

Tēnā koutou from Grant

It's almost time for our Annual General Meeting, to be held on 16 November at 7pm at the Cambridge Bridge Clubrooms in Fort Street. With our last committee meeting on 9 October, I find it hard to believe another year is almost over.

Our seismic work has been completed and we are busily engaged in designing and constructing new exhibitions highlighting the timelines of our local history. The exhibits will take several months to complete, so in the interim the museum will be open for research enquiries only.



Karen and Kate exploring the roof of the Museum.

Support us by attending the AGM to hear about what has been happening and take the opportunity to catch up with other members and friends. Supper will be served, and I look forward to catching up with many of you there.

I, along with Paul Garland, will be standing down and will not be seeking re-election.

I ask that as a member of our Society, you seriously consider joining the Committee to ensure Cambridge history continues to be available to all in the years to come. The job is not onerous and can be a lot of fun. We need some extra inspiration and enthusiasm going forward in these challenging times.

Thanks to those members who responded to our recent reminder notices for subscriptions outstanding for 2023. If your subscription is still outstanding, please make a payment directly into the Society's bank account 03 1568 0041635 00 with your surname as reference, or ring staff on 09 827 3319 to arrange a payment time at the museum.

A warm welcome to our new members **Stephen Schollum, Margaret Grant, Warwick and Lesley Roberts, Sean Brady, Barbara Ryan and Athol Murray.**

Grant Middlemiss
President

ADDRESS LABEL FOR DELIVERY OF HARD COPIES (ON REQUEST)

Tēnā koutou and greetings from Elizabeth, Karen and Kate

We're looking forward to welcoming you back.

The Museum exterior is looking fantastic with its new roof and freshly painted façade. While inside, a phased programme of reshaping the displays is underway. Going forward there will be two spaces in the Museum – a research area and a main gallery. The first space to open will be the research area.

Meet the ancestors

From Monday 16 October, you can book the Research Room for free for a few hours at a time.

Books, articles and press cuttings about the history and archaeology of the area are available and, with prior notice, you can also view the photographs, diaries, letters, and maps in the Museum's archive.

A digitising service will be available for the first time, thanks to the kind generosity and support of the **Cambridge Community Board**. The museum team will be available to help with the technology so that you can digitally scan family archives, photos, negatives and documents. The digitised versions can be saved to a USB key or other device and shared with family and friends.

To book your first free session, please contact us on 07 827 3319 or email us at admin@cambridgemuseum.org.nz

Please note the main gallery will remain closed until the summer.

Snap!

Reg Buckingham's photographs of Cambridge during the 1960s-80s are now being shared worldwide thanks to the time and skills shared by those that attended the Buckingham Bee workshops last year and volunteers Claire, Bronwen and Antu. New images are being published regularly on Kōtuia ngā Kete. <https://www.kotuia.org.nz/>, a collection-sharing site developed by National Services Te Paerangi, a team at Te Papa.

If you would like to be involved in this project, please get in touch.

Thanks Jumble Around

Many thanks to **Jumble Around** for their donation toward painting the Museum's main gallery and ceiling. Jumble Around does a wonderful job of supporting community organisations and we are grateful for their assistance in making the Museum a more welcoming and engaging space.



Jack and Lola Silcock

Jack and Lola Silcock moved to Cambridge in 1958 when Jack was appointed Principal at Leamington Primary School. They spent the rest of their lives here. Lola was a Life Member of the Tree Trust (the Lola Silcock Reserve is part of the Cambridge Museum's Heritage Walk by the Waikato River) and was an active member of the St Andrew's Church. Jack was later Principal of the new Cambridge Intermediate (now Middle) School, before transferring to Melville Intermediate School in Hamilton until he retired in 1976. He enjoyed bowls and held high office in the Cambridge Masonic Lodge. Lola passed away in 2008 and Jack died five years later aged 99.

In our archives is a memoir written by Jack Silcock in 2001 about his WWII Prisoner of War experiences. This memoir forms a basis for this month's article, the second part of which will be printed in a later issue.

Jack Silcock – Prisoner of War

"Time passed very slowly, every man just living from one bite of food to the next." So wrote Cambridge man Jack Silcock on his experience as a Prisoner of War in World War II. His unit had been evacuating casualties from the battles of Sidi Razegh in Libya when it was surrounded and captured by the Germans in November 1941. He was to spend 18 months as a Prisoner of War until his repatriation in 1943.

At the beginning, he thought that his unit would remain where they were, caring for the wounded. But after four days, the Germans handed them over to their Italian allies, who herded them into trucks to the Benghazi Prison Camp. On their first night, his unit had to sleep in the open under tents made with ground sheets. *"My cobbler and myself decided that it wasn't worth the trouble so we laid our blankets down in the open, covered ourselves with our greatcoats and made believe we were in a first class hotel."*

They were shipped to Tripoli and on to cattle trucks which were *"so packed that there was neither sitting nor standing room. One grim humourist lifted his head high in the air and gave voice to a loud "Baa" much to the Italians' consternation."*

After several hours confined in the trucks, Christmas Day 1941 saw the men shivering with cold, hungry, many suffering from dysentery, marched eight miles to camp – four miles uphill. *"There was something about that march up that mountain which told us that, come what may, Britain would never lose the war."* He wrote that the men sang as they marched, every head held high and every man in step. *"I shall never forget it and it is one of my proudest memories to have taken part in."*

When the men were shipped to Naples, their boat already had a hole torn in her forward hold, and they were herded below and battened down. *"We worked out a system of evacuation should anything happen, but it would never have worked. Panic would have been inevitable."* For two days, the men saw no daylight. Sanitary arrangements consisted of lifting a plank over the hold and using the space below.



Jack and Lola on their wedding day 30 September 1939.
From "Jack Cedric Silcock – His Life" © 2000

In Naples, they were taken by rail to Capua where again they slept the first night in an open paddock. It was bitterly cold, a wind *"blowing straight down from the nearby snow-covered mountains."* They sat and shivered all that day, relieved only by an issue of hot soup and 250g of bread. Eventually, they were issued with tents and bedboards. Playing bridge passed many hours as the cold grew steadily worse and water pooled under their bedboards. They all developed colds, dysentery was rife and lice were constantly a problem. *"At night all sorts of discussions took place in the tent. Every conceivable subject was thoroughly thrashed out. One night we even planned a huge chain restaurant business which we would launch when we returned to civilian life. Food of course was always a matter for discussion."*

On 1 February 1942, they left Capua for a permanent camp at Chiavari, 20 miles from Genoa. Some 3,000 men were housed in huts of 100 men. The prisoners carried out the internal organisation. They decided that they would have one meal of the rations per day with an extra light meal on Wednesdays and Sundays. Their food was: 6am – a cup of black coffee, 11am – 200g of bread, 11.30am – stew comprising cabbage, 100g of rice or macaroni, meat if it happened to be meat day and one and a half army mugs of water, 5pm – black coffee. Some men became subject to blackouts and all lost weight. After several weeks, the Red Cross began to get parcels of food through, which meant another meal a day. Jack wrote that these parcels saved many lives.



The camp soon developed into a community. A Welfare Committee was formed, and then sub-committees: Education, Entertainment, Dramatic, Concert, Library and Sports. Educational lectures on every conceivable subject, presented entirely from memory, were held. The camp contributed a few lire each for the purchase of musical instruments and soon had orchestral concerts where *“the talent was in some cases brilliant.”* When the Dramatic Society presented *Of Mice and Men*, Jack *“lost all sense of being a prisoner of war ... as the powerful play of Steinbeck’s, handled by those brilliant amateurs, unfolded.”*

In the individual huts, debates, talks and card tournaments were held. Book parcels from the Red Cross formed the basis of a comprehensive library. The Sports Committee arranged boxing contests, baseball became popular and board games were played on wet days.

There were no stoves, so the men made them from old tins cut into flat sheets, joined together by a hemming method. The stoves boasted chimneys, fireboxes, grates, doors, legs and ovens so devised that the flame could pass round them to ensure an even heat. Even bellows were crafted with concertinaed tins and old material. These were made with scissors (issued to huts with Red Cross hussifs¹) and a piece of wood used as a hammer.

Wood fuel for the stoves was scarce. Green sticks were foraged on working parties and hung up to dry in the huts. The floors of the huts themselves sagged because the stays below had been used as firewood. The space between the ceiling and the roof was another source. *“How some of those huts remained standing is still a mystery to me,”* wrote Jack.

On Anzac Day 1942, the men held a parade in the camp. *“A sort of Nugget was issued to us occasionally and we managed to polish our boots to some degree. Uniforms were brushed, hats brought out and even badges polished. ... I really believe that that parade was as good as would be seen in Auckland or Wellington in peace time.”*

After nearly five months at the camp, 106 men – Medical or attached – had to leave for an unknown destination, *“which brings me to the most interesting chapter in my Prisoner of War life and to experiences which must be unique.”*

“Although the future held unknown but bright possibilities, I was sorry in many ways to leave Chiavari.”

The second part of Jack’s POW experiences continues in a later issue. Our thanks go to Jack and Lola’s family for allowing us to share his story.

¹ Small sewing kits wrapped in material and secured with ties – Hussif comes from the word “Housewife”.

Upcoming Event: Geology in the Waikato



Dr Andrew La Croix will speak on the Geologic History of the Waikato Region.

Friday 27 October 2023 at the Te Awa Lifecare Woolshed, 1866 Cambridge Road, Cambridge, from 10am for 10.30 until 12 noon

Andrew received his Ph.D in Earth Sciences from Simon Fraser University (Canada) in 2016. From 2017 to 2019 he was a Postdoctoral Research Fellow, as part of the Energy initiative at the University of Queensland in Australia.

Since 2109 Andrew has been a Lecturer and then Senior Lecturer at the University of Waikato in New Zealand where he leads the Sedimentary Environments and Analogues Research Group.

Please email or call us (see foot of page) to book your place.

Archbishop Sir David Moxon – “Charlotte Brown: The first Pakeha woman to live in Piako”



Sir David with U3A member Vicki Jacobsen (left) and Museum Manager Elizabeth Harvey

A second U3A Cambridge and Cambridge Museum joint meeting was held on Friday 25 August.

Archbishop Sir David Moxon spoke about the life of Charlotte Brown and her role in establishing the written Māori language.

The first book to be distributed in the newly written down Māori language was the gospel of St Luke known as Te Rongopai. The similarity of the stories in the gospel to the Māori culture resonated with its people, which accelerated the acceptance of reading and writing the language.



From the Buckingham Collection

A selection of photos from photographer Reg Buckingham taken in Cambridge from the 1960s to the 1980s

A brand new Datsun – Car of the Week at Ross-Todd Motors in November 1972. Thirty years before inspiring a Cambridge rock band.



Victoria Street south, taken in 1970:



St Peters school visit to the Cambridge Independent newspaper
27 May 1969:



Upcoming Event: Garden Tour, Takapoto Estate



Join us on a Garden Tour of Takapoto Estate on 16 November starting at 10am (bookings essential).

The Garden Tours are an opportunity to explore the Estate's expansive property, learn about their eco-initiatives, and discover valuable tips for sustainable gardening practices.

Date: 10 am, Thursday, 16 Nov

Venue: Takapoto Estate

\$45 per person which includes tea or coffee and a scone.

Please RSVP by email to admin@cambridgemuseum.org.nz before 30 October.

Cambridge Historical Society (Inc) - Notice of Annual General Meeting

You are very welcome to attend our AGM held at the Cambridge Bridge Clubrooms, Fort Street on Thursday 16 November 2023 at 7.30pm

Please consider putting nominations forward for the following positions:

| | |
|---------------------|----------------|
| President | Vice President |
| Secretary | Treasurer |
| 6 Committee members | |

You can collect nomination forms at the Cambridge Museum front desk, or give us a call on 827 3319 and we'll post them to you.

Our Secretary Jo Barnes needs your nomination forms by Friday 10 November 2023. Her email is: secretary.cbhs@gmail.com.

