



Alfred Carter Broad was born in the small town of Diss on the borders of Suffolk and Norfolk on 28th June 1851, to Charles Broad and Ann Butcher. Charles, his father John, and his father John, formed a long line of brush makers from Kettering in Northamptonshire.

Alfred Carter, always known as AC, married Martha Osborne in Thetford on 12th December 1876 and in 1879, having had two children, emigrated to New Zealand on board the "Coromandel" together with Martha's sister, Elizabeth Ellen who is thought to have shared their cabin.

AC however, having married Martha Osborne and started a family, decided to do what he knew best – brushmaking, working at first under his own name in a small two room shed-cum-stable in Cumberland Street, Dunedin.

Before he left, he had arranged for a shipment of tools, brush fibres etc to be sent from Britain, unfortunately this shipment was lost, but because he had anticipated the possibility and had made the necessary arrangements, was replaced immediately. As soon as the materials arrived production started with a staff of two.

Some time prior to this AC's younger brother Arthur, also a brushmaker, had emigrated to Dunedin and he joined the firm when it was set up.

Within three years the firm had grown to the point where new premises were essential, and in 1885 a new factory was built in St Andrew Street, Dunedin. The family (it grew to eight children by 1908) lived above the works - the top three windows were their home until 1894 when AC had the family home, "Willard" built in "Cosy Dell" Dunedin.

This enabled expansion of the factory into the upper floor and into additional areas of the yard, and work proceeded apace, with brushes being supplied not only to the Dunedin area but all over New Zealand..

AC then visited England and the USA, purchased and returned with some of the latest automatic brushmaking machinery, these being erected in the freed-up yard areas. The machines were complicated and advanced for the time, so AC decided to send his son Lawson to the Ox Fibre Brush Co in Frederick, Maryland, USA where the machines had been made, for an intensive study of their maintenance and repair. This proved to be a most successful trip, and as the result of a more effective use of the machinery and the greater productivity, more factory space became essential.

Around 1908 the old "Albion Soap" factory in King Street [later Great King Street] and Cumberland Street was purchased, providing half an acre for expansion, which proved adequate until 1941 when a further half acre area was purchased. This land contained 18 cottages, possibly a record in New Zealand for population density!

In 1880 the output consisted of three types each of floor and yard brooms, banister brushes and scrubbing brushes, but over the years many hundreds of different types of brooms, brushes and mops for both home and industry were produced, as well as many special types of brushware required by other firms, for processing their various products whether foodstuffs, clothing or other output.

In 1897 AC retired and the firm became the Otago Brush Company, Ltd.

Mr Harry Williams followed in AC's footsteps in 1917, succeeded by Joe Fowell, whose background was the building of steam traction engines in England and had been working a gold dredge in Otago, as well as being involved in the building of the TSS Earnslaw.

He was descended from the Osborn(e) family of Martha, AC's wife. He departed to farm in North Island after twelve years at the helm and was succeeded by Mr Harold Palmer for a year and then by Leonard Frank Broad who had worked for 25 years in the factory before spending 21 years as manager. He was followed by Mr S Taylor who managed the firm from 1957 to 1973.

The Otago Brush Co Ltd began an association with a Christchurch firm, Bunting and Company in 1927, (they had factories in Fiji as well as Christchurch and Auckland) but continued to trade separately until 1961 when it was decided to sell all brushes under the Bunting name, and after a few years the directors decided to rationalise by relocating both the Dunedin and the Christchurch factories to Auckland, resulting in the closure of the Dunedin factory in December 1973.

The move was clearly ill-advised, and the anticipated benefits of moving to North Island did not materialise, leaving the firm exposed to a corporate raider: the business was asset - stripped and ceased to exist... or did it? The phoenix rose from the ashes!

Four of the senior members of the Dunedin staff who became redundant in 1973 formed a new company in 1974 known as the New Zealand Brush Company Ltd. With considerable business acumen, and being aware of the competitive nature of general brushware, they decided to specialise in the niche market of industrial and commercial brushes.

1996 saw the retirement of the last two remaining partners, William Dore and Cliff McAuley, who sold out to a group of Dunedin businessmen, thus retaining Dunedin ownership of the New Zealand Brush Company Limited, now a highly successful firm based at 4 Otaki Street. Nearly two hundred years after the birth of Charles Broad in Kettering, his inherited skills have remained, providing employment for the people of Dunedin and brushes for industry and commerce throughout New Zealand.

Alfred Broad died on 5 June 1927 and is buried in Dunedin's Andersons Bay Cemetery.

Prepared by the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand (www.cemeteries.org.nz) from information supplied by Michael Broad of Dunedin.