



BUSINESS SERIES 3a

# Importers, merchants & warehousemen

Long before the advent of the Warehouse or Mega Stores, the public were not involved in direct buying but purchased all their goods through retailers who had largely obtained their stock from ‘middle men’ — either importers importing direct to retail customers, or merchants and warehousemen importing directly from their overseas suppliers and making their stock available to retailers from the samples and displays in their own stores. Merchants and warehousemen were considered ‘wholesalers’ and the public were excluded from their premises, but with the passage of time, friends and family of staff members would be allowed to buy items at prices slightly in excess of wholesale prices, but cheaper than retail.

Dunedin had several large warehousing companies such as Bing Harris & Company, Sargood, Son & Ewen, and Ross & Glendining as well as a host of smaller companies known as merchants. It was common for merchants to have a range of items which they purchased from their agents and suppliers overseas. Quite often merchants would be agents for one brand of Scotch whisky, gin or brandy, rather than the present-day practice of liquor merchants selling a whole range of spirits, etc. The importers, merchants and warehousemen would ‘indent’ their orders from overseas, pay the local charges, customs duties and the like, plus a reasonable ‘mark up’ for profit, and send their travellers around Dunedin and Otago selling their range of stock.

After World War 2, aggressive countries like Japan moved to eliminate the ‘middle man’ and deal directly with the end buyer of the commodity. With the concept of ‘just in time’ delivery through the regularity of shipping and airfreight, there was no longer a need to have a large warehouse full of wholesale stock. With the ease of so-called ‘overnight’ transport it meant that an importer or wholesaler might need only the one storage facility in New Zealand rather than a branch facility in every main centre. Prior to World War 2 most of the imported goods came from the United Kingdom

and, with up to a three-month transit time from the UK factory to Dunedin, it meant that importers needed to have sufficient stock of a commodity to last several months.

The Hocken Collections hold the records of a number of important companies which were engaged as Importers, Merchants, and Warehousemen.

## IMPORTERS

The Hocken Collections has an extensive archive of the records of **F. Meredith & Co. Ltd**, Indentors, Manufacturers and Factory Representatives, and amongst the 7 metres of files are correspondence files, journals, ledgers, shippers invoices, drafts and credit books and a minute book from 1931–1952. The papers also include a glimpse of Import Licensing in the 1940s and 50s. F. Meredith had commenced trading in the 1920s as an Indent Agent and in 1931 formed a limited liability company. The founder died in 1940 and the company was purchased by W. Gregg Ltd in 1984. For much of its history, F. Meredith was managed by Frank Clifford Keene, a very astute trader, who specialised in the importation of many foodstuffs from literally all over the world, supplying them to New Zealand manufacturers or merchants. The extensive range of products included cashew kernels (Tanzania), cinnamon chips (Sri Lanka), ginger & coriander seed (Cochin), canned salmon, sardines and shrimps (Canada), nutmegs, tapioca, canned pineapple (Singapore), cumin seed, turmeric (India), canary seed, sunflower seed, millet seed, rice and zinc ingots (Australia), canvas shoes (England), desiccated coconut (Philippines), coconuts (Tonga), white pepper, sago (Sarawak), pimento (Jamaica), sage, thyme (Cyprus) camphor (Hong Kong) and peanuts (Fiji).

A number of records are also held of **J. Scott & Co. Ltd** which was established by carver John Scott in 1900. He was later joined by his son George and from 1946 to 1986 by his son Stuart Campbell Scott. The firm specialised in importing

hardwoods and exotic timbers from many parts of the world. For a time after World War 2 it was also importing plaster board, photographic equipment from Japan and corrugated iron from England. It had a subsidiary company, Jarrah Hardwoods Ltd, and was also New Zealand agent for Millars' Timber & Trading Company, a London company based in Western Australia which imported most of the railway sleepers brought into New Zealand. The company also established the first panelwood factory in New Zealand. J. Scott & Company was sold to the Paynter Corporation in 1986 but when Paynter failed, a great grandson of the founder in Auckland revived and expanded the J. Scott & Company importing business. It was later taken over by PSP Building Brands and the final Scott family holding in the company was sold to PSP in 2006. The archive held by the Hocken contains some accounting books of the company but deals more with the activities of J. Scott & Company than the company itself, and mainly comprises records of the 1960s, involving contracts with overseas suppliers in Australia, West Coast of North America, Singapore, Malaysia, and Japan, importing teak, sapele, mahogany, Douglas fir, cedar, spruce, rosewood, Balau, Jeletong, seraya logs, billion posts and other hardwoods including Australian jarrah, karri, blackbutt, wandoo, ironbark and tallow wood. They also include records of timber industry associations such as N.Z. and Otago Timber Merchants Federations, N.Z. Plywood Distribution Association and the N.Z. Timber Importers Association. There are some company records of Millars Timber & Trading Company (Overseas) Ltd in the period 1926–1959. There is also a copy of S.C. Scott's paper *Imported Timbers of New Zealand*. Prior to the advent of telex or email communication many companies used standard business codes to reduce communication costs with overseas transactions, and the Scott archive includes a number of these specialist code books, as well as ready reckoners with tables determining timber scales of measurement.

The Hocken Collections also has a small archive, comprising accounting books 1928–1940 for **D. Forrester & Company**, of 161 Stuart Street, Dunedin, which imported sewing machines.

### MERCHANTS

London hardware merchant Briscoe established a branch in Dunedin in 1862 and subsequently built a large warehouse on the corner of Princes and Jetty Streets. The premises later moved to 74–78 Crawford Street and then in the 1960s to 144 Great King Street. The Dunedin founder was Hugh McNeil who became a prominent businessman in the city and was a director of a

number of companies, including the Union Steam Ship Company from 1875–85. In 1880 he assumed overall management of Briscoe's Australian and New Zealand branches. The company traded as **Briscoe & Co. Ltd** until 1961 when it became Briscoes Limited. The parent company re-trenched in the 1960s and was sold in 1973, emerging under New Zealand ownership in 1990 with 12 outlets throughout the country, trading under the name of Briscoes, but now solely selling retail homeware. The records of the company held by the Hocken Collections include accounting records between 1902 and the late 1960s, wage and salary records between 1893–58, order books 1912–20, stock ledgers 1865–32, 1932–35, 1938–41, 1957, 1959, 1960–63, journals 1954–68. There are private code books used for placing orders with Head Office in London and details of the staff superannuation scheme. What is of interest are annual accounts from a number of other companies which presumably were lodged with Briscoes to establish their creditworthiness. They include financial records of the **N.Z. Hardware Company Ltd** 1904–12, **John McGregor & Co.** 1908–18, **Love Bros**, Port Chalmers 1917 receivership, **North Otago Farmers Co-op**, 1908, 1912, **Mason Struthers & Co.** 1907, 1910, 1915, **Ashly Bergh & Co.** 1910–11, **Canterbury Farmers Co-op** 1908, 1914, 1917, **Southland Farmers Co-op** 1917, **Paterson & Barr** (brief history and list of shareholders 1911), **Schlaadt Ltd** 1912–15, and **Laidlaw & Gray Ltd** 1911.

James T. Mackerras had set up as a merchant in Dunedin in 1862 and was joined in partnership by James Hazlett in 1878. In June 1904 the firm became **Mackerras & Hazlett Ltd** It specialised in wine and spirits, foodstuffs and general merchandise serving stores throughout Otago and Southland. An Invercargill branch was formed in 1915. The records held by the Hocken include extensive correspondence files 1904–1960, ledgers 1865–1868, 1899–1908, 1913–19, 1934–53, balance sheets 1924–1949, stock summaries 1922–52, register of deeds 1881–1912, 1939–1974, Income tax papers 1919–1949, N.Z. Govt Import Control regulations 1939–1960, N.Z. Wholesale Merchants Federation 1930–54, tea market reports 1939–61, sundry price lists and minutes of the directors' and general meetings 1904–63. There is also a box of photographs including staff, members of the Hazlett family, and caricatures of Dunedin businessmen. The business was sold to Wilson Neill Ltd through a share exchange effective from 1 November 1968. Sarah-Jane Anne Piesse, for her BA (Hons) dissertation in 1979 wrote a useful history of the firm under the title of 'Mackerras & Hazlett Ltd — Merchants and Importers'.

Merchant firm **Milne Bremner Ltd** was in business at 23 Vogel Street from 1914 until the company closed in 1965 when it was sold to F. Meenan & Co. Ltd. The company specialised in hotel supplies, wine and spirits and wholesale grocery items. It also supplied mortgage funding to some of its customers and in later years it owned the Raes Junction, Waitaki and Duntroon hotels. It may have been one of the first companies in Dunedin to appoint women directors, as in 1918 Diana Bremner and Barbara Milne (wives of the managing directors) were appointed directors and in 1919 the company minutes 'thanked the ladies on the board for the interest they have taken in the work of the company'. There were only Milne family members from 1920, but there were women directors on the board right to the end of the company. The Hocken holds minute books 1914–29 and 1946–56.

The Hocken holds a modest archive comprising ledgers 1884–1891, 1912–40, journal 1908–58 and invoice book 1884–1891 for **McPherson, Kemp & Co. Ltd**, merchants on the corner of Jetty & Crawford Streets. It became a limited liability company in 1912 and was taken over by J. Rattray & Son Ltd in 1978. Although a wholesale merchant supplying hotels and shops, it specialised in later years in importing confectionery and, when the company was sold, the former manager, Ron Alexander, opened the first specialist sweet shop in Dunedin on 14 December 1978 under the name of Edinburgh Confectionery in George Street.

**Wm Taylor & Son Ltd** was established by William Taylor and his family in 1906 and the library holds a number of accounting records including ledgers 1927–40, 1952–66, journal 1929–67 and sundry

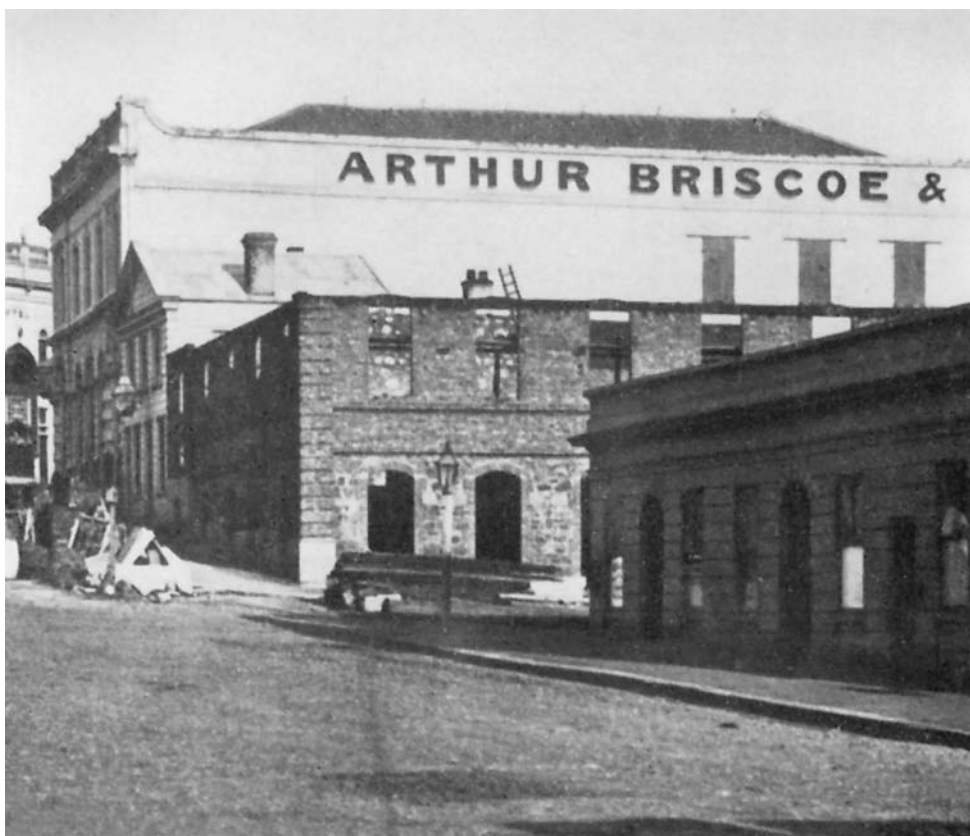


*The headquarters of Mackerras and Hazlett at 43–47 Crawford Street, Dunedin; adjoining Coulls Somerville at 35–41. [Hocken Archives]*

other papers and correspondence 1926–29 and 1941–68. The minute book from the first meeting on 25 October 1906 goes right through until the sale of the business to Wilson Neill Ltd effective from 4 September 1967. William Taylor died on 30 June 1924 and T.J. & J. Hussey took over the business, but in 1939 control passed to T.G. Cole who remained the principal until the sale in 1967.

Although the firm of **J. Rattray & Son Limited** was one of the larger merchant companies in Dunedin the Hocken Collections holds little of its records, apart from share transfers, investment shares in other companies, sundry securities and lease agreements. Most of the company records were lost when it shifted from its long-time site in Crawford Street. A three-page history of the business was written by W.D. Anderson in 1955 and two years later the same author wrote a brochure entitled *Jubilee of J. Rattray & Son Ltd 1907–1957*.

Great Barrier Island on 20 October 1894. John Moloney, an executor under W. Scoular's will, carried on the business and it was incorporated as a limited liability company in 1912. Because of the number of liquor agencies held, the company was acquired by Dominion Breweries in 1968, but continued under its own name for a few more years until the Dominion Breweries name was projected from 1971. The Scoular grocery and tobacco business was sold to J. Rattray & Son in 1970. The Hocken archive includes directors' minute books 1912–1921, 1941–1965, letter book 1894–1924, client purchase books 1934–40, stock books 1935–40, debtors' newspaper reports 1926–63, correspondence relating to the company centennial and with R. Powley & Co. which made an unsuccessful takeover offer in 1966, as well as J. Lindsay & Co. Ltd which was acquired by Scoular & Company in 1969, lists of shareholders, dividends paid, share valuations and share transfers 1955–65,



*R. Wilson & Co's premises as they were being built at the corner of Bond and Jetty Streets in 1872, with Arthur Briscoe & Co. in the background. [Wilsonia, opp p.48, courtesy G.T. Adams]*

The company moved its Dunedin head office to Christchurch in 1975.

Another early Dunedin merchant was **W. Scoular & Co. Ltd**. Established by Andrew, James and William Scoular in 1861, Andrew died in 1864 and James retired in 1882. William Scoular, his wife and two daughters drowned in the wreck of the Union Company steamer *Wairarapa* on

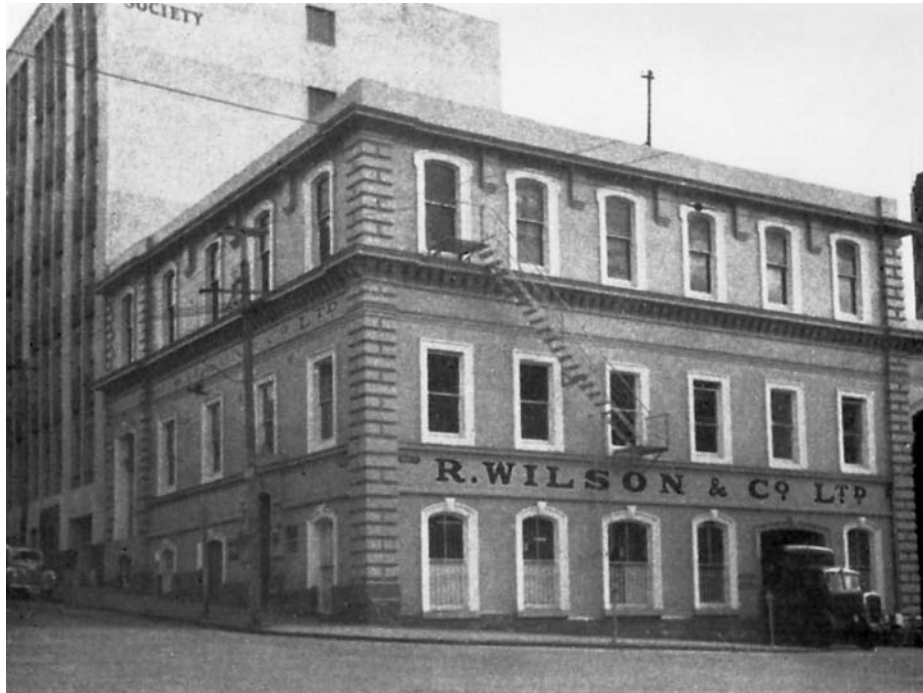
sales managers and managing director reports 1940–65, staff wages books 1947–62 and a host of journals, ledgers, cash books etc mainly covering the period 1939–1967.

One of the larger merchants was **R. Wilson & Co. Ltd** which was founded in Dunedin in 1862. The Hocken has no archives of this company but it does have a copy of the centennial history *Wilsonia*

— *The Story of Robert Wilson and the merchant firm of R. Wilson & Co. Ltd which he founded one hundred years.* It was written by Geoffrey T. Adams and published in 1962. The company merged with Neill & Co. in 1963 and also absorbed two other Dunedin merchants — Mercer & Mitchell Ltd and Wm Taylor & Son Ltd. Its grocery business was sold to J. Rattray & Son in 1979.

In addition to these Dunedin merchants, the Hocken holds some records of the Lawrence merchant, **Herbert & Co. Ltd** which was established at Gabriel's Gully in 1861 by James McIndoe. He sold

Some other minor holdings include a scrapbook of newspaper cuttings mainly of wool sale reports and also circulars from the firm of **Moritzson & Hopkirk** from 1895 and from 1899 (to 1904) when it was renamed **A. Moritzson & Company**. The Moritzson building remains on the corner of Bond and Jetty Streets and the company had a branch in Tyne Street, Oamaru. There is a book containing sales records between 1869–1889 for a Hampden general merchant but there is no information on the name of the company. The Hocken also holds a ledger 1916–38, cashbook 1914–25, day books 1910–46 and invoices 1931–38 for the Milton



*R. Wilson & Co's building as it looked in the 1960s, the third storey having been added in 1911.*  
[Wilsonia, opp p. 48, courtesy G.T. Adams]

the business to Archibald McKinlay, J.F. Herbert and Edward Herbert in 1862 and it continued under the name of Herbert and Company. J.F. Herbert sold his interest in 1873 and, in 1899, A. McKinlay bought his partner out and formed a limited liability company. Herbert and Co. Ltd remained in McKinlay family ownership until 1952. There is an early letter-book 1870–1882, some photographs, and a diary relating to the seed-dressing plant. The material also includes a booklet by J. Bryce McKinlay entitled *Herbert & Co. Ltd* (1999) and an article from the *New Zealand Grocer's Review* on 7 January 1952 on the history of Herbert & Company.

**C.M. Howison & Son Ltd** was a Dunedin timber merchant and the Hocken Collections hold a large customer sales register containing the names, and in many cases addresses, for some 1090 clients in the period 1917 until 1945 when the firm went into liquidation.

merchant **Littlejohns** — originally Arthur Littlejohn & Son 1910–37 and John Littlejohn 1937–46.

Although the Hocken has some archives of the Dunedin tea merchant, **Donald Stuart Ltd**, the material (some balance sheets and financial statements 1975–82, directors minutes 1979–82, a letter book and some correspondence 1897–98, day books 1933–47, cash books 1927–35 and correspondence 1964–83) is in poor condition, due to the effects of dampness, and the items have very limited research value.

#### WAREHOUSEMEN

The three leading warehouses in Dunedin last century were **Bing Harris & Company**, **Sargood Son & Ewen** and **Ross & Glendining Ltd**. The Hocken Collections have an interesting set of early photographs of buildings owned by **Bing Harris & Co.** in Dunedin, Wellington, Christchurch,



*Sargood, Son & Ewen — importers, warehousemen and manufacturers — were involved in a wide range of business. Here staff at the Sargoods boot factory celebrate news of the World War I armistice on November 11, 1918. [Hocken c/n 3589/3. Rembrandt Studio]*

Invercargill and further photographs of staff and sporting fixtures with Sargood, Son & Ewen staff. There are few other records although it does hold a biography of Gerald Benson entitled *Memoirs of a New Zealand Business Man* published in 1961. Gerald Benson was a senior manager with Bing Harris and his memoirs contain segments on the style of business from when he joined the company in 1902.

Frederick Sargood started a drapery business in Victoria in 1851 and, in 1861, J.A. Ewen came to Dunedin to set up a warehouse in Stafford Street under the name of Sargood, Son & Ewen. In 1875 a new four-storey warehouse was built in lower High Street, and prior to that, branches of the company had been set up in Auckland and Christchurch. Records held of **Sargood Son & Ewen**, include correspondence files 1903–12, 1925–29, ledgers 1864–1901, wages books 1876–1890, reference books (credit reports) 1876–1882 and a range of other papers and documents between 1864 and 1944. The extensive archive includes a brief history of the company up to 1926, at a time when the company had a staff throughout New Zealand of 716. There are a number of partnership agreements between F.T. Sargood, J.A. Ewen and Henry Tewsley as well as the Will and distributions of the J.A. Ewen Estate. There are two large

scrapbooks of promotional material designed to motivate salespeople as well as circulars to clients, promotional slogans, brochures from suppliers, invitations to various Spring and Summer, Autumn & Winter openings as well as Christmas Cards received. Bing Harris & Company merged its business with Sargood Son & Ewen in 1973, with Railli International Ltd in London taking a shareholding in the new company.

The Hocken holdings of the firm of **Ross & Glendining Ltd** are listed in the Bulletin 54 (2b) on Manufacturing.

Some companies still retain the right to give permission to view their archives but for genuine researchers, this is invariably given.

*This bulletin has been prepared by Ian Farquhar, with assistance from Hocken Collections staff, Shirley Hay and George Griffiths, and designed by Gary Blackman for the Friends of the Hocken Collections Inc., P O Box 6336, Dunedin.*