

A Journey to the heart of a Pastoral Kingdom

THE RUN: For me it has been a long time since my last run with the Club, and meeting with everybody at the New World Car Park in Aokautere on Saturday morning was a great thrill, with me in my rather modern MG3 and others in more traditional MGs. We took the Pahiatua Track, and there were lovely scenes of pastoral farming and also forestry on the high country. Lambs were gallivanting around, yet to be docked. Roads were in reasonable condition, but the weather was cool and cloudy, with occasional showers.

At the end of Tutaekura Rd, we took SH2 to Masterton. As we drove SH2, we became aware that the very heavy weather events over the last few months had had a considerable effect on some of the hills, and water still laid in some lower flat paddocks.

It was lovely to catch up with our Wellington comrades at the edge of Henley Lake in Masterton, stopping for a while to enjoy a coffee and an opportunity to rest beside a watery treasure, very busy with swans and ducks and tiny ducklings. Many residents were out walking their dogs, and others pushing push chairs and watching older toddlers meandering along the well-constructed pedestrian pathway. For me, it was particularly lovely to catch up with an old friend, my British racing green MGF, now in the capable and caring hands of Peter Fleming.

Our MG journey continued, leaving the lake in a shower of rain and turning right onto Castlepoint Road and then the Masterton-Stronvar Road towards the Wainuioru School. It was on this part of the journey that this pastoral land of large hills and deep gullies had been rather badly damaged with hill-sides with massive slips and slumps, creating some damage to the roading. It was lovely pastoral farming land and one wondered just what might happen next, given that earthquakes were also a recent occurrence.

Past the Wainuioru School, there was a turn immediately into the driveway of the Brancepeth Station Homestead. Many of us were blown away by the grandiose style of the stunning homestead – Brancepeth. It was here that Edward Beetham, the current family steward who directed all the MG's onto the immaculate lawn of the homestead, introduced himself to us and then spoke of the rich and incredible history of his family when they first arrived in New Zealand in 1855. It was a large family of 7 sons and 3 daughters.

They settled in the Hutt and took a lease on the first part of the eventual Station. A term of the lease was stocking the land quickly or lose it so they bought 500 merino sheep in Hawkes Bay and drove them down the eastern coastline, losing a few on the way!

As time progressed, the Beetham family and the Williams family formed a partnership in 1864 which enabled both families to freehold their properties, and develop and expand the amount of land owned, to the point when they owned 79,000 acres of land – as far as the eye could see from the steps of the homestead. Extensive labour forces were employed to create new pastures and buildings and working sheds, all built with wood from the nearby trees, and making their own nails. These elegant structures are still standing, and filled with so many memories of the past. Subsequently the homestead was also constructed, with its own labour, again using the native Totara wood from the farm, and also making their own steel tools and nails. Thus Brancepeth was constructed, named after an event where a wild

boar in 1855 emerged from the bracken, scurried under their where, then raced off back into the bush. A similar event had occurred in England many years back to a family building their property and naming the property Brancepeth – the path of the boar. The Beethams decided to name their homestead and farm the same.

Once Edward took us through all the elegant farm buildings, he then took us into the Homestead, where we were absolutely in awe of the elegance and architecture of the building and the furnishings. Walls were covered in wonderful hand painted portraits, many by family member William Beetham. Edward also took us out into the garden to view some of the magnificent trees, all planted as seedlings, brought over from the UK, including oaks, monkey puzzles and other English trees, at the time of the building of the homestead. The magnificent trees are now over 150 years old and looking very healthy in New Zealand soil. 1080 poison was distributed in the 1980's given the dominance of opossums, rats and other feral animals and has returned the predominance of New Zealand native birds in the surrounding bush. A delightful environment!

Given ongoing light showers, we were guided into the stables where horses were kept and the grooms housed. We observed all the saddles, reins, horse shoes, iron tools and all sorts of farming and gardening paraphernalia. After lunch in the stable we had to leave this glorious historical site and return to Masterton for those staying, or beyond for others.

Sunday proved a much sunnier day as we gathered again at Henley Lake before leaving for Riversdale Beach. Driving along similar roads, we became aware of further damage to pasture land and roads from the recent weather events, but with the sun now constantly shining, one was less anxious about the instability of the roads.

Once at Riversdale, we parked at the Riversdale General Store for our coffees. The locals were observed getting about on their quadbikes while others were walking their dogs or getting coffees from the shop. The sound of the sea and the warm sunshine made a delightful time to chat and reminisce about the outstanding visit to Brancepeth, and how we had all gained more valuable memories of our country's history.

About noon we popped back into our cars and drove to Gladstone for lunch at the Gladstone Inn. What a lovely time it was, scrummy food, excellent table service and time to chat with bikies, Mazda MX5 club members and of course young families and their children. What a delightful way to end a roadie weekend – so much fun, fascinating stories, scenery and great moments. Thanks to Robert and John for organizing such a spectacular weekend!!