



MOUNT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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112 Taylors Rd, Mt Albert: A Student Flat in the mid 1980s

In this article, your editor remembers life in Mt Albert almost 40 years ago. It feels like yesterday...

I moved to Mt Albert in January 1985. I was 19, heading into my third year of a BA at the University of Auckland, and 112 Taylors Rd would be my first flatting experience. Five of us moved in, all country kids; Lynette was from Paparoa via Samoa, her boyfriend Mike from Otorohanga; Brenda, Andrew and I were from Warkworth. Lynette was the only one working in town over the summer, nannying in Point Chev, and she found the vacant house for rent through an agency, and signed us up. Our parents coped reasonably well with us going 'mixed flatting' but less well when they helped us move in and saw the state of the house and section. It had been a rental for quite some time, and was typical of the poorly maintained, uninsulated and unglazed old houses that most of our student friends lived in. But it had a distinct, albeit scungy, personality, and it was our castle.

We scrubbed all the surfaces and electroluxed the floors. Mike ripped up layers of vinyl and lino in the bathroom, revealing a dustbin-lid sized hole in the floor in front of the toilet, which he repaired and re-covered. I scraped back multiple paint layers from the bathroom walls, replacing the pillar-box red with a calmer deep blue. The leaks around the bathtub/shower were so bad that we bought six metres of plain plastic sheet and wrapped the bath completely. Lynette and Brenda scoured the kitchen cupboards and drawers and lined them with clean newspaper, then bravely tackled the encrusted stove. I can still hear their cries of disgust when they opened the warming drawer and found a roasting dish with the remains of an ancient roast lamb dinner. We kitted the flat out with cast offs from our extended families. Mike had a fridge, and our fathers and friends with utes turned up with beds and sofas and desks that had all seen better days. Our mothers and aunts passed on old kitchen items, and Lynette's former employer gave her an almost complete set of old Crown Lynn crockery as a farewell gift.

Let me walk you through our house. Today, 112 Taylors Rd has a high picket fence along the road frontage, but in 1985 it was open to the road. Built around 1911, it had a standard villa layout with high ceilings, a large bay-window fronted room on the left, a corridor down the middle, and a small verandah across the right side of the frontage. There was a fibrolite

single-car garage with a troublesome door to the right side of the house. From the footpath a couple of concrete steps lead down onto the verandah, and from there you turned left to enter the hall, which was very orange. The warmth was illusory – a rotary dial telephone sat on a padded bench in the hall and during the winters we huddled there bundled up like Antarctic explorers to make our calls.

On the left of the hall were three bedrooms. In the big front room with the bay window, the walls were painted black, and one of the old orange roller blinds covering the stiff sash windows had a large Zig Zag cigarette paper logo. This became Lynette and Mike's room. They decorated the walls with bright lavalavas, posters, piles of books and assorted road signs that mysteriously appeared after nights out. I claimed the middle room – a white cube with a glossy brown landscape of jagged mountain tops painted on the bottom half of the walls. A tiny mountain goat perched on one of the peaks. My posters and bookshelves were strategically placed to not obscure "me muriel." Brenda took the small back bedroom, which was painted a gentle happy yellow. This room got the morning sun, but was also the most prone to cold coming up from underneath, as the back of the house hung almost three storeys above the plunging back lawn.



Inside the front door on the right was the fourth bedroom. It was large, but quite dark which suited Andrew who was a night owl. Its walls were powder pink. At the end of the hall was the bathroom, served by a tiny hot water cylinder that required us to stagger our showers through the morning. The tiny living room was off to the right. It was crammed with a squishy old sofa and a large coffee table that we couldn't all sit around. The fridge hummed in the corner. Tall built-in cupboards flanked the unusable fireplace; Lynette's tiny black and white TV sat on top of the left hand cupboard, and we would crane our necks to watch *The Young Ones*, *Hogan's Heroes* and *MASH*. At the end of the living room was the kitchen alcove – just a stove, a

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terrazzo sink bench, and hard-to-open cupboards and drawers painted 50s kitchen green. The old food safe was still on the wall above the stove.

The back door off the kitchen opened onto a small concrete pad. Straight ahead was access to the garage, and to the side, some steep steps led to a wonky concrete path. You ducked under the drooping Hills Hoist washing line to get to the laundry. This was a draughty room tucked under the house with concrete double tubs and a fearsome Fisher & Paykel wringer washing machine that was much older than we were.

The path continued down to the back garden, a huge scoria-walled wilderness of long grass and fruit trees. An ancient wastewater pipe ran along the top of the side scoria wall and across the waste ground behind our boundary. Looking out, all we could see from our lounge and garden were a line of tall trees, smothered in thick morning glory vines, which bloomed deep rich purple for what seemed like most of the year. It was a wild and magical private garden where we sunbathed and studied, played scrag rugby games and held Guy Fawkes bonfires. All of this has now gone. In 1997, 112 and 114 Taylors Rd would be subdivided and soon after two villas relocated onto the back sections. There is no longer the purple-green natural barrier, and the huge housing development *The Alberton* is being constructed just over the back wall.



The sixth member of our household was Lynette's tortoiseshell Kucing, also known as 'Cat called Cat' (her name means 'cat' in Indonesian). She loved our wild section and was quietly tolerant of her human housemates. She would follow when Lynette walked down to the Four Square shop at the corner of Alberton Ave, hiding in the bushes half way down Taylors Rd, then pouncing out at her returning mistress. We used that shop for small, quick purchases, but did our main weekly shop at St Lukes Foodtown on late shopping night (Thursdays). The five of us would walk down, have dinner at McDonalds, do our shop, and carry our heavy plastic bags of groceries home. One night at the Mall we loaded a huge sack of onions onto Andrew's motor bike. It fell off as he turned left into Taylors Rd and when we caught up on foot we found him dashing around through the traffic picking up the scattered vegetables.

We also used the dairy on the opposite corner of Taylors Rd and St Lukes Rd. One of us would dash up there for bread and milk for our breakfasts and packed sandwich

lunches. As students living on a bursary we had very little money, but we cooked sensibly and ate well, with occasional supplements from our parents. Once a term, when our bursary was paid, we would buy a bottle of wine and have a special steak meal.

The owner of 112 Taylors Rd was Gunther Hentschel, a young German who worked as a hospital radiographer. He rented out several old houses: we had friends living in at least one other of 'Gunther's houses.' We paid \$125 a week - \$25 each. One day he asked to meet us, and we sat around nervously. He apologised profusely – he needed to raise our rent by \$15 to cover his mortgage costs. We looked at each other and nodded - \$15 x 5 of us was an extra \$75 a week, and that would still make it one of the cheaper rents around. Then we realised he meant \$15 in total. At that point Mike offered him a beer.

Our neighbours were lovely to us. When we first moved in, we planned a flat-warming party, so Lynette and I went around to all the neighbours, introduced ourselves, explained our plans, hoped that we wouldn't disturb people, apologised in advance if we did, and issued an open invitation to join us (none of them did). That party (and quite a few others) was a great success, and the neighbours, most of whom were retired people, always treated us with warm indulgence.

Our parties were a bit different... We hosted a Mexican Fiesta, and a 'P Party' where everyone dressed as something starting with P. Lynette's 21st party was hippy themed. One night, we hired Bringwonder (Derek Gordon), New Zealand's only full-time professional storyteller, who told violent folk tales from old Ireland to a very mixed audience of arts, science and engineering students packed into the villa's black bedroom. We charged two dollars a head to be able to pay him his \$100 fee. Another night, our Halloween party went awry when the elderly inherited pressure cooker exploded and the witches' brew steak and kidney stew that Brenda and Lynette had been making, enough for 50, splattered all over the kitchen.



Lynette's 21st in the garage, Dec 1985. Alice, Mike, Lynette, Brenda, Alan (a friend) & Lynley

Next door, at 110 Taylors Rd, lived a widower named Adomas Kleinys, who we talked to often. In mid 1985, he was convinced that a woman living further along the

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road, whose husband was French, was Dominique Prieur, one of the Rainbow Warrior bombers. He passed away in his sleep the following year, which was an awful shock for us. Next door to Adomas were Mr and Mrs Eyre. One day not long after we moved in, Lynette and I were sitting on our verandah, with to a Topp Twins LP playing in the background. The Eyrés were walking past, introduced themselves, and commented on our choice of music. It wasn't very loud, but we assumed they didn't like it. Far from it – their daughter Maggie was a close friend of Linda and Jools Topp, who were frequent visitors to their house. They welcomed us to the street and invited us to their place for tea.

To get around we walked and took busses – only a few of our friends had cars. We caught the bus on New North Rd opposite St Lukes Church to travel the two stages into University, and on the way home we usually got off at the Alberton Ave corner and puffed back up the Taylors Rd hill. Lynette sometimes rode her 10 speed bike and Andrew had his motorbike.

I only remember two 'Mt Albert' events. One day we were rocked and shocked by the huge explosion of a petrol tank at a local garage (was it the one on the corner of Kitenui Ave?). And one cold clear night we dressed

Mt Albert 100 Years Ago: November 1922 to January 1923

- Mt Albert was about to be connected to electric power, supplied from the Kingsland sub-station.
- The population of greater Auckland was almost 17,000. 12,000 lived in Mt Albert Borough.
- Planning was underway to extend the tramline through Edendale to Calgary St. This included the erection of a traffic bridge over the railway line at Kingsland, and upgrading the road.
- Concrete paving was installed on New North Rd from Dominion Rd to Kingsland Post Office.
- Lightning ripped apart a house on the corner of Kingsway Ave and St Lukes Rd.
- Torrential rains at the end of January (50 mm/hour) flooded many parts of the Borough. Edendale was badly affected. The Council admitted that flooding in low lying areas could not be avoided, but the Borough Engineer undertook to do what he could.
- Two women in a car were struck by a train at the Edendale crossing. The train pushed their smashed car 100 metres along the track before it stopped. Neither of them were badly injured.
- New houses were being erected in the Mt Albert Borough at the rate of one per day. Six brick shops were erected in New North Rd Mt Albert; five of various materials in Edendale (Sandringham). The volcanic soil was seen as an advantage for flower and vegetable gardeners, but lack of sanitation was considered a drawback of the area.

warmly and trooped up to the archery field on the mountain to peer at Halley's Comet through a telescope. We were underwhelmed, and came home and drank hot chocolate. I still have the souvenir postcard.

I lived there for two years, with some changes of flatmates – Andrew and Brenda moved on, Alice and Jo moved in, Lynette went to France for a year. Over summer holidays, empty rooms were sub-let which brought in some interesting characters – the bass-guitar playing Satanist with the sweet girlfriend; the nice young man who spent hours each day phoning pre-teen girls from his church... We completed our degrees and graduated; I studied part-time and started working in the second year I was there. We worked hard, had lots of mostly good clean fun, grew up and got ready for the next phase of our lives.

After I left, the flat continued for several more years until our social group lost track of it. I'm told that a clothes dryer was installed in the laundry and the engineering students vented it up into the lounge as a source of heating. Those were the days.

Article by Lynley Stone and Lynette Wrigley Brown

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Auckland Star 9 Nov 1922, p.16

MAHS PAST EVENT REPORT

MAHS Christmas Gathering, Sunday 4 December 2022 at the Senior Citizen's Hall in Wairere Ave. A good sized group of members gathered for a fun afternoon, and eleven members regaled us with a wide range of stories about Christmases past in New Zealand and overseas. After the stories, we sang cheerful Christmas carols, superbly accompanied by Reg Towers on the piano. During the final carol, Mary Inomata ushered in a sumptuous afternoon tea with a surprise flaming Christmas pudding. It was a delight to meet face to face and celebrate together.



MAHS DATES TO REMEMBER FOR 2023

Masks are encouraged to protect our vulnerable members. All talks and meetings include a light afternoon tea.

Saturday 25 February. 2.30-4pm. Senior Citizen's Hall in Rocket Park. Ross Fergusson will talk on "From mihoutao to chinese gooseberry to kiwifruit."

Note our room booking is shorter than usual - please arrive promptly so we can start at 2.30pm.

Sunday 26 March. 2-4pm. Neighbourhood walk with Mary Inomata and Lynley Stone. This walk will explore the heritage of the area around Wairere Ave, Burch St and Maybeck Rd, including an overview of some local maternity homes. Numbers limited, please contact Mary at 021 437 480 to book a place.

Saturday 15 April. 2-4pm. Ferndale House. We will celebrate being able to return to Ferndale House after its refurbishment by holding a Members' Show and Tell event, followed by afternoon tea. The theme will be "A treasured old book" and we invite members to bring their treasured book along and spend 2 minutes telling us about it.

Sunday 21 May. 2-4pm. Ferndale House. Historian Debbie Dunsford will talk about her experience researching and writing *Change and Tradition*, the Centennial History of Mt Albert Grammar School. Debbie gave this fascinating presentation to a very small group of MAHS Members via Zoom during lockdown, and we are excited to be able to offer it again in a face to face meeting.

Sunday 18 June. 2-4pm. Ferndale House. Chris Hagon will talk with us about his experience living and working in English heritage homes.