

ZINZAN Robert Vaux and GRIFFITH Isabella

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N.B. prior to reading this biography please read the **ZINZANS in England** biography on this website.

On 6 December 1866, **Robert Vaux Zinzan** (b. 6 Nov 1839) married **Isabella Margaret Hay Griffith**, daughter of the late **John Gwyn Griffith**, Rector of Llansannor, Glamorganshire, at the East Knoyle parish church in Wiltshire.

In 1869, the couple emigrated to New Zealand, sailing on board the *Ballarat* which departed from Gravesend on 1 May 1869. Captained by Joseph Allen the ship made good time, 99 days, arriving at Onehunga on 9 August. The *Ballarat* was a 685 gross tonne wooden barque built in Aberdeen in 1852 for the London to China trade, but it made several trips to New Zealand and Australia carrying immigrants. So delighted were the passengers with the successful voyage and safe arrival they had experienced, that on 11 August 1869, two days following their arrival, a celebratory dinner was held to congratulate Captain Allen and the medical officer, Dr Zinzan on the 'pleasant, prosperous voyage during which universal good health was maintained.'

Robert's younger sister, **Ann Zinzan** with her husband **Francis Gwyn Griffith** and two sons emigrated to New Zealand in 1869, probably also sailing on the *Ballarat*. His elder sister, **Lavinia Caroline Zinzan** and her husband **George Brown Harris** followed approximately one year later.

In Auckland Isabella and Robert Zinzan settled in Onehunga, residing in a large house on a four-acre property with a splendid view, at the corner of Selwyn and Greenhill Streets. In later years (1884) this fourteen roomed home became a school, *Chowringhee House*, administered by General and Mrs Stoddard.

That Robert Zinzan was a popular and capable doctor in the settler town was acknowledged. Public recognition of this was made by the *Onehunga Ladies' Benevolent Society*, which recorded tributes and praise for him on several occasions. **Arthur Guyan Purchas**, the Onehunga doctor-clergyman, and Robert Vaux Zinzan worked closely together, often consulting over difficult patients and certifications. The daily papers published items on scores of situations that Robert attended, many of which resulted in a coroner's or criminal court sitting. These often involved violence, cruelty, gunshot wounds, knife attacks, poisonings, drownings, falls from horse or cart, difficult confinements etc.; violence against wives was not unusual, and liquor often a contributing element. The two Onehunga practitioners served a wide area. In addition to the patients living close to the local settlement, calls were made further afield to surrounding districts, in particular Epsom, Mount Eden and along the highway south. There were few practicing doctors in that early era and settlement was sparse and widely dispersed. Answering medical calls often meant travel on horseback over rough and muddy tracks. Occasionally an emergency call would be made to a patient who resided at a distance demanding a three-hour-or-more-journey each way. Medications and surgical instruments were carried in pannier bags.

Robert and Isabella produced two sons, **Robert Vaux Comport Zinzan** b. 9 Feb 1870, and **Lionel Vaux Zinzan** b. 6 April 1873. Both were born in Onehunga and baptized at Saint Peter's Church. Onehunga.

The elder son, **Robert Vaux Comport Zinzan** died, of diphtheria, at the age of six years, 18 Nov 1876. He was buried in **Saint Peter's Cemetery**.

Although Robert Vaux had put down roots in New Zealand, he was possibly keeping his options open for he retained his medical registration in both England and New Zealand. In all, he practiced his profession in New Zealand for a period of just over 10 years, from his arrival in 1869 until his death on 25 November 1879. Three days later, following the funeral service at Saint Peter's Church, Onehunga, he was buried in the church cemetery in the same plot as his son **Robert Vaux Comport Zinzan**.

The given cause of Robert Vaux's death was *phthisis, (cirrhosis of the liver)*; this has given rise to the conclusion that he was an alcoholic. However, cirrhosis can be contracted as a result of Hepatitis B infection. It was not until around c.1889 that surgical gloves began to be accepted for use in operating theatres. Although the 'aseptic technique' had been introduced prior to this, it would have been possible for a doctor to pick up Hepatitis B infection from a patient's blood; a late and not uncommon complication of Hepatitis B infection can be cirrhosis.

Following her husband's death, **Isabella**, Robert's widow, returned to her home town in Wales with her youngest son, **Lionel**. However, on completion of his education, she sailed back to New Zealand with the then 19 year old. On 21 August 1899 **Lionel** married **Charlotte Augusta Mulgan**, youngest daughter of the Rev. Mulgan, at Saint Peter's Church, Onehunga.

Subsequently **Isabella Zinzan** joined her son, Lionel and family to reside in the Mauku area for the remainder of her life, which ended 17 Feb 1924. Two days later she was buried in the same plot as her husband and son in **Saint Peter's Cemetery**.

Robert Vaux's sister **Ann** and her sons had returned to her home *Llansannor House*, Llansannor, in the Vale of Glamorgan, following Robert Vaux's his death.

Lavinia, the elder sister remained with her family in New Zealand until her death at Pokuru, Te Awamutu in 1931. She is buried in the Harris plot in **Saint Peter's Cemetery**.

Robert Vaux Zinzan and his sister **Lavinia Caroline Zinzan Harris** can be credited with originating a strong line of Zinzan descendants in New Zealand who have excelled in sporting, medical and academic fields. Lavinia and George Harris were the forebears of the father and son test cricketers Parke Gerald Zinzan (Zin) Harris and Christopher Zinzan (Chris) Harris, while Zinzan Brooke, All Black rugby player and coach is a descendant of Robert and Isabella Zinzan.