

Millicent Baxter has lived in the shadow of famous people all her life. Her mother was Helen Cannon Brown, the first woman to receive a masters degree in the British Empire; her father was John MacMillan Brown, who took up the chair of classics at Canterbury University in 1874 and was headmaster of Christchurch Boys' High School.

Her husband, Archibald Baxter, was a noted author and a conscientious objector during the First World War. And her son, James K. Baxter, was New Zealand's legendary poet.

Now widowed and aged 91, Millicent Baxter lives in a tiny house in Dunedin. Her home is stacked with papers and books. In the sitting room, a photo of Jim and a huge drawing of Archibald look down from the walls.

She admits her famous men are a mixed blessing.

"It rather annoys me," she says. "I got introduced as Mrs Baxter and no one takes any notice of me. And then they say: 'She's the mother of James K,' and they all flock back."

So if New Zealand forgot her men for a minute — what would Millicent Baxter like to be remembered for?

"Pacifism," she answers quietly. "It's been the main thing for the past 60 years."

Given her privileged background and generation, pacifism is a remarkable cause for Millicent Baxter. And, she frankly admits, a very uncomfortable cause.

Millicent Baxter spent the first 30 years of her life in the security of a Tory, uppercrust Christchurch family. When the First World War broke out, she was returning to New Zealand after doing graduate work in linguistics in Germany.

(She had completed a masters degree at Cambridge, but was never awarded the degree because Cambridge did not give degrees to women in those days.)

She recalls now that the war was exciting and she helped with the war effort when she got back to Christchurch.

It was a letter written by Archibald Baxter to his parents in Otago that catapulted her into the pacifists' camp. Baxter and 13 other New Zealand conscientious objectors had been deported to the

The pain, fear and joy of being a life-time pacifist

front line in France in an attempt to force them into fighting.

The letter was published in "Truth," which Millicent recalls, then had pacifist leanings.

"I have suffered to the limit of my endurance," Archibald wrote, "but I will never in any sane senses surrender to the evil power that has fixed its roots like a cancer on the world. . . . If you ever hear that I have served in the Army, or that I have taken my own life, do not believe that I did it in sound mind. I never will."

"...the limit of my endurance."

"My whole life changed," Millicent says. "From that time on, I began to look at things quite differently. It was, I think anyone without prejudice would say, a very moving letter. It moved me right out of my shell and out into the open, and out in the open I have remained, looking at things, questioning things."

"It was painful because the people around me didn't change," she adds.

For years, she was frightened to identify herself as a pacifist — the social pressures in New Zealand society were very strongly in support of the war.

"To belong for most of

my life to an unpopular minority, I have found very hard."

She made a special effort to meet Archibald Baxter after the war. And — she smiles — it was love at first sight.

There was an enormous gap in background and education between them. Her father, John MacMillan Brown, saw this and did his best to discourage the marriage on the grounds that Millicent would never make a farmer's wife.

His observations had some basis in fact — Millicent recalls that when

she married she could hardly cook. Scrambled eggs and pastry were about her limit. But she staunchly says that she thrived on the hardships of farm life. And she and Archie didn't fall out of love as her father had predicted.

Millicent was 33 and Archibald was 39 when they married in 1921.

She looks back at her marriage as a chance to start a new life. She had changed from city to farm living, from a privileged life to working-class lifestyle and she changed her overt politics to align herself with a marked man.

As well as physically suffering for the rest of

his life from the torture that he suffered in France Archibald Baxter also carried the stigma of being a conscientious objector. Especially in the early days of the Second World War this made life very tense.

"We were continually harassed by government officials," Millicent recalls. "We didn't have much gorse but we continually had notices to remove what little gorse we had. Our neighbours with much more gorse than we had never got notices."

"We were kept strictly to the regulations about sheep, cattle, crops and anything that could be raked up; we were often fined for infringements of rules that we and everyone else knew nothing about."

"On one occasion we read in the paper about two brothers in the North Island who were heavily fined for not having a licence to run their milking machine. It was either in the paper or else we knew from other sources that they had been conscientious objectors."

"Archie immediately went to the relevant office and asked for a licence."

"You don't need a licence," said the man. "None has one."

"Look up the statute book," said Archie. "You'll find the regulation."

"He did, and it was there, though never used. Archie got his licence, so

that was one we circumvented beforehand."

"On another occasion, two men arrived with a bolt of cloth — beautiful cloth it was — and tried to sell it to us. We were suspicious because we happened to have seen them coming down the coast and they called nowhere else."

"They went away and we watched carefully and they called nowhere else. We always thought it was an attempt to have Archie had up for receiving stolen goods. By this time too many queer things had happened and we were very suspicious."

Later on during the Second World War, Archie was visited by a man who said he was a conscientious objector working in the Mill at Mataura, Millicent recalls how

"...An attempt at a dictatorship."

Archie noticed that the man's hands had never done manual labour.

So when the man asked for advice on being a conscientious objector, Archie was very cautious.

Later, Archie saw the man again — he was a detective in the police force.

Archie and Millicent had

two sons — Terence and James. The family spent most of its life together farming in Otago. They lived a year in Wanganui so the boys could attend the Quaker school there, and they also spent time in Europe visiting Millicent's old haunts and travelling to peace conferences.

Both boys were raised to be pacifists and this brought them into conflict with school at an early age — military drills were a normal part of school life.

During the war, Terence spent four years in detention as a conscientious objector.

Meanwhile, the parents were busy. They worked together to produce "We Will Not Cease," which tells Archie's experiences as a conscientious objector.

They stomped the street for signatures to the "Peace Pledge" and every other petition that encouraged peace.

Since Archie's death in 1970, Millicent Baxter has carried on their work on her own. She is a stalwart member of Amnesty International and is currently caught up in cor-

respondence about a political prisoner in South Africa.

She is also as active as she can be in the United Nations Association. Her arthritis makes her feel the Dunedin cold in her bones, and so "I don't attend meetings in the winter," she says.

She has strong views on current affairs in New Zealand. "The present Government is not doing anything about the economic situation," she says. "It's not helping any more than the Labour Government helped."

"I'm inclined to think that something like Social Credit could be brought in in which money would merely be a means of exchange, not something in itself."

"I feel that at the present time there is an attempt at a dictatorship. I don't think it will come off, but there is an attempt at it. Mr Muldoon wants to run things himself," she says, "and that is a mistake."

Her 91 years give her a fascinating perspective on New Zealand history and her memory is a goldmine of stories — stories of how the Labour Party betrayed the cause of pacifism when they came to power ("they should have resigned from power rather than enter the Second World War"); the mysteries surrounding the disappearance and presumed murder of a conscientious objector from the Wanganui barracks in the First World War; the cultured life of First World War Christchurch; watching her son turn into a famous poet . . .

She has recently drafted her memoirs and has sent them off to her publishers. There is talk of reprinting "We Will Not Cease," and a television documentary of the book is also in the pipeline.

"I want to live long enough to argue about the documentary," she says firmly.

Like her husband and her son James, she is a convert to Catholicism. Her philosophy is simple.

"People," she says, "should be friendly with one another and be prepared to make sacrifices to help people."

And what would she do if she were 60 years younger and living in 1979?

She smiles. "Marry my husband again."



Millicent Baxter—"... the people around me didn't change."

By SUE STOVER

Without fanfare, unremarked by Brian Priestley's "News Stand," not as yet attacked by the Prime Minister and press

fence at them. There are four people in the fa two boy and two B.