

## A Cambridge Icon

### Should the Cambridge water tower be demolished?

Public consultation is open now until 5pm, Friday 26 April 2024.

As a Friend of the Museum and member of the Historical Society, you are likely to be following Waipā District Council’s public consultation on the future of the water tower. The two key options outlined in the Council’s Draft Enhanced Annual Plan are to remove or restore the tower, as summarised on p19 of the *Cambridge News* 11/4/2024, and in full in the Council’s Draft 2024/25 Enhanced Annual Plan here:

<https://haveyoursay.waipadc.govt.nz/enhancedannualplan>

Hard copies of the draft plan are available at the Council office and Library.

The Historical Society is concerned that in considering option 1 to demolish the water tower, the Council are being seen to disregard the national and local heritage status of this building and setting a worrying precedent for the future of other historic buildings in our area. We understand that financial constraints should always be considered but at the very least, the cost option for restoring the water tower should be independently verified before a decision is made.

The above webpage also provides an online submission form. We hold hard copies of the submission forms in the museum if you would like to pop in and have your say.



*Building the Water Tower 1903, CM2958.38*

**Jeff Nobes**  
Acting Chairman

ADDRESS LABEL FOR DELIVERY OF HARD COPIES (ON REQUEST)

## Remembering Joan – one of our treasures



We were saddened to hear of the passing of one of our longest serving volunteers last week.

**Joan McCathie** has brightened the Museum’s Monday mornings for almost twenty years with her infectious laughter and exhaustive knowledge of

Cambridge both past and present. She joined our volunteering team in 2006 and has contributed around 100 hours annually towards the indexing of local paper *The Waikato Independent*.

We know that we weren’t the only ones lucky enough to benefit from her time. She often spoke of the work she enjoyed with the Cambridge Tree Trust, and the SPCA Opportunity Shop where she specialised in repairing children’s toys and games.

Joan’s family have a long history in Cambridge. Her grandfather Henry had a tailoring business which he started soon after arriving in Cambridge in the 1920s with his young family. Joan’s father Dave later owned a menswear shop, and both Dave and Joan’s mother Gwen enjoyed various sports.

Joan taught for many years at Hamilton’s Fraser High School, becoming a deputy principal there in 1981. We currently have on display her book of elocution lessons (with teacher Norma Swayne) when she was, she said, a very shy eleven-year-old. She said that she was very thankful to her mother for suggesting the lessons as they helped her daily when she was addressing students in her teaching career.

Joan has enriched our collection with many donations of archives and textiles over the years and they all provide glimpses of her unique personality, her sense of fun and her love of Cambridge.

Joan enjoyed time spent at the McCathies’ holiday home at Waihi and spent many a weekend there with her sister Gaye and her family. We send our deepest sympathies to them. We will all miss Joan very much.



## Jack Silcock – Prisoner of War

*In October 2023 we printed the first part of an article based on a memoir written by Jack Silcock of Cambridge. Soon after his marriage to Lola, he was serving in a medical unit in Libya. He and his medical unit were captured and had spent eight months in a prison camp in Italy, before he was given the order to leave for an unknown destination. His story continues.*

“We firmly believed that for us, prison life was over. We were going to be repatriated<sup>1</sup> we were sure,” he wrote. But instead they were taken north to the “Ospedale Militare” at Lucca – an understaffed military hospital set up three weeks ago. “Naturally we were a trifle disappointed ... but some irrepressible spirits soared again and we took the philosophical attitude that if there was a job to be done here, well, we would do it.”

The patients were English, South African and French POWs<sup>2</sup>, and some were in a bad state. Seeing 106 of their own men arrive to look after them considerably raised their morale.

Jack was put in charge of Ward III and had a staff of 21 for 100 patients. Two Italian doctors, two orderlies and a suora<sup>3</sup> were also on each ward. They divided themselves into shifts – morning, afternoon and night, and settled into a routine.

At first, the suora oversaw the linen, the cleaning and the food. Sanitary arrangements were two bed pans and four bottles for 100 men. The cleaning was done with inadequate straw brooms. Jack’s frustration is obvious, but “the more we endeavoured to improve [the lot of the patients] the more they demanded, and the more we tried to get things from the Italians for them, the more we were kowtowing to our captors – an invidious position.”

Gradually, Jack and his friend Don Rankin started to pick up the Italian language. They were able to converse with their captors and, importantly, could translate Italian news reports about the state of the war and the growing resources of the Allies. Unfortunately, some of their own men were jealous and at times abusive to those who used the language. “However, that is life and human nature is a queer thing.”

Jack and Don did not confine themselves to shifts; they worked all day and often into the night. They enjoyed it. It filled in time, gave them a chance to learn the language and helped them forget about the barbed wire outside. Sometimes they were called out in the middle of the night, and the Italians considered them as two extra night orderlies.

But their hard work was paid back with kindness. Their suora Zelinda recommended them to her Mother Superior, who squeezed two extra beds in the ward for them. Beds, mattresses and sheets were a well-earned luxury. Eventually, they were given their own room, where Zelinda would prepare meals for them, supplementing spiced meat, cakes and other tidbits. She cleaned, ironed and darned their clothes whenever she had the opportunity. Zelinda became their respected friend.

Another friend was Italian Lieutenant Aldo Chedini. As a civilian he was an accountant in Florence. He was intelligent, widely read and heartily sick of the war. When he was Orderly Officer, he would join Don and Jack in their room, with Australian Ted Broomhead, for tea and cigarettes. They discussed everything from the state of Mr Churchill’s health to Hitler’s latest crime. “There were no barriers and there was a gentleman’s agreement that much that was discussed was confidential.” The only beer they tasted in Italy was from Chedini: first on Christmas Day 1942, and then the night before they were repatriated.



*Jack and Lola Silcock in 1943 after repatriation. From Jack Cedric Silcock, His Life, CM2462*

Jack wrote that the three Italians he would be happy to meet again were Zelinda, Chedini and Arturo. Arturo was an orderly who was a masterly trader with the patients, bringing in tomato sauce, pipes, razor blades, etc which he sold for articles from Red Cross parcels. He would buy the tomato sauce for 10 lira and swap it for a cake of soap, which he sold outside for 25 lira, so he did good business – even better when the POWs were able to receive parcels from their next of kin. Jack described him as “a likeable fellow – big, red faced and dull witted, but I think I had more laughs out of Arturo than from anything else in Italy.” Arturo was not good with numbers or reading. He came to depend on his English friends for tallying his transactions, and for keeping him up-to-date with Italian news. When asked what he would do if Italy was invaded by the British, he said, “I would put on khaki and fight with them.” Jack wrote that that summed up many Italians’ opinions.

<sup>1</sup> Sent home

<sup>2</sup> Prisoners of War

<sup>3</sup> Nun



The most dangerous thing Jack felt that he and Don did was to arrange someone to take a photograph of Zelinda and the Mother Superior. Cameras were strictly forbidden, so Don approached Arturo who contacted a sympathetic photographer. Jack wrote "God knows what would have happened had we been discovered – shot probably." But they got their photograph.

"We were reasonably happy, apart from the ever present longing for our wives and families and missing only our freedom and real New Zealand square meals. Christmas and New Year's Eve 1942/43 came and went in a flash of amazing conviviality. We all managed to become fairly tight<sup>4</sup> and passed the festive season in the true spirit. On those nights all discipline was relaxed to a certain extent and one incident I shall always remember – that of a prisoner of war taking over an Italian guard's greatcoat, rifle, hat and ammunition while the guard departed to buy a couple of bottles of wine for the prisoner."

Jack Silcock was proud of his home country and took representing New Zealanders abroad seriously. His hard-working demeanour and positive outlook meant that he made the most of his time as a Prisoner of War in Italy. He wrote that after his repatriation, on his trip home via Egypt "four of us hired a taxi and visited the Holy Land. So we swam in the Sea of Galilee, visited the sacred places and realised how lucky we were to have the opportunity to do so."

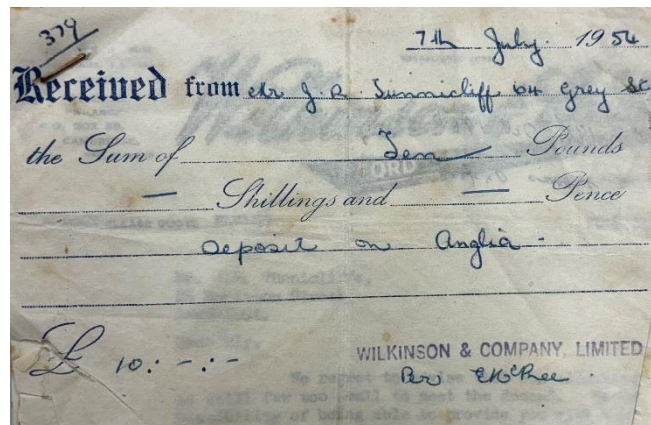
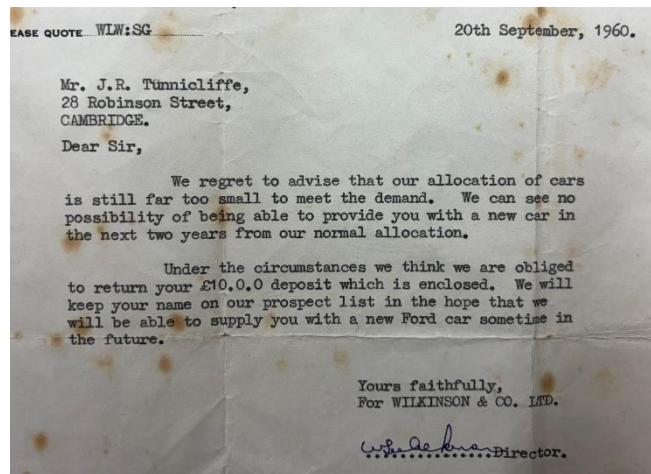
At last he boarded the hospital ship "Maunganui" and headed for home. "No city in the world could have looked better than Wellington as we lined the rails and felt the touch of the wharf as it met the side of the ship. We disembarked and I searched the faces for a glimpse of Lola. Not a sign. Then a tap on the shoulder. I turned around and there she was in her khaki uniform. "Hello darling. Welcome home." It was over."



Jack and Lola Silcock c.1983 From Jack Cedric Silcock, His Life, CM2462

## A Day in the Life of Museum Staff

We came across this piece of correspondence from Ford Dealer Wilkinson & Co Ltd of Cambridge to John Tunnicliffe. Attached was a receipt for a £10 deposit made by Mr Tunnicliffe for a Ford Anglia more than six years earlier:



The NZ Labour Government wanted to protect its car assembly industry by introducing import licensing in 1938. Buying a car was no simple matter – the buyer chose a model from a list, then faced a long wait. The car would arrive in bits and be assembled here. In 1950, with the NZ population approaching two million, there was a shortage of 35,000 new cars.

This was a boon for mechanics who had to keep older cars on the road longer, and were doing a brisk trade.

In the late 1980s the Motor Industry Development Plan led to reduced tariffs on imported vehicles, which were then able to compete with domestically assembled cars. Australian cars were already duty-free under the Closer Economic Relations agreement. This, and a growing flood of second-hand Japanese imports, led to the demise of local assembly by the end of the 1990s.

**Karen Payne**

Ref: [teara.govt.nz](http://teara.govt.nz), and [Hawkes Bay Today](http://Hawkes Bay Today) 14/4/2022.

<sup>4</sup> drunk



## A mystery to solve



In August 1948, a tornado struck Frankton with such whirlwind force that roofing iron and other heavy materials were found in parts of Cambridge for weeks afterward.

Andrew Johnstone's grandfather Bill found this photograph of a bride and groom on their wedding day lying in the wet grass in his paddock near Fencourt.

Can you help us identify them?

You can read more about the tornado here:  
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/WAIKIN19480827.2.20>

## Wheelchair access



Because the old Cambridge Courthouse is a heritage building, we have been unable to provide wheelchair access to our museum.

We have some promising news though. The Waipā District Council, who owns the building, has prepared a proposal to improve access. This will be submitted in its Long-Term Plan discussions in 2025/26.

*We'll keep you posted on further developments.*

## A warm welcome to our new members:

Richard Swarbrick  
Tess McGruddy  
Gal Mitchell  
Sharon Maling  
Fiona Adams  
Diana Swarbrick  
Sue & Tim Wright  
John & Margaret Fisher



## We look forward to seeing you at our events.

Reminder notices will be sent out shortly to members overdue paying their subscriptions. Please pay either online to the Cambridge Historical Society bank account 03-1568-0041635-00 with your name as Reference, or pay in cash at the Museum.

## Upcoming Events

### THURSDAY 2 MAY

**Drop in: Friends of the Museum Morning Tea on 2 May 10am - 11.30 am**

Join us at the Cambridge Museum, 24 Victoria Street, anytime between 10am and 11:30am for a cuppa and cake, to catch up with Friends, share stories and discover gems in the Museum's collection. Bring a friend and show them what the Historical Society is all about.



### FRIDAY 25 MAY 2024

**Targeted Philanthropy and the Transformational Project – Waikato Regional Theatre by the Momentum Waikato Community Foundation**

We partner with Cambridge U3A to provide three lectures a year focussing on the history of Cambridge and the Waikato region.



Meetings are free for Friends of the Museum, held at the Te Awa Lifecare Woolshed, 1866 Cambridge Road, from 10am for 10.30 until 12noon.

The next meeting is with The Momentum Waikato Community Foundation. They will talk about the Waikato Regional Theatre project in Hamilton, which is to become a world-class performing arts centre.

Please RSVP by emailing [admin@cambridgemuseum.org.nz](mailto:admin@cambridgemuseum.org.nz) by 11 May 2024

## COMING SOON DATES FOR YOUR DIARY:

### SATURDAY 6 JUNE 2024

House Tour: Dingley Dell

### FRIDAY 23 AUGUST 2024

Richard von Sturmer, *Walking with Rocks – Dreaming with Rivers – My Year in the Waikato*

### FRIDAY 25 OCTOBER 2024

Warren Gumbley, *The Waikato Horticultural Complex: Adaptation of Polynesian agronomy to a temperate environment.*

