

## *August in New Zealand by Gerri Kimber*

I was fortunate to be able to spend the month of August in New Zealand, researching in the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington for the forthcoming two volume annotated edition of KM's fiction which I am co-editing with Vincent O'Sullivan, to be published by Edinburgh University Press next October. The trip would not have been possible without the generous support of the NZ Society of Great Britain, the NZ UK Graduate Association and the NZ UK Link Foundation.

I flew to Auckland via Singapore. After a 12 hour flight to Singapore, I was staggered to realise I was still only half way there! I was lucky enough to be able to spend the first couple of days recovering from jetlag at the Auckland home of Sarah Sandley, KMS Honorary



Chair. Auckland is an incredible city, and I fell in love with the view of the harbour and the



brooding presence of the volcanic island of Rangitoto.

During my brief stay in Auckland, I met up with Steph Hancox our NZ membership secretary and her mother Conor Williamson, a relative of KM, and the granddaughter of the real 'Jonathan Trout'. I was also able to spend time



with Reuben Williams, the KMS's website designer, who lives in Christchurch but flew up to Auckland for a couple of nights. It was so wonderful to

finally get to meet all these people with whom I have been in contact for so long, but never actually met! Karl and Kay Stead also invited me to dinner

whilst I was in Auckland and I spent a lovely evening there, enjoying their wonderful hospitality.



With my jetlag finally gone, it was time to make my way to Wellington. As this was a research trip, and there would be very little opportunity to do any travelling, I decided to take the famous 'Overlander' train to Wellington from Auckland – a journey of 12 hours – and thus be able to experience a little of the interior of most of the North Island. (It was also cheaper than the plane!) The sights exceeded all my expectations.

Finally I was in Wellington, smaller than Auckland, but just as beautiful.



Vincent, his wife Helen, and their adorable miniature Schnauzer Norman, looked after me during my stay in Wellington. There was great excitement in my first week, as there was a snow storm through much of New Zealand – a few flakes even made it as far north as sub-tropical Auckland! The hillier suburbs of Wellington, including Karori, were actually cut off



from the city for a short time. During the weekend of the storm, we were staying in the Wairarapa and had to make a hasty return to Wellington in order to cross over the Rimutaka mountain pass before it was closed by snow fall.



One of the highlights of my trip was to be able to visit the KM Birthplace House. I was actually staying on the Tinakori Road and so it was an easy

downhill walk to the Birthplace. Mary Morris and her colleagues made Vincent and I very welcome, and it was an unforgettable experience.



KMS member Maggie Rainey-Smith organised for me to give a talk to the NZ Society of Authors

on the proposed KM sculpture, in the idyllic setting of Day's Bay where she lives. There I met Dame Fiona Kidman (who invited me to attend the Prime Minister's Literary



Awards at Premier House), Joanna Woods, Neil Plimmer, Don Long, and other Wellington luminaries, as well as KMS members including Kevin Boon and Simone Oettli. It was a wonderful evening and money was raised for the sculpture. On another occasion, the NZ UK Link Foundation invited Vincent and I to speak about KM and our book project to



their members in the very grand setting of the official residence of the British High Commissioner at Homewood. There was a delicious afternoon tea, with the most dainty and delightful sandwiches and cakes prior to our talk, which was introduced by Joanna Woods and Jane Kirkcaldie.



There were many memorable dinners during the trip including with Fiona and Ian Kidman in their hillside home, with spectacular views over Wellington harbour. As previously mentioned, I was able to see Fiona (Fiction), James Belich (Non Fiction) and Peter Bland (Poetry) each awarded the 2011 Prime Minister's Award for Literary Achievement at Premier House – an occasion I shall never forget! Richard Cathie and the committee of the Katherine Mansfield Menton Fellowship also invited Vincent and I to lunch – it was wonderful to be able to catch up

with them following our collaboration on the week of events in September 2009 in Menton, to commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fellowship.

Aside from all of the above, most of our time was spent in the Alexander Turnbull Library, temporarily housed in the Archive Building whilst the ATL building is being revamped. Here is housed the world's most significant collection of KM-related manuscripts and books.

Being able to spend so much time there was an incredible experience. We were able to make significant progress on our manuscript, going back to the original source material wherever possible.

The ATL also houses microfiches of all the Newberry archive's holdings (the library in Chicago which houses the other main collection of KM manuscripts), which was of great help to us. Finally it was back to Auckland, again on the 'Overlander' train, with time to drive to Cambridge with Sarah Sandley for Sunday lunch with literary columnist Stephen Stratford and his delightful family before the long journey home. Thanks to Sarah again and her partner Brett, whose wonderful hospitality made the beginning and end of my trip so memorable. And of course to Vincent and Helen for all



their kindness throughout this unforgettable journey, and my three fantastic sponsors.