

C. E. Gibbons (1855–1931), seedsman and nurseryman of Napier and Christchurch

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Seedsman and nurseryman C. E. Gibbons does not appear as prominently in historic records as other nurserymen, despite for many years owning successful seed businesses in Napier and Christchurch (Fig. 1A–B) and being the brother and business partner of another successful seedsman, H. C. Gibbons of Wellington.

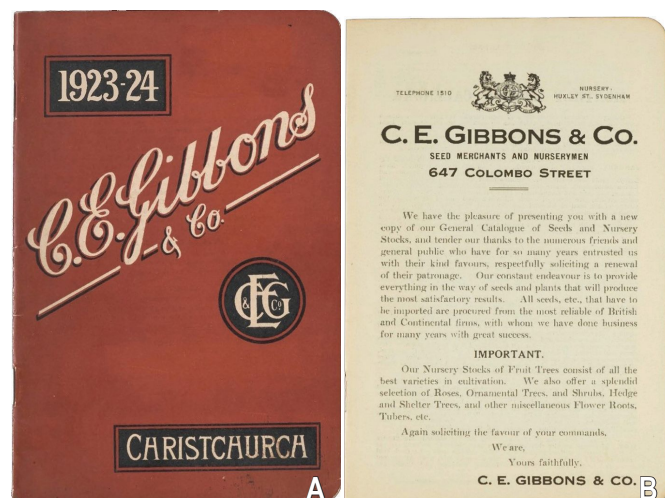


Fig. 1 C. E. Gibbons' 1923–1924 (Christchurch) catalogue. A, cover. B, page.

Clement Edward Gibbons, born in Donington, Lincolnshire, England in 1855 to parents Edward and Eliza, arrived in New Zealand in 1882 and settled in Invercargill, with intentions to continue his profession in the seed industry. Records then suggest that from 1884 he represented Invercargill nurseryman Robert Cleave as a salesman in the Hawke's Bay area, placing advertisements for trees and other plants in the local papers from his base at the Masonic Hotel in Napier (Fig. 2).

Mr C. E. Gibbons, Masonic Hotel, Napier, representative for Mr R. Cleave, of the Avenal and Remu Nurseries, Invercargill, has 10,000 cupressus macrocarpa, for immediate sale.

Fig. 2 *Daily Telegraph*, Issue 4009, 28 May 1884, Page 3.

Gibbons appears to have been employed to travel around New Zealand collecting and dispatching orders for Cleave's nurseries as one of what historian Allen Hale called "men of the roads". In 1885 he married Clara Nash in Dunedin, but the north clearly appealed to him as by 1886, he set up his own seed business in Hastings Street, Napier (Fig. 3–5), opposite Forster's American coach factory.



Fig. 3 This view of Hastings St, Napier, c. 1880 gives an impression of what it looked like when C. E. Gibbons set up his first seed shop there. Collection of Hawke's Bay Museums Trust, Ruawhoro Tā-ū-rangi, 8655.

CHOICE ENGLISH SEEDS,
Guaranteed at London Prices,
NEW AND GENUINE,
FROM
C. E. GIBBONS,
GARDEN & FARM SEEDSMAN, &c.,
HASTINGS-STREET, NAPIER
(Opposite Forster's Coach Factory).

A large consignment of Vegetable and Flower Seeds from London, just to hand ex s.s. Doric, in good order.

C. E. G. for many years had leading experience in eminent Seed Houses in London, Manchester, and Dublin, and latterly in New Zealand. To parties requiring Trees, Shrubs, Plants, or Seeds, he will gladly furnish any information respecting the planting and culture of same.

Dealer in Garden Tools, Implements, and Horticultural Sundries.

Saynor's Pruning and Budding Knives, Gardeners' Gloves, &c.

Lawn Grass, "Paris Prize Mixture," suitable for all soils, 1s 6d per lb.

Permanent Pasture Grasses and Clovers, at market prices.

Clay's Fertiliser, or Plant Food, 1s 6d per tin.

Florists' Flowers—including Pansy, Stocks, Asters, Petunia, Pentstemon, Lobelia, Polyanthus, Mimulus, Myosotis, Verbena, Salvia, Abutilon, Balsam, Anemone, Chieraria, Cockscomb, Carnation, Picotee, Calceolaria, Pink, Garden, Auricula, Primula, and tuberous-rooted Begonia, all saved from choice strains, 6d to 1s 6d per packet.

Hardy Annuals, 2d and 3d per packet.

VEGETABLE SEEDS, leading varieties, **SOLD BY WEIGHT. MARKET GARDENERS** supplied at reduced prices. **LIBERAL DISCOUNT** to Storekeepers.

Orders by Post promptly and carefully executed.

C. E. GIBBONS, GARDEN & FARM SEEDSMAN, &c., HASTINGS-STREET, NAPIER. 175

Fig. 4 *Hawke's Bay Herald*, Volume XXII, Issue 7506, 1 July 1886, Page 3.

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WANTED KNOWN—On exhibition at C. E. GIBBONS & Co., Seedsmen, Hastings-street, a phenomenal Mushroom. It is perfect in shape and color, is eleven inches across, three feet in girth, and weighs 11b 10oz.

Fig. 5 Hawke's Bay Herald, Volume XXIV, Issue 8475, 24 September 1889, Page 1.

To convince new clients in Napier of his credentials and trustworthiness, one advertisement highlights his former professional experience over several years with "eminent seed houses in London, Manchester, and Dublin, and latterly in New Zealand" (Fig. 4). He already had a sizeable range of stock prepared for the start of his business, including vegetable and flower seeds imported from London and America, which was unique to Napier at the time.

Within months, his brother Harry Clifton Gibbons came on as a partner in the business, and so it rebranded to C. E. and H. Gibbons (Fig. 6–7). Much seed was still imported but seed potatoes were grown at their land at Greenmeadows and in other regions such as Otago. This partnership, however, lasted only two years, with Harry moving to Wellington to pursue his own seed business venture. In the early 1890s it seems that C. E. Gibbons sold his shop in Hastings to Cranby and Prebble, with the next few years of his business dealings unknown, but accounts do report that from about 1896 Clement served three years as the nursery manager at his brother's booming business in Wellington.

SEED WAREHOUSE,
HASTINGS-STREET, NAPIER.

C. E. & H. GIBBONS
DIRECT IMPORTERS.

FARM SEEDS
VEGETABLE SEEDS

FLOWER SEEDS

TREE SEEDS

BIRD SEEDS

DUTCH BULBS AND FLOWER ROOTS
Horticultural Sundries.

GARDEN TOOLS, FLOWER POTS, &c., &c.

C. E. AND H. GIBBONS,
SEEDSMEN, NAPIER.

Fig. 6 Hawke's Bay Herald, Volume XXIII, Issue 7545, 20 September 1886, Page 3.

C. E. and H. GIBBONS have for Sale
Cheap several bushels Finest English Evergreen Perennial Rye-grass (imported), suitable for Lawns; also, a prime sample of Lapstone Kidney Seed Potatoes, grown in their own trial grounds at Greenmeadows from imported seed last year. C. E. and H. GIBBONS, Seedsmen, &c., Hastings-street, Napier.

Fig. 7 Daily Telegraph, Issue 5216, 10 May 1888, Page 3.

Records confirm that Clement ended up in Christchurch in the year 1900. Here was the beginning of a prosperous and expanded nursery business for him (Fig. 8). For nearly the next decade he had a shop and office at 109 Colombo Street, then located on the corner of Lichfield Street, with nursery land at Huxley Street, Sydenham. Plants, bulbs, and seeds were now sourced more locally rather than entirely imported. The Huxley Street nursery site was previously owned by J. Stone, once a nursery foreman to William Wilson, who grew trees and shrubs there. The name of nearby Gibbon Street is entirely a coincidence and unrelated to the nurseryman.²

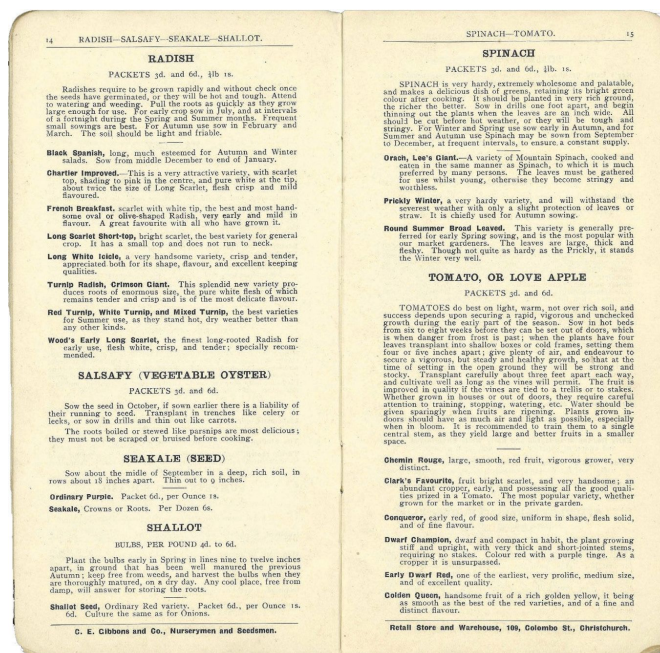


Fig. 8 Page from C. E. Gibbons' 1907–1908 (Christchurch) catalogue.

The shop then moved further along Colombo Street to number 647 (Fig. 1B, 9) where it stayed for a number of decades until it moved yet again, to number 637, another close by spot, around 1955.³ In 1952 the nursery also moved to a larger nine-acre plot at 116 Philpotts Road, Mairehau, at the Winters Road (now Queen Elizabeth II Drive) end, close to where Oderings nursery resides today (Fig. 10). After World War II the company limited their sources of imports to America, England and Japan.

² Unlike Gibbons Street in Upper Hutt, Wellington, named after his brother Harry.

³ Of course, it could be likely that it was the numbering system that changed, not that the physical shop itself moved premises, but the author is taking liberty to assume otherwise.

SPRING FLOWERING BULBS at WHOLESALE PRICES. N.B.—Not less than 25 of each supplied at these rates: Sparaxis, Ranunculus, Crocus Mixed, Crocus blue, Ixia, Tritonia, Crocata, beautiful Orange-Scarlet, Narcissi, Choice Mixed Spring Snowflakes, Scillas (Blue), all at 6s per 100; Scillas (White), Scillas (Pink) Tulips, Choice Mixed, all at 10s per 100; Hyacinths, Choice Mixed, 3s per dozen; Snowdrops, English, 3s per dozen. N.B.—All New Zealand grown. A visit will convince you that we have the largest and finest stocks in town.

C. E. GIBBONS and CO.,
C5605-898 647 Colombo street, Christchurch

Fig. 9 Press, Volume LXVII, Issue 13991, 14 March 1911, Page 1.

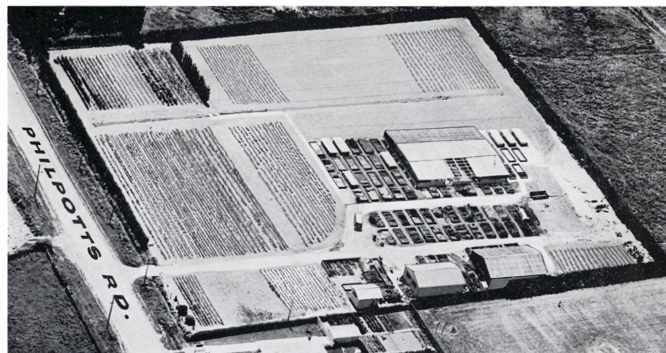


Fig. 10 An aerial view of the nursery at 116 Philpotts Road taken from C. E. Gibbons' 1963 Catalogue.

C. E. Gibbons died in 1931, and his son Edward Clifton Gibbons took over as manager. After Edward, it was carried on by a third generation of Gibbons' under the direction of Lancelot Gibbons. The company's name remained C. E. Gibbons throughout.

The Philpotts Road nursery remained in business until the early 1970s and during that time had evolved into a modern plant nursery and garden centre (Fig. 11) with drive-in facilities, container planting, and public demonstrations of plant care.



GARDENERS!

When thinking of your garden remember what services GIBBONS can offer you.

LANDSCAPING

LANDSCAPING YOUR GARDEN. For owners of new homes, inquire about our landscaping service. We can help you. Shrub catalogues available on request. The planting time for all bare rooted trees and shrubs as well as roses is now in full swing.

ROSES

ROSES, bush, hybrid, tea or floribunda; Climbing Roses; Standard Roses; Weeping Standard Roses. We have a terrific selection of up-to-date proven varieties from which to make your selection. Lists available on request.

FRUIT TREES

FRUIT TREES of all types now available. This wide range includes many on Dwarfing Stock, ideal for the smaller garden of today. Now available that LITTLE WONDER true genetic dwarf Peach "BONANZA" at only \$2.50 each.

SHRUBS

SHRUBS we can confidently say we have one of the most comprehensive selections of these that you will find in the South Island. Why not pay a visit to our nursery at 116 Philpotts Rd. and look round at your leisure. Nursery hours Monday to Saturday 8.30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

DRIVE-IN PURCHASING

Owing to limited space in our town premises we cannot show even one specimen of every variety of shrub we carry. If you are able, we suggest visiting our nursery at 116 Philpotts Rd., Mairangi, Philpotts Rd. runs between Innes Rd. East and Winters Rd. Your inspection of our nursery at your leisure is cordially invited. The Nursery is open to the public every day (except Sunday).

C. E. GIBBONS & CO. LTD.

Nurserymen and Seedsman serving the Gardening Public of Christchurch since 1900.
Town Premises: 637 Colombo St. Drive-in Nursery Centre: 116 Philpotts Rd. Phone 77-919.
A member of the HORTICULTURAL TRADES ASSOC. OF N.Z. INC. which stands for good advice on Gardening matters, and suppliers of High Quality Trees, Shrubs, Plants and Seeds.

Fig. 11 Press, Volume CVIII, Issue 31716, 27 June 1968, Page 11.

Acknowledgements

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