

Famous daughter of former mayor returns to family roots

By LYN HUMPHREYS

THE famous daughter of a New Plymouth mayor who died in an historic plane crash in 1920 returned to the city this weekend on a family quest.

Zena Daysh, hailed as a pioneer of world social ecology and environmental issues, remains — despite her 87 years — the very active head of the powerful Commonwealth Human Ecology Council (Chec).

London-based Mrs Daysh came back to her place of birth to bury her sister's ashes with those of her parents, James and Kate Clarke, at Te Henui Cemetery.

Mr Clarke was one of three who died on November 11, 1920, aged 42, when he was a passenger in the first plane to visit New Plymouth. The plane crashed in front of the thousands who thronged to the racecourse to see the aircraft.

The Industrious Heart, by J. S. Tullett, states the Walsh Bros Avro Moth had visited on a demonstration flight.

"For two days, joyrides were highly popular at \$5 a flight."

All three — the pilot, Richard Russell, Mayor James Clarke and Miss Kathleen Warnock (believed to be a council staff member) — were on the 17th trip.

At his death, Mr Clarke had been city mayor for 10 years.

Mrs Daysh recalled she was just six at the time. Her 11-year-old sister Nola had narrowly avoided death. She was supposed to have joined her father on the fatal flight. Nola

died in March this year, aged 90.

Mr Clarke had been an owner of Clarke and Gilmours, a flourishing real estate and auctioneering firm. The family home was on Standish Hill, where Mr Clarke built a croquet lawn for his wife's favourite sport.

"He was very progressive," his daughter said. "And he was fluent in Maori, which was very unusual at that time."

The Clarks' New Plymouth legacy remains as the Clarke Memorial Hostel, built for the YWCA. It still stands opposite BP Powderham petrol station. Mrs Clarke was a New Plymouth and national YWCA president.

Mrs Daysh believes her father's leadership skills live on in her.

"I took after my father. After my father died, I became the leader in the family. My mother was just beaten to death with the frightful shock of it all," Mrs Daysh said.

The weekend in New Plymouth had brought connection back to her life, she said.

"I'm so grateful I've re-found those connections. It's been a very renewing experience."

After her father's death the family moved to England for the girls' education, as had been her father's wish.

Mrs Daysh was brought to New Plymouth this Labour Weekend by a good friend — with another mayoral connection — Margaret Evans, a former Hamilton mayor who was also from New Plymouth.

Ms Evans is also a convert to socio-environmental causes and is on the board of

the international Human Ecology Foundation, the fundraising arm of Chec.

Mrs Daysh is proud of the fact she took Chec into the United Nations in 1972, where it became the UN's main Commonwealth non-government organisation consultative group.

Her life's work, to ensure a world focused on sustainable development, is to turn the group into one of the most effective in the world promoting human development and awareness. "That's the way to stop someone like (terrorist Osama) bin Laden in his tracks," she said.

Her pioneering work was recently honoured in her place of birth with a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit.

Chec's Focus on the Habitat Agenda, through the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements, had been on the top of the agenda for the recently-cancelled Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Brisbane.

Not impressed with the non-arrival of the prime ministers because of the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States, Mrs Daysh said the representatives of most leading Commonwealth organisations had still attended in force and networking continued.

The Habitat Agenda would now be heard at CHOGM's meeting in Brisbane in March.

"This time we are expecting action," Mrs Daysh said.

Before leaving New Zealand for India on November 8, Mrs Daysh will meet mayors and Cabinet ministers.



FAMILY CONNECTIONS: Zena Daysh, at her family gravesite in Te Henui Cemetery on Sunday. Photo: TREVOR READ