

From "Provincial Pride" No 8, August 1962

"The Foundation of the Frozen Meat Industry in New Zealand"

by S. D. MACPHERSON.

Thanks to the efforts of many people and organisations a correct history of the export meat industry was written prior to the celebrations of the 75th Anniversary of the first shipment from New Zealand in February, 1957.

At that time the writer was surprised that so few then living could remember either William Soltau Davidson or Thomas Brydone—the two men mainly responsible for the trial venture.

My father, John Macpherson, was appointed manager of Totara and Ardgowan Estates in 1879, and was therefore responsible for details of the experimental shipment in 1881.

I have often wondered why Totara was chosen for this experiment instead of the Moeraki Estate. Totara killing shed was erected near the outbuildings and men's quarters and almost a mile from Totara Siding (on the Main line to Dunedin) where the unfrozen carcasses were loaded from drays into ice-cooled vans. Totara had a poor water supply from wells and depended on windmills to lift the water and force it long distances to the killing shed. Moeraki on the other hand, was almost 20 miles closer to Port Chalmers where the freezing plant was located, and a killing shed could have been placed almost at a loading siding on the Main line. Water • by windmill from wells would have been a problem however.

Father and his younger brother Alexander arrived at Lyttelton by the s.s. "Desdemona" in 1876 with introductions to the manager of the New Zealand and Australian Land Co. Father was placed immediately on "The Levels" Estate as clerk and his brother on the Pareora Estate as a teamster.

Prior to emigrating to New Zealand father was engaged first as bookkeeper and later as surveyor and manager at Cambrian Slate Quarries in Wales then owned by a Menzies with whom he kept up a correspondence during the next ten years.

From copies of these letters and from his private letter book the following extracts are taken : 14th Sept., 1877. The Levels.

A pity the Cambrian Co. did not invest in land out here as this is the country to make money in. A farm of 570 acres, sold at auction yesterday next our boundary, brought £10 per acre and was purchased from the Crown a short time ago for £2.

Alex. has been promoted to post as overseer at Pareora at 30/- per week, with horse. They have this year 1,200 acres under grain, 2,300 under turnips, rape, mangolds and carrots, and 1,500 to lay down in English grasses.

We get a new clerk tomorrow and I am to be appointed as surveyor for the Canterbury and Otago Association Ltd. I have done a lot of this lately up at the Cave for the overseer, Jas. McLeod. Mr. Davidson was overseer at the Cave for some years when Mr. Donald McLean was Superintendent at the Levels.

Mr. Davidson is a good hand at surveying himself and wants me to do a plan of Levels and Pareora—the latter contains 33,000 acres freehold and Levels 73,600 acres freehold and 30,000 leasehold which we are steadily purchasing at £2 per acre. Mr. Davidson and I selected 26,000 acres last month on tops of Mts. Horrible and Misery. There is a great rush for land in this district and the country is swarming with capitalists hunting for land back to and including the mountains.

We have no less than 7 railway stations on this property, *viz.*, Washdyke, Levels, Waitohi, Pleasant Point, Sutherlands, Cave and Opawa.

Mr. Brydone, the Superintendent of the estates of the New Zealand and Australian Land Co., is here and I have been riding with him over the run. He told me that it was he who suggested to the Agents (Russell Ritchie) that I be appointed.

Mr. Bydone is a splendid fellow and very clever. He used to be under-factor to the Duke of Buccleugh but was too clever for the head factor and as they could not agree he got out. Our overseer used to work under him when with the Duke. Nice to have a man of his standing as a friend.

I wonder who will be appointed Superintendent to the new Company after the amalgamation of the Canterbury and Otago Association Ltd., and New Zealand and Australian Land Co Ltd. I hope either Brydone or Cunninghame Smith will. I don't suppose they will appoint Davidson as he has not had the practical experience of either.

Mr. Turnbull is going to a ball as a Beef-eater. He got a splendid dress from the Member Mr. Teschmaker from Wellington and will look well. Also Mr. Black in my Highland Dress.

There are far too many letters of recommendation brought out here and they have ruined many a man. We have the son of a very wealthy family cooking for the men out at the camp and recently an earl's son cooking here. There are hundreds of well-brought-up fellows travelling New Zealand with their swags looking for work, as they soon sum a man up here...."

4th Nov., 1878. The Levels.

".... Mr. Davidson is leaving here by the first Suez Mail for Glasgow where he is to act as General Manager to the Company in Mr. Jas. Morton's place. Mr. Brydone who was Superintendent to N.Z.A.S. Land Co. Ltd. Estates is to act in same capacity over the two Amalgamated Co. Estates.

He is here taking delivery of everything from Mr. Davidson. I have a lot of work to do for Mr. Davidson before he leaves.

It is a pity to see so many of the gentlemen's sons carrying swags out here because of drink, as they are put to the meanest work as they are useless for regular work...."

17th Nov. 1877. From The Levels.

"....We are in the middle of sheep shearing and a busy time it is. There are 50 men employed in the shed at homestead and this year we have a new shed on the Island Run between the Tengawai and Opihi Rivers. Another lot of shearers are busy at the Pareora shed behind Mt. Horrible, the largest in the country.

A Mr. Bain is in charge of the shed and gets f4 per week. The shearers get 16/8 per 100 sheep. The wool stapler gets fl per 1,000 fleeces and earns 40/- per day. The wool pressers earn 1/3 per bale of 4cwt...."

These extracts from letters have been quoted to show that prior to his appointment as General Manager of the New Zealand and Australian Land Co. Ltd. in Glasgow Mr. Davidson was a Canterbury man employed by the Canterbury and Otago Association with little interest in Otago. My father was fortunate, indeed, to be so closely associated with him on The Levels Estate and Pareora.

They had the same interests, chiefly book-keeping, surveying and planning buildings, etc. The amalgamation of the Canterbury and Otago properties had taken place shortly before he left to be General Manager of the N.Z. and A. Land Co.

When Mr. Davidson decided, in 1881, to try a trial shipment of meat from New Zealand he wrote to Mr. Brydone, his Supervisor, instructing that a killing shed be erected, butchers engaged and all details arranged prior to the arrival of the "Dunedin" at Port Chalmers.

Probably Totara was chosen, either by Brydone or Davidson, on account of its position between Canterbury and Otago Estates for the assembly of sheep to be killed, or because both men were aware of father's flair for planning the details of such an undertaking.

A boiling-down works had been operating for years at Kakanui and no doubt advice was obtained from Mr. Alex. Thomson, who was the manager, as to the type of buildings required for killing in and cooling the carcasses prior to carting to the siding at Totara.

In the early stages only the skins or pelts were saved. The blood trickled through gratings on a concrete floor into gutters leading to large "pig runs". Heads, trotters and everything else went to the pigs through swinging wooden doors mounted on an Oamaru stone wall.

Gradually contractors began saving certain items like tongues, livers, fat and trotters, even to portions of stomach such as tanners for treatment, such as sausage skins. Alex. Thomson certainly assembled the butchers and taught them how to dress a carcass for the export trade. Tallow was not rendered at Totara but packed in sacks and sent to the boiling down works at Kakanui.

Copy of letter from John Macpherson's personal letter book, folio 104, headed Totara Estate, 24th Nov., 1894.

"Sheep Slaughtering at Totara.

It was from this estate that the first frozen mutton was sent to London from New Zealand. In 1881, the N.Z. & A. Land Co. chartered the ship 'Dunedin' (Capt. Whitson) to take a cargo of mutton from their New Zealand stations to London. The vessel arrived at Port Chalmers in December, 1881, fitted up with Bell Coleman freezer and the first sheep were slaughtered at Totara (in a temporary slaughtering and cooling house erected at the homestead for the purpose) on 7th December, 1881.

The carcasses were conveyed in spring drays from the cooling house three-quarters of a mile to the meat vans at Totara siding and sent by rail every morning to Port Chalmers and frozen on board the ship. After 1,121 sheep were sent off the crank shaft of the freezer snapped and as in those days no extras were carried a new shaft had to be forged and fitted at Port Chalmers. As this took a month to do the frozen mutton on board had to be sold for whatever it would fetch in Dunedin. On 13th January, another start was made with the killing and on 11th February the ship sailed for London with 4,265 sheep, lambs and pigs on board. This shipment was such a success that others followed. Altogether 172,415 carcasses of sheep and lambs besides 100 head of cattle and a number of pigs were sent Home from these private slaughter yards and not a single carcass went Home in bad condition.

The ship 'Dunedin' made 10 trips altogether and after it left Oamaru in March, 1890, with a full cargo it was never more heard of. The surmise is that she and the sister ship 'Marlborough' which left Lyttelton at the same time must have encountered ice on the way home and both foundered. Nothing was ever heard of either ship.

The list of shipments of mutton sent from Totara slaughter house to London from February, 1882, to March, 1890, is :

Date	Ship	Carcasses
February, 1882	Dunedin	(4,265) 5,909
May, 1882	Mataura	1,040
January, 1883	Dunedin	6,833
October, 1883	Dunedin	8,645
February, 1884	Marlborough	9,000
August, 1884	Dunedin	7,999
December, 1884	Marlborough	10,456
June, 1885	Dunedin	9,922
December, 1885	Marlborough	11,000
April, 1886	Dunedin	9,410
January, 1887	Marlborough	12,821
April, 1887	Dunedin	9,162

August, 1887	Oamaru	11,502
November, 1887	Edwin Fox	2,000
February, 1888.	Marlborough	12,273
April, 1888	Dunedin	10,941
March, 1889	Dunedin	11,279
March, 1890	Dunedin	<u>12,344</u>
		172,415

Further extracts from John Macpherson's letters to Menzies.
18th Dec., 1885.

"... The General Manager of this Company (Mr. Davidson from Edinburgh) is out here just now and I accompanied him last Saturday on a ride over our Mt. Dasher run on which is situated the Ballachulish Slate Quarries of which I have written previously. We rode quite close to the quarry on the property and I explained the whole method of slate quarrying. He is greatly taken up with it and as he is soon returning to Scotland will make all enquiries into the present condition of the slate trade at home with a view to the formation of a company to work it.

I met your brother-in-law at Pareora once when up there with the Captain of the ship 'Dunedin' for a few days' hare shooting. We had capital sport that day and the Captain had over 70 hares to freeze and take home.

Captain Whitson brought me out a new gun from London that trip which I like very much.

We still keep sending away a lot of frozen mutton from here to London and you people ought to get plenty of good cheap mutton now.

I am loading the ship 'Marlborough' now and hope to get it away by Christmas. It takes 10,800 carcasses each trip. I have 7,000 on board now and am killing at the rate of 350 sheep per day.

We now keep three vessels going regularly between here and London.
...I expect the ship 'Dunedin' here to load in March and we have chartered another load in June. We have now so many sheep on our stations that we must keep on sending them off though they only nett us one penny per lb. on the station to deliver to the butchers in London, and it is only bringing 4d to 4 1/2 wholesale there now. If we could get twopence for it nett on the place it would pay well.

We have now slaughtered here 84,500 sheep for the London market and not one has been condemned.

Everything is much depressed in New Zealand at present with very low prices for wheat, wool and tallow and farmers are hard up. We have to exercise the greatest economy to make the stations pay and a dry summer this year makes the situation worse.

The people best off in New Zealand now are station managers—workmen's wages are greatly reduced. We pay from 10/- to 15/- a week for rouse-about, 20/- a week for ploughmen, 50/- to butchers, 15/- to shearers and found in rations.

I believe in this part of New Zealand we have the best climate in the world...."

Notes on

THOMAS BRYDONE and WILLIAM SOLTAU DAVIDSON

Thomas Brydone was at one time under-factor to the Duke of Buccleugh and decided to emigrate because of a difference of opinion with the head factor.

He was a big man in all respects and the wives of the various property managers were always terrified of him finding fault with the running of the various households.

My mother was once told by him never to have jam on the breakfast table ; always marmalade.

When he stayed at Totara we were young children and were warned before attending meals not to speak during the meal. We were fascinated by the way he took porridge at breakfast.

A large tumbler of milk was placed beside his plate. He sprinkled salt liberally on the porridge and then with a bone spoon specially kept for him took a spoonful and dipped it into the milk before eating.

He was very friendly with the Menlove family at Windsor Park and if at Totara over the week-end would always visit them.

The buggy and pair would be brought up to the front of the house by the groom. "T.B" (as Brydone was always referred to) always drove the horses, father usually sitting beside him. He was a poor driver and would invariably catch the hub of the front wheel on the gateway leading into the main road. He would remain seated while father and often Pattello, who was sub-supervisor, got out and skidded the wheels free from the post. We children would hide amongst the shrubs in the grounds to watch this performance.

Brydone lived at the Dunedin Club and I think was a member of Committee for years. Totara was a great potato growing area in those days and regularly supplied the Club with the best shaped tubers which were roasted in their skins or jackets.

As boys, we were often put on to picking over a ton of potatoes from the field to select a few sacks of what father thought suitable for the "Gentlemen's" Club. We did not think much of the name Fernhill Club as it was generally called.

If a telegram arrived announcing a visit by Thomas Brydone father always got into a state of agitation-the rouse-about would be turned on to picking some wisps of wool from the wire fences above the homestead and collecting any wet chaff bags hung over fences to dry. Unless this was done before the arrival of Thomas Brydone father would stop a proper blast.

He was, however, a great admirer of both Thomas Brydone and William SoltSoltaudison. Davidson came to New Zealand as a young man to join the Canterbury and Otago Association. Father was associated with him for several years on The Levels and Cave outstation before he went home.

Both Brydone and Davidson were keen agriculturists and as Totara was mainly an agricultural property in those days father owed much to those two men for his training in this work.

I can remember Davidson only on his last visit to the property before it was broken up for closer settlement.

We climbed Sebastopol together to view the Brydone Cairn and I well remember the disappointment in his face after reading the inscription on the monument in which Thomas Brydone had been given the credit for founding both the freezing and dairy industries in New Zealand.

He said little about it at the time which was a sign of his greatness, but I was pleased that during the 75th Anniversary in 1957, he was given the credit he had always deserved.

Except for the visits when General Manager of the two great estate-owning concerns he was little known in Otago and it is perhaps natural that Thomas Brydone got most of the credit for the early work at Totara and Edendale.

We owe much to the wisdom and foresight of these two men.