

'RITES' FROM PAGE 10'

and although a certain kind of Christchurchian delights in living in Sumner, the place is very quiet during the day. The garden bar at the Cave Rock Hotel is purely desolate. At the height of summer it will be packed with people from the beach across the road, noses covered and bodies revealed, but at this time of year the garden is unkempt and it's all but forgotten. Inside, it's a typical old men's pub, you feel very *noticed* when you walk through it. The crowd will change somewhat at night, especially seeing as the other pub, the Marine Tavern is still rebuilding after a fire.

Sumner is often a little warmer than the rest of Christchurch, and the scent in the air is a sea breeze rather than a smog inversion, so some prefer to work in the city and travel the eight or nine miles home (about as far-flung as you get in Christchurch) at night. If you have money, you live "on the hill" and watch the tide go in and out. If you don't have money you live on the flat and on average are probably more likely to own a Volkswagen than someone in virtually any other suburb in the country.

Over a steep hill from Sumner is Lyttelton, the port of Canterbury. As the initial landing place for the first settlers, it's the oldest part of Christchurch and much of it has been built of stone. The Lyttelton tunnel links the city with its harbour these days, but there probably isn't anyone who's been to school in Christchurch who hasn't trekked up and over the Bridle Path, the original gateway to the Canterbury Plains. Long, long before that, it was the side of a volcano.

The First Four Ships might have landed there, but most people have little reason to visit Lyttelton. If they pass through the tunnel, they're probably en route to one of the calm bays further around the crater. We used to come to the place for the British Hotel.

The British is an old hotel, and as seamy as benefits one in a harbour town. It's a hard pub, but not the hardest in town. The daytime crowd in the front bar is a mixed bag; problem drinkers, sailors, a couple of big bikers, a couple of off-duty hookers, locals. The friendly barman wears a faded 'Triumph' sweatshirt which doesn't quite conceal the tattoos around his neck.

But the pub has several bars — the bottom one used to host a weird selection of bands and was a favourite place for the Androidss to play (I dread to think of the connections that led to that). The six band members alone made the little room seem crowded but the Androidss and the place fitted each other. My fondest memory of the place is them shambling out a full-length 'Sister Ray', singing about sailors and prostitutes and junkies to the sailors, prostitutes and junkies. And us. The landlady used to come down and open the side door so all the under-agers could slip outside when the police visited.

After a quick bite at home, it's into the Square just in time to catch the tail of the Gay Law Reform march. Immediately it's a little intimidating,

because the last part of the march, 30 or so people, has been cut off from the main body by traffic. All around us people stare and some shout insults: "Queer shits!" Quite a few of the people looking on seem to be men here for tomorrow's Ranfurly Shield challenge.

It's a lot more fun when we join the rest of the march, 800 or so. Pat Faigan from Say Yes To Apes and several people who seem to be bits of the Connoisseurs and Axemen stroll along playing some merry marching music; 'Get Up Stand Up' and the like. Another bunch of buskers sits on the truck at the front.

The march slows down and halts in Cashel St and there's a chance to look around. The mood is quite ebullient, especially given some of the hatred from the footpath. Men and men hold hands, women and women hold hands, men and women hold hands and for *once*, it all seems pretty much the same. Badges, balloons and banners communicate essentially the same message.

There's a guy I went to school with right from the primers. He's here with his boyfriend and now openly gay — I'd never thought about the possibility he might be. He was rather shy and nervous at school; now he's grinning wildly and looking happy. And nearby is a teacher from my secondary school who risked his job and put himself in line for a lot of stupid student innuendo by being prominent in agitating for gay rights. He's suddenly grey-haired, looks rather distinguished. He seems to know people all around him and smiles as he speaks to them.

The mood is diluted a little when the organisers switch on the PA horns on the truck for speeches that 80 per cent of the marchers can't hear. It's further broken by the attempts to get chanting going. Most of the crowd aren't interested, and fair enough — an issue as simple and clear as gay rights doesn't need that kind of clumsy politicking. There's something a little brutal and superfluous about mass chanting of the same phrase. It seems to undermine the status of the marchers as individuals, and that's the sort of thing that leads to a society that rejects those who are different.

And it also brings the marchers down to the level of the young males who stand back and scream abuse, often in unison, on the Hereford St leg, the end of the circular march. One group of half a dozen or so is effectively silenced by a voice from the crowd: "Hi Fred! Remember me? Remember last weekend?" They all look amusingly sheepish.

It gets nastier as we proceed up the street, past Shades Tavern. (Former All Black fullback Fergie McCormick works at Shades. Anyone who was gay and drank at the Cantabrian when Fergie went to work there will know *his* stand on this particular aspect of human rights. It used to be a gay bar.) A bunch of drinkers, some in matching rugby club dress jerseys, have come through from the pub to look at the queers.

Some actually cross the road and stand on the



centre line to yell abuse. More stand back on the path and chant: "Push shit! Push shit!", then, "Gays should be shot! Gays should be shot!"

That sends a chill through my happily het heart — I can't imagine what it's like for someone who doesn't just wear a badge or march occasionally, but has an entire lifestyle that attracts that kind of stupid, hateful threat. I happen to on balance fall the side of the fence called "normal". A lot of the people around me don't.

Exactly *why* people hate gays, I'm not sure, there are various psychological and sociological explanations. I only know they're *wrong* and they make me feel angry and ashamed: What right do you have to tell two adults who love each other how they can and cannot touch in the privacy of their own home? Do you know how many gay people you meet every day? Would you have them all "shot"? Who the fuck are you? Look after your own life before you try and fuck up someone else's! Maybe you're not really bad, just stupid or misinformed — you still scare me. Enough!

There is an unwritten rule within the gay community that no one challenges anyone else, particularly a public figure, to come out publicly. The understanding apparently protects the double standards of several homosexual politicians (not to mention the odd All Black) who have gone on record as registering opposition to gay law reform — but then they have to live with their own self-hatred.

The protest loses its momentum as the march halts again in the Square, so its time to go to the Zetland Tavern, where Dunedin's Alpaca Brothers are playing. There aren't a lot of people there when I arrive. Look Blue Go Purple's Kath Webster is a half-Brother (sister?) for the weekend and plays and songs on about half a dozen songs each night. She explains that the Alpacas shelled out for 300 posters to be printed, only to have Air New Zealand deliver them to the wrong place ... so, no posters.

But enough people are in the know to make

for a comfortable crowd eventually. Nick from Record Joyn't (my co-host) arrives and gets himself a drink; he's had a hell of a night, a lot of people in town and, just to top it off, two people rolling around on the floor in a fight sparked off by one's wearing a Heterosexuals Unafraid Of Gays badge. There's a slight concern among the staff about violence at the pub after last weekend's confrontation between boot boys and the police. It's not true what you read in the papers about staff calling the police after trouble at the pub, but it still happened.

But there's no problem, and most people get serviceably relaxed. The band has the unenviable task of playing the whole night — naturally the last set is by far the best. Read next month for a description of Saturday night!

Sept 14: The Big Match

To fully understand the Ranfurly Shield, you have to take note of it not simply as a sporting trophy, but as a cultural, social and financial symbol.

The Earl of Ranfurly probably had nothing of the sort in mind when he offered the NZ Rugby Union "a cup for competition in the colony" in 1901. In fact colonialism was still sufficiently pervasive at the time for the good Earl to make the rather embarrassing mistake of handing over a shield with a centre panel depicting a *soccer* game. The mistake was hastily corrected. The only province the shield could logically go to at the time was Auckland, which had just ended its sixth unbeaten season.

After Auckland took the shield in both 1902 and 1903, its status was changed to make it a challenge trophy in 1904. It was up for grabs with every game that was accepted by the holders as a challenge and has been ever since. With only a couple of exceptions, it has only been at stake at the holders' home ground. The question of how many challenges to accept and who to accept them from has been a matter of a "sporting attitude". Any team seen to be giving less than a fair crack at the shield to other teams will bring down dishonour on itself, as North Auckland did by refusing to play any more challenges for the season when it took the shield several years ago.

When rugby's national championship was introduced in 1977, it was feared that the 'Log Of Wood' would lose status, but the shield is just as prestigious and profitable now as it was then. The edge the shield has is that *every* game sees it laid on the line, so the crowds come along every time.

Canterbury's record-equalling spell with the shield began in 1982 with a thrilling win over Wellington, which saw first-five Wayne Smith carve a 30-yard arc through the defence to score the winning try. Since the first defence, a shaky 15-15 draw with Counties on September 25, it has been estimated that the shield has reaped about \$20m for Canterbury businesses. The 10,000 visitors for the Auckland match alone will leave be-

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MARC ALMOND

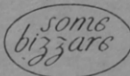


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