

## **Ewelme Cottage in Auckland, New Zealand**

**Ewelme News, July/Aug 2001, Apr-May 2011, Oct-Nov 2014**

An important connection to Ewelme on the other side of the world is Ewelme Cottage in Auckland, New Zealand. This was once the home of Rev. Vicesimus and Blanche Lush and is so named because of Blanche's connection with Ewelme and Ewelme House, now known as Saffron House. Their descendants sold the cottage to Auckland City Council to become the first 'National Trust' property opened in 1971 to be shared by all.

In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century John Webster, the Curator of Ewelme Cottage was keen to share with the Ewelme Archive his prodigious knowledge of the house and the Lush family who built it. Early photographs of Ewelme Cottage show it was once set in an almost empty rolling landscape, but now suburbia has encroached right up to the garden boundaries. Once inside the gate, however, the visitor is transported into a Victorian time-warp.



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The connection between the two properties goes back to the early days of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. In 1836 an orphaned 17-year-old girl named Blanche Hawkins came to Ewelme to live with her widowed aunt, Lady Charlotte Taunton. The Oxford-born Blanche was to live at Ewelme House until her marriage in 1842 to an improbably named Cambridge graduate – Vicesimus Lush (the 20<sup>th</sup> living child of his father's three marriages)! Little is known of Blanche's time in the village, as the Journals kept by the Victorian ladies reflect chiefly the social trivia of the genteel classes. However, one entry has the brief but intriguing remark – '*The sad case of the Tuckwell girl.*' The Burial Register for that year does have an entry of the death of a Tuckwell baby.

Vicesimus was ordained into the priesthood in February 1843 and became the curate of Farringdon and Little Coxwell in that year. However, in January 1844 Lady Taunton died. Blanche tended her aunt through her last days and was her beneficiary, inheriting the contents of Ewelme House which was rented from Edward Rudge. In March 1844 Blanche left Ewelme for good.

In 1849 the position of vicar of Farringdon became vacant, and Vicesimus had hoped for the post after his service there, but he was passed over for an outsider. (Although his service was acknowledged by a commemorative stone tablet and a painted glass window in Little Coxwell's church). Seeking to further his ecclesiastical career he had already written to the Bishop of Auckland requesting a position in New Zealand, and a favourable reply arrived, exactly a year after his inquiry! The family, which now consisted of four young children, plus a servant, embarked on the 'Barbara Gordon' on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1850, for the five-month journey to Auckland and to a new life. Amongst their possessions were possessions taken from Ewelme House.

Blanche and Vicesimus produced a further 5 children in New Zealand and, in common with many Victorian households, suffered their fair share of infant tragedies. (In 1854 three of the children died of Scarlet Fever, and another died of the same disease in 1876). Of the remaining five children, two had offspring and thus the Lush line has continued to the modern day.

The Lush's built their principal home in Parnell out of native kauri wood, finishing it in 1864 and naming it Ewelme Cottage. (John Webster believed, after his personal visits to Saffron House, that the garden landscaping and planting was influenced by the Ewelme House gardens).

Vicesimus progressed in the Church to be Archdeacon of Waikato but died aged 65 in 1882. Blanche continued to live in Ewelme Cottage throughout her 30 years of widowhood until her death at the age of 93 in 1912. There is a photograph taken in 1903 of her sitting on the veranda. She may not have been amused to know that this very veranda, and her parlour, would be used to film the closing scenes of the film 'The Piano' in the early 1990's.

The Lush's descendants lived in the house until it was sold in 1968 to Auckland City Council by their grandson. The Council then leased it for NZ 10 cents per annum to the New Zealand Historic Places Trust to 'manage, maintain and preserve Ewelme Cottage as an historic place.' It was finally opened to the public in 1971.

Although members of the Lush family occupied the house until 1968 much the original furniture and furnishings has remained, and other items were donated back to the House. It is crammed with 'Victoriana' and John seemed to know the origins and history of every piece. Of particular interest are books, paintings and *objet d'art* that had belonged to Lady Taunton when she lived in Ewelme House, more than eleven and a half thousand miles away!



John Webster opened made two 'pilgrimages' to Ewelme in 1978 and 1988. Amongst his 'treasures' was a photograph of Professor and Mrs Hare in their younger days in the garden of Saffron House. John displayed on Ewelme Cottage's hallway a framed pictures of dried flowers, being of flowers from the garden of Saffron House in Ewelme. (John twice visited Professor and Mrs Hare who then lived at Saffron House).

There were photographs of the village and church; Brian and Jenny Lee's notepaper; a copy of *The Ewelme History Trail*; Miss Prister Cruttwell's *History of Ewelme and its Peoples* and curiously, several old copies of the *Ewelme News*. John also has a good collection of photographs taken in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by members of the Lush family who made the long journey to visit Ewelme. John copied for the Ewelme Archive several of the Church taken in the early 1900's and one of an Almswoman taken in 1933 and annotated as "*The oldest village resident.*"

In 1998 John's colleague and protégé also visited Ewelme, following the same English trail of the Hawkins and Lush family so that when John retires the same passion for the family and their origins, including the Ewelme connection, will be preserved.

(In March 2001 John wrote that he was the very proud owner of a new car boasting the unique licence plate - EWELME. Apparently New Zealand had an EWE and an ELM but not the combination so he wrote – "...so it was mine and nobody else now can use it on a motor car, or bike – and so it goes on – all because of a little Oxfordshire village!" However, the plate was causing some consternation for his garage as the staff were "*wracking their brains trying to sort out how to say it*".

[The Ewelme Cottage file, including Guide Books, postcards, photocopies of the Journals and other information is available for inspection in the Archive under Buildings].

### **July/Aug 2001**

John Webster, the curator of Ewelme Cottage, wrote a 28-page booklet titled "*Looking for the Headlands of New Zealand*" which records the departure from England in 1850 of the Lush family, and the long and eventful sea journey and arrival in Auckland. John had written this 28-page informative booklet by referring to the extensive letters and diaries kept by the family. The booklet was produced from a lecture given by John in October 1998 called '*The First Ewelme Lecture*'

Blanche Lush was only resident at her aunt's home [now Saffron House] for 6 years, but the fact that they chose to name their main New Zealand residence 'Ewelme Cottage' reflects the affection she had for Ewelme, the place of her marriage in 1842. Although she and her husband did not return to the 'Old Country', many of their descendants continue to visit Ewelme.

Thanks to John, the Ewelme Archive contains a very extensive history of the Lush family, certainly enough material on which to base a project on the interesting life and times of a well-born 19<sup>th</sup> Century lady should anyone so wish.

### **Apr-May 2011**

#### **Visit of Karen Ferris – descendant of Blanche and Vicesimus Lush**

A family on tour New Zealand had a chance meeting with Cynthia Winfield in the Shepherds Hut that led to a subsequent visit by Aucklander Karen Ferris and her three young children. Karen is a great, great, grand-daughter of Blanche Hawkins, an orphaned teenager, who, in 1836 came to live with her widowed aunt, Lady Charlotte Taunton at Ewelme House, (renamed Saffron House).

The modern 'Lush's' were thrilled to be connected to their roots, and Karen and her children posed for photographs outside the front door of Saffron House. They then traced their ancestors' steps to the church to stand at the spot where the marriage took place, and their story began.

**Oct-Nov 2014**

**Pam Langton (great granddaughter of Blanche Lush),**

Pam Langton visited Ewelme in 2014, the great granddaughter of Blanche Hawkins, a 17-years old orphan who arrived in Ewelme in 1836 to live with her aunt Lady Charlotte Hawkins. Pam was photographed outside Saffron House and at the Church altar where Blanche married Reverend Vicesimus Lush in 1842. Lady Taunton died in 1844 and it was her heiress Blanche who cleared the house of her aunt's effects. Pam was also able to visit Farringdon and Little Coxwell where Rev Lush held the curacy before the family emigrated to Auckland in 1850. They built their home, 'Ewelme Cottage', which still exists as a museum, containing bric-a-brac taken from Ewelme House. Pam disclosed a Lush family story that "*flagstones from Ewelme 'Palace' were laid in Ewelme House.*"

The 1843 diary of Lady Taunton mentions '*dining with the Rudge family*' and would have known that Edward Rudge Snr had bought the accommodation building for the long demolished Ewelme 'Palace' in 1817, and he and his son Edward, demolished much of the building and remodelled the remainder into the Manor. A 1907 archive document by Charles Rudge confirms that his grandfather took bricks and stone slabs from the 'Palace' site '*to form the foundations and walls in the garden*' of Ewelme House, which he also owned. It appears Lady Taunton rented Ewelme House from the Rudge's after they took surplus material up the hill, as a third generation Edward Rudge is recorded living there in the 1880s.

*Ewelme Village Archive*