

Dear Friends of the Museum

January delivered a welcome surprise. Visitor numbers reached record levels over the summer period. This marks the third consecutive year of growth. It has been a pleasure to see the Museum so busy, with a steady flow of locals and visitors spending time with us.

What sits behind the rise? Our summer walking tours have been a resounding success, attracting a further 130 people to the Museum. Craft activities have also played a part, offering simple, hands-on ways to connect with local history. Cambridge News recently reported increased footfall across the town in January. More people in Cambridge naturally leads to more people through our doors.

Going analogue?

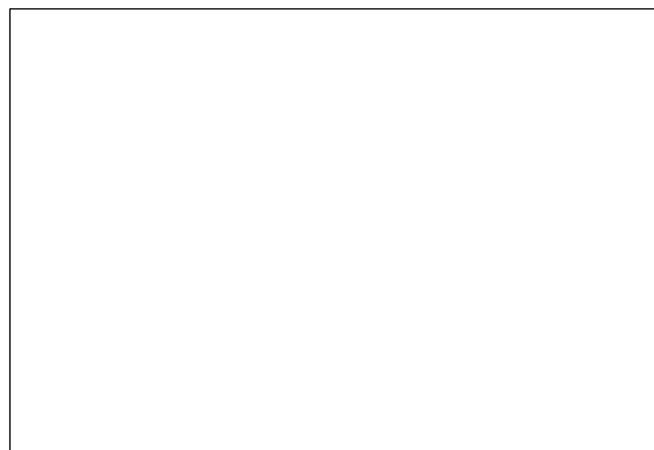
A wider shift is worth noting. Internationally, people are experimenting with “going analogue”. Less time on smartphones. More time in physical, place-based experiences. Museums sit comfortably in this space. We offer time to slow down, look closely and engage with real objects and real stories.

Whatever the drivers, we are grateful you chose to spend time with us and look forward to welcoming you again soon.

What’s Coming Up in 2026

There is a great deal happening behind the scenes at the Museum already. Planning is well underway across exhibitions, collections work, events, and partnerships.

Thanks to everyone who responded to our request for kitchen stories. We are in the process of completing our display, including interactive elements for younger visitors.



Tune In: A Town in Music



The Cambridge Quartet: Clockwise from left, Harry Shields, Len Gerrard, Ron Griffiths (leader) and Charles Strange

As part of our National Music Month celebrations in May, we are preparing a new Research Room display exploring Cambridge’s music scene from concert halls to pubs, and recordings to digital platforms. You can get a taster of the stories to come in Karen’s following article on Ritchie Pickett.

The Works: Voices from Weddell Aotearoa Meat Works, Cambridge

For those of you who enjoy listening to personal recollections of times past, our digital exhibition called “The Works” will soon be going live. It shares photographs and oral histories recorded with former workers from the Weddell Aotearoa Meat Works alongside photographs.



Weddell Aotearoa Meat Works was one of Cambridge’s largest and most demanding workplaces. These recorded voices recall the work, the people and the sudden impact of its closure.

Time to Renew

It will soon be time to renew your association with the Friends of Cambridge Museum and the Cambridge Historical Society. We hope you will continue to support our work. Please encourage family, friends and colleagues to join us.

Come and say hello

We are also delighted to be part of the Autumn Festival Carnival Day on Sunday 22 March. You will find our stall in Victoria Gardens, with games and activities for Friends and families. There may even be a few prizes to be won.

Elizabeth, Karen and Kate



Ritchie Pickett – Fearless in Fashion

1955-2011

This article is based on Andrew Johnstone's interviews with musician/music entrepreneur Grant Hislop and Ritchie's sister Penny, who volunteers for the Cambridge Museum. Please contact us if you wish to hear these interviews in full.

"Black polyester satin bibbed overalls, with purple pockets sewn in red thread."

This is our formal description of an eye-catching, glossy textile recently donated to our collection by Graham Clark, author of the Ritchie Pickett biography *Thanks for the Clap*.

Ritchie Pickett was a long-haired, skinny 19 to 20-something when he wore these overalls in the mid-1970s. In photographs of him as a Graffiti Mk 2 bandmember, he's shown as the epitome of 1970s glam, accessorising with black knee-length boots, furs, a bead necklace and makeup.



Graffiti Mk 2 in the mid-1970s. Left to right: Gary Williams, Ritchie Pickett, John Parker and John Drinkwater.
<https://www.audioculture.co.nz/profile/ritchie-pickett/image/963>

Ritchie lived his final years in Cambridge and died here in 2011, aged just 56. His connection to the town continued until recently through the Ritchie Pickett Scholarship supporting outstanding young musicians at Cambridge High School.

So who was Ritchie Pickett? He was a piano-pounding, sharp-tongued Kiwi country musician who moved easily from 70s prog rock bands like Think, to fronting Waikato band Ritchie Pickett and the Inlaws, to TV fame on *That's Country*, with countless bands in between.

He was creative, intelligent, a prolific reader and poet. His sister Penny describes him as "a musician's musician" who earned the respect of his contemporaries for his formidable talent and ability to entertain audiences with his ready humour and quick wit. In the few online videos that show Ritchie's performances, musicians clearly enjoy playing with

him. He was a naturally gifted pianist who could throw one-liners to the crowd without missing a beat.

A drinking problem meant that he never quite reached his potential. But if friends were let down by his behaviour, "many excused it because of the extraordinary way he related to people," says Penny.

Grant Hislop was starting out as a music entrepreneur when he helped Ritchie professionally at a time when Ritchie's genre (country/folk country and rock'n'roll) was no longer in vogue in the late-80s and early-90s. He employed Ritchie to write jingles for Hislop's radio station *The Rock* in Hamilton, signed him to his record label, and was a member of Ritchie's Hamilton band the Stingray Martini's Excellent Duckbeasts. This was just one of the many Pickett bands carrying outlandish names.

Hislop remembers Ritchie with affection and describes him as "one in a million", despite a rocky professional relationship. Ritchie was a prolific songwriter, and Hislop believes his songs will achieve fame in the future.



Ritchie Pickett in pink paisley shirt and yellow jacket c2003.
<https://www.sunlive.co.nz/news/126148-meet-piano-pumping-mr-pickett.html>

If two items of clothing were to best capture the essence of Ritchie's outlandish personality, perhaps they were those donated to the Cambridge Museum by Graham Clark. We were excited to receive Ritchie's iconic satin overalls – the only example we have of a textile worn by a genuine glam rocker of the 70s. Clark also donated a pair of Ritchie's snakeskin shoes that show unconventional fashion continued throughout his life.

Karen Payne

Historical Society Committee Member Andrew Johnstone is collecting interviews for our Voices of Cambridge oral histories project. His work on Ritchie Pickett captures not just the chaos, but the music and talent that made Ritchie a quintessential character in the history of NZ music.



Market Gardener and Inventor

RALPH LEVESQUE | CM4783

"It may not be generally known that we have in our district a gentleman who may well be termed a tomato specialist, in the person of Mr R S Levesque of Hautapu. Mr Levesque has made a careful study of tomato culture, from all its various aspects for many years now, and has been signally successful in his work, the result of which speaks for itself."

Waikato Independent, 4 October 1921

And to prove it, we have the photos! Bruce Wiseman has donated early images of Ralph Levesque working inside and outside his stove-heated and unheated glasshouses in Wiseman Road, Cambridge.



CM4783/5-6: Boiler used for heating the glasshouse, and steam rising from "the sterilisation of the ground" according to notes on the back of the photos.

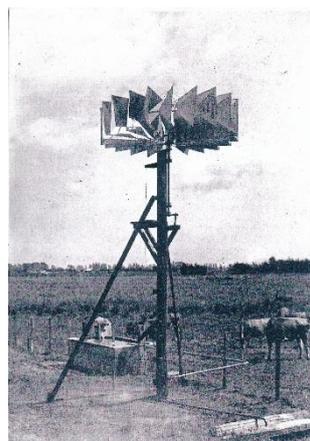
The *Waikato Independent* 4/10/1921 reported that Levesque planted his tomato seeds in boxes and placed them in heated glasshouses to germinate. After a few days, they were "picked out" and transplanted, giving them room for robust growth. They were soon shifted to unheated glasshouses, making them hardy wherever they were finally planted.

Ralph and wife Edith married in c1903 and began their nursery by growing gooseberries and strawberries. In 1919, they switched to tomatoes, and flowers which Edith sold in her jointly owned (with Mrs T Mitchell) florist shop on Victoria Street, Cambridge.



CM2958/19: The Levesques taking strawberries to market in their Ford Model T in 1917, Cambridge BNZ in the background.

Ralph Levesque was an innovator. Client E Griffiths of the Goodwood Jersey Farm wrote in a letter dated 13/9/1920: "Mr R S Levesque installed for me on my Hautapu farm early in January, one of his patent Wind-mills. Since installation it has continuously pumped water for upwards of 40 head of cattle, and has never given a moment's anxiety. It seems to run in the lightest breeze and does not race in a gale. It is practically noiseless and has given entire satisfaction."



CM4783/12: Windmill. On one of the blades is written "R.S. Levesque's Patent 1918"

In later life, we see him in his brimmed hat, proudly demonstrating a crop duster which he also patented.



CM4783/1: Levesque and his crop duster

Ralph and Edith had no children. Ralph passed away in March 1970 in Tauranga, where the couple had moved to retire.

Ralph's brother James Levesque, with his wife and family, also lived for many years in Cambridge. James farmed, grew strawberries and tomatoes, and later took on the Fencourt mail run. In 1965, James returned to Cambridge after retiring in Tauranga. He said that, apart from the trees growing bigger, Fencourt hadn't changed at all in 25 years.

Karen Payne



Coming up

WEDNESDAY 18 MARCH 2026

VISIT TO FONTERRA HAUTAPU

10-11am 287 Victoria Road, Tamahere 3493

Limited to 15 people

Includes a presentation on the history of the plant by Jono Bouda, Site Operations Manager as well as a visit to the cheese factory and wastewater treatment plant. This tour involves walking on uneven surfaces and standing for periods of time. RSVP by 13 March 2026 to admin@cambridgemuseum.org.nz.

SUNDAY 22 MARCH 2026

CARNIVAL DAY AND COMMUNITY STALLS, CAMBRIDGE AUTUMN FESTIVAL

Join us at Victoria Square between 10am-2pm

SATURDAY 12 APRIL 2026

THE DEAD TELL TALES – Guided Walk of Hautapu Cemetery with Lyn Williams 2pm, 210 Hannon Road, Cambridge

This free guided tour offers a rare glimpse into the lives and legacies of those buried at one of town's oldest cemeteries. More details to follow.

TUESDAY 26 MAY 2026

U3A PARTNERSHIP TALK: Recovering a New Zealand ANZAC Legacy – The Story of the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade in Egypt and Palestine (1916–1919) by Christopher Archer & Warren Dawson

Doors open 10am for a 10.30 start. Woolshed, Te Awa Lifecare, 1866 Cambridge Road, Cambridge 3283

On the eve of WWI in 1914, New Zealand dispatched two brigades to join the Imperial Army—one of Infantry and one of Mounted Horse. After Gallipoli, the infantry was sent to Europe, but the Mounted Brigade remained in Egypt.

Over the next three years, the troopers of the NZMR rode 400 miles across desert and mountain in a campaign that defeated the Ottoman, German and Austrian forces in a series of victories unmatched in military history. Yet their extraordinary story was largely forgotten in the aftermath of the war—until, a hundred years later, their legacy began to be recovered.

Christopher Archer, historian and author of *Saviours of Zion*, and Warren Dawson, who retraced his grandfather's route in partnership with Israeli historians, will share their insights into this remarkable history. Together they have also been closely involved with a project to erect a 5-metre Silver Fern memorial in Gan Sorek, Israel, commemorating the New Zealand troopers who fought in Palestine.

For the family in Waipā

SATURDAY 28 FEBRUARY 2026

TUI AND TAMA'S ECO EXPO 2026

9am-1pm Te Awamutu Library Community Rm, FREE

Discover all the awesome mahi being done by our local community groups to help our native plants and animals thrive and preserve our resources. Fun activities for all.

Also recommended

SATURDAY 7 MARCH 2026

PBA125 - Paul's Book Arcade 1901-2026

125th Anniversary

Event at The Link Community Centre, St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, 4 Te Aroha St, Hamilton East, 10am to 4.30pm



A celebration of the iconic Hamilton and Auckland bookshops, William Paul, and Blackwood & Janet Paul publishing. For staff, customers, friends, published authors and artists, and anyone with personal connections or memories, as well as researchers, historians and architects.

Pre-paid \$50 registrations are required from November 2025 until 7 February 2026.

www.facebook.com/groups/1135502001961464 (Paul's Book

Arcade - 125 years)

paulsbookarcade125anniversary@gmail.com

Phone 07-855-8428 Jeff Downs



New additions to the collection:

Ritchie Pickett's shoes and overalls
Stone ginger beer bottle – A G Boyce
Cash books – Cambridge Borough Council
Stokes family photograph collection
Postcard of Lake Te Koutu
Driver's test receipt and AA Agent's receipt
Ralph Levesque photograph collection
Cambridge Golf Club 125th anniversary archive
Biscuit barrel – McClellan family
Mellow family photograph collection

