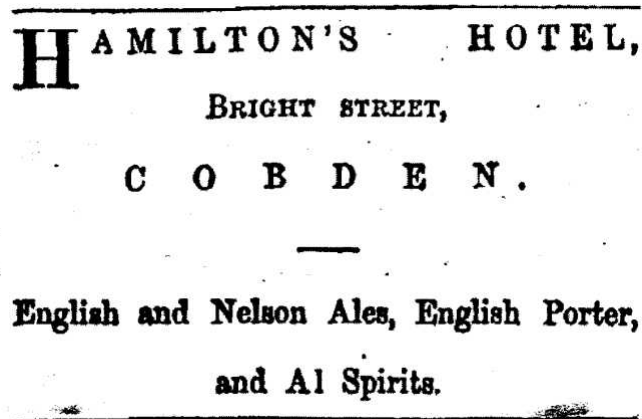


4.1 HAMILTON'S HOTEL COBDEN 1865

John Hamilton built Hamilton's Hotel at Cobden in 1865. This was the first year of settlement and an advertisement for the hotel was placed in the very first edition of the Grey River Argus on 6 January 1866. This means that the hotel must have been built at least about three months before then. This was indeed early for the West Coast as 1865 was also the first year of settlement for Greymouth. This was also the first record we have of any New Zealand activity by John Hamilton.



Grey River Argus 6 January 1866

The hotel was strategically located on the north side of the river opposite Greymouth. It was at a point where the river narrowed and the only road or, more accurately, track to the Grey River gold diggings. There was no bridge across the river until 1884 and in the very early days there was no ferry. Travelers, mostly coming from Hokitika, used punts secured to an overhead line to avoid being swept away by the current. They also had to swim their horses across with the attendant risk of losing them. All travelers in each direction had to pass by the hotel.



Punts on the Cobden side looking towards Greymouth

The hotel was located on Sections 2 & 3. Section 1 was occupied by the government buildings. What government there was at that time was also complicated by the fact that Cobden was in the Province of Nelson and Greymouth on the south side was in the Province of Canterbury. The major issue for the Nelson provincial government was the loss of customs revenue to Canterbury because they had not established their own customs arrangements at Cobden and almost all trade including shipments of gold which came from the Grey Valley went through the port of Greymouth.

The government activity consisted of a court house, survey office, bond store, gaol and offices for the Warden and Commissioner of Goldfields.¹ The initial Warden was John Blackett whose appointment was gazetted on 1 August 1865 at the time of the proclaiming of the Nelson South West Goldfields.² He was previously the Provincial Engineer. At about that time the first shipment of (1050 ounces) gold was made from the Grey to Nelson on the Eleanor. A township (Cobden) had been laid out at the mouth of the river and that a considerable number of business licenses had already been issued to storekeepers and others at Cobden.³

Warden Blackett's term was temporary and it was reported on 4 December 1865⁴ that Thomas Alfred Sneyd Kynnersley who had previously been Warden of the Marlborough Goldfields, had been appointed Warden. He was also appointed as a Justice of the Peace and Resident Magistrate. Kynnersley was 26 years of age when he was appointed and he was a very active warden moving around to the various diggings under his jurisdiction.

As Kynnersley was John Hamilton's next door neighbour there was potential for John to receive very early intelligence of recent activities and the location of new finds on the diggings and also to opening up of land which might have strategic value such as those adjoining or close to the Grey River with the potential for alluvial gold. As an example, land at Totara Flat was opened to selection at 2 Pounds per acre in a notice dated 27 August 1866.⁵ John's nephew Henry Gilmer was the owner of 200 acres of land at Totara Flat. It is believed it was held more for its potential for what might be underneath or adjoining rather than its agricultural worth. This view is supported by number of later leases on land taken out by the Gilmer Brothers partnership and John Hamilton in the area. From other later events it also became clear that a very close relationship developed between Kynnersley and both John Hamilton and Hamilton Gilmer.

In these early days, the administrative processes of land titles were not well established and there were significant delays of years in the processing of applications for land grants. For John Hamilton this meant that he was not granted the land for the hotel until 24 October 1868. It is also possible that he simply squatted on the land, built his hotel and then applied for the land and there was no choice than to grant the land to him.

The hotel was a relatively small single story hotel with one fairly large bar and about 8 rooms for accommodation. It was advertised as the only hotel with accommodation at Cobden.

In the early stages, the hotel also housed the Post Office until the first Post Office was separately established on 16 November 1865.⁶ It played an important part in the formative years

¹ The House that Sam Built by John Hewstone, Ian Cameron, Peter Sydor

² Nelson Examiner 15 August 1865

³ Nelson Examiner 22 August 1865

⁴ Evening Post 4 December 1865

⁵ Grey River Argus 30 August 1866

⁶ The House that Sam Built by John Hewstone, Ian Cameron, Peter Sydor

of the town and many meetings were held there covering such matters as promoting the town and for election candidates to address voters⁷. It was to become a Cobden institution.



1866 Hamilton's Hotel (name on Hotel Roof) and Government Buildings



Cobden 1866, (Photo from History House Greymouth)

⁷ Grey River Argus 17 April 1867. George Donne candidate for Grey District



Cobden 1880's(Photo from History House Greymouth)



Cobden Hotel 2007 (Now Kell's)

Victoria by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and
 Ireland Queen to All to whom these presents shall come greeting Know ye
 that for good considerations to hereunto moving We fords our heirs and success
 Do hereby grant unto John Hamilton of Cobden in the Province of Nels.
 New Zealand Publican his heirs and assigns All that parcel of land in our
 Province of Nelson in our Colony of New Zealand containing by admeasureme
 thirty two perches be the same more or less Situated in the Town of Cobden Being
 Section numbered 2 on the plan of the said Town Bounded on the Northward by
 Crown Land (100 links) on the Eastward by section numbered 1 on the said plan
 (200 links) on the Southward by Robinson Street one chain in width (100 links) and
 on the Westward by section numbered 3 on the said plan (200 links) as the same
 is delineated in the plan drawn in the margin hereof with all the rights and
 appurtenances thereto belonging To hold unto the said John Hamilton his heirs
 and assigns forever In testimony whereof We have caused this our Grant
 to be sealed with the Seal of our Colony of New Zealand Witness our trusty
 and beloved Sir George Ferguson Bowen Knight Grand Cross of our most
 distinguished Order of St Michael and St George Governor and Commander in
 Chief in and over the Colony of New Zealand at Wellington this twenty fourth day
 October in the thirty second year of our reign and in the year of our Lord One
 thousand eight hundred and sixty eight th of A.D. 1868 (L.S.) No 2309 Reg.
 Surveyed by Mr J.A. Lowe Entered on Record this 20th day of November 1868 "J. Donnell" Secretary for
 "The Brunner" Crown Lands R. No 120 Vol. 209
 Chief Surveyor
 I certify the above to be a true copy of a recorded copy of a certain Crown Grant
 registered in the Deeds Registry office at Nelson as No 11076
 Dated this 30th day of November 1901
 M. Macdonald S. Registrar



Street

Scale 1 inch to 1000 feet

Surveyed by Mr J.A. Lowe

"The Brunner" Crown Lands

R. No 120 Vol. 209

Chief Surveyor



Copy of Crown Grant of Land to John Hamilton 1868