

## **GOLDSMITH: PHILIP WHARTON**

**Born: 6 Jan 1857, Aslacton, district of Depwade,  
Norfolk, England.**

**Married: 24 Mar 1881, Ellesmere or Leeston, Canterbury, New Zealand**

**To: Catherine Rhys Williams (b.1858 Ystrad Mynach,  
Glamorgan, Wales  
d.1940 Levin)**

**Died: 27 Jan 1946, Levin, New Zealand**

**Buried: Tiro Tiro Rd cemetery, Levin, New Zealand,  
after cremation at Karori, Wellington**

***Philip & Catherine had six children*** (five born at Irwell, Canterbury,  
the sixth in Gisborne).

Philip Horace (1882 – 1918)  
Marianne Lavinia (1883 – 1883)  
Katherine Mary (1884 – 1913)  
Rhys Wharton (1886 – 1962)  
Tom Selwyn (1887 – 1941)  
Dorothy Winifred Annie (1894 – 1945)

Eventually there would be 17 grandchildren.

### Early Years in New Zealand

As a young man (about 22) Philip and his younger cousin, Thomas Anson Buckingham, decided to emigrate to New Zealand, travelling on the 'Atlanta' in 1879.

In the electoral rolls for 1880/81, 1885/86 & 1890 he is described as a farmer at Irwell in the Selwyn District of Canterbury. He was possibly more a farm manager. (*information from the Canterbury Museum suggests that he was the farm manager for the Reverend Fisher at Sudeley farm.*)

In 1890 the Reverend Fisher sold the Sudeley farm which necessitated the Goldsmiths moving.

They ended up in Gisborne where Philip is described in the electoral roll of 1896 as a settler. The family lived in Gisborne for about 9 years. Unfortunately, it was a very difficult time for farming, and he was also badly let down by his business partner, who forged his name to such an extent that he had to leave Gisborne.

The family moved to Levin in 1900.

Here he took up the role of Secretary/Accountant for the Government's Experimental State farm until 1915.

### Levin's First Town Clerk

Levin was proclaimed a Borough to take effect on 1 April 1906. This meant it was empowered to gather rates and take its own decisions on developing the town after electing a mayor and council. In his part-time role as the 1<sup>st</sup> Town Clerk, Philip's first job was to prepare an electoral roll and to conduct that election in as little time as 25 days. Immediately after, he had to organise the first Council's inauguration – a considerable challenge, which he succeeded in accomplishing. His reputation for integrity was thereby recognised.

The Town Clerk's responsibilities included Treasurer and Collector, Returning Officer, Inspector of Nuisances and Health, Inspector of Public Buildings "or other positions to be appointed." Salary – 20 pounds per week.

He would spearhead the Council's approach to wealthy Scottish/American benefactor Andrew Carnegie to fund a public library in Levin. Dannevirke, Hamilton and Thames were three New Zealand towns to have already taken advantage of Carnegie's philanthropic generosity to provide grants to build libraries all over Britain, the Dominions and the United States. In 1908, Philip consulted his counterparts in these towns and by the following year a request was on its way to Carnegie, retired in Scotland. After an exchange of letters to agree the exact terms of a grant, by November 1911 the elegant new building on the corner of Oxford and Bath Streets was ready to open.

The library was immediately a landmark and Philip sent a photograph to Carnegie, who congratulated Levin "upon its treasure. Mr Carnegie adds that he is certain it will prove a spring from which only blessed waters will flow."

### County Clerk

Philip held the Town Clerk's role until 1915 and then took on the full-time role as the County Clerk for the Horowhenua County Council, which he performed until 1923. The Council's paperwork was in a mess when he was appointed. His predecessor had joined the army, the district was growing and processes to cope with this seemed to have declined. Philip, being a meticulous man, was the ideal appointment. He came in as a new broom, set the office to rights and sorted out all his predecessor's (H E Lodge's) personal papers from official papers.

It would continue to be a difficult role to perform, though, with one task in particular causing much stress. During his time at the County Council the issue of rates not being paid reared its head, with returned soldiers who had been settled on farms in the area especially hard hit. There had been a farming boom after World War I had ended – new dairy factories opened across the country, land values soared – but this trend reversed abruptly in 1921. A struggle for survival followed and paying rates wasn't high on the agenda for farmers barely able to afford paying their rent, erecting and maintaining fences and purchasing livestock.

Philip obviously had sympathy for their plight as in one letter, with a 'kindly' tone, he said "Don't let it run on much beyond Christmas".

The problem was highlighted by four farmers working the land at the top of Heights Road, near Shannon. Having no spare cash, their circumstances were probably

used as one ploy by Philip to put pressure on the Lands Department for a flexible repayment model. Since he had to send a County cheque to the Department in compensation for the land taken for the Heights Road extension, he first deducted the amount of rates outstanding. The Land Commissioner was not amused. In reply, while accepting there was a difficulty, he proposed another solution. If the farmers worked on improving the road up to their blocks – clearing water tables, digging drains, filling ruts etc. - their wages for this would go to defray their rates. It led to Philip having to send his assistant, Fred Hudson, to pay the men's wages with one hand and take most of them back for rates with the other.

Not long after, the four Heights Road returned servicemen succumbed to the pressure and sheer scale of work, relinquished their land and the Council was able to strike off the debt.

#### Horowhenua Power Board Secretary

A little further north along the Tararua foothills, construction had been under way since 1919 of a power station on the Mangahao River behind Shannon to generate electricity for Horowhenua's towns. Levin's first 75 street lamps were switched on in October 1924. By then, the Horowhenua Electric Power Board had been established (set up by a committee representing the Hutt County, Foxton, Levin and Shannon Boroughs and the Otaki Town Board). In another role change, Philip became its first Secretary (from 1922), transferring his skills and experience over from his County position. He continued as Power Board secretary until 1929. (Fred Hudson – Philips' son-in-law - stepped up from being his assistant at the County to become County Clerk).

In the meantime, he was elected to the Levin Borough Council in 1919 and continued as a Councillor until 1932.

He contested for the mayoralty in 1923 and 1925 but was defeated both times by Thomas Hobson.

#### Mayor – 1932-1941

However, in 1932 he was unanimously voted in as mayor by his fellow Councillors on the death of Charles Blenkhorn. They would have been impressed not just by his encyclopaedic knowledge, but also by his genial temperament.

Immediately on taking office, Philip set up a Social Services committee representing all the churches and charity workers to help tackle the poverty being suffered by families most affected by the Great Depression. The committee worked tirelessly to arrange cheap board and food for the homeless, supply materials to repair working clothes and boots and organise fund-raising concerts.

He held the mayoralty throughout the Depression, facing government demands to help cut working hours in local bodies. In 1941, with World War II now dominating the agenda, Philip finally retired at the age of 85.

There ended a likely unprecedented record of service to the Horowhenua district ... town clerk, County Council clerk, councillor, power board secretary and, eventually, mayor.

### Other Community Activities

Philip Goldsmith was also involved in many non-political organisations in Levin, including the Levin and District Beautifying Society, Levin Horticultural and Industrial Society, through both of which he had much to do with tree planting in the town. Throughout his life he was a devout member of the Methodist Church, was a lay preacher for 55 years and secretary to the Church Trust in Levin from 1920 to 1945.

Catherine Goldsmith was known for her kindness, thoughtfulness and quiet modesty. She was especially remembered for her work with the sick during the influenza epidemic in 1918. She pre-deceased Philip in 1940, after almost 60 years of marriage. As already stated, Philip gave up public life the following year and passed away five years later at the age of 89.

References included:

Dreaver, A.J. *"Horowhenua County and Its People, A Centennial History"*  
*"Levin, the Making of a Town"*