

'Brim' still seeks that 10-pounder

A man who has waited 76 years to retire and have time to catch trout now complains there are none in South Taranaki.

He also complains that the golf balls today are not as good as they used to be. They can't be, because they don't go half as far as they did when he was younger.

He is Mr J. W. Brimblecombe, Manaia, raconteur, author, health inspector, architect, dedicated fisherman, painter, collector and writer of letters to the editor which Taranaki editors are delighted to receive.

Born of an old Devon family in 1900 (he can trace his family back to 1536), "Brim" was tutor and public school educated. He joined the Royal Flying Corps in 1917 as an observer, and flew in De Havilland 9As over France doing reconnaissance and photography in the latter stages of World War I.

After the war he was articulated to a firm of architects for three years. In those days you had to pay for the pleasure of being trained, he said. He was architect to the Okehampton-Devon Council for several years, then came to New Zealand in 1935.

A school friend who came here after the war had told him it was a paradise where 10lb trout abounded. "Brim" is still waiting to catch that ten-pounder.

He arrived in the middle of the depression and instead of going fishing had to cut gorse for a living.

A year or two later he joined the newly-formed Department of Housing, designing and laying out various Government sites. He made the model of the first large Government housing project at Hamilton which was displayed at the 1940 centennial exhibition in Wellington, and also built models of many of the Government's multi-storey housing projects in Auckland and Wellington.

When World War II came he tried to rejoin the Royal Air Force, but was by then in a reserved occupation and could not be released.

There was only one other Brimblecombe in New Zealand at that time, at Te Aroha, and the Army Department kept confusing them. It kept writing to J.W.B. asking why he had moved to Te Aroha without letting it know.

"Brim" went from Wellington to Eltham in 1941 as health inspector for the Health Department, and in 1942 moved to Manaia. His inspection district covered Manaia and Waimate West County, Kaponga, Eltham County and town, Hawera County, Normanby and isolated Whangamomona.

The medical officer of health for Taranaki was then Dr F. Dawson, who was recently reported from Northland as still practising at 100 years of age.

When "Brim" retired from the Health Department in 1953, he started again as an architect with an office in Hawera, and the lovely St Cuthbert's Anglican Church in Manaia, built about 1955, was to his design.

Later he was in partnership with J. Rex Roberts of racecourse grandstand design fame. When Mr Roberts went to Palmerston North in 1962, "Brim" gave up his own practice and worked as an architect for Arthur Brown Construction Co. Ltd in Hawera for 12 years, retiring finally two years ago.

He wrote a series of articles for the farming paper "Straight Furrow," and in 1953 they were published in book form as "Shear Nonsense."

That little book which graces most Taranakians' bookshelves, went into four editions and sold 23,000 copies.

His 1964 publication "Are You a Sport?" was a humorous alphabetically arranged exposition of various New Zealand pastimes, including "drinking" under D.

"Brim" who now drives a Mini, has always been interested in cars, and deeply regrets selling the one he bought in 1950 for 150 pounds. It was a 1922 Bentley Sports, with enormous wire wheels and yards of bonnet held down by a large leather strap.

He sold it eventually to a man in Bulls in the understanding that he would have first refusal if it was for sale again. The agreements must have been forgotten, for the Bentley now reposes in a museum at Puketitiri, inland from Napier.

Now he is after that monster trout, but without success. He fished three rivers on opening day this year, but did not see a fish.

"Brim" said he had noticed a decrease in the number of fish in South Taranaki in recent years. He felt it was due partly to pollution, but mainly because of the considerable draining of marshlands in the area, and clearing the willows from rivers. All the water was rushing out to sea, and there was little concealment for a resting fish.

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