

A Word from Kathryn

We were very pleased when the museum reopened on 18 May and we were able to welcome visitors and researchers back.

To meet the social distancing requirements, we changed around some of the furniture and opened another entry door to encourage one-way flow through the main room. As this seems to be working well, we have stayed with this change.

Thanks to a generous Jumble Around grant we have purchased three new mannequins (including two child-sized ones) on beautifully formed wooden stands. The woodturning was done by Cambridge Woodcraft using chestnut wood donated by Paul and Lynne Garland from a tree at Trearne. It's nice to know that even our mannequins have a strong Cambridge connection. The clothing display now focuses on gowns from the 1970s.

While we recently celebrated National Volunteer Week, this and every week we celebrate and thank our volunteers. Individually and collectively a lot is being achieved.

A particular project that deserves mentioning is the fine work done by David Wilson to complete the restoration of a kauri table top display case. This case is now on display in the military room and houses the silver cradle gifted to Mayor Mervyn Wells and Mayoress Barbara on the birth of their second son Mervyn in 1913.



ADDRESS LABEL FOR DELIVERY OF HARD COPIES (ON REQUEST)

Last year Julie Shaw compiled an index to the book by Grant Middlemiss - *The Waikato River Gunboats; New Zealand's First Navy*. This index is now available on the Museum's website:

<https://cambridgemuseum.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/The-Waikato-River-Gunboats.pdf>

During lockdown two volunteers continued with indexing work and other volunteers collected newspaper filing work when we reached Level 2. In June the *Waikato Independent* newspaper indexing team returned to work.

For the July school holidays, bring the children in for our "Cambridge Then and Now" quiz, which will put them into the draw for a prize. Elizabeth, our Museum Assistant, is finishing off the final touches now and promises that it will be a lot of fun. Quiz sheets will be available in the museum and on-line.



Kathryn Parsons
Museum Manager

2020 Cambridge Historical Society Subscriptions

Subscriptions are now due for the 2020 year. The subscription remains at \$20 per individual or family.

The invoices were sent out to members on 26 June, by email or post where requested.

You may pay by internet banking to the Society's bank account 03 1568 0041635 00. Please type your surname, initials and "Sub" under Reference.

Or you can visit us at the Cambridge Museum, The Old Courthouse, 24 Victoria Street, Cambridge to pay by cash.

Your sub goes towards supporting your living and cultural heritage.



Cambridge before the Fire Brigade

Duke Street fire of 1889

“With wooden buildings and little or no water, the destruction to property could be enormous in a town like Cambridge. This is especially true in Duke Street, where stores and shops are close together,” prophesied Thomas Wells at a meeting in the Cambridge Public Hall in 1879.

Thomas Wells



The fifty to sixty people present immediately voted for the formation of a Fire Brigade of 20 officers, and for the supply of eight iron buckets and a hand engine.

However, they soon learned that a Fire Brigade could not be formed as Cambridge lacked a ready supply of water.

Cambridge Public Hall



Arson and the night watchman

Between 1881 and 1882, at least seven fires were recorded in the community. A *Waikato Times* Editorial of 18 March 1882 deplored the possible presence of a “fire maniac”. The Oddfellows Hall and Masonic Hotel stables were damaged and Mrs Maxwell’s cottage in Alpha Street was burned to the ground. Mrs Murphy’s Maori restaurant or wharekai near the National Hotel was destroyed by fire, although the occupants believed this was caused by the negligence of neighbouring butcher Thomas Hoy – an accusation he vehemently denied. In a letter to the editor, he implied the fire was caused by the drunken carelessness of the restaurant’s occupants.

In March 1882, local tradespeople funded the appointment of Charles Hassett as a night watchman. Armed with his stick, Hassett was soon a familiar sight to late wayfarers, including the drunks stumbling home from the many Cambridge hotels.

But Hassett wasn’t immune to the pleasure of a drink himself, and had no scruples in frequenting hotels while on duty. According to the *Waikato Times*, he was twice assaulted – once by bouncer George Walton who threw him outside the National Hotel after he refused to pay; and once by John Arnold after a fracas in the same hotel – Arnold allegedly calling him an “old loafer” for drinking on the job, and Hassett calling Arnold “opprobrious” names and threatening to “pull his nose”.

Perhaps because of this behaviour, the night watchman’s financial support from local tradespeople was dwindling.

He had at least one supporter in a *Waikato Times* correspondent in January 1883, who claimed that Hassett should be commended for foiling an attempt by vagrant James Murphy to burn down George Dickenson’s shop in Duke Street. However, as Murphy had lit only a small fire to warm his billy can, he was released without charge. The *Waikato Times* reported that “it was generally believed ... that if he lit the fire, he did it without any malicious intent, he being somewhat demented.”

It is not clear if Hassett left or was relieved of his post. He was certainly gone by March 1885, when the townsfolk were again requesting that a night watchman be appointed.

Outbreaks

Between 1881 and 1888, at least 32 fires had been recorded in Cambridge, including a major one in November 1883. On Victoria Street, between Queen Street and the Church corner, several businesses were burned to the ground, all being hit with substantial financial loss. The *Waikato Times* lauded the efforts of the Armed Constabulary, which had controlled the fire by pulling down fences and workshops at its perimeter to keep it from spreading.

Tragedy struck when the three children of William and Mary Osborne died in a house fire near the Waikato river on 6 November 1884. They were Hedley (4 years), Julietta (2 years) and Agnes (5 months). Mrs Osborne had walked to town to buy a suit of clothes for her husband. She had locked the children in the house so that they could not stray down to the river.

An effective water supply for firefighting was yet to be sourced, and the townsfolk were becoming desperate.

Insurance costs

Fire insurance costs in Cambridge were skyrocketing. In 1885, the Borough Council was sufficiently concerned to write a letter of complaint to insurance companies but was told that these costs would continue until the water supply problem was solved.

“FIRE! FIRE!”

According to early resident Mr A Johansen, the main business area of Cambridge at that time was Duke Street. It was originally a sand road, and in the wintertime, he described it as a “veritable bog-hole.” But over time, business increased in the street, bolstered by the money made from participants in Land Court hearings in the town.

On the morning of 9 March 1889, Duke Street residents were awoken by shouts from Edward Cussen and Mr Hadyn, who had seen the reflection of fire in the sky at 3.50am. The blaze had started in Bates’ Saddlery, and the Bates family were lucky to escape with their lives.



The school bell was rung as an alarm. The south side of Duke Street East was rapidly becoming an inferno, and residents rushed to the scene to do all they could to save lives and rescue goods and stock. Thankfully, no lives were lost.

The *Waikato Times* applauded the formidable efforts and level-headedness of the women. Mr Bates was described as “overcome with shock”, while Mrs Bates was praised for her presence of mind in rousing the children and moving them to safety. Miss Ellen Dillon, the cook at the Masonic Hotel, was awakened by the glare of the flames and, with others, went to assist. They “worked like Trojans”, saving an immense amount of goods by gathering it in their skirts and moving it from threatened buildings to safety “in quicker time than the men could have done.”

Aftermath

A photograph taken immediately after the fire shows a sorry site. Businesses affected were:

Bates’ saddlery, Bond’s bookshop, Buckland’s horse bazaar, Cox’s grocery and boot store, Golder’s watchmakers, McNeish’s billiard saloon, Hill’s Melbourne Drapery Company store, Neal’s lime and chaff store, Neal’s seed and flour store, Pierce’s fruiter, Riley’s tailors, Ruge’s barbershop, Sargent’s jeweller and Ward’s chemist.

The south side of Duke Street East was now a smouldering mass of ruins, with chimneys jutting from the ground like charred tree trunks. From that time more and more businesses were established in Victoria Street until it, and

not Duke Street, became the main street of Cambridge – effectively turning the town on its axis by 90 degrees.

The Cambridge Fire Brigade

Little progress could be made towards the formation of a Fire Brigade until access to a water supply was secured. So when, in 1903, a water tower was built and water from Moon Creek was pumped to the tank for the town water supply, the people of Cambridge rejoiced.

In May 1904, a special meeting of the Borough Council approved a recommendation to form a volunteer fire brigade, erect a station, and procure the necessary gear. Funds were quickly raised: £60 from townsfolk, with the Council granting £120. The station was erected by voluntary labour, and a hose reel (currently held at the Fire Brigade Museum) produced by local blacksmith John Ferguson. Hydrants and 800 feet of hose were also procured.

The opening of the Fire Brigade was a source of much pride for the town. Speeches, applause and cheers were given, before the firemen gave a short exhibition of hose and reel work that may not have impressed onlookers. According to the newspaper report, “the men have only had the reel a couple of days and have had little or no practice. In time, they will no doubt give a creditable account of themselves.”

The event was held on 24 August 1904, and it was Mayor Thomas Wells who officiated the opening. When he had proposed the formation of a fire brigade back in 1879, little did he know that it would take 25 years to come to pass.

Ref: Cambridge Museum: Fire Brigade Research Files



2958/9/37



Footnotes

Some of the characters referred to in the previous article have turned up in other research. Here are some more references:

Mrs Murphy

December 1882: Regarding Mrs Murphy's Maori restaurant or wharekai, the occupants believed that the fire was caused by the negligence of neighbour Thomas Hoy, a local butcher. Hoy was alleged to have left a log fire burning in the back yard of his premises overnight, from whence embers had blown onto the whare. The occupants intended to lay charges.

Thomas Hoy

Mr Hoy wrote a long letter to the *Waikato Times* claiming that two of his employees had extinguished the fire before he had left that day. He believed that the destruction of the whare had been caused by the wharekai's "red hot" stovepipe igniting the whare's roof of tarred canvas. He wrote that, according to public report, the occupants had been "incapable of knowing whether they had extinguished the fire in their stove or not" on the night in question.

July 1884: Thomas Hoy was charged with riding his horse on the footpath in Victoria Street. He and his two friends said that the road there was so bad that they had had no choice. They were charged and fined.

John Arnold

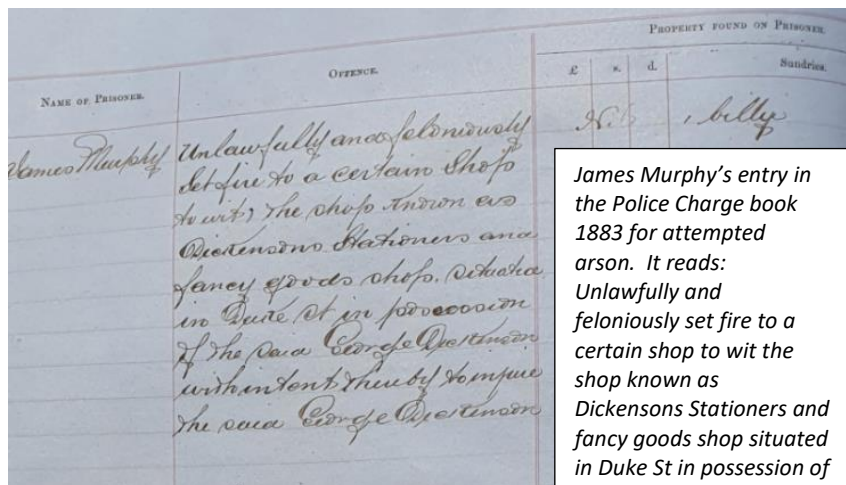
May 1882: Local butcher John Arnold charged Thomas Hoy with sheep stealing. Mr J S Buckland, however, testified that Hoy had earlier bought sheep from him with the same markings as those Buckland had also sold to Arnold. The case was dismissed.

August 1883: John Arnold charged Thomas Hoy with pig trespass. Hoy was ordered to pay costs.

George Walton

8 January 1877: Twenty-eight fallow deer arrived in the country and were introduced to Maungakawa. They came from Burghley Park, the seat of the Marquis of Exeter, England. They arrived on the ship "Thurland Castle" and were under the charge of one George Walton.

January 1883: George Walton wrote an angry letter to the paper, criticising the behaviour of Justices Col. Lyon and Thomas Wells JP at his assault hearing against Mr Hassett, night watchman. Walton claimed that the Justices had been impatient to leave and, after reluctantly hearing only the side of the plaintiff, dismissed the case as "frivolous". Watson was ordered to pay for a lawyer and two witnesses. His crime, he wrote, was to order a man out of a hotel who had refused to pay for his drink after he had got it.



James Murphy's entry in the Police Charge book 1883 for attempted arson. It reads: Unlawfully and feloniously set fire to a certain shop to wit the shop known as Dickensons Stationers and fancy goods shop, situated in Duke St in possession of the said George Dickenson with intent thereby to injure the said George Dickenson

Advertisement for Bates Saddlery, where the Duke Street fire began:

SADDLERY WAREHOUSE,
DUKE STREET, CAMBRIDGE.

ISAAC BATES,

MANUFACTURER AND IMPORTER
OF
SADDLERY AND HARNESS.

SPLENDID VALUE in GENTS
SADDLES, from £2 10s upwards.

Our Concealed Roll Saddle is
UNEQUALLED IN THE COLONY at the prices
we are offering them at.

HARNESS—In Dray, Plough, Spring
Cart, Buggy, and Single and Double
Waggonette Harness on hand and made
to order, AT PRICES THAT MUST ENSURE
SATISFACTION.

Hair-faced Pipe Collars, unequalled
for hard work, and all other styles in
stock.

WINTER, 1884.

COVER YOUR WORKING HORSES, the
best paying investment of the day. Good
Strong Cover, lined, from 20s; best, 25s;
extra large and super finish, 27s 6d each.

ISAAC BATES,
SADDLER, CAMBRIDGE.



The Sample Rooms



The Sample Room Salon is well known in Cambridge for its hair and makeup services. The business is named after the building it occupies in Lake Street (one down from the old National Hotel) which bears the inscription “SAMPLE ROOMS” on its frontage. This article is a short history of the National Hotel sample rooms.

Hotels in the 19th century often occupied prominent street-corner locations. As was the case with the original National Hotel, typical mid-19th century hotels were two-storey timber buildings with a verandah and sometimes a first-floor balcony. Later hotels were constructed from brick and stone and were larger and more elaborate in style – as is the case with the existing building.

These hotels had many different types of rooms. Dining rooms, public bars and private bars were usually on the ground floor, and sitting rooms were on the ground and first floors – sometimes they were located between bedrooms on the quieter upper floors. Larger hotels often had rooms for smoking, reading and playing billiards, and some had sample rooms for travelling salesmen to display their wares. Salesmen were regular hotel clients and it was in the hotel proprietor’s interests to cater for their needs.

The advertisement shown here appeared in the *Waikato Independent* on 24 October 1893.

NATIONAL HOTEL,
CAMBRIDGE.

**EVERY CONVENIENCE FOR
TRAVELLERS & TOURISTS.**

Best Brands only of Wines and Spirits kept.

Good Sample Rooms for travellers and Nearest to Railway Station.

BILLIARD ROOM.
Experienced Marker.

GOOD STABLING AND PADDOCKS.

ARTHUR BACH
(Late of Criterion Hotel, Cambridge, and Royal Hotel, Hamilton),
PROPRIETOR.

According to a newspaper article dated 1 June 1905, “Ladies of Cambridge are invited to inspect a magnificent collection of Indian Hand Work, secured by Mr R. C. Pitt during a travel in the East. Also Real African Ostrich Feathers, in Sample Room, National Hotel, to-night and to-morrow.”

The National Hotel sample rooms were not the only ones in town; there were also sample rooms in Empire Street and Victoria Street. At a fiery public meeting in 1905, where W F Buckland was contesting the mayoralty against Thomas Wells, Mr Buckland stated that the conversion of the “public hall into sample rooms was illegal.” The Public Hall in question was on the corner of Duke Street West and Victoria Street and its use as sample rooms remained until the hall’s removal in 1908.



After the original National Hotel and its sample rooms were destroyed by fire in 1912, local businessman Mr C H Priestley erected spacious new sample rooms behind his own premises in Victoria Street and provided a good description of how the interiors of these rooms would have been set out. They were “particularly well lighted. The table fittings too are conveniently placed, and are capable of displaying a huge quantity of samples. Commercial travellers are delighted at the excellent provision made, and the rooms are now in demand among the fraternity.”

After the National Hotel was rebuilt in 1912-1913, sample rooms were included at the back of the property.

In 1927, a plain brick building next to the National Hotel was completed – and this is the one you can see before you today. The building has had many uses over the years: sample rooms, rugby changing rooms, scout hall – and is now the premises of a hair and makeup salon.



(Early 1930s)



CAMBRIDGE IN
LOCKDOWN

The pandemic has been a pivotal point in our history. Future generations will want to know what it was like living in Cambridge during these times.

Cambridge Museum is seeking donations of items that reflect the ways COVID-19 has impacted and changed Cambridge lives.

Have you any of the following items?

Pictures: photographs, drawings and other artworks that portray life in a bubble.



Writing: diaries (digitally recorded or analogue) that describe the “new normal” of daily life during this time. Postcards/letters/emails that reflect how people connected with one another during forced separation.

Signs/Leaflets/Posters: public responses to COVID-19. We are interested in handmade signs placed in windows and official communications received in your letterbox.

Share your stories and items by emailing
admin@cambridgemuseum.org.nz
or by visiting the Museum at the
Old Courthouse, 24 Victoria Street, Cambridge

Tae a Virus (Anon)

Twa months ago, we didnae ken,
yer name or ocht about ye,
But lots of things have changed since then,
I really must salute ye,
Yer spreading rate is quite intense,
Yer feeding like a gannet,
Disruption caused is so immense
Ye've shaken oor wee planet,

Carona used to be a beer
they garnished it wi limes,
But noo it's filled us awe wi fear
these days are scary times
Nae shakin hawns or peckin lips
it's whit they awe advise
But scrub them richt up to the tips
that's how we'll awe survive

Just stay inside the hoose ye bide
nae sneakin oot for strolls
Just check the lavvy every hour
and stock up yer loo rolls

Oor holidays have been pit aff
now that's jet 2's patter
Pit oan yer thermals have a laugh
and paddle doon the water
Canary isles no for a while
nae need for suntan cream
And awe because o' this wee bug
we ken to be 19

The boredom surely will set in
but have a read or doodle
Or plan yer menu for the month
wi 95 pot noodles
When these run oot just look about,
a change it wid be nice
We've beans 'n pasta by the ton
and twenty stane o' rice

So dinnae think ye'll wipe us oot
aye true a few have tried,
Bubonic, bird flu and TB,
they came they left they tried
Ye might be gallus noo ma freen
as ye jump from cup to cup
But when we get oor vaccine made,
Yer number will be up

From *Thistle* (Victoria) June 2020
Taken from the Scottish Interest Group Waikato
newsletter

