



Norman Harper Bell was born in Geelong, Victoria, Australia, on 16 April 1864, third child of Mary Dawson Harper and her second husband, Scottish-born William Ross Bell, a storekeeper.

His father became a tea merchant in Melbourne in 1885, and the business was carried on by two of his sons as Bell Brothers Tea Merchants. Norman probably worked for a time

in the family firm, and married Edith Laura Kingsland, and they had a daughter and a son.

In 1894 Norman moved to Dunedin to join R Wilson & Co, and in 1899 he became a partner in the Tea Department with Leslie Robert Wilson and Thomas Shepherd Culling. He was instrumental in developing a fine Ceylon blend.

Wilson's tea was marketed under the name 'Victory' but Bell felt another name might increase markets. In 1898 he registered in the name of R Wilson & Co 'The Bell Tea' as a trade mark. He traveled throughout New Zealand appointing agents and introducing a coupon collection system, giving cash prizes to those who collected the most coupons.

The brand thrived and in 1904 Bell purchased the trade mark and began the Bell Tea Company in partnership with accountant Peter Barr and John Ross Peterson, a successful grocer.

The new firm was an immediate success. Business at its Moray Place warehouse was often so busy it blocked the footpaths, and in 1908 the firm moved to larger premises in Princes Street.

Norman Bell took little part in public life apart from being made a JP in 1904. Tea was his life, and his household always ate bland foods to preserve their palates for its fine flavour. He died on 21 April 1912, aged only 47, in a diabetic coma, and is buried in Dunedin's Andersons Bay cemetery under a lovely monument, but sadly with the angel's head smashed.

His son managed the business for many years and then retired overseas. Although the family retained large financial interests for many years, they were no longer involved in the running of the firm. The Companies' Office Register shows the owners today are Cut Price Stores 1979 Ltd of Auckland.

The imposing Bell Tea Building still sits proudly on the corner of Hope and Carroll Streets and the enduring iconic brand still survives in the supermarkets and grocery stores of today 108 years after it was first registered. Kiwis love the "feel alive" flavour.