

# JAMES CORBETT

When Matamata's sole chemist, Hugh KELSO, died unexpectedly in May 1919, it was thought he would be difficult to replace.

According to Murray Frost, in his book "**Behind the Dispensing Screen**",<sup>1</sup> on the death of Hugh Kelso, Mrs Kelso appealed for a locum and it was James CORBETT who arrived a few weeks later.

The newspaper containing the obituary for Hugh Kelso and report of his funeral also announced James Corbett's arrival to take over the temporary management of the pharmacy.

He was born in 1890, in New Zealand, the son of a farmer and publican. After the death of his father his mother continued to operate (with the help of some her nine children) a farm of 175 acres as well as being licensee of the Pioneer Hotel at Hikutaia, near Paeroa.

In 1917 James Corbett was called up for military service, but the Ohinemuri Gazette of 23 April 1917 reported he had been granted a short exemption so that he could sit his exams.

It was not until February of the following year that he was due to enter training camp, although no World War I service record for him has been located.

Mr J. Corbett, of Auckland, arrived in Matamata on Monday to take up the management (temporarily) of the late Mr H. A. Kelso's pharmacy. Mr Corbett is a member of the well-known and respected Hikutaia family.

Matamata Record, 29 May 1919

James Corbett, chemist's assistant, Hikutaia, was granted until July 24 to allow him to sit for his chemist's examination.

Ohinemuri Gazette 23 April 1917

The case of Patrick Corbett, farmer, Hikutaia, was called, being an application for a re-hearing by his mother, who attended, and was represented by Mr Clendon as counsel. The main points of the case were that Mrs Corbett had a farm of 175 acres and a hotel. Since her son had gone to camp she was unable to carry on the hotel. The other son goes to camp in a few days. Mrs Corbett was in delicate health. The five daughters could not assist her sufficiently to carry on the hotel. The son going into camp shortly was a chemist by occupation, and took no part in the conduct of the farm or hotel. Patrick appealed at the request of his mother.

Ohinemuri Gazette, 6 February 1918

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<sup>1</sup> Behind the dispensing screen, early New Zealand pharmacists ; by Murray R. Frost.  
Frost, Murray R. (Murray Raymond), 1958-Hamilton N.Z. : M.R. Frost; 2004

Corbett settled quickly into Matamata and, within three months, purchased the pharmacy business. Before long he required assistance and took on an apprentice to train. This marked the beginning of a 25 year association with Matamata for both James Corbett and his extended family. Almost immediately he began acquiring property in the town, although he did not (at least in 1930) live in his own home. In that year he was among those who lost personal possessions when the Grosvenor (otherwise known as Black's) boarding house was destroyed by fire.<sup>2</sup>

His obituary<sup>3</sup> said

*"James Corbett had vision and 100 percent belief in the town and district of Matamata as a rising centre, as indicated by his purchase of several town properties at prices which were then considered almost ridiculous, but which have since proved cheap"*

Newspaper reports consistently present Corbett as a popular and active member of the community.

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**JAMES CORBETT, M. P. S.,**  
 Pharmaceutical & Veterinary  
 Chemist  
 ONLY the PUREST DRUGS  
 STOCKED.  
 Prescriptions Accurately Dispensed.

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Matamata Record, 13 Nov 1919

## NOTICE

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MR. J. CORBETT, M.P.S., wishes to notify the residents of Matamata and surrounding districts that from September 1st he has taken over the Pharmacy Business recently conducted by Mr H. A. Kelso.

Matamata Record, 4 September 1919

**WANTED**—Smart boy apprentice. Good opportunity to learn business. Apply James Corbett, chemist, Matamata, Phone 4 m.

Matamata Record, 22 April 1920

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## THE MUTUAL LIFE & CITIZENS' ASSURANCE COMPANY LIMITED

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The Company hereby gives one month's notice of its intention to issue a Special Policy in place of Policy No. 211010 issued by the Mutual Life and Citizens' Assurance Co. Ltd. on the life of JAMES CORBETT and declared to have been lost.

Perhaps he lost this policy in the fire. Matamata Record, 22 January 1934

<sup>2</sup> Matamata Record 11th September 1930

<sup>3</sup> Matamata Record 17th December 1945

The first property he bought seems to have been a section <sup>4</sup> on what is now Broadway, now the site of the Regent Theatre building . This was soon followed by the purchase, at auction, of sections in Mr Cave's subdivision opposite the Matamata Show Grounds and Racecourse & facing the Rotorua Railway Line. At this sale, Mr J. Corbett purchased two sections, each just over 2 roods (about  $\frac{1}{2}$  an acre, or 0.02 of a hectare) for £160 apiece <sup>5</sup>. Another buyer, Mr S. Gunn, purchased a single block of almost 9 acres, land now identified as lying between present-day Haig Road and Beatty Road. It is therefore likely that Corbett's sections were situated on the town, or northern side, of Beatty Road.

MATAMATA. MATAMATA.  
TOWN AND SUBURBAN SECTIONS.  
TOWN AND SUBURBAN SECTIONS.  
PROGRESSIVE MATAMATA.  
THE BEGINNING OF A LARGE  
TOWN.  
CAVE'S ESTATE.  
THE COMING POPULAR SUBURB.  
—  
TO RETIRED FARMERS, HOME  
BUILDERS, INVESTORS AND  
SPECULATORS.  
SALE OF 30 RESIDENTIAL  
SECTIONS IN WHAT WILL  
EVER BE THE CHOICEST  
PART OF MATAMATA.  
BY PUBLIC AUCTION,  
AT THE MATAMATA TOWN HALL,  
ON  
MONDAY, JULY 5TH, 1920.  
AT 12 NOON,

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One of James Corbett's bottles from  
the collection of the Matamata  
Historical Society

<sup>4</sup> Section 4, Block IV, Matamata Town

<sup>5</sup> Matamata Record 8 July 1920

BY THE  
**FARMERS' CO-OPERATIVE**  
**AUCTIONEERING CO., LTD.**

These highly desirable and superbly situated Sections are in the highest and healthiest part of the town of Matamata, on a terrace formation, with splendid natural drainage and sandy sub-soil, and are about 23 feet above the level of the main streets of Matamata, within 1 mile of the railway station, post office, and principal business centre, and half-mile from the Glaxo factory.

The situation commands an uninterrupted view over miles of the surrounding country, with a sunny and bracing aspect. The sections being of generous size will set off substantial residences to advantage and obviate overcrowding, and will also permit keeping a house cow, or raising poultry, or gardening on a liberal scale.

The subdivision is opposite the Matamata Show Grounds and Race-course, and faces the Rotorua Railway Line, which has a wide road on both sides, which will always ensure an open panoramic view on the main road frontage, while the back will be farmed as before.

The Sections on the Station Road

The Sections on the Station Road command a fine view of the town, with the Coromandel Ranges at the rear, and are sufficiently distant from the Dairy Factories to avoid any smoke nuisance.

Part of the subdivision is in the town area, and it is possible with the rapid growth of the town that the balance will eventually be embraced, as it is in the line of settlement.

The Matamata Town Board have had loans, amounting to £36,000, sanctioned for water and drainage schemes, while the Thames Valley Hydro-Electric Board has also been granted £200,000. Electric light, power and heat, and water and drainage, are expected to be available on the property within two years. The sum of £6,000 has been authorised for improvements to the Railway Station, and the Town Board proposes to raise a loan of £13,000 for a new Town Hall.

A strong movement is also on foot for a railway connection with Tauranga, which would make Matamata a very important junction.

There is also a sawmill operating in the district, about half-a-mile from the property.

These unique Sections will rapidly rise in value, and no better investment is on the market at the present time, as the vast amount of highly-fertile land surrounding Matamata must make the town a very important commercial centre, and Cave's Estate the most popular suburban area.

**TERMS:**

10 Per Cent. on Fall of Hammer.

10 Per Cent. in Six Months.

10 Per Cent. in One Year.

Balance, Five Years, at 6 Per Cent.

Plans on Application.

**THE FARMERS' CO-OPERATIVE**  
**AUCTIONEERING CO., LTD.,**  
**LAND DEPARTMENT, HAMILTON**

## Matamata Pharmacists

## James CORBETT

Later in 1920 Corbett purchased a section<sup>6</sup> nearer to the current clock tower, and in the following year acquired the adjacent one <sup>7</sup>, on the corner of now Broadway & Arawa Street Extension.<sup>8</sup> The shops on the first of these were destroyed in a fire in March 1923 <sup>9</sup>. Corbett moved promptly to rebuild, and the resulting structure - still standing on Broadway and named Corbett's Building - is today (2025) occupied by The Dollar Store. By March 1924 the building was complete, and J. Rivett advertised the opening of a "high-class Fruit and Confectionery business", while the Misses Cullen and Lawless opened an "Emporium for Children's and Maid's Clothes".



### NOTICE.

The ladies of Matamata are notified that we are opening an Emporium for Children's and Maids' Clothing in Corbett's Buildings, Tower Road, on MONDAY NEXT, MARCH 31.  
MISSSES CULLEN & LAWLESS.

Matamata Record, 27th March 1924

The structure, owned by Mr. J. Corbett, of Matamata, consisted of a fruit, confectionery and soft-drink shop tenanted by Mr. L. Arnold (and it was in this part that the fire is thought to have originated). As well as the restaurant occupied and managed by Mr. D. Roigard. Next to this

Matamata Record, 19 Mar 1923

A commencement has been made with the foundations of a substantial building for Mr. J. Corbett in Tower road, to replace the restaurant and other shops destroyed by fire some months ago. The material to be used is ferro-concrete.

Matamata Record 2 August 1923

### "THE BRITISH FRUITERER."

I wish to notify the people of Matamata and surrounding districts that I have opened a high-class Fruit and Confectionery business in Corbett's Buildings, opp. Bank of Australasia, Tower Rd., Matamata, where both old and new friends will receive the best attention. J. Rivett, late of Hamilton.

Matamata Record 6th March 1924

<sup>6</sup> Section 2, Block IV, Matamata Town

<sup>7</sup> Section 1, Block IV, Matamata Town

<sup>8</sup> In January 1923 he applied and received approval to subdivide this section - Matamata Record 30 Jan 1923

<sup>9</sup> Matamata Record, 19 March 1923