



**BIRKENHEAD HERITAGE
SOCIETY INC.**



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Newsletter May /June 2017

Next Event

Annual General Meeting

President's Report, Election of President and Officers

Speaker: Coral Malcolm

'The Life of My Father Cliff Utting –

Farming in the middle of Birkenhead, before and after WWII'

Cliff Utting's small dairy became the first Birkenhead Museum in Mahara Avenue

Saturday 13th May 2pm.

St Andrews Church Hall, 172 Hinemoa Street, Birkenhead

Remember: Annual Subscriptions are due for renewal each May.

Please support our small committee and bring your sub.

\$25 for single and \$35 for couples or family members.

There is no entry charge to the A.G.M.

our raffles help to cover costs - 3 tickets for \$5 and 1 ticket \$2

The committee will provide afternoon tea

Coming Event

Bus Trip to Warkworth Museum - Saturday 10th June

Introductory talk provided, tables available for picnics.

Bookings: Contact Mavis Throll 483-7230, paying in advance ensures a seat

Cost: \$30, including entrance fee. (By cheque, cash or electronic transfer)

Account Number 12 3035 0511576 00 – please add 'name' and 'bus trip'.

Leave: Verran's Corner 9:30am. Farrington House 10:00am. **Return:** 3.30pm.

The topic for the Annual General Meeting in May will focus on the life and farm of Cliff Utting, located in Birkenhead. It is hard to imagine farms were close to Highbury as the growth of housing and apartments increases around the North Shore.

Back in the mid 1980's while working in Beach Haven I was required to write a profile of the area. Having recently come across the notes it seemed appropriate to share some of the information available at that time.

The development of new housing in Beach Haven, Birkdale, and Birkenhead during the 1960's to 1980's.

Before the Harbour Bridge opened in 1959 Birkenhead, Birkdale and Beach Haven remained semi-rural. The period of population explosion and transformation occurred locally in 1960 -1987.

Every home had electricity at the end of World War Two but only half had flush toilets, the outhouse at the end of the garden was still in use. A quarter of homes relied on a wood or coal range for cooking. The road to Birkdale was lined with toe-toe and gorse. Monthly dances were held in the strawberry packing shed in Rowland Bentley's orchard.

In 1956 *The Herald* described the area between Birkenhead and Beach Haven "an area of farmlets - 2,000 acres carrying a population of only 500 people." With the opening of the Harbour Bridge the strawberry fields and orchards of Beach Haven vanished under subdivision.

In 1961 two years after the bridge opening the Birkdale population doubled from 1-2 persons per acre to 2-4. Birkenhead's population 1936-1946 grew by only 400, with sales of farm and orchard land the population doubled - from 6,000 in 1961 to 13,000 in 1967. In 1963 sewerage reticulation was provided to both Birkdale and Beach Haven.

New schools were constructed:

Beach Haven Primary School opened 1960, with 186 pupils, climbing to 439 in 1964.

Birkdale Primary School opened with 186 pupils, reaching 347 in 1964.

Verran Primary School built 1964.

Birkdale Intermediate and Birkdale North Primary School in 1965.

Kauri Park Primary in 1969 and Chelsea Primary in 1981.

Birkdale College (now Birkenhead College) opened 1972, by the 1980's with 1,000 pupils.

Housing developments:

One of the first areas for state housing occurred at Doris Street. Low cost housing was encouraged by the Birkenhead Council and Housing Corporation, and a parade of homes built in Birkdale for less than \$3,000 each. Universal Homes subdivided the area between Rangatira Road and Tramway Road on strawberry farms. Apple, pear and peach orchards became Frizell and Melba Streets. The best strawberry fields in Auckland became Gemini Place and Taurus Crescent. Pears grew on Fairclough Road, and Mayall's Plums became Sunnyhaven Avenue.

In the 1970's the tougher hillsides 'which would not grow even tea tree' were opened up at Hadfield Street and Brigantine Drive. Also during the 1970's the Chatswood subdivision was commenced by a Company from Wellington, this was planned to be opened in stages and ongoing construction of roads and houses continued for several decades. The area had remained free of housing as it formed the water catchment area for the Sugar Refinery. Again because of the Harbour Bridge construction water pipes from 1959 carried water over the harbour, providing a steady source of water – and the land became surplus to requirements.

In 1989 on the former Ranch House property a further 25 State Rental Housing Dwellings were opened, Helen Clark as Minister of Housing at the time cut the ribbon at the official opening.

The New Zealand Census Report 1986.

Birkdale and Beach Haven had a young population, 31% of the population was under the age of 17 years, and only 6.5% over 65 years. The total for Beach Haven now 8316, and Birkdale 5451, a combined total of 13,767. The 1975 survey indicated a similar demographic data. With an increase in elderly 2.5% since 1975.

Wages were significantly lower during these years.

Most of the wage earners in 1986 fell in the lower or middle income brackets, 42.3% earned less than \$15,000, particularly women. In the £15,000 to \$30,000 range for Beach Haven and Birkdale combined there were 2,289 men and only 1,026 women, and in the highest range quoted, \$50,000+ only 72 males and 18 females.

The 1980's was a time of social changes. The Birkdale Community House was the first on the North Shore, providing a venue for groups, and bringing people together, making the communities needs known. Community crèches and mother's groups were reaching out to isolated families. Birkenhead Highbury Community House, located in the old Vicarage at All Saints Anglican Church was the next, and Beach Haven followed.

Marcia Roberts

Resources: N.Z. Census of Population and Dwellings 1986.

Community Needs Survey 1988 Birkdale – Beach Haven Community Project Inc.

The Story of Birkenhead: Margaret McClure, Birkenhead City Council 1987.

The Birkdale and Beach Haven Telegraph Service in the 1930's and 1940's

Area names and boundaries have changed over the years. In the 1940's Beach Haven was considered to be only that area from Hilders Corner to the Beach Haven Wharf. In those days what is now part of Rangatira Road up to Aeroview Drive was called Kiwi Road, and from Hilders Corner to Kahika Road was then part of Birkdale Road.

Very few people had private phones and public phones were scarce - one at Verrans Corner (penny in the slot) and (maybe) one at Blennerhassets Store near the Beach Haven Wharf. The Birkdale Post Office was in Hilders Store - then the only building on Hilders Corner until the Methodist Church was built in the late thirties - built over two Saturday's with voluntary labour. The Post Office was a party line with Greenhithe and Paremoro the other parties. The Birkdale ring was the morse code "A" - short-long. Greenhithe was "s" - three short rings and Paremoro (almost always called 'Parry') was "o" - three long rings, often three very long rings as it was at times hard to get an answer. With private phones so rare people had to come to the Birkdale Post Office for toll calls. I still remember one family who used to regularly call at night - taking advantage of cheap rates - their relatives in Te Teko - 6J was the number I recall.

Telegrams were sent from and delivered in the Beach Haven - Birkdale area as far as what is now the junction of Verbena Road and Eskdale Road - and beyond Verrans Corner to the reservoir, and down Vermont Road now Verbena Road - also a stretch of about 300 yards down Verran Road, then called Victoria Road East. Vermont/Verbena Road did not join to Eskdale Road then.

Waipa Road from the reservoir was serviced from the Birkenhead Post Office located at the bottom of Hinemoa Street, near the top of the Birkenhead Wharf Hill. Birkdale Post Office telegrams were delivered firstly by my father, Wenman (Bill) Hilder on foot, then by my elder brothers Stan, Colin, and Ivan by bicycle after school and finally by me until I left school in 1946.

Delivery was either free, or sixpence for the first mile from the Post Office to about Hadfield Street on Rangatira Road, and Eskdale Road on Birkdale Road. For the next mile, which covered the distance to the Birkenhead Transport garage, a charge of one shilling was made and (mostly) paid willingly enough by the recipient. Beyond two miles which was at Verbena, and as much of

Verran as then existed, plus a short sector at the bottom of Island Bay Road, the delivery fee was two shillings.

Loud were the complaints from some addresses, but when delivery was refused they soon paid. It was worth two shillings to ride a bike up from Hilders Corner to anywhere down Verbena Road and then back up to the Verbena Hill again, particularly on a wet windy evening. Remember the roads were almost all metalled, sometimes graded, and occasionally rolled. There was a short piece of tar seal on Taylor's Hill between Eskdale and Tiri Tiri Roads and another between Verrans Corner and Island Bay Road. There must have been a Councillor living on these bits of road.

During the war many Telegrams were from the Defence Department advising relatives of serviceman injured, missing or killed, though I cannot recall me ever having to deliver any such death reports - perhaps Dad (Bill Hilder) delivered these. Telegrams were the only means that people had of receiving official news of their serving families. Shortly after the end of the war the shop was sold and with increasing numbers of private phones, telegrams began to be rung through instead of being hand delivered.

Story by Russen Hilder, dated July 1999.

A recent article in the local papers has highlighted plans by the Auckland Council to replace Frank Larking's boat at Beach Haven, next to Hilder's Park, with a pontoon suitable for swimming to and from. A representative from the Birkenhead Heritage Society committee after consultation submitted a form to the Local Community Board in favour of retaining the historic boat. A local petition was signed with many signatures in support of saving Larking's boat. It then became known the wooden seats, with carved memorials in the back rests for a number of earlier residents, located at Larking's Landing are to be replaced. The Birkenhead Heritage Society was represented at a meeting with the Local Community Board to look for a satisfactory outcome. The family members of the those whose relatives are named on the seats were being contacted by a volunteer to understand their wishes for possible relocating of the carved back rests on the old wooden seats.

The outcome of the latest consultation with Council Staff appears there will be a delay in any removal of the current wooden seating so the families can be properly consulted, in the first place, and also to obtain community feedback on a revamped plan. A number of recent visits to Larking's Landing has shown the area is well used. A total of 22 people were seen enjoying the late afternoon sun on ANZAC Day, either fishing, sharing a family evening meal, or just relaxing.

Earlier on ANZAC Day the 10am Service was well attended at the Mahara Avenue War Memorial Park, local crowds joined the parade from the Birkenhead Bowling Club, following the Military Brass Band and representatives from local groups such as Scouts and Guides, local schools and others. The Birkenhead Heritage Society wreath was laid with the many others at the War Memorial at the end of the Service. The Birkenhead Farrington House Museum was open and many visitors came to view the displays, to ask about our local history, or earlier residents.

Remember

**AGM and Speaker Coral Malcolm:
Committee Member of Birkenhead Heritage Society will present:
The Life of My Father Cliff Utting –**

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Marcia Roberts
Editor