

# FIELDAYS HISTORY

## INTRODUCTION

by John Kneebone

Born in 1935, with vivid early memories, of a dairy farm that had a tractor, and also draft horses. Growing up in a home without refrigeration, without an electric stove, TV or washing machine, the 1960s were exciting as mechanical technology became available to New Zealand. Post World War Two shortages delayed the advent of "consumerism" and "planned obsolescence", and this was reflected in a farming family's two big social days out in Hamilton; the Waikato Winter Show, and the Summer A & P Show. Interest was waning in the horse and cattle rings, and the pig and sheep pens. Home Produce displays of winning preserves, embroidery and knitting, etc, were losing ground, to the impact of supermarkets and fashion boutiques, on rural folks' life styles. I was young and brash but convinced our 'big days out' needed some urgent change, but not sure what.



*John Kneebone*

At those shows machinery displays were static, with implements designed for use by horse or tractor, which for a public with access to Northern hemisphere magazines, fostered increasing frustration at New Zealand being left behind. 1966 found me in the U.K. courtesy of the Nuffield Foundation. There were no foreign currency restrictions to inhibit the importation of the very latest of machinery and components for the house or the farm. The negative I was exposed to in the U.K. was the alienation of the rural from the politically influential urban community. I returned to my Kiwi cowshed determined to lobby for greater New Zealand access to emerging technology, and to minimise the growing emasculation of urban folk, from their rural roots. What resulted, did so through the hard work of others who also shared my dreams.

While the New Zealand National Fieldays has been a resounding success as this growing archive will record, its special achievement has been its ability to re-invent itself, almost on an annual basis, not only to maintain the flow of visitors through the turnstiles each year, but to continue to grow. Equally as unique, has been the seamless transition from a voluntary society to an increasingly commercial, professional business. A rare achievement for a bunch of idiosyncratic humans!

- John Kneebone.

## INTRODUCTION

by Ray Fowke

Many decades on, the events leading up to the formation of a Waikato organisation designed to bring town and country together, followed by a committee and sub-committees responsible for the administration of the first New Zealand National Field Days, and subsequently the development of a permanent home for the NZ National Fielddays at Mystery Creek, on the outskirts of Hamilton, New Zealand, all makes interesting reading. So too, the increasingly diverse activities of the NZ National Fielddays Society, its many supporters, dedicated volunteers, committee-persons and permanent staff, over the years.



*Ray Fowke*

The chronological information for this history record has been mainly obtained from correspondence, reports and committee minutes located in files stored in the records room of the NZ National Fielddays Society Headquarters, at Mystery Creek, and embellished with the recollections of individuals who were, and many who still are, involved in the organisation.

The intention of this history record is to recognise the hundreds of individuals who played both large and small parts in the development of the NZ National Fielddays Society Inc., the events that it has organised, and the Mystery Creek venue which has become a household name, nationwide. It is also intended to highlight the resourcefulness and far-sightedness of those town and country people who wanted to see an idea blossom and grow.

A good deal has already been written in the past about many aspects of the New Zealand National Fielddays Society's history and growth and most of those important highlights, together with some amusing incidences, will also need to be repeated within these pages. However, with assistance from many people I have endeavoured to collate and record a host of hitherto unpublished memories which, hopefully, will be of interest to many readers and provide an insight into the operation of this very successful, not-for-profit organisation.

This formal and complete history record is intended to be on-going. It will take many months to compile completely and has been designed to be updated and added to as required. If you would like to be notified when new information and Chapters have been added to this web site, or would like to offer a contribution to its contents, please contact me. Your name and email address will be kept for communication purposes only and not made available to any other person or organisation.

I invite you to return to this Fieldays History Site, again and again. - Ray Fowke, Editor.

30<sup>th</sup> March, 2009

*Ray was full-time Promotions Manager for the NZ National Fielddays Society from 1975 to 1979. On the retirement of the first Secretary/Manager, Vaughan Jones, Ray was promoted to General Manager, a position which he held until retiring in 1986.*