

Welcome to our April newsletter

This month's feature highlights the Cambridge Bridge Club. Like many long-standing groups, it has quietly built connections over decades. It is easy to overlook how much these organisations contribute to the social fabric of the town.

If your group is approaching a milestone, we would like to hear from you. We hold more in the collection than most people expect, and these anniversaries are a good moment to bring those stories forward.

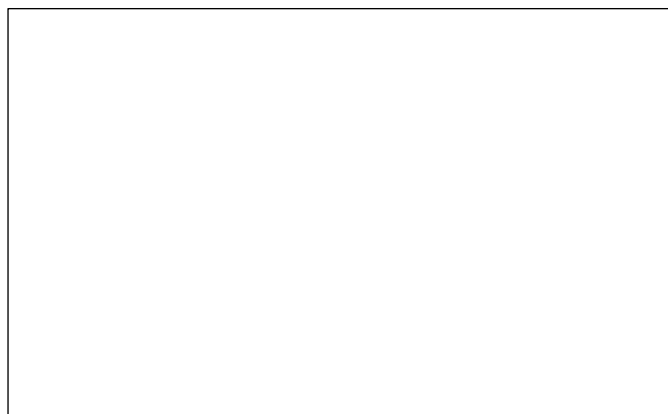
Restoring the Railway Gates



Bruce Dean with Cambridge Community Menzshed members loading the historic gate onto Smythe and McCoard's flatbed trailer, 12 March 2026

That same community effort is behind the restoration of the Railway Gate at the entrance of Lakewood Retail. Members of the Cambridge Community Menzshed, alongside the team at Smythe and McCoard Panel & Paint Ltd, recently helped transport the historic railway gate to the Menzshed to be repaired and strengthened.

The Cambridge railway line opened in 1884, carrying passengers until 1946 and freight until 1996. The station (now Lakewood) was once a hive of activity, with sidings, a goods shed, stockyards and even a locomotive depot. In 1981, the gates were purchased from NZRail by B and K James and generously donated to the Cambridge Historical Society, who has cared for them ever since.



A sincere thank you to Bruce and Bev Dean, Smythe and McCoard Panel & Paint Ltd and the Cambridge Community Menzshed for their support in helping us look after this piece of local history.

Genealogy Group: Goodwood School Indexing

This month we recognise a significant piece of work completed by the Cambridge Genealogy Group. They have finished indexing the attendance records of Goodwood School (1902-1926), creating a valuable resource for families, researchers and the wider community.

The timing is fitting, with the school preparing to mark its quasiqucentennial (125th). Essential projects like this often sit quietly in the background, turning fragile records into something usable, searchable and shareable. They ensure that local stories remain accessible to future generations.

Our thanks go to everyone involved. This is careful, detailed work that requires patience and commitment.

What You Told Us: Visitor Survey

Visitor feedback this summer has been overwhelmingly positive, with 139 responses highlighting what people value most about the museum. Interactive experiences stood out, especially the typewriter, telephone exchange, puzzle and hands-on activities for children, alongside the easy-to-follow timeline and strong local storytelling. Many visitors commented on the welcoming atmosphere and the way the museum works for all ages.

The main message was simple. People want more. More displays, more stories and more interactive experiences, particularly for younger visitors. We were given helpful suggestions around adding more recent history, expanding Māori content, and introducing more digital elements such as short films and QR codes. We are taking these on board, along with practical improvements to ensure interactives are fully working and easy to use.



Have you had a go at solving our puzzle table yet? It's a challenge!

Looking Ahead

The museum continues to be a place built with and for its community. Whether through restoration projects, group histories, or new stories coming into the collection, that shared effort matters.

Elizabeth, Karen and Kate





The Little Club with a Heart of Gold

CAMBRIDGE BRIDGE CLUB GOLDEN JUBILEE
1976 - 2026

Bridge has been part of Cambridge social life for well over a century.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the game was played in private homes, often noted in local newspapers alongside descriptions of the setting and the players. These gatherings reflected a particular social world, where invitation and status mattered as much as the game itself.

By the mid-twentieth century, bridge had become more accessible. The Lyceum Club, established in 1940, hosted regular sessions with up to ten tables in play. At the same time, experienced players often travelled to Hamilton or Te Awamutu to compete, highlighting both the game's popularity and the absence of a local club.

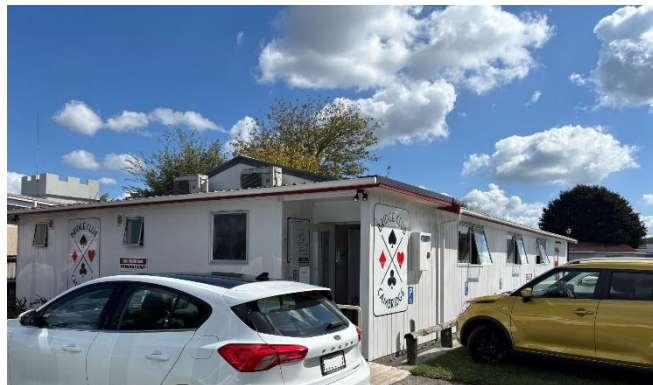
The establishment of a Cambridge club in 1976 marked a shift. What had once been played in homes and small groups became a structured, community-based weekly competition.

Rosemary Stephenson and **Betty Taylor** were the first to gauge the level of interest for a bridge club in Cambridge. They advertised a public meeting at the Cambridge Intermediate School. It was well attended by enthusiastic people who immediately established a steering committee.

In March 1976, an inaugural bridge night was held in the St Andrew's church hall. The room was packed with 18 tables and 72 players. The committee now knew that establishing a Cambridge bridge club was feasible.

An AGM was held on 22 March and the Cambridge Contract Bridge Club was launched. Rosemary Stephenson was elected President. Bridge tables were donated and purchased. **Henry Davys**, managing director of local building firm Speight, Pearce Nicoll and Davys (SPND), made two sets of 28 boards to hold the playing cards, and later a trolley to hold the card tables so they could be easily stored. The Hamilton club was supportive of the new club, lending it boards and other equipment and supplies to get it started.

Originally, members played one night a week. This was soon split into two nights: Mondays for experienced players, and Wednesdays for newer players – as it is today. ACOL was the only system played and **Sue Wrigley**, an experienced player, was director, scorer and tutor for about five years. Club nights were held in the St John Building on Victoria Street (now Property Brokers Real Estate), but this had a concrete floor and was cold and noisy. The club moved to the Alf Walsh room at the Cambridge Trotting Club, where it stayed for about seven years.



The Clubrooms

Money was constantly set aside for the purchase of the club's own premises. One option was the old courthouse. Another was jointly owning a property with Federated Farmers.

Des Robinson was a driving force when he was Club President in 1981-1983. On 18 March 1983, the club, now an incorporated society, signed a lease with the Cambridge Borough Council for a vacant property on 14 Fort Street.

Funding initiatives

Money was raised by \$13,000 cash from club funds, \$7,000 from gifts, a \$10,000 loan from the Bank of New Zealand and \$10,000 in debentures from club members.

Local Accountant **Graham Wrigley**, the club's Treasurer, was the brains behind the debenture scheme. Members put up money secured by a debenture, which was in effect a promise by the club to pay the sum back. No interest was paid. In the subsequent years, an annual draw was made for a percentage of the debentures to be paid back that year. Some donated the money instead of accepting payment. It was an innovative way to raise the necessary funds.

The clubrooms, built by **John Grayling** for \$37,596, were opened on 24 June 1983. Funds for chairs and furnishings were raised by dinners, raffles and hard work by club members.

By the early 1990s, the kitchen and toilet facilities needed upgrading. A 4m bay was added to the back of the rooms. Club funds and a Lottery Board grant enabled the construction to be completed in September 1996.



Progress

One of the most contentious issues in the club’s history was the decision to ban smoking during playing sessions. Some believed the club would fold if it did so. In 1992, 85% of members voted to ban. Everyone could breathe again.

A constant challenge to any bridge club director is getting the temperature of the clubrooms to a degree where everyone is satisfied. Some like it cool and some like it hot. Originally, the club relied on windows, ceiling fans and wall heaters. In 2008, the first heat pump was installed. Thanks to a Pub Charity grant, two more were added. While the temperatures they produce are now effective, the level of temperature continues to be contentious.

Embracing technology

Before the computer age, players manually filled in forms with their results. These forms were taken home by the scorer to carry out the necessary arithmetic to produce a list of winners. This took several hours.

A computer meant that the forms were entered into software in about 20 minutes, and the results calculated immediately. Once a website was created, the scores could be published, and players were able to check their results soon after they arrived home.

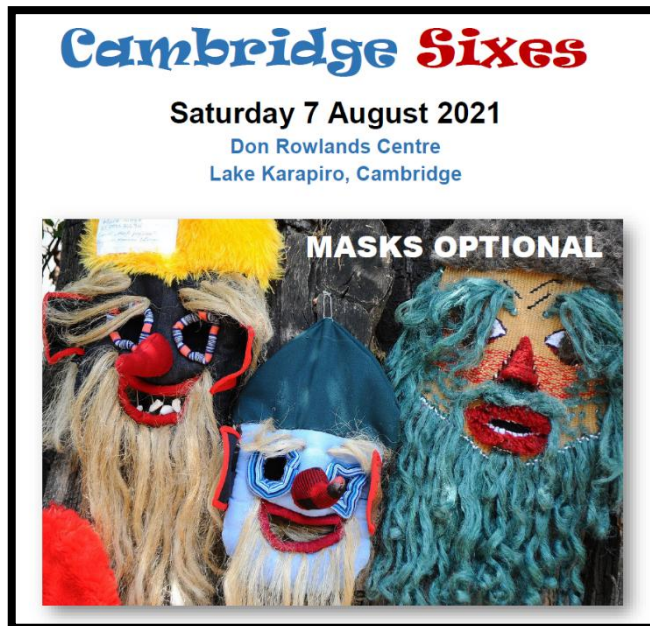
In 2009, the club purchased, by way of a Pub Charity grant, an automatic dealing machine. This provided computer analysis for each hand and allowed players to review their play and check if their bidding was accurate – a major step forward for players keen to improve.



A year or two later, Pub Charity provided the funding for Bridgemates – calculators at each table where scores can be entered after a hand has been played. Results are produced as soon as a session has finished. New members take for granted what was unimaginable a couple of decades ago: immediate results.

X-Clubs

Life Member **Michael Neels** has worked with the club’s software developer **Bob Fearn** in Seattle to create X-Clubs, a program that combines the scores of several clubs on their standard club nights, establishing a list of supreme winners. This has become an innovative way of assessing players’ performance against a larger pool of tables.



Cambridge Sixes promotional poster soon after Covid-19

The Cambridge Sixes Tournament

The Cambridge Sixes was also Michael Neels’ idea. It took the joint effort of the committee, club members and the generosity of other local clubs, to get this undertaking off the ground. Clubs are invited to enter a team of six players to compete. Originally held at the Senior Citizen’s Hall, then the Cambridge Town Hall and finally the Don Rowland’s Centre at Karapiro, this tournament has grown to become the largest one-day bridge tournament in the country. The Cambridge Bridge Club has hosted as many as 44 teams of six, or 264 players, all dressed in costumes, and many opting to stay in Cambridge over the weekend.



The Future

An important feature on the club’s calendar is their learner lessons in March. Past teachers have been **Sue Wrigley, Marie Davis, Beat Moser, Clare Coles, Jane Stearns, Kim Grounds, Anne Blewden, Pam Moore** and **Josie van Weerd**. A buddy system pairs each learner with an experienced player so that they integrate smoothly into regular club sessions.

As of 2026, the Cambridge Bridge Club has over 200 members. Happy Golden Anniversary to the little club with a heart of gold.

Based on research by Alyson Clay and Bob McQueen



Visit to Fonterra's Hautapu Site

BY JANE WEST



Friends of Cambridge Museum with Fonterra's Hautapu site manager Johnathon Bouda (far left), 18 March 2026

A rare behind the scenes opportunity to see Fonterra's Hautapu dairy factory was undertaken by a group of Cambridge Historical Society members in March. It provided a chance to visit one of Cambridge's oldest businesses, which has provided support to the local dairy industry and employment to many Cambridge people over the past 140 years.

The 10am tour began in the boardroom with coffee and delicious cheese tasting platters. The boardroom was lined with framed historical photos of the factory and people. Fonterra's Hautapu site manager Johnathon Bouda gave a Powerpoint presentation detailing the history of the site, through to current scale and production.

We were then fitted with steel capped boots, high viz vests and safety glasses and proceeded to follow Jono on an informative and entertaining tour. The tour went to areas the public rarely get the opportunity to see, encompassing five different manufacturing and packing sites and rail and milk tanker sites. The variety of production, scale and automation was impressive.

Two hours later we finished back at the boardroom, where Jono answered even more questions! He spoke of the interaction the Fonterra Hautapu dairy factory has with the Cambridge community, through investing in a range of sponsorship activities.

Museum manager Elizabeth Harvey thanked Jono for his time and effort. Elizabeth also mentioned a current dairy industry display in the museum. 'The Full Pound of Butter', is a 1960s video of Walter Beer on his Fencourt farm and the Hautapu Dairy Factory.

The tour was enlightening, reminding us of the history and scale of the Hautapu Dairy factory. It highlighted the impact the dairy industry has socially and economically in the Cambridge township and district to this day.

Coming up this Autumn

Cambridge History Circle: Inside the Collection
Wednesday, 29 April, 2pm

RSVP to help with seating by 27 April

What really happens when an object enters the museum? Karen and Kate will take you behind the scenes, following the journey from arrival through research, interpretation and care.

NEW DATE: Lyn William's "The Dead Tell Tales"

- 3 May 2026. Discover the fascinating stories behind the headstones. RSVP by 1 May 2026.

Joint Friends of Cambridge Historical Society and U3A Partnership History Lecture, Tuesday 26 May 2026 (note new day!), The Woolshed, Te Awa. Doors open at 10 am for 10.30 am start. Book your seat by 18 May 2026.



Join historians Christopher Archer and Warren Dawson for a talk on the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade in Egypt & Palestine (1916–1919). This ANZAC story is brought into focus through research and personal journeys, including work towards a Silver Fern memorial in Israel.

New additions to the collection

Lambrequin (mantelpiece cover)
Two homemade toddler dresses, Clow family
Pukerimu Water Supply documentation
Epergne awarded to Hilda Wells
Farm diaries of Morley Boyce
Baby bibs and cotton food bags, Vosper family
Sir Tristram phone card collection (pictured)
Talks, Walks and Stuff by Eris Parker
Karapiro, Whitehall, Taotaoroa Rolls of Honour by Eris Parker
Cambridge, Alive with History by Eris Parker
Audit reports on the Leamington Playground steamroller
Audio-Visual *The Little Shepherdesses* featuring Kerry and Wendy Peake
Cambridge High School yearbooks
Whitehall School and Agricultural Club certificates
The History of Whitehall School



1940 Wedding dress and headpiece of Nancie Wallace with photos, newspaper report and marriage certificate
1943 photographs of the wedding of Eileen Wallace
Brett's Colonist's Guide – First Edition 1883

