



Mary Bailes (nee Thomson) was born in Whithorn, Scotland. She started working as a domestic when she was 12, and by 20 she had risen to be a cook in the home of a London businessman. When she was 23, she married Jack Bailes, a printer. A year later, in 1875, they sailed with their infant daughter Maggie to Dunedin. The young couple tried to farm on Otago Peninsula but without success. Then they settled in Northeast Valley. Things looked good for a while. They saved enough to build a cottage, then leased pastures for cows and ran a milk-delivery service. But this didn't last. Jack had begun to drink a lot and often spent all the money they made on alcohol. In Victorian New Zealand there was a lot of alcoholism, especially among men.

By 1885 Mary had borne seven children, but two had died in infancy, which devastated her. Moreover, Jack had many debts, so he decided to sell the dairy, house and household goods to repay them. Then he left the family and went to Australia.

Mary now had six living children and had to support the family alone. Usually, if a woman had been abandoned she could get some aid from charities, because without a male breadwinner, it was recognised that she would struggle to support her children alone. Women's work, in factories or as a servant, was paid badly, much less than for men in similar work. But Mary was refused charitable aid because the appeal board couldn't believe that her husband wasn't supporting her. So she put her sewing skills to good use. She became a seamstress and sewed long hours. She rented a cottage in York Pl to be nearer her customers. Her daughter Esther had to leave school to help her struggling mother. She worked for up to 12 hours a day for 2s 6d [two shillings and sixpence] a week, a very small amount. Her other

daughter, Ethel, was apprenticed to two dressmakers for no pay and she also did piecework at a stocking factory.

Jack returned from Australia and tried to help, but was unable to get his business ideas off the ground. However, Mary was able to stop sewing when she became the manager of a shop and refreshment rooms, and by 1903 she had saved enough money to build "Fairview" cottage, "a home of our own" at last, in Northeast Valley. Then Mary saw a new opportunity when a 12-room building in St David St was available for rent. She signed the lease and made it into a boarding house for out-of-town mothers. She gained a reputation for giving good service and value, and her business flourished.

Mary's two daughters married, and she must have been relieved that their husbands turned out to be "good providers". This happiness was overshadowed by the death of her son Tom in World War 1, and Ethel's death in the 1918 influenza epidemic. Mary reunited with Jack, who had overcome his alcoholism and eventually became a Presbyterian elder. They lived together in a cottage at Ravensbourne for 17 years before Jack died in 1938. Mary died a year later on 17 February 1939 and is buried in Dunedin's Northern Cemetery.