

**ROBERT GILMER 1843 TO 1932**

Robert was born at Broomfield in 1843 the fourth son of Hugh Gilmer and Margaret Dorothea Hamilton. We are not aware of when he migrated to New Zealand although there were unclaimed letters to him on the Otago Goldfields in 1863.<sup>1</sup> The earliest other reference to him is at Ahaura in 1870.

Robert moved around working in a number of Gilmer Brothers hotels. He was at Ahaura in 1870, Charleston in 1873 and from June to September 1877 at Dawson's Reef ton after which he went to Greymouth. Robert went to Nelson with the purchase by Gilmer Brothers of the lease of the Masonic Hotel in May 1878. The lease documentation showed he was at Wellington prior to this at the Duke of Edinburgh with Sam. The hotel had been acquired by Gilmer Brothers in March of that year.

Robert married Eleanor Esther Carter from England on Easter Saturday, 31 March 1888. He was 45 years of age and she was 29. The wedding took place at Christ Church Nelson which is now Nelson Cathedral. The Venerable Archdeacon John Pratt Kempthorne was the celebrant.

There were no family or friends at the wedding and the witness was the celebrant's wife Anna Louise Kempthorne. Esther was pregnant with their son Hugh Carter who was born before the end of the year on 23 September 1888 at Trafalgar St.

The marriage record shows Robert's age as 39 years and it appears that this was changed from a more likely age of 45 years to reduce the difference in their ages. (His death certificate shows 47 But this looks to be too old). Esther's occupation is shown as "Assistant Servant Hotel."

1888. Marriages in the District of Nelson [N. 802-177.]

Names and Surnames of the Parties.	Age.	Rank or Profession.	Condition of Parties. 1. Bachelor or Spinster (or as case may be). If Widower or Widow— 2. Date of Decree of Divorcement? Wife or Maiden?	Birthplace.	Residence. 1. Present. 2. Usual.	PARENTS.	
						Father's Name and Surname (1), and his Rank or Profession (2).	Mother's Name (1), and Maiden Surname (2).
<u>Robert Gilmer</u>	<u>39</u>	<u>Hotel Keeper</u>	1. Bachelor 2.	<u>Castleknock Ireland</u>	1. <u>Nelson</u> 2. <u>Nelson</u>	1. <u>Hugh Gilmer</u> 2. <u>Farmer</u>	1. <u>Smithy Nelson</u> 2. <u>Hamilton</u>
<u>Eleanor Esther Carter</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>Assistant Servant Hotel</u>	1. Spinster 2.	<u>England</u>	1. <u>Nelson</u> 2. <u>Nelson</u>	1. <u>Carter</u> 2. <u>Relieving Officer</u>	1. <u>Anna Carter</u> 2. <u>Woods</u>

I deliver to me of the Certificate required by "The Marriage Act, 1880," by J. P. Kempthorne Officiating Minister [~~or Registrar~~].

Witnessed between us, Robert Gilmer }  
Eleanor Esther Carter }  
 In the presence of us, John Pratt Kempthorne }  
Anna Louise Kempthorne }  
John Pratt Kempthorne }  
 a true copy of the entry in the Register-Book of Marriages kept by me, J. P. Kempthorne Officiating Minister [~~or Registrar~~].

**Robert and Esther Marriage Certificate**

However, on Hugh's birth certificate Robert's age is shown as 41 years and Esther's age as 29 years the same as on the Marriage Certificate

<sup>1</sup> Otago Daily Times 3 December 1863.

BIRTHS IN THE		DISTRICT OF					
No.	CHILD.			PARENTS.		INFORMANT.	
	When and where Born.	Name of Child, and whether present or not.	Sex.	FATHER. 1. Name and Surname. 2. Rank or Profession. 3. Age. 4. Birth-place.	When and where Married.	MOTHER. 1. Name and Maiden Surname. 2. Age. 3. Birth-place.	1. Signature. 2. Description. 3. Residence. 4. If entry a correction of a former entry, Signature of Witnesses attesting the same.
	1888	Hugh	M.	Robert Gilmer	31 <sup>st</sup> March 1858	Esther Eliza Gilmer	R. Gilmer
	23 <sup>rd</sup> September	Carter		Hotel Keeper	Nelson	Family Carter	Father
359	Trafalgar			41	New Zealand	29	Nelson
	Abroad -	Not present -		Castleblaney		London	
	Nelson			Ireland		England	

### Birth Certificate Hugh Carter Gilmer

A reason suggested for family not being present at the wedding was the weather that had stopped the steamers from operating across the strait from Wellington. This would have prevented both Hamilton and Sam Gilmer and their families from attending. It may also account for John's non attendance as he was at Westport and travel by ship would have been the most appropriate means of transport.<sup>2</sup>

Robert and Esther lived in Nelson with Robert managing the Masonic Hotel. They had a second child but Esther died giving birth, as did the child. This was on 12 January 1892. Esther is buried in Wakapuaka Cemetery in Nelson. The Headstone shows she was born at Chester England. This conflicts with her birth location shown on Hugh's birth certificate which shows Esther as being born in London, England. Robert signed the Birth Certificate.



Esther & Child Dead 1892

<sup>2</sup> John Hewstone Nelson



**Robert & Hugh 1894**

Robert stayed at the Masonic Hotel until 1902 after which he bought the freehold of the Globe Hotel at Haven Road and St Vincent Street. He had the license for about six months. He also sold the freehold in April 1903 to J. A. Harley after being there about 12 months. He was 60 years of age and had other retirement activities to pursue.

### **Scenery Preservation Society/ Croixelles**

Robert was a member of the Nelson Scenery Preservation Society. This society was first mooted in the columns of the Nelson Evening Mail in May 1894 referring to the good work of such organizations in other places<sup>3</sup>. A meeting of those interested in forming such a society was called for 21 August 1894 by the Mayor Francis Trask.

The society was formed at the meeting with solicitor C. Fell as president. The objects were stated as:

1. To endeavour to preserve beautiful scenery and historical sites whether on public or private property.
2. To prevent the unnecessary destruction of bush especially along the banks of rivers and steep places.
3. To encourage tree planting and the general beautifying of public reserves.

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<sup>3</sup> Nelson evening Mail 16 May 1894

4. To publish guide books, pamphlets etc and by means of photographs and otherwise to make known the beauties of the district.
5. And, generally, to endeavour to make travelling easier and pleasanter.<sup>4</sup>

The society set about its work producing and distributing a guide book, seeking and obtaining the establishment of reserves, drawing attention to the destruction caused by bush fires and the carelessness that caused them to occur. Tree planting and council plantings were also issues.<sup>5</sup>

The summer of 1897 was very dry with many bush fires causing destruction, especially in the Rai Valley. The committee, while conscious of the needs of sawmillers and for settlement, agreed to seek the reservation of areas "*for the recreation and pleasure of people and the preservation of fauna and flora.*" Robert Gilmer was present at the meeting and he was appointed to a committee to "*obtain signatures to a petition and to communicate with their friends in Marlborough and secure their influence to get a considerable area reserved.*" The committee included the well known Nelson names of Baigent, Curtis, Maginnity, C. Harley and Tyree.<sup>6</sup>

Robert had more than a passing interest in the spectacular scenery of the Rai and Ronga Valleys to the east of Nelson. While we believe he had a genuine interest in the environment and conservation of the area, he also had shown over a period of time an interest in the prospect that it might contain minerals which would have commercial value.

We believe it was in this context that Robert applied for the lease of land at section 19, Square 91 Croixelles on 29 March, 1899. The issue was heard in the Native Land Court and adjourned for a month to clarify title details. There were no further reports and he appears to have been unsuccessful.<sup>7</sup> Shortly after this there was a report that Chrome had been found at the Croixelles:

**As a result of the recent discovery of chrome at the Croixelles, a mineral lease over the ground has been applied for by a party of Nelson residents. Three men who have been employed to thoroughly prospect the ground have proceeded to the Croixelles, and doubtless some information of a definite nature as to the value of the discovery will be available in the course of a few weeks. Some samples of the ore, which were recently brought to town, are pronounced to be excellent specimens. The contract for getting out the chrome has been let, and the stuff will be sent down hill to the waterside in bags. It will be readily taken by vessels at ballast, and at current rates it is expected that the sale of the chrome should prove remunerative.**

Nelson Evening Mail 1 May 1899

<sup>4</sup> Nelson Evening Mail 22 August 1894

<sup>5</sup> Colonist 30 April 1895

<sup>6</sup> Colonist 23 February 1898

<sup>7</sup> Colonist 30 March 1899

Had Robert heard about this find and attempted to obtain a neighbouring lease? His history of speculating in such matters would indicate there was a high probability this was the case. The chrome mining venture developed and significant quantities of ore were taken from the mine. As we have observed on the West Coast, the newspapers tended to “talk up” the success of the find and the significance of the operation for the area.

Against this background, Robert purchased Section 21, Block X, Whangamoia, on 20 July 1900.<sup>8</sup> This was land of just short of 100 acres which we believe he farmed. On 4 December 1902, Rout & Son at the Richmond Park Showgrounds auctioned “140 prime fat sheep on account of Mr. R Gilmer.” His place at Croixelles is the only place we have identified that these sheep might have been from.

This conclusion is supported by another newspaper article some 16 months later. This described a trip by horseback from the Rai Valley through the Ronga Valley “*over the saddle and through magnificent bush and scenery.*”

*“While on our way through the bush what was our surprise to behold striding towards us one we supposed to be far away in the city? It was Mr. Robert Gilmer, an inveterate and indefatigable pedestrian, lightly clad, coatless and thoroughly well equipped for a long walk. He was greatly pleased to see us and with his usual kindness and hospitality invited us to his place where we received every attention from Mr. Ross.*

*At the Croixelles we were shown around by Mr. Ross, Manager for Mr. Robert Gilmer who has in this property a very fine possession. The bush in parts grows right down to the water’s edge while there are numerous little bays with good landing beaches.”<sup>9</sup>*

This article indicates that the property was being managed and as such likely to be a commercial farming venture. It also shows that Robert was an outdoor person who appreciated the environment in which his property was located. The overlay of a chrome mining activity in close proximity to his farm also indicates that some of the motivation for being there was to prospect for minerals and especially chrome.

The chrome mining activity developed throughout 1900:

**We learn that Messrs James Morrison & Co., of London, have purchased a substantial interest in the chrome mine at the Croixelles owned by Messrs B. Jackson, Fell, Tatton and others. A portion of the purchase money will be devoted to the construction of an aerial tramway, which will be 1½ miles in length. A further contract to excavate 150 tons of chrome has been let, and altogether the prospects of the venture are very favourable.**

**Nelson Evening Mail 8 January 1900**

<sup>8</sup> Nelson Nominal Book 1 Page 468 LINZ Christchurch

<sup>9</sup> Nelson Evening Mail 4 February 1904

Of Interest is that the Chairman of the Scenery Preservation Society solicitor Mr. C Fell was one of the owners of the chrome mine.

By mid 1901 it was reported that about 300 tons of ore had been shipped out to *England* and everyone was optimistic. However, a few months later it was reported that "*the chrome in the present working has run out but the men are working on a new strong lead.*"<sup>10</sup> There was a lack of news on developments from that time on and later no news at all indicating that the venture had finished operations. The last newspaper report was in March 1902.

Robert sold his land at Section 21 Block X Whangamoia to T.A.H. Field. The sale was reported on 24 August 1904<sup>11</sup>. Perhaps this adds weight to the view that prospecting for chrome and other minerals was the major objective for owning the property.

### Robert's Residence Haven Road

We have identified that Robert leased a property in Haven Road from 11 February 1901 and we presume that he lived there. The property was owned by Robert Barnes who died in 1904. The house and land along with another four adjoining allotments were advertised for sale in October 1904.

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**PRELIMINARY**  
**SATURDAY, 29th, 12 noon.**  
**At the Exchange Land Salerooms.**

**City Properties.**

**M**ESSRS BISLEY BROS. & CO. are favored with instructions from the Executors in the estate of Robert Barnes, deceased, to sell by public auction, at their Land Salerooms—

**6 LOTS CITY PROPERTY.**

**Lot 1,** Those premises situated Hardy street, occupied by Mr A. W. Stalford, with and 20 feet 6 inches frontage and 90 feet deep.

**Lots 2, 3, 4,** comprise 3 sections situated on the Port Road, near the Saltwater Bridge, and adjoining the residence of Mr R. Gilmer.

**Lot 5.** The property occupied by Mr R. Gilmer. Haven Road, with Residence thereon.

**Lot 6** The property adjoining Mr R. Gilmer, with the Dwelling thereon.

**Every Lot for Absolute Sale.**

Further particulars, later on, may be obtained from Messrs Pitt & Moore, solicitors; or

**BISLEY BROS. & CO.,**  
**3075 Property Auctioneers,**

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Nelson Evening Mail 7 October 1904

<sup>10</sup> Nelson Evening Mail 30 July 1901

<sup>11</sup> Nelson Evening Mail 24 August 1904

The property occupied by Robert was Part of Section 68 containing two Roods and 19 1/2 Perches or a little over a half an acre. It had a frontage of 78 feet 8 inches to Haven Road and a depth of 330 feet to Stanley Crescent. There was a house on the property and the sale was subject to his 10 year lease from 1901. The annual rent was 31 Pounds 4 Shillings. Robert was also identified as living at Haven Road Nelson for 1908 to 1910.<sup>12</sup>

While Robert was over 60 years old we should keep in mind that his son Hugh was born in 1888 and in 1901 was still only 13 years old and still at school in Nelson. He needed a stable home environment for at least a few more years.

### **Prospecting activities?**

From 1908 Robert had a continuing interest in remote areas near Kaiteriteri. He made a number of applications for Renewable Leases to the Nelson Land Board. These indicated that he already owned some of these leases:

- 14 August 1908 Block vi Kaiteriteri. 450 acres<sup>13</sup>
- 13 August 1909 Blocks iii and iv Kaiteriteri 550 acres. Robert's application for renewal was adjourned for information on improvements. Lease already held by the applicant.<sup>14</sup>
- 15 October 1909 S4 Block vi Kaiteriteri 171 acres 1 rood 24 perches. Robert had a renewable lease and his application was adjourned until the next meeting for information on improvements.<sup>15</sup> There were no further reports.
- 25 February 1911 Renewable Lease Section 7 Block vi Kaiteriteri 502 acres.<sup>16</sup>

This country today is all National Park and mostly covered by native forest. A lot of it is stunted manuka and the land is poor. It is only accessible by sea. It seems clear that Robert's interest was in the minerals that might have existed there.

### **Robert after Nelson**

Robert's movements after leaving Nelson have been hard to trace. His name was last shown in the Post Office Directory in Nelson in 1910 and an entry appeared in Auckland at Gladstone Rd Mt Albert in 1914. However, the entry was there only three years. There are no other entries until ten years later 1927 when he was shown at 2 Albion Rd Parnell. This address was also shown on the 1928 Electoral Roll.

Robert died in Auckland on 3 February 1932 at the age of 89 years. His address at the time was 2 Albion St Parnell Auckland. The cause of death is shown as "Jaundice- probably a Gallstone, Bilary Obstruction."<sup>17</sup>

Robert is buried at Hillsborough Cemetery in a grave without a headstone but marked with a simple plaque placed there by Juann Ryan a descendant of Robert's brother Henry.

<sup>12</sup> Wise's Post Office Directory

<sup>13</sup> Nelson Evening Mail 14 August 1908

<sup>14</sup> Nelson Evening Mail 13 August 1909

<sup>15</sup> Nelson Evening Mail 15 October 1909

<sup>16</sup> Nelson Nominal Book 1 Page 468 LINZ Christchurch.

<sup>17</sup> Death Certificate Ref. 1932/001517



Robert's Grave with plaque Hillsborough Cemetery

Robert's Will

Robert's Will was simple. The Stamp Duties Office certified that the net amount on which Probate was payable was Nil so he did not leave an estate of any significant value. The Will itself was one page in total contrast to the multiple pages of his elder brothers Hamilton and Samuel. His only son Hugh was appointed sole executor and he was also the sole beneficiary of Robert's estate.

THIS IS THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT of me . . .  
ROBERT GILMER of Auckland in the Dominion of New . . .  
 Zealand Gentleman

1. I REVOKE all former wills and testamentary . . . .  
 dispositions made by me

2. I APPOINT my son HUGH GILMER of Auckland . . . .  
 Gentleman sole executor of this my Will.

3. I GIVE DEVISE AND BEQUEATH all my property . . . .  
 whatsoever and wheresoever situated or over which I . . .  
 may have a power of appointment to my said son Hugh . . .  
 Gilmer for his sole use and benefit. . . .

IN WITNESS WHEREOF I have hereunto subscribed my  
 name this fourteenth day of May  
 One thousand nine hundred and thirty-one.

S I G N E D by the Testator the  
 said ROBERT GILMER as and for  
 his last will and testament in  
 the presence of us both being  
 present at the same time who  
 thereupon at his request in his  
 sight and presence and in the  
 sight and presence of each . . .  
 other have hereunto subscribed  
 our names as attesting witnesses:

*James G. Gilmer*  
*James G. Gilmer*  
 Auckland

*John G. Gilmer*  
 Auckland

*John G. Gilmer*  
 Auckland

*John G. Gilmer*  
 Auckland

Robert's Will



**Hugh Carter Gilmer 1888-??**

Hugh attended school in Nelson at Nelson Boys College. His address was shown in a 1925 Old Boys list as 26 Lancing Rd Balmoral Auckland.<sup>18</sup>

Little is known of Hugh's life. He is believed to have farmed near Auckland. However, we have found no record of him on Post Office directories. There are entries for a Hugh Gilmer as a Cheese Factory Manager in the Waikato region firstly at Makatoki from 1920 and later in 1927 at Hikutaia. However, there are no entries after 1928. Hugh would have been 32 in 1920 and old enough to have such a role. However we cannot be sure that this was him and we lean towards this because we are aware of the identities of the other Hugh Gilmer's shown.

The Gilmer family story is that Hugh made a trip to China where he vanished and nothing more was heard of him

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<sup>18</sup> John Hewstone Nelson