



Frederick Augustus Cooke began his autobiography in the spring of 1939, but, before he could finish it, he died on March 29, 1940.

Fred was born in 1870 in Christchurch where his father was a chemist. After a free-ranging boyhood, shooting sparrows and developing an abiding passion for cycle touring and racing, with many scrapes, in 1886 he went to work for a local bicycle maker, building penny farthings. After some three years he joined a firm of brass foundries. During this time he developed a passion for cricket. After time in Sydney and Melbourne he returned to Christchurch and secured employment with Adams Brothers, bicycle makers, who had 20 staff turning out a large number of bicycles every week to meet demand.

A friend in Dunedin alerted him to the opportunity for a bicycle manufacturer to start up in Dunedin. He searched for someone who could handle the selling side he was joined by Ted Howlison.

"We specialised in building the bike to suit the purchaser and would book up orders for all sorts and sizes of machines. Dr Batchelor senior, was an exceptionally tall man, somewhere about 6ft 4inches, while Dr Hocken was an extremely short and stocky man. We built machines for both these doctors, which we named the long and the short of it. It was rather funny to see these two together and we had many a joke about it."

After losing money in a gold-dredging venture, they began making their own tyres using special Egyptian woven canvas and rubber treads from Moseley and Sons, Manchester. Next they ventured into importation of engines for motor-cycles. "The first engines imported by us were 1.5 Hp with outside flywheels, accumulator and wet battery ignition. It was an exceptionally light outfit and one that could easily be adapted to suit the ordinary bicycle, and we were very successful with these little motor cycles." This time in Cooke's motoring history was full of excitement and he tells some wonderful anecdotes.

Motor cars were slow to be introduced to Dunedin because of the difficult terrain and most sales ventures failed. However Cooke and Howlison decide to have a go and took up the Rover single cylinder, 8HP car and purchased new premises in Hanover Street to gain extra space. "Our first Rover car was a single seater and was purchased by Dr R. Fulton."

They dabbled in Star Cars (renamed Stuart for Dunedin), American Buck Boards, Metz, and about 1906 Buick cars appeared. After a thorough investigation into the engineering quality of the Buicks Cooke and Howlison took up the agency for Otago and Southland. "This was the best thing we ever did and was the foundation stone of a most successful business."

Fred Cooke died aged 70 years, on March 29, 1940, and is buried in Dunedin's Andersons Bay Cemetery. Ted Howlison died aged 72 years, on 19 April 1938, and is buried in the Northern Cemetery

Prepared by the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand from Fred Cooke's notes, kindly supplied by Julian Smith. www.cemeteries.org.nz