Hindle, a local salesman who also attended the Wesleyan Church on Papanui Road. The land, bought from Frederick Selwyn, a gardener, cost £200 and was financed by a mortgage for £300. The balance of the
funds was probably used for the expenditure of establishing and developing the new business. Hindle transferred the land to Buxton on 25th January 1896 for the princely consideration of ten shillings. While Buxton opened his new St Albans Nursery first in 1896 it is clear that he had already been working the property for some time, no doubt to bulk up stocks for when the nursery was ready to open. To give an additional cash flow vegetables were grown on part of the property for local sale. Opening the nursery only preceded briefly another major event in the budding nurseryman's life. On 19th March 1896 he married Emily Ann Brown at the Wesleyan Church on Papanui Road. The Browns also lived in St Albans. Emily's parents were both dead. Her father, Thomas Spark Brown (1836-92), had been a farmer in later years after an earlier career as a contractor for road construction. She had seven siblings alive at the time of her wedding, three of whom were the witnesses - Charles, her elder brother, who was also a farmer; Jesse, her younger sister who is described in the marriage records as a 'domestic'; and Jane Brown who is described as a nurse. Emily herself is given no occupation but is described as a spinster of St Albans. She had attended St Albans School, but prior to the arrival of Alfred William's younger brothers and sister. She was a year older than her new husband, who did not attend the school.

Alfred Buxton (senior) is described in the marriage records as a miner. Sometime after 1894 he had moved to the West Coast for a spell. Coal would have been a familiar commodity to him with his upbringing in the Black Country and the Potteries, and his previous occupation in Britain as a coal dealer. Joseph Buxton, who also appears in the wedding photograph, was also on the Coast. He was working at the Brunner Mine at the time of the 1896 Brunner Mine Disaster just one week after the wedding. He helped to bring out the bodies of those killed in the explosion. Why the other members of the family should have to leave Christchurch is again unknown, but it seems likely that the search for employment may have been the critical factor. Scott has described 1894 as the worst year in the depression with low farm prices, the trading community 'decidedly demoralized' and the President of the Chamber of Commerce, G T Booth, recommending an 'attitude of resignation'. But 1895 was to mark the end of the long depression and by 1896 the Prime Minister, speaking in November at the Show luncheon of the Agricultural and Pastoral Association, was able to claim that "the Colony had entered upon more prosperous times than it had seen for many years". The improving conditions of trade in 1896 would have made an ideal launching pad for St Albans Nurseries and its recently married owner. By 1898 Joseph Buxton had returned from the West Coast and was marrying another local girl, Mabel Bolt, the daughter of George Bolt, a local coachman. His occupation at the time is given as a gardener, and it seems likely that he was helping with his elder brother's business. His brother Ernest, a witness at the
wedding, is described as a butcher of St Albans and Alfred (senior) is again described as a labourer, although his address is not given. In the following year, 1899, the first of Alfred and Emily Buxton’s children, a daughter Merle Browning, was born in April. She was followed by two sons, Trevor Sidney, in 1901 and Raymond in 1906.

The century ended with the family reunited in St Albans. In Wise’s *New Zealand Directory for 1900* Alfred (senior) and Joseph are both listed as gardeners, resident in Springfield Road in close proximity to Alfred William’s St Albans Nursery. The family had moved from England to the Antipodes and after initial problems finding employment appeared to have established itself in the district in which it had initially settled by the end of the century. The nursery was developing well and business was expanding. In 1899 Alfred William issued his first nursery catalogue with an ‘Art Nouveau’ cover and an introduction to intending purchasers:

“We have much pleasure in presenting this catalogue to our numerous customers, thanking them for past favours and endeavouring to merit increasing support from them through their kind assistance by recommendation.”

Was this request heeded and how did the new nurseryman and landscape gardener fare in the new century?
Landscape Gardening
A SPECIALITY.

Estimates given for laying out Grounds with Plans and Specifications if required.

Gardens kept in order by monthly or annual contract, or by the day. Estimates furnished for the same, with or without bedding plants.

TESTIMONIALS.

WARABY, HEREFORD STREET, LINWOOD,
CHRISTCHURCH.

Dear Sir,
The enclosed letter will give you some idea of what a casual passer thinks of your work in laying out my garden. It does you great credit. I may add I am thoroughly satisfied with the quality and arrangement of the plants you have put in. The blooms, I am confident, will be hard in heat especilally the Rose trees, from which I have had a very fine show of blossoms.

I remain yours truly,
WALTER SHEAD.
Mr. A. W. Buxton, St. Albans Nurseries.

125, HEREFORD STREET,
CHRISTCHURCH, N.Z., Feb. 3, 1891.

Dear Sir,
If you have no objection, would you mind giving me the name and address of the gardener who keeps your place in order? I was along Herford Street East a few days ago, and was much struck with the appearance of your garden and might perhaps be able to arrange for the same man to keep mine and Mrs. Bruce's in order.

Yours faithfully,
CHARLES BEAN.

To W. Shead, Esq., Christchurch.

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Fig. 3.6 The cover of the first nursery catalogue and the inside of the back cover which highlights the young nurseryman's preference for landscape work. (Thelma Strongman)