

Family History is still being written

One of the greatest privileges of working at the Cambridge Museum is that every object arrives with a story.

Sometimes it is a carefully wrapped family heirloom that has been treasured for generations. Sometimes it is a portrait, a photograph or a keepsake that someone can no longer bear to see hidden away in a cupboard. Whatever the object, the conversation almost always begins the same way: "Let me tell you about the person it belonged to."

That is because our museum is not only about taonga and artefacts. It is about people.

August is Family History Month, a time to reflect on the stories that connect us to those who came before. We recognise the importance of *whakapapa*. More than genealogy, whakapapa reminds us that our identities are shaped by the relationships between people, places and communities across generations.

Those connections are at the heart of what museums do.



Mya Kelly Tate, Jenni Rowarth, Aysha Taylor Tate, Tia Dyresen and Alan Rowarth, descendants of James and Miranda Taylor of Bardowie

Recently, we were gifted a vase that belonged to James and Miranda Taylor. Carefully preserved by the Rowarth family for generations, it has now found a permanent home in the Museum's collection. The Taylor family's contribution to Cambridge has been recognised in the recent naming of Bardowie Drive, after their family home.

We have been fortunate to receive a portrait of builder and businessman Fred Potts, painted by his granddaughter Patricia Bonnette. Potts helped shape the Cambridge we know today. Among the many landmarks he built were the Bowling Pavilion at the Domain, the Courthouse (now Cambridge Museum) and the Masonic and National hotels.



Michael Jeans, Linda Jones and her aunts with a portrait of their ancestor Fred Potts outside one of the many buildings he built in town

Alongside these are more recent additions. Telegrams celebrating the birth of a Cambridge baby in 1971, a 1980s video game, and even a brightly coloured 1970s lunch box which featured in one of our recent Mystery Object reels all remind us that today's memories are tomorrow's history. Museums are not simply about preserving the distant past. They are about recognising the significance of each generation's experiences before those stories are lost.

As Friends of the Museum, you understand that preserving history is more than collecting old things. It is about recording the lives, memories and experiences that have shaped Cambridge, whether a family has lived here for generations or arrived only recently. Together, those stories become the history of our community.

Perhaps this Family History Month is an opportunity to ask an extra question over a family photo album, open a box that has not been looked through for years, or simply listen a little longer to someone's memories. You never know which story or object might one day help interpret the town's history.

After all, family history is not just about looking back. It is also about deciding what we choose to pass on.

Elizabeth

A warm welcome to our new members

June Donkin, Tiaki Ormsby, Beverley Riley,
Suzanne Wilkinson, Murray Allison, Roger Mayo,
Grant Hewison, Gary Webber, Briar Smith, Stefanie Crawley



If Walls Could Talk

BY ELIZABETH HARVEY with thanks to Beverley Bell.

Walk down any Cambridge street and you will pass homes that have witnessed celebrations, tragedies, changing fashions and changing fortunes. Most reveal very little from the footpath. Behind an ordinary front door might be a Swedish name with an unexpected origin, a magnificent Venetian chandelier shipped halfway around the world, or a pair of stone lions that have welcomed visitors for almost a century.

The challenge, and the fun, is discovering how those stories fit together.

Over the past two years, volunteers at the Cambridge Museum have been researching the histories of many of the town's homes, businesses and public buildings as part of our Built Heritage Stories project. Building on earlier work by Dinah Holman, Eris Parker and Jennie Gainsford, today's volunteers have been piecing together the stories that transformed houses into homes and streets into communities.

The work has taken us through newspapers, survey plans, electoral rolls, photographs, family papers and countless other records. Sometimes the answers appear quickly. More often, one discovery simply raises another question.

One of the richest stories we have encountered came not from the Museum itself, but from family historian Beverley Bell.



1 Cook Street, dated 1914, just after the house was built

Following in the footsteps of her father Frank Bell, Beverley has spent years researching her family's history. When she completed her history of the Bell family home, Cederström, she generously shared it with the Museum so it could become part of the Built Heritage Stories collection.

Her research answered questions that had puzzled generations. Why does a Cambridge villa carry such a

distinctive Swedish name? How did the property evolve from land surveyed after the Waikato War into one of Cambridge's significant homes? How did road improvements permanently change the property by claiming part of Matilda Bell's beloved croquet lawn?



Excerpt from 1878 Survey Plan of Cambridge West, showing Lot 73
<https://kura.aucklandlibraries.govt.nz/digital/collection/maps/id/291>
NB: the street names have been added by us.

Along the way she uncovered delightful details. A spectacular Murano glass chandelier carefully brought home from Europe in 1939. A beautifully crafted model of St Andrew's Church displayed in the entrance hall. The familiar stone lions that still stand guard at the front gate.

It is these unexpected discoveries that make local history so rewarding. Every answer seems to lead somewhere new.

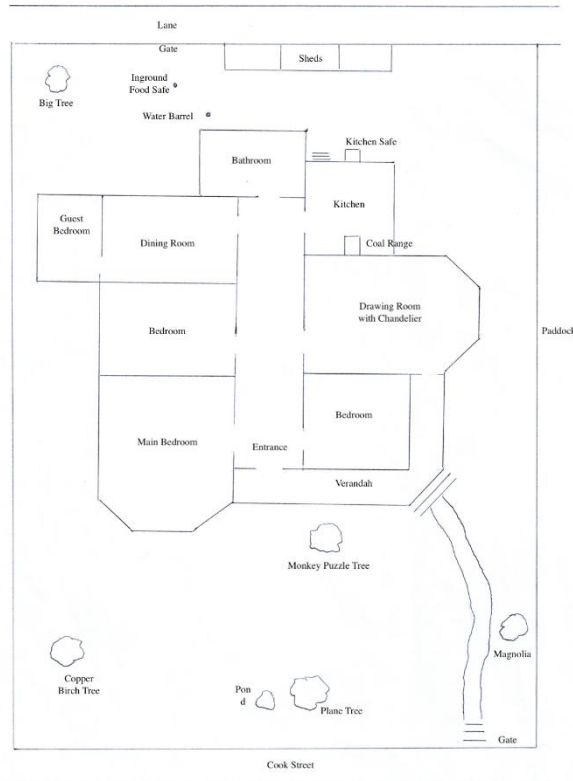
But even the most thorough documentary research has its limits. Official records tell us who owned a house. Memories tell us what it was like to live there.

To add another layer to the story, Beverley introduced us to her relatives Judy and Jonathan Green, whose childhood memories brought Cederström vividly back to life.

They remembered gleaming timber floors, ornate pressed-metal ceilings, toast cooked over the coal range, rainwater carefully collected for washing hair, and her grandmother Matilda sitting by the front window watching life unfold beyond the Waikato River.

Those memories are every bit as important as the dates and names recorded in official documents. They remind us that heritage is not simply about architecture; it is about the lives of the people inside.





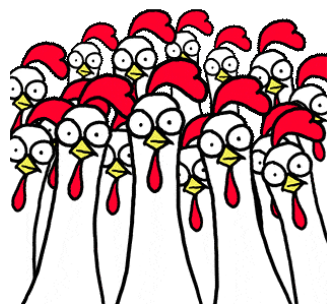
Floor Plan of 1 Cook Street, as remembered by Jonathan Green. Hand-drawn and not to scale. Supplied by Beverley Bell.

That is perhaps what has surprised us most during the Built Heritage Stories project. One family researches names and dates. Another remembers the stories that explain them. Volunteers uncover newspaper reports that nobody has read for generations. Old photographs identify a long-forgotten verandah or garden. Piece by piece, the picture becomes clearer.

It is history built through collaboration, curiosity and generous sharing.

Over the coming months, more Built Heritage stories will be added to the Cambridge Museum website, allowing readers to explore the histories hiding behind familiar façades.

You may discover that a house you have driven past for years has a story you never expected.



Better still, you may realise that your own family holds the missing piece of someone else's puzzle.

Taonga Travels to *Whakahokia!*



L-R: Rob Kear, Elizabeth Harvey, Sonny Karena, Rachael Davies, Maree Mills, Steven Jones, Haylee Alderson, Grant Davy, Harry Wilson. Photo: Karen Payne

This photograph captures a significant moment as three taonga from the Cambridge Museum collection began their journey to Te Whare Taonga o Waikato Museum & Gallery for its exhibition, *Whakahokia!*

Shown are the Museum's director Rachel Davies, curator Maree Mills, Collection Manager Haylee Alderson, Ngāti Koroki Kahukura kaumātua Harry Wilson and Ngāti Hauā kaumātua Sonny Karena. This followed a moving karakia that farewelled the taonga and recognised its safe transfer into the museum's care for their exhibition.

The palisade post and patu tuna were two of eleven archaeological items from the Te Miro area held by Cambridge Museum on behalf of Ngāti Hauā. It is believed that most came into the Museum's care through Cambridge Historical Society member and amateur archaeologist Bob Porter. He worked alongside professional archaeologists, including Waikato Museum's Stephen Eldon, during excavations at Te Miro in the late 1970s.

The ceremony was a powerful reminder of the Society's role as kaitiaki, guardians, of taonga on behalf of the communities to whom they belong so that stories can continue to be shared.

Cambridge Historical Society and Museum's contribution to *Whakahokia!* is an opportunity to see important taonga woven into a wider Waikato story.

Discover more about the *Whakahokia!* exhibition when Whare Taonga Waikato Museum and Art Gallery curator Maree Mills joins us as the guest speaker at the Cambridge Historical Society AGM on 17 September.

Details on the back page.

Elizabeth



New Accessions

Resource consent correspondence for 17 Hamilton Rd
Te Awa Lifecare Village Application Decision
La Gloria Gramophone
Victorian pillow shams and ice bucket from Masonic Hotel
Two cans of beer from "The Tavern" movie (empty)
"Some Old Waikato Days" by J Golden 1922
"Heart of Cambridge" promotional book 1986
Book: Military Service Francis Dickens Bell
Railway Enthusiasts Society pamphlet and train ticket 1964
Original photos of 1964 Borough Centenary
Book: Cambridge Bridge Club Golden Jubilee 2026
Jaycee pins, tags and ticket
Letter: W Souter & Sons
Dreco Varsity tape player
Craw collection: Bakelite shoe tools, parasol, gasoline
measure, Aunt Daisy handbook
Booklet: All Black Tour of South Africa 1960
Wedding dress bodice
Bassinet plus draperies
Portrait of Cambridge builder Fred Potts in oils
Lace collar
"Memoirs of a Museum Volunteer" by Margaret Clow
Gate hinge pin from the Cambridge Railway
Photos of dismantling of Hautapu Dairy Co chimney
Agricultural Club certificates: Leamington School
Cambridge Dairy logo patches
Annual reports for local dairy companies
Bush Hooker collection: wallpaper tools, Winkle's Wedding
card game
Arthur Paton's badges x3 - support groups for the blind
"The Human Condition" vinyl recording by Paul Turney
"The Wallflower" cassette recording by Andrew Johnstone
Photo: Oddfellow's Cricket Club 1939-40, CCBC trophy
Dingley Dell collection: QEII bunding 1954, morning suit,
woman's swimsuit, recipe book

Bardowie vase – Victorian (pictured below)



What's On

Cambridge History Circle: Discovering Family Stories at the Museum, Thursday 20 August, 2-3pm

Elizabeth and Karen share some of the family histories within the Museum. *RSVP by 17 August.*



U3A/CHS PARTNERSHIP LECTURE

Dr James Goodrich: *Odontology and a Marine: The Battle of Tarawa*. Tuesday, August 25, 2026 10.30 am at The Woolshed, Te Awa Lifecare Village.

RSVP by 14 August.



Dr James Goodrich is one of New Zealand's leading forensic odontologists. Drawing on experience from major disaster victim identification and international work identifying US Marines from the Battle of Tarawa, he will reveal how forensic dental science helps solve historical mysteries and return names to those lost in war. More details here:

https://cambridgemuseum.org.nz/u3a-te-oko_horo-history-series/



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY AGM followed by guest speaker Maree Mills, Curator at Te Whare Taonga o Waikato Museum and Art Gallery, Thursday 17 September held at the Cambridge Bridge Club, 14 Fort Street, 6.30pm
Maree Mills will share her experiences curating the new exhibition *Whakahokia!* opening later this year.



TOUR: St Peter's School with Janine Speedy

Monday 28 September beginning at 10 am.

RSVP by 21 September.

A guided tour of the school as it celebrates its 90th anniversary, followed by morning tea. Please note that the tour includes walking and the use of stairs.

