

# Moutere Station

Opportunities, Innovations & Challenges

## The Gold Rush

Shennan needed all his wry humour to accept the Gold Rush situation, in which the arduous task of the run-holder to carve out a home in the wilderness had, when almost crowned with success, resulted in his achievements vanishing 'like a transformation scene.' Many of the miners seemed to look on the sheep as common property, and animals began to disappear at a much faster rate than it was possible for their legs to carry them. Despite Shennan's best effort to provide supplies, there was never enough to go round. Shennan's own description of the rush 'this terrible affair' reflects the exasperation with likely led him to sell Moutere.

## Compulsory Government Land Acquisitions

Compulsory Government Land Acquisition for closer settlement severely affected Moutere Station. The first subdivision was in 1896 when runs 221a (6650 acres) and 221d (5960 acres) were resumed. These were lands running south to Clyde and up the Cromwell Gorge to Halfway House.

In 1912 another subdivision occurred which removed runs 221 h (2940 acres), 221 I (2940 acres), 221j (2262 acres) and 221k (2910 acres). These also were on the southern boundary.

In 1920 soldier settlement demanded that run 590 (7100 acres) on the north side of Moutere be made available for returned servicemen. Moutere was left with some 3000 acres of freehold land and about 8500 acres of leasehold land.

Over the years land adjoining the station has been repurchased to give the present size of 8000ha (20,000 acres).

## Snow

Bob Jopp's memories of his early days at Moutere were of snow and the damage it caused. The great snow of 1896, which decimated sheep numbers in Canterbury and the McKenzie Country surprisingly, had little effect on Moutere. The one Bob remembered most was the 1903 snow. He recalled:

*'The day prior to the snow was a curious day. It was bright and sunny but had no warmth in its rays and the*



Ram hoggets in snow, 1995

*sky had a curious greenish tinge. Old weather wise Scotch shepherds felt in their very bones that something was going to happen and happen it did. A snowstorm came up in the night of July 10th from the southwest and by the following morning lay deep all over the hills. ... The snow lay on the ground for six weeks and five days.'*

Moutere lost 4000 sheep out of a total of 16,000. Many of the survivors had lived snowbound in their sheep camps plucking and eating wool from other sheep that had died. Bob Jopp recalled that 'over the next few years whenever they killed a sheep they found in the fore stomach hard balls of wool polished like mahogany.'

There were further large snowfalls in 1908 and 1918 but neither caused the same problems as the 1903 snow.

## Water & Irrigation

Getting enough water to irrigate land has always been a major



Centre pivot irrigation system

concern for farmers. The Olig Dredging Company had private mining rights to water from Leaheys, Campbells and Young Hill Creek, which rise out of the Dunstan Mountains. This water was carried in a race, which took Chinese workers many years to complete.

In 1910 Andrew and Robert Jopp bought the entire Olig Mining Privilege water rights which ensured Moutere had a good water supply for irrigation. In 1981 Andrew Jopp calculated that the cost of those rights amounted to roughly the equivalent of \$1,000,000 in 1981 terms. This was using his method of common currency – the price of a bottle of malt whiskey then and now!

Initially 'wild flood' contour irrigation systems were set up. In more recent times, improvements in efficiency and technology have enabled the use of hard hose irrigators and centre pivot systems. In addition measuring devices have been engineered on all water intakes to enable accurate measuring of water usage.

## Rabbits

At the turn of the century up to 14 men were employed on the property shooting, trapping and dogging rabbits. Bob Jopp was one of the first to recognise the benefits of

netting fences and early in the 1900's completely ring-fenced the 1200 ha freehold block of Moutere. In 1917 Bob invented a rabbit fumigator.

This machine had an enclosed furnace which burnt coal dross producing carbon monoxide under pressure. A set of bellows kept the coal dross burning and the resulting gas was directed into rabbit warrens by a hose. The machine was transported around by horse. A description of the process was described in the Timaru Herald.

*'When the mouth of the burrow was reached one end of a flexible tube about six feet in length attached to the gas generator was inserted in the burrow and allowed to remain there until the fumes started to return. .... In the shallow burrows the rabbits could be heard kicking and squealing as soon as the gas reached them. The rabbits are left to rot in the holes and no more notice is taken of them.'*

In 1917 a Letters Patent was gained for this invention with drawings completed by A&T Burt, Structural Engineers in Dunedin.

The introduction of the 'Killer Policy', the development of aerial applications of poisons and the introduction of 'Compound 1080' poison revolutionised rabbit control in the 1930s.

Rabbit numbers were decimated on Moutere, and many areas have been completely revegetated since the 1960's.

Moutere now employs a night shooter for a month each year to control rabbits.



Bob Jopp, Rabbit fumigator





# Moutere Station

## Merino Stud & Buildings

### Moutere Buildings

The historic Moutere Station farm buildings include the woolshed, stables, outbuildings and Redfern barn. These date from the late 1860s and are recognised because of their cob construction.

They hold a Historic Places Category I Classification as they are considered to be places of special historical or cultural heritage significance for New Zealand.

They represent the early period of pastoral history where there was little timber available in the area and there was a reliance on technologies which made use of materials that were available locally. The making of cob involved mixing a combination of earth, clay and straw. Surviving examples of cob are rare.

### The Homestead

The original Moutere homestead was a typical one roomed corrugated iron musterer's hut. It was erected in 1873 by Robert McLaren when the Moutere buildings were relocated to their present, more central, position. By 1891 the home had been enlarged to six rooms which were of cob construction, the walls measured 18 inches in thickness.

### The Woolshed

The woolshed layout is unusual in that it is T-shaped. The shorter top arm of the 'T', housed the shearing board originally consisting of 16 stands (eight on either side) for blade shearers. Other features include the press tower which projects above the roofline of the wool room and was built to accommodate an early screw wool press.



Moutere Station woolshed

In 1874 the woolshed was moved from the banks of the Manuherikia River to higher ground more central to the property.

Being of cob construction only the roof and floor were transported to the present site where the walls were re-erected in cob.

In 1953 some of the original flooring was replaced and the exterior roughcast. In 2002 a new woolshed was built adjoining the old. The old woolshed was renovated and allows for stock to be housed undercover to enable a full days shearing. The old wool room houses station memorabilia.

### The Stoneyards

There is a substantial set of yards constructed of stone located on Moutere's southern boundary. The Stoneyards were built by early Scottish stone masons in the 1860s and are constructed of dry stacked stone. They were built to hold large mobs of sheep prior to dipping in nearby 'Dip Gully' to control the infectious 'scab' disease which was a serious problem in sheep at the time.



Moutere Station stoneyards

### The Moutere Merino Stud

In 1904, the Moutere Merino Stud was first registered by Andrew Jopp. The flock was purchased at the Gladbrook dispersal sale in February 1904. It was of Saxon background with strong ties to Puketoi (where Andrew Jopp had previously worked) and Tasmania with the importation of Winton and Scone bloodlines.

Bob Jopp registered a medium combing Stud in 1924. This stud was based on South Australian bloodlines. A poll merino stud was established in 2010. Separate sheep families are maintained in superfine, fine, medium combing and poll bloodlines so that rams bred are true to type.

Moutere has a long established performance breeding program incorporating the latest technologies. This information is combined with hands-on classing with emphasis on skin quality with the aim of breeding productive merinos with quality wool.

Moutere merino rams are bred for use in stud and commercial farming operations throughout New Zealand. Rams and semen have been exported to Australia, Uruguay and Argentina. The emphasis has been on breeding soft, white, fine crimping wool for the Italian suiting and apparel market.

### Stud Recognition

Moutere has received many industry awards for the quality of the sheep and the wool that they produce:

- In the early years until 1965, Moutere showed sheep at various shows including the Canterbury and Central Otago A & P Shows. Many trophies, medals and ribbons have been awarded to Moutere sheep over this time.

### Innovations in Merino Breeding

Over the last 100 years there have been significant improvements in breeding sheep. Sheep were once evaluated just on their looks and the feel of their wool. Now a large number of measurements are made to increase the predictability of breeding more productive sheep.

'Carcass Characteristics' that are measured include:

- Growth rates
- Body weights
- Condition score
- Eye muscle area
- Fat scores

'Wool Characteristics' that are measured include:

- Fiber diameter
- Yield
- Standard deviation of micron
- Percentage of coarse fibers

'Animal Health Characteristics' are also factored in and include:

- Footrot tolerance
- Internal parasite resilience

There are also now additional technologies available to the merino stud breeder to enable a more informed selection for particular characteristics. These include

- Artificial Insemination of ewes - this allows rams that are of a high genetic value to be used widely over a large population of ewes.
- Embryo transfer of ewes - this allows ewes of high genetic merit to reproduce at greater than natural rate.
- Progeny testing of young rams - this allows for an in depth evaluation of a ram's genetic merit before they are used in a breeding program.
- Genetic evaluations using computer based technology - These generate 'Estimated Breeding Values' (EBVs) which indicate the breeding worth of an animal based upon the characteristics mentioned above.



Rams exported to Argentina 2014