

ANZAC lessons

Cotswold Minnie Moppet and Cotswold Lavender Rose visited the Pleasant Point Primary School on Monday 20th April, 2015

When we were asked to take the donkeys along to attend lessons about ANZAC I said yes. I'm always very happy to take the donkeys to a gathering where people can see what wonderful and calm animals donkeys are. Phil Moore, the organiser, was a Vietnam veteran himself and said he was at his wits end trying to find a donkey and then someone suggested he try the vets at Pleasant Point who suggested Moppet and Rose.

The countryside had been in drought mode having missed most of the rain over the summer (47mm recorded for the area over the three months) and I visualised a lovely fine day with lots of children out in the sunshine.

We were so wrong. The usual worrying niggles started to get at me when the forecast was not good and then worsened as I let myself get carried away with the "what ifs." What if we all got soaked and got pneumonia, the donkeys fell over in the float on the hills getting there, got frights at something and so on.

Three days out I blew the dust out of their coats with an old Tellus vacuum cleaner while it was fine. They love that. As the air goes through the vacuum it warms and they enjoy the sensation. Wearing overalls I try to avoid breathing the dust which seems determined to cover all of me and my lungs with a thick layer. The wonderful thing is that not having oily coats donkeys are very easy to clean this way. That is also the reason they are not waterproof and need shelter from rain. Later, with manes trimmed, legs and tails washed, they were transformed and ready for the public.

Covers were worn to keep them clean until the big morning. It was wet! Phil arrived with a posh double horse float. Mine is one of those old single varieties with an open top. It is quite wide enough for two donkeys and easy to tow but it is clearly not up to the standard they will now expect when going somewhere. I could see Moppet was impressed as she walked up the ramp of Phil's float as if this was something she did every day. Rose, perhaps not liking the rain, decided to be awkward and planted her feet firmly below the ramp. She often needs a rope crossed over her back and around her rump and on she goes.

I told Phil to drive really slowly down the hill as donkeys can slip over very easily having narrow little feet unlike a horse's dinner plates to stand on.

It is only 9km to Pleasant Point from home and we were soon unloading, but greeted by large piles of dung which had caked their hooves and was half way up Rose's previously pristine white hind legs. I had washed their feet earlier so set about cleaning them up, finishing with a scrubbing of their hooves. The blackening on their hooves had not come off so within minutes they both looked lovely.

Since it was wet we were to go into the Hall. Rose had been inside and stood up the front of a lovely old Anglican Church when she was a yearling. She didn't even mind walking past the band with drums close to the aisle. Afterwards she led the procession out and around the church with waving palms and a guitar playing right behind her.



I had expected Moppet to be a little hesitant at going up the steps and into the hall, but it was Rose who said no. She could hear the noises from within. Moppet bravely went ahead through two sets of double doors to stand on the wooden floor just inside. As Rose wasn't following, I asked for some muscle power to help and assured them

that she wouldn't kick. Three male teachers leapt up to help. Rose evidently realised that she was outnumbered as she appeared immediately.

We led the donkeys – walking carefully on the noisy timber floor - to the front of the hall where a collector, Malcolm Brady, had all manner of old equipment laid out on trestles and the floor. Each artefact was shown and its use explained which was very informative. There was even a Marmite tin from WWI. Phil wanted the children to remember what life was like for the men who fought and died in the Boer, WWI, WWII and Vietnam wars. There was a colouring competition for the children of the school and St. Joseph's School of Simpson and his donkey and Phil said later "The donkeys brought it all to life."





Moppet and Rose did look lovely. On one side of their ears was a large red poppy knitted by Jan Wright's Mother, Katherine Stockwell, aged 93, which gave the right touch to the event.

Many people came and remarked on their

poppies which were particularly of interest to a couple of women who photographed them at close range and counted the rows of stitches. **(See colour photo on page 34).**

Photo: Malcolm Brady dressed as a WWI soldier as did some of the children who had their photos taken with the donkeys.



After each session some children

dressed up as soldiers but all the children were allowed to file past the artefacts and donkeys who received a lot of attention. I always explain that donkeys and horses are like cats in that they liked to be stroked, not patted or slapped. When we first arrived a boy took command of Moppet and

didn't leave her side until we left. His teacher must have allowed that as when the classes changed, he remained. Rose also had her special person, a young girl with the same name, Rose.

Moppet was exceptionally quiet though both donkeys were happy to take whatever happened and remained calm.

The occasional child ran about and it did get a bit noisy at times but the children were well behaved.

As the donkeys had appeared to empty out on the journey in the float, I was not really thinking about their bowels and also I was unaware of how the time had passed and that it was after 1pm.

Just as the end came Rose got a bit restless and was shifting her feet, then all of a sudden she dropped a pile and Moppet followed suit. Everyone laughed, though I was horrified as I had never had that happen before in a building. The people did not worry in the least. Nick picked up the dung and they said a man would clean the floor. The headmaster came grinning as we walked out into the foyer and he thanked us for bringing them.

Two days later I answered my cell phone and a man from the Timaru Herald asked if I would take in photos as those that had been supplied were not suitable for printing and he had a deadline. As my email was behaving oddly at the time, I had to rush home and put photos on a data stick. After a few days I was thinking that they didn't like my photos either, when on ANZAC morning a photo of Moppet and Rose appeared on page four of the Timaru Herald.

It was not the first time that they have appeared in the paper. Moppet and Rose took part in '*Christmas on the Bay*' when children sang 'Little Donkey' several years ago. Moppet had a child dressed as Mary riding her and Nick was dressed as Joseph.

Another time Moppet had her photo in with me kneeling and kissing her nose and I had wondered why they wanted a donkey having its nose kissed, but have a sneaking suspicion that it was to counter an opinion at the T. Herald that donkeys were nasty little creatures that bit.

Both donkeys were also in after the chief photographer had stopped when we were out walking with our donkeys and two Shetland Ponies.

Lea Hullett –

Cotswold Minnie Moppet and Cotswold Lavender Rose's support person.