

Highway Holdup in Birkdale

By Percy Allison 1991

When Wally Archer, a local builder, built a dine and dance Ranch House in Ranch Avenue Birkdale in 1959, his first obstacle to enticing clients to his new establishment was the narrow dusty metalled Lancaster Road. Most roads in Birkdale were still unsealed with no footpaths at that time. Residents were forced to walk to the bus stop in old shoes, change into good ones and leave their old shoes in the bus shelter before boarding the bus to the ferries en route to town. Sadly, in more recent times, their old shoes may not be there upon return!

Old Wally approached me one day and suggested that the local residents in lower Lancaster Road could join him in a campaign to have Council update the road. His plan was to invite the Mayor, Cliff Utting and all his Councillors to a Sunday afternoon tea and to share the fruits of his overburdened pear tree on site. For our part, we were to wait until the guests were ready to leave the Ranch House and then Wally would have someone down there phone us and have us out on the road in an apparent angry mood to have Mayor and Councillors “run the gauntlet” of residents so to speak.

The first cars slowed down to allow us to ask when the Mayor was coming, just to let



Mayor Cliff Utting

them know we were there on official business. One Councillor remarked that the Mayor was “still up the pear tree”. This caused a laugh.

“That’s where he should be” replied one wit. However, the Mayor eventually did arrive, stopped his car and climbed out to meet a most unexpected delegation. After some heated discussion about the state of the road, the Mayor conceded that something must be done to update Lancaster Road as some mothers also complained at having to push their prams into the blackberries and cover their babies to protect them from the dust of passing cars.

However, not until a change in Mayoralty and a new Council who raised a loan, did Birkdale get its new sealed roads and footpaths. The Auckland Star described our protest with the headline “Highwaymen Holdup at Birkenhead”.