

The Waitaki Years

Obviously it is impossible to tabulate everything and everyone from the 6 years that I was at Waitaki and following is just a snapshot of those times. Others may have a totally different prospective and that's just fine. Apologies for any significant errors and omissions from 60 plus years ago!

In 1953 and just 7 1/2 years after the end of World War 2 and aged eleven 1/2 years I headed to Waitaki Boys High School in Oamaru to start Form One. On reflection it was a good move as I was the only one in my class at Gladfield and Mrs McCarron was probably not the best roll model! Fortunately Aldair Chisholm (Chis) was leaving John McGlashan in Dunedin to start at the same time. It was a little daunting driving up

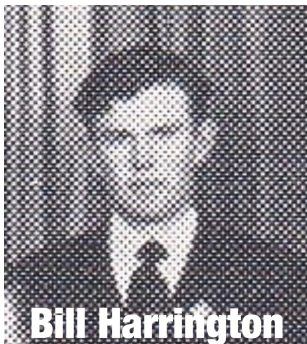


with Mum and Dad in the brand new Vanguard car and arriving at the imposing school. The Junior High School boarders were in a dormitory of their own above the library. There were about 20 of us and the new boys that year were George Berry (Berry & Co, Solicitors), Andy Hope, Palmerston, Paul O'Brien, Christchurch (O'Brien Shoes) Lou Pepper, ? Schaffer, John Souness, and the



house master was a delightful Dr Scotter and he lived in a flat

on the same level. I was quite comfortable as had a big hairy



cousin Bill Harrington to keep an eye on me and he was a prefect. There were about 280 boarders and there was a very strict "social" ranking order. First year students were New Dags and were subject to all sorts of tasks given to them by those higher up that social ladder like first year Dags and second year Dags and so on. Fortunately us Junior High New Dags because we were so young we were spared most things. However by the time we reached the 3rd form we were in a very significant social class being by that time second year Dags - an even higher ranking than most in the class ahead of us who were only first year Dags! Hope everyone can follow all that!

Our wooden sided beds were squeezed in very tight to each other but we were fortunate to have real windows (more on that subject when move to Milner House in Form 3).

There was great excitement when someone had a transistor radio and we heard live the first news of when Edmund Hillary and



Tenzing Norgay

reached the summit of Everest on Friday, 29 May 1953. Then too a couple of days latter were able to tune to of the coronation of Elizabeth II to on 2 June 1953 at

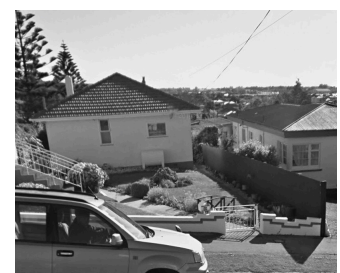
Westminster Abbey.

Our class rooms were upstairs overlooking the Quad (Quadrangle). Initially I was in class 1A after apparently my IQ test showed that was where should be. Most of those that had befriended were however in 1B and after a term and flunking some tests that's where ended up and felt much more at home.

Auntie Elsie (actually a cousin of Mums) had moved to Oamaru after her



husband was drowned during the war in a bombing raid on ships I think in near India. She, Brian and Doreen lived near the top of a very steep Forth Street. Brian was 4 years older than me and like Bill Harrington he too became a big hairy prefect - although of course he was a Scab (meaning Day Boy). They were well down the social ladder as compared to us borders (Rats)! Doreen was the



same age and we had always been great friends from the time she used to come and stay at Tatarepo. About every second Sunday after the compulsory church I would struggle up Forth Street on a very basic bike (well compared to today's fancy models) to a very welcome delicious Sunday roast. It was years afterwards that Dad confessed that he did contribute to these occasions. Over the years Elsie would take us in her trustee Morris Minor to a nice beach or river swimming hole somewhere or out to McDonalds at Otekaieke Station (up towards Kurow). Otekaieke is a very large sheep station and has been in the same family for many generations. Somehow Mrs McDonald was a distant relation and their very vivacious daughter Wendy actually taught me the piano for a year at school until we both gave up. She married



Wendy and Mike Bayley 2014

Otago Daily Times reporter Mike Bayley (Brian's brother) and actually caught up

with them both at Bob (Whitestone Cheese) Berry's 70th recently.

The station actually had its own small hydropower generator and recall being really intrigued with it and asking lots about it. Back at Forth Street I remember that Brian was on the phone to a new girl

friend and I walked past and tapped the receiver button as we used to do on the phones at home (the ones with a handle) to make a clicking sound. However this was an automatic phone and it cut him off and Brian was less than impressed with me!

So to the 3rd Form in 1955 and to the Milner House dormitory. To say that these were basic is a total understatement! The wooden beds were jammed in with only about half a meter between them. There were no windows - only canvas shutters around the whole length. The coast was less than 100 meters away and invariably there was a trace of sea mist on the blankets each night! When you hear about the so called damp cold homes that the media in modern times harp on about - they ain't seen nothing. Yes we survived and to my recollection there were no more health issues than normal.

Mrs Fleming was the lovely lady tasked with the job of looking after Milner House and she was always kept busy darning socks or sewing on the lost buttons. There were strict rules about no talking after lights out and depending who the house master was on duty depended on how much happened.

Bob Boyd was a young new housemaster and was a very firm disciplinarian. No way was there any talking on his watch or it would be up to The Landing for 2 very painful whacks with his cane.

Many decades later he ended up as deputy principal of Southland Boys High School at the same time that I was chair of the PTA and at his farewell I gave a speech reminiscing about those times. When I finished he stood up very very slowly and shook his head saying something like "never in my wildest dreams would I have thought that Jim Ryan would ever ever rise to where he is today - let alone make my farewell speech"!

Despite the no talking rule after lights out and especially after moving well up the food chain (like 4th and 5th year old dog) there was much hilarious banter. One of the guys was a



Milner Dorm-note the open sides!



fisherman's son from Moeraki (as in Boulders) and his dad was searching for a name for his new boat. After some time in all innocence up piped Southlander Kevin Copeland - "what's the Maori name for Moeraki"?! Each morning we were woken by dreadful blaring music from loudspeakers high in the water tower and given 15 minutes to be on parade in the Quad (Quadrangle). Really it was like something from Hogan's Hero's. After a roll call it was off for the run down to the end of the entrance avenue. One of the tricks was to wait until some were heading back home down the Avenue - stop and pretend to do up your shoe laces then simply turn round and join the returnees!

The dining room too had a very strict social hierarchy. There were 10 per table. The head and 2 on each side were normally 4th or 5th year Old Dags. At the other end the 3 were 1st, 2nd or 3rd year Old Dags while the middle 4 were of course new Dags. They had to fetch and carry the dishes from the slide to the kitchen. They mashed the potatoes and were in big trouble if there were any lumps! We all learnt to eat very quickly and with some luck there may be seconds. Have no idea where the meat came from or how it was cooked but it was grey, greasy and fatty. After the meal the housemaster on duty would make announcements and one day a hapless Bruce Hodge had reported that he had lost a sixpence coin. For the rest of his life he was known as Sixpence!

The official school day began with assembly in the magnificent Hall of Memories. An extract from Wikipedia: "*The building was opened in 1927 by HRH The Duke of York (Later King George VI). It commemorates the war service of Waitakians in World Wars I and II, and, as a war memorial, it is unique in concept.*

A fine Neo-Tudor building in the tradition of English public school architecture. It has been designed to harmonise with the other adjacent Oamaru stone school buildings nearby. It is particularly notable for the high standards of craftsmanship evident in both its exterior and interior construction."

Assembly was quite formal with all the teachers on stage and a stern Headmaster, Mr Leadbetter heading the proceedings. The ornate pipe organ played by student Monty Monteith belted out grand hymns and at the end of the service the school song would be sung with great gusto.



Fiji - May 1955

The following segment is from a story in the Waitakian June 1955 as well as my own observations.

During 1954 a tour of Fiji was suggested by Mr Chambers (Po as he was known. Was our Junior High form master. A WW2 veteran and could tell some interesting scary wartime stories) and the idea immediately caught the imagination of the boys and 20 put their names down to go, ranging in age between 13 and 18. Mr Chambers did all the organising and bookings etc capably helped by Mr Hog (Snip - another great guy). Owing to their efforts and those of T.E.A.L. (Tasman Empire Airways Ltd - Air New Zealand) in conjunction with Whites Aviation we were each given an itinerary by October with the cost of the



whole travel which was about £100 (\$5400 in 2019 dollars) including clothing.

It was a time of high wool prices (Korean war) and can recall going around the farm and collecting wool off the fences and dead sheep. Got caught though scrounging around the woodshed and was told off for cheating!

At the start of the school year the trip still seems as far away as ever but the terms seem to speed through and before we knew it final details were completed and it was time to pack where only allowed 44lb (20kg) of luggage but all of us found we only had about 35lb. We left on Thursday fifth of May 1955 at 3 o'clock and we

had to go to school in the morning but needless to say none of us could concentrate on lessons as we are all

very excited about what is for in front of us for the next two weeks. As we passed the school, the train slowed to a walking pace over the crossing and the whole school was there doing the Haka! For some of us this was our first trip out of the South Island so even going across cook straight was quite an experience.

When we arrived in Auckland were met by several old boys who showed us all around Auckland.

Our plane was a DC 6 and left from Whenuapai at 1:20 pm. During the flight lunch was served and then custom forms filled.

Photos were taken by the T.E.A.L publicity man who is travelling with us. We were shown around the cockpit and one old boy was on the plane with us.

We arrived at Nandi after an uneventful five hour flight and after clearing customs and changing some of our New Zealand money to the Fijian currency we were conveyed on an open side bus to Latoka which is 16 miles from the airport.

As we descended from the plane the first thing that struck us about Fiji was the sweet scent in the air and also that your temperature was about 85° (30c).

While at Latoka we were taken out to Saweni beach which was an American seaplane base during the war. Swimming in Fiji is wonderful and the sea is calm as a pond and we spent almost the whole afternoon in the sea.

The next place we stayed the night out was Raki Raki which is about halfway between Latakia and Suva. The school children they gave us a concert and in reply we did the Haka for them they were really frightened but but but seem to enjoy it.

Doggy Amos (from Tuatapere) was always pulling stunts so while some distracted him, we filled up his room and draws with cane toads! They were everywhere outside and were huge disgusting looking, slimy creatures.

We were shown around a gold mine and while we did not go actually enter the mine they showed us right through the processing part of the mine we saw the rough rocks come in and had every step explained to us right to the final process of pouring the gold bars.

The next day we proceeded to Suva that which has a population of about 30,000 and covers an area about the same and as that of Dunedin. While there we stayed at the Suva Boys Grammar School. The school is a boarding school really like our own and to attend the boys must have one European parent (gad I wonder if that rule is still in place!).

Close to the school there are the public baths they were 55 yards long and 33 yards wide and filled with seawater. The first day were on there having a swim and there was no one else and we asked the reason we told her is too cold the water was only 68° (20c).

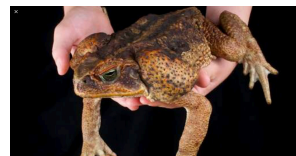
While at Suva we went for a cruise up the river river for a few miles and then we went to Nukulau Island for the rest of the day. The island is about half a mile from the shore and is right on the edge of the reef and at low tide we explored some of the reef and found some water snakes which are harmless. On the way back in the launch many boys found that a touch of sunburn so the sunburn lotion got quite a hiding.

The first night we are in Suva we had a tropical thunderstorm which lit up the whole sky and thunder was deafening. We learnt the next morning that the wind had been at 70 mph.

Our next port of call was Deuba which was 30 miles from Suva and the Beachcomber hotel where we stayed was built by the Americans about 18 months before when they came over to make the film "His Majesty O'Keefe". It was a beautiful hotel and was the only place we slept

without mosquito nets.

The next place we stayed at was Karolevu and was the highlight of the trip. We slept and ate in Bures (huts) which had electric light in bathroom etc and they were very cool. Korolevu is purely a holiday resort so all we did was swim and sunbake at the hotel. We could hire face mask and flippers and most of us spent the time swimming around looking at the



Jim. Fiji. 1955



Lloyd Scott tries Kava

tropical fish.

One morning at low tide some of the party were out exploring the reef when one of them got a very bad sting by a type of coral. It was an object lesson to us all to know that can never be too careful! On our last afternoon at Korolevu we visited a native village and had another Kava (damn terrible stuff) ceremony plus a night of dancing.

Our trip by this time was almost over and next morning we set out for Latoka where we were to spend the last night in Fiji. It was a trip of about 90 miles and we reached there in time for lunch. That afternoon we were shown over a pineapple canning factory. After visiting the factory we then proceeded for our last swim we made the most of it and stayed in the water until it was time to go back to the hotel for dinner.

When we arrived back in Auckland there was quite a media scrum to meet us. This had obviously been drummed up by T.E.A.L. I recall being interviewed by a radio reporter and Mum and Dad actually got to hear their 13 year old on the wireless! It was a very tired bunch travelling back by train to Wellington then the ferry and then all day on the train to Invercargill for a weekend at home and then back by train to Oamaru. We were all almost totally broke but I do recall on the way south scouting around everyone to get enough to buy a Southland Times and pies at the Gore railway station!



Back to school

In 1956 the All Blacks made the school home for a few days leading up to their test against the Springboks in Dunedin. It was neat to see the hero's of the time like full back Don Clark, Peter Jones, Kevin Skinner and winger Ron Jarden. Waitaki was playing the curtain raiser for the test and many bus loads of us went down for it. Our "seating" was planks of wood almost right on the touch line! It was the middle of winter. Cold. Wet. Every so often we would all stand up and do a Haka with much booing from the crowd behind us! Heading back to Oamaru on the bus on the way up the Kilmog (before the Northern motorway was built) the motor dropped out of the bus onto the road! There were pistons, cogs and oil. Think it was the early hours of the morning before somehow we made it back.



Wednesday afternoons were devoted to things military - Cadets. In 1958 I was Senior Sergeant Commander of C Platoon and they were a great bunch except that good friend Ian Collie (from Bayswater) was in the front row. He was a damn pest when I was trying to install some discipline into the motley lot! To bring them to order "C Platoon - at the halt facing left" etc. He would start laughing which set me going and the moment

PLATOON COMMANDERS S./Sgts: A. Coy.—W. W. Townsend, R. Andrew, J. J. Wain (Mortars). B. Coy.—I. H. Fox, D. O. F. C. B. Blaikie. C Coy.—J. D. McVinnie, J. W. Ryan, M. G. Burt D Coy.—J. Allison, K. G. Hall, L. M. Malcolm.

would be destroyed.

The rifles issued to us were WW2 303s. It was the standard British and [Commonwealth](#) military cartridge from 1889 until the 1950s. It was a brute - heavy, clumsy and packed a mean recoil. You had to hold it hard into your shoulder.

Then we were introduced to the Bren. From Wikipedia: "*The **Bren gun**, usually called simply the **Bren**, are a series of light machine guns (LMG) made by Britain in the 1930s and used in various roles until 1992. While best known for its role as the British and Commonwealth forces' primary infantry LMG in World War II, it was also used in the Korean War and saw service throughout the latter half of the 20th century, including the 1982 Falklands War. Although fitted with a bipod, it could also be mounted on a tripod*



or vehicle-mounted.”

They made us fire it, totally dismantle, clean it, reassemble and fire it it and time us. Can't recall the time that we did but think I got nearly top. The shells that were ejected at a high rate of notts and almost red hot were damn dangerous and for many years I had quite a severe burn mark on my left arm. Gad when I think now that us kids had those guns and were shown how to use them but remember it was less than 12 years since the end of World War Two. There were a few of us sent to a real army camp for further NCO (Non Commission Officers). This dreary place was in the wop wops at Sutton near Middlemarch. From the train we were marched some distance to this military camp and am sure this is where Hogan's Hero's must have been filmed! The barracks were identical. The sergeant was am sure Battery Sergeant Major Williams (Windsor Davies) from the [British sitcom It Ain't Half Hot Mum](#). The food was terrible. It was like we were in the middle of the damn Sahara Desert (think it must have been the Christmas holidays). Anyway after about a week we were all very pleased to get home and everyone resolving not to join the bloody army!

In contrast the school scout group was much more fun and relaxing. There were numerous camping expeditions. The school had a camp at Wainakarua about 30 km south of Oamaru. We would bike out there on our clunky old bikes over some quite steep hills. The camp was actually more comfortable than our near open dorms back at school. It was on a river and behind was a vast forestry. We were set up in pairs and given quite complex tramps to navigate our way through, and sometimes these would last for a few days with camping out. We were always very pleased to get back to camp for a good feed and comfortable beds. Another camping spot was out at Five Forks at one of the borders family farms. The Austin family were well known and many years later was to reconnect with Derek Austin through politics. We camped by a stream and do recall the ground being damn hard and we used to dig “iPholes” (hip holes) to allow our hips to sink into the ground! Dampers around the camp fire do recall being delicious although think they we only flour and water to make a dough on a stick.



The showers back at school were quite basic. There were about 20 side by side and we would form lines to await our turn. A sharp blast on the whistle from the duty master and we changed over with those getting out then moving to the cold showers. Am sure today there would be some agency investigation into that barbaric practice!

Outside the dorms, locker rooms and the class rooms or library there was really no comfortable area. The prefects had their own cosy room. But - there were a couple of options if you were onto them. There were snags in

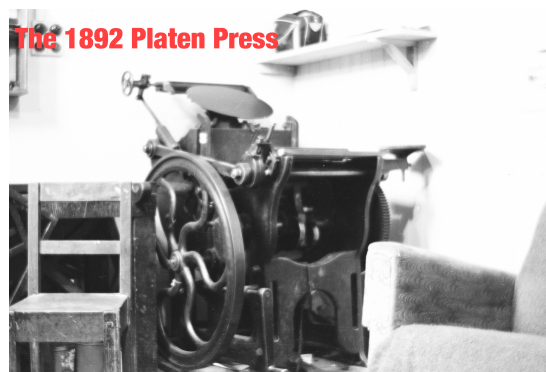
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The first
one we



PRINTING CLUB

Since last term the work printed includes bookmarks, crested envelopes, absentee lists, concert programmes, dance invitations and other various small jobs. At long last two of the rollers have been recovered and the standard of work has improved with them. Our thanks go to members of the fifth form metalwork group and Mr Johnston, their instructor, for much repair work etc., done throughout the year. Through them we have obtained a new part for the press, which greatly assists printing large jobs. Our thanks also go to a local printer who has done much in way of lending us type and generally assisting us in all ways possible.

latched onto was the mail room. A tiny space at the back of the gym. Sure we had to sort the mail but it gave a few of us our own Empire for a year. The cream came when we scored the printing club in 1957. This standalone room by the Quad was real 5 star and we had our own sofas and chairs and could hide away getting up to all sorts of mischief. Lloyd Scott (Scotty in the Toyota TV advert with Barry Crump) Peter Thomson (school boxing champion) and myself were the main “tenants”. Our printing equipment was something like out of the Charles Dickens era. The platen printing press (1892) was foot





operated and each sheet of paper hand fed. OSH would write a whole box of books about it all. The type was fastened into an iron frame, the inking rollers would come down and return and while this happened the operator had to very quickly take out the just printed sheet and place a new one and then the thing would clamp up to print. The speed was determined by how fast you were pumping the pedal. Naturally there was a huge competition to set new records of speed and how the hell no one lost or badly damaged their hands is a miracle. Anyway we printed lots of

different stuff for the school. The type was made by placing individual letters in to a tray and this was then placed into the steel frame that was attached to the press.

However printing was a sideline and while enjoying our own little bit of paradise we were able to make such things as apple cider. We had a close call once though when one of the masters called in to pick up something and the table was covered in apple peelings!

Our form master for the Agriculture class (1957/58) was Bill Laney. To be frank he was a lazy sod which



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Stu Allen, Bruce Francis, Kevin Copeland, Wilson Adams, Brunton
 Robbie Marshall, Ross Millmine, David Buick, David Robins, Darb Morish, Ray Dovey, John Oxley Smith
 Brian Tutty, Neville Goodwin, Horie Spencer, Micky Rooney, Norman Weller, Kim Goyen,Henderson, Robin Leech
 Brian Paterson, Wilfred Lyon, Warren Irving, George Peterson, Bill Laney (Mayor), Allan Shallard,King,.....McLeary, Jim Ryan

suited most of us quite well. Once a month the Agricultural Magazines would be distributed around the class and for a whole period he would get us to read though it while he wandered off and did something else. Things got interesting when he got elected Mayor of Oamaru! We started addressing him as His Worship etc. There were embarrassing standoffs between him and rector Malcom Leadbetter especially at assembly when there was someone important speaking. A few years later Bill Laney became a one term Labour MP.

Labour weekend 1958 and 3 of us headed to Peter Thomson's home at Sumner right on the Esplanade. Peter's dad was the local doctor. Peter as have already mentioned was the school boxing champ that year. Our other friend was Warren Townsend and he was the previous year boxing champ. Both had their bright red school blazers with "Boxing Champion" on them. It was fun walking through the Square with all the Bodgies (from Wikipedia: "*Bodgies were often depicted in the media and folk-lore as louts*"). With Peter and

Warren on either side I was able to easily fire a fair bit of lip at them” They would get wound up with someone daring to challenge them but backed off very very quickly when they saw my two “mindere”!

When we finished school in 1958 Peter, Warren and myself walked the Milford track. I have little recall of the facilities but after the boarding dorms at Waitaki we had no problems. While we were waiting at Milford for our transport a very flash car pulled up and it had electric windows! The driver had delight in letting us have a play with them.

Fast forward 26 years to 1984 and we returned to Waitaki for the Centennial celebrations. Back in 1958 we all thought we would be old and dribbly if we lived long enough to make it for the 100th but most of us were just in our 40s! We were fortunate to be able to stay with Jon Newson’s folks just across the road. It was great to reconnect with so many but disappointing that many could not make it. Interesting that some of the so called high flyers at school had not transformed into something out in the real world and equally the other way round were those that academically were not at the top end were totally getting on with things.

Our 3 boys visited Waitaki in 2014 and there was a lot of banter between us all how they could have turned out better if they had gone there!



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