

ORMSBY George Owen and daughter Maria Louisa (known as Louisa)

George Owen Ormsby: early surveyor and charterer of Manukau Harbour.

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George Owen Ormsby was born in 1809 at Kilmore County, Roscommon, Ireland, to Reverend **Owen Ormsby** (1782-1834) and **Ann Phibbs** (1785-1852) of County Roscommon. At the time, George's father was in Holy Orders in County Roscommon. Rev Owen Ormsby and Anne Phibbs were married 19 October 1803.

George had six siblings: older brother **William** (then **George**), **Isabel**, **Anne**, **Mary**, **Robert**, and **Arthur**.

George studied at Trinity College in Dublin and trained in Ireland as a surveyor. As a young man, he left Ireland in 1836 (on board the *HMS Buffalo*) as an assistant surveyor to Surveyor-General Colonel Light who was bound for South Australia with the commission to survey land for a settlement town which is today's Adelaide.

George Ormsby, Colonel Light, George, and two or three other assistants set to work and surveyed a site carefully chosen by Light on account of its nearby mountains which Light reasoned would encourage greater chances of rainfall than some of the other sites that were recommended. It also had the substantial *River Torrens* running through it. The Colonel was not without his detractors, but he persevered with his choice and set George and the other assistants to work.

George might possibly have set down roots in Adelaide, if not for a dispute between Light and his superiors back in England (his superiors deciding to implement some new surveying methods). These new methods were so unpopular with Light and his crew that Light resigned his post as Surveyor-General. George, in turn, refused to work under Light's replacement and also resigned. With the whole project thrown into disarray, the replacement Surveyor-General was compelled to also resign, and the new methods were dropped. George was then asked to take charge until a third Surveyor-General by the name of Charles Sturt was appointed. One month later, George resigned a second time and in May 1839, he returned to Ireland.

Nevertheless, George left his mark in South Australia. In the *South Australian Gazette*, he was complimented as: 'an active and efficient officer, one of the best, if not the very best, on the staff of Colonel Light.' In addition, one of the rivulets that feeds into the *River Torrens* bears George's name, presumably compliments of Light, as George did much of his surveying work in that area.

George married **Selina Hepenstal**, 12 January 1844, in Christ Church, Delany, County Wicklow, Ireland. Shortly afterwards, **George** and his brother **Robert** set sail for New Zealand, where they landed in Auckland. Together they secured a home in Epsom in both their names. There is no record to date of Selina accompanying her husband George to New Zealand; the story is that she followed later once George had secured a home for them (which he did in Epsom). Selina came accompanied by her maid and a man servant.



George Owen Ormsby

Robert Ormsby came to New Zealand with George on an adventure and was to have returned to Ireland to marry. Life in a new land changed all that.

With George having been appointed to New Zealand Governor Fitzroy as a surveyor, there was also a need for government couriers to other parts of the colony. It was this element that saw Robert and another gentleman carrying a government pouch to the British base in Te Awamutu. They set sail from the Port of Onehunga to the Port of Kawhia and then travelled overland. However, they took the wrong trail and became lost in the heavily forested area of the mountains of the King Country. There, they were found by a large Ngati Maniapoto Maori party of families returning from their Kawhia villages to their inland village. The two men were in a delirious state and were carried to the village where they were nursed back to health; both men eventually taking Maori wives. The story of the Ormsby family of the King Country is well known with the marriage of Robert Ormsby to a high-ranking Maori woman of Ngati Maniapoto. Robert maintained contact with his brother George.

Together **George** and **Selina** had five children: **Eliza Isabel** b.May 1845; **Emily Selina** b. 9 April 1847; **Lambert William Hepenstal** b.19 July 1849; **Maria Louisa** (known as Louisa) b.June 1852; and **Selina Maria** b.June 1855. Lambert William and Maria Louisa were both baptised at **Saint Peter's Church**, Onehunga.

Tragically, **Maria Louisa** died (aged but 21 months) of whooping cough, 13 March 1854, and was buried in **Saint Peter's Cemetery**, Onehunga (Plot 53).

In Auckland, George did contract work surveying Crown land, including a substantial contract with the *Church Mission Society* in relation to its claims before the *Land Claims Commission*. Later, George surveyed the land that is now known as today's Tauranga. He also held the government post of *Marine Supervisor* and surveyed and charted the **Manukau Harbour**. He was later promoted to *Assistant Surveyor-General*. Other appointments included *Commissioner of Provincial Wastelands*; *Commissioner of the Board of Works*, and *Provincial Road Surveyor*.

In 1844, soon after arriving in Auckland, George took advantage of the Government's relaxation of the monopoly that it held on purchasing Maori land and obtained twenty acres from **Reweti** (*Ngati Whatua*) on the north side of the Manukau harbour, at the western end of Arthur Street, Onehunga.

However, not long after, the government did an about-turn and restored its monopoly and George's ownership was immediately subjected to an investigation by the *Land Claims Commission* who seized it for a *Royal Fencibles' Military* settlement. By then George had built his **Onehunga Lodge** on the land. He was offered compensation, but he believed it was inadequate and refused to accept it. He felt he was being treated unjustly and unfairly by the government and ended up in a long and protracted dispute.

Unfortunately, George died, 4 April 1861, after succumbing to illness at the relatively young age of forty-eight. His battle with the government lasted until his passing; a struggle of 17 years. It is not clear what happened to his land, but it appears that it returned to the Government upon his death.

Both **George** and his daughter **Maria Louisa** died at their home, *Onehunga Lodge*. George was buried in the same plot (Plot 53) as his daughter **Maria Louisa** in **Saint Peter's Cemetery**.

George and Selina's four other Children (see next page) ...

Lambert William Hepenstal was educated in Auckland at the Commercial School, the Lyceum, and the Church of England Grammar School. In 1864, aged but 15, he left Auckland for London and then to Ireland where he attended the Royal School at Dungannon, Northern Ireland, and studied medicine. At the age of 19, he had qualified as a physician and surgeon. He took MD at Dublin University in 1879 and at age 21 he had been appointed surgeon to the Meath Hospital, Dublin, a post he filled until his death. He was actively engaged over the years in the medical circles and was knighted in 1903.

Emily Selina married **William Charles Kensington** (a surveyor) at **Saint Peter's Church**, 9 December 1868. Sadly, she died twenty months later, 24 June 1870.

In January 1872, **Eliza Isabel**, and **Selina Maria** (both unmarried) returned with their mother **Selina** to live in Ireland. Selina died there, 18 December 1901.