

SMITH William (Sgt) and Sarah RYAN

Royal New Zealand Fencible Corps

contributed by great-great-granddaughters Sandra-Faye Nagy and Diana Burslem, dianaburslem14@gmail.com

William Smith was born in Ballinderry, County Antrim, Ireland in 1803.

On 24 October 1820 he enlisted in the British Army, aged seventeen, under the official age for service credit until he turned eighteen the following year. He served Britain's military interests in Portugal and England, where he met and married **Rosannah Mackey**, and his first child, **Mary Anne**, was born in 1829. He served in Tasmania where his second child, **Eliza**, was born in 1833. His regiment was sent to India (where, in 1834, **Rosannah** died and was buried), and then on to Burma.

He returned to England to the Military Depot in Chatham, Kent, with Mary Anne and Eliza. There he met and married **Sarah Ryan** in 1840. In 1842 William, having attained the rank of Sergeant during his career, was honourably discharged and repatriated back to Ireland.

The family settled in Ballinderry, where a daughter **Sarah** is believed to have been born and to have died in 1844, aged six months. Their son **John** was born in Ballinderry in 1845. The family then moved to Bryansford, County Down, where two sons were born, **George** in 1847 and **Robert** in 1849.

When it was announced that Fencible Regiments, comprising of former British Army soldiers, were being formed to protect the infant city of Auckland in New Zealand, William was accepted. He became part of the 8th Detachment of the Fencibles under the command of Captain Theodore Minet Haultain. The Detachment that sailed for New Zealand in 1849 included William, Sarah, Eliza, John, George and Robert. What became of Mary Anne is unclear. The '*Oriental Queen*' arrived in Auckland on 18 September 1849.



William arrived nine years after the Treaty of Waitangi had been signed (6th February 1840), but there was still unrest in the country. Following the decision to move the seat of government to Auckland, several villages around the infant city became military settlements: Howick, Panmure, Otahuhu and Onehunga. William Smith was appointed Sergeant, Number 8 Company, stationed in Onehunga. The Blockhouse was subsequently built on *Green Hill Reserve* (now *Jellicoe Park*) in 1860. William, in command of twelve militiamen, maintained the garrison at *Green Hill Reserve* during the years of 1863-1865.

William served the stipulated term of seven years as a Fencible, at which point his cottage and allotment of land were transferred to him. The family continued to live in Spring Street, Onehunga until the death of both Sarah and William.

A requirement of duty for all Fencibles was to assemble in uniform on Sundays and to attend a service at a local church. The Smith family attended Peter's Anglican Church, Onehunga, the younger children being baptised there: **Martha Ann** (b. 22 Feb 1851); **William** (b. 21 Dec 1852; d.17 July 1853); **William Edward/Henry** (b. 30 May 1854); **Joshua** (b. 29 Feb 1856); **Mary Harriet** (b.12 Sept 1858) - all these baptisms conducted by The Rev Arthur Guyon Purchas, first vicar of Saint Peter's Church (Note: there is no church record of the baptisms of William (Jnr) and Joshua.)

William Smith had eleven children in total: two with Rosannah, and nine with Sarah (including the infant Sarah who died in Ireland).

Sarah Smith died 22 April 1866, aged forty-eight years, and was buried in **Saint Peter's Cemetery** with infant son, William. At the time of Sarah's death, the six surviving children of Sarah and William were: John 22, George 19, Robert 17, Martha Ann 15, William Edward/Henry 12; Mary Harriet 7.

William Smith (senior) died 2 January 1883, aged eighty, and was buried with Sarah and infant William in **Saint Peter's Cemetery**. He lived thirty-three years in New Zealand, and was patriarch to a family lineage with as many branches as the oak tree of his native land.

Eliza, (from William's first marriage) in 1850, aged 17, married into a Fencible family.

John worked first in the Thames goldfields until he returned to Onehunga. John and wife Anna Maria lived first in Catherine Street; then, always interested in carpentry and masonry, John became a builder, and in 1894 moved his family into a house, named '*Brompton*,' that he had built at 83 Mount Smart Road, Onehunga; there his family flourished; '*Brompton*' still stands.

George became a blacksmith working mainly in the Waikato region. George and wife Ellen later returned to Onehunga, and lived at 19 Tawa Road. It was his father-in-law, John Redwood, who had secured the contract to build the Blockhouse on the *Green Hill Reserve* in Onehunga.

Robert first joined the Armed Constabulary working in Taupo and Opotoki where he became Sergeant of Constabulary and Magistrates' Court Clerk. Robert and wife Emma returned to Onehunga in 1877. He became holder of sixty acres in Raglan and of five acres in Onehunga. The Onehunga farm was named '*Walnut Grove*' and the house still stands at 11 Mariri Road.

As we researched the family history, we discovered the Saint Peter's Church connection to be very strong. We searched for the graves of our ancestors in the church cemetery. William, Sarah and infant son William were buried in Plot 30. This Plot had no headstone in 1980 when the 1980 renovations to the church extended over the area of Plot 30.

It seemed appropriate that we should place a headstone as close as possible to the actual site of Plot 30. So a headstone was commissioned and family descendants held a ceremony on 15 January 2012 to bless the headstone, sited but metres from the original site. The dedication was performed by Rev Anne Priestley, after which the family adjourned to *Jellicoe Park* (formerly *Green Hill Reserve*) for a picnic and a cake-cutting ceremony. The Fencible Cottages and the Blockhouse were visited, and stories were told as the children played in the *Green Hill Reserve* – on the very soil where our ancestors, the children of William and Sarah Smith would have played so long ago.

Further information on the Smith family
can be found in the book '***Brompton: The Smith Legacy***' which Sandra-Faye Nagy published in 2012.