

## Dear Friends of the Museum

This month, we are delighted to feature an article written by Kevin Wells, nephew of fighter pilot 'Hawkeye' Wells. In his piece, he shares the incredible WWII exploits of his uncle, making it a fitting tribute for our ANZAC issue. A special thank you to Kevin for producing such an inspiring piece on a very tight deadline.

### Doing Your Bit: The Home Front in WWII

Our new display in the Research Room focuses on how World War II changed the lives of many of the 5000 people who lived in town and the surrounding districts between 1939 and 1945. Families and friends were separated, petrol and food rations affected everyday life, and many lived with the constant fear of losing loved ones. This display will be available to view until November 2025.



The three sisters and distant relatives of Dugald MacColl – Kaye Turner, Dianne Baker and Liz Saunders – flanked by Alpha Lodge Cambridge Master David Moore, right, and Masonic chaplain Ivan Smith, after the ceremony. Photo: Viv Posselt

### A Grave Marker

You may have seen the recent article in the *Cambridge News* (6/3/2025) about Dugald MacColl's headstone. MacColl, an Ensign in the 3rd Waikato Militia, was the first to be buried at Hautapu Cemetery in 1866 at the age of 22.

ADDRESS BLOCK

After the headstone deteriorated over time, the Alpha Lodge committee, in collaboration with MacColl's family, crafted a new one. The older marker is now in the museum's collection to help us tell the story of the Waikato 3<sup>rd</sup> Militia.

### Currency of Resistance

Just in case you missed it, we collaborated with Kōtuia on a short article about the Maungatautari cheque in the Museum collection. It is a rare and valuable reminder of the Maungatautari Peeke and its role in the Kiingitanga's pursuit of financial independence. Read more here <https://shorturl.at/1O10c>

### Cambridge Autumn Festival

Thanks to everyone who visited our stall at the Cambridge Autumn Festival. Lots of great questions and some expert players of the porotiti and knuckle bones. We had a blast! Many thanks to the Festival organisers too who showcased a variety of local talents.



Traditional toys and a photo quiz were a hit at the Autumn Festival on Sunday 30 March 2025. The stall was hosted by Heather Wellington, Kirsty Wyndham (CHS Committee), Elizabeth Harvey (Museum Manager) and volunteers, Ethan and Zach Harvey.

### Connecting with Community

We congratulate the Scottish Country Dancing Society, which is celebrating its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary on King's Birthday weekend this year. Merilyn Shepherd has copied some of our many archives for a display at their annual ball in the Cambridge Town Hall. If you are a member of a club celebrating an upcoming anniversary, please give us a call. You may be surprised by what we hold in our archives.

### New Puzzle Table

We are excited to announce that we will soon have a new puzzle table for children in our main gallery, thanks to a generous community grant from Mercury NZ. Local joiners Wackrows are building it for us, and we look forward to unveiling it in the coming weeks.

Hope to see you at the Museum soon.

Elizabeth, Karen and Kate



## Of Spitfires and Cock Pheasants

By Kevin Wells, nephew



*Flight Lieutenant E. P. 'Hawkeye' Wells  
In the cockpit of the Subscription Spitfire, 'Waikato'. Donations from the  
provinces of New Zealand in 1941 supported the purchase of new Mk V  
cannon-firing Spitfires for No. 485 NZ Spitfire Squadron. Aircraft were  
named after the contributing provinces.  
(Credit: K.W. Wells Collection)*

Late last year (2024) in the *Cambridge News*, a short Council brief gave notice that a street in the new Kelly Rd subdivision (Cambridge) would be named Edward Wells Street, after 'a captain in the Airforce'. Close, but the Cambridge son being commemorated in this manner is Group Captain Edward Preston (Bill) Wells, DSO, DFC & Bar. He was better known as 'Hawkeye' Wells owing to his excellent eyesight and prowess when shooting game birds, clay pigeons and German aircraft during WWII.

My mother-to-be, Barbara Taylor, liked Bill very much. As well as being neighbours, they were born only two days apart so they were always aware of each other's birthday. She said he was a favourite with the girls because he was tall, dark and handsome, but she frowned upon him at times as she was sure he was the culprit who sometimes shot her homing pigeons. She said he adopted the name Bill fairly early on as he disliked anyone calling him Billy, Eddy or Teddy. So, Bill he became and Bill he will be in this story.

Not a great deal is known about Bill as a youngster. His good friend, Vic Hall, recalled how sitting with him in the double-seated wooden desks of the Cambridge District High School wasn't such a good idea as Bill would grab a pigtail of the girl in the seat in front of Vic and dip the end of it into the ink well. Vic would then cop the blame, from the girl, and the teacher. At a CDHS jubilee held some decades later, my Aunt Joan Meredith, a contemporary of Bill's, wondered aloud if there were any rooms of the school in which Bill hadn't been caned!

As a young boy Bill began to hunt rabbits and game-birds on 'Ripley', the family's 200-acre dairy farm on the outskirts of Cambridge. He used his father's shotguns; one of which was a .410-gauge, bolt-action Webley, an ideal gun for a beginner. When of an age to legally hunt game, he joined

the Cambridge Rod & Game Club. Over his first season he is recorded as having bagged over 50 birds.

One of these birds was a rather large, regal-looking cock pheasant. Bill took it upon himself to learn how to stuff the creature and mount it on a block of wood. This he did with such competence that Jack Giles, owner of The Sports Depot in town, placed the bird on display in his Cambridge shop window for many weeks. That was in 1933 when the amateur taxidermist was still a teenager. (This same pheasant gains a mention a little later)

The Waikato River, well-stocked with rainbow and brown trout, was easily accessed by a short walk across a few paddocks of *Gwynnelands*, the neighbouring farm of the Taylor family. Equipped with his father's split-cane rod, Bill became a competent angler. He was to retain an interest in trout-fishing over the rest of his life.

Membership of the Cambridge Gun Club provided Bill with the opportunity to enjoy trap-shooting (clay birds) the year round. Gun club events were held each month on the Tucker Brothers' farm at Leamington, but on other weekends he could attend events held in neighbouring towns, like Hamilton, Te Awamutu and Morrinsville. Before long he was not only dominating the sport locally (winning the Boyce Cup in Cambridge, year after year) but in 1938 he achieved national fame when he won the Auckland Provincial Clay Bird Shooting Championship. Around this time Bill took flying lessons and, once war loomed, he found himself at an RNZAF Training School at Weraroa, Levin.

Bill achieved immense status as a fighter pilot in Europe during WWII. His exploits have been well documented in many books so this account will draw on a few personal sources. My mother remembered how Bill's early successes provided a ray of hope during a sad and dark time when many young Cambridge men were reported as having been killed or were missing in action.

A letter to his parents in Cambridge was written at the height of the Battle of Britain, on 28 August 1940. In it, Bill wrote:

*Dear Mum,*

*I'll send this airmail, any mail you send, do the same as an ordinary letter often takes more than eight weeks, and that's too far ahead the way things are moving. I'm at my proper fighter squadron now, all training finished and will be in combat within 48 hours, so it seems prudent to write this letter now. My squadron, whose number I cannot disclose, is just north of London on the East Coast. (It was No. 266 Squadron, based at Wittering)*

*One month ago, there were 24 pilots in the squadron; when I arrived six were still alive. Three of our New Zealanders in my flight from Weraroa (NZ) are dead so far.*



*My pay here is with Glyn Mills & Co. Whitehall, I should have some (funds) with B.NSW London. And St John (brother) owes me £100 of which you can collect £50 in the event of my demise. Also, some with G.P.O. Cambridge.*

*By some coincidence the fellow I'm rooming with said to me the other day "My father's batman at Aldershot is called Wells and looks something like you, has red hair & comes from Cambridge NZ." Undoubtedly the great 'T.G.' (Bill's older brother, Thomas Gormanston Wells)*

*I also met Vic (Hall), he's gone into the technical side of the R.A.F. as a P/O (Pilot Officer).*

*I posted a letter (ordinary) shortly after my arrival. Also 2 cables at different times. Tell Dad I wrote to ask him to tell W/Commander Caldwell ('Grid' Keith Caldwell, retired WWI airman, living in Cambridge) that I'm on Spitfires and like them very much. I've been bombed many times now at different stations, it's quite exciting, you feel a little helpless though. Many interesting things have been observed but I'm afraid the censor would block them out if detailed.*

*My thoughts turn constantly to home, and Mr Grimes' steak (local Cambridge butcher, adjacent to the old Post Office building) which I feel is unequalled throughout the world. Also, our kitchen for a pleasant place to eat it in and yourself to talk to while engaged in such.*

*Give my regards to Dad & all love to yourself.*

Bill

Reading between the lines of this letter one can sense a degree of bravado amidst a great deal of apprehension, a love of family and friends, and an understandable bout of homesickness. Yet there's also his dry sense of humour 'the great T.G.' and a quiet determination with the confidence he expresses about flying Spitfires.

After a shaky start to his participation in the Battle of Britain, when his Spitfire was raked by machine-gun fire, Bill learned the rudiments of aerial warfare rather smartly. By the end of 1940 he had shot down a number of enemy aircraft and had become a competent (but never an over-confident) fighter-pilot.

From another of Bill's letters, dated 8 December 1940, the far more assured young pilot from Cambridge explained how ...

*The wily Hun is getting difficult to find in the daytime, so my score, unfortunately, is almost stationary at five down (three confirmed and two probable). It probably means destroyed in both these cases, but I was otherwise engaged with more Me.109s and could not afford the seconds to watch the actual crash.*

*Quite a lot of our fellows go out in this way, they watch their victim spinning down and forget to watch for other enemy aircraft, and the next thing they know it's too late. It sounds like elementary common-sense but it is easy to make one mistake.*

*Most of those fellows who came away with me, and are in that photo at home (Weraroa), are dead or in hospital. As far as I can check up just roughly there is only one other and myself still in action at the moment of writing.*

*I also have several (enemy) machines very seriously damaged or shared. When the weather improves, I hope to add very considerably to my bag.*

As war-time histories reveal, Bill scored many more victories in the air and, by 1942, he had been promoted to lead No. 485 (NZ) Spitfire Squadron. One of the many adventures he had with this squadron is detailed in a painting which captures the event known as 'The Channel Dash'. On that occasion three German battleships sailed (dashed) from vulnerable harbours in Brest, France, along the English Channel, to safer ports in northern Germany. The NZ Spitfire Squadron acquitted itself well that day in action over the German battleships.



*'The Channel Dash' (12 February 1942)*

*The picture shows Bill's Spitfire, (OU H) attacking a German E-Boat which was left in a sinking condition. The supporting Spitfire was flown by P/O Johnny Checketts.*

*(Credit: Preliminary sketch by NZ Aviation Artist, the late R. Maurice Conly (1991)*

In Cambridge, of course, Bill was a local hero. At the annual branch meeting of the Acclimatisation Society, held on 18 August 1942, a fine stuffed cock pheasant formed the decoration on the chairman's table. Mr Allan Webster explained how they were very proud of the bird, and much prouder of the member who shot it. "He is, said Mr Webster, Wing Commander E.P. Wells, D.F.C. and Bar, D.S.O."



## From wedding to war time style

Nell and Hadyn Murray married in 1940. With fabric rationed during the war, Nell cleverly altered her wedding dress (on display), shortening the sleeves and hem, and changing the neckline. It was then worn as a party dress.

In a 1995 interview with Valerie Bowler for the *Cambridge Edition*, the Murrys shared their story. They moved to Cambridge in 1946 when they were transferred to FAC, a department store on Duke Street. A few years later, in 1950, they bought the Domain Kiosk, a small dairy on Thornton Road. In 1960, they sold it and bought a grocery store on Victoria Street.

The Murrys were known for their friendly service. Customers would hand over their shopping lists, and Nell and Hadyn would gather items for them. Essentials like sugar and flour were measured out by hand, and bread was usually pre-ordered. Hadyn even delivered groceries for free and often helped with handyman jobs like changing lightbulbs or fixing leaky taps. Anyone who paid their account got a bag of lollies. "Going to town was a social occasion for many folk," Hayden said. "Taking time and being a good listener with customers was a way of showing that we cared."

The Murrys quickly became part of the community, joining local clubs and making lasting friendships. After Hadyn passed away in 1996, Nell shared one of his favourite sayings: "I had a great day."



Photo: Nell and Hadyn  
Murray, 18 May 1940,  
CM3165

## Friends of the Museum

A warm welcome to our new members Jane Seddon, Gary and Rose Smith and Kevin and Linda Wells.



## Coming up

**FRIDAY 2 MAY 2025**

**MORNING TEA: DOING OUR BIT**

**10.30am, The Museum**

**Please RSVP by 28 April.**

Join the Museum team for a cuppa and taste some of the baking recipes made popular during World War II.

**MONDAY 12 MAY 2025**

**HORAHORA DAM BARGE TRIP at Finlay Park**

*Not suitable for people with limited mobility*

**Cost: \$10 per person. Meet at Finlay Park at 1.30 pm**

**Please RSVP by 5 May.**

**Places are limited to 35 people only.**

Come along on a fascinating trip to Horahora Power Station, once the country's first large scale power station before being submerged by Lake Karāpiro in 1947. Our journey will begin with a visit to Finlay Park's model showing the Horahora area as it was between 1910 and 1947. Then, we'll go on the barge *Wai Ora* to the actual dam site. The whole trip takes about 1 to 1.5 hours and offers a unique mix of storytelling, scenery, and a touch of adventure.

**FRIDAY 23 MAY 2025**

**Talk by Matthew Gainsford, Marine Archaeologist**

**10.30am, Te Awa, 1866 Hamilton Road**

**Please RSVP by 12 May.**

Matthew is a maritime archaeologist who works mainly within the commercial archaeological sector but has other research interests including fishing structures, NZ Mission Stations, HMS Buffalo, PS Kopu and maritime archaeology. His major interests within maritime archaeology are public outreach, GIS mapping, remote sensing, site formation processes and in-situ preservation of archaeological sites.

**Please RSVP by called 07 827 3319 or by email to [admin@cambridgemuseum.org.nz](mailto:admin@cambridgemuseum.org.nz)**

## Additions to the collection

- Wooden carpentry or leatherwork vice
- Lyceum Club archives
- Digital photos and archives: Clifflin family
- Framed photograph: Fencourt Primitive Methodist Church Committee 1913
- Typewriter
- Postcards: 1900s cnr Vic and Duke Sts, and 1930s Town Hall
- Home film footage of Cambridge in the 1980s
- Photographic negatives of Lake Karāpiro and the hydro dam under construction.
- 12 letters and postcards from WWI in a display book, and one paybook from the Liddington bros
- *The Datsuns* poster 2008

