

Dear Friends of the Museum

Kia ora koutou

August is Family History Month which is a time to celebrate the people and stories that make us who we are. Whether you're just starting your family tree or are deep in the Cambridge Historical Society archives, it's a great reminder that every name, photo, map and memory helps bring our shared history to life.

This month, we are delighted to feature the family history of Thomas Wells (1842–1910), local merchant and mayor. The Memorial Gates at the Domain honour his contributions to the town he helped to build. His descendant Kevin Wells, shares the story of Thomas's early years as a soldier before he settled in Cambridge in 1878. Karen Payne's article, *The Tragedy of Joe Kum Yung*, offers a powerful reminder that personal histories, whether preserved or discovered, help us understand the wider forces that have shaped New Zealand.



Our Matariki celebrations, July 2025 Image: Michael JEANS

Matariki

July was a busy time for the Historical Society. The Museum's Matariki celebrations were a wonderful experience, with visitors of all ages enjoying the displays, crafts and kai. A special thank you to everyone who contributed time and energy to this celebration of new beginnings and remembrance.

Signalling Museum

Our visit to Ken Ashman's Signalling Museum was another highlight. Ken's lifelong dedication to collecting and preserving New Zealand's railway and communication heritage left us all inspired. It reminded us just how much passion it takes to keep history alive.

WDC Long Term Plan

We presented our response to the Council's Long-Term Plan. While the outcomes weren't everything we had hoped for, we are grateful for the Council's continued financial support and encouraged by the ongoing conversations about heritage in Waipā.

Behind the scenes

Meanwhile, our volunteers continue to work on the Biography Indexing Project, cataloguing decades of records one card at a time. This behind-the-scenes work may not always make headlines, but it is vital to preserving our history for future generations. Thank you to (clockwise from top left) Gill, Leigh, Bo, Val and Margaret (absent).



Our Bio Indexing Team at the Museum, July 2025

New Society Constitution on its way

We are updating the Society's Constitution to better reflect how the Society works today. A draft will be sent to all members soon. We encourage you to review it and share your feedback ahead of final approval at our AGM in November.

What's on in August

Coming up, in partnership with the Cambridge Genealogy Group, we'll be offering an introduction to oral history for anyone interested in learning how to record interviews and preserve stories from our community. More details on the back page

Thank you, as always, for being part of this journey with us.

The Cambridge Museum Team

Additions to the collection

- Cambridge Girls Brigade collection
- Books: *Pebble in a Pool* on Finlay Park; *Horahora from the Mountain to the River*; *Cookery for Girls*; *Reynolds of Trecarne Extended*
- Digital Film: *On the Buses* by Andrew Johnstone
- Dog dosing strip sign; Cambridge Dairy Co and Federated Farmers archives, A&P 61st Annual Show catalogue
- Destination Cambridge (i-Site/Cambridge Information Centre) archives
- Fur stoles
- CD: *Let the Mutilation Begin* by Psyclops (Cambridge)
- Covid-19 vaccine record card
- Kaipaki Church 125th Anniversary book, letters from Ron Fisher and Madge Haysmith



The 'Forlorn Hope' at the Battle of Rangiriri

20 November 1863

By Kevin Wells

Earlier this year (March 2025), the *Cambridge News* featured a deserving tribute to Ensign Dugald MacColl of the 3rd Waikato Regiment (Militia) who is reputed to be just the third person interred in the Hautapu (Cambridge) Cemetery. Buried with full military honours, MacColl was barely 22 years of age at his untimely death in 1866. His headstone has been appropriately restored.

Another member of the 3rd Waikatos, also buried at Hautapu, is Thomas Wells. Unlike poor Dugald, Thomas was to live a much longer life as he died in 1910 aged 68. Over much of his lifetime he contributed a great deal towards the development of Cambridge, and for a few years was mayor of the town.

However, Thomas had come close to 'meeting his Maker' when just 21 years old, at the Battle of Rangiriri in 1863.

Thomas arrived in New Zealand as a sailor aboard HMS *Harrier* in 1862. He had joined the Navy in 1859, aged 17, and held the lowly rank of 'Boy, 1st Class'. The warship made an inauspicious entry into Manukau Harbour by running aground on a mudbank. Fellow shipmate, E W Ewington, described how each of the crew had to pick up a heavy cannonball and walk in a line from one side of the ship to the other until the vessel was rocked off the mud bar on the incoming tide. It was then able to berth at Pahurehure (Papakura) to unload supplies for the Drury military camp in preparation for the invasion of the Waikato.



(Top) Sketch of the Naval Brigade's unsuccessful attack at Rangiriri
(Credit: Alexander Turnbull Library, A-145-004)

It may have come as something of a surprise for Thomas when he, and most of the *Harrier's* crew, were handed muskets and told to board one of two large barges which, along with General Cameron's main contingent, headed up the Waikato River to the fortified pā at Rangiriri. The ensuing battle was a disaster for the British as the Māori defenders, secure in a well-organised system of trenches, easily repulsed Cameron's forces after they had launched a frontal attack against the pā.

It was in this bloody confusion that two British officers decided to try to make names for themselves. (The military expression, 'forlorn hope', referred to those unfortunate soldiers who were recklessly ordered to attack a position of high risk so that, if successful, great glory might be bestowed on the officer in charge, regardless of the cost.)

As Ewington later detailed, "I was with Tom Wells, as he was familiarly called, in the Battle of Rangiriri, where he was wounded ... two other attacks were made – one by 36 artillerymen, led by Captain Mercer, and a forlorn hope of 90 seamen, including Tom Wells, led by Captain Mayne, of HMS *Eclipse*."



(Above) Drury Naval Camp

In the early 1860s Drury became a base for the British invasion of the Waikato. This 1863 painting by Henry Scrivener shows the naval camp of HMS *Harrier* on the Pahurehure Inlet, Manukau Harbour. Supplies were shipped from Onehunga and then transferred to bullock trains (in the background).

(Credit: Alexander Turnbull Library, Ref: B-061-020)

Being shot during any battle is no light matter. However, in spite of any pain or suffering, Thomas was to be the benefactor of two lucky circumstances. His first stroke of good fortune was that the Māori warrior who stood up and fired at him had previously run out of musket balls. Instead, he had primed his musket with nails and bits of metal. Thomas therefore suffered shrapnel wounds rather than a possibly fatal musket ball shot.

Thomas' second favourable outcome was that his wounds prevented him from accompanying the crew of the *Harrier* when it sailed to Tauranga a few months later to participate in the Battle of Gate Pā. There, over 35 of his fellow-sailors were killed. Thomas might well have been one of these casualties had he been fit for duty.

I would doubt that Thomas was any sort of *gung-ho* fighting sailor, or soldier. He was a kind and generous soul throughout his life. On Thomas' death, his former shipmate, E W Ewington, wrote "Mr Wells ... was very much liked and trusted by all on the ship. He was ever ready to help his mates out of hot water by turning the best side to London". (An old Victorian English expression for extolling the virtues of a subordinate in trouble to a superior officer in order to lessen a forthcoming punishment.)



The Tragedy of Joe Kum Yung

By Karen Payne

In 1905, the murder of Joe Kum Yung in Wellington's Haining Street exposed an underlying racism in New Zealand.

Joe Kum Yung was born in Poonyu County, Canton in 1837. He arrived in New Zealand in around 1880 after spending about four years in Victoria, Australia. A mining accident left him permanently injured, and he was unable to continue working. Whilst recovering in Grey Hospital, the local Chinese community there raised funds for him to return to China, but he chose instead to travel to Wellington where he was living on the streets.

His killer, Lionel Terry, was a well-educated 32-year-old British man on a crusade to halt Asian immigration here. He walked from Northland to Wellington to personally petition Members of Parliament, but his racist demands were rejected. He then went to Haining Street, the Chinese quarter in Te Aro, and shot Joe Kum Yung from behind. Terry returned to his hotel, had dinner, and turned himself in to authorities the next day. He was found guilty of murder and eventually sentenced to life imprisonment in psychiatric institutions where he died, a diagnosed paranoid schizophrenic, in 1952 aged 79.

The Chinese community was devastated by the killing and dismayed by the sympathy shown to Terry by the jury, media and sections of the public.



Self-portrait of Joe Kum Yung's killer Lionel Terry held at Healthcare Otago Charitable Trust

Lionel Terry was initially given the death sentence. In searching for an explanation for his state of mind, police contacted his family in England who provided a grandmother, aunt and uncle with mental illness. His acquaintances overseas were interviewed, referring to his peculiar way of dressing – “knee breeches and socks, leaving his calves exposed”. These seem to have been part of the basis for which Lionel Terry was pronounced

insane by a Government Minister. His sentence was reduced to life imprisonment in psychiatric institutions.

He began his sentence at Sunnyside Mental Hospital in Christchurch before being transferred to Seacliff Mental Asylum in Dunedin. He made several attempts to escape – sometimes successfully. He promised not to escape again if his prison conditions eased. He was permitted to write and paint. He kept pet goats and sheep and gardened.

In 1940, he assaulted a doctor and was kept in solitary confinement until his death. His racist views never wavered.

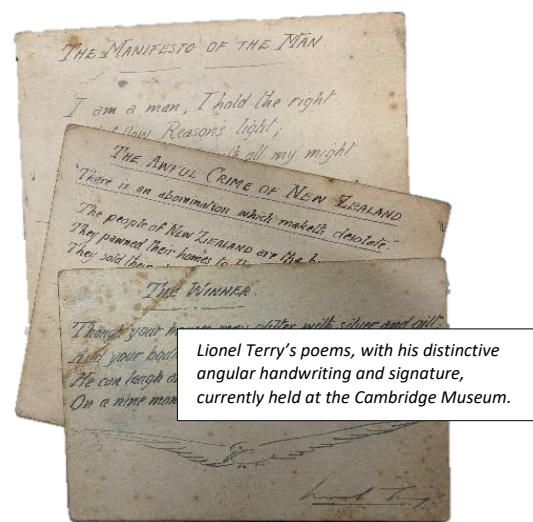
The case has not been forgotten. It has featured in the news at least four times this decade: in 2005 a memorial plaque for Joe Kum Yung was unveiled in Haining Street; protest arose in 2020 when one of Lionel Terry's poems featured in an NCEA exam; Terry's journal surfaced at a home in Christchurch in 2022; and in 2024 a song was released lamenting Joe Kum Yung's death. Seven of Terry's poems recently sold for \$220 at auction.

It was with some surprise that we discovered among some uncatalogued archives, four handwritten poems on plain cards, signed by Lionel Terry. They are undoubtedly genuine and very disturbing. We have chosen not to print his works in full here, but let's just say his xenophobia, misogyny and messianic delusions are chillingly conveyed.



The Chinese Quarter, Haining Street, Wellington, New Zealand Mail 17/8/1904

We will never know for sure how these items ended up in a family collection in the Cambridge Museum. One member of the family trained as a nurse in Christchurch in the early 1910s so perhaps she came across Lionel Terry during her time there.



Lionel Terry's poems, with his distinctive angular handwriting and signature, currently held at the Cambridge Museum.

Since the National Library already holds some of Lionel Terry's writings, we intend to recommend these newly discovered pieces be added to the national collection where they can be studied in context and with appropriate care.

References: Clio Francis, Dominion Post, 23/3/2011; Fandom.com, Healthcare Otago Charitable Trust eHive; Teara.govt.nz



Have You Seen Her Face?

With thanks to researchers Harriet DeMaio and Eris Parker.



The Frances Davies building, Victoria Street
Image: Harriet Di Maio. Inset: Karen Payne.

Next time you're walking along Victoria Street, take a moment to look up. You might just spot a mystery hidden in plain sight.

High on the pediment of 76 Victoria Street above the busy café and offices, is a face in plaster work that some believe to be of Miss Frances Davies (later Mrs Benn), the businesswoman who commissioned the building in 1932.

Built by local firm Speight Pearce Nicoll & Davys (SPND) and designed by Hamilton architect Archie MacDonald, the building was described as "ornate with numerous exterior embellishments." A three-faced clock once hung from the veranda, crafted by its first tenant, H J Salter, watchmaker and jeweller. Today, the ground floor remains a vibrant retail space while the upstairs is office space.

The Frances Davies Building is just one of the sites being researched as part of an exciting new project by Cambridge Museum in partnership with Te Awamutu Museum. Together, we are digging deeper into the stories behind some of Waipā's most iconic buildings and discovering who built them, who worked and lived in them, and what they have meant to our growing district.

Alongside this work, we are developing a brand-new self-guided town history trail that will highlight heritage buildings in the centre of Cambridge. From hidden faces and forgotten clocks to tales of resilience and enterprise, this new trail will offer something for everyone whether you're a curious local or a weekend visitor.

Next time you're in town, don't just walk by. Look up! Can you spot the seashells, festoons and maybe even Miss Davies herself?

Keep an eye out for details about our upcoming town tours and the launch of the new town trail.

Coming up in Family History Month

U3A/CHS PARTNERSHIP TALK, 10.30am, FRIDAY 22 August
The Woolshed, Te Awa, 1860 Hamilton Road

Excommunicated: Two Centuries of Complicated Family History by Craig Hoyle Presentation by the author of a heart-wrenching multigenerational family memoir of an excommunicated member of the Exclusive Brethren.

RSVP to admin@cambridgemuseum.org.nz by 15 August 2025

RECORDING SPOKEN HISTORIES, Cambridge Library:

Wed 20 August, 6.30 – 7.30 pm **Talk: Telling your story – A Guide to Capturing Family History in Sound and on Film**



Sat 23 August, 10.30 – 11.30 am – **Registered Workshop – From Chat to Archive. Practical Oral History Skills**

Discover the power of oral history beginning with an evening talk exploring how recorded stories enrich genealogy and archives. Then join a practical session introducing the basics of recording interviews—perfect for anyone keen to preserve family, community or local histories. No prior experience needed. All welcome. Registration essential for the workshop via the Waipā District Libraries website.

RECOMMENDED – SILENT MOVIES LIVE AT THE TOWN HALL

Friday 19 Sept, 7pm – 9pm, Early Bird Tickets \$20-24

Step back in time and experience classic silent films accompanied by live music in a stunning heritage setting. Bring a friend and enjoy an evening of vintage cinema and good company! Buy your tickets from the Town Hall website.

FAMILY HISTORY MONTH


Recording Spoken Histories

AUGUST 2025

Celebrating Family History Month
The Cambridge Museum and Cambridge Genealogy Group present:

WEDNESDAY 20 AUGUST 2025, 6.30-7.30 pm
Evening talk: Telling Your Story – A Guide to Capturing Family History in sound and on film

SATURDAY 23 AUGUST 2025, 10.30-11.30 am
Registered workshop: From Chat to Archive – Practical Oral History Skills



Free - All Welcome. Please register for the workshop on the library website.
Venue: Cambridge Library

Presented by:
Elizabeth Harvey, Cambridge Museum
Jo Barnes, Cambridge Genealogy Group
Andrew Johnstone, Filmmaker

