

**About Rhodes Tudor and Albert Henry Nicholson,  
two remarkable sons of William Nicholson  
Nicholson of Roundhay Park.**

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The Nicholson families of Roundhay Park consisted of two half brothers, Thomas and Stephen, who had childless marriages, and their nephew and heir, William Nicholson Nicholson whose wife, Martha, had thirteen children. After seventy years the Nicholsons had left their mark on Roundhay but after William and Martha died, their estates were broken up and sold off, including Roundhay Park, which became the property of the borough of Leeds.

William Nicholson Nicholson, the last squire of Roundhay, was a stoical solid kind of person. He studied at Cambridge University and finished with a BA and an MA from Queens' College. He was also a busy man at home and in public affairs serving as a magistrate and as a Deputy Lieutenant of the West Riding. His large family was a responsibility he did not take lightly. Sadly, a couple of his sons were a big disappointment to him.

The first of these was Thomas Nicholson, named after his great uncle, whose success in business was the foundation of the family's wealth. I wrote about Thomas Nicholson junior in Oak Leaves 12 but a few words here may not be inappropriate. After a few undistinguished years in the army, Thomas borrowed large sums of money which he spent lavishly. His father bailed him out when he finally ran into serious trouble. William was so disgusted with his son that he banished him abroad where sadly, Thomas soon died, in Quebec, Canada, in 1860. He was only thirty years old.

William's next eldest son, Rhodes Tudor Nicholson, had a fine start in life as a scholar of Rugby school and an Oxford graduate. For some reason, possibly missionary zeal, soon after he graduated he emigrated to New Zealand travelling steerage as an assisted passenger on board the settlers' ship 'Lady Nugent' arriving at Port Nicholson in April 1850. In

February 1852 he married a Maori chieftain's daughter, Whawha, in the Presbyterian Church at Foxton in North Island and they soon had two children. When his father heard this news he was so upset that he added a clause to an Indenture of December 1852 disinheriting Rhodes and his family.

Family legend has it that Rhodes returned to England to try to persuade his father to reinstate his inheritance. We know he did return to England as he was ordained into Holy Orders by the Bishop of Ripon in 1859, and in 1860 he officiated at the marriage of his sister Emily to William Armitage at St John's Church Roundhay. The latter event suggests some degree of rapprochement between him and his father but Rhodes never regained his inheritance. He was totally excluded from his father's will, as were his children.

Rhodes stayed in Leeds for a while, living close to St George's Church where he became a curate as is shown in the 1861 census. His neat signature can be seen in the church register of baptisms about this time. There are also newspaper reports of his preaching sermons and offering prayers.

From hereon, nothing more can be found about the Reverend Rhodes Tudor Nicholson, but there is a reason for this as we shall see later.

Albert Henry Nicholson was William and Martha's fourth son. Like Rhodes, he also received a good education. He was a pupil at schools at Sedburgh and Bury St Edmunds before going on to Cambridge. He was mentioned in glowing terms in newspaper accounts of speech days at the then three hundred years old King Edward's school in Bury St Edmunds showing that he was a gifted student especially in Classics and Mathematics. In his final year he was School Captain and he was awarded medals and prizes for his academic achievements.

Family legend has it that when Rhodes decided to return to Leeds he asked Albert to go to New Zealand to look after his wife and children in his absence. Whatever the reason, Albert was in New Zealand in October 1857 according to a newspaper report which shows he had been to the Aorere gold diggings

Rich deposits of gold were being mined and perhaps Rhodes had come out to try his luck. Some of the European settlers there at that time were sheep farmers and part-time gold diggers (the gold digging was seasonal) and there is no doubt he was a sheep farmer during the years he spent in New Zealand as we shall see later.

Albert Henry settled in with his brother's Maori wife, Whawha. A relationship developed between them resulting in the birth of three children. A descendant of these refers to the Nicholson homestead near Foxton where Rhodes was married, and there is other information to support that this is where they lived.

William Nicholson Nicholson cannot have been aware of Albert's children in New Zealand or surely Albert would have been disinherited, just as Rhodes had been. Rhodes' and Whawha's descendants believe Rhodes heard of his brother's behaviour with his wife and, taking into account his father's treatment of him, he decided he wanted nothing more to do with his Nicholson family or the Nicholson surname.

At some stage between 1861 and 1863 he changed his name to Edward Vernon (possibly after a former Archbishop of York). He left Leeds and went out to Canada. This may have had something to do with his brother Thomas' untimely death in Quebec which had occurred only a year or two before, about which we know very little. In 1862 Rhodes bigamously married Anna Virginia Wooster in Philadelphia. He worked on the railways, firstly as a general ticket agent and then as a rail contractor. The Vernons had six children. Three survived to have families from whom there are descendants alive today.

Rhodes may have been fortunate in not returning to New Zealand. The 1860s were dangerous years in the North Island characterised by Maori tribes fighting savagely over disputed lands. British-led troops were in action and at times they were on the receiving end of a hiding, so fiercely did the Maoris fight and with great generalship and discipline. Matters were so bad at one point, we are told, the settlers at Foxton fled their homes. It is interesting that in early 1869, Albert acted as an agent for the claimants in a court case in Foxton dealing with land



**Mara Andrews and members of her family at the grave of their ancestor, Edward Vernon, formerly known as Rhodes Tudor Nicholson. The photograph appears here with their kind permission.**

disputes. This was the new way of settling these matters instead of tribal warfare. Among the claimants was Kararaina, Albert's niece, Rhodes and Whawha's eldest child. Rhodes and Whawha also had a son. Both their children had families from whom there are descendants alive today.

William Nicholson Nicholson died in September 1868 and this was probably the main reason Albert returned to England. He sailed on the 'Halcione' from Wellington bound for Gravesend, setting out in January 1870. At the end of this year advertisements appeared offering for sale 'about 3000 Merino Sheep, Mixed Flock, now depasturing on the run of Albert Nicholson, Esq., at Porokaiaia, inland between [H]Orowhena and Foxton.' It seems Albert left some unsettled debts behind him, as a writ was issued in May 1871 by a Wellington merchant to restrain Albert's friend Alexander Gray from disposing of Albert's 'money[,] real and personal property.'

On Albert's way home on the 'Halcione' he travelled in a

first class cabin (or its equivalent) mixing with passengers of that status. Among these was a widow, Christina Balfour and her daughter Marie Clothilde Balfour. Christina's husband, a Scottish marine engineer, James Melville Balfour, had been an uncle of Robert Louis Stevenson. The Balfours went out to New Zealand in 1863 when Marie was only one year old and remained there until James was drowned in a boating accident in December 1869. During his time in New Zealand, the busy innovative James Balfour contributed greatly to the infrastructure, building lighthouses and docks and carrying out other important marine projects. In recognition of his work the Balfour glacier was named after him.

It seems likely that Albert and Christina met and became friends on the long voyage back to England. Next there is a glimpse of them in the 1871 census in April, Christina and her daughter were with Christina's brother in Edinburgh while Albert was at home in Roundhay Park with his mother Martha, three younger sisters and several servants. Albert Henry married Christina in November later that year in Edinburgh.

Their daughter Millicent Claudine Nicholson was born in 1877. The 1881 census shows Christina and her two daughters living in Chelsea with a nurse and a cook. Her husband was abroad. Was Albert back in New Zealand?

Albert Henry Nicholson died in July 1887 in Surrey. In his Will he describes himself as a mining engineer. He makes no mention of his wife Christina. Instead he left everything to Regina Annie Jackson 'daughter of Henry Emly QC late of Gravesend.' As for Millicent, he says :

It should be understood that my daughter Millicent by the Will of my father William Nicholson Nicholson ... has been duly provided for in respect of Five thousand pounds which is now held in trust ...for her benefit.

There was nothing for his children in New Zealand. As for the intriguing Regina Annie Jackson, she remains an enigma to me.

Albert Henry Nicholson named Regina Annie Jackson as his sole Executrix but probate was granted to Frederick Albert

Taylor, a London stockbroker of Threadneedle Street, who is described as 'a Creditor.' Albert's personal estate was £2,230.

Only weeks before he died Albert was in court. He had bought £200 worth of shares in a gold mining company and was complaining that the firm had issued a misleading prospectus. Years before, in 1884, he had been involved in a similar situation seeking a winding up order on another gold mining company against whom he had been granted a judgement order as a creditor. From these accounts it seems that Albert was still interested in the mining of gold.

Christina Nicholson lived on until 1897 when she died in St Servan in Brittany, France 'after a lingering illness.' Her daughter Millicent Claudine Nicholson never married. She died in Bath in 1966 leaving £677 to a spinster friend.

### **Main Sources and Acknowledgements**

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Perhaps what I have been able to bring to the research in particular, has been the results of my extensive use of Internet search engines especially in retrieving information from newspapers internationally and from censuses. This has been very fruitful and I count myself lucky to have this valuable resource, the like of which I did not think would happen in my life time.