

Memories of Richmond's Early Days —
Mrs Ellen Murphy in The Star, 5 November 1927
As told to 'The Reminiscence Man'



Introduction

The article on the following pages appeared in the Richmond Community News in 2007, spread over three issues (#45–47). The RCN articles were unattributed, but the original item first appeared as a single article in **The Star**, Saturday 5 November, 1927. The article appeared under the byline of ‘The Reminiscence Man’ — see below — and featured an interview with an early Christchurch resident, Mrs Ellen Murphy (1841?–1930).

Mrs Murphy arrived in Canterbury with her husband, Stephen (1833?–1917) and two children, from England in April 1863. In the article, amongst other things, she tells how she and her husband were among the early residents of Bingsland, as the Richmond area south of North Avon Road was then known, and so her memories of life in those early days make interesting reading. In the following pages I have reproduced the article and have appended some notes to expand on some points and provide some background and context — see pages 8–11. Following on I have included an image of the article as it appeared in the original newspaper, followed by another map of Richmond in the early 1890s — see pages 12 & 13.

Stephen Murphy is mentioned in the first Christchurch street directory to include Bingsland; George Alfred Buck’s “Christchurch and Suburban Directory, 1879”, living in Cumberland St. After Stephen’s death, Ellen continued living in Cumberland St until the mid-1920s. At the time of the interview, Ellen was living in Berry St, St Albans.

Ellen and Stephen Murphy would have seven more children in Christchurch, two of whom died in childhood. Ellen Murphy died in 1930 and is buried in Linwood cemetery.

*David Hollander
Richmond History Group,
July 2023.*

‘The Reminiscence Man’

The Reminiscence Man was David Morgan (1878?–1933), a well-known journalist in Canterbury in the early 1900s. Mr Morgan worked on many newspapers around New Zealand and was a founding member of the Christchurch Press Club. His obituary (*Star (Christchurch)*, 14 January 1933, Page 9), states:

“Mr Morgan was a very able and well-informed journalist, with a special gift for interviewing, and at one time he contributed to the Christchurch “Star” a series of interviews with old colonists under the pen-name of the Reminiscence Man”.

Between 1919 and 1931, the Star featured well over 50 articles by the ‘Reminiscence Man’.

The cover shows a hand-drawn map of Richmond in 1890, drawn for the Christchurch City Council when the suburb became part of Christchurch city. Several of the streets have changed names, but the general layout of the area south of North Avon Road is quite recognisable. By this time, the Murphy’s had lived in Richmond for over twenty years!

Image from CCC Archives: CCC Minute book, 1890–93 [CCC/ARC/100/15], p628.

The Star, Saturday 5 November, 1927, p23

FROM SWAMP LAND TO PROSPEROUS SUBURB.

MRS ELLEN MURPHY TELLS OF RICHMOND'S EARLY DAYS.

(By THE REMINISCENCE MAN)

"I do not know that I can tell you anything," said Mrs Ellen Murphy the other day when the Reminiscence Man called at her residence, 49 Berry Street, off Springfield Road, St Albans. "My memory is not as good as it was, and, anyhow, I don't think there is much that I can say."

From Cornwall to New Zealand

"I was born in the South of Ireland," she said, "and when my husband and I decided to come out to New Zealand we were living in Redruth, Cornwall. We were to make the voyage on the *Huntress*¹, and had to go up to London to join her. After leaving London, we anchored off Gravesend for some days, in order to wait for some of the officers and sailors who had been left behind. Finally we took our departure for New Zealand on December 9, 1862, direct for Lyttelton. The voyage lasted five months and a fortnight. The *Huntress*, in my opinion, was an old tub of a ship. I do not think she made any other trip, to New Zealand. After she left Lyttelton I fancy she went to the islands for a load of guano, and on her return home was scuttled. I was very pleased, anyhow, to see the back of her.

A Hard-hearted Captain

"Our trip out here must have been about as uncomfortable in many ways as that of any other of the emigrants. The captain was a very hard man, and very, very cruel to the women and children. The fire was put out every night at six o'clock, and, no matter if a person was sick unto death, a hot drink was not procurable, or anything else, either, for that matter. There were sixteen deaths on board during the voyage, due to various causes. A young woman who conducted a school on board among the children was one of the victims. The prevalence of scarlet fever was one of the most distressing elements.

"Good Mind to Put you in Irons"

"One very saddening event concerned a lad of sixteen years who had signed on the ship as cabin-boy. He became very ill, and was sent to the ship's hospital in a dying condition. The captain would let no one in to see him. My husband on one occasion heard the lad crying out pitifully for his mother, so he ventured into the hospital to see if he could do anything for him. As he was coming out he met the captain, who asked what he had been doing. My husband explained his reasons for calling in to see the lad. The bullying captain said to him: 'I have a good mind to put you in irons for the remainder of the voyage,' but he didn't. I fancy that two other men among the emigrants were put in irons, but for what I couldn't say.

A "Parting" from the Captain

"The food aboard the *Huntress* was not good. The soup was made with salt water; the bread was sour, and we were fed upon preserved potatoes. We had pretty fair weather until about half-way on our voyage. One day we signalled another ship and the captain and the doctor went aboard her for some reason or another. While they were away, a storm sprang up and the ships parted company, and it was a day or so before they returned to us again. Our mainmast went in that storm, however, we ultimately arrived at Lyttelton, and a sequel to the

voyage was the prosecution of the captain in the Magistrate's Court by several of the immigrants².

Arrival in Lyttelton

"The Huntress took in ballast at Lyttelton and my husband secured a job doing this. We emigrants lived in the barracks³ for three weeks after landing. Then we had to leave to make room for the people of the next ship to come in, the Sevastopol. Then we had to live where we could. I couldn't exactly say what I thought of Lyttelton when I first saw it. It was a wild-looking sort of a place. While at the barracks many Maoris, particularly the women, used to come along there and by the look, of them I thought they were cannibals.

A Primitive Jetty

"I forgot to say that the Huntress anchored out in the stream, and the emigrants were brought ashore in boats, which came alongside a small platform, or jetty, perched on two posts. There was a beam on top of the jetty, and from this a rope dropped, and by this the newcomers had to pull themselves up as best they could till they were grabbed by the man on top and hauled on to the staging. The luggage was brought along afterwards, and some of the emigrants had a fair amount of it, too.

By Bullock Dray to Christchurch

"For a while we lived in a bit of a hut alongside the hill, and there were prisoners working round about making roads. Presently we decided to come to Christchurch, and travelled by a bullock-dray over the Sumner Road to the Heathcote ferry, where the dray was taken aboard the punt and we reached the other shore; then away by the dray again to Christchurch. Christchurch was a grassy sort of a place, and Hereford Street seemed nothing but water and nigger-heads⁴. There were very few houses, with, in many cases, three and four families living under the one roof. The first place we went to was a house in what is now known as Bealey Avenue, four families living in it.

Harvesting in Bealey Avenue

"My husband got a little work to do now and again. Mr Bealey had a farm hereabouts⁵ — I should say it would be at the corner of Bealey Avenue and Bealey Street⁶. He did a little cropping of wheat and oats. There were no scythes then, and sickles were used. Many a day we women spent in the harvest field gathering up the cut grain and tying up the sheaves. Yes, we had to do our share and bear some of the heat and burden of the day. There was not a great deal in the way of harvesting then, as there was not the population to feed. The threshing those times was done by flails.

Later on there was a mill at the far end of Cashel Street, on the island at Hereford Street Bridge. Lane's Mill it was called, and it stood there for many years afterwards even when it had fallen into disuse. During one very hard winter it was, I fancy, used as a doss-house for homeless men.

Various Shades

"Subsequently we went to live at a place owned by two brothers named Fitzgerald, who let rooms. Besides myself, my husband and two children there lived there a man named M'Carthy and a Mr and Mrs Coutts. Later we moved to Springfield Road; then to Montreal Street and from there to the corner of Salisbury Street and Manchester Street. There were two

cottages there. James Campbell had one, and we shared with him; and Mrs Smith had the other. Those are still there to this day.

“A Place of Our Own”

“After a while, and struggling on a bit, we decided to go in for a place of our own, and bought a quarter acre section in Stanmore Road just opposite where the Working Men’s Club is. It is now part of the present Richmond School grounds⁷. Two old pear trees still standing are a land-mark of that section. The only building in the district then was a bit of a concrete whare. A gentleman working in the Government Buildings⁸ now did us a good turn. There was an old cottage standing on the site of the present Supreme Court Buildings, which was to be sold for removal. Mr M’Clusky, a contractor, had occupied it, and our friend Mr Steward said he thought we could buy the cottage cheap. It consisted of three rooms, and we bought it. That was our first home. How the cottage was removed to Stanmore Road I could not tell you.

Early Impressions of Stanmore Road

“Richmond was then known as Bingsland, an early settler there being Mr Bing⁹, who owned a great deal of property. Mr Lockhart¹⁰, I fancy, bought a good portion of Mr Bing’s land. It was very swampy up Stanmore Road those times, and when Mr Lockhart’s horses used to get out at night you could hear them splashing in the water which lay around. There were no wells and no artesianians there then, and the household water supply I had to draw from a stream running at the foot of the garden. For cooking bread I used a camp oven. Ours was the second house in Richmond so you can guess that I didn’t have any neighbours for a start.

“Some time later a store was opened in Stanmore Road by Andrew M’Gill. The little building is there still and is kept by Miss Webb as a drapery shop¹¹. There were no roads at all in Richmond at the time I am speaking about—it was all one open common, no fence whatever, neither was there a bridge at Stanmore Road¹².

The Spirit that Made the Province

“Wherever one had to go those times as far as the ordinary folk were concerned had to be done on foot. My husband who was working in Port used to walk from home in the morning to his work and then after a hard day’s toil walk back over the hill again at night, arriving home probably at nine o’clock. The next morning start off to work again at five o’clock. His wages were six shilling per day. There was but little work in Christchurch then, and the men had to go wherever they could find it.

Reinforced from Cumberland

“The first school I remember in Christchurch was St Luke’s¹³, of which church Mr Lingard was the minister. Gradually Richmond grew, and among the early comers in our street were John Hughes, the blacksmith, Joe Irving, a Mr M’Donald and a Mr Holden. They all came from Cumberland, in the North of England, and in consequence the street became known as Cumberland Street¹⁴. As time went on the business area grew, and Tom Bunting¹⁵ started a store in Stanmore Road. Mr Bunting, I think, also opened the first pork shop in Christchurch in Colombo Street, opposite Steel’s.

Some Food Prices

“Some people think nowadays that they have a great deal to pay for their provisions, but how do they think the old pioneers fared with the high price even in those days and the small wage

the men were getting? Butter was 2/6d a pound, sugar 6d a pound, Maori potatoes 2/6d a hundredweight, and bacon and eggs were also somewhat in the way of luxuries.

Bus, Tram and Train

“In course of time, transport improved in the district, and Brightling’s ran the first tram up Richmond way¹⁶ — one car drawn by two horses — but I could not say how far it went. Previous to that, a man named Booker had bit of a bus service, but I could not say how he did with it. Richmond has indeed grown now to be a very fine place and is almost city-like, with its many fine shops.

“The train in the days which I have been talking about only went as far as Rangiora, and my eldest son, who was a “Lyttelton Times” newspaper runner for many years used to travel by it and throw off the bundles of paper at the various places required. He is still hale and well, and is employed as a gardener at Chokebore Lodge, Riccarton.

Not Eligible!

“My husband during one of Christchurch’s bad times went with a party up to Hanmer Springs, and when that relief work ended he got a position at the Sanatorium as gardener, and remained there for sixteen years, when he was superannuated. When he returned to Christchurch to live, he was asked one day by Sergeant Bird if he received the old age pension. My husband said that he did not: it had not been granted to him owing to his means being beyond the scope provided for in the Act. Sergeant Bird very kindly looked into the position, and found that a claim for the pension would not hold. This seems hard that an old pioneer, through perhaps a little thrift, should be denied what is a well earned right in his declining years.”

Fond of Sport

Mrs Murphy then went on to say that she is very fond of racing, especially the trots, and that she had made many successful little investments. Even as recently as twelve months ago she had attended the New Brighton trotting meeting. “And I would go to the meetings now,” she said, “only that my sight is so dim that I cannot properly see the horses.”

Adieu

The genial old lady then gave the Reminiscence Man the names of one or two horses to keep an eye on for future events, and, promising to bear these in mind, he thanked her and bade adieu, as the tea-time hour was nigh, and preparations for such cannot be delayed, even by a chat about the old colonists’ trials and joys.

Notes

I have gathered information in these notes from a range of sources. Many are available online: PapersPast; the Macdonald Dictionary of Canterbury Biographies, Canterbury Museum; Canterbury Land District Deeds Indexes held by Archives New Zealand; *Christchurch Street Names* — a series of PDF documents researched by Christchurch City Library staff, available at: <https://my.christchurchcitylibraries.com/christchurch-place-names/>; and Stones and Wise's street directories, available at Christchurch City Libraries, Tūranga.

Documents marked with an * are available on the Richmond History Group web page: <https://www.aveburyhouse.co.nz/richmond-history-group>

1. The *Huntress* arrived at Lyttelton on 21 April 1863. The voyage was clearly not a happy one; the Lyttelton Times included a brief description:

ARRIVAL OF THE SHIP HUNTRESS.

The *Huntress*, Captain Barrow, arrived yesterday evening after a protracted passage. On leaving London she experienced very heavy weather in the channel, and only reached the line after the very long interval of 60 days. At the Cape she again met with contrary winds, and during a heavy gale sprung the foremast badly, losing top-gallant mast and gear. After leaving the Cape, the *Huntress* enjoyed favorable winds, making the coast of New Zealand in 32 days. Attempted to go into Timaru on Sunday, but a heavy south-easter coming on, had much difficulty in beating off shore, and brings all her passengers to Lyttelton. Two births have occurred on the voyage, and 15 deaths, all children, with the exception of one young woman aged 17, and a boy belonging to the ship.

Lyttelton Times, Volume XIX, Issue 1090, 22 April 1863, Page 4

The report includes a list of passengers on the *Huntress*, citing the Murphy's:
S. Murphy, wife and 2 children, Cork, farm laborer,
included in the total: Adults, 191; children and infants 87— 278 souls.

2. Several such cases were reported in the Lyttelton Times and Press, but the judgements supported the ship's officers. The immigration agents' report was critical of some aspects of the voyage:

SHIP HUNTRESS.

SECOND REPORT.

THE Immigration Commissioners abstained in the first report from passing judgments on the conduct of the officers of the ship pending the decision of the local courts on several cases in course of trial. The result of these investigations shewed that many of the immigrants had evinced an insubordinate spirit, and had led the Master and Surgeon to act somewhat beyond the law.

The Commissioners are of opinion that the officers shewed great zeal in the performance of their duties, although in the instances cited they manifested some want of discretion.

The Commissioners have in their former report expressed an opinion that the "*Huntress*" is not a ship of a class eligible for immigration purposes. They further have to draw attention to the following:—

The Master and Surgeon appear to have received their appointments only when the vessel was on the eve of sailing, and in the case of the latter officer to have been unprovided with any proper instructions. In the case of the Master the Commissioners are informed that on his joining the ship, and when the vessel should have been ready for the voyage, he had to

condemn several yards or other spars.

The Commissioners recommend that the usual gratuities be given to the different officers of the ship.

(Signed)

Wm. Donald.

H. S. McKellar.

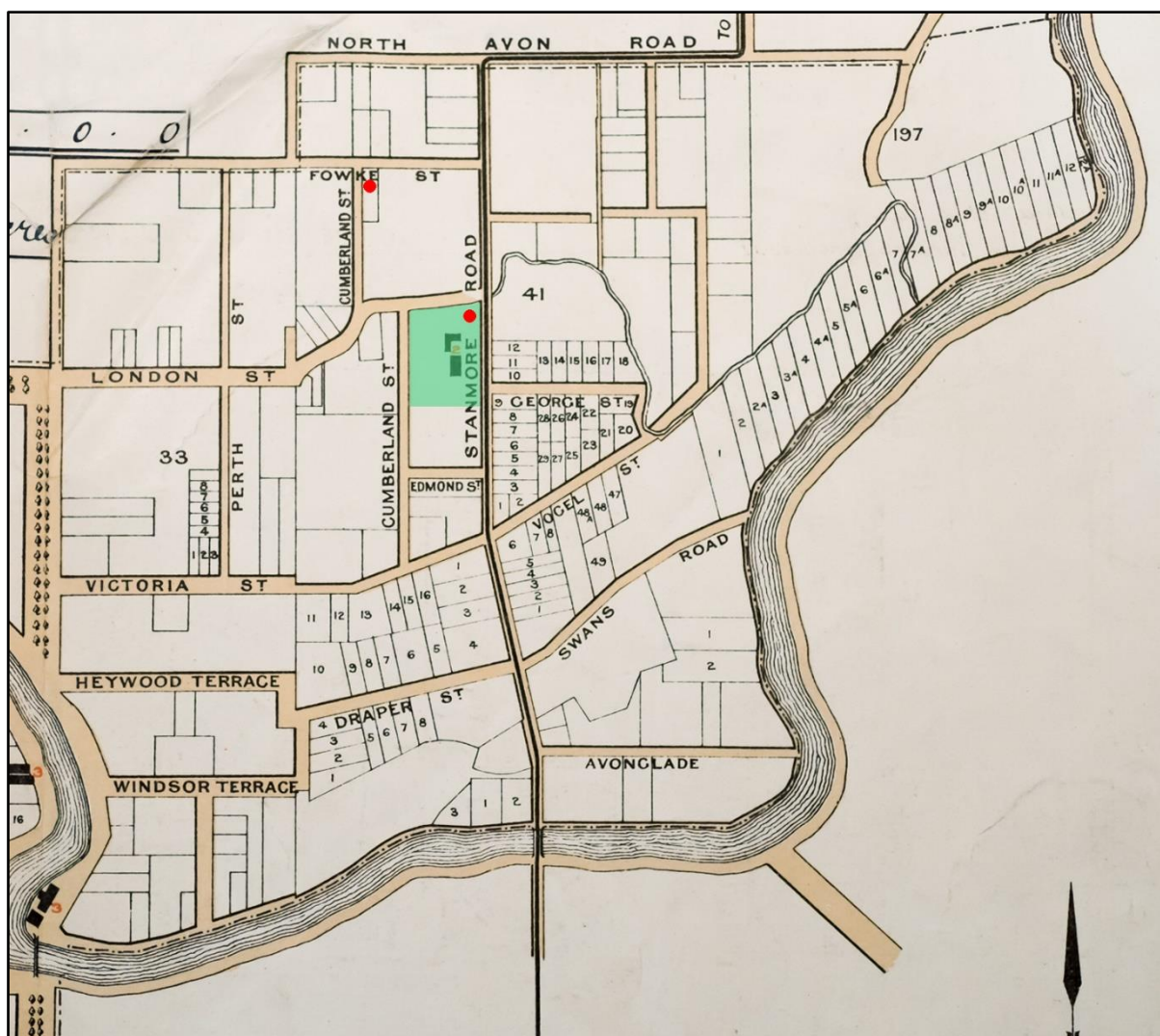
John T. Rouse.

Lyttelton, 30th April, 1860

Press, Volume III, Issue 165, 14 May 1863, Page 6

3. The Lyttelton barracks were built in 1850 by the Canterbury Association to provide temporary accommodation for new arrivals. In order to meet increased demand, the provincial government built another barracks in the Market Square, Christchurch (now Victoria Square) in 1858.
4. At the time, a common name amongst settlers (not surprisingly, no longer used!?) for a native sedge: *Carex secta*, known to Maori as Makura or Pukoi — a plant found in wetlands throughout New Zealand, where it can form large tussocks up to 1m tall.
5. This was Gresford (Rural Section 286 — 50 acres) owned by the Bealey brothers, John (1817–1867) and Samuel (1821–1909). The location of the farm is marked today by Gresford St.
6. Bealey St — now Champion St, renamed in 1948.
7. This sounds like the site of what later became the Richmond school headmaster's house (built in 1876), on the southern corner of London St and Stanmore Rd. That house was built in 1876 and demolished in 1912 to make space for enlarging the playground. The pear trees on that site are mentioned in several personal reminiscences by local residents (see: **Walsh, G. W. Richmond — a Regional History***, p32; **Hubert Flesher Talk-1956/10/16***, p12). The site is now part of Richmond Green; the pear trees long gone.
8. This was possibly John Joseph Anderson (1833–1921) who was custodian of the Provincial Government Buildings at least from 1882, possibly earlier, and who lived in Richmond.
9. Morice Bing (1830–1878). Born in Hungary, Bing arrived in Canterbury from Sydney in 1860 and soon leased R. S. 325, 200 acres north of North Avon Rd, from the Church Property Trustees. Later he purchased land south of there, which he sub-divided and sold in small sections — see note 10. He also donated land for a Methodist church to be built on Stanmore Road. The name 'Bingsland' first appears in newspapers in 1869 and became the commonly-used name for the area around Stanmore Road, north of the Avon River. The name was changed to Richmond in the early 1880s. See: **Snapshot of Richmond 1890***, p5 & 19–20.
10. In fact, it was the other way around. George Duncan Lockhart (1821–1890) purchased R.S.41, 100 acres (then known as Melcombe Farm) in 1862, from Captain John McLean. In 1865, Lockhart's creditors sold two large blocks of the section to Morice Bing. During his tenure, Lockhart had granted some of this land to form Stanmore Rd north of the river as a public road. This was part of an agreement whereby the Provincial Government agreed to build a bridge over the Avon at Stanmore Rd. The bridge was completed in 1862 — see note 12.

11. Stone's Christchurch street directories include entries for Webb's Drapery in Stanmore Rd from 1906 until 1939(!?). The shop was at 263 Stanmore Rd, now the site of Butler Auto Mart. At different times there were up to three Misses Webb involved: Alice, Louisa and Helena Webb, presumably sisters. In the early 20th century, there were quite a number of long-standing businesses along Stanmore Rd serving the Richmond community — 33 years is a good effort!
12. The bridge at Stanmore Rd which had been built in 1862, was destroyed in October 1866 when John Mills and his men cut away the central portion of the bridge to allow the steamer, *Maid of the Avon* to pass underneath. The bridge was replaced in 1868. This may be a useful clue as to when the Murphy's moved to the area; i.e., between 1866 and 1868.
See: ***Stanmore Bridge Petition, 1861****, pp9 & 10.
13. The earliest schools in Christchurch were either private ones or were associated with churches. St Luke's was situated on the north-eastern corner of Kilmore and Manchester streets. A wooden church was built here in 1860. A school associated with the church was operating by 1867.
Chalken, M. *The Church to the North of the River — S. Luke the Evangelist*. 1985, p17.
14. Originally, Cumberland St referred to the entire roadway running between Alexandra St north to Fowkes St (now Avalon St). In 1926, the southern portion, between Alexandra and London streets was renamed Pavitt St.
The Murphy's lived at 68 Cumberland St. This was on the east side near the intersection with Fowkes St; now part of the Richmond Working Mens' Club carpark!?
N. B. A successful system of house numbering was only introduced in Christchurch in 1909, and implementation took several years. Even then house numbers were liable to change when streets were renamed. For example, after 1926, when the southern section of Cumberland St was renamed Pavitt St, 68 Cumberland was re-numbered, 19 Cumberland.
15. Thomas Bunting (1860–1944) was born in County Armagh, Ireland, and arrived in Canterbury in 1879. He established a grocery store in Stanmore Road by 1893. In September that year he won election to the Christchurch City Council representing the Richmond ward, defeating the incumbent, James Flesher by 3 votes. He later became a very successful businessman; in 1895 he purchased a small Christchurch brush-making company, which became Bunting & Co. Ltd, the largest brush makers in New Zealand.
16. The tramline to New Brighton via Richmond was built by John Brightling for the *City and Suburban Tramway Company* in 1894. The company did not prosper and sold the line to Brightling in 1895. He operated the business until 1906 when the *Christchurch Tramway Board* acquired the line.
See: Alexander, Mark, ***On the move: Christchurch transport through the years, v3: Rails in the Road***, 1985 & v4: *The Wire Web. Tramway Historical Society, 1986. pp15–17.
Jonathan Brooker operated a horse-drawn transport service between Richmond and Cathedral Square; the service was operating by 1893 and was popular with local people. Booker lived in Cumberland St. In subsequent years he acquired other coach businesses in Christchurch. The expansion of tram services in the first decade of the 20th century affected his business; he sold his horses and vehicles in 1908 and later moved to the North Island.*



This map shows Richmond in the early 1890s after the suburb had become part of Christchurch city. The location of Richmond School has been highlighted in green. The school operated on this site from 1875–1925. Earlier, according to Ellen’s narrative, the Murphy’s lived on the south corner of London St & Stanmore Road. Later they lived in Cumberland St; both locations are highlighted in red. As well as the street layout, the map shows many of the subdivisions of land that had occurred since 1860.

Excerpt — Plan of the City of Christchurch. Archives New Zealand Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Archives Reference: CH134 Box 186, 8/3/35, R20011301.