



TOWSEY TALES

NAME: Arthur John Towsey

BIRTH DETAILS: June 1847 Henley-upon-Thames

DEATH DETAILS: 9 June 1931 Cambridge, NZ

CHART REF: Towsey Chart B1

MARRIAGE DETAILS: 25 July 1871 St.Paul's, Dunedin NZ

SPOUSE: Jessy Hawkins Mackay

PART 1 of 5

For some reason, Arthur John's birth in Henley was not recorded. Later biographies claimed that his birth was in 1846. It was however, June 1847.

In 1854, the year that the Crimean War started, Arthur John Towsey started learning the piano with the organist at the local church in Henley. Two years later, at the age of nine, he went as a probationer to St.Michael's College in Tenbury, Worcestershire, recently opened by the 31 year-old Sir Frederick Gore Ouseley, the son of a wealthy baronet, successful diplomat and Oriental scholar. Sir Fred's musical career started at the age of five when he exclaimed "Only think, Papa blows his nose in G". At six he played a duet with Mendelssohn.

The purpose of the college was to provide an education for well chosen, musically inclined boys, thereby equipping them to become leaders in the maintenance of a higher standard of music in the Anglican Church.

Arthur gained a scholarship for singing, shortly thereafter, which entitled him to free education and lodging in the college so long as his boy's voice lasted.

During that period, he studied the pianoforte and organ under the sixteen year-old John Stainer, who had been appointed the first organist at St.Michael's. John Stainer went on to become one of the leading scholars of the English music scene in the latter 19th century. He was also a composer and organist and was knighted in 1888.

Arthur received lessons in harmony from Sir Frederick Gore Ouseley himself.

It is worth remembering that in days of old, before the advent of recorded music, live music played a very important part in people's lives. So too did the church.

On leaving St.Michael's College, Arthur John continued his musical studies in London, where he held an appointment as organist.

In 1865, at the age of eighteen, Arthur John Towsey was selected as choirmaster and organist at St.Paul's Cathedral. Not the big barn in the middle of London; one on the other side of the world in Dunedin, the capital city of the southern part of New Zealand.

One must assume that the thought of Arthur's sailing for several months to a strange land, a thousand times further from home than most people would travel in their whole lives, was excitement enough to infect his younger brother, Edward as well, as both of them sailed around the world to Dunedin. It is likely that William Charles Towsey, their elder brother, went a year or so earlier, settling initially in the Hawkes Bay, Napier area.

Jackson's Oxford Journal 11 February 1860

HENLEY-ON-THAMES.

CHURCH CHOIR.—A Concert was given on the evenings of Thursday and Friday the 2nd and 3rd inst., by the younger members of the Henley Church Choir, at the National School Room, and on each evening there was a numerous attendance of the gentry of the town and neighbourhood. The first part consisted of a selection of sacred music; the second of glees, madrigals, &c.; the *Kyrie Eleison*, from Mozart's twelfth Mass, was exceedingly well rendered in the first part, a fact highly creditable to our talented organist, Mr. E. H. Thorne, who has spared no pains to enable his choir to sing music of such a difficult character so effectively. In the second part, the duett, by Holmes, "The Swiss Maidens," given by Masters Arthur Towsey and Jas. Eady, met with a well-deserved encore; and the other pieces were sung with precision, as well as with a considerable degree of taste, and were greeted with very gratifying applause. The audience were assembled by cards of invitation, there being no charge for admission. An evening or two of this description during the winter months would, doubtless, be appreciated by the residents of this locality.

Arthur John and Edward Towsey sailed from London on the London registered ship "King of Trumps", on March 1st, 1866. Captain Jenkins reported that they had fine weather until they crossed the equator on April 2nd. After that, they suffered light winds until April 29th when, about a thousand miles or so south-west of the bottom of Africa, in the South Atlantic, they were hit by a very heavy gale from the north-west, which persisted until May 5th. They had five days of fine weather after that, but were then hit by a hurricane from the north-east, which persisted for three days and then, after several days of moderate seas, were hit by a succession of very heavy gales until June 4th, when they were hit by a cyclone accompanied by very heavy seas.

At two o'clock in the morning, a huge wave hit the port bow, snapping the bowsprit, which is the pole that sticks out the front of a sailing ship, to which those small jib sails are attached.

This was followed by another wave that washed everything off the deck.

By now the broken bowsprit, which was hanging from a tangle of rigging, was bashing against the starboard bow and it was feared that it would soon smash right through.

It was not until noon that the crew were able to free the tangled mess and during these efforts, Captain Jenkins' hand was jammed between the bowsprit and the rail, causing a severe injury.

The King of Trumps then enjoyed just four days of nice weather before running into another gale with winds that ripped away the foresail.

Port Chalmers, at Dunedin, NZ



Dunedin circa 1860



The ship rolled heavily for three days with the main rails going completely under the water, which then rushed into the cabin.

They finally arrived in Hobart Town on June 14th.

Nine of the crew were sentenced to twelve weeks imprisonment for insubordination and another was charged with assaulting Captain Jenkins on the high seas.

The passengers from the weather-beaten King of Trumps transferred to the Eculyphus and arrived in Dunedin on July 9th, 1866.

What must Arthur John's thoughts have been as the ship reached the lovely natural harbour at Port

Chalmers? Apart from being greatly relieved at having survived the forces of nature, he would certainly have been aware that no place on Earth was further away from home.

Arriving at the octagonal centre of the town, he might have compared St.Paul's Church, Dunedin, to the St.Paul's with which he had previously been familiar, in London. Although both of them were constructed atop a small hill, that is where the comparison would have ended. On seeing the "cathedral" to which he had been posted as organist and choirmaster, he might well have observed that the central church of the province, at which he was expected to help to

maintain the highest standards of British religious culture, was not even as big as the parish church in Henley, where his path to this career had started a dozen years earlier.

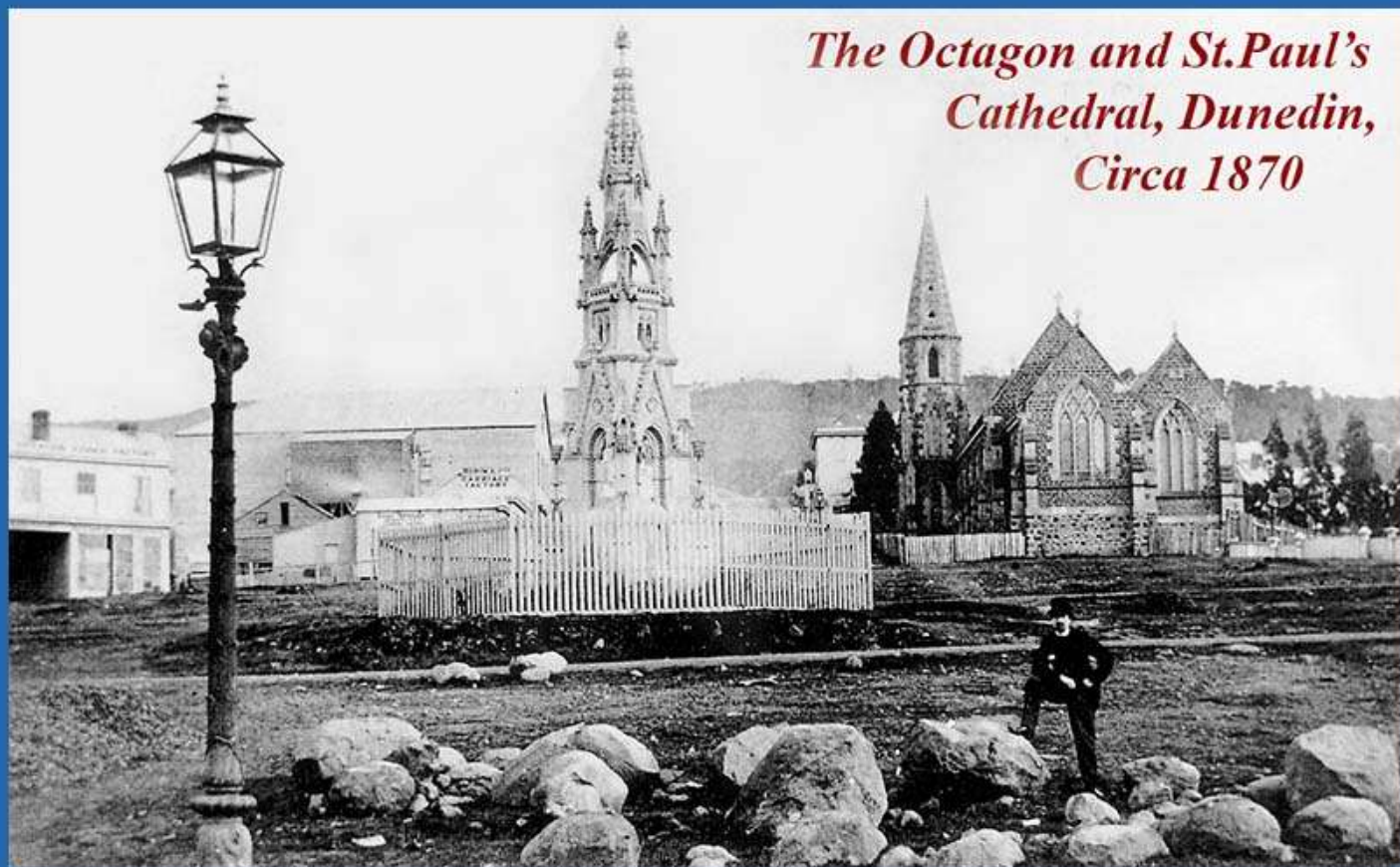
Mister Towsey might also have compared the fine stone edifices surrounding St.Paul's in London, with the insubstantial weatherboard buildings that lined the unpaved streets of Dunedin, noting that even the gymnasium next door was larger than the focal point of New Zealand's religious life.

The shaky hold of the church over the colonists was further emphasised soon after this picture was taken, when the church spire lurched sideways and had to be demolished. The church itself was replaced towards the end of the century with a larger building.

Dunedin circa 1870



The Octagon and St.Paul's Cathedral, Dunedin, Circa 1870



On July 25th, 1871 in Dunedin, Arthur John Towsey married Jessie Hawkins Mackay. He was twenty four and she was five years older. You can read about the Mackay family in the Towsey Tale of Donald Mackay and see those persons on Towsey Chart B5.

Looking at the hand tinted photography of Jessie, we get the impression that they were indeed a long way from the fashion centres of Paris and London. That outfit appears to have been home-made, utilizing what, one assumes, was a large recent shipment of pink ribbon from England. The log chair, on the other hand, indicates that this might have been

someone's idea of a peasant tableau or perhaps a studio set for photos to send back home to England, reinforcing the idea that you were some sort of rough, tough pioneer.

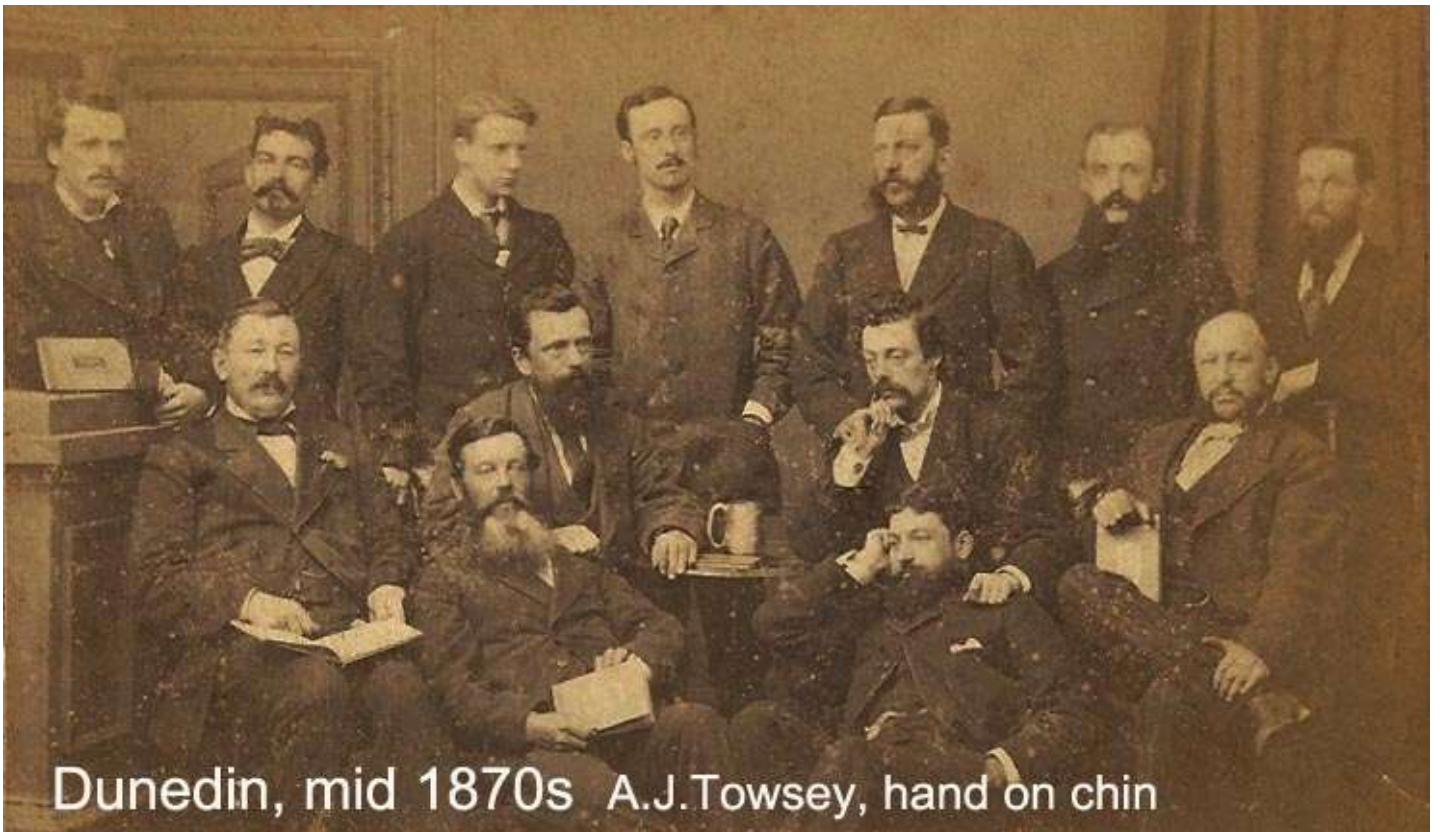
By looking at the travails of the Towseys and their relatives in the colonies, we get a clearer understanding of Arthur's mission; to ensure that the highest British moral standards were maintained in these outposts of empire.

This might sound rather quaint to we who live in a well connected, integrated, global Western civilization, but back then, being on the other side of the world was more removed from the social controls of one's peers, than for us to be let loose on Mars.

Arthur John's mission was not just devised through some abstract concern, but through the very real experience of the British in India, where many of the early British entrepreneurs and adventurers, became quite enamoured with India and its exotic culture and cuisine. Some also married Indian women and really went rather 'native'. Such



Arthur John and Jessie Towsey, 1871



Dunedin, mid 1870s A.J.Towsey, hand on chin

behaviour was largely accepted in the 18th century, but by the time we reach the Victorian era, where the pioneering merchants were being replaced by second-rate, self-important bureaucrats, we see cultural acceptance was being replaced by the mindless bigotry of puffed up colonial administrators, revelling in their undeserved status.

The British Empire reached its zenith during the reign of Victoria and it was at this time that the British establishment became convinced of their cultural superiority over all other peoples. So, it was the combination of this cultural chauvinism, together with the experience of what can go wrong in the colonies, if colonists are left to their own devices, that had formed the basis of Arthur John's training.

Lovers of music assembled very numerous at the University Hall on Saturday evening, when the first concert of the season by the Dunedin Choral Society was given. The unwelcome weather of weeks previously, which kept many within doors, had retired before sunrise in favour of a clear sky and sharp frost, and that, therefore, as well as their attractive programme, aided the efforts of the energetic Committee in a material degree. But these concerts have grown so popular that the seats are generally all occupied some minutes before the overture is played—fine or adverse weather notwithstanding. In fact, those who care to obtain seats now know that punctuality is a *sine qua non*. And gratifying as it must be to the Society to see their exertions so much appreciated, the circumstance that the audience are all seated, or nearly so, before the concert commences, obviates that discomfort which has been experienced on the occasion of other entertainments of less pretentious societies. Mendelssohn's "Hymn of Praise," constituted Part 1 of the Concert, and except that once or twice the tenors, being a little too loud, prevented the trebles rendering effectively their lightest and sweetest tones, every part of this beautiful composition, from the overture to the finale, "All things that live and breathe, praise ye the Lord," was well sung and played. The solos were entrusted to the Misses Marshall, Sinclair, and Thompson, and Messrs Winter, Mendershausen, and Thompson, whose efforts the audience applauded. In the second part the band played selections from "Ernani" and "I Puritani," and well sustained the high reputation gained by the excellent manner in which the instrumental portion of the Society's concerts is invariably rendered. The clarinet

obligato and solo by Mr Martin were prominent and pleasing features; and the part songs, "Old May Day," and "Night Song," were also items that helped to make the evening pass pleasantly. Mrs Murison sang "Va Pensiero" in a voice of inexpressible sweetness. This lady has not sung publicly in Dunedin for several years, and we cordially join with many others in expressing the hope that only a very short time will elapse before she again renders such valuable musical service. Mr A. J. Towsey played the pianoforte solo, Op. 10, No. 2, in the masterly manner characteristic of the self-possessed and brilliant executant. Mr Lewis and Mr Campbell each sang a song, the former gentleman giving "The Owl," and the latter "The Warrior Bold." Each was applauded. The trio, "Thro' the World," from the Bohemian Girl, by Miss Sinclair, and Messrs Campbell and Winter, was well rendered; so also was the song "Come into the Garden, Maud," by Mr Winter. The Society acted wisely in obtaining the services of this gentleman, as undoubtedly his excellent tenor voice was of great assistance. Mr A. J. Towsey wielded the *bâton*, and Mr Little officiated as leader. Many regretted, as well as ourselves, that several of the ladies, whose pretty ballads are always received with great favour, did not sing in the second part of the programme; but we presume the reason was that the trebles had a great deal to do in the first portion. However, the excellent manner in which Mendelssohn's difficult composition was rendered, after a practice of barely three months, not only evidences the creditable progress of the Society, but justifies the public in looking forward to future performances with increased pleasure, and in resting assured, as we think they confidently may, that whatever the Society do will be well done.

Choral Society, 1873

From the moment that he arrived in Dunedin, Arthur set to work, taking the church choir in hand and raising funds through musical events, to pay for a better organ for the church. Apart from his church duties, he also advertised private tuition in singing and pianoforte and even involved himself in the Dunedin Amateur Athletic Sports Association, where he came third, on one occasion, in the 200 yards hurdle race.

Throughout the 1870s, Arthur John Towsey was involved in many different musical presentations, including with the Dunedin Choral Society. I am not sure who the particular group of men might be in the above photo, but I have seen pictures of a couple of them in theatrical costumes. Being an all-male group might indicate that it was a Liedertafel group, but AJT had not yet established such a group. But then, the solitary tankard on the table, does evoke an image of men gathered in a tavern, singing around a table. Of course, as AJT was always active in the Temperance (Tea-total) Movement, they would not be gathered about singing drunken, bawdy ballads. Maybe that is why there is just one tankard between thirteen men.

Reports of Arthur John's performances tended to be positive, with criticisms, if any, usually focusing on the inadequacy of facilities.

The newspaper cutting above, reporting a



Jessie Hawkins Towsey circa 1875

performance of The Choral Society, in July 1873, is fairly typical of the florid journalistic style of that time.

Looking at this report, together with the formal, contrived poses of the gentlemen in the above picture, gives one an impression of the genteel society that they were trying to create in the colony.

Arthur and Jessie's first child, Mary Mylicent Towsey, possibly known as Nettie (or Nettei) when young, was born in early 1877. Arthur Cyril Towsey arrived one year later.

The photo on the left, of Mary and Cyril was taken in January 1879, just before Arthur John left for a year's stay in England and Germany and because it has been cut down, I assume that it was trimmed to fit into something which Arthur could carry on his long voyage.

Jessie and the children departed Dunedin for Melbourne by the steamship SS Albion, the following month, on February 27th. Because this was just before steamships were introduced onto the voyage between Britain and the Antipodes, it is most likely that they took the faster steamship as far as Melbourne before joining a sailing ship to England.



Mary & Cyril Towsey January 1879

About fifty ladies and gentlemen, comprising the leading music-lovers of the city, assembled at the Temperance Hall on Saturday afternoon, for the purpose of making a presentation to Mr A. J. Towsey, the well-known musician, who is about to pay a visit to Europe. The Hon. H. S. Chapman presided.

The CHAIRMAN said: Ladies and gentlemen, we have met here, as you are aware by the advertisements, for the purpose of presenting a testimonial to Mr Towsey, consisting of a purse of sovereigns, previous to his departure for England. Mr Towsey has now been in this city for, I think, upwards of 12 years—I believe 13 years—and you are all pretty well acquainted with him; and you must know that to his exertions are owing in a great measure the considerable development of musical taste which exists in this city at the present moment.—(Loud applause.) He has not been alone in these exertions, I am happy to say, because there are many others who have taken a strong interest in the cultivation of musical talent and musical taste besides himself. Mr West was one of these, for instance; and I am happy to see him here to-day. The Choral Society, which has been during a great number of years a very successful institution, was mainly owing to the exertions of these gentlemen, with a few persons unconnected with music who joined them in the establishing of that Society, and I venture to say, from the excellence of the music given at the Choral Society's concerts, is to be attributed the advance which has taken place not only in musical talent among the community, but in the general appreciation of music which now prevails. I knew there are persons who turn up their noses at these musical performances, and consider that they are of an inferior kind; but we ought never to forget that the enjoyment of music, and even the practice of music as amateurs, has been the recreation of many great minds. The great astronomer, Herschel, began life as an organist. The Duke of Wellington was a great student of music; he was very fond of music, and always attended the great concerts, and his father was a distinguished musical composer. The well-known Jeremy Bentham, a jurisprudential philosopher of the highest kind, played well. Another name, perhaps even better known in these modern times—that of my friend, John Stuart Mill—is another instance that the cultivation of musical taste is not inconsistent with philosophy, for he played on the pianoforte, if not in a distinguished style, at any rate sufficiently well to amuse himself and sufficiently well to entertain some of his friends. Many of the greatest names of Europe are patrons of music. Metternich was one. I don't recollect the names of others at this moment, but I have cited quite enough of great names to show that it does not follow that because a man cultivates music he should neglect the higher philosophy or the higher duties of life.—(Applause.) I don't think I need say any more. There is not much to be said on an occasion of this sort, except that I am sure that all those who have contributed to the purse which I am about to hand to Mr Towsey, cordially wish him well, and will be glad to see him return.—(Loud applause.) We hope that he will have a prosperous voyage to England, that he will enjoy himself there, and with the natural tendency of his mind and talent, there

is no doubt that in travelling about Europe and visiting what I may call for this purpose the great musical centres, he will improve his own taste, and will come back to this Colony even better prepared than he is at present to take a leading part in the cultivation of music here, and in the culture of musical talent

and taste—and, in fact, a leading man in what may be called the musical world of Dunedin. (Prolonged applause.) There is a curious circumstance I may here mention. It is not the first time that the purse I hold in my hand has performed a similar function; for it happens to be the same purse that was presented to Mr West about 15 years ago by the old Philharmonic Society by Mr John Hyde Harris, who hunted it out of an old drawer, and it has now come up a second time for a similar presentation to Mr Towsey.—(Applause.) Mr Lewis will now read a paper to you containing the

Mr F. Lewis then read a paper signed by about 116 ladies and gentlemen, to this effect:—"Mr A. J. Towsey.—Dear Sir,—As you are about to leave us on a visit to the Old Country we beg your acceptance of the accompanying purse of one hundred sovereigns, as an expression of our esteem and regard toward you, and embrace the opportunity of testifying after so many years' intimate acquaintance, to your social and professional character. We heartily wish you and yours a safe and pleasant trip, and shall look forward to welcome you on your return."

The CHAIRMAN, handing to Mr Towsey the purse of sovereigns, said: Mr Towsey, on behalf of the subscribers, I have much pleasure in handing to you this purse, and I think the interest of the presentation is somewhat enhanced by the little history I have repeated of the purse itself.—(Loud applause.)

Mr Towsey, on coming forward to acknowledge the gift, was warmly greeted. He said: Sir, Ladies, and Gentlemen—It is with mixed feelings, partly of pleasure and partly of pain, that I rise to thank you for this very handsome and substantial present. Not only do I thank you, sir, for the good, kind words you have spoken with regard to me, and the kind expressions you have made use of, not only to-day, but during my sojourn in Dunedin, which is now over twelve and a half years, but also the ladies and gentlemen who have subscribed to the present. I may mention that Mr Chapman's was the first house that I entered when I landed in Dunedin certainly as an invited guest, and I feel it an honour to have the pleasure of receiving the purse at his hands.—(Applause.) I never yet was able to make a speech on any occasion, and I am sure you will forgive me to-day if I don't break that line and attempt to make one now. Imperfect as I am, it pleases me to have so many true and real friends. My heart is much too full to attempt to speak, but, as a musical man—and I say it without fear of contradiction—during my sojourn in Dunedin of twelve and a-half years I have received the utmost kindness, engendering good feelings in everybody with whom I have been connected, more especially in the musical world. We have had our little disagreements, of course, as all musical people will. Music, if it was made up all of concord would not produce what was intended. You must have a discord, and as one of my greatest friends has very often remarked, we want a fat one occasionally.—(Laughter.) But in spite of all our little arguments, I believe music has been the means of making the bond of friendship last more strongly between us.—(Applause.) In wishing you good-bye, as I shall have to do to some of you, I suppose, I trust it will only be for a short time. When I return, after having heard better music than I am likely to be able to give to anybody here, I trust that by hearing it and taking an interest in it, I shall return better able to develop music than I have been hitherto.—(Applause.) I thank you very sincerely for this handsome present, and if you will excuse me, I will say no more.—(Loud cheers.)

The CHAIRMAN: That is all the business, ladies and gentlemen. I wish you a very good afternoon. The assemblage then dispersed.

23 December, 1878

One or more of Jessie's brothers might also have still been in Melbourne, in which case she would have wanted

to visit them and it could also be that Arthur went seven weeks earlier so as to either arrange accommodation in England, or to undertake some music studies before the family arrived.

Just before leaving Dunedin, Arthur John had been presented with a purse of 100 sovereigns, which was indeed a very substantial amount of money.

