

The Burkes Pass Heritage Trust Newsletter

Sept 2017



Sad Starling Story

Arrival at Alma Cottage is normally a well-rehearsed routine affair. No lingering in the dark and rain, let the dogs out of the truck, unlock the back door and head through the kitchen to turn the power on. Something was amiss this time, white splodges all over the floor, tins fallen off shelves, the curtains hanging awry, yes, all the hallmarks of a bird invasion. The small cast iron cover below the oven on the coal range was on the floor, soot for Africa, floor, ceilings, walls, and inside the open freezer door. Finally, I spotted the dead starling in the wood box, a mouse trap clamped to one foot. I could hardly bear to think of what it had endured getting past the flue cover, down the flue into the firebox, squeezing across the narrow space over the oven, down the side and eventually glimpsing a chink of light at the soot vent. No doubt there was blessed freedom for a while until the mousetrap clamped on. Some serious hours of cleaning followed and next day a floor polish was called for, even behind the fridge. Another mousetrap was lurking clinging to a wire from the back of the fridge. On releasing its grip it revealed another bird foot, attached to a body jammed into the wires and pipes, not easily disengaged. At this point, fed up with the cleaning and the fridge surprise, I mentioned out loud to the 'man of the house' that perhaps he could help getting it out, however his grip on his newspaper was unrelenting. Well, we women just do what we do and get on with it.....poor birds though. But the man of the house did get on the roof and seal the flue exit with netting!

Helifix- screws for earthquake strengthening cob walls.

Cob walls, just like unreinforced masonry buildings can be at risk from collapse in an earthquake, however we have become aware of useful techniques that can be retrofitted to minimise this risk. One of these is the use of Helifix screws. These mighty long stainless steel screws, which can be a metre or more in length, are being used at Tiptree Cottage, an unusual and charming two story cob building in Yaldhurst dating from 1862 that is now undergoing extensive restoration and earthquake stabilisation. Graham and I have been along to watch the process and came away very impressed with the ease at which they can be fitted with a hammer drill. They can tie walls together at the corners or hold a timber bond beam to the top of the walls. The corkscrew twist 'bites' well providing a good key into the cob, has some flexibility, and is resistant to corrosion with a high tensile strength. We now plan to make use of these in Alma and Annis Cottages.



Welcome to our new trustee – Janine Donohue

Janine and Peter took over the reins of the Mt Cook Road Board Office (formerly known as The Stone House) from Liz and Maurie Angelo 6 years ago and have enthusiastically continued the restoration of this grand old residence. Janine has kindly agreed to become a trustee after the Corcoran family moved to Timaru and left a vacancy. Interestingly John Corcoran was helping to clear out his aunt's estate in the UK recently and came across a book on her shelves that contained an old photograph of a cob cottage at Burkes Pass. Can't escape the place.

Condolences for the Family of Brenda McCarthy

Memories of Brenda arriving with sleeves rolled up to a Trust working bee and her lively enthusiasm came to mind with news of her recent death. She and her late husband Max raised their family in the cottage next to the church while Max managed Paddys Market Station and ran a shearing gang. Brenda was a trained nurse when she first came to the Pass to visit her parents, Major Harold and Olive Calcutt, met Max, whose parents operated the shop, and they later married at St Patrick's church. They were an integral part of the Burkes Pass community for many years and she was a past president of the local Country Womens Institute and in 2014 kindly shared her stories with me and photos of her time at the Pass.



Brenda McCarthy on Burkes Pass Gold Rush Day

Traps

A couple of glimpses of stoats darting about our garden and native bush area a couple of years ago convinced us to try some humane DOC traps. We set 6 traps through our native bush area and a couple close to buildings using an egg as bait. It did not seem to matter if the egg was fresh or not and we also twisted a wreath of dried grass around the egg to give the impression of a nest. In just over 1 year we have caught 6 stoats and 6 ferrets. Both native and exotic birds seem to be thriving in the bush now that the trees and shrubs are maturing and providing great shelter and nesting sites. The bird song is a real treat, compared with other areas of the farm. Whether or not trapping has made a difference to the bird population is difficult to say, however it seems a logical step to give it a go.

Public Loo News

Thanks to the efforts of Garth Nixon, Community Facilities Manager at the council, in response to a request from residents, there is now money allocated for a much needed public toilet at Burkes Pass from government tourist infrastructure funding. It is anticipated to be in place for this summer.



Church News

A significant fund-raising effort is about to start to make some repairs to the church, replacing a couple of small lengths of rotten weather board, metal capping to cover the fissured roof capping boards and an overdue repaint of the exterior walls and porch. While we have some savings allocated to this in the budget we will have to raise significantly more. Any contributions to this would be greatly appreciated and donations to the Trust have tax deductible status with the IRD.

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