**Sweet** was the eldest of five children of Thomas and Hannah, his father was a ship owner and on occasions known as an East India tradesman. In 1861 there were three servants looking after the family so it can be assumed they were middle class. His father full name was Thomas Whittle Sweet and he outlived his children dying in 1918 at the age of 91. The date of his arrival in New Zealand is unknown but it is possible he arrived on the “City of Melbourne” in 1871 when he was aged 20.

His brother Charles was described in the census as a “private secretary to MP” and “merchant’s clerk”, possibly working in the family business. Charles died in 1892 at age 37.

Thomas also had three sisters, Ada and Edith who didn’t marry and were variously described as governesses and artists, and Gertrude who married a Swedish fellow Axel Lindstrad and had two children. Gertrude is also described as a governess before her marriage at 29, which would have been very late in those days. All the sisters lived on into the mid 20th century.

Sweet was a fast bowler and a member of the first Auckland team to tour the South Island in 1873. After the Auckland match against Nelson in December 1873 he left the team

and came to Christchurch to live. He played three matches for Auckland taking 21 wickets at an average of 6.7. Sweet had an outstanding debut match for Canterbury in January 1875

with eleven of his wickets being bowled. Otago were dismissed for 148 and 55 and Canterbury won by an innings. A year later he again proved too good for the Otago team. Canterbury

were behind by 26 runs on the first innings but an improved batting effort saw them make 272 in their second innings. Otago were all out for 101 in their chase for 246 with Sweet

removing the tail. In December 1876 he played for the Public schools and University team against the World.

The Auckland Star 6 November 1873 said “that TS Sweet is another of the slashing ‘school’, he may be called the ‘J.C.Thornton’ of the south from his many ‘sensation’ and ‘leviathan’ hits. He is by far the hardest hitter in the team and more lost balls have been credited, or rather debited to this young gentleman than is good for the interest of the clubs he belongs to. In defence is improving. Drives to the ‘on’-side and ‘leg’ hits are his special favourites. Advice to any bowler who has to tackle him: get him out in the first over if you can, or look out for squalls. Sweet is a very fast bowler, and on account of his great pace sometimes very destructive. A very lively and effective field, throws in well from a distance, but has to be kept well in check when close to the wickets”.

  He was a foundation member of the Pilgrims Canoe club in October 1875 which was the first organised club to row on the river Avon. The clubs flag displayed a black Maltese cross

on a scarlet ground and Sweet was known as the mate.

In January 6 1876 at the age of 26 he married Clara Constance Thornton, with his brother Charles in attendance, at the Wesleyan Church in Durham St. She was the daughter of George Thornton, who became the Provincial engineer after Dobson’s resignation in1869. Clara was age 20.

Sweet was on the first CCA committee formed in August 1877. From September 1877 he was secretary, treasurer of the Midland club. At a club meeting on 4 February 1878 it was found that Sweet had disappeared and there was a deficit of 62 pounds in the account. (see Star paper) He was also found to have embezzled money from his employer, The Press Company,

as well as being in debt all over Christchurch, one amount was said to be 600 pounds. He also embezzled 100 pounds from the CCA and accounts against him were still being requested in

July. A warrant was issued for his arrest. Sweet had disappeared to Australia and when the divorce case came before the Supreme Court on August 28 1885 there was a request for a commission to examine a witness in Australia, namely FJ Reeder, a former friend and neighbour of Sweets.

The case took place in Christchurch before a Judge on October 10 1885 and Clara was granted a divorce. At the initial divorce hearing on March 3 1885 Sweet was described as

having worked as a clerk and collector for the Press newspaper. His wife Clara said they lived together until December 26 1877 and they had two children, Ethyl born November 21 1876

and Mildred born February 18 1878. She said that Thomas Sweet was living with a woman named Gibb in Carlsrine near Kyneton in Victoria Australia. The pair had several children.

At a hearing in Melbourne on September 14 1885 FJ Reeder (a former Canterbury cricketer) gave evidence before a judge. He said he was at present working as a reader at the Age newspaper in Melbourne. He had known Mr and Mrs Sweet as he and his wife were neighbours and had attended their wedding. He knew Thomas Sweet well having played cricket with him. Reeder said he had moved to Dunedin in 1878 and then to Melbourne in 1881. Shortly after his arrival in Melbourne he saw an advert for a cricket club in Castlemaine signed by Alfred Shardlow Simpson which he believed could be his old friend Thomas Sweet. On March 22 1885 he went to Castlemaine with a Press cricket team to play the local club. He saw Sweet before the game but he did not seem to recognise him. However after the match Sweet approached him and asked if he could have a quiet talk at a suitable time. The time was found and Sweet was keen to know of Christchurch and how his wife was. He did not know of the birth of his second child. Sweet asked Reeder not to tell Christchurch people where he was or even the people in Castlemaine of his past. He had remarried, had not told his present wife Elizabeth C Gibb of his past and considered his time in Christchurch over. He kept a picture of his first wife in the bedroom and his second wife believed he was a widow. Sweet had met her in Cootamundra NSW and married her there under the name of Simpson in 1879. He said he had wrecked one home and did not want to wreck another. Sweet was now the hotel keeper at the Supreme Court Hotel in Castlemaine. Reeder had dinner with Sweet and his wife after the game and while Sweet was away at the bar his wife told Reeder that they were married, had three children, one five years, one four years and an infant. Alfred and Elizabeth Gibb had six children altogether. He named their first daughter after his wife Clara, before he was even divorced from her.

Elizabeth Simpson died in 1945 and is buried alongside her husband at the general cemetery at Kew. The divorce for Clara Sweet was granted on October 10 1885 and she died in 1939, presumably not having remarried, at the age of 83.

Carley Tucker, who lives in Sydney, contacted author Brian Adams in May 2016 indicating that her grandmother, Vera, was the youngest child of Thomas and Elizabeth Gibb and that

she was writing a novel based on Sweet’s life. From her more information was obtained on Thomas Sweet. She said “Alfred Simpson” actually lived in Cootamundra NSW when he first came to Australia which is where he met Elizabeth Gibb. She was not “the daughter of a wealthy landowner” as appears in some reports but the niece. Her father died when she was about 8 and she was taken in by her uncle. Alfred was running various businesses there including an auction house. As far as I know, the family had no idea that he was anyone other than Alfred Simpson, or that the marriage of Alfred and Elizabeth was bigamous and all the children including my grandmother were therefore technically illegitimate. They moved briefly to Carlsruhe where Alfred was running a pub, and then back to Cootamundra, and then in the 1890s they moved to Melbourne where he worked for Dalgety’s the stock and station agent. Alfred also deserted Elizabeth, in 1890 when they had five children. There is a police report of a warrant for his arrest which describes him as “45 or 47 years of age (he was constantly disguising his age – it is wrong on all the birth certificates of their children, 6 feet 2 inches high, very sallow complexion, light blue eyes, scant whiskers (if any), light moustache, swaggering; a good pianist”. But either he came back or was persuaded to return as the warrant is revoked a couple of months later. Lucky for me as my grandma was the sixth child born in 1893! We don’t know why he did this and it’s unlikely we will ever find out.

TheCootamundra Herald, 19 March 1878 said that “Simpson, a very free bat, perhaps rather too much so, but hits very hard and can punish loose balls; a very fast bowler, and in consequence of his pace at times very effective, he can field anywhere with the exception of just round the wicket”.

Carley also said that “Sweet was convicted for horse stealing in Auckland in March 1871 under yet another name and he spent a year in jail before coming to Christchurch. It seems in those days that a posh accent and a good education meant you could get away with anything, including marrying the chief engineer’s daughter after a spell in prison”.