



West Auckland Men's Rebus Club Newsletter

January 2024

Next meeting: 10:00 am Friday 12th January, Friendship Hall, 3063 Great North Rd, New Lynn

COMMITTEE

President	Bill Mutch	president@rebuswestauckland.nz	817 4721
Vice-President	Noel Rose	noelrose1976@gmail.com	828 1305
Immediate Past President	Bill Fairs	bill.fairs@gmail.com	627 8297
Secretary	Vince Middeldorp	secretary@rebuswestauckland.nz	828 5250
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Welfare Officer	Vacant		
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Newsletter	Vince Middeldorp	editor@rebuswestauckland.nz	828 5250
Speakers	Noel Rose	noelrose1976@gmail.com	828 1305
Hospitality	Trevor Pollard		817 8822
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Membership	Vacant		
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Photographer	John Mihaljevic	john@rebuswestauckland.nz	098361504



Ian Smith is organising a river cruise on the heritage scow Jane Gifford in February or March 2024

MEETING REPORT

December 2023

Chairperson: Bill Mutch

Attendance: 22 members plus 1 visitor

Raymond Barrett, Neil Castle, John Corban, Peter Cox, Stephen David, Mensto De Roos, Bill Fairs, Maurice Forbes, Andrew Geddes, John McKeown, Vince Middeldorp, John Mihaljevic, Bill Mutch, Charles Nicholls, Lyndsay Parris, Trevor Pollard, Noel Rose, Ian Smith, Alan Verry, Ken Webster, Allan Williamson, Garrick Yearsley

1. Welcome and Introduction:

The meeting began with a warm welcome to everyone present.

2. Apologies and Visitors:

Andrew Narayan was an apology as he was currently on a cruise. One visitor was present at the meeting.

3. Condolences:

Alan Babich, who used to assist Trevor in the kitchen, has been absent for most of the year because of his wife's illness. Sadly, his wife has recently passed away. A condolence card has been signed and sent to him.

4. Correspondence:

Letter from Rebus confirming that the affiliation fees would remain at \$2.75 per member for the next year.

Email from Rex Billington, a long-time member who had been absent for a while, saying that he would be coming back to the meetings.

Email from Justin Griffith, saying that he would be back in New Zealand on the 11th of January and asking if he could come to the meeting in February, which the secretary agreed to.

Suspicious (scam) email from someone pretending to be Bill, asking for assistance with an assignment and reimbursement. The email was sent to committee member's forwarding addresses shown on the front page of the club's newsletters. Only committee members named on the newsletter front page received it.

5. Treasurer's Report:

Treasurer Charles Nicholls treasurer presented the budget for the year 2024. The budget showed \$1,070 total expected income: \$600 from memberships (25 memberships at a \$25 subscription), \$240 from donations, and \$230 from morning teas. Expected expenses were \$1,319.75 in total: \$550 for speakers, \$696 for hall hire, \$68.75 for affiliation fees, and \$5 for transaction fees. Income over expenditure (\$249.75) deficit.

Mention of successful \$1,000 grant for lapel microphone from Whau Local Board.

Proposed a resolution to set next year's membership fee at \$30, which was passed. The \$5 increase from \$25 to \$30 reduces the projected budget deficit for 2024 by \$125 (50% reduction in deficit).

Proposed a resolution for Bill and Vince to become signatories to the club's Kiwibank account, which was passed.

Proposed a resolution that the account can only be closed by a resolution carried at a special general meeting which was passed.

6. Upcoming Events and Activities:

Trips organiser Ian Smith mentioned the success of previous coffee mornings and expressed gratitude for the turnouts, especially at Zeki's Cafe last month.

Outing to Devonport Museum followed by Christmas function at McHugh's on Wednesday, December 13th.

7. Next Meeting Date:

The next meeting is scheduled for January 12, 2024.

Meeting Adjournment: 10:32 am.

PRESIDENT'S PRATTLE
President's Report January 2023
Bill Mutch



Bill Mutch leans over to talk to Alan Verry at the November meeting

Greetings to all of you.

I hope you all had a wonderful holiday season and are ready for another year of fellowship, friendship, and fun.

Unfortunately, Covid has not spared me. It will be the jn.1 variant that is going around.

All the officers and committee members who served the club in 2023 deserve our gratitude. They did a fantastic job of organising and running the club activities, communicating with the members, and liaising with the speakers and venues.

Our club also owes a lot to the members who participated in the club events, shared their stories and opinions, and helped out in various ways. You are the lifeblood of the club and the reason why we exist.

I see 2024 as a year of opportunity for our club and look forward to seeing some membership growth. Let's all attend the meetings in the New Lynn Friendship Hall on the second Friday of the month and bring some friends and acquaintances to join us.

Together, we can continue our proud history as a vibrant and enjoyable meeting place, for men of good character who are no longer working full time.

Cheers
Bill Mutch

Claudia's Corner

Where did Noah keep his Bees?
In his Ark Hives.

How do you impress a female Baker?
Bring Her Flours.

What do you call a pony with a cough?
A Little Horse.

Why did the stadium get hot after the game?
Because all the fans left.



GUEST SPEAKER

LOCAL HISTORIAN LISA TRUTTMAN

The Explosive History of Fowler's Factory: A Journey from Tin Smithing to Extraterrestrial Conspiracies

Transcribed by WhisperAI; Written by Microsoft Copilot



Noel Rose looks on as Lisa Truttman tells Alan Verry about historical plans for an Avondale to Panmure rail link

Abraham Fowler was born in West Yorkshire, England, in 1826. He was a tinner, or a tin smith, who made and repaired various items made of tin or similar metals, such as kettles, pots, pans, and utensils. Tin smiths were common in England in the early to mid-19th century, but their trade declined with the advent of the Industrial Revolution, which made mass-produced goods cheaper and more accessible. Abraham Fowler struggled to make a living as a tinner, and even had to borrow or take money from his children's inheritance to keep his family afloat. He decided to seek a better life in the colonies, and in 1865, he boarded the ship *Matoaka* with his wife and six children, and sailed to Auckland, New Zealand.

Upon arriving in Auckland, Abraham Fowler set up a small tin smithing business in Freeman's Bay, in Drake Street. He lived and worked there with his family until his death in 1874. He did not achieve much fame or fortune in his lifetime, and was barely mentioned in the newspapers, except for some occasional advertisements for his services or for young lads to help him with his work. He left his business to his sons, Francis and William Squire Fowler, who would take it to new heights.

Francis and William Squire Fowler inherited their father's tin smithing skills and business acumen, and expanded the scope and scale of their operations. They moved their business to Durham Street West, and then to the corner of Elliott Street and Victoria Street West, where they built a large factory and showroom. They renamed their company F.&W. Fowler, and advertised themselves as galvanized iron and sheet metal workers, plumbers, tin smiths, gas fitters, and bell hangers. They also diversified their products and services, and became involved in various projects and contracts in Auckland and beyond, such as roofing, plumbing, gas fitting, bell hanging, and manufacturing of boilers, tanks, pipes, fittings, stoves, ranges, lamps, and other metal goods.

In the 1920s, they shifted their business to Albert Street, where they continued to operate until the 1960s. They were quite prominent and well-established in the central city, and celebrated their centenary in 1965, although they claimed to have been established in 1852, which was not accurate. In the 1930s, they had two main products that were making a name for themselves: the Hayman electric water heater, and the Monarch

brooder, an incubator for chicks. They also made electric urns, washing boilers, water heating elements, hot water towel rails, glue pots, dairy heaters, and sterilizers.



The F.&W. Fowler premises were located in Albert Street from the 1920s to the 1960s

In the 1960's Auckland Harbour Board had plans to create a western port on the Rosebank peninsula, and to reclaim large portions of the land and the river for that purpose. The Harbour Board plans caused the Auckland City Council to change the town planning for much of the Rosebank peninsula from a special rating area to an industrial zone. Many firms then set up factories in the Rosebank peninsula such as Reckitt and Coleman, Nugget New Zealand Limited, James Steadman Henderson Sweets Limited, British Paints, Phillips and Impey, Thompson and Hills, and Felton Textile New Zealand Limited.

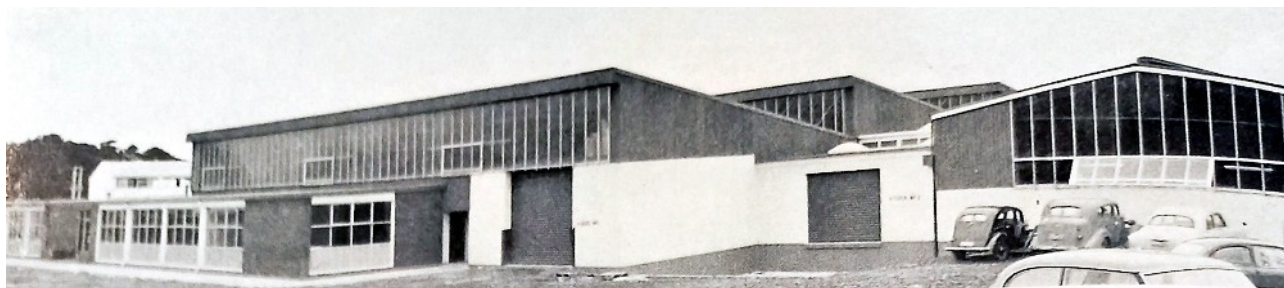
One of the firms that moved to the Rosebank peninsula was F.&W. Fowler Limited. It was still a family run firm. William Squires had died in 1918 and left the firm to his brother Francis. In 1927 Francis died and left it to his son Edward. In May 1966 Edward passed away and left it to his two sons: Edward and Jack Francis.

The Fowler's factory in Rosebank was built on a former farm land that was owned by Daniel Pollen, a farmer and politician, who died in the 1890s. His farm was subdivided in the 1900s, and Peter Robertson, another farmer, bought a large portion of the property. He built a large house and planted Norfolk pines. His property was again subdivided in the late 1920s, and number nine of the subdivision was the site of the future Fowler's factory. The title was taken by Ivy May Pope in 1928, and transferred to Norman McCallum in 1929. He was an absentee landowner who leased the land to various tenants, mostly European farmers and market gardeners.

The Fowler's factory in Rosebank, was a modern and sophisticated metal works that specialized in casting of all types of bronzes and special aluminium alloys. The company used some of the most modern equipment and processes available, and had a skilled staff in all three phases of the company's operations: sheet metal work, casting, and machine shop production. The company focused on producing goods for the local market rather than the export trade, and claimed to turn out a product equal with anything available from overseas. The company also had a heat treating process, which gave greater strength and corrosive resistance to the product, and was something relatively new to New Zealand. The company was proud of its achievements and reputation, and was one of the largest non-ferrous foundries in the Auckland district.

On the early morning of Friday, 23 September 1966, a loud hissing sound was heard by some of the nearby residents, who wondered what it was. Seconds later, a huge blast lit up the night, as the Fowler's factory exploded, sending a shockwave that tore open the factory complex, and smashed windows, jolted buildings, and could be felt as far away as Waiuku. The explosion also caused extensive damage and disruption to the nearby residents and businesses, who had their windows shattered. The explosion was compared to the V2 bomb, a German rocket that was used to bomb London during World War II, by some of the witnesses, who had experienced the war in England.

One of the witnesses was Mrs. Loretz, who lived just down the road from the factory, and whose house had some windows smashed and some plaster cracked by the blast. She woke up to the sound of the hissing, and immediately called Mr. Edward Fowler, the owner of the factory, who lived in Mount Eden. She asked him if he realized what had happened to his factory, and told him that there was a blast, a fire, and that her windows were gone. He quickly got dressed, got into his car, and drove to the scene. He arrived to find the fire engines from as far away as the city centre, joined by the fire engines from Port Chevalier and Avondale, at his factory. The fire was soon put out, but the damage was done.



F.&W. Fowler's Rosebank Road factory in the 1960s

The cause of the explosion was not clear, and remained a mystery for a long time. A government analyst, O.H. Keys, inspected the site, and said that it was a mighty blast, and that it seemed that the molten nitrate salt used for the heat treatment of metals exploded. He said the salts were melted in a steel bath at high temperature, and that in his opinion, the bath exploded, but it was not clear what initiated this violent reaction. He said that one obvious possibility would be overheating, but this was not at all clear. He said that the bath, when in use, did contain 300 pounds of molten crystal, and that a boiler was not far from the salt bath, but it was not the seat of the explosion. He said that the downward thrust of the explosion drove some of the fire bricks beneath the salt bath several inches into a concrete base, but that most of any other evidence pointing to a likely cause was destroyed by the blast itself, or even vaporized. He said that a depression, 13 inches deep and five feet across, was left where the nitrate salt bath once was.

Edward Fowler described the episode much later as a chain of events which had never happened before and were unlikely to happen again. Unfortunately, that was not quite the case. In the late 1940s, after World War II, in a part of Los Angeles, there was a similar factory that was using this kind of salt bath to process metal works. A brand new supervisor came up and saw the process, and thought that it was too slow. He decided to add the chemical acetic anhydride to it, thinking that it would speed up the process. He told somebody two days before him and another worker added acetic anhydride and then blew up half the block in and around the factory. The explosion killed both of them, and destroyed many buildings. There is a video on YouTube of the aftermath of what was left around the factory, and it shows buildings that were just basically splintered. So this kind of accident had happened before, and it could always happen.

F.&W. Fowler managed to recover and even diversified its business into producing firefighting equipment in the 1970s. The company changed its name to Thaler Industries Limited, and became well-known for its quality and innovation.

In the 1980s, the company's fortunes changed when it was acquired by a corporate conglomerate called Holcorp, which had a large portfolio of other businesses. Holcorp bought up 60% of the company's shares in 1987, and then took over the rest. Within 18 months, Holcorp realized that its investments were not performing well, especially after the stock market crash of 1987. Holcorp decided to liquidate many of its assets, including Thaler Industries. By 1992, the company was deregistered and ceased to exist. The land on Rosebank Road was sold to another company, Glucina Smelters Limited, which also dealt with metals and chemicals. Ironically, Glucina Smelters suffered an explosion accident in 2010, which killed one worker and injured another.

The 1966 F.&W. Fowler explosion sparked a UFO mystery. According to some eyewitness accounts, a bright light was seen descending from the sky over Avondale, just before the explosion occurred. One of the witnesses was the late Ian Smith who was spending some private moments with his girlfriend on the summit of Mount Albert, when he saw the light. Some said that the light made an audible hum that woke up houses in the area and set dogs barking. Others said that the light was actually going up, not down, and that it was a UFO that had crashed into the factory, causing the explosion.



The explosion wrecked the F.&W. Fowler building and blew out every window within half a mile radius

Two weeks after the Rosebank explosion, a TV news crew from the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation visited a farmer in Pukekohe, who had found a perfectly formed hole about 20 centimeters in diameter behind his cow shed. The farmer said he had lowered a plumb bob into it, and when it reached 20 meters, he gave up. It looked just like the hole in the electroplating bath in the Fowler factory. The farmer speculated that it was caused by a UFO that had landed and then taken off, leaving the hole behind. He said that he had heard a loud noise on the night of the explosion, and that he had seen a bright light in the sky.

The story of the Fowler's factory explosion and the UFO sighting was revived in 2011, when a Metro magazine article by Bob Harvey titled "Alien Nation" made further claims about the 1966 explosion being caused by a UFO which crashed into the factory. Bob Harvey was a friend of the late Ian Smith and had been told about the explosion over a beer at the Queen's Ferry Hotel in the CBD. The Metro article also made the claim that aliens had visited the farmer in Pukekohe.

OUTINGS AND TRIPS

THE CHRISTMAS LUNCH AT MCHUGHS OF CHELTENHAM

Vince Middeldorp and Copilot AI

We had a splendid time at the Christmas lunch at McHughs of Cheltenham, a lovely venue right on the edge of Cheltenham Beach. The views of Rangitoto across the water through the large plate glass windows were stunning. Inside, the facilities were perfect for having friendly chats with our fellow club members while enjoying a delicious meal.

The weather was not very inviting, so we did not stay outside for long. Most of us came on the coach that departed from St John Hall in Te Atatu South, and some drove their own cars to McHughs.

McHughs offered a buffet lunch with a variety of dishes to choose from. We could fill our plates with as much of our favourite food as we wanted, such as the succulent ham that was carved by a very obliging McHugh's staff member from a large piece of meat that had been cooked to perfection.

The roast potatoes were especially tempting, and they ran out quickly. I was curious about how they made them so golden and crispy, and I learned that they were deep fried in canola oil and then finished in an extraction oven.

I don't think anyone could have left the lunch unsatisfied. It was a wonderful occasion to celebrate the festive season with our friends from the West Auckland Men's Rebus Club and the Waitakere Combined Rebus

Club. If more people knew what they were missing out on, I'm sure both clubs would have a lot more members than they do now.



Waiting in line at the buffet room



Enjoying lunch and conversation



The dessert table is in the distance

VISIT TO DEVONPORT MUSEUM

Vince Middeldorp and Copilot AI

The Devonport Museum, nestled in the Mt Cambria Reserve, is a charming place that showcases the history and culture of Devonport's early settlers and some of its notable figures.

Our group had to park the bus on Vauxhall Road, as the road leading to the museum was too steep and narrow for it. Some of us who drove our own cars were glad we did, as the walk up the hill was not easy. A few members decided to stay on the bus and wait the return of the others.



Carpenter's hand tools and blacksmith's tongs hang on the wall at the Devonport Museum

We were greeted by David Veart, a friendly member of the Devonport Museum society, who turned out to be a qualified archaeologist. He had worked for DOC at Maungauika/North Head for 25 years and had some fascinating stories to tell. He told us that archaeological excavations had revealed traces of some of the earliest Maori settlers in New Zealand, who had lived in Devonport long before the Europeans arrived.



Peter Cox leans against the butcher's chopping block and looks at exhibits on display

The museum was full of nostalgic exhibits that reminded us of how life used to be in Devonport. One of them was a large butcher's chopping board, carved from a kauri log. It brought back memories of the local butcher's shop, where the floor was covered with sawdust and the meat was hung in a cool room behind heavy doors.



Glass quart and pint milk bottles on a shelf at Devonport Museum

Another nostalgic exhibit was a quart milk bottle, the kind that was delivered by the local milkman every morning. Those were the days when you could leave the money for the milk in the letterbox, along with the empty bottles. Imagine doing that today - it would be an invitation for thieves and vandals.

REMEMBERING ROGER LALOLI



Roger Laloli wearing the red scarf with his wife Jewel at Kings Garden Centre

“Roger Laloli was an irrepressible person who always radiated energy and enthusiasm. He was a cherished member of the Rebus Club community, and we are deeply saddened by his passing in 2023. Roger had a successful career as an accountant, and he generously shared his expertise with the West Auckland Men’s Rebus Club, where he served as the Vice-President for many years. He also stepped up as the treasurer when the club needed him. We will always remember Roger for his kindness, generosity, and spirit.”

SUPPORTERS



The January meeting date is Friday 9th February 2023

Our meetings are at 10:00 am, **2nd Friday of the month**, New Lynn Friendship Hall, 3063 Great North Rd.