

Quaker History in Nelson

Town Acre 667 – Site of New Zealand's first Society of Friends Meeting House.

Martha and Samuel Strong are buried here, in the top corner of what was once Town Acre 667. Members of the Society of Friends (Quakers), they both attended worship in New Zealand's first Quaker Meeting House on this site, 15 May 1853. Martha was unwell at this time and the following year she died and was buried here. Samuel Strong is buried beside his wife. Two infant children of Isaac Hill are also buried here, one named Samuel Tertius, the other name unknown.



Samuel Strong(1795-1875) and **Isaac Hill** (1816-1885)

The Strongs arrived in New Zealand in the ship *Bombay* in December 1842. They were keen members of the Quaker faith and for a time held regular meetings in their own home.

Other Nelson Quakers included surveyors Samuel Stephens, John Cotterell and Frederick Tuckett, and storekeeper Isaac Hill. It was Cotterell who selected Town Acre 667 in 1842 from the New Zealand Company, but died the next year. Two English Quakers, Robert Lindsay and Frederick Mackie, purchased the Acre from Cotterell's heir and established the Meeting House in the small cottage that was on the site. The building was first used for Worship on 15 May 1853, when 6 adults and 3 children were present.

The drawing from which the photo below was made was probably done by Frederick Mackie who accompanied Robert Lindsay.

It is thought that meetings were not held here on a regular basis after the death of Samuel Strong in 1875. The land was leased to timber merchant Henry Baigent in 1884 and was used as a horse paddock. In 1922, parliamentary authority was obtained to sell most of the Acre for subdivision, except 17.5 perches which included the graves and the site of the Meeting House. The Nelson City Council took over maintaining the property in 1934.

The Society of Friends

Members of the Society of Friends, although few, were valued in the early settlement period of Nelson for their concern for the welfare of Maori people and abhorrence of the use of force against them. They supported the establishment of churches and schools of all denominations. Early Nelson Quakers Tuckett and Cotterell were both involved in the 1843 Wairau Incident where they refused to fight or bear arms. Tuckett escaped, but Cotterell surrendered and died; his grave can be found at Tua Marina, and that of fellow Quaker and surveyor Samuel Stephens at Fairfield Park Cemetery. Isaac Hill is buried in the

Baptist section of Wakapuaka Cemetery. Although few in number, Isaac Hill treasured the company of his fellow Quakers at the early meetings held in Nelson at the Strong's home. "I must acknowledge sitting in silence though with only a few to be a great privilege, and so all will find it who are absent from large meetings." Isaac Hill's diary, 2 October 1843. The Society of Friends meet every Sunday in Nelson at its place of worship, 30 Nile Street.



Trees

The cottage of John Cotterell, which became the Quaker Meeting House, purchased by Robert Lindsay of Brighthouse (Yorks) for the Society of Friends in 1853

At the time the Meeting House was first established here, the Society applied to the government for funding under a "support for establishment of denominations grants". The Society did not qualify due to its small number of members, but the government did provide prison labour to clear the property. It is recorded that native trees and shrubs were planted although none from this era survive today.

Today an old yew, *Taxus baccata*, stands at the front of the grave. In England, yew trees have been a traditional tree for planting in churchyards and beside graves. The yew provided timber to make bows, crossbows and long bows.