

Where the role leads

Brian Carlisle's work has taken him all around the country and further. Saying yes to the opportunities at hand and sticking with what he enjoyed has provided him with a successful and fulfilling career. **BY MARY SEARLE BELL.**

Brian Carlisle was born in England in January 1930. As an 18-year-old, he joined the Royal Air Force for his two years' military service, and was assigned to the Meteorological Office group headquarters in Suffolk. There, he was part of a team that provided regular weather forecasts and information to RAF pilots.

"We were open 24 hours a day," he says. "There was around 20 staff – about four or five forecasters and 10 to 15 assistants.

"We issued a major forecast at 9am, which was updated every three hours, and a weather summary every hour, and provided weather forecasts for any flights."

With his military service complete, Brian was able to focus on his career. He realised he wanted to do surveying and drafting so got a job with the Agricultural Committee of the local district council. However, he wasn't there long before he made the decision to move to New Zealand.

His widowed mother, along with her father and two sisters, had emigrated to Whakatane the year prior. Brian decided to join them, so in 1953, duly booked a passage on the Captain Cook.

He soon got a job in drainage with the Ministry of Works in Thornton, a village 15 kilometres along the coast.

"They had put a lot of returned servicemen [in Thornton] but they objected to the fact a lot of it was underwater," he says wryly. "Their drainage system was there but a lot of maintenance work was required."

In his role as a field assistant, Brian was kept busy measuring water flows and the flow in the river.

"Also, Kawerau [Tasman Mill] was just being built and they needed a lot of water for the paper plant," he says.

At work one day he came across a magazine which had an advert by an organisation for surveying and engineers' assistants.

"They had a course on engineering – it covered the topic from one end to the other. It was all done by post and had an examination," he explains. "I learnt quite a lot there."

Newly qualified, Brian got a job as an engineer's assistant



Brian Carlisle

with the Hawea Borough in Central Otago, where for the next two-and-a-half years he was kept busy building kerb and channel among other general borough work.

Next came a role with the Waimairi County Council in Christchurch – a job he describes as more of the same but on a bigger scale. However, while in this position he was given a two-year leave of absence to complete his qualifications to become a registered civil engineer.

He went to Auckland during term time – to Seddon

Memorial Technical College – and completed a five-year part time course in two years, full time.

“I missed a lot of lectures doing it this way but it gave me a lot of spare time to study, which made up for it.”

In 1960, just as the course finished, he married a girl he had met when living in Hawea, and the couple returned to Christchurch.

His next job took them to Feilding and a role with two distinct parts. The town had a reticulation system that only worked when it was raining. And when it did rain, it flooded and the sewers filled with water, pouring raw sewage into the streets. This, naturally, needed addressing.

Feilding was also in the process of constructing a sewage treatment plant – quite a large one as it was to cater for the borough, freezing works and sale yards (paved and possibly the largest in New Zealand at the time), as well as the discharge from the Palmerston North abattoir.

“It was a three stage treatment plant and took two to three years to get set up,” says Brian.

With that project complete, he took a job in Hamilton.

“Hamilton had virtually no sewerage system – the older part of the city had septic tanks that went into the Waikato River, while houses in the new part had their own septic tanks. As the city is on clay, there was no overflow drainage so instead sewage would run into the streets.

“I was appointed as design engineer for drainage with the Hamilton City Council and we had to start from scratch.

“There was considerable fall to the treatment plant so we designed three main lines to the plant, drained by gravity. In the low areas we used submersible pumps – the first use of these in the country.”

The council was having trouble getting the money for this project, so Brian and his family took an opportunity to spend a few years in Fiji. Brian had a contract with Harrison Grierson, planning a sewerage system for Suva then working on a big residential development scheme.

They returned to New Zealand in 1973, a time when the government was becoming concerned with the quality of the water in rivers. Brian was employed by the Waikato Valley Authority to look after Waikato River’s water quality.

“I determined the conditions for permits to discharge,” he says. “It wasn’t too difficult – the Waikato is a big river, with a huge flow that’s deep and fast. It’s pretty hard to get a build-up of pollution.”

A restructure in 1977 meant Brian was out of a job, but the Hamilton City Council was in need of a new drainage engineer. So Brian returned to the council, holding the role until he retired at the end of 1991.

It seems the traveller was finally tamed, and Brian, now 86, and his wife are happy to remain in Hamilton. [WNZ](#)