

The Burkes Pass Heritage Trust Newsletter

May 2017



Dry Land Pasture Trials Recorded

The Trust has recently been fortunate enough to be able to make some film and sound recordings of David Reynolds who has had many leading roles over many years in the Mackenzie District and is currently the Patron of The Burkes Pass Heritage Trust. David was a farm advisor for the Ministry of Agriculture during the 1950's and 60's, based in Fairlie and covering an area from lowland Cave to the high country and mountain stations of the Mackenzie. Part of his role was educating farmers about options to maximize their production and he was an instigator of many innovative techniques. It seems topical to revisit the efforts put in over past years to find a way of making farming both sustainable and profitable in the Mackenzie and ideas trialled in the days prior to irrigation being even contemplated.



One of his initiatives was to import some seed from specialized clover varieties he had heard of in North America and set up plots to see if they suited local dry land conditions in the Mackenzie basin. A trial plot with different seed varieties given various treatments, with and without added fertilizers, was located on Holbrook Station beside the main highway so that passing station owners could see the results for themselves. The clovers were drought tolerant, rich feed for stock while unattractive to rabbit browsing, able to be over sown onto existing pasture with no cultivation required and competitive to hieraceum. However, the optimal time frame for some of these clovers to establish and spread locally via their stems and root system was 10 years or more.



Zig Zag Clover

Unfortunately, due to the inevitable restructuring of the time, the results of the trial were never satisfactorily completed. Today, 50 years or more later, despite rabbits, hieraceum, dry conditions and the incursion of wilding pines to the fenced site, the results can be viewed from the roadside and are impressive with the luxuriant mounds of clovers spilling from the plot onto the road verge. Could this have been a useful contribution to some of our current problems?

The Trust is extremely grateful to David for making the time and effort to make the recordings and we hope to make more of this valuable archive available in the future.

Autumn Chimney Repairs at Alma Cottage

One of the delights of winter for us in our old cob cottage is a roaring open fire in the large original clay fireplace. The cast iron fire grate with its Victorian floral tiles hold all the large twisted hunks of wood that the log splitter groans and spits out. An impressive flaming heat with crackling and showers of sparks sent skyward is more entertaining than any screen show. The large 8 gallon cast iron pot embedded into the clay back of the fire grate from the day it was built, continues to give good protection. What was happening at the top of the structure we sometimes wondered but procrastinated about lifting the iron roof to have a good look. Cooler weather recently prompted us at long last to do the deed. We were a bit shocked to find blackened wood and a couple of holes right through the chimney at the top. So, after removing any loose cob and any woodwork that made contact with the cob, we got to and resurfaced the old chimney with some fresh clay/tussock and manure mix.



While we were at it we put a strap around the top brickwork that protrudes just above roofline, just in case of

a big shake. Perhaps we just got lucky, but evidently those that made the original structure knew what they were doing as it had lasted until we got around to maintaining it properly.

Grant for Renovation of Church Fence

Many thanks to the Mackenzie District Council who have approved a grant from the Council's Heritage Protection Fund to contribute to the cost of materials to re-instate the original style picket fence of the Burkes Pass Church. The church is listed on the MDC Heritage Schedule and therefore eligible for assistance with a project that enhances its heritage value. The current pipe, railway iron and netting fence has certainly done a good job and is very serviceable, however we now have the opportunity to display the church and its architecture in a manner that befits its history. This was recommended by the heritage architects in the conservation plan for St Patrick's in 2003. The setting is an important factor in a heritage building and luckily we have old photographs that give a good guide to the style of fence it originally had. The swagged picket fence is also seen in photos of the old cottage (demolished in the 50's) next to the hotel and also the house opposite the church. The style is a little more complicated than the usual picket fence pattern (where the pickets are aligned in a straight line) but was evidently popular and maybe the same craftsman built them all.

Who Remembers Winston the Little Engine?

A video found on U-tube recently reminded some of us of very enjoyable rides on the model railway that ran for several years at Burkes Pass in the 1990's, the project and inspiration of Robin Stevens and Shirley O'Connor. The gleam of Winston, the engine, steam driven with a real coal fired boiler, the railway station with all the accoutrements of the full-sized version, rails and points, signals, wooden water tower, over bridge and route through hills and dales punctuated by the unmistakable steam whistle marking progress through the scenery, was magic for adults and children. Robin and Shirley are involved with the Nelson and Blenheim modelers, and continue to be an amazingly creative pair.



The entire U-tube video is called **Burkes Pass Rly & Loco named WINSTON, New Zealand.mp4** and the link is <https://youtu.be/KNBwS4BHRKQ>

Farewell and Thank You to the Corcoran Family

Barbara and John Corcoran who lived beside St Patrick's at 'Church Gate Cottage' and more recently 'Taryn', were the key holders and minders of the church for many years and now have moved on to Timaru. The Trust is very grateful for their input and wishes them all the best for their new ventures. On a personal note, I am going to miss the neighbourly banter and their chickens wandering around the church lawn looking quite at home.

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