

# The story of our *Armstrong Holland* road grader

by Silke Hackbarth (Rotorua Settlers and Steam Museum)

**This is not an article about machinery and mechanical details, but it is an example of how objects and their stories can bring history to life! Discovering their memories and meanings creates connections between the present and the past...**

A little while ago I came across some of our old museum newsletters from the 1970s! After reading an article that described the adventure of locating and bringing a horse-drawn road grader to our museum, I wondered whether this item of machinery was still in our collection today. And eventually I located it in the garden between our workshop building and the roadside fence! I had actually seen it many, many times before – I go past every time I come to the museum – but I had never taken much notice of it, even though it is painted in some bright and unusual colours. (As you might have guessed, I don't have a huge interest in machinery...) This time though, I looked at this vintage grader differently. I crawled and climbed around it, inspecting it, trying to figure out how it used to work, and hoping to find evidence that this was really the machine from the newsletter article. It was meant to be 'horse-drawn', which confused me, as this grader seemed to be way too heavy and not designed for being pulled by horses. However, it is the only grader in our museum grounds.

Sometime later, I learnt from one of our long-serving volunteers that 'horse-drawn' could also mean 'tractor-pulled'. He confirmed that this was the grader, that was brought to our museum in the 1970s. And he explained, that it would have been used in the forestry for cutting fire breaks and most likely would have been pulled by a crawler tractor.



“... [Around 1973 our] Board member Frank Johnson heard from a logging truck driver of this old grader, and Gordon Pennell was asked to look into it. It was on a back road in one of the NZ Forest Products forest areas! Sheward and Pennell made a special trip through to Kinleith to see those in charge and to locate it. Yes – if it was any good we could have it! Some said they had heard of it – others said it did exist, but they had not seen it in years. However, it was finally located in Springfield Road, rounding a corner it loomed into sight – surely the biggest road grader of its type we had ever seen. It was peeping out from above banks of blackberry and we could immediately tell in what state it was.

However, a working bee was arranged for a Saturday – and a fire permit arranged by Gordon. And Henry Ashton, Frank Johnson, Robert Waaka, Sheward and Gordon descended on it armed with slashers, and soon its full size was revealed. We also discovered a broken arm which controls the blade. Obviously this is why it had been abandoned.

The blade was soon jacked up free of the ground and all wheels checked. Yes, they all turned and even better, once a little grease was added. So, the easiest part was done. Now the biggest task remained: how to get it back to Rotorua?

It was the biggest, longest, widest and heaviest object we had tackled. There were suggestions of bringing it home by logging truck. But after months it was discovered it was too big. Finally, board member Judith Ashton called on Waikato Heavy Haulage, and they undertook to transport it as a back load. Just a few days before Christmas Waikato Heavy Haulage rang, and Sheward went through to Tokoroa with driver Graham Bone to collect the grader. Would it still be there? Had some scrap merchant cut it up? Had NZ Forest Products given it to someone else in the belief that we had lost interest, it being so long? We had on one occasion rung to explain the delay in collecting it. But our fears turned to joy as again we rounded the corner and there it stood! After an attempt to pull it onto the transporter forward which had failed, we pulled it on



backwards and it fitted – just. Then, perhaps the fastest it has ever been, the grader arrived at the museum. Well, in the hostel driveway, as the transporter would not fit through the entrance! Getting it off was no trouble: it was tied to a tree, and then the transporter slowly pulled away and it came off. The museum board is grateful for Graham Bone for delivering it safely to the museum, and a big thank you to Mr. Fred Harrop of Waikato Heavy Haulage for making its delivery possible.

‘What next?’, you may ask. Neighbour Syd Bridson has towed it into the museum grounds, and he will undertake the welding of the broken arm. Next the board will hire a plant and sand blast the machine clean (at present it is rusty and has lichen growing on it). Spray painting will follow (its original colour appears to be ‘steel blue’), and who knows, we might have the grader in the New Year’s Parade next year. So, Frank Johnson’s dream comes true: a grader at our museum! The many school children that call will love the wheels and gadgets, that help make up the machine. The dimensions are: 26 feet length, 9 feet 6 inches width, 8 feet 6 inches height. The grading blade has a 12 feet sweep...”

[source: “Pu-Kaea – Te Amorangi newsletter, Vol. 1 No. 6, 1975]

After spending quite some time researching online, I still haven’t been able to find out a lot about this grader. It has an ‘Armstrong Holland’ sign on one side, so, it seems to be made in Australia, possibly built in the 1930s. If you have any information or comments, we are looking forward to your email (to: [teamorangimuseum@xtra.co.nz](mailto:teamorangimuseum@xtra.co.nz)).

Photo on the right from The Fletcher Trust Archives online. NZ State Forest Service, Grading fire breaks in the Kaingaroa Forest near Rotorua in 1929. [<https://www.fletcherarchives.co.nz>]





# Mystery Creek Field Days 2023

## One Hundred Years of Farmall 1923-2023

Back in March we had a few Farmalls on display at the International Harvester stand at the Memorabilia Rally in Morrinsville, along with some of Agrizone, new Case IH and New Holland products.

While talking with Andrew Giltrap he asked if we would be interested in being involved with the Field Days display, as they were keen to do a '100 years of Farmall' display. The Farmall name was patented on 1 July 1923, with the first prototypes. The 'Farmall' was born and built by hand along with the 10-20 models from that date.

The tractors ranged from 1930 to 1974 which was the last year the Farmall name was used on an International Tractor.

We supplied Claire with as much as we knew about our tractors and she and her team came up with some awesome graphics to go along with the display. The timeline board behind the tractors was incredible and they tell me they cost many thousands of dollars. We were also asked to help speak on Farmall tours which happened each day at 10.00am. Richard, Roy and I along with James from Case IH, ran the tours; James did a

Those attended Field Days and saw our display were impressed with the range we had, working with the team from Case IH marketing has been great with their resources of information and stored history. The team from Giltrap Agrizone and Case IH marketing looked after us very well and hope we can work together again in the future.

George Gardner  
Waikato Vintage Tractor and Machinery Club



great job with company heritage and names. Being a tour guide was a daunting thought but was enjoyable on the day and a great experience. Giltrap Agrizone picked up and



So in due course we were contacted by Claire Norris from Case IH marketing. Roy Johnson, Claire and myself hatched a plan, this involved each club supplying half each of what was available for display. This only covered 90 plus years, as early tractors were prototypes and we haven't got those. Roy from Otorohanga Club provided a F20, A, B, H, BM, SBMD, B450, 766, and I filled in the gaps from the Waikato Vintage Tractor and Machinery Club with tractors with a bit of significance. This was a 1930 Regular, Farmall 12 & Plough, Farmall C, Super MDTA, 504 Farmall, A-514, Farmall Cub and Plough.

delivered all the tractors, a big job on any scale with all that had to be done to run their site at Field Days.







### 2003

#### FARMALL REBORN

After 82 years of trials, Farmall's basic design proved to be remarkably timeless. This time it's a new compact tractor, designed for the needs of smaller farms and residential acreage - combining the legacy of innovation and versatility into the new design.

#### FARMALL TURNS 100

With over 25 models, ranging from the iconic 12 to the 100, we have something for everyone. We have a tractor for the grower, for the farmer, for the rancher, for the contractor, for the utility, for the residential, for the commercial, for the professional, for the enthusiast, for the collector, for the historian, for the future.

