

# THE Ascott Martyrs

Sixteen women from Ascott-under-Wychwood who were sent over the hills to glory

by Beverley McCombs

*The Ascott Martyrs* tells the remarkable story of sixteen women living in the Oxfordshire village of Ascott-under-Wychwood. In the spring of 1873, they tried to prevent two youths working in place of their menfolk who were on strike for better wages. The women, two of whom had babies, were arrested, tried, convicted, and imprisoned with hard labour.

Newspaper coverage about the treatment of these women and forthcoming questions in the House of Commons brought increased publicity for the fledgling National Agricultural Labourers' Union. It exposed for public scrutiny the exploitation of agricultural labourers – 'the white slaves of England' – the ineffectiveness of the Trades Union Act, and shortcomings of the legal system. Resultant reforms were far-reaching. The women were later celebrated as martyrs and several emigrated to New Zealand.

## The author

From childhood in rural New Zealand, Beverley McCombs had heard about her great-grandfather, Eli Pratley, who was born far away in a place called Ascott-under-Wychwood. Beverley was curious to know more about his life in England and why he had emigrated to New Zealand in 1874. By chance on a visit to the Oxfordshire village of Ascott-under-Wychwood in 1988 she came across the memorial to sixteen women who had been to prison. A sociology graduate, Beverley was immediately intrigued by the story, especially as three of the women had the surname Pratley. She was determined to discover more about these women.

*The Ascott Martyrs: Sixteen women from Ascott-under-Wychwood who were sent over the hills to glory.*

By Beverley McCombs. RRP \$35.00, ISBN 978-0-9922603-8-5

Soft cover, A5, 156 pages, including an index of names. First published November 2016

Writes Hill Press Ltd, PO Box 23 032, Wellington. [www.writeshillpress.co.nz](http://www.writeshillpress.co.nz)

Please email purchase orders to [lynn@writeshillpress.co.nz](mailto:lynn@writeshillpress.co.nz)

