

FROM MILTON-UNDER-WYCHWOOD

Glenda Lewis

2016

January 2017

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Executive summary

I went to the West Oxfordshire village of Milton-under-Wychwood for six weeks (May/June) and got to know many of the locals, especially farmers. My great grandparents left this very beautiful part of the country during the rural depression of the 1870s. I wanted to compare land use, and life there generally, with the situation in southern Hawke's Bay where they and many other villagers settled.

I started a blog before I left - www.glendajanelewis.nz - and have written 20 posts (c25,000 words). I promoted each blog directly, by email, to over 150 people, many of them in the media or positions of influence, such as the President of Federated Farmers, Cabinet Ministers, and academics. As at 03 January 2017, the site has recorded 888 individual visitors, and 2140 views. About two thirds of visitors are from New Zealand, a third from the UK, and the rest scattered all over the world.

For me, this project achieved everything I wanted and more. It gave me the credibility, confidence and opportunity to write and "put it out there". I received very encouraging feedback from readers and interview subjects. Bruern Estate owner, Henry Waldorf Astor, responded thus to my article about him and his great grandmother, British MP Nancy Astor: "interesting, well-written, accurate... and funny!" I am very proud of the fact that former British intelligence chief, Fiona Walthall (my neighbour in the village), placed the trust in me, and me alone, to write her story and reveal her 20-year struggle with bulimia. I was very careful with my fact-checking, and had not one challenge as a result. I spent a long time on each article, and former work associate Emeritus Professor Charles Daugherty edited my work.

I found that I naturally centred my articles on people, rather than land use topics. Their lives and family histories provided a more interesting and less didactic frame for the information

on farming. I also liked weaving together a variety of themes – immigration, Brexit, local history, ancient history, mental health, animal welfare, regional development, water pollution, the role of women, climate change, evolutionary biology, the cost of housing, the end of intergenerational farming - as you will see if you read my blog posts.

I now have the confidence and inspiration to start a significant writing project based on my 20 years' experience in the science sector. I also have a good foundation of knowledge from which to continue my investigations into our land and water use, long term.

Being in Britain in the five weeks leading up to the Brexit Referendum added a whole new dimension to the project. I learnt a lot about the situation with regard to agriculture from listening to debates on BBC4 radio and BBC television about the pros and cons of EU membership.

But what did I achieve for my fellow New Zealanders in terms of sharing my new knowledge about farming and sustainable land use, and the history, current state and future of our farming communities, using my family story as a lens? I cannot directly measure that, except by the website metrics. I did note that the journalists I sent my articles to, like Radio NZ National presenters, Kim Hill, Jesse Mulligan and Kathryn Ryan, responded to my emails and picked up on some of the themes, and my suggestions for interviews. I endeavoured to make my writing accessible to all readers - amusing, anecdotal and not over-stuffed with facts and figures. I tried to foster understanding and respect for the many good farmers here and in the UK, while pointing up the hard facts about farming's adverse effects on our environment, and timely questions about animal welfare.

Perhaps one of the most effective outcomes of my project was the interview I suggested Kim Hill conduct with former President of Federated Farmers, Mr Bruce Wills. I had interviewed

him in the course of my research. He gave listeners an excellent status report on agriculture and projections into the future (17 December 2017).

My research was not comprehensive enough for me to offer any useful opinions about the future of farming and our rural communities. But it opened my eyes, and I will continue to learn. What I *am* sure of: the acre of my grandparents' farm my family still owns has kept us together, is enormously important as a meeting place, and that the river my sisters and cousins once swam in so joyously is now visibly polluted and choked with weeds. My grandfather milked 30 cows; the new owner has 450. The countryside my ancestors left is incomparably beautiful, but is still mainly the preserve of very wealthy people. The dream of land ownership is becoming just that here, too. Despite Oxfordshire's beauty, its biodiversity is just as impoverished as it is here.

I am really grateful to the Trust for giving me this chance to start writing, which was the main value of the Fellowship for me.

It was coincidental that the village I went to was so close to Winston Churchill's birth and burial places. I visited Blenheim Palace and Churchill's grave at Bladon to pay homage to my hero and indirect benefactor. He was born while my great grandmother, Jane, was sailing to New Zealand. His influence was to be felt strongly, even 13,000 miles away.

Introduction

This is the introduction I wrote for my blog, and as a general “media release”.

January, 2016

From Milton under Wychwood

Glenda Lewis has a 2016 Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship to compare the farming communities of the Wychwood villages in Oxfordshire, UK, and southern Hawke’s Bay, New Zealand. Her great grandparents were among the cohorts of assisted migrants from Oxfordshire, motivated by the rural depression of the 1870s. She will use this comparison as a personal illustration of the big trends in agriculture, and to think about the implications of what is happening in rural New Zealand now for individuals and communities.

Glenda is an independent science communications adviser, who specializes in public science education through public talks, events, and the media. Her mission is to understand more about the science of farming, sustainable farming practices, the restoration of our land and water to health, and to share what she learns with her fellow New Zealanders.

In 1874, my maternal great grandmother Jane Watts (aged 18) left the hamlet of Lyneham in Oxfordshire on a one-way voyage to Waipawa, Hawke’s Bay, New Zealand. Her husband to be, Joseph Pratley, had left six weeks earlier from the neighbouring village of Milton-under-Wychwood – one of 140 villagers to emigrate to the new colony at that time. The golden age of agriculture in England was over, and a surplus of labour meant choosing between staying put on bare subsistence wages, going “into service”, seeking work in London or one of the factories up north, or emigration to the colonies and leaving home and family forever. At a candle-lit meeting on a field near Milton-under-Wychwood, New Zealand agent C R Carter,

described it to the 500 or more villagers as “one continued march down a hill with the workhouse at the bottom”.*

Their desperate situation had come to a head in the Wychwood villages in 1873, when 16 local women were imprisoned and sentenced to hard labour for trying to dissuade two men from working on the Hambidge’s farm, replacing their own menfolk – members of the new National Agricultural Labourers’ Union - who were striking for higher wages. A riot erupted outside the jail in Chipping Norton, and 3000 gathered the following day to protest the harsh sentences. The incident came to national attention in Parliament and The Times. Queen Victoria eventually intervened, though they had served their sentences by the time her warrant to remit them was received. The fact that two of the women had been imprisoned with young babies added to public outrage. A seat encircling the oak tree on the village green of Ascott-under-Wychwood commemorates the “Ascott Martyrs”, as they became known. At least four of the women and their families emigrated to New Zealand in 1874, including Mary Pratley who had been imprisoned with her ten week old baby.

When I visited that most beautiful area over 130 years later and learnt about these dramatic events, I started to wonder. Did Jane and her descendants realise their hopes of land ownership, independence, and meat on the table? What happened to the villagers who stayed behind? Who owns and works the land there now? And many questions arise about the current situation here in New Zealand. What has happened to inter-generational family farming in New Zealand? What is it like to live the roller coaster of commodity prices and how have the small rural communities of southern Hawke’s Bay changed in the lifetimes of Jane’s descendants? Farms and mortgages get bigger, margins tighter, and 86% of New Zealanders now live in cities – land, or even home ownership, far beyond the reach of many younger people. Far fewer people have the family connections with the country that I enjoyed as a child.

“It is well acknowledged,” says Michelle Thompson of the Rural Health Alliance, “that rural communities have higher rates of anxiety, depression and suicide and poorer health outcomes generally than the rest of the population. We know, for example, that more farmers are dying from suicide than from occupational deaths.”

The purchase of farmland in New Zealand by foreigners is causing much disquiet, and we are now dependant on people from the Philippines and the Pacific Islands coming in on temporary visas to work our dairy farms and pick our fruit crops for minimum wages. Our land and water have been seriously polluted in less than 200 years of European settlement, overwhelmed by introduced pests and weeds, and will require a mammoth effort to restore. There are disturbing issues around the welfare of our farm animals – a recent Sunday programme (TV1, 29 November 2015) showed the serious mistreatment of calves going to the abattoir, secretly filmed by the animal welfare group, SAFE. The import of large quantities of palm oil kernel as supplementary feed for our cattle is perceived to be endangering the future of orang-utans and other animals in Indonesia and elsewhere. Consumers are increasingly aware of the contribution of agriculture to greenhouse gas emissions. The consumption of beef is now being discouraged.

Yet, we recognise just how important agriculture is to our national economy, and that New Zealand leads the world in many agricultural practices, including animal welfare, and the quality and *relatively* low carbon footprint of its production compared to other countries.

Jane and Joseph’s family story will illustrate the vicissitudes of the agricultural sector, and personalize what these current and historical trends mean for individuals and their communities. Now that humans have spread to every landmass on the globe, New Zealand being the very last stop, there is no place to ship out to... we have to find a sustainable way of living off the land here, and understand enough to share in political decisions about land

and water ownership, use and care. I want to use this grant to increase my own understanding of the problems and potential solutions, and share what I learn as widely as possible.

* (The Farthest Promised Land, by Rollo Arnold, Victoria University Press, 1981, pg 125)

Interview subjects

Professor Mark Thomas, University of London, expert on the ancient history and spread of farming, including the mutation that allows humans to digest milk into adulthood

Henry Waldorf Astor, farmer and heir to Bruern Estate, Wychwood Forest Project Trustee

Richard Lord, Barrister, land owner, Chair of the Wychwood Forest Project Trust

Vaughan Lewis, river management consultant

Stephen Jennings, expat (from a farming family in Taranaki), economist/investor, land-owner, Swinbrook

Margaret and John Hartley, farmers (3rd generation in this location) and community leaders

Anne and Mike Hartley (cousins of Margaret and John), pig farmers, and respectively Anglican Minister and Church Warden

Pat and Mary Eginton, farmers, Upper Milton

Nigel and Jane Adams, farmers, nr Shipton under Wychwood

Paul Fischer, Chipping Norton, maker of classical guitars and other musical instruments (UK Churchill Fellow)

Martin Jarratt, retired Forester, Bruern Estate, resident of Chipping Norton

Fiona Walthall, former British Military Intelligence chief, now a charity worker

George Fawdry, retired farmer and amateur historian

Dave Scott, curator of the Rollright Stones (prehistoric stone circle)

Ruth Gillingham, Librarian, Milton under Wychwood (originally from the King Country, NZ)

Elizabeth Cleary, a descendant of one of the Ascott Martyrs

Dr Steve Thompson, agricultural economist, NZ/UK science go-between

Emeritus Professor Charles Daugherty, ecologist, now resident in Hawke's Bay

David Hunt, 3rd generation farmer, Norsewood, former local President of Federated Farmers

Graeme and Heather Heald, 3rd generation farmers, Norsewood

Will Foley, 4th generation farmer, Takapau, President Hawke's Bay Federated Farmers

Bruce Wills, farmer, Hawke's Bay, former President of Federated Farmers

Dr Hamish Campbell, geologist, GNS Science

Professor David Mellor, Massey University, farm animal physiologist and welfare expert

Vets and other staff, at Dairy NZ

Callum Irvine, NZ Vets Assn

My Blog: Milton under Wychwood – www.glendajanelewis.nz

I promised the Trust to deliver through at least ten 1500-3000 word articles. I wrote 20 blogposts, c 25,000 words.

My blog is a comprehensive account of who I met, what I did, what I learnt, and what I thought, so I will not repeat it in this report. I have summarised the content below. I did my best to distribute my articles widely by emailing as many people as I could, and sending them to media outlets and individual journalists. I am only starting to learn about social media and feel I could have done much better if I had known at the beginning what I know now.

Latterly, I began tweeting about new blog entries, with some effect. As it was, learning to set up and maintain a blog took quite some effort initially.

The Chipping Norton Mail publicised my open letter to the community asking for help with my research, and they also publicised my website address and an article summarising my impressions of the area. I made quite a few connections as a result of the letter, including an offer from former Churchill Fellow (classical guitar and musical instrument craftsman) Paul Fischer, to be my local guide.

On the whole, I feel my writing had a very beneficial effect on the people I wrote about, because of its generous and compassionate tone. This in no way compromised the points I had to make about farming, its history and future prospects. I did not publish anything without first seeking approval from my subjects. I spent a lot of time fact checking, and polishing my writing to a standard I could feel proud of. I was fortunate to have former colleague and referee, Emeritus Professor Charles Daugherty, editing my articles.

Awa Press Owner, Mary Varnham, has more than once expressed interest in publishing a book of my blog entries, but these have now been widely read and I would rather now use the information as a basis for a new series that could be published in future.

Blogpost Catalogue

These are the main articles, in chronological order.

Blessed are the Meek...

An introduction to my family farm, and childhood memories of life there in the 50s and 60s.

The Hunts and the Healds

A story about two third- and fourth-generation farming families on the Otawahao Block where my grandparents farmed. One of the farmers has suffered severe depression and both families are in financial distress because of low milk prices.

Turning Milk into Water

Based on an interview with Professor Mark Thomas, University of London, an expert on the evolution of farming and the mutation that enabled humans to continue to digest milk into adulthood. It addresses issues related to the current slump in milk prices and the sale of our water for bottling, noting that some bottled waters are more expensive than milk.

Steve Thompson

A profile of Dr Steve Thompson, an agricultural economist, who worked on a farm just north of Milton under Wychwood. He told me a lot about farming practices in the 1960s, and how they have changed. Dr Thompson gave me a book called Akenfield (1967), a collection of interviews with farmers, labourers, vets, teachers, and others in a typical English village.

Brexit, Brexit, and other decisions

This was the first post I wrote in England, and records my impressions of the countryside, the preoccupation with the forthcoming Referendum, and local consternation over a new housing development project. Two of the farmers I later interviewed had sold some of their land for this housing development.

They're a lot like us

An interview with two hardworking and impecunious farmers, Nigel and Jane Adams. They were working 14 hour days, seven days a week, and looked exhausted. They had not inherited their land, but had acquired their first farm from a Council sale of Crown land. It is unlikely that their son will be able to buy out his sister. Like three or four other people I interviewed, the son had worked on farms in New Zealand and loved the experience. He now rents land off other landholders to graze sheep.

11,510 miles to Waitara

I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to interview Waitara son, Stephen Jennings, an immensely wealthy landowner in Swinbrook, right next to the former manor house of the Mitford sisters. Stephen is an economist/investor and previously worked at the NZ Treasury. He had hired a river consultant, Vaughan Lewis, to advise on how to avoid future floods. There had been catastrophic floods ten years ago. I was interested to hear his opinions on land use, Fonterra, and comparisons of UK and New Zealand. He was just about to go to NZ at the invitation of the NZ Institute.

Fiona's Story

Fiona Walthall, my neighbour in the village, was Britain's highest ranked female military intelligence officer. This had nothing to do with my central theme, though our conversations

began with her very strong views about Brexit. She was the only person I met to declare her “vote leave” position. During her high stress, exciting career, involving active service in Northern Ireland, she suffered quite severe bulimia. My story was her way of disclosing this to the villagers. I was approached by media and a eating disorder website to ask Fiona for interviews, but she wanted to leave it at that. It was such an honour to be trusted to write her story.

Climate Change at the Library

The Milton under Wychwood Library, run by expat NZer, Ruth Gillingham, runs a series of discussions on various topics. I attended an excellent presentation on climate change by Oxford University philosopher, Professor John Broome. It was interesting to observe the different attitudes of the very well-off villagers and hear their questions. In my blogpost I reminded villagers about the ice age history of the village – terminal glacial moraine on nearby Bruern Estate indicates that the last great ice sheet ended there.

The Hartleys

I think this is one of my best articles. It is about two branches of the Hartley family who have been the centre of the community for a long time. Margaret studied mathematics at Cambridge. Second cousin by marriage, Anne, is a pig farmer and of late, an Anglican Minister. She is also a mathematician, and tutored the village children for nearly 40 years.

Henry, Paul, and Martin

I discovered that the farmer I had been corresponding with from NZ, Henry Astor, was in fact Henry Waldorf Astor, great grandson of the amazing Nancy Astor, Britain’s first female MP. Contemporary Winston Churchill was often a guest at Cliveden. The story about him

includes former Churchill Fellow, Paul Fischer, maker of exquisite classical guitars, and Martin Jarratt, the Bruern Estate forest manager for many years in Henry's father's time.

Henry was very frank with me about the adverse effects of his aristocratic upbringing, especially the remoteness of his father – a point which I addressed generally and obliquely in the article to avoid hurting his parents. He had made his career in New York as an ad man and documentary maker, and, coincidentally, had made a documentary on Paul Fischer. He is now back running the family estate, and is involved in the Wychwood Forest (restoration) Project.

Calving Time

The beginning and end of my research was marked by the screening of secret videos showing cruel treatment of calves. I had been thinking for some time about what cows and calves suffer when separated, and really wanted to know what animal experts had discovered about this. In 2015 I had witnessed some cows in apparent distress at having their calves removed and loaded onto a truck - on the very farm that Stephen Jennings owns, as I discovered this year. I had been crossing it to see where the Mitford sisters lived. I arranged two very long interviews with animal physiologist and farm animal welfare expert, Professor David Mellor. I also researched facts about calves through the NZ Vets Assn and Dairy NZ. The NZ farmers I interviewed were dismissive of public concerns. Mine remain. Animal welfare has improved a lot, but I think we will soon look back on animal farming practices with horror.

The introduction to the piece refers to the Havelock North campylobacter poisoning, which gave me a very timely opportunity to raise questions about water pollution.

Rats and Mice – a personal history

Pest eradication from farmland has emerged as a major issue. I have been very involved in this through my work. This blogpost relates my experiences at the farm with wider issues, and the heroic exploits of my great hero, Nancy Wake, The White Mouse (had to get her in the picture somehow!). The possums have gone from our farm but the rabbits are eating everything! I'll follow Nancy's example and learn to use a gun.

A highway runs through it

Musings on the fate of small, moribund towns like Norsewood and Takapau, immigration, geological history, the Ruataniwha Dam, the virtues of wool, and the terrible road toll on State Highway 2.

Some of the things I learnt in the UK?

- That my great grandparents and hundreds of their fellow villagers who came to NZ in the 1870s once lived in an exquisitely beautiful part of Britain, but were hopelessly impoverished.
- The same estates that existed in my great grandparents' time - Blenheim, Cornbury, Barrington, Bruern – are still intact, and comprise enormous tracts of land, which are beautifully maintained.
- The people who live in West Oxfordshire now are very wealthy and receive generous EU agricultural subsidies, though the farmers resent EU dictates about what to grow where, etc.
- Farming does not pay there, currently, but the price of land and farm buildings is extremely high because of the proximity to London.
- The land is mainly used for crops such as barley, wheat and rapeseed oil, with very little stock – it used to be a predominantly sheep farming area.
- Local farmers expressed astonishment that NZ can sell lamb in the UK at 60% of the price of local produce, such is our efficiency now.
- Farming in the UK is highly mechanised; I hardly saw anyone out on the land.
- UK farmers seem to take a great pride in the appearance of their land. There are many more trees on farms than in New Zealand.
- It is impossible for people to get into farming without a lot of money, but you can buy stock and rent land to graze it on. I spoke to a couple of farmers whose sons were doing that.

- Many of the residents are professionals who commute to London or Oxford, including former PM David Cameron.
- There is strong resistance to new housing developments and outsiders moving to the village. The area is very “white”. Farmers who sell their land for such developments are not very popular.
- Society is still finely stratified and people are conservative and reserved.
- Very few of my ancestors, who once dominated these villages, remain.
- The community hubs are less the pubs, than the Churches, Women’s Institutes, History Societies, Library coffee mornings, Choirs and allotment groups. I attended as many of these meetings as I could.

Some of the things I learnt in New Zealand

- I learnt a lot about animal welfare and the fate of calves from animal welfare expert, Professor David Mellor, in the course of two 3-hour interviews. There were more videos showing the mistreatment of calves this year.
- I felt the pain of two farming families who are in deep financial trouble as a result of the slump in milk prices.
- I heard from one farmer about his struggles with depression which have taken him to the edge of suicide. He is on permanent medication. He told me about the loneliness of living in the country.
- I discovered that all the farms on my grandparents' block (except theirs) were initially given to returned WW1 soldiers. Most didn't last very long – it was just too hard. I interviewed two descendants of that original group – two of three remaining families.
- I learnt some of the basics of farming, which made me realise just how ignorant I was and how ignorant the population at large probably is.
- During the course of my project, the Havelock North campylobacter disaster occurred, pointing up water issues resulting from intensive land use. And the Court disallowed the land swap by DOC to free conservation estate for the Ruataniwha Dam. These are two major events impacting the future of farming in southern Hawke's Bay.
- I learnt a lot about general farming practices, pest eradication, etc, from Bruce Wills, former President of Federated Farmers, who was interviewed by Kim Hill, 17 December 2016 (as suggested by me).
- I am now constantly attuned to information about farming, immigration, economics, and land and water use.

Conclusion

My topic was very broad and I am really just at the beginning of my investigations. Some major events and issues happened during the year which highlighted the questions I was thinking about: the Brexit Referendum; low dairy prices; the Havelock North campylobacter poisoning; the Court decision to disallow use of conservation estate for the Ruataniwha Dam; and more media exposure of calves being badly or cruelly treated. In the background, there were immigration, housing, and regional development issues. The worldwide trend is urbanisation and, increasingly, we rely on immigrant labour to do low wage jobs such as milking and fruit picking.

I have not concluded anything as yet, and have just as many misgivings about farm animal welfare, the very high numbers of dairy cows and the consequent import of palm oil kernel to supplement grass feed, the pollution of our rivers, the lack of trees on our farmland, and the loss of family-based communities in the country.

In Oxfordshire, inter-generational family farming seems to be coming to an end, too. The same impermeable social structures are in place 150 years later, but there is also a lot of “new money” buying up the farms, abbeys and manor houses, and building new ones. Newcomers in the village at the bottom end of the housing market are not welcome. I could not help but agree that the new housing estates spoil the landscape. I will continue to explore all of these themes in my writing. My research to date has already been useful in my job as science communicator, educator and facilitator.

What a great experience it was to live in an English village and walk through those fields at dusk . What a luxury to have some time to think about it all...and write.

Financial Report

Airfare and travel insurance, c\$2350

Cottage rental 16 May to 19 June, \$5,300

Two nights in London Hotel, \$600

Food (mainly self catering), \$1500

Rental car and petrol, \$1500

Trains/buses/tubes/taxis, \$500

IT connection costs / mobile phone, \$500

IT assistance (Xequals Ltd, Dixon St) to set up blog, \$250

Total cost: c\$12,500

Churchill Trust grant: \$8,500

My direct contribution to the travel costs: \$4,000. I also contributed a very substantial amount of displaced income – six weeks overseas, plus 250 hours before and after that time in New Zealand on writing, research, planning and setting up my blog. This amounted to about four months' income in total and is borne out by my significantly reduced income this year.

Total personal contribution

c\$60,000 based on my normal charge out rate (\$140.00 per hour as a self-employed science communications consultant)

Some people I met



Anne and Mike Hartley (Anne's a vicar and maths teacher; Mike's a pig farmer)

Henry Waldorf Astor (farmer, Bruern Estate)





Vaughan Lewis, river consultant, Thames Valley



Ruth Gillingham, Library Manager, born in the King Country, NZ



Pat and Mary Eginton, retired farmers, Upper Milton



Jane and Nigel Adams, hardworking farmers, Shipton under Wychwood



George Fawdry, retired farmer, Salford. Dear George.

Arthur and Lawrie, the two magnificent tenors in the Wychwood Singers





Martin Jarratt, retired forester, formerly worked at Bruern Estate

Fiona Walthall, former British Military Intelligence “Chief”





Stephen Jennings, expat economist/investor, at his property in Swinbrook

Professor Mark Thomas, University of London, expert in the evolution of farming





Malcolm ??, long-time resident of Shipton under Wychwood, born in Wellington, while his father was advising the NZ Defence Forces

Paul Fischer, former Churchill Fellow, maker of classical guitars





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on farming. I also liked weaving together a variety of themes – immigration, Brexit, local history, ancient history, mental health, animal welfare, regional development, water pollution, the role of women, climate change, evolutionary biology, the cost of housing, the end of intergenerational farming - as you will see if you read my blog posts.

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But what did I achieve for my fellow New Zealanders in terms of sharing my new knowledge about farming and sustainable land use, and the history, current state and future of our farming communities, using my family story as a lens? I cannot directly measure that, except by the website metrics. I did note that the journalists I sent my articles to, like Radio NZ National presenters, Kim Hill, Jesse Mulligan and Kathryn Ryan, responded to my emails and picked up on some of the themes, and my suggestions for interviews. I endeavoured to make my writing accessible to all readers - amusing, anecdotal and not over-stuffed with facts and figures. I tried to foster understanding and respect for the many good farmers here and in the UK, while pointing up the hard facts about farming's adverse effects on our environment, and timely questions about animal welfare.

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him in the course of my research. He gave listeners an excellent status report on agriculture and projections into the future (17 December 2017).

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*Glenda Lewis has a 2016 **Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship** to compare the farming communities of the Wychwood villages in Oxfordshire, UK, and southern Hawke’s Bay, New Zealand. Her great grandparents were among the cohorts of assisted migrants from Oxfordshire, motivated by the rural depression of the 1870s. She will use this comparison as a personal illustration of the big trends in agriculture, and to think about the implications of what is happening in rural New Zealand now for individuals and communities.*

Glenda is an independent science communications adviser, who specializes in public science education through public talks, events, and the media. Her mission is to understand more about the science of farming, sustainable farming practices, the restoration of our land and water to health, and to share what she learns with her fellow New Zealanders.

In 1874, my maternal great grandmother Jane Watts (aged 18) left the hamlet of Lyneham in Oxfordshire on a one-way voyage to Waipawa, Hawke’s Bay, New Zealand. Her husband to be, Joseph Pratley, had left six weeks earlier from the neighbouring village of Milton-under-Wychwood – one of 140 villagers to emigrate to the new colony at that time. The golden age of agriculture in England was over, and a surplus of labour meant choosing between staying put on bare subsistence wages, going “into service”, seeking work in London or one of the factories up north, or emigration to the colonies and leaving home and family forever. At a candle-lit meeting on a field near Milton-under-Wychwood, New Zealand agent C R Carter,

described it to the 500 or more villagers as “one continued march down a hill with the workhouse at the bottom”.*

Their desperate situation had come to a head in the Wychwood villages in 1873, when 16 local women were imprisoned and sentenced to hard labour for trying to dissuade two men from working on the Hambidge’s farm, replacing their own menfolk – members of the new National Agricultural Labourers’ Union - who were striking for higher wages. A riot erupted outside the jail in Chipping Norton, and 3000 gathered the following day to protest the harsh sentences. The incident came to national attention in Parliament and The Times. Queen Victoria eventually intervened, though they had served their sentences by the time her warrant to remit them was received. The fact that two of the women had been imprisoned with young babies added to public outrage. A seat encircling the oak tree on the village green of Ascott-under-Wychwood commemorates the “Ascott Martyrs”, as they became known. At least four of the women and their families emigrated to New Zealand in 1874, including Mary Pratley who had been imprisoned with her ten week old baby.

When I visited that most beautiful area over 130 years later and learnt about these dramatic events, I started to wonder. Did Jane and her descendants realise their hopes of land ownership, independence, and meat on the table? What happened to the villagers who stayed behind? Who owns and works the land there now? And many questions arise about the current situation here in New Zealand. What has happened to inter-generational family farming in New Zealand? What is it like to live the roller coaster of commodity prices and how have the small rural communities of southern Hawke’s Bay changed in the lifetimes of Jane’s descendants? Farms and mortgages get bigger, margins tighter, and 86% of New Zealanders now live in cities – land, or even home ownership, far beyond the reach of many younger people. Far fewer people have the family connections with the country that I enjoyed as a child.

“It is well acknowledged,” says Michelle Thompson of the Rural Health Alliance, “that rural communities have higher rates of anxiety, depression and suicide and poorer health outcomes generally than the rest of the population. We know, for example, that more farmers are dying from suicide than from occupational deaths.”

The purchase of farmland in New Zealand by foreigners is causing much disquiet, and we are now dependant on people from the Philippines and the Pacific Islands coming in on temporary visas to work our dairy farms and pick our fruit crops for minimum wages. Our land and water have been seriously polluted in less than 200 years of European settlement, overwhelmed by introduced pests and weeds, and will require a mammoth effort to restore. There are disturbing issues around the welfare of our farm animals – a recent Sunday programme (TV1, 29 November 2015) showed the serious mistreatment of calves going to the abattoir, secretly filmed by the animal welfare group, SAFE. The import of large quantities of palm oil kernel as supplementary feed for our cattle is perceived to be endangering the future of orang-utans and other animals in Indonesia and elsewhere. Consumers are increasingly aware of the contribution of agriculture to greenhouse gas emissions. The consumption of beef is now being discouraged.

Yet, we recognise just how important agriculture is to our national economy, and that New Zealand leads the world in many agricultural practices, including animal welfare, and the quality and *relatively* low carbon footprint of its production compared to other countries.

Jane and Joseph’s family story will illustrate the vicissitudes of the agricultural sector, and personalize what these current and historical trends mean for individuals and their communities. Now that humans have spread to every landmass on the globe, New Zealand being the very last stop, there is no place to ship out to... we have to find a sustainable way of living off the land here, and understand enough to share in political decisions about land

and water ownership, use and care. I want to use this grant to increase my own understanding of the problems and potential solutions, and share what I learn as widely as possible.

* (The Farthest Promised Land, by Rollo Arnold, Victoria University Press, 1981, pg 125)

Interview subjects

Professor Mark Thomas, University of London, expert on the ancient history and spread of farming, including the mutation that allows humans to digest milk into adulthood

Henry Waldorf Astor, farmer and heir to Bruern Estate, Wychwood Forest Project Trustee

Richard Lord, Barrister, land owner, Chair of the Wychwood Forest Project Trust

Vaughan Lewis, river management consultant

Stephen Jennings, expat (from a farming family in Taranaki), economist/investor, land-owner, Swinbrook

Margaret and John Hartley, farmers (3rd generation in this location) and community leaders

Anne and Mike Hartley (cousins of Margaret and John), pig farmers, and respectively Anglican Minister and Church Warden

Pat and Mary Eginton, farmers, Upper Milton

Nigel and Jane Adams, farmers, nr Shipton under Wychwood

Paul Fischer, Chipping Norton, maker of classical guitars and other musical instruments (UK Churchill Fellow)

Martin Jarratt, retired Forester, Bruern Estate, resident of Chipping Norton

Fiona Walthall, former British Military Intelligence chief, now a charity worker

George Fawdry, retired farmer and amateur historian

Dave Scott, curator of the Rollright Stones (prehistoric stone circle)

Ruth Gillingham, Librarian, Milton under Wychwood (originally from the King Country, NZ)

Elizabeth Cleary, a descendant of one of the Ascott Martyrs

Dr Steve Thompson, agricultural economist, NZ/UK science go-between

Emeritus Professor Charles Daugherty, ecologist, now resident in Hawke's Bay

David Hunt, 3rd generation farmer, Norsewood, former local President of Federated Farmers

Graeme and Heather Heald, 3rd generation farmers, Norsewood

Will Foley, 4th generation farmer, Takapau, President Hawke's Bay Federated Farmers

Bruce Wills, farmer, Hawke's Bay, former President of Federated Farmers

Dr Hamish Campbell, geologist, GNS Science

Professor David Mellor, Massey University, farm animal physiologist and welfare expert

Vets and other staff, at Dairy NZ

Callum Irvine, NZ Vets Assn

My Blog: Milton under Wychwood – www.glendajanelewis.nz

I promised the Trust to deliver through at least ten 1500-3000 word articles. I wrote 20 blogposts, c 25,000 words.

My blog is a comprehensive account of who I met, what I did, what I learnt, and what I thought, so I will not repeat it in this report. I have summarised the content below. I did my best to distribute my articles widely by emailing as many people as I could, and sending them to media outlets and individual journalists. I am only starting to learn about social media and feel I could have done much better if I had known at the beginning what I know now.

Latterly, I began tweeting about new blog entries, with some effect. As it was, learning to set up and maintain a blog took quite some effort initially.

The Chipping Norton Mail publicised my open letter to the community asking for help with my research, and they also publicised my website address and an article summarising my impressions of the area. I made quite a few connections as a result of the letter, including an offer from former Churchill Fellow (classical guitar and musical instrument craftsman) Paul Fischer, to be my local guide.

On the whole, I feel my writing had a very beneficial effect on the people I wrote about, because of its generous and compassionate tone. This in no way compromised the points I had to make about farming, its history and future prospects. I did not publish anything without first seeking approval from my subjects. I spent a lot of time fact checking, and polishing my writing to a standard I could feel proud of. I was fortunate to have former colleague and referee, Emeritus Professor Charles Daugherty, editing my articles.

Awa Press Owner, Mary Varnham, has more than once expressed interest in publishing a book of my blog entries, but these have now been widely read and I would rather now use the information as a basis for a new series that could be published in future.

Blogpost Catalogue

These are the main articles, in chronological order.

Blessed are the Meek...

An introduction to my family farm, and childhood memories of life there in the 50s and 60s.

The Hunts and the Healds

A story about two third- and fourth-generation farming families on the Otawhao Block where my grandparents farmed. One of the farmers has suffered severe depression and both families are in financial distress because of low milk prices.

Turning Milk into Water

Based on an interview with Professor Mark Thomas, University of London, an expert on the evolution of farming and the mutation that enabled humans to continue to digest milk into adulthood. It addresses issues related to the current slump in milk prices and the sale of our water for bottling, noting that some bottled waters are more expensive than milk.

Steve Thompson

A profile of Dr Steve Thompson, an agricultural economist, who worked on a farm just north of Milton under Wychwood. He told me a lot about farming practices in the 1960s, and how they have changed. Dr Thompson gave me a book called Akenfield (1967), a collection of interviews with farmers, labourers, vets, teachers, and others in a typical English village.

Brexit, Brexit, and other decisions

This was the first post I wrote in England, and records my impressions of the countryside, the preoccupation with the forthcoming Referendum, and local consternation over a new housing development project. Two of the farmers I later interviewed had sold some of their land for this housing development.

They're a lot like us

An interview with two hardworking and impecunious farmers, Nigel and Jane Adams. They were working 14 hour days, seven days a week, and looked exhausted. They had not inherited their land, but had acquired their first farm from a Council sale of Crown land. It is unlikely that their son will be able to buy out his sister. Like three or four other people I interviewed, the son had worked on farms in New Zealand and loved the experience. He now rents land off other landholders to graze sheep.

11,510 miles to Waitara

I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to interview Waitara son, Stephen Jennings, an immensely wealthy landowner in Swinbrook, right next to the former manor house of the Mitford sisters. Stephen is an economist/investor and previously worked at the NZ Treasury. He had hired a river consultant, Vaughan Lewis, to advise on how to avoid future floods. There had been catastrophic floods ten years ago. I was interested to hear his opinions on land use, Fonterra, and comparisons of UK and New Zealand. He was just about to go to NZ at the invitation of the NZ Institute.

Fiona's Story

Fiona Walthall, my neighbour in the village, was Britain's highest ranked female military intelligence officer. This had nothing to do with my central theme, though our conversations

began with her well-formed views about Brexit. During her high stress, exciting career, involving active service in Northern Ireland, she suffered quite severe bulimia. It was such an honour to be trusted to write her story.

Climate Change at the Library

The Milton under Wychwood Library, run by expat NZer, Ruth Gillingham, runs a series of discussions on various topics. I attended an excellent presentation on climate change by Oxford University philosopher, Professor John Broome. It was interesting to observe the different attitudes of the very well-off villagers and hear their questions. In my blogpost I reminded villagers about the ice age history of the village – terminal glacial moraine on nearby Bruern Estate indicates that the last great ice sheet ended there.

The Hartleys

I think this is one of my best articles. It is about two branches of the Hartley family who have been the centre of the community for a long time. Margaret studied mathematics at Cambridge. Second cousin by marriage, Anne, is a pig farmer and of late, an Anglican Minister. She is also a mathematician, and tutored the village children for nearly 40 years.

Henry, Paul, and Martin

I discovered that the farmer I had been corresponding with from NZ, Henry Astor, was in fact Henry Waldorf Astor, great grandson of the amazing Nancy Astor, Britain's first female MP. Contemporary Winston Churchill was often a guest at Cliveden. The story about him includes former Churchill Fellow, Paul Fischer, maker of exquisite classical guitars, and Martin Jarratt, the Bruern Estate forest manager for many years in Henry's father's time.

Henry had made his career in New York as an ad man and documentary maker, and, coincidentally, had made a documentary on Paul Fischer. He is now back running the family estate, and is involved in the Wychwood Forest (restoration) Project.

Calving Time

The beginning and end of my research was marked by the screening of secret videos showing cruel treatment of calves. I had been thinking for some time about what cows and calves suffer when separated, and really wanted to know what animal experts had discovered about this. In 2015 I had witnessed some cows in apparent distress at having their calves removed and loaded onto a truck - on the very farm that Stephen Jennings owns, as I discovered this year. I had been crossing it to see where the Mitford sisters lived. I arranged two very long interviews with animal physiologist and farm animal welfare expert, Professor David Mellor. I also researched facts about calves through the NZ Vets Assn and Dairy NZ. The NZ farmers I interviewed were dismissive of public concerns. Mine remain. Animal welfare has improved a lot, but I think we will soon look back on animal farming practices with horror.

The introduction to the piece refers to the Havelock North campylobacter poisoning, which gave me a very timely opportunity to raise questions about water pollution.

Rats and Mice – a personal history

Pest eradication from farmland has emerged as a major issue. I have been very involved in this through my work. This blogpost relates my experiences at the farm with wider issues, and the heroic exploits of my great hero, Nancy Wake, The White Mouse (had to get her in

the picture somehow!). The possums have gone from our farm but the rabbits are eating everything! I'll follow Nancy's example and learn to use a gun.

A highway runs through it

Musings on the fate of small, moribund towns like Norsewood and Takapau, immigration, geological history, the Ruataniwha Dam, the virtues of wool, and the terrible road toll on State Highway 2.

Some of the things I learnt in the UK?

- That my great grandparents and hundreds of their fellow villagers who came to NZ in the 1870s once lived in an exquisitely beautiful part of Britain, but were hopelessly impoverished.
- The same estates that existed in my great grandparents' time - Blenheim, Cornbury, Barrington, Bruern – are still intact, and comprise enormous tracts of land, which are beautifully maintained.
- The people who live in West Oxfordshire now are very wealthy and receive generous EU agricultural subsidies, though the farmers resent EU dictates about what to grow where, etc.
- Farming does not pay there, currently, but the price of land and farm buildings is extremely high because of the proximity to London.
- The land is mainly used for crops such as barley, wheat and rapeseed oil, with very little stock – it used to be a predominantly sheep farming area.
- Local farmers expressed astonishment that NZ can sell lamb in the UK at 60% of the price of local produce, such is our efficiency now.
- Farming in the UK is highly mechanised; I hardly saw anyone out on the land.
- UK farmers seem to take a great pride in the appearance of their land. There are many more trees on farms than in New Zealand.
- It is impossible for people to get into farming without a lot of money, but you can buy stock and rent land to graze it on. I spoke to a couple of farmers whose sons were doing that.

- Many of the residents are professionals who commute to London or Oxford, including former PM David Cameron.
- There is strong resistance to new housing developments and outsiders moving to the village. The area is very “white”. Farmers who sell their land for such developments are not very popular.
- Society is still finely stratified and people are conservative and reserved.
- Very few of my ancestors, who once dominated these villages, remain.
- The community hubs are less the pubs, than the Churches, Women’s Institutes, History Societies, Library coffee mornings, Choirs and allotment groups. I attended as many of these meetings as I could.

Some of the things I learnt in New Zealand

- I learnt a lot about animal welfare and the fate of calves from animal welfare expert, Professor David Mellor, in the course of two 3-hour interviews. There were more videos showing the mistreatment of calves this year.
- I felt the pain of two farming families who are in deep financial trouble as a result of the slump in milk prices.
- I heard from one farmer about his struggles with depression which have taken him to the edge of suicide. He is on permanent medication. He told me about the loneliness of living in the country.
- I discovered that all the farms on my grandparents' block (except theirs) were initially given to returned WW1 soldiers. Most didn't last very long – it was just too hard. I interviewed two descendants of that original group – two of three remaining families.
- I learnt some of the basics of farming, which made me realise just how ignorant I was and how ignorant the population at large probably is.
- During the course of my project, the Havelock North campylobacter disaster occurred, pointing up water issues resulting from intensive land use. And the Court disallowed the land swap by DOC to free conservation estate for the Ruataniwha Dam. These are two major events impacting the future of farming in southern Hawke's Bay.
- I learnt a lot about general farming practices, pest eradication, etc, from Bruce Wills, former President of Federated Farmers, who was interviewed by Kim Hill, 17 December 2016 (as suggested by me).
- I am now constantly attuned to information about farming, immigration, economics, and land and water use.

Conclusion

My topic was very broad and I am really just at the beginning of my investigations. Some major events and issues happened during the year which highlighted the questions I was thinking about: the Brexit Referendum; low dairy prices; the Havelock North campylobacter poisoning; the Court decision to disallow use of conservation estate for the Ruataniwha Dam; and more media exposure of calves being badly or cruelly treated. In the background, there were immigration, housing, and regional development issues. The worldwide trend is urbanisation and, increasingly, we rely on immigrant labour to do low wage jobs such as milking and fruit picking.

I have not concluded anything as yet, and have just as many misgivings about farm animal welfare, the very high numbers of dairy cows and the consequent import of palm oil kernel to supplement grass feed, the pollution of our rivers, the lack of trees on our farmland, and the loss of family-based communities in the country.

In Oxfordshire, inter-generational family farming seems to be coming to an end, too. The same impermeable social structures are in place 150 years later, but there is also a lot of “new money” buying up the farms, abbeys and manor houses, and building new ones. Newcomers in the village at the bottom end of the housing market are not welcome. I could not help but agree that the new housing estates spoil the landscape. I will continue to explore all of these themes in my writing. My research to date has already been useful in my job as science communicator, educator and facilitator.

What a great experience it was to live in an English village and walk through those fields at dusk . What a luxury to have some time to think about it all...and write.

Financial Report

Airfare and travel insurance, c\$2350

Cottage rental 16 May to 19 June, \$5,300

Two nights in London Hotel, \$600

Food (mainly self catering), \$1500

Rental car and petrol, \$1500

Trains/buses/tubes/taxis, \$500

IT connection costs / mobile phone, \$500

IT assistance (Xequals Ltd, Dixon St) to set up blog, \$250

Total cost: c\$12,500

Churchill Trust grant: \$8,500

My direct contribution to the travel costs: \$4,000. I also contributed a very substantial amount of displaced income – six weeks overseas, plus 250 hours before and after that time in New Zealand on writing, research, planning and setting up my blog. This amounted to about four months' income in total and is borne out by my significantly reduced income this year.

Total personal contribution

c\$60,000 based on my normal charge out rate (\$140.00 per hour as a self-employed science communications consultant)

Some people I met



Anne and Mike Hartley (Anne's a vicar and maths teacher; Mike's a pig farmer)

Henry Waldorf Astor (farmer, Bruern Estate)





Vaughan Lewis, river consultant, Thames Valley



Ruth Gillingham, Library Manager, born in the King Country, NZ



Pat and Mary Eginton, retired farmers, Upper Milton



Jane and Nigel Adams, hardworking farmers, Shipton under Wychwood



George Fawdry, retired farmer, Salford. Dear George.

Arthur and Lawrie, the two magnificent tenors in the Wychwood Singers





Martin Jarratt, retired forester, formerly worked at Bruern Estate

Fiona Walthall, former British Military Intelligence “Chief”





Stephen Jennings, expat economist/investor, at his property in Swinbrook

Professor Mark Thomas, University of London, expert in the evolution of farming





Malcolm ??, long-time resident of Shipton under Wychwood, born in Wellington, while his father was advising the NZ Defence Forces

Paul Fischer, former Churchill Fellow, maker of classical guitars





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