



*Above: Fred at 23
Above centre: Fred at 14*



The very young Fred



Fred and his brothers – Standing L-R: Simon (half-brother by Frank's second wife), Peter, an uncle, David, Fred. Front: Rod, Laurie. (Sept. 1998)



Left: Fred (c. 18 years) and friends at a Church Camp – note that Fred is kneeling with his knees in his shoes.



Fred in his workshop – 'Fred's Shed' – explaining details of recorder making to VRG members, 1997

Memories of the Early Life of Frederick Gilbert Morgan

Geoff Hughes

These memories are drawn from my own life, from notes provided by Fred's brother, Peter and from reminiscences of old friends. In the 1950s the Morgan and Hughes families attended the same church in Moorabbin. The Morgans lived in an old weatherboard house in Warrigal Road, Mentone. Fred's father, Frank, worked in a shoe factory, later on becoming the owner of the factory.

Memories of Fred and music

In the mid-fifties, I was asked to form a recorder group for the youth of the church. Only two young people came forward: Vern Cresswell and Fred. Fred was about 14 years old at this time. We three, together with my brother David, used to play together. I imported a consort of Dolmetsch recorders, and using these we formed a consort, playing at church functions around Melbourne. Eventually we all acquired our own Dolmetsch instruments.

Fred and I spent time at my place playing duets and listening to recorder music. We were amazed to realise that we could not hear Frans Brüggen breathe! We enjoyed Carl Dolmetsch and Edgar Hunt playing Bach's *Fourth Brandenburg Concerto* until Fred noticed that in the first recorder solo, in the run in the last bars of the second movement, Dolmetsch played a Bb instead of a natural! Somehow the mistake always stood out.

The consort began to pick up outside engagements as associate artists. As we enjoyed playing Susato's dances, we called ourselves The Susato Recorder Consort. On one occasion Fred had arranged a performance for a suburban music society. He had agreed to give an introductory talk on recorders. He was extremely nervous about this but found a bottle of nerve tonic in the kitchen. The high alcohol content loosened Fred's inhibitions and tongue. He spoke for over twenty minutes. With the support and interest of Dr. A.E. Floyd, The Susato Recorder Consort gave several recitals on ABC radio.

In our preparations for these engagements Fred showed a natural musicality, adding ornamentation and other stylistic details that improved our performances. Fred had had no formal music lessons

until he was fifteen and a half. He and his brother Peter did Prep and Grade 1 piano, having great difficulty sitting at the small desks with the 'little kids'. The teacher talked him into doing Grade 2, but that was as far as Fred went with the piano. He was happy playing recorder.

As the youth of the church grew older, we formed a group called The Fabulous Five. I played clarinet and David was on trombone, Bruce on drums, Vern on tea-chest bass, Barry on violin and someone on piano. Fred played my soprano saxophone. Our boisterous and raucous performances were enjoyed, especially by us. We also prepared a taped compilation of various recordings and sound effects, to which we mimed in suitable costume. Fred was always able to come up with hare-brained ideas. In one mock talent quest, Fred was awarded a 'gong'. 'More gongs for Morgong!', he demanded.

Fred was an outstanding student at school and gained a studentship to train as an art teacher. I had been working during the school holidays at Ade Monsborough's Pan recorder factory. Fred asked me to see if Ade would give him some casual employment there while he did his course. Ade agreed and Fred was thus initiated into the world of recorder making.

Fred loved art but soon realised that he did not want to teach it. He applied to have his studentship changed to primary school teaching, but this was not permitted by the Education Department. The studentship was cancelled and Fred was in need of a job. Ade was able to take him on full time in a position where he worked with the experienced woodworker John Hansen. Eventually the factory ran into financial difficulties and Fred, John Hansen and John Rippon bought Ade out.

After about ten years with The Susato Recorder Consort, it became obvious that Fred's skills had outgrown this group. He and Vern left to form The Frederick Morgan Recorder Consort.

Memories of Fred as a child

Fred was a daredevil boy. He used to go bilycarting and rock jumping around the sea front near Beaumaris. He was usually with his older brother Peter and would return from these adventures with skinned, bruised knees and soaked clothes. He tended to attract accidents and trouble. It was with Peter that he rode 1 000 kms around Victoria in January 1955 at the age of fourteen. Peter remembers one occasion on which Fred lost control of his bicycle. He left the road and plunged through some trees yelling wildly, but managed to miss the trees and survived to continue the journey.

Fred and Peter rode their bicycles to Sandringham Technical School about four miles from Mentone. In the depths of winter Fred would ride in shorts and a shirt—he wanted to 'look tough'—while Peter was warmly rugged up. But underneath Fred's shirt were two or three jumpers as appropriate.

At 21 or 22, Fred got his first spectacles. Peter recalls him coming home with them, saying, 'Isn't the traffic shocking! I didn't realise how many cars there were on the roads. When you want to pass a car, you see all these other ones coming towards you.' Peter wondered if he had never seen them before.

At any rate, he had never hit one.

Because of his size, Fred was at home in big cars and many of us remember two of them in particular. A Dodge and a superb Packard. Peter recalls the day Fred asked him to walk beside him while he drove the Packard: 'I walked beside him as he drove, in top gear, proudly showing me how he had set the manual spark timing to full retard. He did love that car!'

The Morgans and the Fletcher family of Mentone became very close. Peter married Meryl Fletcher. She remembers that Fred and Peter used to hurl peppercorns and apples over the back fence at the girls she was playing with. And she remembers young Fred hanging around their place, his clothing worn out at the elbows and knees, content to lean on a fence or sit on the porch step, whittling away at a piece of wood.

Peter writes: 'How was Fred able to do such beautiful work: at the drawing board, in command of the arithmetical ratios crucial to maestro tuning and with the wood he loved? As one who grew up with Fred, the answers are obvious. His school report card for years 7, 8 and 9 showed 100% for Mathematics, Drawing (Solid Geometry) and Science. His bottom was shaped to a seat outside a friend's house in Mentone [the Fletchers'] where he sat for many hours whittling and carving pine bark and other unforgiving timbers. Later, it all seemed so natural.'

Below: Fred's Shed, 1997

