

Extract from:

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David Sclanders of Sclanders and Company was another merchant of enterprise, interested in shipping, as was Francis Otterson, the owner of Nelson's first bonded store. The latter's career was closed by an early death. Other wholesale merchants in 1842 were G. W. Schroder, A. Perry, R. Howroyd, C. Empson, and F. G. Moore, joined in 1843 by S. Strong. Although a number of businessmen from other settlements visited Nelson, not many ventured to open branches there. Two Auckland firms took this step – Brown and Thompson and Joseph and Nathan. The latter firm did much to lower prices, but in 1843, in view of the state of the market, it sold out its retail business in the town.²⁶

Trade was fitful, even at the best of times, with dull periods interspersed with the excitement following the arrival of a cargo from England or Australia or even Boston. Sometimes one merchant bought a whole ship's cargo before it was unloaded. There was little specialisation, storekeepers taking anything saleable they could get, so that boats, clocks, snuff-boxes and cheroots, hams and candles, furniture and liquor and hardware jostled one another in glorious confusion. Patronage was solicited with a deference far removed from modern advertising. Lists of wares were 'respectfully' announced for sale, while a tailor, returning 'grateful acknowledgments for the liberal encouragement' received, hoped 'by industry and attention to merit continued patronage and support'.²⁷

One branch of commerce thrived throughout all the vicissitudes of the colony - the liquor trade. Nevertheless, it was forced to begin operations at Nelson without the sanction of law, owing to the tardiness with which publicans' licences were issued. Grog was sold from the days of the preliminary expedition. With the arrival of the settlers the demand grew for the proper licensing of the trade and the establishment of hotels where men could gather without offending against the law. The case of William Murray brought matters to a head. After applying in vain for a licence, he sold liquor without one. Moreover, he established a house of public entertainment where patrons could enjoy not only the glass that cheered, but also dancing to the fiddle. Early in April he was called before the magistrate, H. A. Thompson, and the Justices of Peace, Tod and England, who fined him £30 for his illegal activities. Messrs Poynter and Young, believing that the Government was at fault in not issuing licences for Nelson, immediately called a public meeting to protest at the manner in which the evidence had been secured and at the severity of the penalty.²⁸ The outcry continued until on 20 April Thompson, with Captains Wakefield and England, constituting the bench, issued eight licences to the following - R. Mills, J. Hoare, W. Miller, J. Collins, J. Cockburn, E. J. Ellerm, W. Wright, and jointly to F. A. Lloyd and A. Turner.²⁹ Some of these men were already proprietors, who hastened to build more suitable premises. Miller's Tavern had been a popular meeting place before this. At the port, Joseph Hoare kept the Wakefield Arms. He was the first man to drive a gig in the town, his Maori wife often accompanying him stylishly dressed in the best European manner. He prospered so well that by the end of 1843 he was able to retire 'with enough to make his body comfortable, at least as much so as money got in that way can', as the abstemious Mr Hill remarked.³⁰ William Wright of the tideway grog shop opened 'that commodious new house', the Nelson Hotel, at the junction of Haven Road and Bridge Street in June 1842, with wines of the first quality and 'Well aired Beds'.³¹ Further along Bridge Street was the Freemasons' Tavern, kept by Lloyd and Turner. These two dissolved partnership in June 1842, Lloyd remaining at the Freemasons, while Turner soon afterwards set up the Surveyors' Arms, at Motueka. Also in Bridge Street were the Commercial Hotel with billiard room, kept first by T. K. Warburton, and then by J. Cockburn, and the Lord Collingwood Inn, which was, according to its proprietor, E. J. Ellerm, 'the only respectable public house in the best thoroughfare in Nelson'.³² Mills kept the Auckland Hotel, and Collins the Ship Inn. In April 1843 six additional licences were granted, the settlement then being blessed with 14 hostleries, of which only one, at Motueka, was out of town. New hotels of 1843 included the Sutherland Arms (A. McKay), the Carpenters' Arms (C. Harley), the Shamrock Inn (T. K. Warburton), the New Zealand Tavern (Bright and White), the Caledonian Inn (W. Murray), and the

Gardeners' Arms (W. Johnson).³³ Some of these establishments were mere drinking shops: others provided good accommodation and meals. At their best they provided a much needed social centre, being for some time the only place where working men could gather in warmth and comfort to forget the primitive conditions under which so many lived and worked. Some proprietors organised lively and even lavish entertainment. The Carpenters' Arms in Collingwood Street was the scene of a ball, complete with the Nelson Band, in March 1843; while the irrepresible Mr Murray built a Shakespeare Saloon at his Caledonian Inn, where the first essays at drama in Nelson took place. In May 1843 'the celebrated comic singer', Mr Mackean, visited Nelson, giving two performances at the Saloon, which was fitted with 'appropriate Scenery'. The first, on 1 May, was a 'grand concert of Vocal and Instrumental Music', mainly comic songs and recitations, with the dialogue from *Venice Preserved* set among such items as 'The Death of Nelson', 'The Fall of Adam (by desire)', and 'The Cove What Spouts'. During the evening, the Nelson Band, whose appearances were frequently reported, without any references to its leader or members, played marches and overtures. On 15 May Mackean, assisted by Mr Medhurst and other gentlemen, presented a programme of very different class with the Tent scene from Shakespeare's *Richard III*. The saloon was filled 10 minutes after the doors opened, and many were turned away. The *Examiner* preserves a discreet silence about both the name and the role of the actress who so delighted an overflowing audience.³⁴ Thus the theatre made its gay debut in the Monday evening concerts at the Caledonian kept by a stage-struck publican.

²⁶ Hill, Diary, 1 March 1844; *Examiner*, 3 June 1843, p. 257.

²⁷ *Examiner*, 17 September 1842, p. 109.

²⁸ *ibid.*, 9 April 1842, pp. 17-19.

²⁹ *ibid.*, 23 April 1842, p. 26. The licences were granted under the Licensing Ordinance, 10 February 1842.

³⁰ Hill, Diary, 14 December 1843.

³¹ *Examiner*, 11 June 1842, p. 53.

³² *ibid.*, 3 June 1843, p. 257.

³³ *ibid.*, 22 April 1843, p. 235.

³⁴ *ibid.*, 29 April, 13 May, 20 May, 10 June 1843, pp. 237,245,250,262. The lady appeared on 5 June.