

Emigrants from Estonia in New Zealand

Note by Graham Avery

In the churchyard of the Church of the Holy Innocents at Mount Peel, in the Rangitata valley of New Zealand's South Island, are many memorials including three to persons from Estonia. I discovered them when I visited the Rangitata valley in 2006 to see the Mesopotamia sheep station founded in 1860 by Samuel Butler, the British author of "Erewhon".

This note includes:

1. Information on the memorials at the Church of the Holy Innocents
2. Background information on the persons commemorated

1. Memorials at Mount Peel

Mount Peel sheep station was founded in 1856 by John Acland and Charles Tripp, and its church was built in 1869. The website <http://www.rootsweb.com/~nzlscant/peel.htm> has a list of all the memorials in the churchyard, photographs of some of them, and historical notes on the persons commemorated. I transcribe below 5 of the memorials (the numbers given are those attributed to them on the website):

Leonore Butkevitsch

(no.s 32 &33 - see photograph on the website)

Born Tallinn Estonia 9 October 1893

Died Christchurch N.Z. 2 May 1984

Loved sister of Val Muling

Anita Muling

(no. 34)

Born Riga Imperial Russia 10.1.1903

Died Christchurch New Zealand 20.9.1990

Comment: Anita was the wife of Val Muling; Riga is the capital of modern Latvia

Val Muling

(no. 35)

1896-1961

ГДЕ ДЕНЬ В КРАСЕ ЗЕМНОЙ

СГОРЕЛ СКОРОПОСТИЖНО

Comment: this is a Russian text in Cyrillic script. Transliteration: GDE DEN" V KRASE ZEMNOY SGOREL SKOROPOSTIZHNO. Here's someone's attempt at a translation. : `This is the place where the day in its earthly beauty burned out`. The Russian text is poetic with archaic words. It is a line from a poem by Boris Pasternak called "Mushrooms" or "Mushroom foraging."

Sylvia Sibbald Fox

(no. 38)

5-12-1898 - 6-10-1992

Comment: a friend of Ngaio Marsh

Edith Ngaio Marsh

(no. 39 - see photograph on the website)

1895 – 1982

2. Background information

Ngaio Marsh (1895-1982) was a theatre director and author who divided her time between New Zealand and England. As a writer of crime fiction (she wrote 32 detective novels) she was a contemporary of other authors such as Agatha Christie, Margery Allingham & Dorothy Sayers.

Her novel 'Spinsters in Jeopardy' published in 1954 was dedicated to 'Anita and Val Muling, with thanks'.

According to the biography "Ngaio Marsh: A Life" by Margaret Lewis (1991) "Ngaio Marsh introduced the Mulings to the sheep station, Mount Peel. The Mulings were expatriate Russians who moved to Christchurch. Vladimir (Val) became a particularly close friend and one to whom she could confide. In late 1960, while Ngaio was in England, Val died following a stroke. The Acland family generously offered a place for Val in the graveyard".

After Ngaio's funeral service in Christchurch in 1982, "a small group of her friends took her ashes up to Mount Peel, where they were buried near other early settlers from the district, and not far from the grave of Vladimir Muling. It is a peaceful resting place, backed by dramatic mountains and looking out over the wide Canterbury Plains".

Source : <http://www.rootsweb.com/~nzlscant/peel.htm>

According to the biography "Ngaio Marsh: her life in crime" by Joanne Drayton (2008) "she became involved in the 1950s with two Estonian immigrants Vladimir or Val Muling and his wife Anita. This was a "friendship of three" that rapidly assumed a great significance...Val would become an arbiter of her detective manuscripts ... the Mulings were colleagues in culture and close friends" (page 197). In December 1958 she sought a job for Val from John Schroder, literary editor of *The Press* in Christchurch, writing: "Val (Vladimir) is an Esthonian [sic] who was exiled at the age of 19 & has spent the rest of his life in Paris and then in China where he was Commissioner for the Northern (I think) Territory. In Paris he studied the piano under Corteau [Cortot] and played with the Paris Symphony Orchestra. Val speaks some eight languages & is quite astonishingly civilised & the nicest of chaps" (Page 202). "She was intimately connected to both of the Mulings, but her link to Val was perhaps the one she valued most. When he was charged with soliciting sodomy in a Christchurch park

toilet, Ngaio never faltered in her support and affection for him or Anita. Ngaio was never a prude. She accepted sexual diversity as a matter of fact” (Page 202).” “Many of the men she felt particularly drawn to were homosexual” (Page 292).

Ngaio Marsh “was widely supposed to be lesbian, on the basis of her deep voice and her habit of wearing trousers. A lifelong friend, Sylvia Fox, lived in a bungalow just above her house, and many of her travels were with one woman friend or another - but then, that was the only safe and respectable way for an unattached woman to travel. Her biographer says that in 1953 she fell deeply in love with a married man, Vladimir (Val) Muling, but it is also possible he was gay (he was charged with soliciting in a local park but acquitted)”

Source: <http://www.gaynz.net.nz/history/NgaioMarsh.html>

An American genealogical website gives the entry: „Waldemar Mühling, birth about 1900 Estonia, death after 1949 Christchurch, New Zealand”. Source:

http://www.familysearch.org/Eng/Search/IGI/individual_record.asp?recid=100411399930&lds=1®ion=16®ionfriendly=Southwest+Pacific&frompage=99

The burial register of the church at Mount Peel gives the addresses of “Valdermar Muling” as 25a Cornwall St, St Albans, Christchurch and of „Leonore Lelia Butkevitsch” as "Holly Lea" 123 Fendalton Rd., Christchurch. Source: information from Margaret Todd in Timaru.

The New Zealand government’s Archives site records an Immigration Case File in 1949 for „Muling, Anna” and „Muling, Valdemar”; access to the file, which is located in Wellington, is restricted. One may deduce that they entered the country in 1949, when he was aged 53 and she was 46. There is also an Immigration Case File in 1951 for Leonore Butkewitsch, so one may suppose that she (Val’s sister) joined them in New Zealand two years later at the age of 58. There are Probate files for Valdemar in 1960 and Anna in 1991; access to these files is open, but they must be viewed in Christchurch. One may suppose that these files include their wills, following their deaths in 1961 and 1990 respectively. The entry for Valdemar describes him as „civil servant”

Source: <http://archway.archives.govt.nz/CallItemAdvancedSearch.do> (keyword Muling”

In 1979 Mrs Anita Muling donated to the Christchurch Art Gallery a folio of works on paper (L’Art Décoratif Théâtral Moderne 1919) by the artists Mikhail Larionov (1881-1964) and Nathalia Gontcharova (1881-1962) who left Russia for Paris in 1915. Source:

http://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/media/uploads/2010_06/CAGTPoW_Bulletin_B.161_June_July_August_Final_low_res_2010-06-09.PDF page 18

and http://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/media/uploads/2010_08/GoodWorks.pdf page 59

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