

*Searching for
'Waratah'*

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THE LIFE AND WORKS OF
WILLIAM HENRY SCOTT HINDMARSH

Jo Wynne

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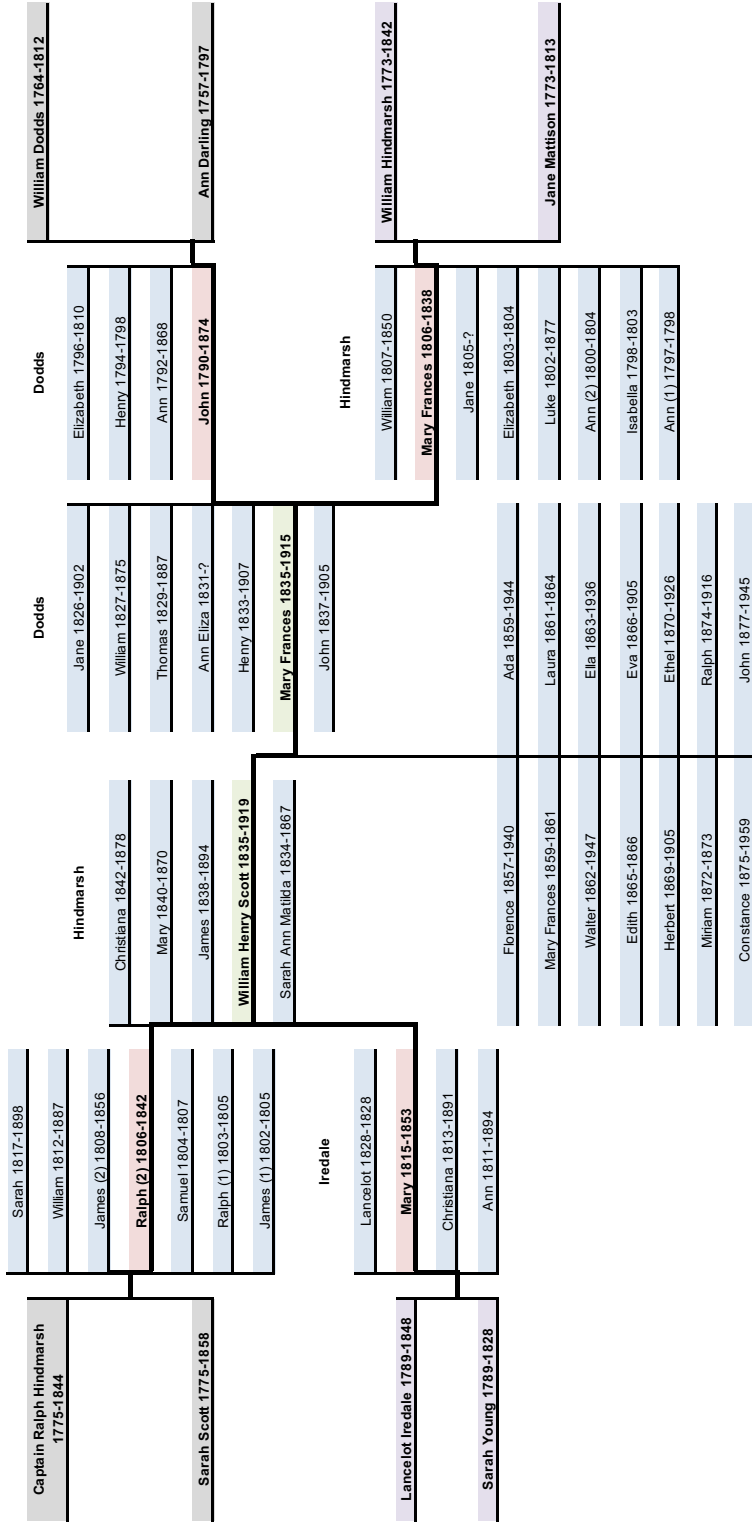
*This book is dedicated with loving memory to my mother,
Kathleen Hindmarsh, who sowed a seed by telling me the stories
she heard at the knee of her grandfather 'Waratah'.*

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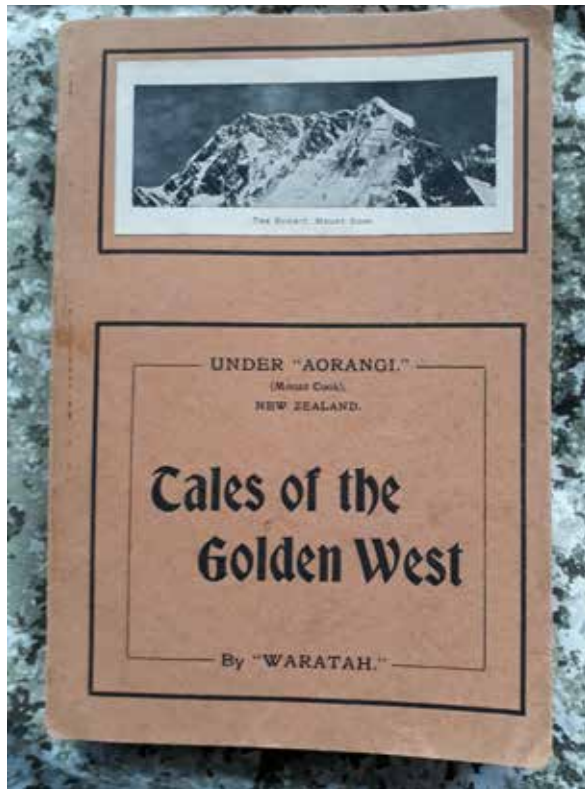
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Preface

At the heart of this book lies the work *Tales of the Golden West: Being Reminiscences of Westland from its Settlement by Gold-seekers and Traders* by 'Waratah', first published by Whitcombe and Tombs Ltd in 1906. The book has been reprinted several times, most recently in 2010.



Tales of the Golden West by 'Waratah'. First edition cover, 1906.
PUBLISHER WHITCOMBE AND TOMBS LIMITED, CHRISTCHURCH, 1906.



W. H. S. Hindmarsh, watercolour. *Waratah Flower*, circa 1911.
PRIVATE COLLECTION.

The name ‘waratah’, an Aboriginal word for ‘beautiful’, comes from the Eora people, the original inhabitants of the Sydney area. The botanical term for this shrub, *Telopea speciosissima*, is perfect, seeing that the blooms are big and visible from far away. *Telopea*, from the Greek word *telepos*, literally means ‘seen from afar’. The large red blooms stand out among the green of the bush, and the shrub stands tall, strong and erect. Each waratah flower is comprised of a cluster of flowers, an inflorescence, ranging to as many as 240 individual flowers.

As a child, I never opened the copy of *Tales of the Golden West* that was on my parents’ bookshelf. I didn’t connect this book to my mother’s

grandfather, William Hindmarsh, who lived next door when she was growing up in Reefton, in the West Coast region of New Zealand's South Island. I knew my great-grandfather by the art and decorative script he'd done in his grandchildren's autograph books, and I'd seen his calligraphy in St Stephen's Church, Reefton. I also did not connect 'Waratah', the author of this book, with Great-grandfather, even though I'd seen his painting of a waratah flower in an autograph book.

The stories my mother told me were about colourful characters from further back in the Hindmarsh family history. As a young child, I told these stories to my friends. One of these was about Captain Ralph Hindmarsh (William's grandfather), who had done transport service during the Napoleonic Wars in the Mediterranean. In 1814, as part of that service, he was the captain of a sailing ship that took Napoleon's Imperial Guard, horses and equipment to the island of Elba. Napoleon was pacing anxiously on the beach when they arrived. His mood changed to happiness as he watched them unload the vessel. He said that Italian sailors would have taken eight days to do what the British sailors did in eight hours. He added that the Italians would have broken some of the horses' legs, but that the British sailors took such good care that not one of the horses received a scratch. My story would finish with Captain Ralph speaking to Napoleon in French and Napoleon giving him a diamond-encrusted snuffbox.

Another master mariner, Great-grandfather's uncle John, the eldest son of Captain Ralph Hindmarsh, was the subject of more stories. He was the first mate on the government brig *Governor Phillip*, transporting prisoners from Sydney to Norfolk Island. He uncovered and helped to foil a prisoners' plot to poison the crew and guard and take over the ship. I had the headline to prove my story: *Diabolical Conspiracy to Murder the Crew and Guard of the Governor Phillip Transport*.¹ 'DiaBOLical' became a catchphrase among my friends.

After his ship, *The Lord of the Isles*, grounded, turned over and sank in about three minutes in the Hooghly River in West Bengal in September 1834, Captain John Hindmarsh left the sea. He became the postmaster at Diamond Harbour near Calcutta and married an 'Indian princess'. One

day when his wife became ill, he set off in his small boat to fetch a doctor. While they were returning, a violent squall came up and the boat capsized, but they managed to scramble onto its hull. John was a strong swimmer and decided to swim to shore. When he was partway there, the doctor, who was still on the upturned boat, saw him turn onto his back, scream and sink. The doctor believed he had been taken by an alligator. Three days later, the doctor's guess proved true – John's body turned up. It was almost a skeleton and could only be recognised by the ring on his finger!

William H. S. Hindmarsh, 'Waratah', is the only possible source of these tales, telling his children and nearby grandchildren, who in turn passed the stories down.

In later life, William wrote journals recalling the first twenty years of his life. I read a transcription done in the 1980s – some 300 typed pages – and young Willie came to life for me. I wondered how the rest of his life unfolded, but at that time there was too much going on day by day to be delving into the past. It wasn't until 2014 that an obsession about family history took over. I had planned a trip to England to celebrate my seventieth birthday. An exploration of the south of England, combined with a week WWOOFing and the British ukulele festival at Cheltenham, was on the cards. The rest of the time to be spent enjoying a feast of theatre with my good friend, Fi, in London.

I knew from William's journals that during his early teens he had lived for six years with his grandmother and aunt at Trinity Almshouses' cottages for distressed seamen and mariners, and their wives, children and widows, at Mile End, London. His grandfather, Captain Ralph Hindmarsh, had died in 1844, just before William arrived in England. When I found that these cottages still stood, I added visiting them to my 'things to do in London' list.

A few months before I left New Zealand in 2014, I researched the background of Captain Ralph Hindmarsh – his sailing adventures and what led him to petition for one of the Trinity Almshouses' cottages. The more I found out, the more I wanted to know.

I cancelled my WWOOFing and exploration of England's south and

asked Fi if she would like to come to Northumberland with me. This was where the Hindmarsh ancestors came from. I needed to walk the streets they had walked and breathe the air. We travelled from Newcastle upon Tyne in the south, to Alnwick and other small towns on the way, to Berwick on Tweed, Belford, and Holy Island near the Scottish Borders in the north. Whether it was a feeling of the West Coast of my childhood or some deeper connection – whatever the reason – I felt a sense of familiarity and belonging in Northumberland.

Not only both of William's parents but also his wife, Mary Frances Dodds, and her parents, all came from Northumberland. When I returned to New Zealand, I was driven to round out the stories of these ancestors over the next three years. At first my main focus was the stories of the earlier characters, but questions were forming about my great-grandparents, William and Mary Frances – the only descendants from these Northumberland families to settle in New Zealand. Why did they come here?

During those three years, I read *Tales of the Golden West* for the first time and became absorbed in the abundance of early West Coast history and anecdote. From Ngahue and the greenstone legends, to the early explorations of Heaphy, Brunner and Rochfort. From the crimes of the Burgess–Kelly gang in the 1860s, to the ascent of Aorangi/Mount Cook on 3 February 1905 by a group of locals. William's own explorations of the West Coast, and his experiences attending court sittings and inspecting early coal mines, are written into his tales. A local case of tarring and feathering, which happened during his early years in New Zealand, became the tale 'A Grey Pastoral – The Widow and the Tar', included in *Tales of the Golden West*, which was echoed in Blerta's 1977 film *Wild Man*. Many tales are about people William had met or knew personally. These vary from his experiences as a neighbour of Chief Werita Tainui, to trying to sell life insurance to Dick Seddon, to detailing the life of Bridget Goodwin, captured in the story 'Little Bidy of the Buller', appearing in *Tales of the Golden West*. The reminiscences of this four-foot-high, female gold prospector as told by 'Waratah', have been repeated many times by various authors.



W. H. S. Hindmarsh, thought to be in his early sixties.
PRIVATE COLLECTION.



W. H. S. Hindmarsh – his signature and pseudonym.
PRIVATE COLLECTION.

I already had a record of the first twenty years of young Willie's life as written in his journals. I now knew about this significant publication written when he was seventy. It felt like a natural progression to leave the older ancestors and concentrate my research on William. His book sat on the desk in front of me and as I looked at it, I wondered: Who was he? What influences, interests and events during his life shaped him to be the man who wrote this book? Why did he use the pseudonym 'Waratah'? His early childhood in New South Wales, Australia, seemed to be the only reason for him using the pseudonym 'Waratah', but the name was beginning to have a special meaning for me. After all, a waratah flower can be seen above the surrounding bush. The older Hindmarsh characters were now in the background, but Great-grandfather 'Waratah' stood out and was signalling me from afar.