

## Report by Kate Gower-James on the 'Rewi Alley Youth Tour, July 2017'

### Monday 17<sup>th</sup> July: Shanghai

Arrived in Shanghai at Pudong airport, Monday morning at 7am. Extreme heat! Beautiful city, very very clean and not as full-on as expected from the world's biggest country. Shared a room with Brittany. First stop was a museum that had photos of Rewi Alley. The building was beautiful and had once housed the the editorial office of 'Bolshevik' [*a revolutionary newspaper in 1927*]

We then went to a community centre where we learned about Rewi Alley's red couch [that he used to rest on]. From there we went to the Hongkou fire station where Rewi Alley once worked. We even got to see the room he once slept in! We then had the official opening ceremony at the fire station. The New Zealand second general commissioner Megan spoke, as well as the deputy principal of Lanzhou University. We watched firefighters perform a real life activity and got to see the firefighters' museum. Dinner was served at the firefighters quarters and was delicious.

Our final stop for the day was to see the night lights over the water [*River Huang Pu, in Shanghai*], from the Bund. They were absolutely beautiful. This was also where Rewi Alley first set foot in China. It must have been so overwhelming for him.

#### **Key takeaways [*experiences*] for the day:**

- Chinese people respect and acknowledge Rewi 1000x more than NZ does
- Chinese have incredible English and try very hard.
- It's very hot.

### Thursday 20<sup>th</sup>: Xian

This was my favourite day so far. Up early to see the Terracotta Warriors. Absolutely blown away, with the sheer size and beauty of them. Very helpful having an English tour guide. 6,000 warriors unearthed so far from 3 pits with a lot still to go. They were beautiful with incredible detail. The emperor [*Chi Shi Huangdi*] made each of the artists sign their name on the leg of each soldier and if they weren't up to his standard the artist was killed! Little did such artists know that they too would be buried with the emperor. He had horses and chariots commissioned too. The Emperor's tomb will never be unearthed as it is thought to contain *toxic* mercury. This visit really gave me a greater appreciation of Chinese history.

Off to the cave factory in Baoji. Incredible! Not what I expected at all. Were warmly welcomed by people passionate about Rewi and also was gifted a book written by a man whose great-grandfather worked in the cave factory. Rewi Alley was asked to engineer the plans for the [*Gung Ho*] cave factory so that textile work could carry on whilst Baoji was being bombed during World War 2 by the Japanese [*strictly, during the second Sino-Japanese War, 1937-45*]. Rewi moved 61 different factories from Xian underground to the tunnels so the work could continue. The huge tunnels were built in a year. 24 tunnels were built in a criss-cross pattern running deep into the hills. Being inside the tunnels gave a real perspective to what it would have been like working underground. The men and woman must have been really brave! This made me feel extremely proud of Rewi Alley and what he had achieved. I had no idea he was a part of the war movement and played such a critical role in the survival of the textile industry of Baoji.

Visited a day-care centre for the elderly, where we were once again warmly welcomed and shown around the centre and given a delicious vegetarian lunch.

Over the mountains to Fengxian - stunning! Hate to imagine George Hogg biking over them. Had a nice walk along the river in the beautiful city.

### Friday 21<sup>st</sup>: Fengxian

Short trip up the road to Rewi Alley's and George Hogg's cave home where they lived between 1938-1944. It was a very cute little place. But so small! Hard to imagine that they lived in there with George's 4 adopted sons. Felt extremely weird to see a photo of the Moeawatea (Rewi Alley's whare) on the wall!! No one at home would believe a

photo of the little old Moe was on the wall of an old house in Fengxian. By now I have started to have a lot more respect and understanding of all that Rewi Alley achieved and why the Chinese have so much respect for him.

Went to the Fengxian Museum to see local treasures, awards and cultures and then off to the Shangshipu primary school where a school was initially established by George Hogg and Rewi Alley as the Bailie School. Photos on the wall showed the friendship with Amberley Primary School in Christchurch. Once again amazed by the New Zealand connections that have come from Rewi's legacy.

On the train to Shandan.

### **Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> Shandan**

Stayed in Shandan. Went to the museum that houses hundreds of Rewi Alley's artifacts. Very good museum that provides lots of understanding of Rewi's life in greater detail. Each day we learn more and more about Rewi and his achievements and each day I grow prouder to be a New Zealander and proud of all that Rewi achieved. Off to the tombs of George and Rewi - a very moving experience. Was shocked and saddened to learn that George Hogg died when he was only 30! It must have been very hard for Rewi losing such a close friend in a foreign country. Great to see the tombs were so well-preserved and cared for. This really put into perspective about how much respect the Chinese had for Rewi as the tombs were huge. Off to the Bailie School that Rewi and George moved to Shandan. It was incredible to see inside his old house containing all the history and knowledge of the school and see how it was originally set up. *[It was moved to the present site after an earthquake].*

### **26<sup>th</sup> July Beijing**

In the capital - Beijing! Went to Tiananmen Square this morning. It wasn't what I expected and was almost a little underwhelming. One of the hardest things about China has been visiting all these beautiful places with 1000s of people there and trying to appreciate the beauty of them. Arrived at the offices of the Chinese Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, which was also Rewi Alley's home in his final days. It was a real step up from his house in Fengxian. It was very humbling to attend the final banquet and made me feel extremely privileged to be given the opportunity to come on this incredible journey. We then went to the Great Wall, which has always been on my bucket list. It was our last night with our Chinese 'family' and I felt quite sad to be leaving people that I had spent every waking hour with for the past 2 weeks! So many friendships and life-lasting memories had been made and I feel like I'm leaving with a new group of friends and a new-found respect for Rewi Alley and the Chinese people.

### **Overall View**

Overall the trip was an incredible whirlwind experience and one that I will never forget. Going into the trip I had limited knowledge of Rewi Alley and George Hogg and I felt like I left as an expert! I gained so much respect for all that Rewi Alley had achieved for the Chinese with his schools, war effort and the Gung Ho movement. He has left a lasting impression on the Chinese people - one that they acknowledge extremely well.

I thought the organisation was second to none and the trip ran very well with no hiccups. The Chinese teachers treated us like kings and we were always well looked after. If this trip were to be run again the one thing I would suggest would be to allow an extra week as 9 cities in 10 days was exhausting! It would have been nice to spend more than one day in some cities.

I learned so much about Rewi Alley but also about the Chinese culture and myself. I feel strongly about the New Zealand China Friendship Society and believe that I can contribute to the growing friendship between NZ and China by educating my peers and others on all the positive things that are happening in China at the moment.

And in the words of [Miriam Beard](#) "*Travel is more than the seeing of sights; it is a change that goes on, deep and permanent, in the ideas of living*". I feel that retracing the footsteps of Rewi Alley has changed my perspective on China as a whole and I am proud to be a part of the journey of educating others on Rewi Alley and all of the great things he achieved.

*Kate Gower-James*