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Life lessons on Terrace Station

by Belinda Cullen-Reid

Dealing with natural disasters has been part of the reality of life for Kate Foster, who has come to realise that landmarks are as much about people as they are about places.

Home for Kate is the historic Terrace Station near Hororata built by her illustrious great-grandfather Sir John Hall, New Zealand Premier from 1879 to 1882 and mover of the Parliamentary Bill which gave women in New Zealand the vote in 1893.

Growing up in her great-grandfather's home, strewn with historical mementos of his political career, seemed unextraordinary to Kate.

"I knew the house wasn't like my friends' houses. It didn't seem nearly as nice. It wasn't until I was about 18 and one of my friends said 'your house is really great'. I began to see it in a new light."



Kate Foster in front of the historic Terrace Station homestead

The Terrace Station homestead began as a modest pre-cut three roomed house sent over from Australia in the 1850s. Several extensions have seen it grow into a 550 square metre rambling weatherboard homestead, set amongst a large woodland garden.

While some historic homesteads in the district suffered major earthquake damage following the September 2010 earthquake, structurally Terrace Station got off relatively lightly.

"There's little structural damage.

Being a wooden house it moved. It's built on riverbed boulders."

Kate remembers the shock of being woken in the early hours of the morning as the 7.1 magnitude earthquake ripped through Selwyn.

"I remember the noise of the chimneys coming down, and the mess.

In the earthquake we lost power and that set off the fire alarms. Throughout the house was this loud voice telling us to 'evacuate the premises'."

Extensive refurbishment work to be done by EQC meant the family had to move out of the homestead for six months, emptying the house of most of its contents. "We had to pack up the possessions of four generations and put them in a 40 foot container and other places. There were over 200 banana boxes of books."

Now back in the homestead Kate can enjoy the repaired interior walls with fresh wall coverings, repainted exterior walls and a total of six new chimneys.

The homestead is now owned by a charitable trust who took the opportunity to add insulation to some areas of the house and do some well needed restoration work.

"Although the earthquake was hideous, the outcome has been wonderful."

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717 Weedons Ross Road
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Kate Foster looks through books on political theory in the office of her late great-grandfather Sir John Hall, while the portrait of her grandfather looks on

Kate has seen Terrace Station go through a number of challenges, but the earthquake was the most significant.

“We’ve had two major winds, floods that went right through the garden, and snow storms. The earthquake was the worst of all the natural disasters. The natural disasters reinforce that the built r created world, and even the natural world, can be destroyed.”

Perhaps it is the pioneering spirit coming through in Kate that helps her to remain philosophical in times of distress.

“It was like what the pioneers would have felt — the similarity between losing everything familiar. What did they have to hold on to? In the end it’s about relationships. A good relationship becomes the landmark of your life.”

As one of four daughters to Godfrey and Peggy Hall, Kate made the decision to be the one to continue the family farming tradition, along with her husband Richard. Strength and determination were required to take on Terrace Station.

“It was unusual for a woman to be in a farming situation. It was an onerous responsibility. It is easier now that the family has grown.”

Ensuring that history is preserved remains a priority for Kate and Richard which is why the Terrace Station Charitable Trust was formed.

“It’s one of New Zealand’s most important heritage places. Putting it in a trust protects it for all times. We feel that it’s totally ours, to share with New Zealand. You can’t hold on to possessions too tightly.”

