

Memories of the Wetherall Family and the old Birdsey Valley Inn

By Lyn Benfell

After crossing the Ferry Road Bridge and turning into Bridle Path Road with the scene of the hills and Castle Rock before us I have to think how lucky we are to live in Heathcote Valley. My name is Lyn Benfell nee Wetherall and have lived in the Valley since 1984 when we purchased 112 Bridle Path Road.

My great-grandparents the Wetheralls Robert, Robina and their family occupied the Birdsey Valley Inn from the 1880s until 1930. The hotel was situated on the east side of Bridle Path Road not far from the Junction of Bridle Path and Port Hills Road. Mr John Birdsey was unable to renew his licence and sold to Mr Fitzmaurise who obtained a licence and ran the hotel until 1877 when he transferred to our present Valley Inn in Flavell Street.

had a great memory. It was a lovely time for me with her.



The Wetherall Family taken in the Recreation Grounds, Heathcote Valley around 1909
Back Row – William, Annie, James, Rosina, George, Jane
Middle Row – Hector, John, Robert, John (Father), Jessie (on his knee), Robina (Mother), Frank
Front Row – Olive, Adeline



Robina and daughter outside the Wetherall family home, the old Birdsey Hotel.

They were a fun loving family and dancing occurred in what they referred to as the ballroom. I can imagine them doing the Gay Gordons and the likes. Burberrys owned the property next door and joined the fun. Rosina married Ted Burberry. I nursed Rosina when she was in Princess Margaret Hospital aged 98, she

The Wetherall boys worked at the Maltworks including my grandfather James. James married my grandmother Lillian Bushell and my Dad was born in August 1914. My Dad Frank Wetherall recalled sitting on his grandmother's knee in the old hotel in front of this huge coal range which took up the entire wall. His recollection was that it had several ovens and was big and black. I always wondered as he was only four that the coal range might not have been as big as described. A few years ago while holidaying in Naseby we stayed in an old hotel and there in the kitchen was this huge coal range which indeed took up the whole wall just as Dad had described it.

The Wetherall family spent many happy years in the old hotel and it appears so did the grandchildren. A few



Malting Company staff, c1906

Back, from left: Jack Evans , Gibbons, Freeman, Marker, Perkins
 Middle: Shackleton, Bill Evans, G. Evans , Mullan, J Wetherall, Smith, Hewlett
 Front: Hedgeman, Barker, G. Wetherall, J Wetherall

years ago Ted Burberry visited us with his older brother who was then in his 80s. His memories of staying with his grandmother were filled with happy adventures, of climbing up the hill behind the hotel to the cliffs and their caves. These caves were used by Rapaki Maori when they went to their pipi beds in Sumner and Brighton. He said there were all sorts of things left in the caves. I understand the artefacts were recovered. I look up at those cliffs and their dark looking caves and imagine times gone by.

My Dad also had happy memories of the old hotel. He would pile us children into the old Rugby car and head up the valley. I remember the old barn still standing. The hotel had been demolished in 1938. We would peer over the fence to the railway tracks and watch the trains popping out of the tunnel. There was no road tunnel in those day. Both passengers and goods were transported by rail or had to be taken over the hill.

The Wetherall boys like many other young men from the Valley served in the 1st World War. John left NZ 5th December 1916 and was killed in Palestine 19th November 1917. His brother Robert George lost his life 13th September 1918 in France. Frank Alan left NZ on 16th October 1914 and was wounded in Egypt in 1916. I cannot begin to imagine what heartache that must have brought to the family. More sorrow as just around the corner—the flu epidemic of 1918 took the lives of Robina, Hector and Jane.

We the descendants of Robina and Robert have regular reunions such is the interest in the family. We are always drawn to Heathcote Valley. Our last one was in 2021 in the new community centre. It is great to meet with our cousins and seem always to learn a bit more about the family. I was given a photo of Frank in uniform on his horse Rata. Something more to add to my collection. I feel I belong in this beautiful valley. We are so lucky.



Frank Wetherall on his horse Rata