

## NZ Tunnelling Company Tour

### Mike & Debra ROYCROFT

*Tour Leader*

*Grandson of 43082 Lance Corporal James Lewis Roycroft*



My Mother was Colleen Roycroft, one of eleven children of Jim and Doris Roycroft. My Grandfather James (Jim) Lewis Roycroft was a miner in the Waihi Gold mines who joined the New Zealand Tunnelling Company 5<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements in 1916 as a Lance Corporal. He returned to Waihi after the war and continued working in the gold mines.

In 1954 at the age of two I was brought to Waihi and was raised with my mother's family until I left Waihi to work in Hamilton in 1969. I went to the Waihi East School, the old Intermediate School and the new Waihi College. My most known attribute to Waihi was my music, which was to later play a very important part of my life for 37 years as a professional entertainer. I recorded with RCA, EMI and BMG. In 1983 I was honored with New Zealand's Country Music Entertainer of the Year and NZ Male Vocalist Award.

In 1987 my family and I moved to Australia where I continued my music career. In 1992 I was honored with Australia's highest country music accolade a Tamworth Gold Guitar.

In 2000 my wife Debra and I created a café brand called Coolabah Tree Café and set out to establish the biggest chain of road house restaurants in Australia. In 2009 after establishing a chain of 17 roadhouses with over 300 staff we sold two thirds of the business and left the remaining third to be managed by our son. We have a daughter who lives in Holland and have been travelling there at least once a year for the last nine years. Now that we are semi-retired this has been bumped up to two times a year. It was during one of these trips that we happened to visit Ypres in Belgium. It totally fascinated me and I remembered that my grandfather James had fought in this region during the First World War.

Upon returning I decided to investigate exactly where my grandfather was located during the war. It so happened that the Tunnelling Company and Arras connection was starting to emerge. In May 2010 I visited Arras and was totally fascinated

with the whole story. I quickly realized that it was one of the best-kept untold secrets in New Zealand's military history. It was later during a visit to Waihi that I met up with Sue Baker Wilson and the rest is history.

I am keen to see the establishment of a Waihi Tunnelling Company Memorial, a museum in Waihi commemorating not only the Arras involvement in the war but also the social aspect and lives of those miners/soldiers that fought in the war.

My Tunnelling Company Grandfather was not the first Roycroft to see service on the Western Front. His Grandfather, my Great Great Grandfather, came out to New Zealand as a Fencible in 1847. He had previously served with the 42<sup>nd</sup> (The Royal Highland) Regiment of Foot at Waterloo in Flanders.

### Eileen and son John TILLER

*Niece & Great Nephew of 21437 Sapper William Frederick Hansen*

*Eileen's father, Albert Hansen, also served in World War One. He was a member of the New Zealand Rifle Brigade where he served as a Stretcher Bearer. He served at Passchendaele, Ypres, Messines, Bapaume. He was wounded at the Front on 11 September 1917.*

### Eileen Tiller

I was born in Gisborne in 1923. My parents were farmers. In 1929, because of the depression, they sold the farm and moved to Wellington where Dad's parents lived after they retired from 21 years in the Lighthouse Service. While still in Gisborne I started school and was the only white child in a small Maori school in Patutahi.



Dad managed to get a job as a packer at W.D. & H.O. Wills. He hated indoor work but considered himself lucky to have a job during the Depression. In due course we moved to Westhaven Inlet in 1934, a very remote area on the coast west of Collingwood, via NW Nelson.

A Public Works camp was situated there where a road was being put through from Pakuwau to the coast at Patarau. It was called the Dry Road, and was started to give access to the coast for people living there and a job for men during the Depression. Dad was storeman in charge of equipment and explosives. It was the most wonderful place for children growing up. An account of our time there is in *NZ Memories* Issue 72 June/July 2008 and later included in the *Best Of*, published in hardback, 2010.

When the road was finished we moved to Dunedin where my mother's family lived.

In 1942, I applied to join the New Zealand Air Force and was amused when the enrolling Officer said, 'I'm sorry Eileen, you have to be 18 to join.' I was then 19 and a half! So I was able to join, and spent my time as a W.A.A.F. in Wigram Air Force Base as a medical clerk with a flight to Wellington for a Medical Clerk's Course. While at Wigram, and often bored being on Station at weekends, I put a notice up in one of the Rec. rooms asking if anyone was interested in forming a Tramping Club if we could get transport. Several did, and in the end we had dozens of W.A.A.Fs and airmen taken to places as far afield as Arthurs Pass & Mt Hutt. That was long before the latter was a ski field. Station Cooks provided the food – huge roasts, many loaves of bread, and huge fruit cakes, vegetables & fruit.

I married in 1947. Brian was born in 1950 and John in 1954. Their Dad was Medical Records Officer at Wellington Hospital and then Lower Hutt.

When both boys were at College I decided I would like to work, and being very interested in Geology, phoned the NZ Geological Survey and had the most wonderful job for almost 20 years – it was a very sad day for me when I had to retire when I turned 60. Public Service rules. I felt I had so much more to give. I still have all my rock and mineral samples in more than 20 drawers. Some of my most treasured are pieces of the Pink Terraces, and fossil shells from when the Sahara Desert was green and fertile.

Family history has been of great interest for many years. I can go back to my Grandfather from Denmark & Grandmother from Faunton in England. I also have three sheets of my maternal family – back to 1157! But not compiled by me. I've only worked on the last 150 years, give or take.

These days I garden, knit for charity \_ overseas orphanages, health Camps & S.P.C.A. (puppy jumpers) and did some beanies for Christchurch.

Because I only have sons, I was and still am interested in motor racing, model trains, and went to the Indy 500 with John in 1975 and have been to Bathurst twice!

*An hour after the return flight is due to land back in NZ Eileen will celebrate her 89<sup>th</sup> birthday.*

### John Tiller

I was born 26 January 1954 in Lower Hutt, Wellington, New Zealand, and grew up in Trentham, Upper Hutt. I was a pupil of St Brendan's School and then St Patrick's College, Silverstream.



*The photo of me holding an image of NZETC tunneller Fred Hansen is taken in front of a roll-top desk which he made from shipwreck timbers, and the desk remains in daily use in our home. Amongst other things Fred made, were violins (one of which is sitting on the desk), rowing boats and other woodworked items.*

Joining the Wellington Harbour Board in 1971 (as my first and only job application), I have worked in the Queens Wharf area, Wellington, ever since. From 1986 onwards, originally on secondment from the Board, but now Wellington Waterfront Ltd, and working with a small team, I have been involved since that time in the redevelopment of Wellington's Waterfront as a place for people to live, work and play.

Living in Tawa, Wellington, I have been married to Lynn for 29 years. We have two children, Mike, who last year obtained his Bachelor of Science degree at Wellington's Victoria University, and Emma, who is in the third year towards obtaining her degree in Film and Theatre, also at Victoria.

I have an older brother, Brian, who lives with his family in Paraparaumu.

My interests include motorsport, and for a number of years, I photographed motor racing events for promoters and magazines. Other interests are model making which include military dioramas, cars, aircraft and railways.

My late father, Tom, (who served with the RNZAF in the Pacific during World War Two) was much interested in shipping, and in 1949 formed the New Zealand Ship & Marine

Society. From that date he was its Dominion Secretary and composed the *New Zealand Marine News*. The society still flourishes today with an active membership.

My mother, Eileen, also taking part in this trip, has her own biography paper (above).

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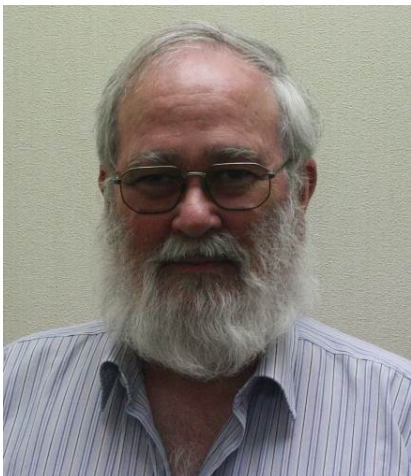
In 1917, whilst recuperating from tuberculosis in Oatlands Hospital in England, Fred made temporary wooden legs for wounded soldiers. He also learned embroidery work while convalescing and after returning to New Zealand, continued to embroider many articles for his home. Samples of his embroidery work are now held by Te Papa Tongarewa, the national museum of New Zealand and a link follows:

<http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/objectdetails.aspx?oid=864100>

## Stuart PARK

*Great Great Nephew of 4/1553 Sergeant Samuel Edward Portman Vernon*

Sam Vernon has not been a well-known figure in my family history research, so now to have so much information about him is wonderful.



I have two other great uncles buried in France who are more closely connected to the family, so my visit to Arras and Sam's grave was a bit of an afterthought when I went to France and Belgium. I used the deaths of all three as a way to personalise the history of the war, and found it a great way of improving my understanding of what can seem, and indeed arguably still is, an incomprehensible slaughter. I knew nothing much about the tunnellers before I went, but several museum and site visits assisted me greatly. I much enjoyed my visit to cemeteries and battlefields in France and Belgium (and Gallipoli) in 2004, and doing it again with a slightly different focus, on the tunnellers, should be another memorable experience.

*Northland Area Manager, NZ Historic Places Trust, Kerikeri (1999 – current)*

*Masters degree in Anthropology and qualifications in museum studies and management*

*Anthropologist, Otago Museum 1965 - 1979*

*Director, Auckland War Memorial Museum 1979 - 1993*

*Concept Development Te Papa 1994-98*

*Manager Museum Resources & National Services, Te Papa, 1998 -9*

*Publications on archaeology, numismatics, museum studies and New Zealand studio glass.*

*Surveys of New Zealand war memorials while at Auckland Museum, and currently in Northland.*

## Garry & Debbie PRESTON

*Grandson of 4/1530 Sapper John Edward MacManus*

I have had a lifelong interest in Grandad "Big Jack" MacManus and his involvement in the Labour movement. Grandad working on construction of the Catlins railway. This is where he worked as a Tunneller. He went away to the Great War and like so many families of the time he left Nana with two little ones and one on the way. (My Nana and Grandad meet at a Socialist Party social in about 1908 in Dunedin.) My Mum was the last baby born in Dunedin in 1919. It was said that she was born nine months after Grandad got back from the war.

I was brought up in Caversham and Pearl Preston was my Mum. I joined the Caversham branch of the Labour Party back in 1974 while I was still a teenager.

My wife Debbie and I were going to France last year but sadly I had a stroke three days before we were going to fly out to London. Big Jack had a stroke at about the same age as me so it must run in the family. I have had a remarkable recovery. Been back at work three months and ocean swimming, biking and running again. I thought a lot about Grandad while in hospital and reminded myself that he recovered through hard work. I kept saying, "I am a fighter and I am from a family of fighters and I am going to recover from this", just like Grandad.



My wife Debbie is an educator and we have to fit the Arras descendants' trip in with school holidays and long service leave that she cannot take until Term Two. School holidays in NSW do not start until the 6 April which is Easter. We plan to be in Arras by the night of 8 April.

## John & Raina DAVIES

### John Davies

*President, Waihi Returned Services Association*

My full name is Norman John Davies. I am known as John Davies or JD. I was born in Taumarunui on the 12<sup>th</sup> October 1941. I moved to Waihi in 1959.

I did National Service from 1962 to 1966, attaining the rank of Lance Corporal. I worked for various companies and during that time learned a lot about the history of Waihi from the old miners working with us. They also served in the Second World War. I also worked for the local power company for 31 years.

I first joined the Returned Services Association Waihi branch in 1972, and was elected Senior Vice President in 1998.

In 2001 the then President resigned and in the half yearly AGM I was elected President.

I still hold this post and intend standing again for this position in 2012.

When Sue Baker Wilson and Kit Wilson approached our RSA about the New Zealand Tunnelling Company, this to me was something to get involved in.

We are looking forward to our trip in Arras and to meeting you.

### Raina Davies

*Kuia*

*Ko Tararua nga Maunga*

*Ko Hokio te Awa*

*Ko Kurahaupo te Waka*

*Ko Ngati Tamairangi te Hapu*

*Ko Kawiu te Marae*

*Ko Taueki te Tangata*

*Ko Raina Tipuna Davies ahau*

I was born in Carterton, Wairarapa on the 14 July 1948. I grew up in a family of eight girls and five boys. I am number seven.

Mid 60's to late 60's was my first experience with the war. One of my uncles put his age up from fourteen years to twenty two years just so he could go serve our country and yes he went overseas and when he returned after the war, sadly he drowned.



I attended a 50<sup>th</sup> Golden Jubilee with my late in-laws (my father in-law was in the Maori Battalion). It was also attended by the Governor General Sir Bernard Fergusson. The theme was based on the war in Tobruk and Gallipoli. Further to that my Father in-law invited me to accompany him the Egypt to 'lift the tapu' off the fallen Comrades graves (especially Maori) which I declined.

1999 onwards I met and married Norman John Davies – also known as John or JD – on my birthday, 14 July 2000. I have lived in Waihi since and have supported him in his involvement at the Waihi Memorial RSA.

JD and I have decided to travel to France for the 95<sup>th</sup> Commemoration of the Battle of Arras, April 2012. He will represent the Waihi Memorial RSA.

My role as Kuia will be to support (tautoko) our leader and embrace (awhi) the group we will travel with.

*Members of the NZ Pioneer Battalion assisted men from the NZ Tunnelling Company in the underground works at Arras. Names can still be seen on the Arras cavern walls. These include the name of Pioneer Solomon Isaacs from Rarotonga. Sergeant Denis O'Brien served in the same Main Body Section as tunnellers Sgt Sam Vernon and Sapper Jack MacManus. Vernon is represented by descendant Stuart Park and MacManus is represented on the trip by Garry Preston. O'Brien ended the war as a Lieutenant in the Rarotonga Corps. His brother Cletus also later enlisted in the Tunnelling Company 5<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements (along with L/Cpl Roycroft) but died from a brain tumour and is buried in England. His mother was listed as his Next of Kin. She resided in Cape Foulwind, where Sapper W.F. Hansen also enlisted. Sapper 'Fred' Hansen is represented on the trip by his niece and great nephew, Eileen and John Tiller.*