

## 'Spitfire Heroines, Doing their Bit'

Women who flew Spitfires and many other types of planes during World War 2 were part of the Air Transport Auxiliary and were sometimes nicknamed 'Attagirls'.

These ladies would fly six different types of planes in just one day's work; Spitfires, Hurricanes, Barracudas, Harvard's, Wellingtons, Tempests and Lancaster's. In January 1940 eight female pilots, the first trainees, ferried open-cockpit planes, Tiger Moths, in the wintry conditions from Harfield up to Scotland. Within a year their numbers had swelled to 168. Five women pilots from New Zealand were part of that number.

They flew in changeable weather without radios or navigation aids. This required them to stay within sight of the ground, flying with maps, a compass and a watch. Some later made it their goal to learn instrument flying. It wasn't until 1944 that the pilots were taught how to use radios.

Their training programme was rigorous. They worked thirteen successive days on and two days off. Some of the skills they needed were a cool head; excellent co-ordination and an athletic background.

These pilots faced danger, sudden death, serious injury and bereavement on an almost daily basis.

The initial plan was that the Air Transport Auxiliary, ATA would carry personnel, mail, medical supplies and do air Ambulance work, but as pilots they were immediately needed to work with the Royal Air Force, RAF, transporting aircraft. From records it shows these women flew 415,000 hours in total.

Five New Zealand ladies were pilots. One more local lady, born in Wanganui was Jane Winstone. She arrived in England in 1942 and after passing her tests, undertook training in handling different aircraft. Ferrying was hazardous work; pilots usually flew solo; radio contact was forbidden and sudden changes in the weather could necessitate unscheduled landings in difficult circumstances; pilots also had to be

on constant alert for barrage balloons. In 1944 Jane was killed in service when her aircraft crashed. She was 31 years old. A retirement village in Wanganui is named after her.

The women thought of themselves as simply tiny cogs in the giant wheel of Britain's war effort. They were such brave women. R H



Photo's of Jane Winstone



# Coach House Chronicle

Volume 4  
Issue 19

May  
2019

in association with

## Feilding & Districts Community Archive

A collection of interesting items for friends and supporters of 'The Coach House'

### Walter George Pearce's Story

1857—1934

Memoirs of W G Pearce's life written when he was about 60 years old.

The handwritten notes, completed by Walter Pearce were given to me by Winston Pearce, his grandson.

#### Part One

About 1870 some 25 settlers in the Lower Hutt formed what was known as the Sandon Small Farm Association, with the Late Mr H Sanson as chairman. They approached the then Government with a request to set aside a block of land in the Manawatu district for them. After much negotiation and considerable delay their permission was granted. Two or three members of the association, with Mr Sanson proceeded to the Manawatu district to spy out the land, and they fixed on what is now known as the Sandon District.

Each settler had allocated to him 180 acres of open land and 20 acres of bush, making 200 acres in total. One pound per acre on the 10 years deferred payment system. The sections were drawn by ballot.

In 1872 the settlers began to trek to what we were pleased to call the 'Promised Land.' Messers Heaphey, Sanson, Farmer, Phillips, McKenzie and Harris were among the first arrivals. We came up in June of that year-1872. My father and a young man named Thomas Wors

ley, and I drove our cattle up the coast from Lower Hutt. We had about 30 head in all and a few belonged to Mr Hedges and were in Worsley's charge. My father drove the horse and dray which contained tools, camp equipage, provisions etc. Worsley had a saddle horse, I had none and had to walk or ride in the dray



Walter George Pearce at 'Cloverly', Colyton -1930..

until we got to Paekakariki. Here we traded a very well-bred sheep dog, from imported stock, for a young horse, just broken. Worsley took the young one and gave me his, and then I commenced to learn to ride.

At Horowhenua we travelled along quietly fording the rivers at low tide. We reached Foxton and here we had to cross the Manawatu by punt and started for the other side. The ferryman elected to put the small cattle in the punt and to swim the grown cattle. There was a large

contingent of Maoris with canoes and poles to lend a hand. The calves were put into the punt and started for the other side and the Maoris helped us to drive the balance of the cattle into the river behind the punt. Before the punt had reached half way across, the calves rushed to the stern with the result that it sank down at that end, and all the calves were precipitated into the water among the larger cattle. They formed a circle and swam round and round following one another; the Maoris in their canoes trying to prevent them landing on the wrong side of the river. Only about half got across. With darkness coming on it was impossible to make another attempt, so they were left until morning, when it was found that they had all, but one, come across the river onto the Foxton side, but were scattered all over Foxton. It took us all day to gather them up again. In Horowhenua there was no accommodation, so we camped in a Maori whare and put the cattle in a small paddock; all sand and not a blade of grass.

We dined that night of toasted bacon and bread and billy tea and had the same for breakfast next morning. The floor of the whare was covered with rushes by way of bedding. There was an extraordinary number of small company present, which were not visible in the fire light, but one was painfully conscious of their presence all the same.

We were up bright and early next morning, but not too early for the Maori who was there to collect the 'pay' for the paddock. We pushed our hungry cattle along the last stage of the beach with many promises of the good feed they would get when they reached the 'Promised Land'.

We arrived at Scott's on the Rangitikei River that night where both man and beast got something to eat.

Next morning it was decided to leave the cattle for a few days to rest, and to ride on to Sandon and then come back

for them later. We rode up the eastern bank of the Rangitikei River which was in flood. On the way up, we happened on Mr Tom McKenzie's whare, which was at, what is now known as Clydesdale. Mr McKenzie kindly rode along with us and saw us safely across the Makuwai Creek which was in high flood. We arrived at the Pukapukatea Sawmill in time for tea at Mr M Sanson's, a brother of Mr H Sanson, the leader of the pioneers. After tea we pushed on to our new home. On the way we called on the late Mr D McKenzie who had arrived about a month before us. The young folks who had been my school mates were in bed but got up again to have a look at me. So pleased were they to welcome me to the new country. At a late hour we arrived at our new home which the carpenters had just left. Our progress had been slow, owing to the darkness and our horses being tired, and only a track through the flax and scrub. Our journey altogether from the Lower Hutt occupied nine days.

As we had left our dray at Scott's we had nothing but what we stood up in. Worsley's whare was on the next section, on the other side of the Makuwai Creek which I have stated was in flood. Father and Worsley went down to try and cross the creek to get some blankets. Worsley climbed into a leaning cabbage tree and thought he could jump across, but owing to the darkness could not judge the distance and jumped into the creek up to his neck. We had to do without the blankets and I spent the night under the carpenter's bench in the shavings, while Father kept the fire and his pipe going and saw visions of what the Manawatu was going to be in the days to come.

In the morning I walked over to the brow of the hills and had my first view of the 'Promised Land'.

*To be continued with the June edition..*

## Glenbrook Steel Mill

While travelling recently we viewed the Glenbrook Steel Mill iron plant, located 40 kms south of Auckland. Between Christmas and New Year it was steamed up and working. It employs 1,150 full time staff and 200 semi-permanent contractors. It goes under the brand name New Zealand Steel.

The mill opened in 1968 with sand being mined at the mouth of the Waikato River and Taharoa, a few kms south of Kawhia Harbour. This deposit covers over 1,600 hectares with estimated reserves of 300 million tonnes. By 1970 they were producing enough steel for domestic and export markets.



It is New Zealand's sole producer of flat rolled steel products for the building, construction, manufacturing and agricultural industries.

They use locally sourced ironsand to produce around 650,000 tonnes of steel a year. It is a remarkable example of how an industry can successfully adapt to take advantage of a natural resource. The sand contains mainly ironsand and lime-soda feldspars or rock minerals.

By 1987, New Zealand Steel was producing flat steel products. The continuous galvanizing line was modified in 1994 to produce ZINCALUME steel and this led to a range of products for construction, infrastructure, rural and transport applications.

It has been interesting for me to find that substantial industries exist in unexpected areas of New Zealand. R H