

James Corbett was deeply involved in Matamata civic and social life. He was active in the Chamber of Commerce, the Matamata Beautification Society, the Golf Club and the Tennis Club.

He showed interest in the Horticultural Society and was an entrant in the second Matamata Flower show, held in 1932 ¹. A Roman Catholic, he served as president of the Holy Name Society in 1936 ², while also supporting fundraising efforts for the St Andrew's Presbyterian Church. ³ (He won a Turkey.)

He attended the first annual general meeting of the Matamata Swimming Club in 1930, and was elected one of the vice-presidents. ⁴

In 1927 a well attended meeting established a branch of the United Political Party, and Mr Jas. Corbett was elected to the position of treasurer ⁵

For the golf club, he donated at least one trophy and with Mr McIntyre in 1930 provided the Rocky Downs club with a mower, and supported the fund raising for a lawn mower for the Matamata Beautification Society ⁶.

In his younger years it seems golf was his principal sporting interest, competing at other clubs as well as his own, and in 1928 he scored a hole-in-one at Rocky Downs. After the clubs merged and played at the new course at Okauia, members may not have anticipated the unusual hazard reported in 1936, when stray bullets, rather than golf balls, became a concern.

¹ Matamata Record 8 Dec 1932

² Matamata Record 15 June 1936

³ Matamata Record 14 August 1924

⁴ Matamata Record 3 November 1930

⁵ Matamata Record 11 March 1929

⁶ Matamata Record 22 January 1932

⁷ Matamata Record 23 May 1932

He was even an associate member of the newly established Matamata Aero Club ⁷.

HOLE IN ONE.

Feat by J. Corbett.

Playing on the Okoroire links last week, James Corbett, of the Rocky Downs club, joined the very select band of golfers who have done a hole in one. The hole in question was the short fifth.

Matamata Record, 5 June 1928

Messrs. J. Corbett and G. Fitzgerald intend to compete in the Napier golf tournament next week.

Matamata Record, 30 August 1934

NOT "ALL QUIET"

ON THE OKAUIA "FRONT"

The whizz of a bullet and the report of a .303 rifle startled golfers on the Okauia links on Saturday. The bullet in its flight passed between Messrs. J. Corbett and M. Loveridge, who with Mr. H. J. Buckley were standing close together at the third tee.

There was no clue as to where the shot came from, but the report of the rifle was heard by a number of golfers on the links. The incident caused much concern on the links.

A few weeks ago a bullet struck the cab of a lorry that was parked in the Okauia district.

Matamata Record, 3 August 1936

By 1927 it is evident horse racing had become a major interest. He was one of the many men who were named as officers of the Matamata Racing Club. By 1932 he was Clerk of the Course, and in 1933 joined the ranks of race horse owners, with the purchase of "Dark Marble" from Joseph Pohlen.

J. McManemin; starter, Mr. J. C. Potts; judge, Mr. H. Washer; clerk of scales, Mr. J. Corbett; clerk of course, Mr. C. G. Payze; timekeeper, Mr. M. G. Philpott; hon. vet. surgeon, Mr. W. C. Ring; hon. surgeons, Drs. J. T. Laurenson and Porterfield;

Matamata Record, 8 February 1932

The Matamata Races in January of 1936 were a successful event. There was a good turn out bolstered by a special train bringing racegoers from Auckland (Although it was an hour late.)⁸. Dark Marble won the big event of the day, The Matamata Hack Cup. The trophy for this was a "Handsome Grandfather Clock". This had been on display in Mr Corbett's shop paving the way for a good joke at the presentation. In 1936 he was elected president of the Matamata Racing Club.⁹

In 1937 he bought a chestnut colt at the Trentham sales. Sired by Night Raid (also the sire of Phar Lap).¹⁰ This horse was named The Cardinal and in 1939 won the Avondale Cup.



Evening Post 23 Dec 1939

The Cardinal returning to the enclosure after his victory in the Avondale Cup last Saturday. This four-year-old gelding is one of the few chestnuts sired by Night Raid and he is already being seriously mentioned as a New Zealand Cup prospect. He is owned by Mr. J. Corbett, of Matamata, and is trained by J. W. Cathro at Matamata



From the collection of the
Matamata Historical
Society

⁸ Matamata Record 3 February 1936

⁹ Matamata Record 7 September 1936

¹⁰ Matamata Record 28 January 1937

Nearly 20 years after commencing in business he set out on a what was intended to be a lengthy overseas holiday.

He arrived in San Francisco on April 19th 1938. The incoming passenger list describes him as 5ft 6 inches tall, (about 168 cms) with grey hair and grey eyes ¹¹. In England he was seen at Clovelly, Devon by Mr G. T. Newsome of Waharoa, who wrote home to report on his own trip ¹², and he attended the Dublin Horse Sales where he bought a horse "Douglas Hyde" (named after the first president of Eire, inaugurated in June 1938). However by November 14th 1938 he had returned home, having left Britain on the Orontes on September 24th 1938 ¹³. A letter from the racing club reported on November 17th 1938 was to welcome home and wish him a speedy recovery. ¹⁴

Although he is thereafter mentioned many times in the Matamata Record, it is clear his health is an issue. Although still the President, he was unable to attend the 1939 AGM of the Matamata Racing Club, and had tendered his resignation. ^{15,16} Mr Tims was elected to that role.

Purchased in Ireland

Mr J. H. Corbett, president of the Matamata Racing Club, during the course of a world tour, acquired at the Dublin sales a two-year-old colt by Interlace.

Waikato Times, 12 October 1938

TOUR OF THE WORLD

MR. J. CORBETT'S PLANS

Mr. J. Corbett, president of the Matamata Racing Club, intends leaving on a world tour on April 4, two days after the Matamata race meeting.

Mr. Corbett will travel via the United States, and intends spending some time in San Francisco, and also in Texas, where he will visit a famous owner of racehorses. While in the States Mr. Corbett hopes to see any of the big races which may be held while he is there. If possible, Mr. Corbett hopes to leave America in time to witness the English Derby in June, and may also cross to France to witness the Grand Prix de Paris run. Before returning, a two months' tour of Ireland will be undertaken with Father M. Curley, of Poverty Bay, who is also keenly interested in horses, and who owns a string of polo ponies.

Matamata Record, 21 Feb 1938

¹¹ The National Archives at Washington, D.C.; Washington, D.C.; Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving At San Francisco, California; NAI Number: 4498993; Record Group Title: Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1787-2004; Record Group Number: 8. Accessible at [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) accessed 4th Jan 2026

¹² Matamata Record 25 October 1938

¹³ The National Archives; Kew, Surrey, England; BT27 Board of Trade: Commercial and Statistical Department and Successors: Outwards Passenger Lists; Reference Number: Series BT27-146027. Accessible at Ancestry.com. Accessed 4th Jan 2026.

¹⁴ Matamata Record 14 November 1938, 17 November 1938

¹⁵ Matamata Record 21 August 1939,

¹⁶ Matamata Record 11 September 1939

VALEDICTORY

TRIBUTE TO MR. J. CORBETT

Over 80 club members attended a social evening tendered by the Matamata Golf Club to Mr. J. Corbett on the eve of his departure on a tour of the world. The function was held on the golf course.

Proceedings commenced at 4 p.m. when a six-hole medal competition was held. The winners were G. Campbell and Miss Sewell. Tea followed, and during a suitable interval the president of the club, Mr. B. C. Taylor, presented Mr. Corbett with a travelling trunk as a token of esteem from members.

Mr. Taylor commented that the guest of the evening was one of the senior members of the club and had been club champion in the Rocky Downs days. Mr. Corbett had also been one of their best supporters, as he was of most sports, and had proved a generous friend. He had always played the game for the game's sake and had been popular with everyone. Facetiously, the speaker remarked that Mr. Corbett's play had slipped somewhat during the past two seasons, and he expected that while away he would engage the world's best coaches with the idea of improving his standard. They wished him the best of luck and a safe return.

Musical honours were accorded, after which Mr. Corbett warmly thanked Mr. Taylor for his kind remarks and members for their generosity. In humorous vein the speaker admitted his form had fallen somewhat, but he warned members that as he anticipated playing on some of the worlds' best courses he was determined to be club champion in 1939.

Proceedings closed with the singing of "Auld Lang Syne" on the green, with the guest of honour in the centre of the ring.

Matamata Record 31 March 1938

The Bank of Australasia has purchased the corner section in Arawa street opposite its present premises from Mr. J. Corbett, of Matamata.

28 March 1938, Matamata Record