



THE BIRKENHEAD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

(Incorporated 1979)

PO Box 34419

Birkenhead

Auckland 0746



November 2012 NEWSLETTER

John Malcolm – saying our goodbye

Sadly we report that John passed away recently after a long illness. John has been a long time member of the society, a current member of our Committee and a past Vice President. In addition John has done some really important work, an example is the electrical wiring for our Museum. John was farewelled at Zion Hill Methodist Church. It was very large funeral in which the Fire Service appropriately formed a large part. White Gloved firemen carried John's coffin into the church, several firemen spoke about Johns long involvement with the service and a vintage fire engine bore the coffin away. John's coffin was carried into the church by white gloved firemen and taken from the church on a fire engine. At the service the speeches talked on the strands of John's life of service to family, church committees, fire brigade and historical society. I was privileged to speak on behalf of the Historical Society and provided some historical anecdotes of Birkenhead "as was" which included my boyhood sights of John stepping onto the fire engine as it paused on the Glenwood Road hill when heading to a Birkdale callout, and the special story about how the combined trades at the Sugar Works were able to fix a broken door on the fire engine without the fire chief knowing.

So long John – we will miss you.

Brian Potter



We would also like to acknowledge the resignation of Tom Cotter one of our Vice Presidents. Tom has been a stalwart in helping to re-organise display material and with the Museum inventory. Tom is committed to many ongoing projects and there are only 24 hours in the day!! Thank you Tom.

A Story of Change

This story is a little unconventional but it seems to me that history should be fun. It is about the 1960's and there is no doubt that we all lived through those events so here we go. Some might say the 1960's were only yesterday – yes only half a century ago.

We are all influenced by the events when we grew up and so, as people of the 60's, it's good to reminisce a little.

Perhaps we will recall the good times. We might even remember things we thought, or wished, we had forgotten – that's life.

It seems that the 60's started out quietly and ended up as a time of massive change, almost as an over-reaction to the more placid 1950's. As the Beatles were to be singing in 1969 "we're having a revolution and we all wanna change the world". It seemed that all at once we had nations wanting their independence, rise of feminism, the drug culture, cultural taboos being stripped away, music and film taking on a more aggressive style, rise of the peace movement and San Francisco flower power. Our political giants were changing too; Britain's influence was waning, the EEC was gaining in power. The US was starting to be mistrusted, Russia and China were still locked away behind their curtains.

Hold that word "revolution" in your minds please.

The 60's saw NZ a quiet place politically. Keith Holyoake (Kiwi Keith) was Prime Minister for the whole decade which was a never to be repeated feat, the world wanted to buy every pound of butter we could produce and every side of lamb we could grow yet by the decade end Britain was moving to join the EEC which put trade shivers down our spines. At the decade start we were still clearly British and loved Royal Tours yet by the decade end these had lost their novelty.

In his 1960's song, Cheryl Moana Marie, John Rowles sung of a "sleepy little town where soft breezes blow". While he was singing of his Maori miss his sleepy little town could be Birkenhead. Back then Birkenhead was undergoing its own revolution. The bridge had opened in 1959 and the land agents were busy slicing up farmland for sections. The Birkenhead Parade of Homes was open at Levesque St to attract people to the area. Television had arrived and people gathered around Continental TV in Mokoia Road on late shopping night to watch the black and white flickering images. The sure business of the Kiwi Cinema was in trouble. Further up the road the RSA Hall Friday night dance was like never before – different and louder music, different dancing. There were new faces on the street; we no longer knew everyone. The single Four Square supermarket was overtaxed, the small Self Help, Blue and White and Mr Emsons IGA couldn't cope anymore. So we got a Bonanza Supermarket, the name provided by the TV series of the time. It had its own parking on the roof; all one had to do was haul the purchases up the stairs. Birkenhead Point was a backwater and the ferries no longer called. The yellow NZ Express trucks had started to become a traffic problem as they now carried all the refined sugar instead of the lighters.

Although our children still attended Birkenhead Primary, Birkdale Primary, and Northcote Primary as their parents had done these schools were bursting at the seams and prefabs were being moved in.

We still played in the summer sun but now caught the Birkenhead Transport buses to the city instead of the ferry. At least the bus colour was still the same. Our sugar works ash paved roads were breaking up under the traffic load and a tarsealing programme had begun.

Revolution was occurring across the world.

In Africa some 32 countries gained their independence, during the 60's, and they were not always better off. Some political changes were to have decades of effect e.g. 1969 saw overthrow of the Libyan monarchy by a group of officers led by a Colonel Gaddafi.

Revolution of thought was occurring too. In New Zealand radio was still state controlled until the Radio Hauraki pirates managed to establish a floating station in the Colville Channel in 1966 – 1480 KHZ Top of the Dial. Most TV content came from US and Britain but we had a few local shows such as Graham Kerrs Galloping Gourmet. Westerners were starting to experiment with Eastern religions – the Beatles at the forefront in this.

And yet in some places revolution of thought was brutally suppressed such as in the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 to suppress a more liberal communist government where the Prime Minister was taken to Moscow for questioning.

Relations between Russia and the West plunged in 1961 when construction of the Berlin Wall was commenced. Pink Floyds popular song "another brick in the wall" reflected this decades later.

We hadn't yet acknowledged that we would need to be friends with Germany and Japan following the abomination of World War 2. Some ex servicemen as good as stated that a camel would have to pass through the eye of a needle before they would drive a Japanese car.

Importing into NZ was strictly controlled. If you wanted to buy something not on the shelves you had to find someone with overseas funds. New car ownership was restricted to those with overseas funds.

The Vietnam war had a profound impact on NZ life. The US inherited a French war in early 1960's, started out with a small contingent and by late in the decade had a huge contingent plus several other countries involved, including NZ. The war became widely unpopular and the focus for a growing protest movement reflected in the music of the era. It was clearly no longer acceptable for a NZ government to commit NZ troops to battle without much wider discussion. The peace movement became stronger here and worldwide adopted this symbol.

Fashion changes arrived and thank you Mary Quant for the mini skirt. One of my workmates fell over a Herald box looking at one of those. Twiggy showed us a new generation of ultra thin models.

Our cars changed. At decade start we were driving mainly British cars with a few American "yank tanks". A typical carpark might show Morris 1000, Ford Prefect, Humber 80, Singer, Ford Zephyr Mk2, Vauxhall Velox. By decade end there were many more Japanese cars.

We decided to change our currency to decimal, accompanied by a massive publicity campaign "10th of July Next Year".

Our interest in heritage was growing. We recovered the treasure from the Elingamite, and relics from the Boyd.

We had our tragedies too such as Wahine (1968), Kaimai Air Crash (1963), and Inangahua Earthquake. Our literature style was changing. Maybe the writer of the decade was Barry Crump who seemed to have a never ending pile of stories of his life, most likely the stories told by those he met.

And our music was revolutionising. Our stars were becoming idols, with followers trying to imitate their clothes, music and lifestyle. The Beatles travelled here in 1964 to be met by hordes of screaming girls. At Auckland Airport, then at Whenuapai they were corralled on top of the short control tower. They also bought fashions of Beatle boots and Beatle haircuts. They were followed by the Rolling Stones with their more radical music, telling us about their difficulties in getting satisfaction. In following years their number turned to a torrent: Creedence Clearwater Revival, Joan Baez, Bee Gees, Cliff Richard, Led Zeppelin, Monkees, Animals, Eric Clapton, Deep Purple

and generally the music became louder and more disconnected as style changed. There was little connection between the styles in say the Beatles "a Hard Days Night", Joe Cockers "with a little help from my friends", Marvin Gayes "I heard it through the grapevine" and Led Zeppelins "Whole Lotta Love", Deep Purples "Smoke on the Water".

The '60's saw further development of New Zealand music: Dinah Lee was asking us to do the Bluebeat, Ray Columbus, Howard Morrison Quartet. Peter Sinclair was our extra excited TV show host.

We also saw the rise of music festivals starting with Woodstock in 1968, although it's said that if you can remember it you weren't there!

Decade end saw the moon landing – a challenge that had been thrown down by President Kennedy in 1962. Of course he did not live to see it and one of the defining moments of the decade is for us all to remember where we were when we learned of his assassination.

1969 technology showed us those grainy images of the moon landing, in my Dad's words the greatest expression of impossibility in his young life was "you might as well talk about flying to the moon" – and we had done that, and flown back to prove it.

Perhaps this was the revolution of the decade.

Brian Potter 2012



COMING EVENTS

**17 November 2012
Christmas Party
“Throw the Toys Out of the Cot”
2pm St Andrews Church Hall
Hinemoa Street
Birkenhead**

Throw your toys out of the cot and bring them with you for an afternoon to remember what Christmas was like when we were children. Was mum cooking Chicken or Turkey if you were lucky in an old camp oven or was it a lazy day at the beach or was it the rallies' gathering for the one get together of the year (that wasn't a wedding or funeral). What about the kids trying to sneak past mum and dad at 4 o'clock in the morning to get to the present first just to see what Santa had brought them (get back to bed it's too early). If you have a friend or know of anybody who may be interested in joining the Society do invite them to join us in this Christmas celebration. Please bring a plate and come and share your stories and toys with us for a fun afternoon.



Thank you to those who have supplied an email address for us to send the newsletters to. If anyone else would like to receive the newsletter electronically please don't hesitate to contact us with your email address.

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