

Living in Hammerton

By *Barrie Woods*

Did you know that Heathcote was originally known as 'Hammerton'? This was the name of the 150 acre property owned by the early pioneer, Isaac Cookson, in the area we now know as Heathcote Valley. Hammerton Lane, as you might have guessed, takes its name from this property.

The Cookson family arrived in Lyttelton aboard the *Dominion* on 28 August 1851, and first lived in London Street. Within a short time they moved to the Christchurch side of the Port Hills, where they named their property "Green Hammerton" after the village of the same name in North Yorkshire, England. Early maps show Green Hammerton encompassing the land at the head of the valley.

Isaac Cookson, together with a Mr S Fisher, were responsible for bringing the first bee hives to Christchurch in January of 1852. The hives were brought down from Nelson on board a ship called the *Mary*. They had one hive each, and presumably Mr Cookson's was kept at Hammerton.

Isaac Cookson became a Justice of the Peace in 1852 and represented Lyttelton on the Canterbury Provincial Council from 1853 to 1861. In 1859 he became the first president of the Canterbury Chamber of Commerce. Cookson also served as a Member of Parliament from 1860 to 1863, firstly representing the Christchurch Country electorate, and then Kaiapoi. As well as having the Hammerton property, Cookson, together with business partner William Bowler, purchased two large runs in North Canterbury, however they only held them for a year.

The Cooksons left New Zealand in 1863 when they received news that their only daughter had fallen ill in Europe. Sadly she died before they could see her and they never returned to New Zealand, nor to Hammerton.

Heathcote Valley is named after Sir William Heathcote, a British landowner and Conservative politician. He became a member and secretary of the Canterbury Association in 1848. Interestingly Sir William Heathcote

never set foot on New Zealand soil, though he did have a prominent role in the early settlement plans for Christchurch.

The name Heathcote was originally given to the Heathcote River (Ōpāwaho) by Captain Joseph Thomas, who was the chief surveyor for the Canterbury

Association. Captain Thomas was responsible for naming many of the features in the Canterbury region (rivers, hills and some proposed towns) and most of the names he chose were attributed to prominent Englishmen of the time, many of whom were members of the Canterbury Association. It seems Heathcote Valley was probably also named at this time (1848), but there was no settlement here as the first permanent settlers had not yet arrived.

For many years, Heathcote was associated with a much larger area as covered by the Heathcote Roads Board and then, later, the Heathcote County Council. This encompassed most of the southern part of modern Christchurch city, from Ferrymead through to Cashmere. Heathcote became a county in 1911, separate from Christchurch City, and was not abolished until the 1989 local government reforms. Older readers may remember the old Heathcote County Council offices at the present site of the South Library in Colombo St.

Isaac Cookson was one of the first and perhaps the largest landholder in Heathcote Valley, and during his tenure there were probably just a few cottages and a hotel. The railway was soon to be built and in 1859, the Provincial Council referred to the requirement for "not more than five acres for a station at Green Hammerton".



Sir William Heathcote

III. Provided that not more than ten acres shall so be taken for a station at Christchurch, and not more than five acres for a station at Green Hammerton: and that the width of the land so taken between Christchurch and Green Hammerton stations shall not exceed twenty-two yards, with such additional width as may be necessary for making the fences, ditches, and slopes of the cuttings and embankments of the railway.

Lyttelton Times, 17 December 1959

Anticipating interest in land in the valley, Cookson offered his estate for sale in 1860. He described it as having "a good mansion house, with well stocked garden and several paddocks; and the inn, situated at the foot of the bridle path, and known as Martin's Cottage". However the property didn't sell.

TO BE SOLD.

GREEN HAMMERTON ESTATE.

THIS well known property is situated in the Heathcote Valley, and comprises 150 acres freehold, and pre-emptive rights adjoining. A good mansion house, with well stocked garden and several paddocks; and the inn, situated at the foot of the bridle path, and known as Martin's Cottage.

Apply to

MR. ISAAC THOMAS COOKSON,
Lyttelton.

March, 1860.

Lyttelton Times, 14 March 1860

The first sod was turned for the railway tunnel (Moorhouse Tunnel) on 13 July 1861, marking the start of big things to come. Cookson came up with a new plan to sell his land and turn a profit from the growing activity in the area. On the 15th of June 1863 in an article in the Lyttelton Times he announced:

NEW TOWNSHIP IN THE HEATHCOTE VALLEY.

H A M M E R T O N .

MESSRS. J. OLLIVIER & SON have been favored with instructions from I. T. Cookson, Esq., to sell by Public Auction, on an early day, all those valuable Sections of LAND, as now laid out, in the Heathcote Valley, and immediately adjoining the site of the Lyttelton and Christchurch Railway Terminus, consisting of Quarter-acre and other allotments, fronting on the Hills Road to Christchurch.

The locality of

HAMMERTON

Lyttelton Times, 9 May 1863

The article advertised the sale of allotments adjoining the site of the new Lyttelton and Christchurch Railway Terminus, forming part of the Green Hammerton Estate of I T Cookson Esq. The first sales were to take place by auction at Birdsey's Valley Hotel at noon on Friday, June 26. The location of the new township was to be south west of the railway line, along Port Hills Road (called Hills Road at the time). The sections were slow to sell, perhaps because there was so much other land available to choose from in the wider district.

There also seems to have been some controversy around Mr Cookson selling a large portion of his land to the government for an undisclosed sum, which was frowned upon as he was a sitting MP at the time. This portion of land is now the domain and playing fields.

In 1874 another 'township' (these days we would call it a subdivision), named St Kilda, was announced for the Heathcote Valley, with frontages to the Railway station.

TOWNSHIP

OF

S T . K I L D A .

MR CHARLES CLARK is instructed by the proprietor, A. L. Smith, Esq., to offer

FOR SALE, BY PRIVATE TREATY,

THE

TOWNSHIP OF ST. KILDA,

Situated in the Heathcote Valley, in blocks of a quarter and half-acre sections.

THE PROPERTY

Fronts on the Heathcote Valley Railway Station, and is bounded on all sides by the Government road.

TERMS OF PAYMENT :

One-fourth cash; remainder by instalments, extending over three years, bearing interest at 8 per cent, purchaser having option to pay off the balance of purchase money at any time.

THIS BLOCK

Comprises the whole of the Land in this desirable neighborhood that is open and suitable for building sites.

Plans can be seen at

MR C. CLARK'S OFFICE.

No 848

3-4 2539

Press, 4 March 1874

These properties will have been along Station Road, Flavell, Marsden and Rollin Streets. The street names were different at the time, with Smith (now Flavell and Rollin) and Vogel (now Marsden) Streets appearing in early advertisements. The sections were offered by Alfred Lee Smith, the proprietor at the time of the Wincolmlee Brick Kilns and the Wincolmlee Malt Kilns in the valley. Quite possibly he had purchased the land from the earlier sale of the Green Hammerton estate. Take note that the interest rates were 8% at the time!

The first store in Heathcote was opened in the new St Kilda township by Mr George Wilson who, when he put it up for sale in 1877, claimed it was the only store "within an area of nearly four miles". It had a corner frontage facing directly onto the railway station.

The store was likely located at what is now 16 Station Rd, and so remained the commercial centre of the township right up until the 2011 earthquakes.

TO STOREKEEPERS AND OTHERS.

TO LET OR FOR SALE,—The ST. KILDA STORE, Heathcote Valley, now in the occupation of Mr George Wilson. These valuable premises, now in a rising district, command nearly the whole trade round, being the only store or place of business within an area of nearly four miles, and consists of shop, sitting-room, bedroom, kitchen, and store-room. The house is a substantial one, being built of brick, constructed with hollow walls, and plastered throughout, with galvanised roof. The outbuildings consist of stabling for one horse, cart-shed, hay-loft, and fowl-houses, with $\frac{1}{2}$ -acre of land attached, and all fenced, and is the only section in the new township of St. Kilda adapted for business purposes, having a square corner frontage on the main streets, and facing direct on the railway station. For further particulars, apply to Messrs SAUNDERS & HENDERSON, Lichfield street; or Messrs J. B. DALE & CO., Cathedral square; or to
5778 Mr GEO. WILSON, on the Premises.

Lyttelton Times, 26 February 1877

So you see, the place we now know as Heathcote, began as two small clusters of houses, Hammerton and St Kilda, each side of the railway. We could easily have been known by either of these names, but for whatever reason the old names didn't stick, so today, thanks to Captain Thomas, way back in 1848, we are simply called 'Heathcote'.

Sources:

Papers Past

Christchurch City Council

Christchurch City Libraries

Archives NZ

The Port Hills of Christchurch, by Gordon Ogilvie