

# The Burkes Pass Heritage Trust Newsletter

## December 2016



**Happy Christmas and Best Wishes for 2017 from the team at Alma Cottage**  
Speckle, June, Sally and Lucky

### **Bridge Building Stories**

Dave Page, a visitor to Alma Cottage recently, had some interesting yarns from 1946 when he was a youth of about 16 years of age helping his uncle Norman, the contractor, build a couple of the concrete bridges in place of old wooden ones along the Burkes Pass Valley. Health and safety was not yet invented. The piles were made on site from concrete poured over steel into boxing on the flat ground then were raised with a gantry to an upright position and driven in with a wooden faced rammer. Once in place, the fun started when they had to connect into the concrete deck that was poured next. A star chisel, sledge hammered in was guided with a metal 'dolly', and gradually knocked a hole into the top of the pile. Some gelignite was plugged into the hole with clay then the fuse lit and the top blown off the pile to expose the steel reinforcing.

Trying to restrain the road users from crossing the creek as this was done was difficult, no hi -vis vests or signs of authority meant that co-operation was reluctant and sometimes refused. One local man carting goods with his horse and buggy, remembered as a large man who habitually chewed on tallow candles, declined to stop and when the blasting carried on regardless, his buggy was left in the creek after the horse kicked loose and bolted for home.

Another man not wishing to be delayed in his business and driving a more upmarket car, furiously disputed with the dishevelled looking Dave, who was positioned 50 yards from the bridge to stop traffic. A big explosion set a fearsomely impressive chunk of concrete on an arc through the air toward them. Dave, hoping like heck not to be hit by this, was relieved when it struck the tight top wire on the adjacent fence and surprisingly ricocheted into the car door.... argument settled and a rapid car reversal ensued.



## Heritage Trust Events since April 2016

### **Annis Cottage Cobbing Day – May 7th**

It was a hot day and significant progress was made on the back wall. Max Willetts, Mike Bunckenburg, Grant Wills, Neville Smith and Peter Gallagher lent a hand to Graham and I, to literally get more of the project off the ground. Many thanks to all of you.

The bank behind the cottage has also more recently been cleared of huge fallen willows, fenced and planted in natives.



### **Stories of Burkes Pass – our oral history presentation on 17<sup>th</sup> June**

The South Canterbury Museum hosted the Trust, when we presented sound bites from the five interviews from stage two of our oral history project together with photographs from our archives. It was a great turnout and the seminar room was packed, with a lot of sharing of yarns and memories afterward at a magnificent afternoon tea. Family members from five different owners of the shop/gallery were represented. For those that missed this event, the short excerpts and photographs can be accessed via our web site <http://www.burkespass.org.nz/burkespass/photos/index.htm> or the Burkes Pass Heritage Trust Facebook site. <https://www.facebook.com/burkespassht/>

### **Queen Victoria Oak Tree Plaque re-instated – 18<sup>th</sup> June**

Winton Ballantyne and his family attended a small ceremony the day following the oral history event when his story was shared. Winton presided over fixing the replacement plaque to the trunk of the old oak tree that had been blasted by lightning in Sept 2013. He clearly remembers the original copper plaque present during his childhood that commemorated Queen Victoria's 60<sup>th</sup> Jubilee in 1897. The original words were replicated with an explanation of subsequent events. Amazingly it appears that a new shoot from the base of the tree means that it may well rise again.



### **The Mighty Pines Threatening the Church Safely Removed – July 2nd**

Thank you to the Mackenzie District Council. The church is listed on the council heritage schedule and therefore it qualified for a grant from the Heritage Fund to pay for a significant portion of the cost to do this work. John Baxter, master tree dismantler, took the trees down from the top and finally the trunks were felled and landed with thunderous force safely out of the way of the fragile heritage church building. John had given them a couple of 'haircuts' in the past, however they had definitely come to the end of their lives and most people would agree were not a pretty sight having been disfigured over many decades of wind and snow and previous pruning attempts. Thanks to John they are now removed. Their formidable stumps are the only remaining sign after 140 plus years of service sheltering the little wooden building from strong winds but eventually becoming more of a hazard than a help. The leaning larch was also removed later.

## Wood splitting – August 12<sup>th</sup>.

There was a big wood splitting working session at St Patricks over 4 days. At the height of activity on Saturday there were 3 log splitters working with a crew of 3 on each, with additional machinery loading logs, manning chainsaws and carting split wood away. Many thanks to all who participated and particularly those who brought their equipment and laboured as well, especially Ivan Eason, Mike and William Guerin, Dave Taylor, and Max Willetts. Thanks also to our amazing caterers Ruth Waters and Julie Greig. See the video here. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZEPDek3bYg&feature=youtu.be>



## South Canterbury Historical Society group visit – October 15<sup>th</sup>.

A wonderfully enthusiastic bunch from Timaru and beyond, walked the heritage walk from Anniss Cottage to St Patricks Church then returned to Alma Cottage for a traditional cup of tea. A photo book from this trip has kindly been donated by Ashley Shewan, the organiser.



## Alma Cottage Update

The earthquake that was so devastating to Kaikoura was felt at the cottage as a creaking and vaguely 'at sea' sensation. This reminded us that our determination to take some proactive earthquake protection measures was overdue. The brick chimney to the coal range was dismantled to the roofline and a steel cover placed over the existing metal flue. Perhaps one day we will recreate a lighter brick slip version to give it the original appearance, however the occupants of the bedroom below and kitchen can feel more re-assured now. Investigations into strengthening the cob sections are being made, even if it is just to make it more likely for a safe exit if 'the big one comes'.

Best wishes for the Season,

Jane Batchelor

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