

## THE WELLINGTON YEARS (1958 - 1961)

This period of my life covers my time at university in Wellington. I started to keep a daily diary of things that happened so that I would have things to include in the weekly letters I wrote home. These diaries have been a help to assisting my memory when writing this account. For convenience, I have divided the file into two main parts, the first dealing with the university side and the other life at the hotel where I stayed.

### Getting to Wellington

Before going to university, it had been necessary to find somewhere to board. So I wrote to a number of hostels. Most of these were unsuccessful as they had already been filled. This include Weir House, the university hostel (shown in the photo of



a view of Wellington in the 1950s; the university is on the right but not in the picture). Then, I heard about the Boys' Institute from a friend in my same class at school, Graham Hillman, who was also seeking accommodation. We both wrote seeking places and were both successful. The idea of flatting was never considered; most students looked for hostel boarding, at least initially. After being in Wellington for a while, a number of people I knew actually moved into flats. (Graham Hillman himself gave up in the third term of the first year and returned to Gisborne.)

This was the first time I had been to Wellington. It was chosen as it was believed it would probably be a healthier place because of my asthma. I would have liked to have gone to Auckland, possibly because I had already been there and liked it, but the bad experiences with asthma precluded that. Wellington did, in fact, turn out to be good for my health, but whether Auckland would also have been all right will never be known now.

I travelled to Wellington at the end on February 1958 with my parents. We stayed at a Bed and Breakfast place (in Willis Street in the centre of town) for a few days before I moved into the Boys' Institute hostel.

## The University

### The name of the institution

The university was then called Victoria University *College* (VUC) and was one college in the University of New Zealand system. It was founded in 1897 (the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Queen Victoria's coronation).

The first building on the current site (the brick building in the photo on the right) was completed in 1904. In 1961, with the



dissolution of the University of New Zealand, it became an independent university known as Victoria *University* of Wellington (VUW). It was proposed to call it just the University of Wellington, but as there was so much opposition to dropping the 'Victoria' (from Queen Victoria, of course), that this name was retained. The photograph above is of a more recent view of the university. It is situated on a hill overlooking Wellington harbour and the buildings gradually spread up a hill. There is no space for parks, sports grounds; every inch is taken up with buildings. (The ground in the foreground is a municipal cricket ground and not part of the university.)

Motto: '*Sapientia magis auro desideranda*' (Latin). "Wisdom is more to be desired than gold" (English). The emblem of the university is shown on the right.

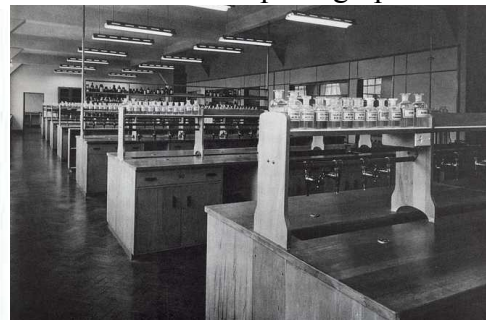


### University buildings and facilities

The original building plus a Biological Sciences building behind it were the only academic buildings on the site when I first enrolled. There was also a small gymnasium and cafeteria and a very small theatre. That was it! No swimming pool or other facilities that universities now have.

The Chemistry department, in the original building, was very small and cramped and the laboratories completely inadequate. Later that year (1958), a new six storey science block was completed (photo, below left), with about half of it allocated to Chemistry. Marvellous! It was very pleasant having lectures in nice new lecture theatres and working in the new, modern laboratories (lecture theatre and one of the laboratories in the other photographs. In

fact, the picture on the next page is of a Chemistry class, with our lecturer, and I could even be in



the photo!). The Mathematics department had the top floor of the building, which meant that most of my time was spent in this building.

The science block was only officially opened in July of the next year (1959). I helped in a lab demonstrating to the public.

A large new gymnasium with a weight room and other facilities was constructed behind the Science building and opened early 1961.

Quite often, particularly in the earlier years, and when the weather was nice, I would sit on the grassy area next to the old/main building and eat my lunch.

If you really want to know more of the history of the university, from which some of the above photographs are taken, go to the website:

<http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-BarVict-fl.html>

### **My first day**

The university year in New Zealand is normally from late February to early November. My first duty was to report to the building and offices for teaching bursary students; it was actually a slightly modified old house just across the road from the university itself. The teaching bursary paid for university fees and gave a living allowance every two weeks. This allowance was paid by cheque. (There was no direct banking, no ATMs and, of course, no e-banking then. I would have to take the cheques to a bank to cash them. Payments, such as my board, were made by cheque, or by cash.) There was then nothing to do for more than a week.

### **Enrolment and courses**

At the end of the first week in March, I enrolled for my first year courses. In those days, if you had your University Entrance certificate (UE), you just turned up on enrolment day; there was no need to pre-apply to universities. The reason was simple - fewer people went to university; many who had their UE qualification would go directly to work. The courses I took for the four years I was there are as follows:

Year 1: Chemistry I, Physics I and Mathematics I

Year 2: Chemistry II, Mathematics II and Applied Mathematics I

Year 3: Chemistry III, Applied Chemistry I

Year 4: Chemistry Masters (M.Sc.)





I did well at Biology at school and would have liked to have taken Botany and/or Zoology. Also, I would have liked to have taken Geology (which is not taught at schools) but these three subjects included practical work (for no extra credit!!) so I would have been overloaded with work if I had taken so many practical subjects. A practical subject, such as Chemistry, with three lectures a week and two three-hour practical sessions got just as much credit as Mathematics with just three lectures a week! The first three years was for a baccalaureate degree, at the end of which I got a Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) degree. The fourth year was for a Masters degree in Science (M.Sc.) The Masters year began earlier than usual and finished late in December, with my thesis work continuing until February 1<sup>st</sup> of the next year, the day before I left Wellington to go to Christchurch (see below under 'Academic results').

In those days, each subject was a whole year course. Nowadays, they have to the US system and have courses lasting just a term. So in Chemistry I, we studied Physical Chemistry, Organic Chemistry and Inorganic Chemistry which today would be three distinct courses. We used to have term examinations and then finals on the whole year's work. In those days there was also a language requirement for Science students. The choices were French, Russian and I think, German. I took French as I had studied it for three years at secondary school.

My choice of subjects from year to year was affected by my final examination results and also by other required subjects. I actually liked Physics more than Chemistry but my Chemistry I result at the end of the first year was much better than for Physics I so I decided to continue with and major in Chemistry, which also meant I was required to take Mathematics II. Had I majored with Physics, I would have to have taken Mathematics for three years, but although I liked Mathematics, I often found it tough.

### **Getting there**

The Boys' Institute, unlike Weir House, was quite a distance from the university. For the first few weeks, I would travel by tram to the centre of town (using old, rickety trams like those in the picture; I may even have travelled on those trams along the road in the picture) and then by cable car to a stop close to the university. But as that took quite a time, as well as being too expensive, I then began to walk to university, rain or shine. This entailed a steep uphill section near the university. It would take about 35 to 40 minutes usually, but I note in my diary that I say 20 to 40 minutes; the 20 minutes must have included some running!



## Academic results

The folder contains a transcript of my academic record at both Victoria University (and later at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch). Subjects (and grades):

Year 1: Chemistry I (A), Physics I (C), Mathematics I (C), Science French (Fail!)

Year 2: Chemistry II (B), Mathematics II (C), Applied Mathematics I (B), Science French (Pass!)

Year 3: Chemistry III (B), Applied Chemistry I (A)

Year 4: Chemistry Masters (M.Sc.) (Pass). A file with the marks of all the students in the Masters' class is also in the folder.

As mentioned in the previous file, I was in Gisborne during the summer holidays when the examinations results came out. Before we received our results in the mail, they appeared in the local newspaper. I remember it was somewhat harrowing looking to see if I had passed my subjects or not and being very relieved to find I had. Then of course, I looked for the results of other Gisborne students I knew to see how they had done.

I failed Science French in the first year, and so had to repeat it in the second year. I passed, quite easily as a big part of the examination paper was to translate passages from the textbook. This was the same textbook we had used in the first year, and during that first year I had written translations onto the passages!

## Masters year and thesis

As well as doing four Chemistry courses for the Masters degree, I also had to do a thesis. This involved practical research in the laboratory for most of the year. In fact, I was still doing practical work while writing up my thesis in December and just managed to hand in the completed *draft* manuscript to my supervisor in time for assessment (the results came out December 19<sup>th</sup>). But there was still work to do. The manuscript had to be typed up and bound. There were no word processors in those days of course, so I had to hire a lady to do the typing. I finished the manuscript in January and then gave it to the lady for typing, which she completed mid-January. The bookbinders finished with it on the morning of February 1<sup>st</sup> and I delivered it to the university that afternoon, the day before leaving for Christchurch. In terms of marks, my overall position in the class was 14<sup>th</sup> out of 21.

**Research area:** I specialised in Organic Chemistry, investigating a natural product found in a New Zealand tree. The natural product was a type of compound called a *carene* (which is also a constituent of turpentine) and I had to derive its structure. This involved first analysing/breaking down the compound into bits to find out what it was made of and from this infer a possible structure. Then second step was to synthesise this possible substance and if its properties (e.g. melting point) turned out to be the same as the original product from the tree, the structure was probably correct. The title of the thesis was:

*“7,7-dimethylnorcarone as a synthetic intermediate for chamic acid”*

For more details, you will have to read my thesis (see folder).

### **My overall evaluation of my academic performance**

Satisfactory, but not brilliant! I realised later that I did not have a clear understanding of what Science and scientific research was all about. I think this realisation came during the non-scientific study I did when in Christchurch doing my Dip Ed, which I fully understood and appreciated what it was all about.

### **Happenings at University**

- **The two chemistry classes:** In the first year, as there were many chemistry students, there were two classes with two different lecturers. The class I was in had an excellent teacher (see photo above). Unfortunately, the other class didn't and gradually his students migrated to our class until there were students standing and sitting in the aisles and the situation could not be ignored. They then brought in attendance records which we had to sign and which had never been used before. This helped to solve the problem, but some students overcame this by attending both classes.
- **Big explosion:** When doing my thesis, one of the steps in the synthesis involved hydrogenation, that is, adding hydrogen to a compound in a machine called a *hydrogenator*. (similar to the one in the picture). This required the use of a high temperature and a very high pressure. The hydrogen gas is added to the machine from a large cylinder of the gas. As the hydrogenation process takes some time, I would set up the apparatus in the evening and leave it going all night. For the first batches, everything went fine as many of the gas cylinders used were nearly empty so the gas pressure in them was rather low. But later a new cylinder was used so the initial gas pressure in the hydrogenator was much higher than previously but I did not realise this (I would have if I had checked the pressure meter!). As gas pressure increases with temperature, the pressure in the hydrogenator eventually exceeded the limit and the safety valve exploded and all my precious liquid ended up all around the room. I got a phone call early in the morning telling me what had happened, so I went up. The first thing I noticed as I entered the building (not the hydrogenator room) was this intense but rather sweet smell of my product all through the building. That explosion destroyed nearly all of my product and I had to go back and start preparing it again.
- **Applied Chemistry:** One of the two subjects in Year 3 was Applied Chemistry. Because of the applied nature, the class made a number of outings to various research laboratories. One such visit was to Grasslands, a research centre near Palmerston North. We travelled up in cars and spent the day there. We came back via the Wairarapa. The car I was in reached



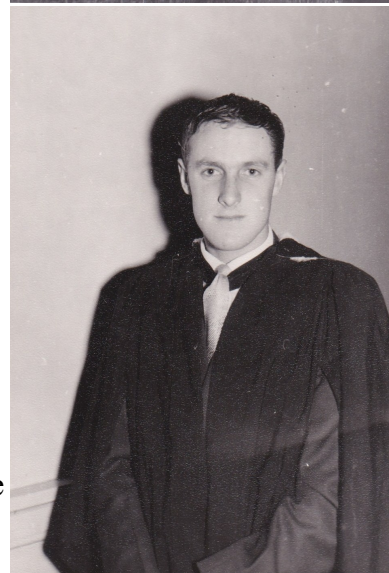
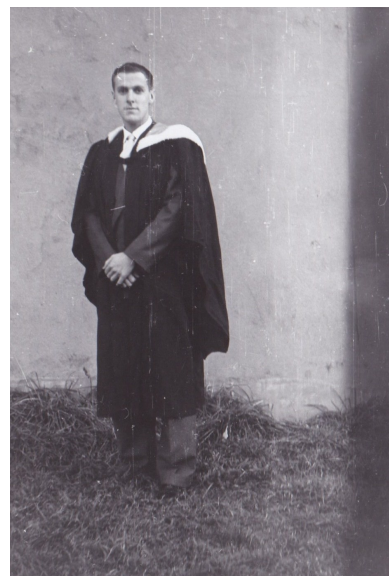
a speed of 100 mph, the first time I had ever travelled so fast. (The car was a Ford Zephyr, similar to the one I bought later when in Christchurch).

<sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> **Student-teacher romance:** I have mentioned that one of the girls in this class had been in most of the same classes as me since primary school. Well, in the final year, she was friendly with one of the young chemistry lecturers (the poor teacher referred to above) but none of knew about this until much later. Eventually they got married and still live in Wellington.

- **Graduation ceremony:** The graduation ceremonies are held in the May of the year after you actually graduate. Hence, during my masters' year (1961), I attended the ceremony to receive my B.Sc. degree. This was held in the Wellington Town Hall. I did not buy a gown, just hired one.

In 1962, when I was in Christchurch, I had to travel up to Wellington for my M.Sc. graduation. I could easily have missed the event as the weather in Christchurch was so bad that the flight I was on to Wellington was cancelled. A bus took the passengers to Blenheim from where we flew across to Wellington. For this ceremony I bought a cap and gown which had to be obtained from England. But what a hassle it was in those days. There was no free currency exchange so I could not just go to the bank to send £ to the UK. However, the Post Office allowed you to purchase *one* coupon for a small amount for posting overseas. So I went round many Post Offices (and I think, back to some of the earlier ones again) to get enough coupons which I then airmailed to the UK. The cap and gown eventually arrived and I still have them.

I was not much concerned about getting graduation photographs taken (much to the chagrin of my mother), so the pictures here are the only ones I had taken. And I am not actually sure which is which. I *think* (only think!) that the upper one is for the B.Sc. while the lower is for the M.Sc.



- **Procesh:** On the morning of the graduation ceremony in 1961 (for my B.Sc. degree), the university students (of most subjects, not just chemistry), held a float parade through the street of Wellington. This is called 'procesh' (after 'procession' I guess). The floats were very primitive. Our Chemistry masters' class made a float. It was to be a flying saucer from Mars (why we chose this idea I do not remember, though a sign on the float says something



about the stages of evolution) and I was appointed the job of the Martian on our float. In the pictures (below), I am seated in the 'flying saucer' on the roof of the cab of the truck. One thing that the others guys did was to spray liquid air onto the spectators. Relatively harmless as it would evaporate almost immediately it left the container. (Other photos of process are in the folder.)



- <sup>35</sup>  
<sub>17</sub> **Hitch-hiking:** During almost all of the term breaks, I would return to Gisborne. For the very first one (May, 1958), one of the girls in the Form 6A in Gisborne (and in a number of earlier classes as well), persuaded me to hitch-hike the 320 or so miles (520 km) with her. This was my first attempt at hitch-hiking and it turned out to be quite an adventure.
- We set off at about 5.30 am on a Saturday morning, by going to a milk depot and getting a ride (free of course) in a milk tanker that took us about 50 miles up the (west) coast. On to Palmerston North, where an elderly couple in a very old car took us - painfully slowly - a little further. They called in at some place and told us to wait. Instead we sneaked off back to the main road to try to get another faster vehicle, when lo and behold, they were the first people to arrive. Not wanting another very slow ride, we dived into a ditch so they wouldn't see us. Well, things went smoothly after that, though still not very fast,
  - When we were a few miles past Wairoa (about 64 miles from Gisborne) it was about 6 pm and became very dark and was pouring with rain and we were almost soaked to the skin even though we were wearing raincoats. We got to the hot-springs area at Morere and called in at a grocery store to ask if they knew of anybody travelling on to Gisborne. Instead they told us the road was closed because of a slip caused by the heavy rain. So, we were stuck. The folks then invited us to stay with them for the night. The girl got a nice room inside the house while I got a much rougher shelter behind the house.
  - Later the next day, the slip was cleared and the road opened again. We got a ride all the way to Gisborne with the folks dropping each of us off at our respective homes.
  - We returned to Wellington (independently) by train! I never tried hitch-hiking that route again (though I did lots of hitch-hiking in subsequent years when I visited the UK and Europe. (refer to later files on my travels.)



- **'Uncle' Arthur:** My mother had an uncle (on her mother's side) who lived in Wellington. His name was Arthur Harper. He was the younger brother of 'Uncle' Bernard who was killed at Messines (Mesen) Ridge in Flanders in WWI which we visited in 1993. He worked in the civil service and rose to be the Secretary (head) of the Department of Internal Affairs from 1949 to 1958. This was an important position and he was in charge, for example, of royal visits to New Zealand. So when the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh visited the country in 1953, he would often be accompanying them. (This visit occurred when I was in Form 3; I



turned out to see them when they came to Gisborne; the public welcome was held on the grounds of the Intermediate School.) I very occasionally visited the Harpers but on one occasion he gave me a special pass to visit Parliament while a debate was in progress. I have included here a picture of the building which housed his department, mainly because it is the second-largest wooden building in the world. (It is now the Law School of the Victoria University of Wellington.)



### **Boys' Institute and life there**

I lived here for all four years I was in Wellington. Hostel life was new to me, of course, and I loved it. I was never tempted to move out into a flat though some of the boys did; the thought of having to clean the place and cook all your food did not appeal to me.

- **The building itself**

The building, as it was when I lived there, was opened in 1914 in Tasman Street. It actually consisted of two parts:

1. The Boys' Institute itself, which occupied the first two floors (as shown in the photo)
2. The hostel part, called the "Sarah Ann Rhodes Home for Boys" on the three floors



above this (not in the picture having been demolished well after my time because of an earthquake risk).

However, the whole establishment was usually called the Boys' Institute.

The ground floor, as well as having offices, consisted of physical exercise facilities. There was a pool that was the first indoor swimming pool in the Southern Hemisphere. For three of the four years I was there, this was boarded over and used as a gymnasium, and for basketball and volleyball. It was then changed back into a heated pool and a new gym was built next door. At the rear of the pool there was a boxing and wrestling room cum weight room. The picture on the right shows the BI logo, which is similar to the (?old) YMCA logo but has the additional word 'social'. (This is the logo I had sown onto my track suit top for many years.)



The top three floors of the building were the hostel. It was not large really and there were only about 30 or fewer boarders. It was old, and it showed. Most of the rooms were double occupancy though there were some single rooms. There were the bare minimum of facilities but they were sufficient. These included:

- One telephone for everybody. Whoever answered the phone would let out a holler for the person concerned. There was no TV.
- There was a lounge with old chairs and a sofa and a  $\frac{3}{4}$  size billiard table, which I used a lot. There was a piano which was also a pianola (a piano in which you could place a roll with many holes in it) and on using foot pedals, the roll would move and music would be played.

#### • **My rooms**

I shared a double room in the first year then had the same single room for the remaining three years. The picture shows me studying in my single room. It was spartan, with a bed, a wardrobe, a set of draws a shelf and a table. The chair is one I bought myself. In the picture, the part above the shelf is actually part of a sloping roof. In the top left of the picture there is a window through which I could climb onto a ledge and then onto the (flat) roof. I would sometimes go out to sit in the sunshine. (The two neighbouring rooms had similar windows.)



In 1959, my second year there, I bought a small radio; I would listen mainly to the classical radio station. Later I purchased a turntable to play records, i.e. long-playing flat discs (this was years before CDs). I also joined a record club called the "World Record Club" (WRC) which issued records at cheaper prices. The only condition was that you had to buy at least

one(?) of the records they issued each year. When the company started, it issued a free record of “Swan Lake”, which I still have!

- **Washing**

There was a wash-house on a large balcony, which contained an old-style electric washing machine for cleaning clothes (not unlike that in the picture but without a lady to do the washing - we had to do that ourselves). This had to be filled with hot water from a tap using a hose. It had a wringer (?electrical) to wring the clothes and outside on the balcony were wires on which to hang the clothes. As in the picture, there were also a couple of old tubs.



- **Balcony**

The balcony allowed us good views of the “Basin Reserve” a cricket ground below the hostel. This is shown in the picture; the BI would be in the background, approximately where the arrow points (but cannot be seen here as all the top floors have been demolished).



- **Food**

There was a kitchen and a dining room. Breakfasts and dinners were taken there and were at set hours, e.g. breakfast was at 7 am or 7.30 am. The staff would also prepare sandwich lunches for those who wanted them, though I was not always keen on the fillings. If you came back late, and let them know, there would be a warm dinner waiting in the oven, though by then it had often dried out and was not very appealing. Still, it had to do.

At one point, we rebelled against the quality of the food that we got. So, the management said we could set up a committee to design a better menu. This we did and the food improved a lot. Eventually it was stopped as our tastes, apparently, were too expensive!

- **Matrons**

The hostel was run by a matron who lived in-house. We had two matrons while I was there. The second was rather old and partial to me and I think I was her pet. In the evenings she would give me a thermos flask of hot milk (?chocolate drink) for supper. I found that I was able to manipulate her quite easily, though I never did this in a malicious way but mainly to placate her when some boys - including myself - had done something mischievous (see below under 'Pranks').



- **House master**

The hostel always had one or more house masters, chosen from the residents. From October, 1960 (my third year there) I was a house master. One advantage of this was that board was much cheaper. There were some responsibilities but these were not onerous at all. One task was to issue keys to boys who would be out late as the front door was locked (by the house master) at about 10 pm.

- **Provisions from home**

My mother would regularly post provisions down to me.

This was mainly food and it was good to get it to supplement what the hostel gave us. Provisions were mainly her fruit cakes (dark, rich, no icing and delicious!) and boxes of fruit. (The picture is not of my mother's cakes but hers looked very similar.) I would ration these out by including just *one* slice of cake and *one* fruit for lunch with



the sandwiches provided by the hostel. Occasionally, she would also send clothes. (On the drawers in the photo of my room above, there is a tin. This probably contain a cake as my mother would always send them in a tin.)

- **Haircuts and clothes**

When living in Gisborne, my father would give us boys haircuts. But in Wellington I had to go to a barber's to get it cut. In 1961, I got a Caesar haircut (see picture). (George Clooney is also supposed to have a Caesar haircut though I think mine looked more 'Roman' than his.)



In the first year at the hostel, a classmate friend from mine from Gisborne also stayed at the hostel (I have mentioned this). One day, we decided to give him a haircut. This turned out to be a disaster; by the time we had finished, he had a 'basin' haircut.

For most of the time, I would wear corduroy trousers (cf. those in the picture); they were fashionable in those days. However, when they got old, bits of the corduroy would drop out to leave patches.



- **Health**

My day-by-day diaries seem to suggest that I was sick quite often (though that is probably because I wrote down everything that happened). There was the usual asthma, though just occasionally.

Others included diarrhoea and sore throats. I also seemed to be tired many times. It seems I would go to bed to sleep off some of the afflictions. But all the time I was in Wellington, I



never, as far as I can remember, went to see a doctor. And the university had so medical services.

- **Entertainment**

- From time to time (actually few and far between), socials were organised at the hostel. I remember a dance held in the lounge in my first year. Girls were brought in from somewhere - a girls' hostel I think. Others, we organised (or tried to!) ourselves. In 1961, we organised a dance for an evening but it was a complete flop; only three couples turned up! We had lots of food left over. So we took it to Athletic Park (Rugby ground) intending to sell it to the crowds who were lining up to buy tickets for a Rugby test that was being held the next day. Even that was a flop. I think we ended up giving the food away.

- Most of our entertainment came from going to the movies, usually on Fridays nights. If you look at the diaries for these years, you will see that I have listed the titles of the films seen. Often, the movie would be followed by a visit to a coffee bar for a cup of coffee. In those days, smoking was allowed, and I did not always enjoy these places because of it.

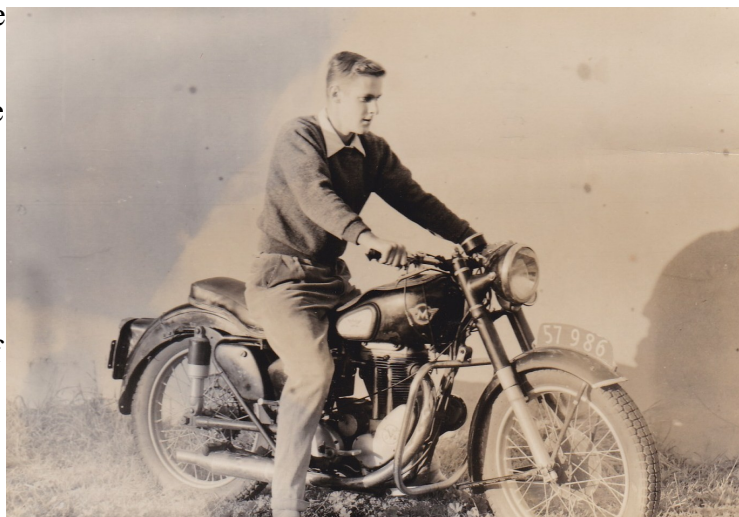
- **Chapel**

The Boys' Institute had a small chapel and on some Sundays held (non-compulsory) services. I would go on occasions.

- **Motor bike**

Very, very few people of my age could afford cars in those days.

But motorcycles were affordable - just. In the second year (1959), I bought a second-hand motor-bike, but I think I got a 'lemon' as it was always breaking down. (My 1959 diary records many of the problems I had with it.) The bike was a 'Matchless' 500 cc single cylinder machine. It was



kept in an old wooden bicycle shed in the grass plot next to the BI. As I was new to motor cycling, I had what were called 'L' (learner) plates which meant there were some restrictions such as not being allowed to carry a passenger or travel above a certain speed (I often ignored that!) before getting a license, which I got a few months later; this involved a written test and a driving test.

**First trip home:** At the end of the *first* term (May) I travelled to Gisborne and back to Wellington on the motor bike. All went well, except when I ran out of petrol at about the halfway mark and where I was a long way from a petrol station. A guy stopped to assist

and offered to tow me to a station. First, we tied a rope from his vehicle to the steering column of the bike. This did not work as I could not steer with the result that the bike went in one direction - the wrong one - and fell over. After that, I think I held on to the rope and we made it to the station.

**Accident:** However, I had a serious crash later that year while travelling to Gisborne at the end of the *second* term (three terms a year) in August. I had got just past Wairoa (where relatives - mother's second sister and family - lived on their orchard and where I had stopped for a while to see them) and had about 50 miles left when I remember I was thinking about the Rugby test between the All Blacks and the British Lions that was under way at that time back in Wellington. I think I went to sleep momentarily because I then ran off the road at a bend (which later turned out to be a very innocuous bend). I was not travelling fast as I had passed a traffic policeman sitting in a car a mile or so back and had seen him pull out to follow me. Although what happened next took just a second or two, I can replay most of it in my mind and it seemed to happen in slow motion. Where I left the road, there was a pile of hardened dirt placed there after road improvements. The front wheel of the bike hit this and the back of the bike flew upwards, catapulting me through the air like a missile. I remember seeing a rock about 18 inches long jutting out from the embankment and wondering (yes, in those one or two seconds I was actually wondering!) what would happen if I hit it. The next thing I remember was picking myself up from the deep muddy drain at the side of the road. I then saw that my bike was virtually a write-off. What I think happened was that after launching me into the air, the bike went up then came down head first. The handle-bars had snapped off. The headlight was a crumpled piece of metal. The front forks and wheel were buckled and had pierced the petrol tank which itself was also crumpled. The fuel had spilled from the tank onto the very hot engine. I think the only thing that prevented an explosion was that there was so much fuel that it flooded the hot engine and couldn't evaporate (which is needed before a fuel can ignite). Then I looked at myself. I was virtually unscathed except for being covered in mud. I was wearing long, somewhat loose water-proof overalls plus a similar jacket. I then saw that they had been sliced open from head to toe! I guessed that I had grazed that rock that was jutting out and it had cut them open. Had I been just one or two inches closer to the rock, I would not be here today recounting what happened.

My reaction then was *not* how lucky I had been in avoiding that rock but how on earth I was going to get home!! Well, at that point (remember all this happened in just a few seconds) the traffic policeman arrived. He helped me, though I do not remember what he said. One legal requirement was that an accident had to be reported to a police station within 24 hours. However, he said not to worry about it; I guess back-country policemen take things a little easier than others. He drove me back to a telephone and I called my relatives back in Wairoa who came out with their car and trailer and took me and the

wrecked bike back to their place. After a clean up, I called home. My mother answered the phone and I first said “Its me here. And I am all right. ....” Then I took the railcar (which was due in Wairoa about then) to Gisborne. My uncle sent the wrecked bike to Gisborne a few days later by freight train. Also, my holiday luggage arrived on another train; I had to send my luggage by rail as I could not carry it on the bike.

**Repair:** I spent the rest of the three-week holiday trying to repair the bike. My cousin Roger (son of the Wairoa uncle) was at that time working in a garage in Gisborne and boarding at our place. He took the remains of the headlamp and fuel tank and almost miraculously panel beat them back into shape. I bought a second hand set of handle bars from a spare parts shop. The front wheel and bent forks needed more help and repairing them was a professional job, and the one that cost the most. The rear of the bike was essentially unscathed. However, the frame of the bike had been bent slightly and there was no way that could be fixed. The result was that that the bike had a slight lean to one side when ridden. When 'fixed' (as well as I could), I took it out for a long test ride. I was actually riding, quite fast at times, just in shorts - no footwear, no shirt *and* no helmet (helmets were not compulsory then though I did use one normally).

**Return journey:** I had fixed the bike sufficiently to enable it to be ridden back to Wellington at the end of the holidays. It was a Saturday. But that journey was also eventful. About half way, there was a large bang from the primary chain case. The chain had snapped! But fortunately it was the pin joining the two ends of the chain that had snapped rather than a chain link. So, I left the bike by the side of the road and hitch-hiked the 10 or so miles back to the nearest town (Hastings) and found a motor bike shop at about 11.58 am, two minutes before it was to close for the weekend. I managed to get a new pin then hitch-hiked back and repaired the chain and proceeded on my way.

As I neared Wellington, it was getting dark so I switched on the headlamp. Then I noticed that it was getting dimmer and dimmer. This was because the battery was not being re-charged by a chain from the engine. So I switched off the lights and only turned them on again if I thought a vehicle on the road might be a traffic policeman. Once in Wellington, I kept to the back roads for the same reason. I eventually made it back at 6.15 pm. (Actually I am not completely sure if this last bit about the lights occurred at this time or in the previous (May) holidays when I was returning to Wellington on the bike.)

After returning to Wellington, I was sick of the bike. It still caused trouble so I sold it - at a loss!

**The radar trap warning:** Once when nearly at the university science block (at the top of a long straight hill road), I passed a radar trap placed at the bottom of the hill. This was obviously intended to catch drivers who drove too fast coming down the hill. So several of us made a big sign to warn drivers and placed it on the roadside. I think it worked!

- **Pranks**

Being boys, I suppose, we got up to quite a lot of pranks. Here are some of them.

- **Water fights:** Occasionally we would have water fights *inside* the hostel. Once we even used the (fire) water hoses! The place was a mess afterwards.
- **Room ransacking:** For whatever reasons, we would often ransack rooms. You would come home and find the whole room ransacked (not damaged). Then if you knew, or even suspected who did it, the same would be done to their rooms.
- **Cricket:** In the corridor (not really a prank): We would use a tennis ball rather than a real hard cricket ball. Unfortunately, with the staircase at the end of the corridor, the ball would often end up several floors below which meant a long trek to retrieve it.
- **Initiations:** For new boys, or for some special occasion, a ducking in a bath full of water was in order. This would be done with clothes on and in winter was quite cold. Of course, we would resist so it would generally take a lot of people and a lot of time before it was successful. I got a ducking after I had been promoted to house master.
- **Rooftop antics:** I mentioned that we could climb through the windows in my room (and neighbouring rooms) and get onto the (flat) roof. On the roof there was a water tank. We would sometimes use this to throw bags of water onto boys from the hostel on the footpath below. Once, we saw a guy (not from the hostel) we did not like approaching. We had quite a big plastic bag so we filled this with water and dropped it. I think it missed, but the guy must have complained as we got a visit from two policemen later who just warned us.
- **Midnight swim:** Once, in the final year, at my instigation, a group of us decided to go for a midnight swim in the (heated) swimming pool on the ground floor. (The BI physical director was also in on this as he had the key to open the door.) To help avoid detection, we had the lights turned off. But eventually we were caught by the matron and she was mad. But when she saw me - her 'pet' remember - things quietened down and nothing happened.
- **Water fountain:** One evening, after a movie (probably) on the way to a coffee shop, we were stopped by a couple of policemen when I had climbed up a fountain in the Civic Square and jumped off. Not serious!
- **Queen Victoria's mysterious footsteps:** On a prominent street in Wellington is a statue of Queen Victoria (see the photograph). Just behind her on the left of the photograph, but not visible, are public toilets. One day, some mysterious large whitewash footsteps appeared on the road from the base of the statue to the ladies' toilet and back again. These were placed there by a group of us (for what reason, I cannot





remember). We had made two large three-ply feet and went down late one night with these and a bucket of whitewash and placed the footsteps on the road. They did not last long; with the first rain (and it rained a lot in Wellington), they were washed away.

- **Guy Fawkes prank:** The first Guy Fawkes Day was celebrated in our corridor by throwing fire-crackers out the window, though not at people. (In my first room, there was only a roof below the window.)

- **Visiting ships**

From time to time, various kinds of ships would visit Wellington and these were sometimes open to the public. I and others liked to visit these and inspect them. Here are some examples:

- Whaling ships: In 1958, 27 ships of a Russian whaling fleet arrived. Another chap and I visited the mother ship and spent about 2½ hours looking over it. We also managed to get some souvenirs (Russian matches, cigarettes and coins) from the crew. I still have these.

- Liners: In the days before international air travel became cheaper and more available, most people would travel overseas on liners. There were regular runs to Australia, the UK and, I think to the USA though these were less popular. Two liners to the UK were the “Southern Cross” (pictured above) and the “Canberra” (lower). I also had a look over these ships.



- Naval ships: Ships from various navies would also make visits and would often be open to the public for a while. For example, in 1958, we had a look over two Australian frigates that were in port, the “Queenborough” and the “Quickmatch” (pictured). We also managed to get below decks which apparently was not allowed; surprising what you can do if you don't ask! In my 1961 diary, I write about another visit in September of that year.



HMAS Queenborough



HMAS Quickmatch

- **Pencil drawings**

Once or twice (mainly in the second year) I got keen on art and did some pencil drawings. These were mainly of views I got after climbing out my window and sitting there. I still have one of these drawings.

- **Protests against South African Rugby tour**

In May 1960, the All Blacks were due to leave for a tour of South Africa. However, because of their apartheid laws, South Africa demanded that no Maoris be included in the team. This caused outrage and there were many protests around New Zealand to stop the tour. On the date



mentioned in the poster, a group of us from the BI joined in that protest in the Town Hall. However, the tour eventually still went ahead. (Bigger protests that led to riots occurred in the 1980s for the same reason.)

## **Exercise and Sports**

- **Basketball**

While in Wellington, basketball (as it was called then in NZ to distinguish it from 'girls' basketball' which was played outside and later renamed 'netball'), I and others had always wanted to play this at school but there were no facilities for it. I played for University teams. Competitions were held one evening a week during the season, in a public stadium. Sometimes games were very late e.g. after 10 pm. Our games were almost always very low scoring, for example, a score of 10 to 8 would not be uncommon. As well as playing, all teams were expected to act as official scorekeepers occasionally, once every few months, for the whole evening.

In 1961, I was selected to represent the university in basketball at the annual inter-university sports tournament for that year, which for that year was held in Palmerston North about 120 km north of Wellington (where Massey University is). I was not the first choice for the squad but must have been a reasonable enough player to have been selected. I cannot remember whether or not we won the basketball tournament - probably not.

In the later years, the Boys' Institute also had a basketball team which I was part of. So, for a while I would be playing in the same competition in two different teams. (I cannot recall ever having to play in both teams at the same time against each other!)

- **Swimming and water polo**

When the pool re-opened at the Boys' Institute, we set up a water polo team and practised there. We competed against other teams in Wellington and didn't do too badly. I enjoyed water polo even though it can be a dirty game (I learnt to play some tricks under the water that were difficult for the referees to pick up) and scored a number of goals. I also started swimming in the pool though my longest swim was only one mile; most were much less than that. I would also enter some swimming competitions held in the pool though never did very well.

- **Weight training**

I started weight training at university. Again, there were no facilities for this at school back in Gisborne. I would exercise regularly either at the university gym or the BI gym.

- **Running**

I also began to do some street running, though not much. This would consist of the occasional run around the (big) block and would be only from about 6 to 10 minutes in length. Street running did not really begin in earnest until I went to Christchurch.

- **Boxing and Judo**

I also took up these two sports for a short time but did not pursue them - too much study to do.

- **Holiday street runs**

For some of the time I was in Wellington, my cousin Roger was working in Gisborne and boarding at the Gisborne home. When I came home in the holidays, we would go for runs up the hill through the hospital and then in a loop back. These took about 20 minutes. I was very competitive and liked to win. As we were both of a similar standard, this would usually involve a sprint for the last 800 metres or so.

## **Opening of Wellington Airport**

- **The old airport**

Until 1959, the Wellington airport was at Paraparaumu, about 50 km up the (west) coast from Wellington, so it involved a lot of road travel just to get to or from it. I only used this airport once on a flight from Gisborne after a term break in 1960. I remember the weather for this was appalling with heavy rain and low cloud. The plane (a DC-3) flew via Napier and Palmerston North under the cloud for a lot of the way and also flew between the hills along the gorge east of Palmerston North. It was a rough trip with safety belts on most of the way. We had to land at Paraparaumu because the recently-opened new airport in Wellington was closed due to the weather. We arrived at Paraparaumu at 6.15 pm in utter blackness. I eventually got back at the hostel at 7:50 pm.

- **The new airport**

This was built in the city where there had once been a very small airfield. It was built on land that had been uplifted during a major earthquake in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It had only a single runway (and still does) and to make it long enough, it extends into Cook Strait at one end and into the harbour at the other end.

**Opening and near disaster:** The airport was opened in October 1959 with great fanfare and with an air pageant. This included jet fighters (I think!) and an RAF Vulcan bomber that had flown out from England specially for the occasion. A group of us went to the air pageant



in the afternoon for the official opening. Instead of entering at the official gate (not sure if you had to pay), we, along with quite a number of others, climbed through a hole in the perimeter fence on the other side of the runway. This nearly proved to be fatal! Everything went fine until the Vulcan arrived and tried to land. The runway was too short for it to land, as jets in those days did not have reverse thrust to slow them down. But there was a strong wind blowing (not uncommon for Wellington which is known as the 'windy city') so the pilot thought this would allow him to land. After two dummy runs with brief touchdowns, he approached for the third time from the direction of Cook Strait. To ensure he could use the maximum length of runway, he came in low intending to touch down right at the beginning of the runway. Unfortunately, there was sudden down draught which caused the plane to hit the embankment at the end of the runway. The undercarriage hit the ground and the plane lurched and veered to the left - right to where we were standing. I could see what was happening and thought the plane would crash, taking us with it. The pilot reacted quickly and gave it full thrust and managed to get it into the air. We could see that the port undercarriage was broken and that it had punctured a fuel tank causing fuel to spray out. The plane then flew on to make a crash landing at the RNZAF base at Ohakea about 120 km north of Wellington.

*[The picture shows the broken undercarriage. as the damaged plane climbs. I would be in the picture in one of the groups in the background Here is a YouTube video of the near crash:*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3iMw7Q7H68&feature=related>

*In the video, the first shots show the initial trial runs. In the third and near-fatal attempt, note that as the port undercarriage hits the bank, the port wing dips and the plane veers to towards the groups of people at the side of the runway – right where I was!!*

*Also:*

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-tkSvP\\_Bng&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-tkSvP_Bng&feature=related)

*Here are some still photos plus an account of what happened:*



<http://www.thunder-and-lightnings.co.uk/vulcan/gallery.php>

See under 'Break a leg!' Roll your mouse over the photos to get a description of what is happening.

## 21<sup>st</sup> Birthday

In those days, reaching the age of 21 was an important milestone as it was *supposed* to be the age when one became an adult. It was almost always celebrated with a birthday party. I became 21 in March of 1961 and had my party in Gisborne in the following May holidays. This followed the graduation ceremony and two of my university friends were with me. The pictures show the invitation card and the cake (big isn't it?) I am not sure if my mother made the cake; she might have baked the cakes then got someone else to do the icing (she might not have done that). In the family photo, the lady on the right is Grandma Vallance, my mother's mother (who was living with the family in Gisborne then in the converted washhouse). I note that Grandma Heyworth is not there; I do not know why she did not attend. The



last photo shows me and the two friends (not staying at the BI) who came to Gisborne with me for part of the holidays.

Note how formally we are dressed!



## Girlfriend

There was no time for girls for most of the time I was at university. There was just too much work to do to have to worry about girls. But in November of 1961, when the Masters examinations were over and most of the thesis work was done, that changed (for a while anyway). My two friends (in the above photo) arranged a 'blind date' night out to see the movie "My Fair Lady" accompanied by three nurses. The nurse I partnered was called Kartini de Bres. Her family had emigrated from Holland in 1952 and settled in Wellington. Her first name was taken from that of an Indonesian lady who became famous in Indonesia and Holland (Indonesia was once a Dutch colony). After the movie outing we kept in contact and followed it up with a couple of outings and dinner at her place with her family (who were then in the process of moving to Auckland). In December, she and her family were to have a holiday in the middle of nowhere near Rotorua and I was invited. So I went there for about four days before heading to Gisborne for Christmas. There was not much to do at the place she was staying, except go for swims in the river and play table tennis. She was keener on me than I was on her and it fizzled out after I went to Christchurch. (A little more on this in the Christchurch file.)



## Church

I continued going to church while in Wellington, attending one of the churches in our denomination. (The church building is shown in the photograph.) On many, but not all, Sundays I would walk there from the BI (took about 20 minutes) to attend Bible class followed by the church service. I had a number of



acquaintances there though this was mainly limited to Sundays. There were also some other branches of the church in the Wellington district and occasionally there would be youth

functions, including sports events and beach outings. I also note from my diaries that I, and others, visited many other churches as well.

At the church, there was one family in particular (named Halliwell - they also had relatives in Gisborne) that used to take care of young people like me who were staying in Wellington. From time to time they would invite me to their place for meals (usually after church).

**Youth camps:** Each year, the churches of our denomination would hold a youth camp at Easter time, alternating between the North and South Islands.

In 1959, my second year in Wellington, there was a camp in Nelson (a town at the top of the South Island). I particularly remember this one as a group of us from Wellington flew there and it was the first time in my life I had flown. We flew in a DC-



3 like the one in the photo (incidentally taken when it was at Nelson airport, though I got this picture from the Internet). We left Wellington on a perfect evening with the moon shining. I remember being fascinated watching the moon rise and fall as the plane banked. At Nelson, the camp was held in a school with classrooms being used for dormitories. I had asthma quite badly at times while there which was not very pleasant. I also attended an Easter youth camp in Wanganui (in the North Island) in 1960.

**Billy Graham crusade:** In 1959, Billy Graham held crusades in Australia and New Zealand. This included Wellington with services being held in Athletic Park, the main Rugby ground. He and his organisation used to hold these crusades in various places around the world that had invited them. A



few of us from the BI attended one of the meetings. (The photograph here is of a meeting in Auckland, not Wellington.)

### **Note on aircraft**

If you zoom in on the picture of the DC-3, you will see 'NAC' on the rudder of the plane. This was the name of the internal airline in New Zealand - "National Airways Corporation". The international airline then was TEAL ("Tasman Empire Airways Limited"). Later, the two



combined to become Air New Zealand.

In 1959, NAC got new “Viscount” aircraft (pictured).

These were the first turbo-prop driven aircraft in the world and were much faster and smoother than previous aircraft. I don't think I ever flew in one (in New Zealand) as they flew only between the main cities.



## Summer Work

As mentioned earlier, I spent most of the summer holidays working in Gisborne at the end of Form 6A and the first three years of university (1958 - 1960). I did not work in the summer at the end of the fourth (Masters) year, as the thesis work lasted right through the summer. The summer work was as follows:

End of 1957: At the beach camping site in Gisborne.

End of 1958: At the beach itself.

End of 1959: At a wool store in Gisborne.

End of 1960: At the same wool store and a grain store.

- **1958 - the beach:** At the beach in Gisborne there was a promenade and a building with changing rooms and places for picnics (see photograph). (This building has since been replaced.) To use the changing rooms, people had to pay. My job this summer was to sit in the changing room office to issue tickets and to check in any property, such as valuables). Each morning, on arrival, my first task was to hose down and clean the changing rooms, the shower cubicles (cold water only!) and the toilets. This job was nowhere near as interesting as that in the previous year working in the camping grounds. But still the pay, especially the overtime pay, was good.
- **1959 - the wool store:** For the next year, I decided not to go to the beach again but to work in a wool store. This particular job was well sought after by university students as the pay was quite good. (The other sought after jobs were at “Watties” a food-cannery, which would employ both boys and girls; wool stores were boys only.) There were a number of large wool stores in Gisborne. Summer was the peak shearing season on farms and the wool was brought into the wool stores for classification (as to fineness/thickness of the





fibres; fine wool is more valuable) and baling ready to be shipped overseas, mainly in those days to Britain. I worked in a wool store in which just two people worked regularly, one being the father of Peter Bennett (mentioned a number of times) was the manager. Because it was the peak season, I was hired to work there.

When the wool was brought in from farms, fleeces were first spread out on a large table and classified. Mr Bennett was an expert at this and while classifying the wool, he would teach me how to do it so that by the end of the summer, I became quite proficient at classifying (but was never allowed to do it without supervision). Classified wool was then put into bales. As the fleeces were tossed into a bale, they had to be compressed in order to get in as much as possible. This was done by a person - usually me - getting into the bale and compressing it with my feet. I remembered that after a long session, my legs would be covered with lanolin, which I suppose, was good for my skin. Then the bale would be sown up and weighed. Some bales weighed up to 500 lbs! The bales then had to be moved by *hand* trolley and stored in a large stack. Placing and moving such heavy bales was an art. Using hand forks, it was possible with practice to move a bale across the floor by turning and balancing it on its lower edges then using deft flicks of a hand fork to spin it across the floor.

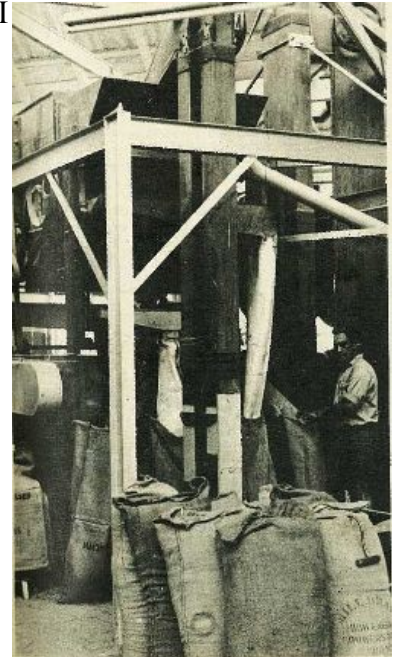
To place the bales in the stack, a small lift was employed. One day, this almost cost me two fingers on my right hand! Without thinking, I was holding the guide rail as the lift platform was lifting a bale. The wheel in the guide rail then ran over my fingers, squashing them. Naturally I let out a terrifying scream. Two fingers had been split open and it was possible to see large yellow globules of fat. If I remember correctly, there was not much blood. I was rushed to our family doctor (not the hospital) who treated me, without using stitches (I think). The wounds took some time to heal but I did not lose any time off work.

At lunch hours, I would bike (very quickly) to the beach (above, which was not too far away) for a swim followed by sunbathing while eating my lunch. Then I would get on my bike again and rush back to work. I could judge it nicely so that I go back right on the hour mark.

The guy who worked with Mr Bennett had served in the Army in the Italian campaign during World War II. During morning and afternoon break for a cup of tea, he would regale us with stories of things that happened. I remember that he was particularly scathing of the inaccuracy of American bombing, though I suspect there was a degree of 'We are better than you' in it.

- **1960 - the grain store:** In the next year, there was not enough work at the wool store for the whole holiday period so when the wool side started to taper off, they moved me across the road to help with the packing of grain (e.g. wheat, rye grass, clover) into bags. This was a very dusty job but I don't think it affected my asthma too much. The photographs (taken

in 1967 and not by me) show this in the actual store where I worked exactly as it was when I was there.



### **The Model T Ford**

My cousin Roger, whom I have mentioned a number of times, spent a few years in Gisborne during the time I was in Wellington and boarded at our home. At one stage he rented an old Model T Ford from the local auctioneer. One time, when I was home for the the summer holidays, we dressed up in smart suits and drove up and down the main street of Gisborne to show off! If I remember correctly, we were stopped by a policeman who told not



to show off and to go home! I suppose we did. I think the car was similar to the one in the photograph. It certainly was a two-door version with a seat that opens where the boot/trunk is (I think it might have been called a 'jump seat').