

Lynne, a daughter of UNZT office holders Freddie and Yvonne Hall, is on a prolonged visit home from New Zealand with her husband and two children. Here Lynne recounts a life of adventure and achievement.

*March 2019, just a few days before leaving NZ for NI.
Philip and Lynne ready to head to Wellington for his
British citizenship ceremony at the British High Commission*



Tell us a little about yourself

Originally from Lisburn I resided here until moving across the water aged 18 to study Law and Economics at the University of Leicester. I then lived in England for about 12 years having moved, after graduating, to London for work and then back up to West Yorkshire before heading to NZ in 2010 with Philip my Kiwi partner (now husband) who I had met in London. Philip was born in Invercargill in the South Island and then moved to Feilding in the North Island at the age of 9 years. His father is a retired stud stock agent with Wrightson PGG, formerly Dalgety Crown and his mother a nurse.

Philip has always been interested in mechanics, woodworking, fishing/hunting, outdoor pursuits and any machinery that moves, which led to his career in mechanical engineering. Before ever meeting Philip, I had travelled to NZ twice to see some Kiwi friends met in England and on the second trip also visited my sister, who by that stage was living in NZ. My career has always focused on legal work within various Government organisations in both the UK and NZ. I currently work within the NZ Police Prosecutions Department though I have taken a 2 year extended period of leave to allow us to spend time back in Northern Ireland.

How were you lucky enough to find a NZ husband?

Philip and I were very fortunate to meet through a chain of mutual friends. The first Kiwi friend, John, made whilst living in Leicester introduced me to another Kiwi friend, Paul, who he had met in Fiji whilst travelling and was now also in England. When I moved to London I was then introduced to Paul's brother Rhys. Unknown to me, Philip and Rhys had grown up together in Feilding and were childhood friends. I met with Rhys for lunch one day and he brought a couple of friends along - one of whom was Philip! - we hit it off and as they say the rest is history. I remain good friends with John, Paul and Rhys to this day and we often talk about the chain of events that led to me eventually meeting my future husband in London during 2005.

Philip had just booked a one-way ticket back to NZ the week before I met him, but thankfully became convinced to not go on that plane 6 months later and remained in the UK for another 5 years! He was originally meant to be here for his Big OE, Overseas Experience, for one year and ended up staying seven!

By then had your sister also had the good fortune to meet a Kiwi?

No, Philip and I were together before Gail met her husband John in Christchurch when travelling/working in NZ for a year to visit some Kiwi girlfriends. They had met working in London as teachers. When Philip and I returned to NZ we were both keen to live in Christchurch as Philip had studied there and both of us preferred the South Island. We ended up living about 5 minutes from Gail and John and we still have houses less than a 5 minute drive from each other. To have that connection and family support on the other side of the world was and is fantastic. They have three children, who are best friends with our two.

How long have you lived in NZ?

Philip and I moved to Christchurch in 2010 leaving behind many friends in NI, London and Leeds. Philip as a mechanical engineer found lots of work opportunities around Christchurch. I discovered that despite being well qualified NZ is the type of place where it is more about who you know! So it took me a little while to find my feet career wise working for Legal Services in Christchurch.

Then following the Christchurch earthquakes I tackled a challenging analytical role, leading a large group within the Earthquake Commission. The first major earthquake occurred only 5 months (Sept 2010) after our arrival to Christchurch and then 5 months later (Feb 2011) the most destructive one occurred. The city we had moved to had changed dramatically, but the underlying charm that has always been there remains. I was working in the city centre on the day of the February earthquake, memories of which will stay with me forever. Both my family and my sister's family were lucky to avoid any injuries or sustain any major damage to property - many others were not so fortunate.

We remained in Christchurch following the earthquakes and the start of the rebuild, a very slow process given the scale of damage and mass demolition required to begin the rebuild throughout the city. I was privileged to lead a team within the Earthquake Commission that sought to bring resolution to many who were struggling with liability issues between their private insurer and the EQC. Through new processes, joint working and dispute resolution forums we helped to resolve over 5000 customers' claims so they could move forward from the effects of the earthquake. The work undertaken during this 5 year period was unprecedented with huge challenges and a period that I will always look back on with great pride.

Having been in Christchurch for 5 years, with a trip back to NI to get married in 2012 and having our daughter Isabel in 2014 we discussed moving to the North Island to the small town (pop 20,000) of Feilding. Philip's parents, grandfather, brother and family all lived there and we were keen for Isabel to get to know them in her early years. Feilding is well known for being one of NZ's most beautiful towns having won NZ best kept small town for 16 years and has neither traffic lights nor parking meters! The town centre stock yard being one of the largest in NZ.

I secured a job with NZ police and Philip an engineering manager's role with a firm he had worked for many years earlier. We have had a fabulous 3 years living in Feilding now with two kids as son George was born in June 2016. They have had the opportunity to enjoy the rural side of NZ on their grandparents' farm in Feilding as well as their great grandparents' farm in Taihape.

We became familiar with many cousins and second cousins and we had my family over from Lisburn in December 2016 for a combined Hall/Robinson Christmas - Kiwi style of course! Outdoors with barbequed meat from the farm. Towards the end of 2018 we made plans to return to Lisburn in early 2019 for a couple of years. I was keen to see family and friends, my brother was getting married, and there were a few special birthdays. Philip and I wanted to travel around more of the UK and Ireland as there were many places out of bounds for travel when I lived here a teenager.

Philip and I finished work in January 2019 and spent a month at his family's bach, Kiwi for holiday home, on Lake Taupo in the centre of north island. Starting our 2 year sabbatical by fishing, swimming, boating using a 1970's Hamilton jetboat Philip restored over the course of 5 years and walking every day with very little else to worry about.

Except how much sunscreen we would need to slap on the next day!





Fun at Lake Taupo in the centre of North Island



Isabel gets geared up for some fishing at Lake Taupo

We were lucky enough to squeeze in Philip's grandfather's 97th birthday before we departed NZ in early March and he is still going strong. Then came a 2 week stopover in North Carolina to visit friends and explore the great Smokey Mountains before finally landing back in Northern Ireland on 18th March last year. During April and May 2019 travelling through England, Scotland and Wales we managed to see parts of Snowdonia, Devon, Cornwall, Western Scotland and the Scottish Highlands while catching up with various friends along the way. We were blown away by the scenery, especially in Scotland, and it was a great start to our time here. A lot of time was spent visiting different parks, nature reserves and walking areas in Northern Ireland and enjoying parts of the country not seen before has been fabulous.

Everywhere is so well kept and Northern Ireland has really turned on the weather thus far! A 10 day trip at half term took us to Fermanagh and then to North Donegal again mostly for walking, biking and exploring the great outdoors. Beaches and bays on the north coast of Donegal are some of the best I have seen anywhere.

The whole family enjoying the lovely NI weather at the North West 200!



Impact of corona on your plans?

Well we still have a list of places to visit but this has been curtailed due to Covid-19. A 6 day trip to Norway in June for my 40th birthday had to be cancelled and its unlikely we will be able to reschedule. We are hoping to reschedule a trip to Killarney, Cork and Dingle later in the year as Isabel (5.5yrs) can sing the song 'Over in Killarney' word perfect and is very keen to visit! I have never been to any of these places so would really like to get there as well. Philip did a pretty comprehensive trip around Ireland on his OE, but it will be a different experience with family. Less whiskey distilleries and Guinness.

Apart from travel plans Covid-19 obviously stopped school for our two kids 3 months early - thankfully with them being so young they are happy being at home and having mum as their teacher! The schools here have been exceptional at providing resources for home schooling and keeping the children entertained over this prolonged period. Now to see what September brings in terms of schooling! We have also been unable to cuddle our new nephew born in May, so it has been tough for our kids not to be able to kiss and hold their baby cousin as they have been looking forward to him arriving for so long!

Is NZ's internationally acclaimed lady PM as popular at home despite annoying some farmers?

Jacinda Ardern is as popular in NZ as abroad and is having a great run so far though not quite as admired by farmers due to proposed taxes on water and emissions; though this is more of an historic labour party versus farmer issue than an individual one. Her pragmatic, decisive approach seems to chime well with New Zealanders. The PM has been transparent and doesn't make false promises which has gained her much respect. Her impact on the world stage has been positive considering she was only leader of her party for a short time before taking up the role as PM.

Your husband Philip's impressions on returning to the UK and NI in particular

Since our arrival my impressions of NI have been favourable. I find that Kiwis and Northern Irish have similar temperaments and interests, probably helped by the claim of many Kiwis to have heritage traced back to this country! My father's grandfather came from Ballymena, and my father and I drove past the farmstead 9 months ago with the help of a printed A4 sized map that Dad had brought with him compliments of his brother Roger who enjoys tracing the family history. The fantastic weather has helped my first 'living here' impressions, having expected to be wearing my rain jacket more often than just the few occasions it has been necessary. One of them standing on York corner for over 6 hours for the last NW200 in 2019.

I have been fortunate to have gained a mechanical design role for a bakery that builds its own bakery equipment thus giving me my first working life perspective on NI. I have found the Northern Irish keen to get stuck in and especially proactive in pushing forward with an interesting approach of 'push all the buttons until something happens sort of style!

The quality of schooling for our two children Isabel (5.5) and George (4) has been second to none and the unexpected challenge of C19 has proved their two respective schools to be as versatile, forward thinking and hardworking as anyone could have ever expected - with the remote coursework and daily activity scheduled to be seamless and almost instantaneous.

Lynne and I are very grateful for this and have said to each other on more than one occasion that both NZ and NI would really have to rate as the two places **worldwide** where we would have chosen to be during this pandemic time. In terms of immediate physical surroundings during the pandemic NI would win with the abundance of numerous well-kept and well organised parks and accessible green spaces close to home. The healthcare network has been comparable (very good) to NZ and has obviously proved itself in the past months and we feel in safe hands. I have yet to cast a fly into Northern Irish waters, but have had some great day walks, most recent before lockdown to Slieve Binian, and Doan with some amazing views rivalling that of favourite haunts in NZ. I enjoy being waterside and feel at home with the many lochs and rivers surrounding me and look forward to some more adventures in the coming months.

***Thanks to Rodney Magowan for chatting with Lynne & Phil
to gain this most interesting personal insight***