

THE CHILDREN'S LIBRARY OF UPPER RICCARTON

The 50 Year Story of the
Sir John McKenzie Memorial Children's Library
Upper Riccarton, Christchurch



Discovering A Need

After twenty years of depression, war, and rationing by the early 1950s New Zealanders were suddenly beginning to sense the dawning of a new prosperity. With this prosperity came, it seemed, a certain loosening of the traditional moral codes. One of these was the spread of cheaply produced and marketed comics. In the early fifties there was, as one commentator put it, "a great uproar throughout the country about the masses of "horror" comics available to our children". Joan Fazackerly, a mother of four children in their early primary school years was among those concerned. The spread of these gruesome and tawdry comics was pervasive, and they inevitably found their way into the playground culture of children everywhere. Whilst attending a meeting of the Plunket Society in the Riccarton area Joan found other mothers there felt as she did about their children being exposed to such trashy publications. The group of mothers discussing the problem "came to the conclusion that their youngsters seemed to turn to comics only when there was nothing better available." Books were far too expensive to buy in quantities sufficient to keep up with enthusiastic demands of young readers. Yet no children's library existed closer than the city centre, a considerable bus journey away and, anyway, a journey impossible for the younger children to make alone. The city library was also not part of their own rating area. Primary school libraries in that era barely existed, with few schools having a complete room dedicated as a

library. Such was the energy and interest generated by the discussion about good books for children, six of the mothers decided to start their own children's library! The obvious starting place seemed to visit the only existing library in the area, the voluntary library at Church Corner, the Upper Riccarton War Memorial Library.

This library had been opened in 1919 as a very practical form of memorial to those from the district who gave their lives in the First World War, the first of seven such war memorial libraries built around New Zealand. The site had been a generous gift from John Edward Hanson, given in exchange for the far less valuable site of the old library, by 1919 described as "decrepit". This was probably a building, once associated with the Reverend Tyrell's School (which ran in the 1890s) some distance down Hanson's Lane and too far away from settlement at Church Corner to receive a great deal of patronage. Appropriately enough the War Memorial foundation stone had been laid by Lady Bowen, of Middleton Grange, widow of the man most closely associated with the introduction of compulsory education to New Zealand in 1877, Sir Charles Bowen.

The Upper Riccarton War Memorial Library was run by volunteers, mostly older men, some of them First World War veterans. When approached by this handful of women the men were in equal parts sympathetic and sceptical. "Have you any idea of the cost of books? Don't you realise the hazards and

complications of trying to start a library? Who knows better than we do the great difficulties of trying to keep a library going relying only upon volunteers!"

Gathering Support

The mothers however would not be dissuaded so the men agreed to allow the women to form a sub-committee to investigate ways and means. The women were under few illusion about the men's motives for this move. As Joan Fazackerley wrote some years later, "This was done mainly to keep the mothers quiet and give them something to do. But as far as the ladies were concerned they were off!"

Where to go next? The first approaches were made to the Canterbury Public Library (as it was then called) administered by the Christchurch City Council, the largest library system in the province. Naturally enough the librarians were sympathetic. But they could offer the mothers little by way of practical help. The Canterbury Public Library had recently started supplying children's books from a pool, to suburban community libraries run by volunteers in the Christchurch rating area [see box next page]. But Upper Riccarton fell way outside the city boundaries (indeed was separated from the city by Riccarton Borough). The City Council, the women were advised, would only consider supplying pool books outside its rating area if a substantial fee was paid by the organisation involved. Certainly far more expenditure than any small

voluntary committee could easily hope to raise on its own. Nor was luck forthcoming when the Country Library Service was approached. Much of Upper Riccarton was still rural, fields even bordered parts of Riccarton Road (though they were rapidly being built upon). It was worth exploring. Again moral support was personally expressed by the library staff, particularly the head librarian Jean Wright, who was as keen as anybody to see more children encouraged to read. But Upper Riccarton was too close to the city to be within their designated rural service delivery areas.

The women's sub-committee decided perhaps the local County Councils would help fund joining the Canterbury Public Library children's library pool scheme. Both Waimairi County Council and Paparua County Council were approached – after all the boundary between the two counties ran right along Riccarton Road at Church Corner – the proposed library could be potentially in either county. Which itself proved to be part of the problem. Neither county was enthusiastic about investing major funds in a public enterprise which would draw a significant portion of its participants from the neighbouring county. The focus of the mainly rural Paparua county and its farmer-politicians was, anyway, on repairing pot-holed shingle roads and new irrigation schemes not children's books. A donation of three guineas was offered as a token of support but nothing substantial enough to equip a library.

It seemed without such official

Library services in Christchurch in the early 1950s

For a city long associated with its cultural and educational institutions public library services in the greater Christchurch area in the early 1950s were surprisingly impoverished. The public library services lagged well behind the library services of the other main centres.

For 70 years, until administration was transferred to the Christchurch City Council in 1948, the Canterbury Public Library was under the control of Canterbury College (later University of Canterbury). Totally dependent on endowments and fees for purchasing books, a "pitifully inadequate" system, it had failed to attract patronage, with only 9% of the city population of 123,000 estimated to be members of the city library in 1950. This was well below the New Zealand Library Association benchmark of 30% of the catchment population in any area enrolled in the local library. Unlike Wellington, Auckland and Dunedin, the Christchurch city library had no suburban branches. Partly as a result of this, it appears, over a dozen independent community libraries had been established. These were created and run by volunteers and included the libraries at Addington, Opawa, Beckenham, St Martins, Sydenham, Spreydon Woolston, Sumner, Redcliffs, New Brighton, St Albans and Papanui. The services for children, whether in the city or suburbs, were particularly limited. Nor did many schools have proper libraries. Whereas Auckland and Wellington budgeted 1,500 pounds per year for the purchase of children's books, and Dunedin 1,000 pounds, Christchurch budgeted only 530 pounds. The newly appointed City librarian, Ronald O'Reilly, in a report to the Christchurch City Council, noted "the suburban libraries spent little on children's books – some of them nothing at all, and the total children's membership of all the Christchurch Public Libraries is estimated at 4,390 (Dunedin 1949/50 – 8,498)." He also commented that many parents told him that they were not comfortable about their children catching buses and trams into the city centre after school, at the busiest time of the day.

Ronald O'Reilly's report recommended the problem be addressed by the city upping annual expenditure on children's books to 1,500 pounds per year with an additional immediate boost of 500 pounds for suburban stock and to build up the city children's library "which is in a shocking physical state and insufficient in number of volumes." As a result the Canterbury Public Library launched a pool system supplying each of the voluntary suburban libraries with children's books, to be available without charge to the children. This saw a rapid increase in issues to children. A problem was that a further 50,000 residents of the greater Christchurch area lived in adjoining boroughs and counties – Riccarton, Heathcote, Halswell, Waimairi, and Paparua – and their libraries were not eligible for Christchurch City Council funded projects.

backing all dreams might be dashed And then, in the time honoured way that "God helps those who help themselves" and fate supports those prepared "have a go" a piece of serendipity occurred. The sub-committee discovered that the community library at Opawa was henceforth going to source its children's books from the city pool and would no longer need its existing stock. Approached by the Upper Riccarton children's library sub-committee, those at Opawa were friendly and supportive. They agreed to sell all books from their existing children's stock to the Upper Riccarton group. The Canterbury Public Library had already removed books they considered suitable to incorporate into the pool but there were still 700 remaining. The basis of sale was "as is where is", good, bad, battered and indifferent. The price asked was very supportive, a goodwill gesture towards the Riccarton committee, 10 pounds for the lot. Concern about whether that amount of money could be raised in time was put at rest when husbands of two women on the sub-committee, Eddie Britnell and Maurice Fazackerley, said they would put in 5 pounds each.

Meanwhile "A hard-working secretary [Valerie Clark] wrote dozens of appealing letters to the long suffering local firms and businessmen and soon the Committee was receiving donations which gave new hope to the tired workers, whose spirits at the end of a long day's efforts were apt to flag a little. "Ten shillings here, two pounds there – donors included

local businesses C.W.F Hamilton Ltd, (in those pre-jet boat days assembling bulldozers), Associated British Cables, Canterbury Jockey Club, Gilmour & Hill, and the Carpet Manufacturing Company. (Feltex). By the time the Upper Riccarton War Memorial Library held its next committee meeting the women were able to report they had over 700 books and about 72 pounds — the equivalent in modern day purchasing terms of several thousand dollars!

A Home For the Library

Confronted – indeed "startled" - by such passionate commitment and success the committee of the Upper Riccarton War Memorial Library agreed the women definitely had the start of a Children's Library. It was decided to make available a new room, which had recently been added to the back of their library, as a site for this. Although not huge it did have the advantage of facing north and being warmed by plenty of sunshine. Mind you it had to be shared. It was used twice weekly by the Plunket Society, and three times weekly by a bank. It was also used as a depot for collecting payments of Power Board accounts, and often hired out for evening meetings and socials. If it was used as a children's library all records and inappropriate items, etc would need to be cleared away after each library session. Nonetheless the women were delighted to have a space to call their own. There were obviously real advantages, too, of being located in an existing library building. Perhaps a little overwhelmed by the women's

energy, the War Memorial library committee also granted independence to the former sub-committee and gave them the blessing to operate as a completely separate committee and to run their own affairs, as the Upper Riccarton Children's Library.

Meanwhile the headmaster of Riccarton Primary School (whose committee would raise ten pounds towards the project) inspired by the women's efforts, had initiated a book drive inviting all parents to offer one book to the new library project. (His only comment to the women was, "As no long as there are no silly space rocket books", concerned such books gave children the ridiculous idea that one day people were going to be able to travel to the moon!). Some of the books went straight to the rubbish bin but there were gems and genuine quality donations amongst them too. Other books were offered by those who had heard of the project, steadily adding to the original 700. Few of these books were "an answer to a librarian's prayer" but the Canterbury Public Library did come to the women's assistance in one respect. For a very small charge the Canterbury Public Library sent out two members of their bindery staff to teach the women how to repair and recover books, and provided samples of the requisite materials. And then came back out a second time when the children's library group said there were still things they weren't sure about. Part of Maurie Fazackerley's car repair workshop, at the Church Corner end of Yaldhurst Road was obtained as a place to store the

books and used as a workroom for repairing them.

The six women themselves were inspired by how much they had achieved, as were two other women who joined them. The founding mothers of the new library were May Britnell, Margaret Allingham, Margaret Doody, Flo Thompson, Valerie Clark, Joan Fazackerley, Ivy Cameron and Gwen Mills. Although Joan Fazackerley was acknowledged as the natural leader and spokesperson there was little hierarchy and much team spirit. Everybody who participated in the work was perceived as being a committee member. Strong bonds of friendship that would last a life-time were created during the long hours of working together. Each book in the large stacks, was assessed for its literary and educational merits and physical condition. Any torn pages and loose bindings were patched and repaired, worn books were supplied with a new linen spine, and all books given a catalogue number on page 31 and the title details entered on to a catalogue card. The women rapidly developed the skills to repair books to quite a professional standard.

The mothers on the Children's Library were not wealthy women with time on their hands but hard working mothers often with families of three, four or more children. At that time, according to the census, almost half the population of New Zealand still did not own an electric stove, washing machines or fridge. For some on the committee washing was done by firing up the copper in the wash-house. There were nappies

of the younger ones to be washed and hung, children to be breakfasted and packed lunches made, for mother as well as the children, and a dozen other household tasks completed before they even stepped outside the door of their house. Then it was a case of seeing the older kids off to school and pushing the pre-schoolers in the push chair, or carrying them on the child-seat of the bicycle, down to the workroom in the garage. The mother's gathered regularly about 8.30 or 9 am and set about the task of selecting and repairing and cataloguing books, in between chatting, laughing and dreaming up ever more ingenious ways to raise funds for new and better books, stationary, shelving and equipment. And then, with the afternoon crowding in, off to meet up the older children, cooking tea for husbands and children, bed time baths and stories and the other endless demands. There were long hard days but they were exciting nonetheless. Especially as the designated opening day drew close.

First Days

Opening Day it was decided would be the 1st March 1954. As with any such event much midnight oil was burnt to get all the many tasks done. The shelving was built and painted by some of the husbands, again with grace and generosity, buying materials out of their own pockets. As the room had to be shared in between times, with Plunket, bank and Power Board agency, curtains were made on expanding wire and hooks, so the bookshelves could be covered when the library was not in operation. Storage room for the

accounts and catalogue cards was found – under the sink bench! And all the books, now repaired, catalogued and sorted shelved or arranged in display.

So much effort had gone into creating the library that there was little energy left for any ceremony and few of the women had had time to consider what they had done was both unusual and impressive. The interest from the newspapers – the opening day blaze of publicity – quite surprised them. "Riccarton Mothers Start a Children's Library" was the caption on one of several photos published. Read another caption "The library was opened mainly through the efforts of a group of six mothers who, becoming concerned about the popularity of comics, decided to do something themselves to ensure plenty of good books for children in the district." Equally overwhelming was the response from local children and their parents. In the relatively small space of the children's library the opening day crush was enormous. But also exhilarating. The President's Annual Report for that first year later recalled the opening event and "the great joy to the apprehensive committee to at last see the realisation of all their hopes, dreams and hard work."

Expectations of a membership base of about 200 children were quickly swept away – 100 joined on the first day alone! Membership could be obtained in two different ways. Parents could either pay 7 shillings per year and children had to pay no further charges. Or, membership was free but 3d [three pennies] had



RICCARTON MOTHERS START A CHILDREN'S LIBRARY.—A photograph taken yesterday afternoon at the opening of a children's department in the Upper Riccarton Memorial Library. Committee members at back are (from left) Mesdames J. Doody, F. Thompson, and V. Clark. Seated are Mesdames F. Fazackerley, A. Mills, W. Cameron, E. Britnell, and D. Allingham. The establishment of the children's library was mainly a result of the efforts of six young mothers who were concerned about the popularity of comics and who wished their children to have good books to read.

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to be paid for each book borrowed. This was unlikely to break the bank for most parents as each child was limited to one book per visit. In this policy, the committee modeled their system on the Canterbury Public Library system, seeking to be as much like a professional library as possible! It also reflected an era when mass printing, relying on the letter-press process, was far more cumbersome, and books were a far more rare and precious thing, each valued in their own right. An age where there was a certain reverence for a book, any book. If a child was an avid reader he or she could swap his book three times a week for the library was opened on Monday,

Wednesday and Friday after school each day. Of course not all wanted to swap. One little chap, greatly remembered, came in each week to renew the same book. "Don't you want something different". "No" said the resolutely shaking head, month after month, as he held tightly to the much loved book! The library was hugely popular, surpassing even the children's section of many of the more established voluntary libraries linked to the Canterbury Public Library children's library pool system. To handle the large numbers of children turning up each day the committee, which had grown to 20, rostered on four

women each afternoon. The task of processing new books and making repairs to older ones was mainly carried out by working bees each Tuesday morning. The committee was also active in fund-raising – a fruit cake raffled that year produced a generous local response, enough tickets being sold to raise 33 pounds.

By August, only six months after opening, the newspapers could report "On Wednesday morning, a working bee was held to prepare 50 [pounds] worth of new books to be placed on the shelves during Children's Book Week. A grant of 20 [pounds] was made by the Waimairi County Council and the rest has been raised in the district. This children's library now has a stock of 1200 to 1300 books and 990 members are enrolled".

To celebrate a most successful year, for the first birthday, on March 1st 1955, a committee member made two large cakes. After a young borrower had blown out the candle each visiting child received a piece. A local newspaper reporting the first birthday of the library noted, "between 15,000 and 16,000 books have been issued to young members" and "new books to the value of 50 [pounds] have been added to the shelves as a birthday present to the library." Given that books were issued one at a time, and the library was only open a few hours a week, it was a remarkable figure, around 100 children queuing up to borrow books each session.

If there were early fears that the men in the main library at Upper

Riccarton might deprecate the women, in some sort of supercilious male way, they were unfounded. Joan Fazackerly, the President, in her first Annual report not only conveyed the children's sections appreciation of the men's co-operation but [a most evocative if unusual expression] "better still their amazing lack of non-cooperation." "In not one single instance have they even put one obstacle in our way." By the end of the second year she could report they had broadened the scope of the library with a section of "Books of Special Interest" and received an grant of 100 pounds from the J. R. McKenzie Trust fund to purchase books. It was the beginning of a very fruitful relationship, between the Trust and the Children's Library.

Over the next four years the Library continued to prosper and the group of mothers who created it remain strongly loyal and committed, even as their numbers were swelled by new mothers, equally passionate about their children's reading and education. Said one newspaper report "In less than five years the children's branch of the Upper Riccarton Memorial Library has grown into the busiest in Christchurch. The 15 children's branches of the Canterbury Public Library between them issue 22,000* books a year – yet from one small crowded room in the Riccarton Library 14,000 books were distributed last year." [*Canterbury Public Library statistics showing growth of children's issues in the preceding years would suggest this figure was probably out of date. This said, the number of children's

books issued by Upper Riccarton was not matched by any other library in the pool system]. That there was a real demand for their service and that children would avidly read good books if they were provided had certainly been amply proved.

An Unexpected Benefactor

Although the grants to the Upper Riccarton Children's Library from the J.R. McKenzie Trust came from a national organisation, by chance John McKenzie the founder of the fund, lived locally, up Yaldhust Road on the outskirts of Christchurch, and was personally familiar with the Upper Riccarton War Memorial Library. The founder of one of New Zealand's larger retailing chains, and owner of the country's foremost harness racing stud farm established in 1928, Sir John McKenzie [as he became] had on occasions visited the War Memorial library. After World War II added poignancy came with the Anzac Day services held at the War Memorial – the oldest son of John McKenzie, Donald, was listed on the Memorial Board as one of those from the district who had given their lives in that war.

As with many of his era who had been forced to leave school at 13, McKenzie placed enormous value on education and formal learning and qualifications and spent much of his life trying to ensure others had the opportunities he himself had not enjoyed. *[see box]*

Sir John McKenzie died in August 1955 in London whilst on an

extended overseas trip at the age of 79. Described as New Zealand's greatest benefactor, John McKenzie had contributed in excess of one million pounds to charities in his lifetime and bequeathed a further 160,000 pounds upon his death. Many were the accolades and tributes that poured in from around New Zealand and overseas. These included public tributes not only from the Governor-General, and the then New Zealand Prime Minister, Sid Holland, but also one from the recently resigned Prime Minister of Great Britain, Sir Winston Churchill. It was typical of McKenzie, who respected character not status, that he left a request that there be no flowers sent. Rather he asked that people donate a book, to an institution probably few even knew existed, the Upper Riccarton War Memorial Library at Church Corner.

McKenzie a keen member of Rotary International, known to his colleagues as "J.R." or Jack, had made the New Zealand Rotary Clubs the main agents for allocation of funds held by his Trust funds. One of the country's newest Rotary Clubs was that which had been established in Riccarton, in 1953. The attention of local Rotary Clubs had been focussed on the War Memorial Library by Sir John's unusual request. A joint delegation from both Christchurch and Riccarton Rotary clubs arranged to visit the War Memorial library to see if there were other ways they could help. Perhaps they could purchase a major item, the Encyclopedia Britannica, for instance, whose normal cost was

well beyond that of a voluntary library. The men at Upper Riccarton War Memorial Library were dubious, as much as they appreciated the gesture, they could not see their members using an encyclopedia set very often, certainly not enough to warrant the costs involved to Rotary. Nor could they see any great need other than more stock in general, which hardly seemed a distinctive memorial to McKenzie. The Rotary men asked if they could just have a moment to discuss the situation amongst themselves. They were ushered through the door into the back room. "What's all this?" asked one, eyeing the curtained bookshelves. Maurice Fazackerley, one of the Riccarton Rotary members was able to explain. "It's the children's library, my wife and some of her friends have set up. Very successful really". The other men were curious. When they heard how the six women had started it, how their numbers had grown over the years, the hundreds of children that crowded in and out of the library each week, looking around the relatively small room they were amazed. "Well there's the project we're looking for," said one, "Why don't we see if we can build them a proper library. What could be better for a memorial to Jack McKenzie than a children's library?" "And it will be supporting those who are making an effort to help others as he always did himself," added another Rotary member. All agreed. It would be an enormous project for a new branch (Christchurch Rotary offered back up) but such a very fitting memorial to the spirit of McKenzie. "I've got something to tell you" said Maurice

Fazackerley to his wife Joan when he arrived home that night.

A site for the new Children's Library was soon found, almost directly across Riccarton Road from the Upper Riccarton War Memorial Library. The land on the corner of Hansons Lane and Riccarton Road was in an open paddock but on the west-side of this, at the start of Main South Road, some years previously a village of pensioner cottages had been constructed by the government. Following an approach from the Riccarton Rotary Club a small unused section of this land, fronting the road, was given by the Crown, happy no doubt to offer a site that would become a memorial to Sir John McKenzie. This in turn was vested by the Rotary in the Paparua County Council, whose eastern-most boundary ran along Riccarton Road and down Hanson's Lane. On June 21st 1958 a photo appeared in a city newspaper of a group of men and boys gathered around a huge stump. Members of Rotary led by the Chairman of the new library committee, Cecil Rhodes, were tackling the considerable task of clearing the site ready for the builders. "This is the way the Riccarton Rotary Club has decided to pay tribute to the late Sir John McKenzie, who lived in the district and gave more than 1,000,000 [pounds] to youth work through the Rotary" Noted a later newspaper report "The total cost of the memorial is approximately 3,500 [pounds] and of this sum Rotary clubs throughout the country have contributed 1,596 [pounds]. The balance was found by Riccarton Rotary Club plus donations of

Sir John McKenzie

Few New Zealanders over 35 years old will fail to remember "McKenzies", the chain store which, along with an almost identical "Woolworths" (often in the same block) dominated budget shopping in New Zealand during the middle of last century. The founder of this chain was Australian born John McKenzie, a horse trooper in the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) who after being wounded and invalided home set up shop with his 16 year old sister, selling "fancy goods" in Melbourne. Within 12 months he had two shops operating. In 1908 his main competitor made an attractive offer to buy him out, with possession to take place in a month. John McKenzie's "closing down sale" was such a huge success he was going back to the wholesaler to get more "last stock" - his competitor/purchaser was so annoyed he tried to make McKenzie close before the agreed date! John McKenzie had discovered the value of small mark-ups on high turn-over goods. Subsequently he established shops in Sydney and Tasmania. Visiting New Zealand, for a holiday tour in 1909, he saw good opportunities and decided to move base, opening his first "McKenzies" shop in Dunedin in 1910. Over the years further shops were added. On a buying trip to the USA in 1928, he studied the "five and dime" department stores, converting all the currently owned 22 shops to the same principles on return. By the time the chain was bought out (and dismantled) in 1980, long after his death, it had 75 large stores and 1,800 employees. McKenzie was a hard taskmaster, an astute businessman but his deepest satisfaction appear to have come from his belief in public service and his readiness to support others making an effort even in difficult circumstances. From 1910 onwards he set a third of his profits aside and in 1938 established the J.R. McKenzie Youth Education Fund, (originally to help poor children stay at school longer) and then, in 1940, the J.R. McKenzie Trust with a huge capital base of 100,000 pounds. He also did many spontaneous acts of personal generosity – buying a specially modified car for an amputee, an electric wheelchair for another, paying for a blind bowler and associates to tour New Zealand and teach it to blind New Zealanders, included. In his life-time and even more so since his death John McKenzie has been one of New Zealand's greatest benefactors. At year 2000 over \$50 million dollars has been distributed by the Trust, chaired for many years by one of his sons Roy [later Sir Roy] McKenzie. The only other son, Donald, an air force officer, and his co pilot, Jack de Villiers were lost without trace over the sea near Lake Grassmere whilst on a low level training flight during WWII. Roydon Lodge Stud, named for those two sons, from 1928 Sir John's home at Yaldhurst, became world renown for breeding of top harness racers. Subsequently gifted to the Education Department, by Sir Roy McKenzie (himself a generous benefactor in his own right) it is now the McKenzie Residential School.

building materials by business firms in and about Christchurch. The builder was Mr Dick Boniface." All in all, not only for the women who had founded the library but also for the members of the Riccarton Rotary Club it was a considerable project to create a whole new building and organise all the fittings necessary. The building was purposely designed so that its back wall could be extended by 11 feet at some later date, if so needed. A valued help was the Paparua County Council, no doubt more than happy to get such an excellent new facility in their district without capital cost to themselves. Instead they agreed to give the Children's Library the standing of a sub-committee of the Council, voiding any need for a separate legal body. As well as bearing responsibility for maintaining the building the Council also undertook to monitor accounts and prepare an annual balance sheet on behalf of the library. In its turn, the Upper Riccarton Children's Library handed over 115 pounds to the Paparua County Council, money they had been setting aside over the years towards the day they might be able to purchase a building themselves, now happily no longer needed. Nonetheless the women of Upper Riccarton Children's Library could not but feel a pang of regret at the loss of their library's original name and identity, the entity they had worked so hard to establish.

A Grand Opening

To the delight of getting a brand new purpose built building was added news of the official opening.

It was announced that the Sir John McKenzie Memorial Children's Library was to be opened by the highest office holder in the land, the Governor-General Viscount Lord Cobham G.C.MG. It was exciting news for the women of the committee, and for Riccarton Rotary, and not only because of the status and recognition it accorded their efforts. Despite his distinctively aristocratic manner – the last of the "grandee aristocrats" one journalist called him – Lord Cobham, only one year into his posting, had established himself as probably the most popular Governor General in New Zealand's history. Although every inch an Englishman he has several past connections to New Zealand. He was a great grandson of Lord Lyttelton, one of the financial backers of the Canterbury settlement, whose family name was given to the local port. Hagley Park drew its name from the Cobham's stately home in Worcestershire, Hagley Hall. Lord Cobham was popular for his relative youth, his love of the outdoors and for his sporting prowess (he had been vice-captain of the English cricket team that toured New Zealand in 1935/36). But it was his remarkable speaking ability that created the real connection. So popular were Lord Cobham's New Zealand speeches that when they were reproduced in a book form the book sold an astounding 50,000 copies. Lord and Lady Cobham also had a large family – Lord Cobham, himself, jokingly referred to his family as being of "almost Old Testament proportions" - eight children.

Needless to say every effort was



Dressed in the high fashion of the day! — the women committee members await the arrival of the Governor General for the official Opening of the new library.

made by each of the women involved with the children's library to look their Sunday best, complete with the obligatory white cotton gloves and hat that were the fashion in that era. Curtsies were practised in case they were needed. Presumably tying the opening in with other Vice-Regal duties, the official opening was made on the day before Show Day, Canterbury's provincial holiday and part of the busiest week of the year in the province, with major race meetings and an Agricultural and Pastoral show bringing "country to town".

Thursday 14th November 1958 turned out to be a fairly hot day, - almost too hot to be wearing suits and finery. About two hundred people were in attendance, with stacker chairs spread across the

lawns of the adjoining pensioner cottage complex and a flag bedecked podium beside the library. Air Force Harvard planes from nearby Wigram air base droned overhead, practising their maneuvers. The Vice-Regal Rolls Royce drove up with its pennants fluttering and the Royal New Zealand Air Force Band delivered a stirring march tune. Speakers included Roy McKenzie [later Sir Roy] son of the library's late benefactor, the President of Riccarton Rotary (Mr Dick Harrington) and Lord Cobham.

Roy McKenzie's speech suggested a sensitivity to the difficulties faced by the mothers involved, tackling such a large project as starting a library while trying to raise families and be supportive to husbands. He

paid tribute to his own mother and the part she had played in her husband's career. Sir John McKenzie was "not always an easy man to live with" Roy McKenzie told the crowd. Sir John, he said, was himself Rotarian for 32 years, who felt "that it was everyone's duty to provide for those less able to afford education and professional training". "Sir John did not believe in memorials and the like unless they served a useful purpose. He considered the best means of benefiting the community was to place within its reach the ladders upon which the aspiring can rise, and he carried this out in practice."

Lord Cobham, humorously eyeing the large number of children present, remarked "I feel a great proportion of my audience consists of juvenile delinquents, so I will be brief."

"Books were the gateway to all knowledge and the greater part of wisdom." he said, " From the empty head springs the naughty tongue ... I consider myself at my age an expert on juvenile delinquents." [the term had a more humorous connotation in that era].

As one not unacquainted with the nursery and its problems said Lord Cobham he wondered how the ladies' committee intended to preserve the books on the shelves. He could remember his father's real and stern displeasure when he found thirteen volumes of Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" being used as a [toy] railway embankment."

It was reported "The president of the Riccarton Rotary Club, Dick Harrington then presented Lord and Lady Cobham with copies of large, illustrated editions of "Alice in Wonderland" and "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" for their twin daughters Sarah and Lucy, now nearly five years old." But undoubtedly the most pleasing moment for the Riccarton Rotary members and, even more so, the women committee members present was the comment made by Lord Cobham as he stepped through the door, "This is how a children's library should look". All it seems felt a great sigh of satisfaction.

A Very Busy Library

The advantages of being out in the public eye, on a street frontage, very quickly became obvious. Window displays now became an added activity – the most popular of all time being the fluffy baby chickens in an incubator as part of a display celebrating Easter. By the end of the first year in the new library, president Joan Fazackerly, could report the number of books issued as being 26,676 , the membership as now at 1,374. This was composed of 474 annual subscription members and 900 3d [three-pence] a time members. Among the innovations had been the establishment of an "Intermediate" section (later renamed Older Children's section) and matching smocks for all the voluntary staff, made by the women themselves.

As was common for many libraries in that era dust-covers made of thick paper, covered with ads for local



The Sir John McKenzie Children's Library immediately after it was opened.



Children queuing up at the counter in 1958.

businesses, were purchased. These were orange and apart from protecting the covers of the books themselves also made it easy for parents to locate the library book in the child's room.

Although the mothers now had a building, with all capital and maintenance costs met, the constant need to raise money for books, by grants and fundraising activities remained. A successful dance at the Yaldhurst Memorial Hall in late 1958 netted a very satisfactory 30 pounds. Not long after a film evening was run in Riccarton at the Rex Theatre [better known by its later name the "Avenue International"] on a Sunday night. A certain amount of "red tape", typical of that highly regulated era, had to be negotiated first. Permission was sought, and granted by the Riccarton Town Clerk subject to a list of six conditions, including that the films be G rated and the names of the films be submitted to the Borough Council for prior approval!! And also that "a senior male of the permanent staff of the theatre is attendance during the whole of the screening." In later years socials would become a regular annual or bi-annual feature. Often these took the form of ladies only luncheon, particularly at Christmas time. Venues over the years included the Hotel Russley, The Trans Hotel, the Plaza Lounge, Cokers Hotel or Behrens Restaurant. They were usually well attended.

Sharing the Experience Gained

The success of the Upper Riccarton

mothers also inspired them to contact a group of mothers in the very new housing sub-division at Hei Hei and offer them some surplus books so they too could start a children's library. The book stock at the J.R. McKenzie library had risen to over 4,000 books making it possible to cull out 400 of the best of the remaining Opawa library books and supply them to form the core of yet another children's library. The Sir John McKenzie team also spent a morning passing on their knowledge and providing a "quite unexpected, delicious morning tea" to the women from Hei Hei, a smaller library the upper Riccarton women would continue to support in a variety of ways over the years to come. The creation of a library specifically for children may also have played a role in inspiring similar libraries elsewhere. After approaches from parents in Cashmere the Heathcote County Council constructed the Cashmere Junior Library, on Dyers Pass Road, using reserve funds from the adjoining Rhodes estate. This opened in October 1959 with 100 books. A campaign to have a Hoon Hay Children's library was also begun in the early 60s, and one was later established in Hoon Hay Road.

In 1959 an article, written by Joan Fazackerly telling the story of the library and its origins, was printed in "New Zealand Libraries" the journal of the New Zealand Library Association. Describing the system of having all librarians on the committee (there were 25 at that time) Joan wrote, "...it has been found that by all having an equal

say, many good suggestions can be aired in the proper place, the committee room. This has made for a very harmonious relationship..." Wrote Joan, "I do not think there will be one member on the library committee who does not feel she has been enriched by the experience in this local project for youngsters." Joan was invited to speak at a two day seminar organised by the Country Library Service for volunteers working at the smaller libraries around the province, about what the group at Upper Riccarton group had achieved. She was also interviewed on 3YA, the national radio system, and 3ZB, the local commercial station, about the library.

Of course most of the energy went into the never ending cycle of tasks common to all libraries. This included purchasing and cataloguing new books, and giving each new book a clear acetate cover; repairing books that had been damaged – often several hundred or even over a thousand a year; issuing and discharging books, offering advice to children or parents about relevant books for homework topics or appropriate books for age reading levels. Although the number of issues was never to reach 26,000 again, throughout the 60s most years the number of annual issues hovered between 15-20,000. The one book at a time rule was retained, but for children living in defined rural areas, of which there were quite a few, two books at time were permitted. An added task for this library of volunteers was the offices of the committee, and the pursuit of additional grants and

loans with which to buy new stock.

In the early 60s Joan Fazackerley had a further child, and had to reduce her level of commitment and Gwen Mills was elected President. She would occupy this role for almost three decades. After Valerie Clark resigned as Secretary her place was taken briefly by Dorothy Pennington and then by Molly Watson for some years and subsequently Nona Laurie. June Irving was the dedicated secretary from 1972 to the end of that decade. Hazel Blake who joined the group in 1977 took on the responsibility for maintaining the catalogue, and was secretary (and sometimes also treasurer) from 1981. May Britnell remained treasurer from the earliest beginnings right through until 1966, when Ena Gibson took on the role. followed by Thora Gates. A particular time consuming task was chasing up over-due books, in the first instance sending out notices but also sometimes involving phoning and even making personal calls to the home of the miscreant. Janet Ragg filled this role for many years, and from 1973 Jean MacDonald took it on and served the library for 20 years in this capacity. Tedious it might have been but it saved the library many thousands of dollars over the years in books that might otherwise have been lost forever. In 1969 it was reported only 61 books [including also those damaged beyond repair] had had to be cancelled, this from a stock of several thousand. A feature of the library was a fish tank, originally with goldfish, later converted to tropical fish – maintenance of this, as well as many other small odd-

jobs fell to "Mr Mills" courteously thanked each year by the president in her report – actually his wife, Mrs Mills, Gwen. Christian names did not appear in records until the 70s, as was normal in that era. **[Those known to have been on the committee over the years are listed at the rear of this booklet]**

Opening on Friday nights was introduced after the library moved into the new building. Although only open for an hour this proved very popular, the busiest time of the week. This made better lighting imperative and here, as in almost every other aspect of maintenance and improvement, the Paparua County Council provided good support, installing first a better spotlight, then later fluorescent lights in 1971 and, some years later, after a burglary, security lights. The Council also re-painted the library inside and out in 1969 and again in 1979. When a plumber's bill, for what appeared a minor job seemed inordinately high, the County Council had their building inspector check it out, and he was able advise the committee all was in order due to added complications which had arisen. As one could walk over the pedestrian crossing immediately in front of the library and be in Waimairi County, obviously many of the young borrowers were drawn from this area. Appreciating that the library also benefited children of their own ratepayers, the Waimairi County Council also sent the children's library a donation each year.

At the time the library was built, the large area of land on the eastside,

between itself and Hansons Lane, was vacant. In fact it had been purchased in 1950 by a major local retailer, Hays Limited. In his overseas travels James L. Hay had seen the trend towards shopping in major suburban centres. Thinking well ahead of many contemporaries he realised that "The key to success of the shopping centre is the car park." It was only in the fifties that car ownership in New Zealand became the norm for almost every family, (the number of cars registered in Christchurch rising by 30% between 1954 and 1957). James Hay bided his time until 1960. In that year the library became neighbour to a large and noisy building site. The largest suburban department store and supermarket ever built in New Zealand to that date was under construction. An unusual aspect was the inclusion of a sculptural work, an abstract but nonetheless recognisable family group, by leading New Zealand artist Russell Clarke, on the forecourt area. It was an appropriate statue for the children's library too, and it eventually outlived the Hay's department store building, which was torn down after only a few decades for an even bigger supermarket (and even bigger car park!). When this occurred the statue was moved beside the children's library, building and the librarians in recent years have begun to feel a certain affection and stewardship for "their statue". So much so an offer was made by the volunteers at the library to clean it – definitely not was the response, it requires highly skilled professionals and special techniques!



Another department store in the rapidly growing commercial sector along Riccarton Road in the 60s was the opening a McKenzies branch at Riccarton Mall in 1966 – given the special relationship between the children's library and this generous family, to mark the occasion, the thoughtful Roy McKenzie made a gift of books to the library bearing his father's name. Responding to a request the Paparua County Council had extended the bike stands in 1959, very necessary in the early years but as traffic grew in the last decades of the century, with a busy adjoining car park, it became increasingly difficult for children to ride directly to the library. Formal school parties sometimes made visits with the library being opened

in the morning especially to facilitate this. In 1967 a request for 25 application forms came from a teacher at Russley School, with the comment "the children have the need for a wider reading material".

In 1968, ten years after opening in the new building, issues stood at 19,719, book stock at an estimated 4,369 titles and membership at 2,306 children - 377 financial members at, [now decimal currency had been introduced] 75 cents per year and 1,929 free members who paid 3 cents per item borrowed. New carpet was installed with help from the County Council and one of the husbands made a far more effective book return bin for after hours returns.

The 70s & 80s

The following year issues passed 20,000 but the year after that, 1970, they began to slump, dropping by 3,302 on the previous year. One factor considered was the change of late nights from Friday to Thursday to bring the library into line with the new late night, introduced by the Riccarton Businessmen's Association in September 1969. The next two years issues regained some of the ground lost but in 1974 the president Gwen Mills reported issues had fallen to 14,936 "This is total disappointingly, is 3,769 less than last year's number. Why this is so it is hard to say, the opening of the Paparua County Council's library at Hornby, more than a year ago now, may have made a slight decrease in the number of borrowers using the library. A good percentage of our readers are in the younger group." She added it would be good to get more of the older group. During the 70s the solid and consistent turnover of around 15 – 20,000 issues per year which had been the norm for 21 years began to steadily fall away. Between 1973 and 1978 issues continued to fall by over a 1000 a year each year, finally stabilizing around the 7000 mark in the late 70s and early 80s. In light of this decline and increased pressure it placed on shelving, the book limit was increased to 2 books per child per visit for all children during 1975. Eventually in the 80s the library would find a baseline of about 5-6000 issues per year.

There were many possible factors for this decline – the spread of car ownership and even second cars, so that mothers too could now drive

and drive further afield to bigger more sophisticated libraries where they could get books for themselves as well. Or the growth of school libraries; or the increasing transient nature of residential populations and the resulting general loss of sense of immediate community and loyalty to local community institutions that went with it; or older children staying home after school to watch children's television programmes; or the increased difficulty of access to the library for older children walking or on bicycles due to the amount of traffic on Riccarton Road. The volunteers had to adjust to a changed tempo but there was still plenty of children who did use and enjoy the library and, as always, plenty of work needed doing to maintain, repair and replace book stocks.

During the late 70s and 80s the number of librarians continued to shrink, as some left the district and others passed away and few came forward to fill the ranks. By the mid 80s attrition saw the committee that had once numbered 22 – for every librarian participated in committee decisions – down to just 7 ("seven community minded women" as Gwen Mills would later describe them in her 1988 report). Given the reduced issues matched the reduced number of volunteers, the work level for those involved remained the same. And of course, so too the satisfactions, of working with the many children still using the library.

Keeping an public facility open week after week, year after year, also places a great strain on a voluntary organisation and

understandably members can become more conservative, less enthusiastic about promoting additional activities or actively promoting their cause. Understandably they begin to feel they are giving enough already, and a pattern of retrenchment can settle in. President Gwen Mills, in her 1978 Annual Report commented "We continue to enjoy our small social get-togethers, which gives us a chance to meet together and even hold an informal meeting or two, as we have dispensed with regular evening meetings. The grapevine system works better, or a note left on the library counter!"

Your Library has been an outstanding success

During the middle 70s the library was placed on a more secure footing and given a more integrated standing within the Paparua County Council. The Council had always nominated a representative of the Council to be on the Children's Library Committee. Because several of the committee had husbands who at various times served on the Council or its bodies, or were associated in some way, these were usually men such as Will Ragg, Arthur Fazackerly (Joan's father-in-law) or Eddie Britnell. These men could maintain the necessary connection without usually attending meetings, apart from the occasional AGM. When the fairly tiny Halswell County Council amalgamated with Paparua, in the late 60s one of the institutions that came with the area was a small voluntary library founded as far back as 1897. There were also small

voluntary libraries at Tai Tapu and Ladbrookes. In 1972 Paparua opened a Council library at Hornby, giving it six libraries to some degree or other under its jurisdiction, most of them within what had now become distinctly urban areas. It seemed an appropriate time to formalise these relationships and place these libraries on a common footing. Following discussions with representatives of the Council the Committee of Sir John McKenzie Children's Library received a formal letter setting out the basis of a proposal for the council to "become financially responsible for the running of your library." Stated the letter, "The Council will provide an adequate annual sum for all book purchases and miscellaneous expenditure including the upkeep of the library complex, providing all subscription charges to your readers are terminated. A further proviso would be that your Committee continues to administer and operate the Library as in the past. I understand that you are well aware of the reasons that the Council would like to see your Library along with the Halswell Library and Hei Hei Children's Library become entirely on a free basis. It should be re-iterated that the Paparua County Council will not interfere with the "day to day" running of the Library nor will the County Librarian have any authority in its administration. Your Library has been an outstanding success within the Community since its inception 20 years ago and the council has no wish to interfere, apart from providing the necessary finance to meet all expectations". As the amount the Council was intending

to provide was well above that raised by annual subscriptions and the library relied greatly on annual grants from the J. R. McKenzie Trust fund to purchase books, it was an offer that could hardly be refused. The McKenzie Trust fund nonetheless continued its role as a generous benefactor, giving several hundred dollars a year towards book purchase.

In 1977 Riccarton Rotary re-visited their first major project and raised a considerable sum, to allow the library to be extended by moving the rear wall of the library back 11 feet [as had been allowed for in the original design] - an added alcove area that was excellent for the Older Children's books. A library is in some part a very safe place and a sanctuary for many quieter, more studious or sensitive children. Having a regular place after school where they could have time to themselves amongst the stimulation of books, but also become personally known to supportive mature adults other than their parents is an important building block of independence for many children. The smaller size and more intimate nature of the Sir John McKenzie Library, with its strong connections to the surrounding community, was admirably suited for playing such a role, for several generations of children.

The Paparua Council had long recognised that the library filled a vital role in the community. On the 30th anniversary year of the founding of the library tribute was paid to these enduring volunteers. "In November 1984, the librarians

attended a function organised by the Paparua County Council and they were proud indeed to receive a Community Service Award, sponsored by the Sockburn District Community Council. The Award was given in recognition of outstanding voluntary service in the field of Recreational and Educational services to children. This award in the form of a sizeable framed certificate, hangs in pride of place behind the librarians receiving desk."

County and City Amalgamate

The anomaly of a major metropolitan area being under several different administrations, with all the added complexities, waste of resources and loss of effectiveness, implicit in this arrangement came to an end in 1989. Under the massive New Zealand wide re-structuring of local Government Paparua and Waimairi County Councils (as well as Riccarton Borough) were joined with Christchurch City Council to form one council. Probably to minimise complexities, the Paparua County Council sent the J.R. McKenzie children's library a letter advising them they has \$3,368 sitting in account which should be spent on books before the end of the financial year, even advising them to go \$200 above this amount to use up funds in other library accounts.

Amalgamation of local authorities took place on 1 November 1989 and ownership of the building and the role formerly filled by the Paparua County Council was taken over by

the Christchurch City Council, and in particularly by the Canterbury Public Library. The obvious loss was the fairly intimate and informal relationship which had long existed between those involved with the children's library and officers of the much smaller Paparua Council. Often just a quick phone call and a chat with an already well known member of the Paparua staff was enough to get a problem addressed. Connections between families in Upper Riccarton went back along way, to the days when Church Corner, Sockburn and Hornby had been more like linked villages than the sprawling urban area they had become.

The gain from amalgamation was being brought under the umbrella of a major metropolitan authority, with a level of resources and support far above that previously available. In particular the Canterbury Public Library had a whole department – Suburban Services [subsequently renamed Outreach and Special Needs] – devoted to the libraries scattered around the city. Whilst the main focus of this was its own community libraries, and special services to rest homes and sight handicapped persons, it also acted as a liaison service with the local voluntary libraries. Suburban Liaison and Development Officer, Erina Parks, was able to offer the children's library support and advice from a very large library organisation with many resources. In 1991 Erina Parks wrote to the committee offering the services of Bill Nagelkerke, Children's and Young Person's Librarian at Canterbury Public Library. "He is

only too willing to help in whatever way he can, whether accompanying buyers to local suppliers or helping locate titles in particular areas which you may want to build up".

The City Council also had (and further developed) criteria for the supply of funding, services and books to such libraries, based on the number of issues each year. The service and support offered by Erina Parks and others was warm and friendly, not the faceless bureaucracy that had perhaps been feared at the time of amalgamation. Nonetheless the J. R. McKenzie children's library could not but be aware they were now just one small element in a much larger picture, involving more than two dozen libraries (of all sorts) scattered across Christchurch. In particular the City Council aimed to deliver a high level of modern sophisticated and full library services to all suburban areas, by steadily upgrading existing council libraries (their own or those "inherited") and, where none existed, building new libraries to create a comprehensive network across the whole city. The Council's obligation was city wide, the best service for the most people, at a level far beyond that which most of the voluntary libraries could match. Support for voluntary libraries, that had so long filled a gap in various areas, would need to be reviewed as each major new suburban library was opened. With the greater skill and expertise the larger city library system could offer the children's library revived slightly, with 114 new members recorded in 1991 but the problem of too few volunteers remained.

Crisis

So much of the energy and drive of the children's library, had been maintained by Gwen Mills and when she became terminally ill in 1993, Hazel Blake, the secretary-treasurer, herself due to move away from the area, called a meeting, with Erina Parks attending on behalf of the Canterbury Public Library. Only six were present and most of these were now elderly women and unable to extend their contribution of time or energy. All felt they "had done their bit" (surely an understatement!) and that the closing of the library had seemed inevitable for some years past. A motion was put to meeting "That the library committee voluntarily wind up the operation of the Sir John McKenzie Memorial Children's Library, the last day of operation being 23rd April 1993". Erina Parks and Hazel Blake agreed to visit Gwen Mills immediately after the meeting to inform her of the decision. Understandably it was a very distressing situation, for all involved. Gwen Mills, who had given 40 years to the library, not surprisingly, found it very difficult to fully accept the finality of the committee's decision.

The City Librarian, Dorothea Brown, also felt deeply concerned. Although a major new library was planned for the Avonhead/Upper Riccarton area, other areas requiring libraries had been assessed as having greater priority. The Upper Riccarton area was unlikely to see a new library for at least a decade and the Sir John McKenzie children's library filled an important role for

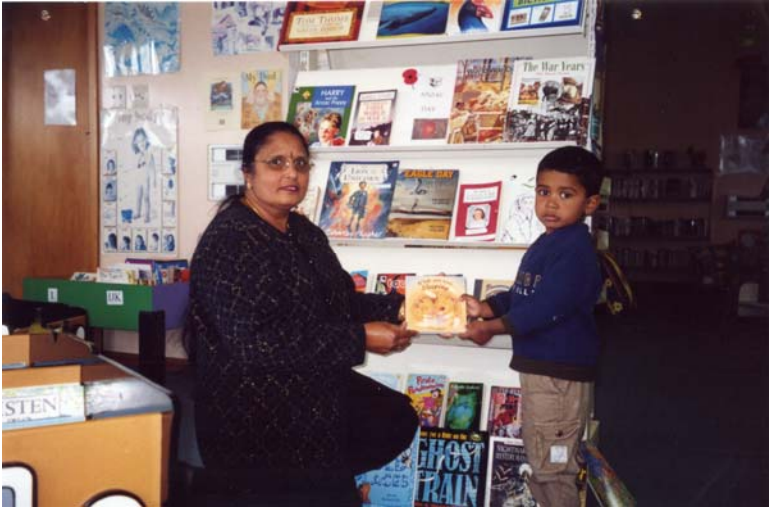
children in this area. Dorothea Brown felt a concerted attempt should be made to help get the library back on its feet.

The remaining volunteers decided with Gwen's passing it was indeed the end of an era and decided to retire. With the help of Trish Heaton from the Upper Riccarton War Memorial Library (across the road and still going strong) a campaign was started to attract new volunteers. Posters and news statements were widely distributed, including to local school newsletters. A local newspaper, *The News Advertiser*, printed a photo in a prominent page, with a caption saying "Helpers Urgently needed at children's library once or twice a month between 3 pm and 4.30 pm"

On the evening of Tuesday 6 July 1993 a meeting was held in the children' library building. Reflecting the difficulty the former committee had had, the turn-out was small and mainly composed of city library and community board representatives. Nonetheless the genesis of a new committee was there, with Trish Heaton taking on the role of president, Bob Dolan the task of treasurer and Ann Whitnall agreeing to be secretary. Through their efforts further volunteers and committee members were attracted.

Revival

Any organisation benefits from an input of new blood. And new faces brought new energy and new ideas. A considerable sum had been accumulated in the account and this allowed the new committee to



Tulsi Gopal one of the many volunteers over the years with young borrower.

immediately look at purchasing new stock. Professional help came in the form of staff from the School Libraries Service and from Christchurch City Libraries, who was able to effectively "weed" out books no longer likely to go out very often and help up-grade the stock. Another person greatly valued was one of the volunteers Denise Direen who came with a background and qualifications in children's literature and experience in advising school libraries.

Although it was never likely that the Sir John McKenzie Memorial Children's Library was going to return to the heady days and high patronage of the first two decades, under the new committee a very healthy growth in the number of members and issues was recorded through the middle 90s, with annual issues just below 10,000 in 1995 and 1996. The president, Trish Heaton, in her annual report by

1995 was able to list 15 librarians, "we have a hard core of willing and enthusiastic volunteers on our library roster and others are co-opted as necessary." A trial had begun in opening the library two mornings a week. Since the previous AGM 146 new children had become members. She was also able to report that the library was the statistically most used of the community [voluntary] libraries in Christchurch. In 1997 Ann Whitnall, now the president could report on the new carpet and the installation of an improved heating system bringing the library out of the "ice age", these obtained through a Community Development Scheme Grant. New paint-work and pictures on the walls, for so long bare, as well as colourful book bins and mobiles, had "certainly made it a more pleasant environment to work in and, I am sure, for our young clients to browse in." Much care was given to the selection of books,

their being keen awareness children no less than adults can be discerning readers. "Probably the most popular display is the N.Z. Post Children's Book Awards". Due to an article written by Frances Ouwering and Denise Direen and published in school newsletters, and another in *The Press* and "wanted" posters, the following year the librarians ranks had grown to 27 volunteers.

Christchurch was growing ever more cosmopolitan in its ethnic mix and this was reflected in the children wishing to become members and also the volunteers coming forward to help. Indian, Chinese, Korean children were amongst those who became members in the 90s. In recent years there have also been Afghani refugee children, including those from families rescued from a sinking boat on the high seas in the highly publicised "Tampa incident". The Sir John McKenzie children's Library, with its intimacy of scale, has been able to offer something of a caring sanctuary for immigrant children from these and other cultures keen to acquire knowledge, without the school type pressures.

The volunteer librarians – who themselves have included an Iranian, several of Indian descent, as well as Chinese and Korean parents – have found they are playing an added role in helping children new to this country find their bearings amongst the books and language culture of their new home, a role which given the eagerness of these children to learn was particularly satisfying. Typical of the moments that made voluntary work at the

library so fulfilling was the helping of such a girl from one such family find books and prepare a homework assignment – enormous was her excitement and great the delight of the librarians when a few days later she burst into the library beaming all over. Her project had received an A grading, the first A she had ever received in her life.

Another facet of the modern age was the much greater concern about healthy and safety issues, for the children and for those working in the library. The Christchurch City Council took an active lead here, with information, training and surveys of premises under its jurisdiction. As well as physical hazards the library became more aware of the special trust involved working with children and that some form of formal application and vetting of those who volunteered was appropriate.

With the relatively younger age group now running the library there was also more transience, with greater propensity for volunteers to move out of the district or to take up new work in hours that conflicted with the time they had previously volunteered. Nor do all new volunteers stay long – in 1999 the sudden loss of many librarians simultaneously (for a variety of reasons) seemed likely to lead to closing the library on some days previously opened. But another active campaign through flyers and posters, saw 7 new volunteers come forward.

A community grant allowed a whole set of new open faced shelving in

the pre-school area and during the 90s and early "00s" all shelving, was replaced with the new more attractive style units now available. To have the necessary legal identity to be eligible for grants the library registered itself as a trust in 1998. In 1999 much work was done by Dawn Averill, bringing the non-fiction section into line with mainstream libraries by making the Dewey System more operational (it had been introduced many years before but in a simplified version). In subsequent years Dawn also gave up many hours of her time, working her way through book stock checking every book for wear and tear and repairing as necessary. Others who played a major role in the 90s, over and above taking their turn at the counter, were Denise Direen and Frances Ouwering, particularly, in selecting and buying books; Tulsie Gopal, was joined by Toni Herbert (until another baby arrived) and then joined by Brian White, in the age old task of chasing up over-dues. In more recent times Dawn Averill has taken on this task with great dedication. In August 1999 Anne received a Community Service Award for dedicated service to the community. Miriam Simon was elected secretary in 2000 and continues to full this role with Ron Whitnall now treasurer. In the last few years issues have again declined to below the 5000 level, a natural source of concern to all.

With the opening of a new community library in Upper Riccarton in December 2005 the future for Sir John McKenzie Memorial Children's Library's is uncertain. What is certain though is

the tremendous contribution it has made to the children of Upper Riccarton in the 50 years since the first library was opened at the back of the Upper Riccarton War Memorial Library on March 1st 1954. In that time it has issued over 500,000 books to the many thousands of children that have been members. And not by computer but by the traditional methods of a card catalogue system! And not with paid labour but entirely by the voluntary labour of scores of caring and committed mothers and the occasional father or other person.

The words each generation use have changed over the years but the commitment that inspires the voluntary librarians remains constant. Ann Whitnall in her presidents report to the 42nd Annual meeting of 2000, no doubt spoke for the feelings of countless others over the years when she wrote;

"As I look around the library I am filled with a sense of pride and achievement knowing that we, as volunteers, have created a facility for children that is modern, user friendly and one which can offer the very best in reading material. We can feel justifiably proud of what we are offering our young clients."

Upper Riccarton Children's Library

Opened 1st March 1954

Sir John McKenzie Memorial Children's Library

Opened November 13 1958

The following is a list of the volunteers who worked in the library across the years. The hope is all who played a major or long term role — several years or more - will be included here, as the full list of volunteers of each year was listed in most annual reports. As well, there will be some (but not all) volunteers listed who had a shorter involvement. For anyone missed apologies.

Margaret Allingham, Shirley Anderson, Dawn Averill, Ruming Bai, Jean Banks, Mureen Barr, Jenny Bell, Elaine Benger, Hazel Blake, May Britnell, Noeline Bussell, Penny Callaghan, Ivy Cameron, Mrs Chappell, Valerie Clark, Margaret Coppard, Mary Corbett, Mrs Curtis, Wyn Deam, Isobel Deavoll, Eileen Dick, Denise Direen, Bob Dolan, Margaret Doody, Robyn Drabble Marie Faulkner, Joan Fazackerley, Joan Fitzgerald, Ann Frances, Mrs Franklin, Thora Gates, Ena Gibson, Tulsi Gopal, Lyall Gourley, Gail Graham, Marie Griffiths, Margaret Grotzky, Shrubhra Gupta, Elizabeth Hamilton, Joan Hammond, Dianne Harper, Karen Harris, Mrs Halliday, Julie Hayes, Amelia Hart, Jane Heinz, Wyn Hellewell, Nicole Herbert, Toni Herbert, Margaret Hills, Mr R. Heaselwood, Trish Heaton, Ann Hefferman-Dale, Linda Hurndell, Mrs Irvine, June Irving, Mrs James, June Jamieson, Dawn Johns, Mrs Johnston, Marion Jones, Julie Jordan, Mrs F. Kean, Daphne Kearton, Cecily Kilner, Lucy Kitto, Pat Lammerink, Nona Laurie, Junghye Lee, Muriel Legge, Thomas Liang, Narges Lor, Rachel McCardle, Jean MacDonald, Mrs McGregor, Beatrice MacGuire, Mrs D. McIntyre, Karla Madden, Fiona Manton, Cynthia Marinus, Peggy Marks, Mamta Mehrotra, Christine Middleton, Gwen Mills, Mary Moore, Roslyn Mullenger, Leonie Mumberson, Melba Murfitt, Marie North, Frances Ouwerling, Ann Owens, Mrs Patrick, Dorothy Pennington, Agnes Quinn, Margaret Perreau, Betsy Platts, Betty Prescott, Betty Preston, Janet Ragg, Mrs A. Ramsay, Alec Reid, Monica Reid, Shirley Rhodes, Doris Rivers, Audrey Rodgers, Bessie Saunders, Mrs Shatford, Sindu Sharma, Sun Hee Shin, Miriam Simon, Edna Smart, Joyce Smith, Georgina Sprott, Mary Stark, Gladys Staunton, Gladys Swain, Reima Tentori, Flo Thompson, Betty Tweedie, Eleanor van Voorthuizen, Mrs Vincent, Jenny Voice, Susan Wallace, Molly Watson, Dawne Watson, Iris Wheeler, Brian White, Margot White, Ann Whitnall, Megan Whitnall, Ron Whitnall, Mrs N. Williams, Mavis Wilson, Nyra Wilson, Fay Wright, Graham Wright, Emily Wright, Mrs Yates.

Researched and written by David Welch on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the founding of the Upper Riccarton Children's Library. Material sourced from Annual Reports of this library and its successor, the Sir John McKenzie Memorial Children's Library; from contemporary newspaper reports; from a published article written by Joan Fazackerley in 1959, from district histories of Riccarton, Papanui and Waimairi; from Canterbury Public library reports to Christchurch City Council 1951-1955, from biographical information about of Sir John McKenzie, Lord Cobham, James Hay, and official histories of Rotary, and general material about the 1950s. Prepared with the help of Joan Fazackerley, May and Eddie Britnell, Ann Whitnall, Dawn Averill, Susan Wallace, Hazel Blake, and Erina Parks, who all helped in various ways to help create as accurate a record as possible. This said, all opinions remain those of the author's.

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