

# A Baker's Dozen

A selection of  
Jack Baker's tales

*Edited by Jeanette Grant*

Epsom & Eden District Historical Society Inc  
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Cover photo: Jack Baker just before leaving for war, 1945

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# 1 Origins

I read somewhere that if you want to be blessed, don't join the 'spiritual elitists' who are impressed by their own speeches and writings and continually display their own accomplishments. Memories too should be included with this group.

For when you pause, ponder and re-read, you seriously wonder if you have a misguided value of the importance to others of these memories. They seem to pale into insignificance compared with the real achievers and heroes and the world-shattering events with their sorrows and sacrifices which happen daily.

Over the years I have jotted down bits and pieces about growing up in this delightful green suburb we moved to in 1927, little knowing that these words would be of interest a lifetime later. I must admit here, I did survive a somewhat rumbustious youth but with the patience and support of my wife and family, I've survived my 85½ years.

I have lived in The Drive, in the heart of Epsom, for over 80 years and have many many memories. The land along the Onehunga or Epsom road (now Manukau Road) was rather famous in Epsom's early history. In 1845 there were only two houses and a public house at Epsom. In 1850 the Rev Lush referred to visiting some people in a raupo cottage in the district and making the journey through wild, desolate and frightful country. Things improved; bush was cleared and rock walls erected to get the stones in the ground out of the way. Half the road to Onehunga was macadamised.

By 1882 several houses had been built on this particular block together with Jamiesons Store and a butcher's shop. Also in that year a hall was erected and a library, formerly a chapel, was donated by William Gardner of Emerald Hill and moved on to a site opposite Onslow Avenue (then Onslow Road). The chapel had been built in Watties Lane (now Alba Road) in about 1850 by the



*Family group c.1949 — Fay, Dad, Mum, Jack*

Wesleyans, who sold it in 1871. It passed through several owners until purchased in 1878 by Gardner, a Presbyterian. That Epsom hall and library had many uses — schoolroom, Bible class room, monthly meetings of the Epsom & One Tree Hill Road Board, and the Mutual Improvement Society and a debating society also met there. It was the same hall where in 1906, seven Epsom men met to form the Epsom Bowling & Croquet Club.

In the early 1840s, bush inns were authorized to sell spiritous liquors when Justices of the Peace in any district considered such a licence desirable for an accommodation house in remote and thinly populated areas, through which travellers passed going to and from the hinterland. Robert Forbes of Leith, Edinburgh, with his wife and son, came to New Zealand in 1841 and the following year became the first proprietor of the 'Prince Albert Inn'. This was situated in Epsom Road (now Manukau Road) opposite Green Lane Road and on the corner of Alba Road, where the little grass reserve is now. It existed for 67 years to 1909 until Reduction was carried in the Eden Electorate; at various times it was called 'Watties', 'Tyes Inn', and finally 'Epsom Hotel'. In 1856 it burned

down and was rebuilt. It was there that in 1851 a meeting was held which resulted in the formation of the Auckland Agricultural and Pastoral Association with its original Show on Potters Paddock. The Association then acquired the adjacent property which remains the Auckland Showground.

Seventy years ago about now, World War II had just started and London was under attack. Seventy years ago about now, my sister and I would ride our beloved Farmers' Monarch Special bikes from our home in The Drive to the Epsom Library in an effort to stimulate our minds after an early diet of *Champion*, *Triumph*, *Chums*, *Girls' Crystal* and *Magnet* comics with their stories of Colwyn Dane — Detective; Rory's Racing Midget; Biggles and Mad Carew. I can't believe that seventy years later I'm giving talks in this same place of learning, peace and quiet.

As the great Jimmy Durante once sort of said: "Memories. I have a million of them." So, what to include and what to leave out — and to be honest, before meeting Nancy I had experienced a rumbustious and sometimes tumultuous life — so some memories remain censored.



*Jack with his sister's bike, 1939*

I was born on 12 April 1925 at Northcote Point. The house is still there on the corner of Alma and Queen streets, about 400 yards up from the wharf — although in 1925 Dad was told “it may have to come down for a bridge”. Also in 1925, my Dad’s second love started its life — Blandford Park, the home of soccer — tucked away in Grafton Gully where our family spent most winter Saturday afternoons watching the game. But to be honest, in later years I’d rather have been at a matinee at the ‘Regent’ (now the ‘Lido’) watching cowboys Buck Jones or Tom Mix in ongoing serials, but then I think Dad was a bit concerned about his son’s morals.

Dad was Committeeman, Chairman, Selector, Life Member of Auckland Soccer for 40 years; an Auckland Rep for four or five years, but war service in the trenches of France spoilt certain New Zealand Honours.

Dad, Frank Baker, was born in the old Newton Post Office in Karangahape Road but his father died very young so his Mum, three brothers and one sister shifted to Ponsonby where they moved to many different addresses. Fortunately, All Saints Church and the Leys Institute with their clubs and gymnasium, were their saviour. About 1909, Dad formed a group of five young men to play soccer, and the Tabernacle (later called Everton) Soccer Club was formed. They won the Auckland Senior Championship from 1910-13. In World War I, they all joined up together, experienced the Somme, Paschendale, etc, but sadly, many didn’t return. Everton never re-formed. Three of the Baker boys who went away returned and Roy, the eldest, remained in New Zealand to care for their mother.

Dad joined the old Union Steamship Company as a purser, making several Tasman trips on the *Maheno* before firstly going into the Union Company office and then making a switch to Laidlaw Leeds in Fort Street. This, the forerunner of the Farmers’ Trading Co, had moved to Hobson Street in 1914. He remained as manager of their Shipping Customs Department for 40 years.

During World War II, dealing with claims for cargo lost on ships sunk on the way to New Zealand and making frequent onerous rail trips to Wellington to see Walter Nash for more import licences, all

took its toll on his health. Mr Laidlaw thought the world of him and showed his appreciation in many ways. Dad in retirement became Secretary for 15 years then President and Life Member of the Epsom Bowling Club.

Now Mum, she was born in one of the old sugar works cottages at Chelsea (the Duck Creek) and later shifted to Crescent Road (now Mariposa Cres) in Birkenhead. Her Mum, my grandma, was a McPhail, a sister of one of Birkenhead's first mayors — James McPhail — whose statue still stands at that little park in Highbury. He was honoured for his great contribution to the district during the disastrous 1918 'flu epidemic.

My grandpa was in charge of the Golden Syrup Dept, deep inside the mysterious and ghostly sugar works. My Uncle Stan definitely saw the ghost in a horse paddock one day. In those days, all rellies seemed to work at the sugar works. More often than not, tied up at the Chelsea wharf would be a black, dirty old ramshackle tramp ship that had brought sugar cane from Fiji. How we loved our ferry rides to Gug and Nana's. On the ferry of course we were stimulated with peanuts in their shells from the vendor's little cart opposite the Ferry Buildings — and of course those comics from the magical bookshop inside the Ferry Building. If going by vehicular ferry in our old Pontiac about 1931–35 or our Vauxhall 14 later, I can still hear Mum pleading with Dad if first or second in the queue as we drove on, to “be careful Frank” — “no further Frank” — “Frank stop!” as the man signalled for us to creep up to the rope, inches from toppling into the Waitemata. Somehow we all made it. But it would have been OK. Dad was a champion swimmer — once beating New Zealand champion Malcolm Champion over 50 yards in Devonport's old Calliope Dock.

After a short yellow bus ride from Birkenhead Wharf, there would be Nana on the verandah, two houses up Crescent Road just before Highbury, with her big bare arms covered in flour from those big brown crisp, hot but soft scones she was baking in the old coal range. On the huge scrubbed white kitchen table in the large warm kitchen would be oodles of butter and honey. Highbury, just up the road, was lucky to have three or four shops in those days. Every New Years Eve was spent at Nana and Gug's old Birkenhead

home (still there) with uncles, brothers, sons etc all imbibing Gug's home brew or Waitemata beer from those old quart bottles. Those trips were so exciting, especially if rough, through all those old ghostly hulks swinging and groaning at anchor in 'Rotten Row'. The Japanese purchased many of these hulks before World War II. We were lying on Milford Beach one day, when in the Rangitoto Channel we saw them being towed away. Dad's prophecy "One day we'll be sorry" was so true. As weapons of war they were probably returned with interest a few years later.

In the school holidays, a highlight was lunch with Dad in those sparkling Farmers' Tea Rooms with amazing views and the historic playground. I still recall those three-tiered silver cake-stands and those magnificent, soft cream cakes with protruding angel wings, in pretty crinkled and ruffled paper cups, with a little piece of red jelly shivering on top of whipped cream. Great memories of Farmers' staff kiddies' parties, lucky dips and the roof playground. Yes, the Farmers, with our staff discounts played a huge part in my formative years. It wasn't so good during the Depression when Dad had to go on guard at the main doors in Hobson Street during the riots — with a golf stick as I recall.

So Birkenhead and the Farmers' played an integral part in my early youth. The Farmers' is a story in itself with a new book by Ian Hunter published in 2009 to celebrate 100 years. I still have an old 1927 catalogue which still brings me hours of nostalgic reading. I can assure you it will never be hung from a nail in a dusty, spidery 'longdrop' like so many of its contemporaries.

It was at 97 The Drive, when huddled over a 5 valve Farmers' radio on a Sunday evening, that we heard Chamberlain's momentous declaration that we were at war with Germany. For once Dad was wrong. He said: "The war won't last five minutes with all these modern weapons. Thank goodness son, you won't have to go." Five long years later on my 19th birthday my parents reluctantly signed my Navy papers.

Oh yes — birthplaces — my wife Nancy was born at remote Motatau, (inland from Maromaku — or turn left at the Towai pub and keep going) where she and her seven sisters and two brothers schooled with the Going boys. The rail passed through

Motatau on its way to Kawakawa — the ‘city’ for Nancy’s family and neighbours.

Her dear old Maori Grandad Ben died at 99 and he loved an occasional beer and smoke. He was a Wynyard, but the history of the Wynyard family and the New Zealand Wars and all the land owned on One Tree Hill slopes around Greenwoods Corner etc would be a book on its own. Nancy’s uncle was the much respected Sir James Henare.



*Jack's wife Nancy,  
Christmas Day 1992,  
in her lovely garden  
at 97 The Drive*

## 2 Formative years

I always believed that I was an Anglican and attended Sunday School and Church occasionally at St Andrews. Years later I found I was baptized John Robert Baker at Birkenhead's Methodist Church at Highbury where my parents were married, but I stayed with St Andrews. It was the closest and had the prettiest girls and the best socials.

As a teenager, many of us learned ballroom dancing at 'Johnnies' in Omaha Road, Remuera, with Mabel Johnson and Jock Hutchinson — to the sweet music of Victor Sylvester and orchestra. After 'Johnnies' or after school many would stop at Pecks American Milk Bar on the corner of Teed Street and Broadway in Newmarket for a milkshake, sundae or banana split — or a tune from the gaudy juke box. However so much romance etc flourished — that the Milk Bar was put out of bounds to Auckland Grammar boys, Diocesan, St Cuthbert's and Epsom girls!

Then there were the balls. How many tried to smuggle the odd bottle up the stairs and into a cubicle at the old Peter Pan? Girls tried inside a fox fur; men down a sock. It never worked. Manager Tiki Whye knew all the tricks. It's said he had a huge personal stock of confiscated alcohol. The same applied to the Crystal Palace Ballroom and Epi Shalfoon with his daughter Reo as vocalist.

After the ball, at 1am, how many stopped at New Zealand's first-ever popular hamburger joint — the Ball Brothers 'Frisco' at the Great South Road/Manukau Road junction? Packed to the doors, few ballgowns or suits escaped spilt tomato sauce etc amongst all the jostling.

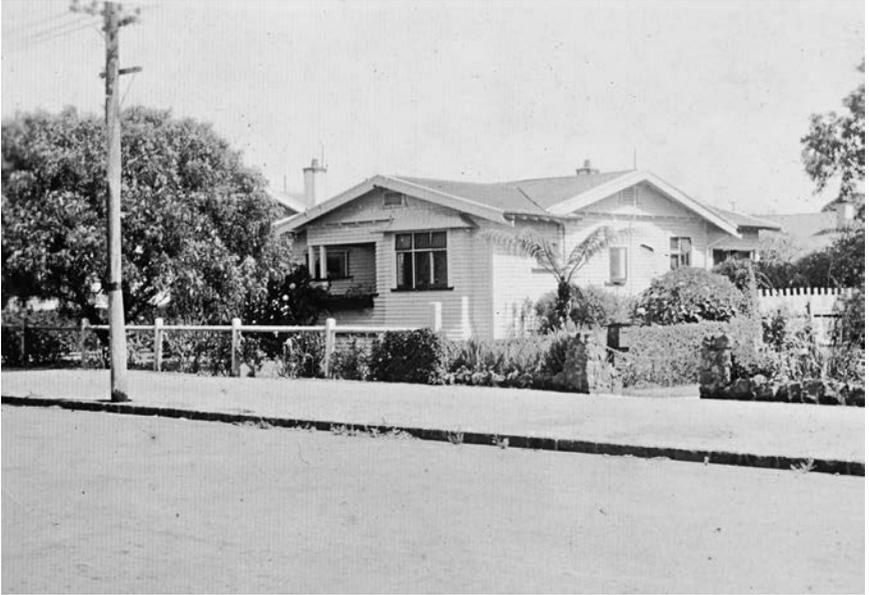
So now sit back and for a while forget supermarkets, jet planes, fast cars, high rises, infill-housing, TV, crime, locked houses, computers, depression — and think of a world with the

fragrance of fruit blossom and flowers and the buzzing of bees and bird calls, clean air, fresh bread, horse manure and old 5 valve radios. Radios you huddled over in winter next to a roaring fire with Mum wielding the toasting fork and Dad with his pipe on Sunday evenings listening to Uncle Scrim's 'Friendly Road — you go to your church and I'll go to mine' — and singing 'The stranger of Galilee'. Scrim making a long trip to America and bringing back and playing America's latest hits — Bobby Breen singing 'Rainbow on the River', 'Little Sir Echo' and a big hit, 'Three Little Fishes'. What drama when Scrim's session was jammed one Sunday evening with gear installed and operating from a shed in Newmarket's Railyards, and how he again got into trouble politically when towards the end of the 1930s Depression he played 'Happy Days are here again'. How many can recall NZ's own Deanna Durbin, the lovely June Barson singing 'Il Bacio', or Bing Crosby, John Charles Thomas, Vera Lynn, Gil Dech, Nelson Eddy, Jeanette McDonald, Gracie Fields or Sandy Powell on 1ZB's Sunday request session — or on a Monday night — a Town Hall wrestling match with commentaries by Gordon Hutter and blind Peter, and the always-booped referee Jack McLean.

Rigged matches or not, what superb athletes were Lofty Blomfield and his Octopus Clamp, Earl McCready, George Walker and his Back Loop Slam, Paul Bosch, Chief Little Wolf, Dean Detton, Ken Kenneth, etc.

Large Sunday roasts at midday with alternating grandmothers, and leisurely Sunday afternoons' drives without someone blasting a noisy horn behind you, were a highlight; as were being allowed to sit up in pyjamas huddled over the radio to listen to All Black tests, Aussie/England cricket tests for the Ashes and regular Joe Louis boxing matches. Unlike today, Joe Louis seemed to fight every month.

We left Northcote Point when I was 18 months, had a short stay right on Milford beach and then shifted to 53 The Drive (now 97) in 1927. This corner of Onslow Ave and The Drive was to be my home on and off for 68 years. The Drive was originally called Cleghorn Road and had a grass strip down the middle of it. One neighbour was the Hon W E. (Bill) Parry, Minister of Internal



*The house at 97 The Drive c.1926*

Affairs in the Mickey Savage government. Despite over-the-fence Sunday heated discussions, we were friends. It was to Bill Parry that New Zealand's greatest ever High Commissioner to London — Bill Jordan — wrote to say: "Please tell your neighbours Mr and Mrs Baker, that I met their son in the NZ Forces Club on V.E. night and he is fit and well".

These peaceful years on reflection now seemed so quiet. But one frustrating noise was that of a tram clattering past the stop at the top of Onslow Road, as, puffing madly up the hill we just missed it coming from Greenwoods Corner. I remember trams with their noise, sparks and the confusion as they left the Barn or started their return trip from the bottom of Queen Street. Why were the lady conductresses employed during World War II so chubby? With a money bag in front and a cabin full of straphangers it was a slapstick comedy with passengers falling and landing anywhere as she'd push through to get everyone's fares.

There were stables all around us — Stowes, Kennedys, Webbs, Lees, and Stormonts. A regular noise was the early morning clang

of shovels as Dad and the neighbours raced to be the first for the warm horse droppings as trotters returned to their stables nearby, after their early morning workout. These went into a 44 gallon drum, resulting eventually I suppose, in healthy vegetables. Our drum was amongst the gooseberry bushes and the lilies and I don't know which smelled the worst! Every Sunday morning that was my hiding place in a futile attempt to escape St Andrews Sunday School — up the same steps still there today nearly 80 years later — to the little hall. I felt a proper sissy in silly frilly shirt, velvet pants and patent leather shoes singing 'Jesus bids us shine . . . You in your small corner' and getting a stamp on my hand. Remember the horrible smell of brown mashed-banana sandwiches when removed from humid schoolbags at lunchtime! I must admit though, I always enjoyed the noise of handmowers and posties' whistles twice a day.

Friday evening, tram rides for me and sister (tuppence ha'penny) and Mum (five-pence) to town to those great community 'sings' in the old 1ZB Hall in Queens Arcade, Town Hall, or Scots Hall, Symonds St. The leaders were Albert Russell, Reg Morgan, Grey Campbell or Tom (Uncle Tom) Garland whose old house was on the corner of Selwyn and Buckland roads, Epsom — and always on the piano — the lovely Mrs Barrington-Snow.

Other enjoyable memories were Friday night socials with rag football and kingasini at St Andrews (Rev Willis), St Georges (Rev Litt) and Presbyterian (Rev McKenzie) church halls. There were Scouts and Cubs at Epsom Methodist Church at Greenwoods Corner with the Tahutamai Group. Scoutmasters were Messrs Freer and Cormack.

In the city were the street photographers and Canada Kate in Queen Street and Karangahape Road, the man/boy named Tracy who, when a man, still wore school shorts and socks, and a violinist with a clever fox terrier who rode the ferry boats for years. Art Union tickets at 2/6 and buying a Melbourne Cup ticket was prohibited — but tobacconists flouted the law with their windows carrying the sign 'We post to Melbourne'. There were no restrictions on travelling to Aussie. After a few drinks maybe on a Friday night it was possible to go to the wharf, pay your money and

find yourself on the *Awatea* or *Wanganella* and arrive at Sydney as regular as clockwork on Tuesday.

Before the American Milk Bar, a favourite place was Cooks near Queens Arcade at the bottom of Queen Street for the best ice cream sundaes, etc, ever. Next door almost, the flea house — The ‘Roxy’ — where for 6d you could stay all day watching great cowboy and B class detective films. Remember the magnificent smell from the Daisy Coffee Shop opposite the Ferry Buildings, a favourite place for wharfies. Huge mugs of boiling but milky coffee for 3d — not like the fancy luke-warm poncy stuff today.

In a paddock, behind the site of what is now the Liberal Jewish Synagogue, Richard Gross had his foundry. There he cast his infamous (then) statue for the Domain gates. His model was NZ and Olympic champion athlete Alan Elliot, who I saw running many times at the Domain’s exciting Labour Day sports with Bill Savidan, the Lumley twins, Mal Byrne and Alex Stonex. Memories also remain of one of Auckland’s greatest-ever mayors, Sir Ernest Davis, and rumours about his relationship with Vivien Leigh, and the Bailey murders.

Dad’s cars were a significant part of those years. The oldest car I can remember him owning in 1929–1930 was a Citroen — confirmed by a couple of old photos I have. It appears to be a collection of iron supports and running boards and canvas.

I have a better memory of his next vehicle, a Pontiac, probably in 1932. It was a very elegant car — blinds with a tassel for the rear and back windows, a finely etched silver head of an Indian Chief on the front of the bonnet, and a little sign attached on the side saying ‘BODY BY FISHER’.

Came streamlining and Dad moved to a Vauxhall 14. Believe me — in those years about 1934–1935, car firms allowed prospective buyers to take a vehicle home for the night, or even the weekend, ‘to try it out’. I still remember our excitement when Dad arrived home on Friday evening with our shiny sparkling ‘sample’ car for the weekend.

We had a couple of those Vauxhall 14s before the onset of World War II in 1939, then followed four or five years of petrol rationing and import controls on new cars. The motor firm would put your

name on a list and of course all sorts of graft went on. I even think Dad made some 'arrangement' as manager of Farmers' Shipping Customs Department, for just at the war's end (I was still overseas) my sister arrived home to find a brand new, green Hillman Minx. He had two or three Hillmans later — all English as opposed to New Zealand assembled. He arranged the transfer of funds through the Farmers' buying agents in London, Tytherleigh & Co, and had the car freighted direct to him. Hillmans remained Dad's car of choice till he passed away in 1967. His last car was a shocker to drive but of course Dad would not admit it. Like all of them, the gear change was a lever on the steering column just behind the steering wheel on the left-hand side. To me it seemed upside down and back to front on the very few times I had to drive. It graunched and it stuck. It was impossible. But Dad never agreed to my suggestion to get it fixed. Stubbornly he'd mutter "You just don't know how to drive it".

Dad had a park reserved at the Farmers' — got his petrol at their Service Station behind the big building and meticulously kept a little notebook he'd had since Citroen days, showing every oil change, service and repairs. But as I believe is quite common, he never taught me to drive in any of these cars. In fact I was normally not allowed to drive them. Except once — to the Auckland Grammar School ball in 1942 when Dad very much approved of the girl I was escorting!

Wonderful times were spent in all those vehicles. Sunday drives and picnics with alternating grandparents to Little Bucklands (where you can always get a swim as opposed to big Bucklands next door which is very tidal) and Panmure — on the way to Little Bucklands in the mid-1930s comprised only the Hotel — and a horse that stood in the corner of a paddock opposite for what seemed like year and years.

We used to enjoy six weeks holiday every Christmas at Milford for years and later, Manly and maybe even Rotorua. Manly then had only a dozen baches and Tindalls and Stanmore were deserted.

### 3 Auckland's Everton

The year I was born, 1925, was the same year that Blandford Park was opened. For the next 12 years or so, it seemed our family spent every winter Saturday at my Dad's beloved park, watching soccer.

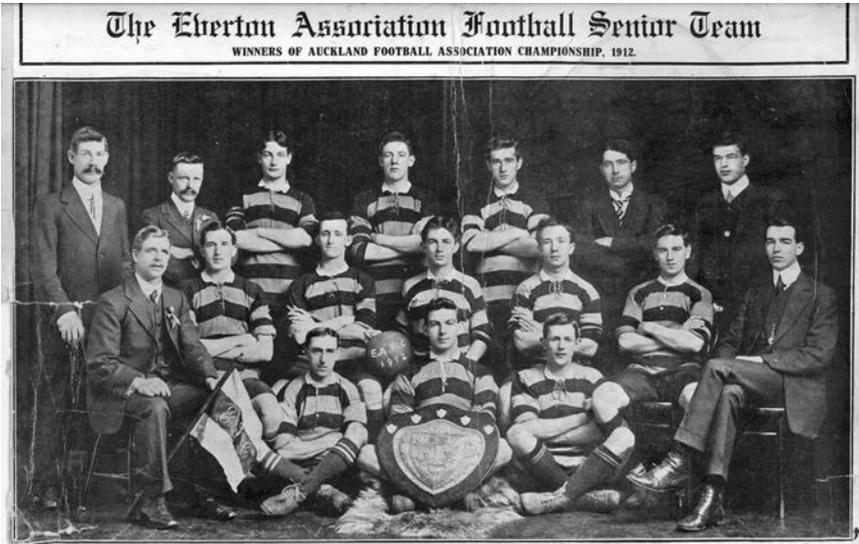
At the end of a distinguished playing career my father, Frank Baker, served as an Auckland Football Association Control Board member from 1926-43, spent two years as Chairman and was honoured with a Life Membership in 1940. We still have his valued scrap book with press clippings and photos from most of Everton's matches, plus his beautiful velvet blue and gold Auckland caps. It annoys me when younger people say such things as: "Soccer is finally going ahead." They should see that scrapbook. Before World War I crowds of 5000 or 6000 were common at the Domain, Devonport or Victoria Park.

In 1912 the *New Zealand Herald* had columns dedicated to soccer, of pre-match and post-match comments, including on a Friday, half-page photos of tomorrow's captains for the main game. In July was the following report. 'Frank Baker, who at 20 years exemplifies in his 9st 7lb of well developed muscle and sinew the energy of Everton. He has led the black and blue eleven since the team took its place in the Auckland First Division of 1911.'

The *Auckland Star* also wrote:

Formed in 1907 under a different banner (Tabernacle), the team had a triumphant march through the grades. In 1911 now with the name Everton the lads formed a new dynasty as it were and Frank Baker led the team to runner-up in their first attempt in 1911. The Everton Premier Team was one to be proud of. They had started together as Ponsonby boys in 1907 and worked up through the grades, gained the position of runner-up in 1911 and won the Championship this year.

Seven of the original founders were still in the Premier team. If everyone trained and worked together as the Everton XI had, 'soccer' football would progress wonderfully. In 1912, he perched them safely on top and they stayed there till the outbreak of WW1 in 1914. In 1915 with the legendary Reg Craxton in goal, they also won the Auckland provincial Falcon Cup. At that time Everton fielded 12 teams.



### **Everton Association Football Seniors, 1912**

Back Row: W. Boyne (President), S. White (Vice-President), S. Robinson (Fullback), T. Brewer (Vice-Captain, Forward),

R. Booth (Halfback), A. McMath (Vice-President), A. Whaley (Emergency)

Middle Row: S. Moyle (Vice-President), A. Cantell (Goal), J. Caradus (Halfback), F. H. Baker (Captain, Centre Half),

R. Webster (Forward), H. Ridley (Fullback), E. G. Atkinson (Hon. Sec.)

Front Row: A. Shergold (Forward), Reg. Boyne (Centre Forward), C. Isbister (Forward)

Matches played: 10   Matches won: 9   Matches drawn: 1  
Goals for: 49   Goals against: 13

The famous Ces Dacre wrote in the old *Observer* — 'my ideal half-back is Frank Baker — a hard man to beat and you could never lose him.' Dacre had 17 New Zealand caps and played for

Auckland from 1901 to 1927. He was also one of the country's best ever batsman, playing in the UK for many seasons.

Another press report in my Dad's scrapbook read 'Apart from being a thoroughly good sportsman, Frank Baker was shrewd, active and as game as a pebble.'

In 1913 Dad left for the UK and the *New Zealand Herald* wrote: 'Sixty Everton members sang "Auld Lang Syne" to farewell their popular skipper. The unanimity spoke more than words for the hold that the good-looking, cheerful and modest man had gained in Auckland Soccer. Untiring, unselfish, fearless and simmering with energy that never boils, Baker has a genius for making openings. Everton's effective machine-gun combination is due to the confidence players have in the man who controls their attack and defence.'

Another star of Everton was centre forward Reg Boyne who had the distinction of being the first New Zealander (not NZ born) to be signed for an English professional club. In 1913 during a match at the Auckland Domain, the headquarters of the Brotherhood team, Boyne scored three great running goals in the first half. Burton, the Brotherhood goalie, was a son of the Aston Villa Director. At half-time he approached Boyne in Baker's hearing and said "Reg would you go home to play for Aston Villa if you had a chance?"

Reg replied "Don't be a bloody fool man. Of course I would." Within weeks arrangements were completed and Boyne was on his way. Several years ago, his son Harold still had the cables and copies of the contract subsequently signed.

Strange to say, Baker had left on a working holiday two weeks earlier and was on the Fenchurch Station in London when Boyne signed the contract with three Villa Directors. Boyne's arrival created a great deal of enthusiasm — billboards and placards everywhere announcing his arrival. The public really expected too much from him. He played for several weeks for the reserve team and Baker was at the famous Villa Park when Boyne made his first appearance in the first division against Sunderland, substituting for England's international centre forward Harry Hampton. He did not do very well that day. He later played many games for the second division. World War I interrupted his career

as well as Baker's and many others, and during that period Reg worked on aeroplane manufacturing, where he met his wife, and played for Lincoln City. Reg returned to Morvern Road, Epsom, after the war and played for North Shore, and with Baker was an Auckland selector for some time. He was, with Baker, a champion bowler at the Epsom Club and his son Harold, of the Eden Soccer Club, represented Auckland for two seasons.

World War I put an end to a lot of sportsmen's careers. Baker was on active service for three years and returned to play for Northcote and Auckland although he settled in Epsom. Everton was disbanded as sadly many of their stalwarts did not return. Baker joined the Auckland Football Association executive in 1922 and with others was instrumental in the formation of Blandford Park. He played senior cricket for Varsity and was an Auckland swimming sprint champion.

Incidentally after 60 years of playing and watching soccer, Baker always considered the Auckland team he managed to Wellington in 1926, was the greatest team ever to represent a New Zealand province — yes, provincial soccer was a big deal then. Each of the players except Lucas represented NZ at some time. This team, selected and coached by Phil Neesham, was Lucas, Gerrard, Reid, Tinkler, Kissock, Jones, Innes, Dacre, Spencer, Hislop and Kay

I personally remember dear old Blandford Park in the 1930s with 7000 or 8000 attending club, provincial, Navy and international games. It was a great little ground, nestled snugly in Grafton Gully. It opened on 9 May 1925 with 6000 watching Auckland defeat Waikato 4–2, and the same crowd a week later watched the first club game — Tramways and Thistle. The park's main entrance was right at the bottom of Grafton Road. On its far side a wooden winding staircase dropped down from St Paul Street. This was the Scotsman's Grandstand where a lot of newly arrived, probably UK and Scots supporters would keep up a barrage — "Keep it on the Island" when the ball went out or "Hang 'im on the wire" when some poor player was hurt. Almost at the top of the steps, was the Wynyard Arms where supporters had probably enjoyed a liquid lunch. In the front of the wooden grandstand you were so close to the touchline you could almost touch the players.

In fact, you actually could touch them as they came out of the tunnel. There, feeling shy, instead of important, we Bakers had reserved seats because of Dad's connection as Chairman of the Control Board, later a Life Member. Dad never sat with us though. He was in a little office higher up at the rear next to a little wooden shop displaying in large letters 'MINTIES' — they were a great contributor to many dentists' incomes in later years.

Nestled in the southeast corner was the Caretaker/Groundsman's old house on the edge of the bush, from where spectators commanded a great view of the ground. Reporters in the 1930s were George Pearson (*8 O'clock* and *Auckland Star*) and Jack Sibbin (*New Zealand Herald*). They sat in a little area tucked in behind the back wall, high up in the stand.

The far, western side of the ground was a mysterious area rarely occupied because of its lack of sun in the late afternoon. There was a small grassy area that merged into the bush and the trees of Grafton Gully. It was mysterious because we kids were told, and it could be true, not to venture in there as unsavoury characters lurked there. In fact there was the odd whare in there, still occupied. A long, shaky, old wooden fence stretched along the Grafton Road side of the park, often covered in posters. There was no graffiti then! In fact the whole park seemed to be wooden, as wooden tiered terraces stretched right around the northern end. If at the back, high on the Terrace, you dropped your programme or Minties, it was almost impossible to squeeze down between the seats to ground level to retrieve them without causing a lot of hassle to those wedged in beside or in front of you. Blandford Park, the home of soccer, was so close to Carlaw Park, the home of Rugby League, that when a cheer went up from one ground it could be heard clearly at the other. The first live broadcast of a soccer match was made from Blandford Park in 1925.

Yes it was a homely ground. It was also where Dad lost a lot of money (in those days) from unredeemed debentures — a sore point always with Mum. Of course on occasions I'd rather have been at a Saturday cowboy and serial matinée at the Regent, but Dad always insisted it was better by far to be out in the fresh air,

and possibly he was worried about my morals as a growing lad. After the game, we were always last to leave as Dad and other committee men wrapped up the afternoon with a little refreshment from the top drawer.

Again the trip home was always the same in our Vauxhall 14. It was interrupted with Dad stopping at the Newmarket Hotel to have a 'spot' (or two or three — and you never hear that word 'spot' now) while we, the family of Mum, sister Fay and me, sat impatiently in the car outside. However he usually stopped a little further up Manukau Road at Ravlic's fish and chip shop on the corner of Green Lane Road to buy a bottle of oysters in a vain attempt to placate Mum. Yes fish shops always remained open late on Saturday afternoons and that is why with 6 o'clock closing on the 'drunks' tram' you'd see so many passengers unsteadily carrying newspaper parcels of smoked fish. But often these parcels never lasted the distance and were consumed by 'mates' on the tram.

Later I must admit I followed Dad's tradition by visiting the Newmarket Hotel, a great sportsmen's hostelry, on most winter Saturday afternoons after sport. This meeting place was central to Eden, Blandford, Newmarket, Carlaw and Hobson (hockey) Parks. In its earlier years Blandford Park was used for motor bike races under floodlights and in its later years in summer for softball.

Blandford Park closed in 1964 to make way for motorway construction, but happy times were spent at Olympic Stadium, later Newmarket Park. This became soccer headquarters in 1964/1965, and there I spent a few years in the Press Box reporting soccer for an earlier *Sunday Herald*.

However the history of Newmarket Park (earlier used for athletics) is another story, culminating of course in July 1979 with a large part of it slipping into a gully — a part where my son and I had been sitting only a few days earlier. This was the end of another great soccer venue, once described as the Wembley of the South Pacific.

## 4 School years

I started Epsom School in 1930 and my sister Fay, four years earlier. She told Mum on her first day there was a sign at the school reading ‘circus grounds offered’ How disappointed she was when was told that she had misread Epsom’s motto ‘success crowns effort’.

The Puriri trees that Sir John Logan Campbell planted along The Drive frontage of Epsom School in 1901 are still there today. A platform was installed in the 1930s under these trees in a futile attempt to shade the warm creamy milk and Jonathon apples the government supplied for every New Zealand school. Were you ever a ‘milk monitor’? In winter we could buy hot cocoa at one penny a mug — pushed through a hole in the fence by a kindly couple next door.

At school we were encouraged to save. The Auckland Savings Bank at Newmarket sent out a bank clerk once a week and we would bank our 3d (threepenny) pieces. When we had saved 5/- (five shillings) we felt rich!

We lived on our Monarch Special Farmers bikes up on our beloved Wunny (One Tree Hill) which we still walk almost daily, or down at the Windmill Road Reserve kicking a footie, playing King-asini or cricket. It was later that the thick bush on one side became more interesting. I’ll leave it at that! Around the new Melville Park was a no-go area. It was then a vast quarry developed through the Depression by Bob Semple’s No 13 scheme for the unemployed.

In the old wooden Primer building at Epsom School I can still visualise the piano where Norman Tait, the Fun Doctor, entertained for threepence. He juggled, played the piano with his nose and told jokes, etc. He did the same for an eternity at all Auckland schools and had a dinky little car with ‘Fun Doctor’ signwritten on it.

Other great memories of pre-Auckland Grammar years at Epsom

School were visits to the Winter Show on Kings Wharf — girls with kewpie dolls on wands and boys with free ‘Nugget’ pencils — and Luna Park near Mechanics Bay, later sold to an Aussie.

Dad came home early one afternoon and loaded us into our old Pontiac or Vauxhall and followed hundreds of others on the old dirt track to Mangere Aerodrome to greet lovely Jean Batten at the end of her record breaking flight. Finally, after much scanning of the skies, a call went up, “There she is”, as someone saw a spot on the horizon. What excitement! Her brother John was an early Hollywood actor with other early New Zealand stars Colin Tapley and lovely Nola Luxford. Nola of course started the famous ‘Anzac Club’ in New York for NZ Servicemen on leave or passing through in World War II.

Then there was ‘the house of horrors’ or as some schools called it ‘the murder house’ ie the dentist! I still shudder today at the name of Mr Gunthorp the dentist. With fear and apprehension Mum would drag me up those steps — still there on the corner of Empire Road. The sight of Mr Gunthorp hovering over his treadle drill was horrible. But Mrs Gunthorp was quite kind — as you left she would give you a lolly — looking I suppose for return business. Christine Fletcher laughed when she heard this. They were her husband’s grandparents.

In 1938 I started at Auckland Grammar and those were a mixture of sad and happy days. I have always very much respected Mr Colin Littlejohn, the headmaster, and most of the masters I had for five years. To get there I always biked, walked, or occasionally trammed. Again at Grammar I made life-long friends — now sadly most are gone. In 1941/42 with the Japanese war machine heading south and the threat of invasion very real, we regularly had exercises to vacate the building in two minutes. On many occasions a bell would ring about 11am and we’d have to be across Mountain Road and in the bush opposite. There were no houses then and the bush stretched down almost to Newmarket. When the news was bad, it was so scary. Those living close were sent home and I well recall cycling madly down Mountain Road and Gillies Ave to reach home in a vain attempt to reach Mum and my sister before the ‘Japs’ arrived. What could I have done? Rape

then as today was a horrible word. My everlasting gratitude goes out to the Americans' arrival and their halting of the Japanese advance at the Battle of the Coral Sea.

In 1942, I suffered my most embarrassing experience. I was in the First Cricket Eleven at Auckland Grammar School. New Zealand's greatest batsman, Bert Sutcliffe at Takapuna Grammar School, was well on his way to becoming a legend. Henry Cooper (later Sir Henry) was our coach. We were to play Takapuna on the following Saturday. After much research, Henry decided Bert was suspect early on the leg side. "Baker," he said to me, "you have good hands. You go to square leg and Murray Tanner will bowl on the leg stump." Everything went great. Bert was tempted — he hooked — the ball went high and I got under an easy catch, and dropped the b.....g thing! Well Bert went on and got his usual double century and I had nowhere to hide! I had to face the whole of Auckland Grammar, 900 pairs of eyes plus the masters, at Assembly on the Monday morning. I pleaded sickness on Sunday but Dad was too wise for that. It was a terrible experience!

Years later I took two elderly and respected ex-NZ cricketers Paul Whitelaw and Eddy McLeod, to a Parnell Cricket Club Reunion. At the back door a voice rang out: "Baker you 'B'. I've never forgiven you." Ken Savory, a member of our team that day, appeared with a smile, or was it still a sneer. The ex-NZ reps understood — I hoped.

## 5 Fond memories of ‘The Regent’ Epsom in the 30s & 40s

The Regent, Epsom, opened Monday 28 July 1924 furnished with handsome tip-up seats, its own orchestra, and the best carpet money could buy. The film shown that evening was the 1922 British silent version of *The Bohemian Girl* with a splendid cast of Ivor Novello, Gladys Cooper, C. Audrey Smith (a very early English test cricketer), Ellen Terry and Constance Callier.

Hal Roach made a later version in 1936 in the USA with Laurel & Hardy, described in *Variety* as a ‘comedy with little comedy’.

In Gordon Ingham’s great book *Everyone’s Gone to the Movies* he wrote: ‘You could see all the cowboys at the Regent, Epsom, opposite the old Tram Barn’, and the milkbar cowboys flocked there accordingly. In the late 1960s they changed the name to the ‘Lido’ for the showing of continental films and better class movies that were not appreciated by the ‘hoi polloi’ in Queen Street. So the Lido achieved what the Remuera Tudor also set out to do and thrived accordingly.

For 20 years or more, the Regent’s manager was jovial Mr Samuel Hardwick, always standing by the ticket office, immaculate in dress suit and bow tie. He lived in Wilding Ave Epsom and walked to the theatre two or three times daily. Everyone knew him and greeted him. The usherettes were the Stacey sisters — twins I think. Their father owned a factory in Newmarket where they made those great Pulmona pastilles for coughs and colds. Valmae Cordes was another attractive usherette.

The Regent had a dress circle, unlike the Lido today, and the broad staircase was on the right of the ticket-box with toilets and manager’s office beneath. The dress circle of course was sixpence or a shilling dearer than the stalls.

Saturday night was a real social occasion, mainly for adults.

Mums and dads dressed for the occasion and many Epsom residents had firm bookings on that night throughout the year to see Greer Garson, Bette Davis, Walter Pidgeon, etc in such classics as *Mrs Miniver*, *How Green was my Valley*, *Dark Victory*, etc. Otherwise, reserved bookings for a Saturday night were made at the ticket office throughout the week. The girl had a large plan of the theatre — you made your choice of seats and a large cross was made — you paid and received tickets. On the Saturday you had to claim your reserved seat/s 15 minutes before the curtain went up at 8pm. If there was a popular film, there were usually a few patrons standing by in case the reserved seats were not claimed. If by chance, the original ticket holder turned up five minutes before 8 o'clock, then the genial Mr Hardwick had the job of sorting it out.

In the 1930s, Saturday afternoon matinees if you were allowed to go were an exciting experience. Cowboy films and serials with Buck Jones, Tom Mix, Tim McCoy and later the 'sissy' singing cowboys Gene Autrey and Roy Rogers. The serials always finished with the hero in dire circumstances and you just had to go the next week to see how and if he got out of it. You'd run home from these action films convinced you wanted to be a cowboy, twirling an imaginary six-gun and trying to sing 'Home on the range' or 'I'm heading for the last roundup'.

During the mid 1930s, I was an ice cream boy for a short time. I was filling in for the regular lad and selling 3d and 1d (one penny) hard ice cream in cones from a tray before the start and during the interval. Sometimes the ice cream cones were passed along the rows to those in the middle. How hygienic! Also on the tray were chocolates, including Nestles 'croquettes', I think they were called. Very elegant thin, round chocolate pieces individually wrapped in silver paper, they were about one inch in diameter and stacked about six inches long.

Those ice creams came from the confectionery shop adjoining the foyer on the right side with the entrance in Manukau Road. It was owned by Messrs Goodwin and Wood. On the left of the foyer was Mr Hills, hairdresser & tobacconist — later Keith Prendiville. The Regent was surrounded by all sorts of shops — a very busy

area. Two doors down from the Regent towards Alba Road was another dairy run by Mrs Hilda Williams and two doors up towards Queen Mary Ave, yet another dairy owned by Gibb Hill. The two main ice cream brands were Peters (with Mr Puttick of Alba Road the manager) and Robinsons. I preferred Robinsons. At half time, patrons would flock out and fill these three outlets for ice creams, drinks and sweets. When ‘Choc Bombs’ were invented, no matter how careful you were — chocolate stains were inevitably found on good trousers or blouses, etc the next day.

After World War II, paper was in short supply and the popular Saturday night sports paper the pink coloured 8 o’clock edition was rationed. I well remember standing outside the Regent with many others, even after the National Anthem, ‘God Save the King’, had been played, waiting anxiously for the tightly tied bundle of 8 *O’clocks* to be thrown from the passing vehicle. The dairy owner would rip open the packaging and sell the papers to the anxious customers at 2d a copy, I think. When you entered the theatre 15 minutes later you’d whisper to Mum & Dad to tell you what you’d missed with accompanying “Shush, Shush.” The same vehicle of course continued quickly on to service all the dairies and other outlets down to Onehunga. This happened all over Auckland. We loved to see who had scored all the runs or all the tries and if it was you, to see your name in print.

Oh yes, returning to matinees — I think my parents were concerned about my virtue. The back seats were always occupied by the older and braver boys with the local lasses.

Epsom around the Regent was so different from today. Trams rattled past almost within touching distance, as cars just squeezed past. The shops adjoining had verandahs and you’d quite safely just prop your bike against the verandah posts. The theatre was a focal point on a Friday or Saturday night. If it wasn’t the Regent, or if it was ‘booked out’, you’d look at the nearby cinemas — the ‘Crystal Palace’ in Mt Eden Road, the posh ‘Tudor’ at Remuera, the ‘Alexandra’ — later the ‘Victory’ at Greenlane, or Newmarket’s ‘Rialto’. But it just wasn’t the same as going to the good old Regent — with all its familiar faces.

The Regent played an exciting part in our days at Epsom School

in The Drive. I well recall paying threepence and marching up Queen Mary Ave in class lots to see exciting educational animal films. (How sad for those who couldn't afford it and were left behind.) They were a series with Frank Buck called 'Bring 'em back alive'. This took place about once a year, except in 1936 when it happened twice, for I remember also marching up to see film of the coronation of King George VI. Such was the community spirit that to raise funds for the school, pupils sold tickets for a certain evening and some of the proceeds went to the school.

Another feature of those years were Tuesday or Wednesday 'guest nights' when two people were admitted for the price of one. During the war of course, the Regent as well as other theatres throughout New Zealand were well and truly 'blacked out'.

Where have all the suburban cinemas gone? Long may the Lido/Regent continue!



*The Regent Theatre (large white building), December 1956*

Photo: Graham C. Stewart

## 6 The heart of Epsom

After living in the heart of Epsom for over 80 years, I've thousands of memories of our beautiful suburb. Our *The History of Epsom* covers the churches, schools, hospitals that abound in Epsom so I'll just ramble with a few memories.

Epsom has changed so much! I was sad when the original Fisher home, where Mr and Mrs Mick Fisher raised their three sons Woolf, Lou and Gus, was removed from the corner of Banff Ave and The Drive. Maurice Paykel then lived further along The Drive on the corner of Queen Mary Ave, now a doctor's residence, and young Maurice attended Epsom School across the road. A little later Maurice's sister married Woolf Fisher. In 1934, as young men holidaying in the far North at Houhora, Maurice and Woolf decided to start Fisher & Paykel. Also gone from Banff Ave is the private hospital 'Whare-iti' with Sister Doris England as matron in the 1930s and 1940s, subsequently named St Swithins.

The contribution that the Wynyard dynasty made to New Zealand and Auckland history is well documented. Col Robert H. Wynyard was the first Superintendent of Auckland Province in 1853. He died in Bath, England, in 1864 but his wife returned to New Zealand and was buried at St Andrews, Epsom. His son Robert McDonnell Wynyard farmed the land stretching from the lower slopes of One Tree Hill to Manukau Road. Robert's son was Gladwin, hence Gladwin Road, while Lewin Road was named after the son of Montague Wynyard who also farmed here. Robert Wynyard's home has a steep entrance at the top of Gladwin Road but backs onto Cornwall Park and is now owned by Dr Jack Sinclair.

A while ago, Fred Orange born in Alba Road, Epsom, and later a great athlete and long-serving Auckland Grammar master, wrote me with some great old Epsom memories. In the early 1930s during the Depression his family moved six times locally, just to

save 1/- a week rent. Every Friday in 1932, Fred had to pick up six pennyworth of fish backs and heads from Baxendales (later Ravlic's) fish and chip shop on the Greenlane/Manukau Road corner. This constituted the family soup and main meal for Friday and for days after, while the Depression reigned.

It was at this same fish shop, that on Saturday evenings when Dad had overstayed at the old Newmarket Hotel on his way home from beloved Blandford Park, he would stop to buy one of those squat bottles of oysters or whitebait. This action was an attempt to appease my waiting mum. Rarely did it work. A few times I recall our dear quiet mum returned the parcel with interest. She was quite a good shot. What a mess! Have you ever tried to pick whitebait off a carpet?

With few cars or telephones and limited transport in the 1930s, Epsom was well covered with pockets of shops within walking distance. Take for instance the three main roads — Great South Road, Manukau Road and The Drive. At the corner of Great South Road and Market Road there were Bunton's and Marriott's grocery shops, Owen Morris the chemist, Cliff Slack's fish shop, Mrs Moon's dairy, Mrs McPherson's drapery, Hellaby's the butcher, and Mrs Hall's bookshop.

Going along Manukau Road past Ambury's on the corner of Owens Road was Beal's the grocer and opposite, Findlay's Bakery, Mrs Davison's dairy and Tommy Green the famous jockey and his wife had a haberdashery (where can you find one today?). At Ranfurly Road, Les Boyd was the butcher, the Wangs & Chens had the fruit shop. Ivan Brown was the grocer and of course the Quinlan sisters had their wonderful stationery book and toy shop and Des Pegler was next door with his stocked-to-the-ceiling hardware shop. Later it became Rawlinson's dairy. The chemists were Irving's, and Waymouth & Nichol. Porters Dye Works always looked out of place in Market Road, as did the Tip Top factory in Dunkerron Ave, before it shifted to Penrose in 1960.

Before I get on to Epsom's major shopping area by the Tram Barn, I'll just mention The Drive shops — yes three of them. Nothing there now, but in the '30s and '40s there was a wonderful grocer's shop where the lights are now opposite Alba Road. It smelt

great, just packed with tins, bins, jars, scales and sacks, and was owned at different times by the Blakeleys, Taylors, Millers, Browns and Richardsons. A pennyworth of broken animal biscuits was a luxury. Right on the bend where The Drive turns into King George Ave was Cowlrick's Grocery Shop. Just outside where the Epsom School swimming pool is now, was Mrs Ada Stacey's little dairy and lollies shop. It had gas mantles for window lights and ice-chests for iceblocks, butter, milk, etc, and had previously been a shoe repair shop.

Incidentally, opposite us on the Onslow Ave/The Drive corner was one of Epsom's earliest public telephone boxes where it was common to see half a dozen anxious callers queuing up for their 'penny for three minutes' call. One very local gentleman used to get most irate and frustrated waiting to ring his bookie. That was a bad corner. A large tin fence ruined visibility and accidents were frequent. Crash! Out would rush Mum with her jar of black iodex and bandages and my sister would make tea. We had to use Bill Parry's phone to ring the ambulance and police.

All around Epsom the streets were full of walkers. Nuns walked Epsom streets in pairs, doing good works, looking for donations, drinking tea and using toilets, as did 'the opposition', vicars and curates from St Andrews and St Georges etc. It was a competitive business. Sometimes poor Mum ran to three cups of tea and bikies within a couple of hours. Banff Ave then reached only as far as the Catholic Church. The Drive area was a paddock till the Holy Cross Convent was built; but I won't go on about the battles between the Epsom brats and the Convent rats. Troubles in Ireland were minor when we pupils clashed.

Pukehana Ave too then was only half a street called Carnachan Ave. The name was linked with property there owned by the family of Blanche Carnachan, the Infant Mistress at Epsom School who was well known nationally for her role in education.

Further Epsom characters were the man who in ragged clothes who walked the streets 24 hours it seemed, making funny clicking noises to the kids, the young man who leaned backwards at right angles as he walked, looking straight up into the sky, a violinist, and the blind tea lady, Miss Laurent. There was also a young

Maori man who walked with a sack of coal on his shoulder as a penance, a man selling coal and those ti-tree clothes props, and unforgettable dear Pearl Dawson in mannish clothes, cap and her little car, who umpired ladies' cricket and hockey at Melville Park for years. She died at 100. A Mr Stone delivered butter, cheese, etc, from his little van — and there was a very funny chubby little conductor on the Onehunga tram for years.

Epsom streets were full of trammies in uniform coming and going from the Tram Barn with their grey tin boxes and twirling their ticket clippers like Buck Jones' six-gun. Leightons 1936 *Directory* for Epsom showed every second or third address to be a motorman or conductor. You could almost touch the trams as they rattled past and vehicles would just squeeze between tram and kerb, missing each other by inches. The 'Tram Barn' then stretched from what is currently the Chaska Bar and Restaurant in the old administration building, to Greenlane Road.

Over the road was Baxendales, later Ravlics fish & chip shop on the corner where a liquor wholesaler is now, and on the other side of Manukau Road were grocers on each corner of Alba Road. What a great shopping area it was with such exciting smells from the Tass's Coffee and from Alf Norwood's grocery adjoining the fish shop, and later the aroma of fresh bread from Loebers Bakery. The building and office of that bakery is still there at the top of Arcadia Road, now occupied by a panelbeater. There was the tang of sawdust from the two butchers, the sweet smell of Robinsons and Peters ice cream, of pies and cakes from Mackies on the corner of Queen Mary Ave, and of fresh fruit from Lowes whose children were all born upstairs above the shop and were great scholars. For a period of about ten years, if another Lowe didn't enrol at Auckland Grammar School or Epsom Girls' Grammar School, masters would wonder about the state of Mr Lowe's health.

Remember the camphor and mustiness of Miss Minifie's haberdashery, the leather from Mr Long's shoe shop, the saddlery from Magee's and the steam from a narrow little Chinese laundry? We were always thrilled by the exciting posters outside the new Regent (now the Lido) — it was a real focal point. There was always a fireman on duty standing beside the entrance for every showing.

Oh those serials and cowboy films when I was allowed to go to a Saturday matinee!

I loved it when my Mum sent me down to the shop opposite Alba Road with a note. I would stop at that mysterious high tin fence then covered in advertising posters at the Bowling Ave corner, stand on the seat of my bike, look and wonder why all these funnily dressed men in high hats, some with ties around their pants, were throwing big balls and tossing their arms about. Yes the history of Epsom Bowling Club is fascinating. I'd reach the shops, prop my Monarch Special safely against the verandah post, clutch Mum's shopping money and note and enjoy the excitement. It's now incredible to think that between the Tram Barn office and Ngaroma Road at the far side of the Greenwoods Corner shops, there were nine grocers, five butchers, eleven lolly and ice cream shops, six home bakeries, seven fruiterers and that is not counting the shops in The Drive.

And I mustn't forget Ravlic's Grocers Shop tucked away on the corner of Empire and St Andrews Road. Mick Ravlic and his son Frank were great Epsom bowlers. This shop was nearly opposite the narrow overgrown path down to the delightful three courts of St Andrews Tennis Club — called Aotea in the 1930s. I joined there when I was twelve and the club is still going well and almost unchanged.

By the Tram Barn there was also Falwell's Billiard Saloon opposite the modern restaurant. George Bartley the chemist adjoined the Lido and two used book shops, two coal merchants Condons and Birnies, four plumbers, Kyle, Hayes, Bakers and Watson, a carrier, three petrol stations, De Luen & Hardley, Fletcher & Maddox and Kenny & Kenny, Madame Daw piano teacher, watch repairs, Barney Forman's stationery shop and library, and the man who started Epsom's first T.A.B. The blacksmiths, Mr Godfrey and son Lance, and horse trainer Togo Lee, square, strong and sooty, shod nearly every horse racing, in that brick building which is still standing just inside 'the trots' back entrance off Campbell Crescent. At No. 2 Arcadia Road lived Mrs Flo Allen, the sister of that famous cartoonist David Lowe, Hitler's No. 1 enemy, who kept Britain smiling during World War II.

Electioneering in the 1930s was fun to us kids. The Regent was used for election meetings. It was then in the Roskill electorate and the Labour candidate for years — ‘Richards of Roskill’ — used to throw down his box on street corners, talk for fifteen minutes and then move on to the next corner. The heckling was great fun. He was always accompanied by a couple of minders though. It happened outside our place on the corner of The Drive and Onslow Ave, as our neighbour was the Hon Bill Parry, Minister of Internal Affairs with the Mickey Savage government. But closer to election night he’d use the Regent for the larger and rowdier meetings.

At the top of Rangiatea Road, kindly Mrs Schroeder had her jolly little dairy for years. The shop is still there. Togo Lee’s daughter Eileen wrote me: “We always spent our pennies there but we had to have a clean face and hands or she wouldn’t serve us. My Dad, Togo the horse trainer, was a rough diamond and always went there on a Saturday night for a bag of sweets and of course the pink ‘8 o’clock’ sports edition.”

Remember the Epsom Windmill in St Andrews Road, demolished in 1953, but so well described in Audrey Drummond’s fine little book *Te Ana Rangī*, the history of generations of the Dignan family and their fine home nestling beside Melville Park with its entry from King George Ave. Later it was occupied by Dr Brian Knight, an early child psychologist.

Remember also the old stone house which stood between Alba and Arcadia roads and is now at MOTAT? Original tenants who rented it from Sir John Logan Campbell were Mr and Mrs Lennard who had the Harp of Erin Hotel, later the Potters and the Hartfields. Mr Cowan founded an early Epsom cricket team which included such well known names as Murray & John Tanner, Stu Dow, Ken Greville, Geoff Black, the Ingram Bros, Sir Hugh Kawharu, Jack Takerei and Jeff Black

The turret house on the slopes of Maungakiekie was the original clubhouse for the Auckland Golf Club whose course occupied 37.5 acres of Cornwall Park from 1901 until its relocation to Middlemore in 1909. Then in 1912 the Maungakiekie Golf Club continued on the same site until the land was seized for the military use in 1942 under wartime emergency regulations. The old clubhouse is

now a beautiful private residence accessed from the end of lovely little Fern Ave off Golf Road. Historian Trevor Watson, well known to old Radio Pacific listeners, told me that as a kid he once waited at the clubhouse all weekend until someone picked him to caddy for 1/6 a round, late on a Sunday afternoon.

You've probably all seen the photo (below) of the old Prince of Wales and Mountbatten teeing off in the amphitheatre in 1920. Maungakiekie Club divided; some moved to their present course in Mt Roskill and some to Titirangi. A colourful golfing chapter in Cornwall Park's history had come to an end.



Photo: Maungakiekie Golf Club

## 7 The Epsom Bowling Club

One hundred and four years ago, on 3 September 1906, a public meeting was held in the Epsom Public Hall situated in Manukau Road, just across from Crockers at the top of Onslow Avenue. A Mr E.W. Burton was in the Chair and there it was proposed and seconded 'that the meeting resolves to form an Epsom Bowling & Croquet Club'.

A week earlier, seven men had met in Mr Jones' residence in King George Avenue and contributed 5/- each to advertise this September meeting, and to circularize the 60 or so residents in the adjoining area. These seven men were Messrs Burton, Eagleton, Farrington, Harrison, Jones, Pollard and Watkins.

At this meeting subcommittees were set up to deal with the purchase of land, the costs of forming a green and the erection of a pavilion, finance, greenkeeper and accessories. The meeting found £1.12.0 to cover the initial expenses, and another meeting three weeks later carried these resolutions:

- That Sir John Logan Campbell be elected first patron.
- That Mr Burton be elected first president.
- That Messrs Craig and Jones be elected vice presidents.
- That the annual sub be £2.2.0 and that the committee be appointed trustees.
- Mr S. Harrison was elected first secretary and treasurer.

The committee at its first meeting in 1906 passed the resolution 'that it be left to the President and Secretary to deal with the purchase of three sections of land comprising  $\frac{3}{4}$  acre on The Drive, the property of Mr Southey Baker'. This they did, and Mr Baker agreed to a figure of £490; this now comprises the No.1 and No.2 greens. Further land was purchased in 1917.

Much negotiation and fund-raising followed. The first Euchre

Party in November 1906 was so successful that £9.17.3 was handed to the treasurer. Ten evenings a year were held on the Wednesday nearest the full moon, because Epsom was not well lit and there were just tracks through the grass outside. The secretary had to make special representation to the Epsom Road Board asking that gorse be cleared and a footpath be formed, tarred and sanded from Merivale Avenue to Bowling Avenue.

Concerts were held in the Epsom Hall, and at one 300 tickets were sold at sixpence and a shilling, and £6.10.0 was raised. Complimentary picture evenings were later held in the Lyric Theatre, Symonds Street, which became the State Theatre. The club also raised £20 by renting the fence along The Drive for poster displays.

The first pavilion was built by A. Pollard & Sons early in 1907 for £138.2.6. Mr Carpenter was contracted for the greens formation. The club purchased the seed, and under the expert eyes of Messrs Craig and Harrison working bees sowed the first grass. Such was the hard work and expertise that the gardens were planted, greens weeded and all was neat and trim for the big day. This is how the *New Zealand Herald* of 26 November 1907 reported the first opening day:

So on Sat. 23 Nov. 1907 the Epsom Bowling & Croquet Club with flags flying, music by Bourkes Orchestra, refreshments flowing and camaraderie abounding set off on the Bowling career. Mrs Burton threw the first jack and Mrs Hill struck the first croquet ball.

Because of increased interest in bowls, the Croquet Club moved amicably to Gillies Avenue in 1930, with a donation of £40.0.0.

The club finished its first year with 70 members. The first green-keeper was Mr Carpenter. He was guaranteed two days work a week in 1907 at seven shillings a day, and members were allowed to employ him privately on the other days.

During the club's first year an acmena hedge was planted along Bowling Avenue, and on this was hung wire netting and scrim in an attempt to stop the strong wind. What a mess that became. Every annual report mentioned it was 'likely to last another year'

which it did until 1955, when a stalwart team of axemen had one heck of a job to clear it. My Dad even dragged me down a few times.

In July 1915 subs were raised to £3.3.0 and support was given towards a convalescent home for soldiers in Epsom. The Saturday draw then closed at 2.15pm. A reminder surely of working days when six days a week included Saturdays from 9am to 1pm.

Work began in 1918 on shifting the old pavilion to its present site, and an earlier edition of the present building was built in 1924 for £1229.17.5. The greenkeeper's cottage was completed in May 1922 with a total cost to the club of £470. Mr Wallace supervised at 3 shillings an hour and had to supply scaffolding, etc.

I well remember 11.45pm on 16 March 1940 being awoken when a major fire disaster was narrowly averted. Fire broke out in scrims and mats stored under the stairs, but prompt action by the fire brigade prevented a complete disaster. The club received £683.13.6. from the insurance company for damage to the pavilion, furniture, lockers and bowls. Nearby clubs came willingly to help, for all inter-club matches and tournaments, etc, were cancelled for the balance of the season. The pavilion was modernized in 1963, and in 1967 the lounge downstairs was created from an open verandah.

Our first illegal bar (so long ago as to be outside the Statute of Limitations) was a small room in the old tool shed. Money was cunningly put in a box labelled 'Contributions'. Despite this camouflage, the innocent treasurer, who must have been a 'wowsler', in his Cash A/c came out in the open with 'Takings from the Bar' — so much!

During World War Two the club sent food parcels to members and their families overseas. I was fortunate enough to receive one. The pavilion was used by the Red Cross for meetings. On 24 April 1942, anti-air raid fighting equipment was obtained for £50, and Mr Jones next door was our first official fire watcher. Members later set up a roster. I still have my EPS messenger armband. From October 1942 the Epsom RSA (now defunct) used this hall once a week for meetings before shifting to a Nissen hut next to Ravlic's

fish & chip shop on the corner of Greenlane Road and Manukau Road, where the liquor store is now.

The AGM of 24 June 1944 decided to hold a postal ballot on the issue of Sunday play. It was lost by 27 to 83 against. A year later the AGM had to consider the club's financial position, the number of players, the number of rinks and the likely load factor. The club agreed to increase playing member numbers from 180 to 200 (we had a large waiting list) and increase the annual sub to £5 with a 10/- rebate.

Opening days were always an opportunity for the local MP to pontificate; sometimes he would attend two or three openings on one day. On one occasion Kiri Te Kanawa sang there as an 18-year-old.

A history was produced for the Golden Jubilee in 1956, and I would like to quote one paragraph.

'The progress of this Club over 50 years shows that the enthusiasm of our progenitors was most definitely justified and those same cheers reinforced by our Golden Jubilee today will echo on to the centenary and further.'

Membership of sporting clubs everywhere is a problem for so many different reasons. When membership dropped to under 200 men only thirty years ago, there was great concern. Now as a 'mixed' club we are probably under 100. However with foresight our directors, with the support of the members, have made the drastic changes you can see today. Greens that can be used 365 days of the year under conditions which would have wiped out play in the past.

However it is to be regretted that a lack of forethought in 1920 and again in 1954 saw the club miss the opportunity to buy land which would have given access to Merivale Avenue and provided better parking.

I cannot conclude this précis of the club's early history without paying tribute to my neighbour for 50 years — the late Johnny Killeen. When John returned from WW2 he asked Dad if he could use our telephone occasionally to get his signwriting business established. (In those days, as for cars, you had to put your name on the waiting list for a phone.) To help John, Dad asked him to

design our honours board. This he did, and he and his partner Neil updated it annually — and the club never received an invoice for his time. Later, by now a keen bowler himself, he was offered free membership — an offer which was appreciated but ignored. His son Richard, aka Ricky Killeen, is now a world famous contemporary artist.

My personal association with the Epsom Bowling Club spans 80 years, but I still admit when I quietly stand in the upstairs hall and gaze at the surrounds, I can't help but reflect on the club's proud history and fond memories. I look on the faces of past presidents — including my Dad's — and still read the impressive honours board with the names of friends and forbears who have successfully steered the club through 104 years. And through its windows I see One Tree Hill, Mt Eden, St Andrews Church, beautiful old green trees, and try to visualize the area as it was in 1906 with paddocks, tracks and gas lights if lucky. How quiet it must have been then. Maybe this will help you to make a decision to play bowls, to enjoy the fraternity of fellowship.

Here are two true sayings:

'Bowling can add years to your life and life to your years.'

'You don't stop bowling because you grow old; you grow old because you stop bowling.'

## 8 From the Pacific to the Tasman — *the only coast to coast tramway in the world*

‘Trammies’ — the drivers or motormen, conductors, and inspectors — were a common sight walking the Epsom streets as they reported for duty or returned from their shift at the depot, the old Epsom Tram Barn. All were in uniform, caps, etc with the conductors swinging their shiny ticket-clippers around their fingers like six-guns and carrying familiar black or grey rectangular tins. In these they carried their tickets, change, etc and probably their dinner. At shifts-end they had to check in and balance their takings at the administration office where a restaurant now operates.

This was the main entrance in and out of the Barn and with it came a mass of rails, overhead wires, points, etc. There was a constant buzz of activity as trams left and returned at the beginning and end of the day. Some went down to Onehunga to start the Onehunga–City service and some to town for the City–Onehunga service. Conductors and drivers yelled as, surrounded by sparks of flying electricity, they tried to locate their trolley poles on the overhead wires. Airbrakes were released with a hissing sound.

Unlike train tracks, tramlines were set flush with the road in a tar-sealed area in the middle called the ‘tramway reservation’. The actual track was recessed a couple of inches below the surface. Very occasionally a wheel would jump the track if a stone, etc lodged in the groove. One can imagine the work involved in the laying, maintenance and finally removal of tracks from 1902–56. There were approximately 72 kilometres of lines servicing Auckland City and suburbs.

The sheds or barns at Epsom stretched right to Green Lane Road and held 100 trams on 15 tracks; the Gaunt Street city depot held 130 trams on 18 tracks. Each tram seated approximately 52 passengers, 24 could strap-hang in the central passageway

and seven were allowed on the front and rear platforms where a large sign always amused me: 'Seven standing if full inside'. That sign on the platform was particularly applicable in the days of six o'clock closing on the 6.15pm 'drunks' tram. You can imagine the difficulty a conductor or conductress had trying to collect all the fares on a crowded tram. With a ticket bag with money in front it was well nigh impossible to push and shove through the congested middle aisle. This caused many amusing incidents with a few overweight employees, and many passengers must have escaped paying.

Oh yes, remember the 'inspectors'! Just like the old feared school inspectors, these guys were likely to pop up at any time any place on any route. Their job? To check passengers' tickets and to ascertain they had paid the right fare and to run an eye over conductor, driver and tram itself. Immaculate, severe looking, they would send the old heart racing as you frantically sought your flimsy ticket before he reached you. Was it in your tightly clenched fist, in the deep recesses of purse or pocket or dropped on a cluttered floor? However with bark worse than bite — and after giving your ticket a second clip — they'd drop off at a tram-stop further on — to dutifully board another tram somewhere someplace. They certainly acted as a deterrent to any free loader. But I always thought they had a pretty sweet job.

During the World War II years with manpower short, and up until the last tram on Saturday 29 December 1956, conductresses did a mighty job and earned the respect of the travelling public. At the demise of the trams, 54 years had passed since Sir John Logan Campbell drove the first tram, No. 1, in Queen Street on 17 November 1902.

Very often at night after the pictures in the city came out, the last tram or two went only as far as the Barn, and I walked home from there. In the city as well as in Karangahape Road, Symonds Street, Newmarket and Customs Street, there were raised platforms in the middle of the road called 'Safety Zones'. From this often precarious, but supposedly safe position, you'd stand waiting for the right tram to arrive, peering to read the destination board above the driver's windows. There was no shelter and no seating —

just a concrete platform on either side of the double set of tracks, raised about six inches above road level and with a curved waist-high concrete wall at each end, many of which were destroyed by errant motorists every weekend it seemed.

Names of ‘trammies’ around us in The Drive were: Ellis, Parsons, Keenan and O’Neill. In fact from my 1936 *Streets Directory* there were 12 trammies in King George Ave, 6 in Rangiata Road, 6 in The Drive, 4 in little Bowling Ave and 5 in Onslow Ave alone. Harold Over, a cousin of Trevor Watson, was a real character on the Onehunga/City tram service. A slightly chubby, smiling conductor, he would joke with all, especially the children. They’d squeal with delight, as Harold would pretend to clip them with his ticket clipper. A real gentleman, he’d help the elderly and became a well-loved institution on this route. Harold joined the trams in 1928 and was there for the last tram in 1956. He estimated that in that period he crossed Auckland 99,000 times.

Going to town by tram in the 1930s, our nearest stop on the Onehunga–City route was under the verandah — then Hellaby’s — at the top of Onslow Road (now Onslow Avenue). It was quite



*Tram at the top of Onslow Avenue, 1957*

Photo: G.W.A. Bush

nerve-wracking walking up Onslow Road, as you'd start to worry about 50 yards from the top. You couldn't see the tram coming from Greenwoods Corner, only hear it, and unless there was someone actually waiting for it, the tram would invariably just sail noisily by. In those days, it was fivepence for adults and twopence halfpenny for kids 'to town' from Onslow Road.

It seemed that about 90% of our tram service went by Newmarket, Khyber Pass, Symonds Street, Karangahape Road and down that marvellous slope of Queen Street to the bottom of town. Travelling that slope, drivers would have bags of sand at the ready in case better traction was needed. Probably about 7% of trams from Onehunga and Epsom (maybe) entered the city via Parnell Rise and about 3% via Anzac Ave and Customs Street to the foot of Queen Street.

Who can forget that magical area — Customs Street/Queen Street intersection, by far the busiest intersection in New Zealand? Those wonderful shops stretching to the Ferry Buildings: Wingates, Chesneys with their hams and meats, Sanfords Restaurant (great fish and chips), the Big Orange Bar (fresh chilled juice coming from a giant yellow model of an orange), McKeowan's Tea Rooms, the Oxford Theatre (in the 30s and 40s it was named the 'London'), the Daisy Coffee Bar and on the corner before crossing to the wharf, Wah Jang's Fruit Shop with the peanut vendor's little cart parked outside. What a mess those shells made in trams and ferryboats! So many personalities in this fascinating area! One being the 'lucky' Art Union man who sat in a small box wearing a bowler hat, a tie and a flower in his buttonhole. Across the road the Chief Post Office looked down on it all.

This was the hub of Auckland's tram service with convoys of trams going in all directions. There was a recording clock where motormen or drivers had a special key to record departure times. There was a green, tramway despatch box, which controlled all services. There was a central pole in the middle of the intersection with overhead wires going in all directions. By this pole stood a traffic points-man smartly controlling the never ending traffic flow. Also, there stood a relic of earlier years — a water trough for horses!

Anyway back to our tram, standing at the safety zone at the bottom of Queen Street apparently facing the wrong way. But no — it couldn't turn round for the return trip, so the driver would remove the handle from the front cabin and walk back through the tram. He would then reinstate the handle in the now front cabin (ferryboats operated almost the same way). Then he would get out, and he and the conductor would have the frustrating job of lowering one trolley pole and relocating the other one on the overhead wires. 'Clatter-clatter' as with outstretched hands the conductor would pull the backs of the slatted wooden seats forward to face the other way. With all aboard and ready, and the tram now vibrating gently with power, the conductor would give a tug on the overhead cord, a bell would ring, you heard a clunk as the driver released the air-brakes and our tram would grind through the points at Customs Street on the start of our 30–40 minute journey home.

A nice touch, unless you were in a hurry, was when a tram slowed appreciably to allow a wife, son or daughter to catch up and very cleverly hand their loved one — driver or conductor — a steaming billy or thermos of tea, etc. Imagine the impatience if it happened today.

So back to the Barn. Directly across the road was Wynn Falwell's establishment housing a barbers shop, tobacconist and billiard parlour. In fact from this barber's chair, you looked directly into the entrance of the Barn. There was just so much activity to watch. Of course, similar to all billiard saloons in those days, you entered by a side alley. But really, what a harmless place it was, and so convenient for the trammies. With petrol rationing, tyre shortages, lack of spare parts, 24,000 private cars were off the road by 1943. Indeed cars were impossible to buy — and those import controls lasted for many years after the war. As Graham Stewart wrote in *Around Auckland by Tram in the 1950s*, trams were just not a form of public transport. Driver and conductor were expected to do much more than just control speed and collect fares. They cared for their passengers with the solicitude of a First Class cabin attendant.

You all know Mrs Doris Sterling's plant shop on the corner of

Ngaroma Road at Greenwoods Corner. Well this building was there at the turn of the century when horse trams struggled past on the old Auckland/Onehunga route. When the newfangled tramlines gradually reached Greenwoods Corner in 1901–02, many elderly people complained they had to climb four steps to enter the building, then a ‘trading post’. So for ease of access, the whole road was raised up for their benefit. This building would have to be the oldest at Greenwoods Corner and the entrance is still flush with the footpath.

Trams were used for everything. They regularly carried freight and were used as travelling decorations for Royal Visits, recruiting, peace celebrations and carnivals. Special trams ran to race meetings and sports events. Eden Park had a special loop for 35 trams! Thousands were moved from the grounds in half an hour! Carlaw Park had a special siding. Three ‘free trams’ ran continually from Beresford Street to the Farmers’ Trading Company store in Hobson Street, with four at busy times. There were loop lines at Ellerslie Races, Alexandra Park and Greenlane Hospital and the Showgrounds. If you want to earn a safe bet, ask someone for the highest point above sea-level on the old tram or trolleybus route City/Onehunga. No it’s not Karangahape Road or Symonds Street area, but the corner of Onslow Ave and Manukau Road; a gentle rise from the City and a gradual slope to Onehunga!

My sister has just reminded me of the 5 o’clock rush, which we were lucky to survive. It was like the inside of an All Black scrum! Safety zones (!) and tram stops were packed and pandemonium ruled as your tram came to a stop — in fact before it stopped — as hundreds surged to get on board — even if the conductor cried: “Tram full.” Despite that sign on the platform ‘7 standing if full inside’, there was often a daredevil or two clinging to the bottom step.

To alight you pushed a buzzer, or someone near one did it for you. The driver would not start again until the conductor was sure the passenger/s had shoved through the ‘strap-hangers’ and was well clear of the tram. He would then give the overhead cord two pulls and we were away again. Apart from the trams, the foot of Queen Street was chaotic at 5pm as the ‘Shore-ites’ surged down

Queen Street in a wave, anxious to board the ferry boats in the same way.

I've always remembered that hopeful or hopeless sign in the middle of each tram 'Smoking at rear of this notice only'. When it rained, in a crowded tram with no windows open — apart from not being able to move your arms — passive smokers in the rear section were helpless victims of the wafting fumes. It is an unpleasant lingering memory. Windows, often very dirty, seemed to operate reluctantly on a ratchet system. A great tussle always ensued (in front of hundreds of pairs of interested and amused eyes) to make a maximum gain of four inches.

So in my time in the 1930s and 1940s, the tramcar was everyone's transport and Queen Street was the heart of town. In the evening peak between 4.15 and 5.15pm no fewer than 153 trams would travel up Queen Street, covering most of Auckland. There was an average of one tram every 23.4 seconds. During the same period a total of 111 trams travelled down Queen Street, an average of one every 32.4 seconds

All trams carried advertising, either on boards in front and rear just below the driver's cabin e.g. 'FARMERS NO INTEREST WEEK' — 'ASPRO — SAFE FOR HEADACHE & PAIN' — 'GIRLS WANTED BYCROFT' — 'USE SKOL — PREVENTS SUNBURN, PROMOTES SUNTAN' — 'VACANCIES FOR MILLINERS & LEARNERS — MK' — 'GET MORE FOR YOUR MONEY — MAPLE' — or on a long board on the roof running the length of the tram e.g. 'LONDON BATTERSBY HATS'.

The tram destination signs were on a roller controlled by the driver. They were very clear with street name and suburb printed in bold capitals, white on a black background eg 'CITY VIA TOWN HALL' or 'CITY VIA PARNELL' or 'CITY VIA ANZAC AVE'.

My last memory: if sitting by a window in busy times, you'd automatically flinch when a car or truck came abreast; sometimes it seemed only an inch away. But we lived through it all and tram-mies will always hold a special place in my memory.

## **Sources**

Graham Stewart, *Around Auckland by Tram in the 1950s*.

## 9 Making hay in the army

In 1939 at 14 years of age I, together with the family, all huddled around our little five valve Farmers radio, had listened sadly to Chamberlain's laboured and sombre announcement that we were 'at war with Germany'. Dad, ex machine-gunner in World War I in France, stated:

"Thank Goodness son, you won't have to go — with all the modern equipment they now have — the war won't last five minutes."

I never knew him to be so wrong!

But he had been so very right a few years earlier. About 1936 or 1937, when sitting on Milford Beach one day (where Dad gave us six weeks holiday every year) we saw several old ships from 'Rotten Row' in Auckland Harbour being towed to Japan. Yes we sold them to the Japs. That day Dad said "One day they'll come back in a different form." How right he was that time.

Suddenly our childhood days seemed over. After five enjoyable years at Auckland Grammar School, decisions had had to be made for the future and my entry into the work force. I had left with my Dad's frequent reference to an accounting career ringing in my ears, but I wanted desperately to be a journalist — sports preferably — and for a while I had won. Resplendent in a Donegal tweed, 'pepper & salt' suit from Milne & Choyce's, I started work next door for the *NZ Herald* in Miss Money's Reference Library where everything — and I mean everything — was filed under three different titles. On my first day I had a run in with (unbeknown to me) the Editor Leslie K. Munro for being too slow. (I got my own back later when I had to remove him from a function). The *Herald* was a pretty miserable environment then as there were few opportunities, and sport was limited in wartime. I then went to D. Henry & Co as some sort of cost clerk. David Henry, founder of

NZ Forest Products, employed a salesman Sid Jolly, whose order book was a penny notebook, so small were Forest Products sales in about 1943/44.

In the hot dry summer of 1943 when I turned 18, I became eligible for Compulsory Military Training (C.M.T.) and was soon doing my three months stint at Matata. I still have my well preserved pay book showing 7/6 a day.

My number came up and off we went to Papakura Military Camp. Here we were issued with and signed for an ill-fitting army uniform, blankets, palliasse, ground sheet, plates (2), mug, knife, fork, spoon (I still have my original receipt for these). I think that was the first and last time we were to don the uniform.

With so much farm labour away at war, manpower in 1943 was strained, so our entire period was spent on various jobs in the countryside but mainly hay-making around Te Aroha and Matata. I remember the Johansons' farm in particular. Fit and tanned, we just seemed to live in army shorts! At Te Aroha we were deployed in four-man tents on the racecourse among lovely trees and I'm always reminded of this site when watching *Trackside* on TV as the gallopers race around the corner entering the straight, and these same trees come into view. Every morning, army trucks lined up and dropped us off at farms around the countryside, and we returned the same way in the afternoon. Backbreaking work though it was at first, especially if on a fork at the top of a growing stack, it was fun and I can well remember that tasty food and thirst-quenching drinks brought down by wives and daughters. That summer was brilliant but did include a couple of wet days stuck in a scruffy tent, bored and playing cards.

With work in this area completed, off we went to our tent camp on a hill at peaceful, picturesque, isolated Matata. Perhaps then we wore our uniform and heavy boots as we marched on a steaming hot day from the quaint little rail station through the township of pub, hall and general store, along the main and only dusty street before the eyes of a total population of maybe twenty. We were a novelty for them. Little did they know then we were only farmhands in uniform.

What beautiful memories clearly remain of Matata with its bril-

liant white sand and blue ocean stretching as far as the eye could see, tranquil lagoon and bird sanctuary. It all seemed a million miles away from the rest of New Zealand and the tumult of World War II raging beyond.

In those three months I'd never been fitter, even if we didn't do much militarily. Again we built haystacks. The highlight of the day came in late afternoon as we fell off the trucks on return from a farm. We'd strip off, run across the road, through the lagoon up to our waists, through the lupins and greenery, across the hot white sand into the pounding surf which I remember as a muscle-soothing blue sea. There was, however, some army discipline and at 18 we were too young for the pub — even in Matata. But very often we managed to obtain a small keg, and what fun it was sitting in a nearby paddock in the moonlight enjoying a drink before lights out. There was an occasional dance in the local hall and a beautiful young Maori lass always set my heart pumping on these occasions. In fact she and a couple of mates knew when our trucks were due back and often joined us on our late afternoon swims.

But alas, it was over all too soon. I could have stayed at Matata forever. Fit and tanned we returned to Papakura and I was fined threepence for a lost dish when our gear was handed back and checked (I still have the receipt).

(We tried to identify where it had been some time ago, when my wife Nancy and I stopped there for an ice cream on the way to Ohope. Now the lagoon has virtually disappeared — just a few inches deep strewn with cars and caravans, stones and mud and devastation everywhere. How very sad. I had retained a love affair with Matata and was heartbroken. Storms, floods, slips and earthquakes have ravaged this glorious little township. It just looked so desolate I don't think I want to return again. But my memories of a never-ending summer of sunshine, hard work and fun, a fit body, hospitable locals, good mates with a bit of romance thrown in, will never fade.)

Meanwhile, after Pearl Harbour, thousands of American lads flocked into NZ (Auckland in particular) for rest, recreation and recovery during their battles with the Japanese in the Pacific.

They were blamed and praised in turn, but I'll never forget them for rolling back the Japanese at Coral Sea.

Right now however, my memories turn to nylon stockings, new brands of cigarettes, chewing gum, peanuts, hamburgers, milkshakes, swing and jive and the appearance of the legendary Artie Shaw at the Civic Wintergardens (but without wife Betty Grable). And we did forgive them for their takeover of our sports grounds at the Domain, Victoria Park, Hobson Park and One Tree Hill.

Their favoured sport of course was indoor basketball — no large areas required and games were quick, fast and exciting — but



*Epsom Indoor Basketball Squad, c.1950*

*Back: Colin Martine, Sandy McAllister, Jack Baker, John Tanner  
Front: Murray Tanner, Stu Dow*

*Absent: Don Stevens (Senior Varsity rugby player and later Mayor of Dargaville)*

their NZ opposition was never strong. However, the game here flourished; associations formed throughout NZ including the Onehunga Indoor Basketball Association with headquarters at their Drill Hall. Epsom decided to enter a team and we played there for three seasons about 1950 — and we did very well in their competitive competition. We walked or trammed to Onehunga and returned the same way, always stopping for a thick shake at the top of the now Onehunga Mall. Our team, all Epsom boys, lived within about a quarter of a mile from each other. It included Sandy McAllister (a dentist who rose to the top echelon of the NZ Dental Service) and Colin Martin, who was to become one of NZ's top saxophone players, and with Murray Tanner played in many radio and early TV bands. Murray, a lawyer, still playing trumpet also played for the Auckland Rugby team. John Tanner, also a dentist, was a fine All Black and Stu Dow was an excellent all-rounder — cricket, rugby, boxing. The Dow family features highly in Mt Eden history.

## 10 War service

After Chamberlain's broadcast of the declaration of war on 3rd September 1939 came the news of Pearl Harbour in December 1941 and the threat of Japanese invasion. Trenches appeared in back yards all over the city and the Sir John Logan Campbell statue was deeply buried; after the war there was some difficulty in finding it. The 'blackout' became the norm at night. Names like Home Guard and E.P.S. (Emergency Precautions Service) became commonplace. Lettuce, beetroot and potatoes (one crop came in at 14 tons) were grown in Potter's Paddock, and the Spud Paddock next to the Olive Grove on One Tree Hill was created. Anti-aircraft guns were mounted on Mt St John and their concrete mountings are still visible today in the pits on the summit. The Teachers' Training College in Epsom Ave was taken over, and in the grounds, 'The Bunker' was built as the HQ of the combined forces and later used by Civil Defence. The dispossessed College assembled weekly at the Crystal Palace in Mt Eden Road and classes were held at Mt Eden Normal Primary (now Auckland Normal Intermediate), whose pupils in turn had been dispersed to Epsom Normal Primary and other local schools. School children wore little bags around their necks containing cotton wool and corks. If there was any 'trouble' you were expected to run home with the cork between your teeth and the cotton wool in your ears!

The Cornwall Park Tea Kiosk was taken over for officers. Eden Epsom Tennis and Epsom Bowling clubs were taken over by the Emergency Precautions Service Organisation as fire stations. Six men slept at the tennis club with a vehicle laden with hoses, shovels and sandbags, and the caretaker slept at the bowling club. I still have my (bike) messenger's EPSO armband. Gas producers belching smoke appeared on some vehicles, and trams were blacked out. After Pearl Harbour, the Ellerslie Grandstand,

Hobson Park, Auckland Domain, Victoria Park and Cornwall Park became hospitals. Sixty-five acres of Cornwall Park land became an American hospital with 48 wards, 1500 beds, 123 buildings covering 367,000 sq feet, all interconnected with walkways 2,600 feet in length. By 4 February 1943 it had a staff of 62 doctors, 143 nurses and 500 other staff. Four days after opening, the first 500 patients — young Americans from the Pacific war were admitted. Later of course it became National Women's and Cornwall Geriatric hospitals until 1974.

Searchlights were mounted on Mt Eden. Patriotic shops appeared in Essex Road. Mt Eden School and the Dominion Road Methodist Hall were Aid Posts. The Mt Eden Tea Kiosk was for housing troops and the Home Guard trained in Mt Eden with broomsticks. Caves long closed in Three Kings and Mt Eden were shored up with timber, etc, and new entrances made so they could serve as bomb shelters.

As the Americans started to arrive, suddenly we had hamburgers, milkshakes, strange brands of cigarettes and chewing gum. Jitter-bugging and jiving appeared. Suddenly it seemed we had all grown up — and sadly, telegraph boys were seen more often. But I felt I was only marking time until my nineteenth birthday and my entrance into the Navy. Mum and Dad had promised to sign my Navy papers when I turned 19. I recall being by their bed at dawn on the morning of that birthday with form and fountain pen in hand!

A few months later after short spells at Devonport Naval Base and HMS *Tamaki* on Motuihi and at the American camp, Camp Hale just below the Cenotaph in the Domain, we were starting on our journey into the unknown aboard the old *Ruahine* with Captain Lettington. The *Ruahine*, built in 1909, was brought out of retirement as a troopship. We did have a troublesome journey to the UK — eight weeks in all. We plodded through the Pacific flat out at about 13 knots, blacked out at night and with two breakdowns, where we really were sitting ducks and watches were forever on the lookout for a periscope. Tiredness and imagination can play some funny tricks at times like this. Rumours — or buzzes as we called them — abounded on shipboard as to destination, ports of call, how the war was going, etc.



### *Coming through the Tropics*

On board we had a party of NZ wives going to the UK to join their husbands. In the tropics (which do funny things) one of our boys was on watch on the bridge. Captain Lettington barked out: "Signalman go up forward and tell those two to adjust their rug." Yes, one of these ladies and a certain Lieutenant Commander had dozed off after a moment of passion and the breeze had disclosed a compromising position. That same lady later wrote an article in the *Weekly News* entitled 'An eventful trip home', describing icebergs, storms, U-boats, etc but no mention of the tropical tryst.

After three weeks the scene suddenly changed. Our port and starboard lights were switched on for the first time in three weeks, sea birds became more visible, the colour of the sea changed and the atmosphere was charged. We entered a world of noise and sights and sounds. There were fog horns and sirens. Boats pulled alongside and the *Ruahine* suddenly became full of officials all carrying guns. Of course, we were at Balboa, at the entrance to the Panama Canal.

In my diary I have written pages about the Panama Canal — what an engineering feat — and our journey through it; the

jungle, the dark, sweating labour on the banks, all the locks we had to navigate etc till we reached, at the other end of the Canal, a steamy, immoral, dangerous, American troop-laden Colon, and there our engines stopped for the first time. We got leave. From here I sent home four pairs of those hard-to-get nylons. (They never arrived.) We ate fruit, drank milkshakes and had a huge meal at a huge American United Services Organisation. We had two leaves of eye-popping excitement in this strange world for an innocent 19-year-old.

Here is one long letter, written in instalments:

Dear Dad, Mum & Fay,

At last I have a bit of news.

Quite a lot has happened since my last letter & to describe all the events fully would take a whole pad. In one statement we have come half way across the globe and have come face to face with names that previously appeared only as names on a map. Admittedly we spent very little time at each stopping place, but it was just long enough to make me realize the importance of obtaining a good position later to enable me to travel again — in much better circumstances. We still have perhaps the most hazardous part of the trip before us — being only four days out of New York — but if this ship continues having the luck it is well known for, I will be posting this letter in about a fortnight.

A lot of the chaps have written pages of detailed account but I am either lazy or perhaps it's the thought that it would not prove very interesting to you — but I think I'll just write more or less an outline.

The Pacific Crossing was very uneventful and monotonous. The other letters will give you an idea of what it was like. A regular routine was installed & the days' duty-men consisted of one of the nine messes. The lack of fruit and milk was very noticeable & very often quite a few were out of sorts. I'm afraid, as always, a lot of time was wasted in playing cards, arguing & just sitting below thinking.

A ship like this as Dad will probably know, is a great place for 'buzzes' or rumours. Each person thinks his own authentic & the funny part is that every one laughs at them but has a secret inner feeling that it may be true. Anyway they abounded in the hundreds, particularly with regard to leave in Panama. Various dates were given as when we should arrive but March 21st was finally settled upon. On the evening of March 20th we lay on our hammocks with the comforting thought of 'land tomorrow' in our minds. At 4.30am the next morning our first ship passed quite close to us. It was the first lights we had seen for 3 weeks as ships so close to port had their navigation lights going. Every-one rushed to the guard rails. I don't know why — but it was a thrill to see it.

The 21st dawned very foggy but it gradually lifted & at approximately 8am land was seen from the crow's nest & at about 8.30 it could be seen quite clearly.

Then quite suddenly we seemed to come into a world of great activity. Small boats started buzzing around, ships of war, invasion barges, hospital ships, light ships, buoys were much in evidence on the surface, while fighter planes, seaplanes and birds of every description abounded in the air. Pelicans, a very strange bird, terns and others with forgotten names created a lot of interest. All this time we were being boarded by various official looking characters who came alongside in a launch & jumped onto the rope ladder, armed guards always followed them — in fact all the Yanks seemed to carry revolvers. We were rushing from port to starboard trying not to miss anything & one of the officers who'd been there before pointed out anything interesting. We steadily got nearer until the big buildings of Panama and Balboa were seen. The waters edge was fringed with palm trees, banana trees, coconut palms & other thick vegetation. The dark shapes of the cranes at the Canal's entrance reared up further inland. About now we took on an American armed guard to prevent sabotage in the Canal & also the ugliest party of workers I've ever set eyes on. They were negroes and their job was to work the winches & help in the engine room whilst we were being hauled through the lock

section of the Canal. They all had newspapers & sold them at an exorbitant price as we were so glad to see any news at all. More ships of all shapes or sizes came into view & by this time we knew we were going straight through & refuelling & rewatering at Colón. Now stories of Colon began to circulate & by all accounts it was not a very impressive or 'highly moralled' city, to be proven very correct later.

Then we entered perhaps one of the greatest engineering projects in the world. This, like New York, cannot be adequately described. It is just a great cut through the American continent in the heart of the jungle. It is American owned 5 miles each side & then nothing but thick jungle stretching south to Columbia & north to the central American states. The three locks, Miraflores, Pedro Miguel, Gatun, raised us a total of approx. 63ft altogether. We were pulled thru' this man-made section of the Canal by monkey engines on each side which travel on rails on a ratchet principle. All along her are darky labourers — sorry, labourers, praise them — anyway they moved slowly and lazily but evidently knew their job. American sentries are posted at regular intervals & the whole thing has the appearance of vastness or enormity. The employment & upkeep of the Canal numbers 12,000 & in the middle there is a monument erected in honour of those who lived, worked & died in the Canal. After this section you pass into the large lake in the centre & the Calibra Cut. This lake is very beautiful & lonely with thick jungle to the water's edge & little islands, thickly vegetated, quite near to the boat. The cut is just an enormous slice right thru' the hills. Dad can probably give you any other information on it as I must press on. Small American outposts are situated in little clearings the whole length.

By this time a note had been put up saying subject to the authority of the Post Captain, leave would be granted until 3am. Our hopes were raised ??

The lights of Colon became visible — a long wait followed whilst a ship came out of the first lock but eventually the big lighted arrow went over & we entered the last lock & headed

for the pier at Colon where we were tied up by our negros [sic] who were bawled at and shouted at by the pilot — who by the way they say gets £50 for each ship he brings them.

We finally stopped the engines for the first time at 9.55pm. Our C.O. formed us up & broke the news that all servicemen had to be off the streets of Colon by 10.30pm. If we cared to we could go ashore — now it was 10.05, the pier was very long — we had to show our identity cards at the gate & the centre of town was a good distance away. But we decided to go — and what a rush. A mad race along the pier, out the gate & then the wonders of Colon hit us. The noise, smell & bawdiness of the place is unbelievable. Well in the ¼ hr ashore our main idea was fruit & here we were introduced to the art of bargaining. However we were not too fussy & managed to get a pile of oranges & beautiful floury bananas at a ridiculous low price. We got back at 10.30 — ate our first fruit — & retired on the deck. Leave was granted at 10am the next morn until 4pm. Dressed in our whites we all trooped ashore and boy did we really have a day for ourselves. It was a beautiful day about 10 times hotter than ever experienced at home.

Well Derek & I stuck together — twos are far better than a crowd, & we reckon we saw & did everything worth while in that limited time. It is not exaggerating to say that every building is either a salon, cabaret, bar, bazaar, eating house or brothel. We walked around the town & were gazed upon in awe by many people as if we were from another world. One taxi driver had never heard of NZ & would not believe it was 7000 miles or 21 days away.

(About here I want to make an apology. In Colon & New York the only present of any value I bought was 4 pairs of nylon stockings. Other boys bought cosmetics, underwear, tennis balls & other things but honest, in both places I just never seemed to get around to it. I'll see what I can do later however.)

Well back to Colon. It is really nothing more than a grand amusement centre, a passing through place for all the different races of the world. It is impossible to realize a place like it

exists. The negroes [sic] in all the shops pull you in, implore you to buy & gradually lower their prices. Kids crawl round your feet with a tin of Nugget trying to dab some on your shoe so they can charge you, babies with distended stomachs run around in the nude, fruit sellers in every corner, women of doubtful reputation trying to entice you into their rooms, cabarets with blaring bands & swinging doors every 20 yards — what a place. Derek & I bought oranges, bananas, pineapples, mandarins in the morning and then went for a walk. Honestly I thought Freemans Bay bad but the section where the natives live is terrible — tumbledown, ramshackle, stinking, big buildings where about 200 families live together in squalor that has to be seen to be believed. Washing is everywhere. For lunch we went to the American U.S.O. & what a difference. Everything entirely American, Gym, a big canteen, a very large restaurant with American dishes, a great swimming pool & every other convenience possible. We had iced tea, steak & chips, pineapple tart, a glass of milk, rolls, coconut salad etc etc for 90 cents which is quite reasonable.

After that we had a game of ping pong then went & discovered the city again. We went thru' the better class living quarters called Cristobal. Long large houses of Spanish design. Everywhere were cars, more like boats gliding along, nothing like them have ever been seen in NZ. The negro taxi drivers are like kids, they go like mad. Blaring away on their horns & the air is filled with the kids balling [sic]. The shopkeepers shouting, juke boxes, bands & every other noise possible. Open air meat markets do not improve matters & after lunch when the natives were having a siesta we had a good look at their quarters. I had to smoke or the smell would have made me ill. Fat greasy men & women curled up anywhere & covered in flies would sleep there in the blazing sun. The native police have to be avoided. They get promotion on the arrests they make. They are short wiry chaps with revolvers & whips — the whips they use on the shoe boys to disperse them from tourists etc. The town is full of Yank servicemen but luckily no trouble ensued. I bought my stockings at quite

a nice place, They put over a good line but only you Mum & Fay can tell whether they are any good. One pair was \$3.50 and the other were \$1.75. The good pair is not wrapped up in the envelope. Fight for it. Liquor was in abundance, whisky, gin, rum, brandy, sherry & wines that have not been seen in NZ since the war started. At 3.30 we had our snaps taken in the main street & they were developed in about 2 mins & are likely to fade. [They never have.] We wandered back at 4pm to be told that we had leave until 10.30.

Well another dash back to town a swim & shower at the U.S.O. [United Services Organisation founded 1941 — Ed] a few games then we went to a bar and had a few bottles of Milwaukee Root Beer. In quite a good mood we went down a street called Cash Street where girls look at you appealingly & cry ‘three dollar’ ‘three dollar’. Steering clear of them we visited a registered house of ill fame. We wandered thru’ the building peering at girls reclining in double beds but there is no need to worry as Jack knows how to take care of himself.

After that Keith, Stal, Derek & I went to a show. Beer ordinarily costs 20c a glass but after you leave the bar and go into the dim, cleverly-lit cabaret & a waiter slides up to you, beer costs 50-75c a glass. That’s not all — a seductive, barely clad senorita idles up & sits on your knees. After a while she says “You buy me drinkee” and you either tell her to b..... off or go yourself. The show itself is good however & the artists there, & far beyond any type of NZ entertainment. We went to 2 or 3 of these shows then went back to a bar where we gathered around a Yank sailor at the piano & had a real good sing song. We payed [sic] a negro with a good voice to lead us. Back to the U.S.O. Picked up our parcels then down to a big Serviceman’s place called the Club House where we had a big milkshake & a bigger banana split & back to the boat to pull out at 6 the following morning.

Souvenirs were plentiful, every place did a roaring trade, lights noise, immorality & evil abounded. Sabotage is guarded against as it has reared its ugly head there quite a bit. Negros [sic] on the whole are not a high class native race — money can

be spent like water. These are a few impressions. But amongst this mad rush of living, there are a lot of beautiful churches & one glorious Cathedral. There are many little parks full of palm trees & colourful gardens where the water in the ponds evaporates as soon as it is issued. However I'd like to visit there again — perhaps next time with all of you.

Fully provisioned again we slipped out & passed the breakwater to be met by a destroyer which on account of a few recent happenings in the Caribbean was to escort us to New York. It zigzagged continually ahead of us & this old crate hit 14 knots which is about the fastest it's ever gone. The Caribbean was very calm & blue & the week it took was very enjoyable. A constant watch was kept & though it was mighty cold from 12-2 or 3-4 it made one realize what it's like in a N. Atlantic convoy as we are experiencing now. Brrrr! Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica, Bahamas, Florida slipped by & we got within sight of New York on Friday morn 30<sup>th</sup> March — Good Friday — to be contd in a later letter.

Hope it's been of interest folks & please show to Dawn & Colleen, Murray & Stew & anyone else interested as I just couldn't write this again to all of them

Your loving son

Jack

PS During the trip, many of the biggest ships built have been seen. If a war does anything it certainly makes one realize that things you just see in books & take for granted have to be seen to be believed that they really do exist

PPS Regards to Gran, Ray & family, Fred & family, Floss & Bob, Eileen & kiddies, Dud & family & apologize that I can't write to all of them.

Finally we passed Coney Is and the Statue of Liberty — and while we thought Colon was packed, New York harbour was a hundred times worse. There were Liberty ships, huge passenger ships, tankers, all anchored within 100 yards of each other. We sailed right up past hundreds of piers until we berthed at Manhattan.

I wrote home: "Tell Murray Tanner" (an Epsom boy in those days and still playing trumpet in Auckland) "I saw Benny Goodman, Louis Jordan, Cal Callaway, Frank Sinatra and Betty Grable." All this of course free of charge, courtesy of one of New Zealand's greatest women — Nola Luxford and her famous Anzac Club where we spent most evenings dancing with those lovely volunteers who had been doing the same for New Zealand servicemen in New York since war started. Another letter which survived says:

7 April '45

Dear Fay, Dad and Mum,

Well to start with, please excuse the writing as it's about 34 deg. which is 2 deg. above freezing point, and I can hardly hold the pen. To make it worse I've just come off watch and haven't yet finished shivering.

I'm sure I don't know where to start this letter, as many times I've said a thing is beyond description, but honestly New York is. It simply cannot be described adequately and I'm not kidding. The enormity, the well-stocked stores, the people, the clubs, the world famous names, the buildings, all over 100 stories, cannot be done justice to on paper.

Well last letter took us up to the morning we entered New York harbour. I was on watch from 6–8 and was just about frozen. We were up aft and could not see much at first. Luckily they called the watch off about 7.30 so we had breakfast and went up on deck to see as much as possible. All the buoys contain bells, and the slightest movement made these ring. 'Twas Easter Friday morning and the ringing of all these bells sounded strangely like Church. By the way, they condescended to give us 2 Hot Cross buns each for breakfast. Well, closer and closer we got till in the distance we saw the dark dim shapes of land drawing nearer.

At first it was just the same as Colon with boarding parties, small boats, planes, birds, but where I thought there were a lot of ships at Colon, New York was absolutely and positively

packed. Tramp ships, liberty ships, large passenger ships, tankers, all were anchored within 100 yds of each other, and this was just at the entrance. We later found out that it was like this right up to the numerous piers where we berthed at Manhattan. However, that is going too fast. By this time Coney Island — a magical name — was in view, with its enormous scenic railways and other pleasure contrivances. New York itself was not actually in view, but even where we were the outskirts were larger than Auckland. Various buzzes were going around and it seemed pretty sure that we wouldn't get ashore that day. Out of the many ships that surrounded us we picked out the one Roy Grainger travelled on and we heard that they were unable to get ashore at either Colon or New York on account of a case of smallpox or something. However they pulled out a couple of days before us.

A couple of hundred yards more and out of a thick fog a great crowd of skyscrapers reared their heads. They were all packed tight together and believe me it was a great sight to see these buildings — one or two higher than Mt. Eden — standing proudly there. The size of these buildings has never been emphasised enough in NZ. About now the engines stopped and here we were in sight of New York surrounded by ships, and the uncertainty of leave or departure hanging over us. Well, all day Friday we stayed there, everyone was extremely touchy, and honestly it was the most miserable and depressing Good Friday anyone could experience. Saturday dawned and hopes of leave, risen again, were soon dashed and we spent another day of cards, sleeping, arguing. That night a lot of bunting was put up on deck and a concert attempted. No ones spirits were too high; however everyone was glad of any sort of entertainment and it wasn't a bad show. Sunday dawned and what a raising of feelings when about 8 a.m. the engines started to pound again and the anchor could be heard coming up. We started to move. The shipping had thinned out a little, a convoy had gone and the tugs had been working all day and night taking the others up to one of the numerous piers where a space occurred. Some ships were two abreast and the

tugs were kept very busy refuelling and rewatering any ship that couldn't get in. We were refuelled in the stream and that was another thing to give us the feeling that we mightn't get ashore.

We were steadily moving towards the skyscrapers now and soon we passed the Old Lady — the Statue of Liberty — and edged into the N. Hudson R. and berthed at a pier there. New York really consists of the big main area of Manhattan Island which is 12 miles long and 2 miles wide. Here is the chief shopping area and is really New York. It is bounded on one side by the Hudson R., separating it from Jersey City, at the northern end by the Harlem R., which separates it from the Bronx, and on the east by East River which separates it from Queens. Well leave was to be given at 10.30 and we were all advised to make for the Anzac Club at 106W 56th St. Leave was from 10.30 a.m. Sunday to 2 p.m. Monday, and dress was either dickeys, black jumpers, and white or black hats. I wore all black as it was a bit cold. Taking my coat, little bag, with toothbrush, soap etc., Derek and I passed the official, declared the amount of dollars on us, showed our identity cards several times and made our way down the long, roofed-in pier until we reached the barrier where we were searched thoroughly and reminded by a gent in uniform that the boat was at Pier 15 North R and NOT TO FORGET IT as there were about 10 Pier 15s. Passed the Hoboken ferry and we were on the road.

When I say road I mean elevated highway. It was a broad, sweeping stretch of road with bright yellow taxis zooming along in all directions. I'll say now, that when you had managed to cross any street in New York you felt that you had really done something worth while. At first we were doubtful whether to walk or take a cab to the Anzac Club. Well, what a ridiculous idea — I think we thought we were in Auckland. We hailed a cab and piled in and gave the address.

Well what a drive — along broad elevated highways under which other broad highways ran with ramps connecting them. I don't mind saying that everybody had the wind up. It was like you see in the pictures — he did 60 most of the

way, missed cars by inches, came to screeching stops at the lights and manoeuvred the cab through the most impossible looking openings. Passed enormous signs advertising shows, films, circuses, Pepsi-Cola, which seems a sort of national drink, Coca-Cola, etc. etc. Passed hundreds of piers all numbered, crowded with ships, then up a side street about as big as Queen St., passed crowded apartments with kids playing baseball in the streets — the downtown area — then down 56th St. to the Anzac Club. By now you have realized the stupidity of our walking idea. Up the stairs to the Anzac Club where we were met by Nola Luxford herself. The Anzac Club is a large room luxuriously furnished with wash-basins and other conveniences in another room. Here is everything that anyone could need — billets arranged, free tickets issued to shows, meals arranged, tours arranged, mail, cables and parcels attended to. Nola Luxford is a great woman and her work should be made more public. She is attractive, with a corker personality, and could not do enough for us. Here we picked up maps and other pieces of literature dealing with New York and I enclose a couple of them. Here we met Aussie airmen, Canadian and other interesting characters. Nola has several helpers and she gave a little speech of welcome, explained the plan of Manhattan which is divided from end to end by Avenues with the world-famed 5th Ave. in about the centre, and off 5th Ave. run all the streets starting from 1st Street about the Southern tip near Washington Square and going up to about 215th Street near Harlem River.

They are either, e.g. East 56<sup>th</sup> Street or West 56<sup>th</sup> Street — depending on which direction they run from 5th Ave. Actually New York in all its enormity is very easy to get around so long as you use a bit of c.s.

After this little explanation she advised us what to do in our limited run ashore. She advised now, a walk down 56th St. to 5th Ave — along 5th Ave passed [sic] Rockefeller Centre which we could tour if we like, and stay a while on 5th Ave to watch the famed Easter Parade — theme of Irving Berlin's song 'In Your Easter Bonnet' etc, which could be heard issuing from

halls, churches, homes all through Easter Sunday — after this a trip to the Empire State Building, take in a show or film, then back to the Anzac Club about 4.30 for a light tea, to arrange billets and entertainment for the night.

Right, we left the Anzac Club and into the street. We decided on the right way to 5th Ave and it's a hard thing to do as you seem walled in on all sides and just don't know where you are. Once on Fifth Ave it started. You might have read that it was a record Easter and that it started as early as 9 a.m. Well by the time we got there it was about 11.15. Naturally fully intending to see a procession we were sadly mistaken, for the Easter Parade is nothing but an opportunity for the people of New York and visitors from neighbouring states to show off their best clothes and mainly their hats — and what clothes and hats. The hats are mostly alike for the parade — small with flowers etc. and these people walk up and down 5th Ave all day.

About here I'd like to say that in New York everything runs continuously, films, shows, tours etc, and Sunday is no different from any other day. What a crowd, millions of them, of all races and creeds. The churches run continuously and the crowd is shepherded in by police — they were queued up when we saw them. I've never seen such a display of fashions, colour and well being in all my life. A cameraman on a moving camera photographed the crowd, and it was truly American. Well we wallowed in this splendour for about an hour and were gazed on in awe by most, as, if New Zealand was unheard of. We must have looked like country boys, standing on the edge of the footpath and gazing up to the top of these enormous skyscrapers. However, we moved on and were pushed, more or less into the street with the most magical name in the world — BROADWAY, with Times Square right before us. Broadway surpasses all said about it — such a concentrated gathering of shows, films, lights, chromium, splendour, it is impossible to realize. It certainly is the Grand White Way. It's colossal!!! Times Square, the centre of Broadway is a seething mass of Servicemen in search of entertainment. in close proximity are

the 'Stage Door Canteen', 'Duffy's Tavern', 'The Stork Club', 'Jack Dempsey's Bar' and hundreds upon hundreds of milk bars, cabarets, picture theatres, etc, etc. Tell Murray that whilst there I saw Benny Goodman, and Louis Jordan, Cab Calloway, Frank Sinatra and Betty Grable were all there. I could go on for pages — pictures like 'A Tree Grows in Brooklyn' and shows like 'Oklahoma' had been running for years, still drawing capacity houses and booked for months ahead.

Times Square, named after the 'New York Times' which comes out about every 5 mins, has a news serial on a screen high above the buildings. Candy, Planters peanuts big shop, ice cream, chocolate, abounded. People like Vanderbilt and Rockefeller were gazed on in awe as they strutted on down 5th Ave.

Well Derek and I took all this in and tried to decide where we'd go, but unfortunately time was against us and we had to be content with only a few places. Dinner was the next item so looking up our pamphlet we decided on the famed U.S.O. down E.65th St. So along 5th Ave we went with the enormous Empire State and Rockefeller and Woolworths bldgs high above our heads. Distance is measured in blocks and we had about 20 blocks to go and passed famous shops — Ciro's etc etc — and eventually came to 65th St. and the enormous U.S.O. where possibly more servicemen have passed through than any building in the world. We seemed to be in a different world and it was the first time we felt anything like civilized for about 6 weeks. Lounges, showers, facilities of every type, hospitable people who will probably drop you a card, could not be bettered. A wash and down to the restaurant where the service and surroundings far surpassed Milnes. Scrambled eggs and buttered beetroot, apple pie and cream, coffee, rolls and crackers eaten in the true American style of fork only, all on the house, were eagerly accepted. I would have liked to stay there all day with so many good things on the programme — dance at 1.30, Broadway entertainers, concert etc. etc., but we had to push on.

At the U.S.O. about 2,000 could sleep and breakfast for 50c each. Down 5th Ave again and right along to the Empire State Bldg which is the tallest bldg in the world. I'm getting fed up with 'colossal' 'enormous', 'unbelievable', but they are the only words to adequately describe New York. Well the Empire State rears its head 1250' into the air and contains 102 floors with on top of this a long mooring mast for zeppelins. Many think New York ugly, but to me it was just the opposite and the buildings are modern and beautiful. Once in the portals of the Empire State you are in a different world. The square base contains large shops, and alleyways as wide as Queen St. Queues were lined up to pay for the tour, but Servicemen were free and we were ushered into one of the many lifts all run by girls. The door was closed and our ride to the 80th floor was accomplished at the rate of 1000' per minute in a silent smooth lift. Here we had to change lifts and were whisked to the 102nd floor where we came onto the large observation roof. Here I came upon — I really mean this — the most amazing sight I've ever seen or it could ever be possible to witness. There spread at your feet was New York — cars like pin pricks, people indistinguishable — buildings of 50 or 60 storeys far below you — 5th Ave and Broadway stretching out straight and narrow for miles — Manhattan clearly defined — outlying districts in a pall of mist. To look straight over the parapet turns your stomach upside down. What a sight:

On the roof was a large restaurant, bar and souvenir shop. We had a truly American choc sundae each, and then unfortunately had to leave. To realize the commerce and business carried on there, muddles the mind. Leaving there we went up 5th Ave again and into the richest St. in the world — Park Ave. Manhattan contains no houses, all the people live in apartments and hotels, of which there are thousands. Park Ave is very beautiful, running beside Central Park, a huge area with pools, zoos, walks etc right in the centre of the city. Here, hotels with uniformed doormen and grand limousines pulling up every minute are numerous. Waldorf Astoria, the biggest and most well-known is an imposing affair.

After that a stroll through the park full of couples, ice cream and popcorn vendors and peanut sellers, and those 'Shabby Old Cabbies'. From there we went back to the Anzac Club after buying sweets, milkshakes, ice cream, biscuits and everything else we'd desired for weeks. Once in the Anzac Club and the majority of chaps had gathered, tea was served which consisted of cakes with icing right round them and very rich and spongy, cookies and biscuits. After tea we fixed up our billet at the YMCA on 23rd Street and got an invitation to a supper party from 5-9, and also a ticket to what so far ranks amongst the greatest thrills of my life that I'll tell you soon. Downstairs, and out again down to 6th Ave where we had two free reserved tickets to — 'THE NEW YORK METROPOLITAN OPERA HOUSE' — that famous name that has only been a name to so many people. We got there at 5.30 and were ushered into a beautiful softly-coloured Hall with a ground floor and about 3 tiers. It was just as in the pictures. It was packed. Derek was keen to go but I didn't think I'd enjoy it, but honestly, folks, as I've said before it was a great thrill. — Very often over 1ZM we've heard a ½-hour show called "The Metropolitan Opera presents" compered by Milton Cross — listen for it. Well, we were ushered in to two of the best seats in the whole building amongst glances from all, and at 5.30 we were on the air and we were the audience that Dad is so inclined to disbelieve. When the compere shook his arms we clapped and when he stopped we stopped. It was the final of a contest for the two best voices of 1944 and Thomas Hayward, tenor, and Robert Merrill, baritone, dead-headed and both received a career in the Met. opera and a cheque for \$1000. They sang individually and together and it was a very wonderful half hour.

After that down to 8th Street where we had this invitation from the Engineering Women's Club, a little organization that gave us a wonderful tea, salads, meat, cake etc, and we had a very interesting discussion till we left at 9. Here they pin your name on and the girls of America that I met are the most intelligent and good-looking that you could wish to come

across. From here Derek and I took a large double decker bus — seems to be as high as our highest building downtown — to Times Square where we just wandered round and had a dashed good time. Had a few milkshakes, ice creams, bought a heck of a lot of crisp nuts of every description, went to quite a few shows — any of the cabarets or theatres were miles superior to NZ, and went to the ‘Stage Door Canteen’ which was overdone by Hollywood in the film but which is very good. See the film if possible as it gives a good idea of the atmosphere of the place.

Leaving there we went to the U.S.O. again for a while and then took a cab back to Times Square again. Don’t overlook the fact that the side streets which are really main streets to us, are also full of restaurants and places like the world famed Carnegie Hall, Madison Square Gardens, Central Station and Philadelphia Station, Library, Museums, Zoos. Of these, the Stations are supposed to be out of this world. We visited a bar where drinks were very plentiful and cheap and a drink you ought to try Dad is ‘Rum and Coke’ — short for Coca Cola. I believe it is a very popular song now — have you heard it? We had a couple of sherries and feeling in a good mood we hung around Times Square till 2 a.m. although a curfew has been imposed now making all shows and pictures stop at 12. Film shops, developing in 2 mins, record making places, juke boxes and honky tonks, orange and hamburger bars remain open, and it is then that the people gradually and magically disappear. We had a picture taken — you may have it by now — but they only last about 6 months. After that we went to a subway station (which I’ll describe later) and went to the YMCA about 3a.m. What a great show that is. Large clean dorms and bathrooms, entertainment and eating facilities all for 50c a night. A shower and to bed. It was absolutely great to get into a soft, comfortable, clean bed again, and we slept like logs till 8 a.m. when we got up and dressed and took a subway to the Anzac Club. (In the early hours the cleaners get to work and believe me they have a job.)

Here I posted two photos and also sent a cable; Full of good

intentions about shopping we first decided to visit Rockefeller Centre which I think should be the 8th wonder of the world. It is a city in itself. It is only 12 acres in area, but its daily population is 153,000 exceeding the official population of all but 55 cities in the U.S.A. It is in the heart of the business and hotel district of Manhattan with railroad and subway end bus terminals running to the door. It consists of 14 bldgs, 12 are office bldg, four of which are skyscrapers. Rain or shine you can visit there and tour its 3 theatres, 2 miles of shops, all connected by sub-surface corridors on the ground floor, while also enclosed in its walls is the famed Radio City, the NEC, the New York Museum of Modern Art, the N.Y. Museum of Science and Industry, newsreel theatres, skating rinks and the Radio City Music Hall — the world's largest and most beautiful theatre where you seem to walk knee-deep in carpet and which accommodates 6,200. 75,000 workmen were employed in building the Centre and it is a great tribute to American architecture. Rockefeller Centre needs a letter to itself, but try and realize the magnificence of the place. The Music Hall with murals all around and brilliant lighting effect. The whole block is a bigger city in itself than Auckland. It's wonderful. Leaving there I tried, but was unable to invest in a subscription to a few periodicals. Next, to Woolworths, the second highest building, which sells everything. A restaurant on each floor and things, Mum, that would be the envy of any NZ woman. But again I must apologize in not buying much as I didn't get around to it. It is harder than you think to part with your money when by yourself and not advised what to buy. Woolworths have a great name and fully deserve it. Across to a 5 and 10 cent store where we stocked up on candy and then for a stroll through Macys, very much like Woolworths, and then for a walk down the East Side that appears in so many films. Apartment houses next door to each other, with corner drug stores and railed steps all going up to the door, kids in breeches playing baseball in the street, and street vendors of every description. Pawn brokers and second hand shops where all sorts could be bought that would surpass a leading store at home. Records were plentiful and I should have bought a few for Murray but I couldn't get them home very well.

Then to the Hotel Edison for a corker lunch, where beautiful girls were introduced to each chap. Dancing and games were thoroughly enjoyed and at half past one Derek and I took a cab and were treated to another fast and thrilling ride to the pier where we were thoroughly searched again and arrived on board at 2.

Everyone was satisfied, a few were still adrift, and arrived in various stages of intoxication. Yarns were swapped, purchases examined, clothes — thrown anywhere when dressing — were sorted and we settled down to the old life of buzzes and routine. In our old clothes we lazed around and turned in early and finally pulled out about 9. Much organization was needed and we slipped out passed the Statue and Staten Is again about 12. On deck in the morning and what a wonderful sight greeted me. In all directions, all over the ocean, lay ships and I counted as many as twice Dad's age. So here we are 6 days now out of New York — about 32 deg now — too cold to venture on deck and about 10 days to go. Last night I had the 4-6 watch and my extremities just about dropped off. It was very very cold, but very starry and clear and I was thinking of home quite a bit. By my calculation it was about 8 p.m. Sunday and I could just picture you all, either at Church or sitting in the good old breakfast room — Dad scratching his head reading, Mum sewing and Fay curled up on the sofa reading. It was a very pleasant picture and I was woken out of it by my relief, looking as I, like a man from Mars in Balaclavas, big gloves, long oilskins and boots. All the same I'd like another balaclava as my ears absolutely freeze.

It was good to get back in the old scratch (hammock) and I slept soundly till 8. Had brekker at 8.5 and have been writing most of the day.

This afternoon there were 5 large explosions, passengers rushed on deck in coats and some with bags and of course life jackets, as these must be carried at all times. Depth charges had been drooped and a contact had been made, but except for a lot of buzzes we are in the dark.

Impressions of New York: The world's best city for a

Serviceman's leave. Everything plentiful including cars. The cars are beautiful creations — like we're going to have 'apres le guerre' Dad. A hive of industry pulsating with the breath of living. Wonderful clothes. Hospitable people. Food plentiful except perhaps meat and butter. People very fond of childish things like comics, sweets and drug stores. Entertainment super, Hotels palatial with the average rent on Park Ave \$500 a month. Cosmetics a great industry and used plentifully and skilfully. Lower class places like the Bowery very happy districts — no real slums. The transport is wonderful and I'll try and describe it a little. First is the cab — hundreds of them cruising about that simply have to be hailed. Quite reasonable, and very fast — as described. Buses — Greyhound buses — beautiful big affairs — stopping every block or so — will take you anywhere at a very reasonable rate; trains — very like ours but faster and cheaper. Finally the thing that created the biggest impression on my mind — the subway. Built far below the surface and got to by stairs — they are a speedy, safe, cheap and accessible way of travelling. Down there these coaches speed along regularly and they are distinguished by a big letter on them, e.g. the A train, the B train etc. They connect to any of the streets and there are a few routes running parallel so you never have to walk far to a station. In the station you simply drop your 5 cents in a slot — pass through the revolving gate and step onto your train. The train only stops for about 10 secs so you have to step lively. Then you are whisked along at about 50. You can travel up to 20 miles for 5 cents as the subways run out from Manhattan under both rivers and connect with the Bronx and Brooklyn. A subway station in 5th Ave is a great affair comprising another little city, with bars, photo places, some with a newsreel theatre, souvenir shots and darkie bootblacks. We spent about ½ hr there and really enjoyed ourselves in a bit of an amusement alley. The other stations are big lonely places with the usual peanut machines, bookstalls, and coca-cola ads. A subway is a wonderful thing and is definitely needed in Auckland.

The night we spent there, there were 2 murders, 2 hold ups,

an attempted suicide and a fire, and this is not an unusual night for New York. The police force — all with revolvers — number many thousands and it is a thrill to see the police car — siren whirring — tearing through the streets. Other impressions — the escalators in all the buildings — the many negros [sic] — the places that we didn't go to, e.g. Le Guardia airport, Anzac Garden, Wall Street financial district, Grant's Tomb, Harlem, Chinatown, etc etc — they will have to wait for another visit that will surely come.

Well folks that's that . . . .

The reason for our New York stay was that our good ship *Ruahine* had been waiting to become a small part of a huge convoy for the Atlantic Crossing. Delays were caused because of information received that limpet mines had been attached to the hulls of many ships so divers had to be sent down for inspection. Finally! What a sight we made as over 60 ships of every description gradually moved off. When we reached the open sea, in every direction all you could see were columns and columns of ships. Every ship trailed a paravane from the stern which cut through the water and at night, especially, caused a flash of phosphorescence to glow and help the ship behind to keep its distance. How often to tired eyes, a paravane was mistaken for a periscope. We headed North to escape subs until huge icebergs became a danger — and then a great great storm hit us in terrible fury. I was on watch, tied to a rail, as this letter describes:

13 Apr 45 (still at sea)

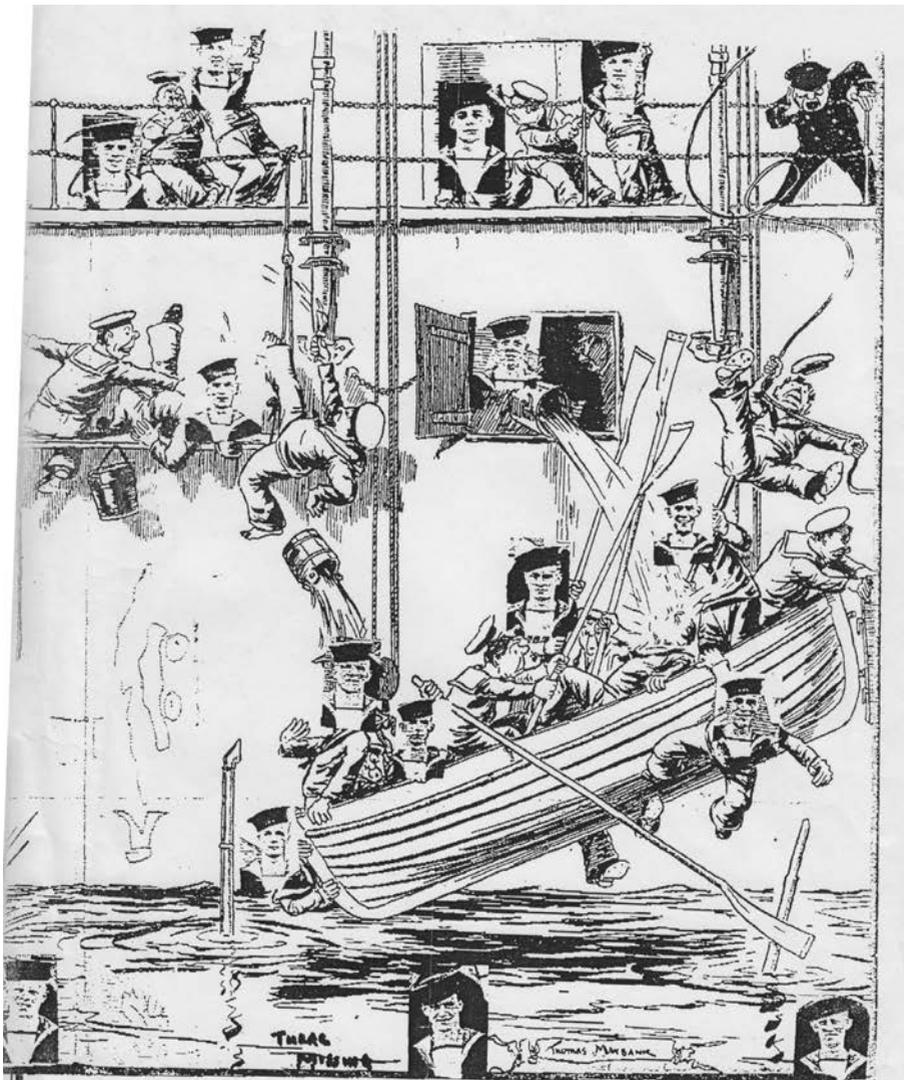
Dear folks,

Just a note to bring this letter up to date. As you will see by the date it is one day after my birthday. As a matter of fact I was just dozing off last night, when someone mentioned the fact that tomorrow was Friday 13th and that was the first notion I had that it was my birthday. The main reason for this I think is the mix up we've had in the last few days. We were unlucky enough to run into an extremely large storm.

Tuesday was a bit rougher than usual but we turned in as always about 5.30. The ship was pitching and tossing somewhat and then, about 10.30, a huge wave gushed through the closed port somehow and drenched a chap sleeping on the table, several kitbags, and a lot of coats. Then this happened to all the other ports. The ship was lurching heavily — attaché cases, lifejackets, books, toilet gear, fell off the racks and spilled all over the deck (floor). The waves were now breaking over the Main deck and also over B deck, going through the ventilators, and coming down into our quarters. Cups, plates, were breaking wholesale while kitbags and other movables were slipping and sliding everywhere.

Water was now pouring down the companion ways (stairways) and water was nearly 2" deep in some places. Hammocks were swinging sickeningly and to stand up and move around was often impossible. The whole sleeping quarters were in an absolute chaos. The ship was creaking and groaning; water was pouring in everywhere, and I'm sure a lot of stomachs didn't feel too good although I felt fine. Kitbags were lashed to poles, walls, tables etc, and attaché cases etc secured. That night no-one slept and the morning dawned with everyone bleary eyed and tired. What a sight greeted us on deck. 1/14th of the convoy was in sight. The waves seemed mountains high and they were breaking very often over the bridge, drenching the lookouts and those on the bridge. A biting wind was blowing and driving hailstorms came over frequently. The bow of the ship would go down deeply into the wave and the old stern would go far up till you thought it was never going to stop and the old ship was at an angle of about 45 deg. The few other ships were being tossed around like corks.

It was amazing that no accidents occurred in the night as with the pitch darkness and mountainous waves, visibility was nil. For breakfast the only thing we had was boiled eggs as it was impossible to cook anything else. Tea was already milked and sugared to prevent spilling and you had to cling on to everything while also trying to eat. All through this I had



**ROBINSON'S DISENGAGING GEAR**

*The cartoon "Life at Sea"*

the pleasant thought of going on watch at 10 a.m. Securing everything again I put on two pullovers, pyjama coat, overcoat and oilskin and balaclava and climbed up amidships. Luckily I could shelter a little from the wind and rain behind the gun. The whole ship seemed to pivot around me. Several times I thought it was going to stand on end, but back she came with a racing of screws that shook the whole boat. The whole horizon was a mass of white foam and huge waves. My feet and hands were frozen and I had to hang on tight to stop being thrown forward or back. However I was relieved at 12. Everyone retired to their hammocks that afternoon and I know I slept till 5.30 despite the movement. Wednesday night there was a very slight improvement and Thurs. morning was still very stormy. It improved during the day however, but there was still about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the convoy missing. Escorts had their work cut out, rounding up etc. As a matter of fact we just put our nose into the weather and rode it out whilst waiting for the other ships. They kept arriving in ones and twos all day and it wasn't too good just being a sitting target. However, when a few more arrived we moved off still with very few escorts. Thurs night was much better although the barometer was still very low and Friday (today) dawned a very nice day, with still a lot of ships arriving and still a lot missing. Rearranging is going on now, and the majority of ships look very weather beaten and battered around.

Our port of arrival is now changed to London instead of Liverpool. Sailing through the channel is going to be a great experience — I hope? It was a great experience but I'm glad it's over and won't be sorry if the weather is good all the time now, especially tonight as I've got middle watch. The thing that amused me was seeing chaps walking along the deck seemingly defying the law of gravity.

Everyone worked together however, cleaning out and drying up — there were very few sick — luckily — and the old ship behaved pretty well,

Yours etc etc

Over 60 ships had disappeared — not one in sight — just dispersed. Again like a sitting duck, we just sat and waited until the convoy gradually re-gathered. And then a few days later at midday lunch, a terrible roar and the motor tanker *Empire Star* about 300 yards abreast of us was covered in terrible black and blood red flames and smoke. Horribly we could hear the screams as a few of the seamen on the bow tried to lower the remaining lifeboat into the rapidly spreading burning oily water. They were engulfed. *Ruahine* had to go hard to starboard to miss the spreading flames. The subs always attacked at the change of watch before the new lookouts' eyes were accustomed.

Then another ROAR — American liberty ship *Cyrus H McCormick* was hit on the far side of the convoy. Our escorts, destroyers etc buzzed about dropping depth charges but the convoy plodded on. The rule was to never stop. As we forged ahead, for over an hour we could hear the noises of ammunition going off from the stricken ships and the depth charges. That night, despite the cold, we slept on deck. It was so comforting to learn that if we fell into the Atlantic we'd last about five seconds in the freezing water. A few years later we learned from U boat archives in Cuxhaven, Germany, that this sub was destroyed by American aircraft flying out of Oban, Scotland.

As the UK approached we left the convoy with trepidation and steamed along up to Tilbury through a channel littered with masts etc of sunken vessels and with the White Cliffs of Dover confronting us somewhat on the left.

From London to barracks at Plymouth at HMS *Raleigh* and then a couple of weeks of leave in Scotland and our training started. Tytherleigh & Co were the Farmers' Trading Company London Buyers and Shipping Agents. Twice when out of money I was allowed to visit them and borrow £5 on one occasion and £2 on the other. They fixed it up with Dad through their next draft on the Farmers'.

Well enough of the Navy life apart from a couple of interesting events. Twice I was chosen for a NZ Services Cricket team — one at Guys Hospital and one at East Molesley but my efforts I recall didn't have much influence on the game. The other memory is again in the cold Atlantic. 'Away sea boats crew' was sounded.

So, smartly over the railing our seaboat crew tumbled into the life boat. The crews on the falls — or lowering ropes — took their positions and lowering started OK on an even keel. Then all hell broke loose as one team on the lowering gear lost control and we fell perpendicularly into the Atlantic, hanging onto seats and the side to stop hitting the freezing water. I was stuck as one of the heavy release pulleys fell onto the boat and just missed my leg (or I'd have been history) and pinned my wide Navy pants to the boat's bottom. Luckily I had a Navy knife and cut myself free — and ruined the pants. Those up high on deck of the Dauntless tossed three knotted ropes down — useless — so then down came a rope ladder and with much difficulty we climbed up and up and survived. Our reward? We were made to suffer with those who caused the accident — to run around the deck a few times carrying a heavy shell case.

The other major event was a very narrow escape. About 10am one day we were walking down Kingsway with the dome of St Pauls in the distance when we heard a V2 rocket above. Suddenly the motor cut out — which was a danger signal. Next, down she dived and we heard the explosion as she hit. The ground shook and dust and debris was catapulted into the air. But luckily the impact was a couple of blocks away from us.

During the war, Covent Garden was turned into a huge dance hall — so large that three big bands played simultaneously in three sections of the hall. Joe Loss was one of them and one band didn't interfere with the other. Every dance nearly was a 'Ladies excuse me'. It was great.

## 11 When peace broke out

Sixty-two years ago, at 10am on Monday the 7th May 1945, a mate and I caught the 'Flying Scotsman' back to London after a great leave in Scotland at Perth, Aberdeen, Inverness etc, and as I wrote in a letter I still have, 'Boy — could that train fly!' We had three stops, at Newcastle, Darlington and Newark and after having to sit on our suitcases the whole way, we pulled in to Kings Cross at 6.15pm.

We could feel the excitement in the air as we arrived at the YMCA and then news came over the old radio at 8.30pm that tomorrow would be VE Day — and Night; Germany had surrendered unconditionally!

I experienced amazing scenes and celebrations for the next 48 hours. I was a couple of hundred yards from Churchill when he gave his famous 3pm speech broadcast all over London the "war with Germany has ended" — and London went mad with bonfires, searchlights, rockets, rosettes, bunting and balloons. Millions flocked out onto the street singing and dancing — 'Knees up Mother Brown' — 'Booms-a-daisy' and those beautiful Vera Lynn wartime songs were booming out over loudspeakers all over London.

Strangers were kissing us — giving us chocolate and one kind lady pushed her two free 15/- tickets into my hands for Evelyn Lane playing in the 'Three Waltzes' at the Princess Theatre in St Martins Lane. I recall well dating WRENS and WAAFS to meet at midnight at Trafalgar Square subway. Discretion won out as midnight came and went but somehow, I've forgotten how, we did see Evelyn Lane and I did get to a corner of NZ Services Club to dash off a letter home.

Unfortunately, maybe, London almost ran out of beer about 10pm both nights. Certainly the NZ Services Club did. Untold amusing incidents still stand out. At 2pm somewhere near



*The NZ Services Club — now the Charing Cross Library*

Piccadilly Circus — a mate still in Christchurch reckons it was the Midland Bank building in Shaftesbury Ave — was a balcony with a flagpole protruding at about 45° with a large Union Jack proudly fluttering — it was a calm night weather-wise. Up the façade and onto the balcony went our lightest rating — Derek Hume — perched on Arthur Hughes and my shoulders. You can guess the rest — with the aid of his Navy knife and a cheering crowd — plus courage from earlier beers and good balance — Derek secured the flag — and then a voice froze us:

“Ullo, ullo, What have we here?” But this typical London bobby saw our NZ shoulder flashes I think, and quickly and quietly added, “Stick it up your greatcoat lads and take off.”

Derek had obtained his smaller flag earlier and more easily on this eventful night so handed this one over to Arthur — later of Hughes & Cossar, All Black fame, and Auckland Racing Club President, etc. He was a great boss of Jean Bell and Aline Andrews and business associate of Des and Olive Walker and Bill Miles. Jean did all the secretarial work for our eight reunions over the years. Sadly Arthur died a couple of years ago and his wife Jean, through son Wayne and at Arthur’s request, passed the flag on to me. And I still have our treasured flag 65 years later. It flew at our last ever reunion at Hastings.

Another amusing incident that magical evening. You just went with the crowd as everyone got shoved and pushed. It was like a large rugby scrum except everyone was happy. Somewhere near a crowded little pub there were shouts of “this pub has beer but no glasses”. Our mate Mason Nelson — all 6’ 4” of him — spotted over the heads of the crowd and across the road, one of those suspended lamps with a large glass bowl. In fact it was probably the first time in six years this lamp had been turned on. Mason tumbled to the fact that this bowl would hold a glass or three. By various acrobatic acts on shoulders again, wing-nuts were undone and it was passed overhead to the bar with a 10/- note tucked inside. Back it came precariously overflowing to us thirsty ratings — but what a heck of a job getting our lips around its large lip. It did the trick but our greatcoats again absorbed a fair bit of it. Back it went overhead with a request to return it later with thanks.

My letter home describing this event was printed 50 years later in 1995 in a little booklet printed by the Charing Cross Library to mark the 50 year commemoration of VE Day — as the Library building was now on the site of the former NZ Forces Club where we all spent many happy times. The letter concluded: ‘I lost the others and wandered around on my own and managed to find my way back down Piccadilly to Park Lane at 4am and there was a huge bonfire in Green Park with a happy crowd, some trying to get some sleep, all around it. Here I crashed for a couple of hours . . . . We have to report back to Plymouth tomorrow and won’t get any leave for a long time.’ But we also had leave on VJ night three months later.

Now please . . . try to cast your minds back 30 years earlier than VE Day to a different war, to the trenches of France. How my sister and I, like a lot of you I bet, regret not asking our Dads for more details of their war experiences. Dad never volunteered much information — and I’ve forgotten whether it was at the Somme, Paschendale or Ypres — but he did tell us that during a lull in action, an old German plane approached the British and NZ lines and from the cockpit fluttered an object attached to a long streaming tail. Dad was a machine-gunner and a pretty famous footie player. He had the quickest legs in a dash to retrieve the mystery object. It had a little packet at one end, still in good condition, and inside a note simply with the word ‘Cheers’ written on it. The note is still inside the packet but in poor condition and I promised sister Fay who is the keeper of this treasure, that I wouldn’t open it.

To conclude, here is a copy — although I still have the original — of a poem which my Dad’s mother and his eldest brother of four, handed to Dad when he left for France in 1916. Their father had died when Dad was five and this eldest brother took responsibility for them all, with three serving overseas. Dad kept the poem right through France and when, 30 years later, our packed old troopship *Ruahine* was about to edge away from Queens Wharf, Dad handed me an envelope. He was allowed right up to the ship with a pass from his shipping and customs connections. Later as we rounded North Head and left Rangitoto behind, not knowing what lay

ahead, I opened the latter and there was the poem plus a letter, as regretfully, we had had our ups and downs. In 1999 when our son left for almost four years away, with only an occasional trip home, I too gave him a copy of this poem — which he still keeps.

For Honor and For Her

Somewhere a woman, thrusting fear away,  
Faces the future bravely for your sake.  
Toils on from dawn till dark, from day to day,  
Fights back her tears, nor heeds the bitter ache.  
She loves you, trusts you, breathes in prayer your name.  
Soil not her faith in you, by sin or shame.

Somewhere a woman—mother, sweetheart, wife,  
Waits betwixt hopes and fears for your return.  
Her kiss, her words, will cheer you in the strife,  
When death itself confronts you, grim and stern.  
But let her image all your reverence claim,  
When base temptations scorch you with their flame.

Somewhere a woman watches, filled with pride,  
Shrined in her heart, you share a place with none,  
She toils, she waits, she prays, till side by side,  
You stand together when the battle's won.  
Oh, keep for her dear sake a stainless name,  
Bring back to her a manhood free from shame.

By Margaret Scoutton

In December 1945 about 3000 NZ servicemen returned home on the large troopship *SS Mooltan*. We boarded at Liverpool, having been in an advance party to prepare the ship. Unlike our trip over we had a trouble free voyage to Suez, when to our amazement we were told *Mooltan* was returning to Taranto, Italy, to pick up NZ troops. We anchored in the stream as there was an epidemic raging through Taranto. On the way home many lost or won a fortune at two-up or crown and anchor.

About five years ago when swapping memories on the Epsom Bowling Green, a member confided he was Chief Engineer on the *Mooltan* at that time. Alan Mills — passed away since — with wonderful stories I never got to share. When I joined the Remuera Bowling club I finally found three members who also returned on *Mooltan* — Ken Baker, Judge Ron Gilbert and John Bates.



*Naval reunion group — Christchurch, Feb 2005*

## 12 Civilian life

Returning home after my tumultuous experiences, and not yet 21, I was restless and couldn't settle, so after a few weeks with the family, I answered an advertisement in the *Herald* for a reporter on the *Northland Age*. I got the job and in February 1946 I packed a suitcase with cricket and footie boots, and caught a train on my way to far off Kaitaia (I didn't even know where it was).

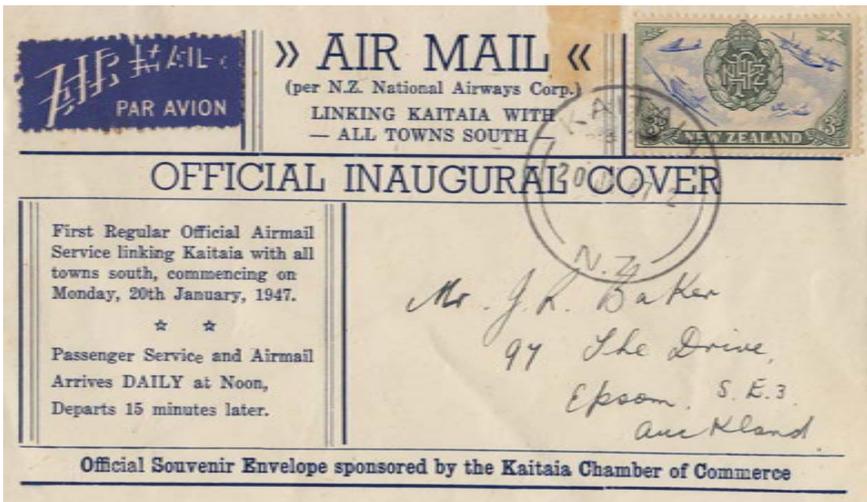
A few hours later I got off at the cowboy-looking railhead at Otiria Junction among guys on horseback and old dusty beat-up trucks. I found *Age* owner Bruce Berry and his blue Chev and we started our hazardous journey to that beautiful, isolated township of Kaitaia. It started with a long dusty car trip through the Mangamukas and on to Mrs Ramsay's pretty strict sober boarding house where I started the most enjoyable nearly two-and-a-half years of my life. She was a God-fearing total abstainer. But I managed.

My reporting job was done on shanks' pony or pushbike — a Farmers' Monarch Special Dad freighted up to me. What a wonderful period of work and partying and socialising in the beautiful isolated Far North. Kaitaia just after the war had an eerie feel about it. They were still a little weird and wary of strangers in town as that could have been the first port of call for a Japanese invasion. Rumours abounded: strange lights off the coast; mines washed up on 90 Mile Beach, etc. On two assignments only did Bruce lend me his Chev. Famous drover Ken Lewes reported he saw a mine washed up when driving cattle down the beach at dawn. A drive to Ahipara and up the beach — and the mine turned out to be a fishing buoy.

Another time Mrs Ramsay's old phone tinkled at tea time to report a mysterious light plane had just landed at Waipapakauri — I was to meet with two strange men by their plane. However



The 'Northland Age' office



The 'Official Inauguration Cover', 20 Jan 1947

suspicion soon disappeared. These two men were Auckland identities — an MP, Mr H.T. Morton, and pilot Bill Endeen. They were looking for Kaikohe — the other side of the Mangamukas. I arranged accommodation and in return Endeen gave me a horrible acrobatic flight over Kaitaia in his Rearwin Sportster the next morning.

It was then nine hours by car from Auckland — if you didn't get stuck in the Mangamukas as the *Herald* bus always did. I covered the area on my trusty Monarch Special. The *Age* came out once a week and for the big news I was usually scooped by the *Northern Advocate's* reporter living in Kaitaia. However one day a few months later, we scooped the world! On 20 January 1947 we covered the commencement of the Kaitaia — Auckland Air service. This was because our paper came out on a Thursday afternoon and the opening events happened that morning. The ten-seater Electra Kahu touched down at 11.55am. I had to work quickly. This day we put out a special afternoon edition. The circulation was 900 once a week when I started and twice a week by the time I left.

What a great time it was! Work — cricket — rugby at Te Kao, Te Hapua, Ahipara etc plus a bit of romance. My mates Cyril and Gordon Wild and Wally Hoddle and I brought the greatest little rugby team in Kaitaia's history — the Kaitaia Greyhounds — to Auckland on a nine hour bus trip. They were 16-year-olds who had never seen a ship, a train, a tram or large buildings. They were billeted — me at home with two of the boys. We played an early curtain-raiser to a big rep game at the Showgrounds and won brilliantly. Old Kaitaia rugby-ites still remember this team! Kaitaia publican and sponsor Norman Boyd bought 50 copies of the *Age* with my story — to send to his Aussie mates.

In Kaitaia I had my 21st birthday with some of the best mates you could find; some are still remaining. I was sad to leave — but I think my sober landlady might have been glad to see me go. Years later the *Age* printed my reminiscences over two editions headlined: 'Jack Baker arrives with cricket boots and bike for two years of sport, romancing and work.'

In the late 1940s, I managed about three months in Australia fruit-picking (and sunbathing) with my good friend the late Bruce

Nutsford. Bruce had just qualified as a lawyer. The Nutsfords lived in Goldsmith Road and Mr Nutsford snr was a lawyer and one of the founders of the old Epsom R.S.A.

I well recall our eight or nine hour trip over on one of the old flying boats from Mechanics Bay (still have my advice booklet about return tickets, etc) to Rose Bay and the trip back home on the *Monowai*. We based ourselves around Griffiths in the outback of NSW. For some reason — escaping tax or something — I recall we had worked under fictitious names. As time went on and from talk around the huts we lived in, we soon realised the danger of this and it became quite a worry. I do hope our ‘serious crime’ was not a forerunner for Griffith becoming the drug centre it is today. After the heat and hard work, we enjoyed a couple of weeks loafing around Bondi before coming home. We stayed at the Cape May Private Hotel, Bondi Junction. In reflection, it must have been cheap!

Back in NZ, I thought I owed it to Mum and Dad to settle down (but how wrong it proved to be). I thought I’d packed enough excitement into 21 years so I applied for and got a position with one of the new great international organisations as Agricultural Chemicals Rep for ICI — Imperial Chemical Industries — which had just commenced in NZ. There I stayed for 15 years; and was covered incessantly with 245T and 24D (Agent Orange) as we sprayed gorse, thistle, buttercups, etc.

The present publicity given to the health problems of Vietnam War veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange is timely and warranted but I believe another side of the story of the early history of 245T and 24D in NZ should also be told. Unfortunately no statistics are available. It’s the story of those storemen, farmers, spraying contractors, technical officers, company reps and pilots involved in the early packaging, marketing, and application of these products to gorse, thistles, blackberry, willows, flat pasture weeds, etc, in the early 1950s prior to Vietnam. I, like many others, cannot prove whether a health problem, luckily checked early, was attributable to the many seasons I had been working with 245T and 24D. But, I’d be most interested to know how many of my contemporaries are still around and to learn from the families

of those now gone, who were involved in those very early days of marketing the products.

The market for 245T and 24D in the late 1940s and 1950s was highly competitive. In the Waikato, Auckland and Northland areas alone, there was my firm ICI(NZ) Ltd, Ivan Watkins, J H Barbour, and Yates — all marketing their products through their appointed agents or distributors, mainly stock and station agents like Dalgety, NZ Loan & Mercantile, Alfred Buckland, Wright Stephenson, North Auckland Farmers, and Newton King, under such trade names as Butoxane 245T, Ethone 24D, Weedon 24D & 245T and Stantox. This material was available to users such as farmers, spray contractors and government departments, in one, four, ten and 44 gallon drums.

F M Winstone entered the market later and caused controversy by cutting the price by selling direct to the user from 44 gallon drums. Garages, etc, were appointed as outlets and the material was decanted into the buyer's own container. An overall price reduction certainly resulted.

So, you can see from the above, just how many people actually handled the stuff from manufacture (which I haven't even mentioned) till application (with its resulting spray drift) is unknown. Competition was fierce and as usage extended, so did interest in the method of application. Gorse, blackberry, thistles and willows were the major problem and flourished in areas not always accessible by hand-held spray pumps, etc. In the mid 1950s, ICI technical staff worked with James Aviation and their pioneer NZ Helicopter pilot Bob Scott of Rotorua, to develop application of these products by helicopter, while Ivan Watkins of New Plymouth favoured fixed wing aircraft.

We ICI reps and Ivan Watkins reps were fierce competitors but were known to share a jug in the same country pub at day's end. Long winter months were spent with our distributor's rep talking to farmers and government departments with gorse and other problems and booking work for the summer months. ICI made arrangement with Elynor Rudnick of Rudnick Helicopters, Bakersfield, California to supply us with a suitable machine, a Hiller helicopter pilot and crew for many summers.

Once we had the helicopter on the job, spraying usually took place from the calm of daybreak until the wind got up at 9 or 10am. We reps flew between jobs seated next to the pilot with the bubble off and just a seatbelt between us and the ground. We had to guide the pilot from job to job often over rough country, while the ground crew with their water tanker way below, wound their way over pretty awful tracks to the next farm.

In these early years I cannot recall the warnings — if any — on the labels of the containers, but I do know, and regret, that we were certainly reckless with the stuff. I can recall almost on a daily basis, sitting on the back of a truck somewhere between Tuakau and Kaikohe, eating sandwiches with unwashed hands, measuring and decanting 24D and 245T by primitive means into suitable containers. Spillages occurred of course at all times — when filling the tanks or the helicopter, from drift from its spray booms, from many other places. In fact we virtually lived with the stuff.

However it was not only out in the field where exposure was common. Our factory staff, season after season, daily decanted the material into suitable containers to fill our distributors' orders. It was just a normal occurrence then, certainly with no knowledge or thought of possible consequences. Protection from breathing the stuff, gloves or protective clothing was never considered. The same applied to the thousands of farmers, contractors, etc, in the late 1940s, 50s and 60s who season after season were exposed to 245T and 24D. Occasionally a 'Letter to the Editor' might express concern.

So those ex-servicemen and their very real concerns with Agent Orange have not been alone. But obviously for so very many it's now too late but the probable dangers of the material well and truly existed in NZ before their overseas exposure. I often wonder if many of my compatriots from those early days are still around — and healthy.

During this time I survived a couple of horrific car crashes, one caused by alcohol — and I've never drunk and driven since. I was also involved in an unsolved murder! I'd spend the winter booking spraying jobs with our agents, Dalgetys and Bucklands,

ready for the helicopters ICI sent each season from Bakersfield in California. One season they sent a pilot called Grierson Jackson — an alcoholic whose wife Alison (also an alcoholic) followed him out. They created a ton of problems, including one late night when they caused a fire in the Tuakau Hotel. The manager threatened to throw them out and while trying to get the spraying programme back on track, I spent hours in the bar of the Tuakau Hotel revising schedules until I crashed my new Vauxhall 14 at Drury and woke up two days later in Middlemore Hospital with Mum and Dad at my side. Dad would never let me see my car. No-one else was involved and I was swathed in bandages for weeks. Somehow I was exonerated by ICI and even got given a new car (Vanguard). I also got a nice letter the following year from Rudnicks for the success of that operation, but the scars on face and arms remain with the promise never to drink and drive again.

While I was in hospital, Jackson's wife went missing and it was alleged that he had murdered her. A leg was found on Henry Whitford's property at Te Kohanga, Port Waikato and at one stage police asked me if I could identify a cast of the foot. At this stage, Jackson was under police supervision at Auckland Hospital. Somehow he was discharged and a few days later a fellow guest heard something suspicious in a room in a boarding house in Park Ave. Jackson was found after horribly mutilating himself and drinking a mixture of cyanide and sherry. Mrs Jackson was never found and it still remains an unsolved mystery!

For three years I was the resident rep for ICI in my beloved Northland where I had a very interesting bachelor flat. But I didn't know then that Nancy lay a few miles further north in sleepy Motatau, with her seven sisters and two brothers. They all attended the tiny Maramaku School and were contemporaries and neighbours of the Going boys of All Black and rugby fame.

Her father Stan arrived in NZ at 18 years of age as a farm cadet fresh from his 450-year-old Christ's Hospital School at Horsham — where they still wear knickerbockers! He married a Maori lass from the historic Henare and Wynyard families and a cousin to Sir James Henare. Stan went on to own and manage Maori Affairs farms way back in isolated areas. He never drove a car or a tractor,

but lived on horseback! Their large family were all born at home with assistance from their lovely grandparents Peene Wynyard and Pae Matire Wynyard. A distant neighbour was Bella Prime, mother of Dalvinus Prime.

I first met Nancy at one of these local farms when I called as Resident Rep in Whangarei for ICI. Years later we met again in



*Annette*

Auckland and married. Annette, our daughter, is a senior insurance executive in Brisbane for Marsh Pty Ltd and has been there for 30 years. She is a top rock climber, skier, kayaker and tramper. Our son John is a widely travelled rock band manager, entrepreneur and historian. For five years he travelled the world as road manager for the Detroit band ‘White Stripes’, then one of the world’s top bands. Unfortunately, grandchildren — nil!

Then for about 15 years on and off I had a couple of Co-op Taxi licences and did part-time sports writing in Auckland; another story; another place, but not without its thrills and spills.

Life was not all work. I played both cricket and hockey until I was 40 plus. My cricket career started with the Auckland Cricket Association’s Parnell Cricket Club where I became good friends with Merv Wallace, one of NZ’s greatest batsmen, and later with YMCA who disbanded when a district scheme was introduced. Then for nearly 20 years, I played under the now defunct City & Suburban Association at their Auckland Domain HQ. My teams there were Ponsonby/Blockhouse Bay and Green Lane.



*Johnny*

Cricket lovers reading this might recall the one and only Charlie (Chas) Kerr of Green Lane. What a character and

mighty all rounder! Merv Wallace always reckoned Charlie should have made the great NZ 1939 team to the UK of which Merv was Vice Captain, even at Charlie's good age. I was there when Phil Warren, then Auckland mayor, sprinkled Charlie's ashes over his beloved No. 1 wicket and renamed the Domain Grandstand the 'Charles Kerr Memorial Grandstand' with a suitable plaque beside the front door. Many times I've had to advise media of the stand's correct name.

In 1942 I played my first senior hockey match for Grammar Old Boys on Hobson Park because of the shortage of players during World War II. I played for Grammar First XI in the morning and Old Boys in the afternoon. I went on to play, coach and select for Grammar Old Boys for 25 years — of course in late years slipping down the grades somewhat.

When possible I played as much tennis as possible at the old St Andrews Club. It is looking much the same today — down that somewhat hidden path — as it did in 1937 when at the age of 12, I joined its large number of members who had to wait on a Saturday afternoon for every second or third game for a hit, such was its popularity.

A long bowling career is still in progress!

My one and only appearance on TV was about five years ago on



*Bebe de Roland*

the Holmes Show as a result of our search for former NZ ballerina Bebe de Roland who went to London with her mother on a scholarship just prior to the declaration of war. Stuck in London, beautiful Bebe then became a voluntary worker at the NZ Forces Club, serving us spam and sometimes sausages and mash during the day, and dancing at the blacked out 'His Majesty's Theatre' at night as the leading ballerina.

So, as a result of calls on good old Radio Pacific's 'Open Country', three of us, Reay Mackay (a former bomber pilot of 149 Squadron, Lakenheath), Mona

Stanton (a New Zealand Red Cross nurse in London for four years and author of *Four Glorious Years*) and myself, started a search. It ended about 18 months later when we finally found Bebe in Victoria, Canada. She had married a Canadian pilot. To cut it short, the Holmes Show linked us up with Bebe, Reay and Mona in Wellington, and me in Auckland, and she talked with us. Lisa Manning was the reporter. It was a romantic story, for when Reay was on leave, he always attended the ballet and Bebe would always say at curtain-call: "Would that NZ airman in row so and so see me after the show." After the war, Bebe visited Sydney with a show called 'Follow the Girls' and met up with Mona again. Unfortunately both Reay and Mora have now passed away.

## 13 The mystery of Wilding Ave

Late one Friday afternoon in 2004 I left the phone feeling the same as I did in 1950 after seeing Gloria Swanson in *Sunset Boulevard* — with shots of her decaying home and ageing self.

I'd just had a ring from Rena Rosenfeldt (formerly McIndoe) who I'd worked with at the *Herald* in 1943. Her daughter Christine Hardy and husband Colin had recently purchased a property at 22 Wilding Ave, Epsom. Before the Balmoral Road/Alba Road intersection was realigned in the early 1970s, Wilding Ave was a 'No Exit' road running off Merivale Ave. It came to an end at the rear of the bottom ground of Epsom Primary School and if it had continued it would have come out into King George Ave. When the regional road was created, the start of Wilding Ave disappeared, part of Bloomfield Ave became a 'No Exit' street off Merivale Ave and the remaining two sections of these two roads were joined together and renamed Wilding Ave, leading off The Drive.

As a kid playing footie in the 1930s on Epsom School's bottom fields, that area fascinated me. A few old houses with enormous sections and large tracts of open ground — it seemed a mysterious cul-de-sac with cows and all.

Well Rona thought I might be interested in, and be able to help with, the background of No. 22 Wilding Ave. Little did I know what mysteries would eventuate when I rang Christine — who said: "Come straight down." Our charming hostess met us at the front door. A modest road frontage belied what lay behind. We couldn't believe our eyes as a different world unfolded. It was 'Sunset Boulevard' all over again. The back section seemed to stretch forever, joining up with properties which faced onto St Andrews Road to the west.

Dominating everything was a beautifully shaped oak tree that arborists suggest is about 75 years old. In 2004, Colin and

Christine were discovering new treasures daily. Much of course, was not in pristine condition, like Gloria Swanson, but the Hardys were well into reconstruction. Details would take much too long so I'll just mention a few of the features though I doubt if imagination could do justice to the actual view.

There were two fountains, one an upright, water-spouting seal in the centre of a pond with goldfish. There was a waterfall, the water flowing over an attractive stone background, while adjoining these was an area paved in beautiful blue mosaic tiles — for dancing, it's believed. A neat small grassy mound hid tanks for the water supply to all these amazing features. Colin then was already bringing them back to life.

Throughout this fairyland, punga and other native trees, plants and flowers flourished. From the back door and across a small lawn to where the excitement starts, were large concrete footprints covered by arches overgrown with old fashioned climbing roses, to keep guests dry.

And everywhere — just everywhere — taps and more taps fed by an underground system which must have been an early Epsom plumber's delight (or nightmare). Old copper pipes were even embedded into the trunks and branches of the trees! One can only guess what this magical area must have looked like in the evenings — lit up with fountains playing, mosaics sparkling and the oak tree rustling.

The driveway up the side of the house terminated in a long concrete garage with space for three or four cars, narrowing towards the rear and sloping down until it was almost underground, and hanging in there was the derelict old switchboard with various switches labelled 'Bar', 'Fountain', 'Waterfall', etc where the host could change light patterns and water features at will. What a sight! With much to see and mysteries to solve, we returned home that Friday, heads spinning as to how we could find some answers for Christine and Colin.

And then, about 9pm that evening, it came to me. Dozing, I was back in the 1950s in the old Newmarket Hotel with my usual friends. There was this man — he had a butcher's shop in Karangahape Road and the story was told that he was one of

Auckland's biggest bookies with a beautiful wife and a wonderful little fox terrier called Ritzio. Of course I recalled them. I'd stroked this dog as I'd met this man on walks.

And then I awoke with a start. It was all so clear. I'd shared a tram with this man many times. We'd even get off at the same stop at the top of Rangiatea Road and walked down the road together — then I went to 97 The Drive and my friend to Wilding Ave and many times he had invited me to 'dos' at his home, but I never went!

It was now so obvious— but his name eluded me and I wanted confirmation. And yes, at the end of Wilding Ave (the house still there) lived the Speechley family. Mrs Speechley made tea at the Epsom Bowling Club for 30 years. Mr Speechley and son Keith used to watch me play cricket at the Domain for many seasons. So, on to the phone book — only one K. Speechley. Keith remembered me well AND he also remembered 22 Wilding Ave. The occupants he said were always entertaining — but unlike today, with no disturbance to neighbours! Their name was Reid; he was a large hospitable man with a lovely blond 'bird' and a friendly foxy 'Ritzio'. Was the Reid's first name Les or Laurie?

And then Keith surprised me with other recollections of little Wilding Ave. I already knew the Harris family lived there. Their daughter Ethel married All Black Percy Tetzlaff who just died in early October 2009. Next door were my parents' great friends the Spearys, but I had not realised that three of my future friends once lived there too. Former famous NZ tennis player Alan Burns and wife Viv built there. All the Burns kids went to Epsom School and the family lived in Onslow Ave and had a hardware shop in Newmarket. It seemed quite a coincidence that the Burns built in Wilding Ave as it was named after Anthony Wilding (1883–1915), NZ Tennis champion who won Wimbledon titles from 1907–14, and with Norman Brookes also won the Davis Cup for Australasia.

Keith added that the Horne family lived in Wilding Ave. I'd played tennis with Val Horne for many seasons at the old St Andrews tennis Club — still there after 80 years. Val and his wife, a former well known NZ athlete are the parents of former NZ Cricketers Phil and Mat Horne. I rang Val and yes, he too remembered the

Reids at No. 22 — always entertaining but never any problems. Val added that there was a former Miss New Zealand living next door to the Reids — Leonie Main — and to my further surprise, Val said Keith Lamb had once lived there. He was one of Auckland's largest chemists with a shop on the left of Karangahape Road, just before the Queen Street intersection. An Epsom bowler, Keith later owned a large home in Coronation Road.

Keith Speechley also recalled the huge property and orchard at the rear of their home and lovely old Maori lady with a full moko — a Mrs Allen — smoking a pipe and weaving kits. Also in Wilding lived Mr Sam Hardwick, the manager of the Regent (now the Lido) picture theatre for a few years.

So that is the position now. Did the Reids build No. 22 and was he responsible for these magnificent features? I strongly feel 'yes'. A man before his time, a wealthy, generous, friendly gentleman who loved nature — trees, birds, flowers and people. But perhaps because of the 'bookie' activities all the magnificence of the back area of his home was hidden by an unpretentious street frontage. Was he ever caught and convicted? The answers must be out there somewhere.

PS Christine rang later that evening to say, when pulling up the floorboards in their bedroom, they discovered a solid combination SAFE! What lies inside?

2010 sees me in the unexpected role of author. Remembering old friends and school mates now gone has always given me great pleasure. Now, after years of giving talks and jotting down assorted memories of places and persons, I am suffering the pangs I guess all authors must endure — wondering what important things I have omitted.

My thanks go to Nancy for her patience and support. To Jeanette for reading my handwriting and to the Epsom & Eden District Historical Society Inc for this totally unexpected opportunity to organise my ramblings into what Jeanette christened a 'Baker's Dozen'.

Epsom has changed over 80 years but still has a distinct identity — comfortable, green, accessible and friendly.

Long may it — and my memories — last!



