

Welcome to our June newsletter

What do a school register, a handwritten diary, a La Gloria Gramophone and a band jacket have in common?

Each carries a story about people who have lived in our community. Together, they help us understand what makes Cambridge such a remarkable place.

Over the past two months, the Museum has been buzzing with activity. We have welcomed more than a thousand visitors through our doors, opened a new exhibition, shared local stories with school students, preserved important historical records and brought people together through our new History Circle programme. Behind every project is a simple goal: to ensure our stories are shared, discussed and enjoyed.



David Stone of The Tremors with a photo of his band from July 1965. Photo Mary Anne Gill. <https://wbn.co.nz/2026/06/04/from-halls-to-headlines/>

Tune in to local stories

One of the highlights has been the opening of *Tune In: Our Sounds, Our Places* – an exhibition celebrating the musical heritage of Cambridge and the wider district.

Music has the power to transport us instantly to another time and place. Through photographs, instruments, recordings and personal stories, the exhibition explores the sounds that have accompanied life in our community across generations. I encourage you to make time to call in and experience it for yourself. You may discover a familiar face, a forgotten memory or a story you have never heard before.



Connecting with the community

Education and community engagement continue to be at the heart of what we do. During May we welcomed 110 middle school students for hands-on learning and gallery activities. We are grateful to the Senior Citizens Hall for allowing us to extend these activities into their building. Seeing young people connect with local history reminds us why preserving and sharing these stories matters.

We have also been delighted by the growing reach of our social media reels and the positive local and regional media coverage the Museum has received through the *Waikato Business News* and *Cambridge News*.

Caring for our collections

Behind the scenes, important work continues to improve access to and care for our collections. Bo recently completed the digitisation of the Horahora School registers, preserving a valuable part of our district's educational history for future generations.

Karen and Kate shared insights from our Collection Audit project at the Waipā Heritage Forum, highlighting the progress being made in understanding, documenting and caring for the Museum's collections.

Growing a community of historians

Another success has been the launch of our new History Circle programme. These gatherings bring together people who are passionate about local history, whether they are experienced researchers or simply curious to learn more.

Last month, we were privileged to hear from Valerie Millington, author of *Ellen of Dennistoun* and *Winds of Time: Ōhaupō Then and Now*, who shared practical advice and encouragement for those interested in researching and writing local and family histories.



Valerie Millington talking to the History Circle, May 2026, photo by Elizabeth Harvey

The conversation generated by these sessions have confirmed there is an appetite for local history and opportunities to learn from one another. Be sure to check our What's On calendar on the back page.

Elizabeth, Karen and Kate



The Stories Not Always Seen

By Elizabeth Harvey, with thanks to Raewyn Nordstrom

In early May, Friends of the Museum gathered beneath the autumn trees for a guided walk through Hautapu Cemetery. Led by local historian Lyn Williams, *The Dead Tell Tales* tour explored many of the great and good connected with the district's history. Familiar names emerged from the headstones: Māori Rangatira, community leaders, town merchants, farmers, veterans and families whose influence still echoes through Cambridge today.



Yet as is often the case in museums and local history, the most important stories are not always about those most visibly remembered.

Among the visitors that afternoon was Raewyn Tipene Nordstrom, who had come to visit her own ancestors resting within the cemetery grounds. While listening to Lyn's stories, she reflected on another cemetery story, one preserved not through plaques or official records, but through oral history.

Raewyn had heard a story about a korowai discovered during an exhumation and wanted to speak with someone who might hold first-hand knowledge of it. She knew exactly whom to ask – former cemetery sexton Dean Signal.

For many in Cambridge, Dean was as much a part of the cemeteries as the trees and weathered headstones themselves. As sexton for the district's cemeteries for almost thirty years, he was a guardian of the town's dead. He often joked that he had "hundreds of people underneath him and had never received a complaint." But behind the humour was someone remembered for his compassion, empathy and a strong connection to the cemetery and the people buried there.

Raewyn also held a personal connection with Dean. Over many years he had buried members of her own whānau at Pukerimu Cemetery. She knew him as someone who understood not simply the physical work of burial, but the emotional and cultural weight carried within it.

At Dean's funeral in August 2024, stories emerged of him speaking gently to children he had buried "just to make sure they were comfortable", worrying overnight that a freshly dug grave might collapse before the next day's service, and even stopping to

bury an injured cemetery duck with care and dignity. ([Cambridge News, "So Good for the Souls", 22/8/2024](#))

Dean Signal understood that cemeteries are not simply places of death. They are places of memory, grief, love, ritual and continuing connection.

It was during Raewyn's interview with Dean that he recounted the story of Andrew Hokai.

Andrew Hokai and the Journey Home



Records show that Andrew Hokai served in the 5th Māori Contingent during the First World War. His service number was 16/1512, and his father at Whangape in the Far North was listed as his next of kin. Today his service is remembered through Auckland Museum's Online Cenotaph records and the 28th Māori Battalion website.

Andrew Hokai's story is not straightforward. Newspaper accounts from 1949 record that he died following a violent altercation that later became the subject of court proceedings. ([Northern Advocate, 28 July 1949, Page 5](#))

Such details remind us that local history is rarely neat or easily reduced to simple narratives.

Like many Māori who died away from their ancestral lands, Andrew Hokai was originally buried where circumstance required. In earlier periods of New Zealand history, distance, transport limitations, financial hardship or work often prevented immediate return home following death.

Yet for many Māori families, burial places are deeply connected to whakapapa, whenua and identity. Returning tūpuna to their homeland is not simply about relocation. It is about reconnecting the deceased with their people, ancestors and whenua.

According to Dean Signal's recollections, Andrew Hokai was later exhumed so he could be returned to his ancestral home. Significant tikanga are involved in exhumation, or hahunga, the traditional practice of uplifting and moving tūpāpaku.

The story itself is significant, but equally important is the fact it survives at all. Without Raewyn taking the time to record Dean's memories before his passing, this small but meaningful piece of Cambridge history may well have disappeared entirely.

A remarkable discovery

One detail from Dean's recollection remains especially vivid. During the exhumation, the korowai or cloak wrapped around Andrew Hokai's coffin was found to be intact.

This seems extraordinary, given Cambridge's long association with swampy wetlands. Yet Dean believed the sandy nature of parts of

Often [local history] survives because somebody asked questions and recorded a conversation before it was too late.



the cemetery soil may have contributed to the preservation of the flax.

Whether viewed scientifically, culturally or emotionally, the image is a powerful one. A korowai symbolising dignity, identity, honour and connection, surviving beneath the earth long after burial.

The story reminds us that cemeteries are layered places. Beneath the visible landscape lie stories of movement, displacement, return and remembrance. In many ways, the people no longer physically present within the cemetery can sometimes tell us just as much about our history as those who remain.

Preserving more than headstones

Perhaps one of the strongest reflections from the cemetery tour was that local history is not preserved only through monuments or official records. People such as Dean Signal carried enormous amounts of local knowledge that existed nowhere else except in memory and storytelling. Through Raewyn's foresight in interviewing him, one of those stories now remains part of Cambridge's shared history.

For museums and historical societies, this is an important reminder. Preserving history is not only about protecting artefacts, photographs and archives. It is also about safeguarding voices, memories and human connections before they disappear.

As Friends of the Cambridge Historical Society and Museum drifted quietly from the cemetery that autumn afternoon, many likely carried away more than dates and names. They carried an understanding that history is not always found only in grand monuments or official records.

*Photograph of Hautapu Cemetery: Waipa District Council
Photograph of Andrew Hokai: Auckland Cenotaph*

Coming up this Autumn

Cambridge History Circle: Inside the Collection
Thursday, 18 June, 2pm at the Museum
FREE RSVP to help with seating by 14 June

Michael Jeans will be joining us to talk about his photographs of people and places in the Cambridge area.

Tour of St Andrew's Church
Saturday, 27 June 2026 at 2pm
FREE. Book your place by 21

June. Join local historian, Tom Fuller for a special guided tour of St Andrew's Church and grounds.



Three Experiences in One Day

With local guide Penny Pickett
Morrinsville Museum • Morrinsville Gallery
• Nottingham Castle Hotel

Saturday 11 July, 10am. Meet at Cambridge Museum.
\$35 per person including transport and entry, not lunch.
Only 11 places available. Book today.

Some thoughts on early cultivation

The following is quoted from the *Waikato Independent* on 15 September 1941

CONSERVING NATURAL RESOURCES VEGETATION PRESERVED

Various writers and speakers have emphasised the truth that the old-time Maoris were intelligent conservers of natural resources, which they regarded as assets, perpetual yielders of benefits. This fact is brightly mentioned by Mr L W McCaskill in the "Education Gazette".

"Although the ancient Maori population may have reached 200,000 in numbers, the system of agriculture and food-gathering left little mark on the native vegetation", he writes. "Small clearings for cultivation were made in forest or shrubland or fern, but these were rarely permanent in nature, and in time reverted to the original covering. In the drier districts tussock-grassland or manuka or fern may have replaced forest, but the total area would be very small.

"Further, the Maori destroyed only what was absolutely necessary. Before he cut a tree or commenced the fowling season elaborate rites and ceremonies were necessary. He believed that trees and birds were akin to man, that all three sprang from a common source in the god Tane, the fertiliser.

"We would not have a conservation problem today if we all developed some of the ancient Maori's reverence for Tane and his offspring."



Today, *Envirohistorynz.com* says: A site was used for gardens for two to six years and then left fallow for several years, during which time a cover of fast-growing native shrubs developed.

Unlike later European gardens, pre-European Māori gardens were not plagued with weeds. New Zealand's native flora does not include weedy annuals or biennial plants that invade cultivated soils. If any tropical weeds arrived with the ancestors of Māori, they did not survive in New Zealand's temperate climate.

Photo: www.waikatoregion.govt.nz



Listen to *Popular Jocular Doctor Brown* and other hits!



La Gloria Gramophone (renovated), self-standing, approx. 800mm high.

Despite so many innovations in sound recordings, records and record players have never really gone away. And this recent addition to our collection helps to explain why.

Cameron Knapp, the donor of this handsome La Gloria gramophone, is a keen collector and renovator of sound technology. He renovated this piece by replacing the La Gloria grille in the front, repairing the player and revarnishing the exterior. Cameron also donated a collection of records of the same era. These are made of shellac, which is heavier and more brittle than the vinyl records we know today.

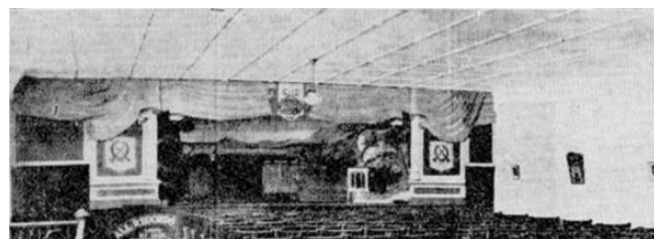
Cameron told us that he has always been fascinated by the transmission of sound. His hobby is repairing players so that old records, reels and tapes can be played to a new generation of listeners.

La Gloria Gramophones Ltd

According to MOTAT, La Gloria gramophones were designed and manufactured by William Henry Newcombe of Auckland in the early 20th century. Between 1918 and 1922, Newcombe filed several patents on improvements to the diaphragm, sound-box, and amplifier components of

these hornless 'talking-machines'. Newcombe developed several different shapes of the amplification chamber and tone arm of the gramophone. He also made improvements to the diaphragm by a unique layering of strong paper, fine woven material such as silk, and a layer of cork. Newcombe claimed these improvements allowed for more accurate and attractive reproduction of sound, specifically of the human voice and music. Newcombe established Newcombes Limited (later La Gloria Gramophones Ltd) offering high quality New Zealand-designed and made gramophones to the New Zealand market.

W White of Victoria Street, Cambridge, advertised these gramophones in 1927.



Papers Past: The Sun, 24 May 1930, p13

The above photograph shows the Recital Hall at La Gloria Gramophone Ltd at 155 (now 375) Karangahape Road. *K Road Heritage's* Facebook page explains how Newcombe sold his gramophones, records and radiograms, and also had a recital hall on the first floor where people could listen to records and recitals. It may also have been used as a dance venue. The firm operated its own radio station which later became 1ZB Radio.



THE SUN "ON THE AIR."—Mr. C. H. Pearson, of 1ZB station, Auckland, broadcasting late news from THE SUN to town and country listeners last evening.

Papers Past: The Sun, 14/6/1927, p16

Thanks to Cameron's donation, we can celebrate the work of Newcombe - a New Zealand innovator in the earliest days of sound recordings. This gramophone is just one part of our display on the history of music in Cambridge – *Our Sounds Our Spaces*.

