

## MAGAZINE



**HEALTHY LIVING:** Harold Lester at the door of his milkbar, and a window display featuring Horlick's energy drink. Harold was especially proud of his window displays.



**IN PLACE:** Eager customers crowd Lester's milkbar after its refurbishment, possibly on opening day in 1938.

# Meet you at the milkbar



**OUR BIT:** Harold Lester's patriotism shows in this World War II window display (above). **PROUD KIWIS:** Harold Lester (left, white jacket, looking ahead) joins a big crowd to hear aviatix Jean Batten speak from the balcony of the Criterion Hotel in 1936.



**LOYAL SUBJECT:** The original Lester's milkbar, resplendent in Union Jacks to mark the coronation of King Edward VIII in 1936.

**L**ONG before the long black, the latte bowl, the Earl Grey and the energy drink, urban social life centred not on the cool cafe but the local milkbar.

A good cup of tea or coffee, or a milkshake, helped the conversation flow, while children were often kept quiet with an ice block, sometimes made on the premises.

Lester's milkbar, next to the Mayfair Theatre in Devon St, was one of the most popular haunts in New Plymouth for nearly 30 years, from the late 1920s to the mid-50s.

Harold and Dorothy Lester came from Ngaere. Harold, a salesman, and his wife moved to Auckland in the 1920s, then in 1927 returned to Taranaki to open their milkbar.

In 1938 a much larger and modern Lester's milkbar opened on the same site when the new Mayfair building was opened. People came not only

for the drinks, the chocolates and the sweets but also the coned ices Harold Lester made himself – flavoured milk blocks for a penny, and cream and fruit salad blocks for threepence.

Harold's daughter, lifelong New Plymouth resident Yvonne Barnes, says she still gets reminded by old acquaintances of the much sought after blocks, and remembers days at Central School when she would cringe as her father arrived with leaflets, enticing young customers.

The milkbar operated six days a week and usually stayed open until after the Mayfair theatre crowd emerged at night. At the interval, Lester's staff would sell snacks in the theatre.

In about 1956 the milkbar was sold to make way for Lovell's Hairdressers. It later returned to use as a food outlet, and today is the home of Hatter's. □



**PRIME LOCATION:** The Mayfair building around the time of its opening in 1938, with Lester's milkbar on the left.