

## **Vita Shoe Company Limited - A Family Business**

Harry & Wendy Brackstone, well known Newmarket identities, share their business story.

Vita Shoe Co Limited was established in January 1941 by Vern Brackstone, (Harry's father), Jack McKenzie and Morrie Andrews as a footwear manufacturer, originally operating from premises in Stanley Street Parnell. The company manufactured children's footwear and army boots during the war years. When they moved to Newmarket in the 1950's other shoe manufacturers, such as Morrow Taylor were established there.

In 1955 property was purchased fronting Khyber Pass Road and Kingdon Street Newmarket. A two storied building was erected on the site and manufacturing was transferred there. Production was expanded significantly with men's and women's footwear being distributed throughout NZ

In 1961 a four storied building was erected on the corner of Khyber Pass Road and Kingdon Street with Vita Shoe Co Ltd occupying space on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> floors

By the 1970's significant quantities of men's and women's sandals were being supplied to the NZ Market and export sales to Australia and the Pacific Islands.

Additions were made to the building in 1975 and 1980.

In 1978 Vita Shoe Co Ltd was licensed by a major American sports company to manufacture sports footwear for the New Zealand, Australian and Pacific markets.

In 1982 the property at 2 Kingdon Street was purchased, it also fronted Khyber Pass Road. The corner was leased to a service station. A mezzanine floor was added, and the property was used for production. At this time 190 staff were employed.

With the restructuring of the industry in the 1980's production moved to assembly of imported components until manufacturing ceased in 1990 when all footwear distributed was imported.

After almost 50 years of protection, in the mid 80's the New Zealand government ended import licensing and reduced tariffs, opening the way for cheap footwear imports. The effect of these imports was dramatic, leading to the closure of many factories and businesses.