

Ebenezer Tredgett - Edward Turner: Villain or hero?

By Kelvin Turner, great grandson of Edward Turner via Ian Grenfell Turner and Edward's seventh son, H Ray Turner

Capturingcambridge.org has two residential entries that are of interest to the descendants of a man known by two names. Ebenezer Tredgett, born in Bottisham, Cambridgeshire (d.o.b. 25/04/1847) and Edward Turner, who died in the suburb of Mt Albert, Auckland, New Zealand on June 18th 1918. The two residential addresses are 312 Histon Road and a property opposite it, being 297 Histon Road. The entries explain their connection as one built for the man and his family and the other the site firstly of the business Ainger Nurseries and later the home of his first wife Sarah Tredgett and their children. The entry refers to him running away with his shop assistant Maude Constable who worked in the shop located at 31 Market Hill.

The Scandal

Various renditions propagate the story as reported in the British newspaper, the *Cambridge Independent Press*, on two occasions, being the 13th March 1885 and the 27th March 1885. These were followed up by eleven New Zealand newspapers. Cambridge University had connections with Otago University; the story was therefore published first in Dunedin's *Otago Daily Times*. Auckland's morning paper *The New Zealand Herald* followed on the 21st August 1885. Three other newspapers published the story in August and six in September. Elopements were published regularly as the male perpetrator could be dragged back to face the courts.

The articles stated the reason for the elopement as Maude's pregnancy. As with all gossip and innuendo this reason suited Cambridge's townsfolk, fuelling curiosity and sympathy for the perceived innocent victims. It was however incorrect. The pregnancy was actually an opportunity which Ebenezer/Edward took to create a new life for himself. In short, a catalyst.

If the pregnancy was not the motive then what was? I believe the real motivation was not one event. Rather a totality of events and circumstances that started from birth and accumulated over the thirty-eight years he resided in England.

My conclusion has come from research conducted over a five year period. It has revealed a man trapped in a world created by family, church and community wide expectations. A man who took up the responsibilities thrust upon him but in the end could take that which was thrown at him no more. He was neither the villain portrayed in the newspapers nor the hero presented in the New Zealand family and business literature. He was a man.

The main source I've used in this journey has been the British National Library's archival resource of past papers. I have also used various documents and books passed onto me by family members. The life and times of 19th century England

has also framed the environment that led to Ebenezer Tredgett becoming Edward Turner.

The boy

The Tredgett family's origins go back to the 1500s. Several generations lived in Castle Camps and Shudy Camps before that. It was George who moved closer to the city. He and Anne (née Harvey) lived in Bottisham. It was there that Harvey, Ebenezer and their sisters were born. The 1851 and 1861 censuses record the family as living at two separate addresses in the city's surrounds. When Ebenezer was five George had set up a retail nursery located just 2.7 miles (4.3kms) from the town's centre.

Ebenezer/Edward's education would have been limited as compulsory attendance at school was not mandatory until 1880. He would have joined the business about the age of 12 following his brother Harvey. Something propelled him away from the city of his birth. At the age of 14 he left home and headed for adventure. He found himself at London's docks wanting to obtain work on a trade ship. Due to his age the captain required his father's permission. The reply was given in a rather curt manner. Four years later he returned a much different person. It was supposed to be a visit as he intended to return to the sea to working the North Sea trade routes.

The Family man

Now eighteen years old the boy was replaced by a man. It is possible an intervention directed his father George to offer him two glass houses to encourage him to stay and make something of himself. He also found himself marrying a young woman one year his senior. One whom he knew in his early teens as they lived a few doors apart in the same street. Another year past and the husband became a father for the first time. A second and third child cemented the responsibilities of a family man. As the family increased so also did the pressures. By 1884 the family included husband, wife and 12 children. It also had household servants under its roof.

The businessman

Being the second son he would have been expected to work in the family firm but not necessarily as his brother's equal. A rather significant event occurred in 1869. Harvey (the older brother) left the family firm. An advert informed Cambridge folk he had left Ainger Nursery and moved his employ to another business. He must have put savings into it. His absence required Ebenezer to take on a greater share of the work and responsibility. He became an employer as apprentices were taken on. His father gave him management of the seed department. Weekly adverts appeared in the newspapers. These advised the folk of Cambridge that many fruit and flowering plants were available for sale in very good condition. These adverts continued on for many years.

A mere one year later Ebenezer faces another setback. More responsibility was added. Harvey went into bankruptcy. This required a meeting with a lawyer in London resulting in an advert placed in the London Gazette. It informed creditors to declare their monetary interests towards the person known as Harvey Tredgett.

For centuries bankruptcy was a very bad thing. It meant humiliation of the family, the permission for creditors to take household items from the person's home and possibly the wife and children put into workhouses, as well as the "criminal" being put in gaol. Harvey had one thing in his favour. The same year he left the business, the British government amended the bankruptcy act. Imprisonment was off the cards. Creditors could still demand payment but at lesser rates. Harvey's situation meant he could not take any role in the ownership or formal management of the business.

Along with all the previous roles mentioned Ebenezer now found himself the successor to a business his older brother was expected to have a share in. He was required to find more ways of generating income for not only his immediate family but also that of his brother's and his parents'. Church fairs, funerals and weddings generated business. He entered floral arrangements into country horticultural competitions gaining wins several times. He became a judge of the same competitions he had been an entrant in. The connections created a wider customer base which was good for the business.

A new venture

The businessman was also an entrepreneur. A risk taker. Ebenezer saw an opportunity to yet again create more exposure and greater custom for the family business. A lease became vacant right next to the city centre where for centuries the townsfolk came together to trade their wares. The two businesses worked together. The adverts mentioned both, thus branding them as one.

Consider this; by 1885 Ebenezer may have be responsible (directly or indirectly) for up to thirty individuals. This would have included immediate family, extended family, household servants, nursery employees and shop assistants.

The catalyst

In 1884 the shop assistant position became vacant for the second time in three years. Maude Mary Constable applied for it and was appointed. One year later Maude informed Ebenezer she was "with child" and roughly two or three months pregnant. On March the 11th (a Wednesday) the couple left town.