

Family History is still being written

Chairman's Report

This year marked the Cambridge Historical Society's 66th Annual Meeting, following our registration on 19 November 1959. At the AGM I asked whether anyone who had attended that inaugural meeting would please stand, although I did add that a wave of the hand or walking stick would be perfectly acceptable.

More seriously, I would like to thank everyone who has supported the Society and Cambridge Museum over the past year. Our members, volunteers, staff and Friends contribute an extraordinary amount of time, knowledge and practical support.

A special thank you goes to Bev and Bruce Dean, whose generosity funded the work on the Railway Gates, and to Cambridge Menzshed for contributing their time and expertise.

I am also pleased to introduce our 2026/2027 Committee: Jo Barnes (Secretary), Michael Gore (Treasurer), Lisa Meehan, Philip Moon, Jane West and Bronwen Byers.

At the AGM, our Treasurer, Michael Gore, outlined the Society's commitment to raising funds for an improved collection workspace.

Stephen Schollum



Museum Manager Elizabeth Harvey (right) at the Cambridge Historical Society's AGM, with guest speaker Maree Mills of Waikato Museum.
Photo: Michael Jeans

Museum Manager's Report

2025-2026 has been a strong year for the Cambridge Museum. We welcomed 6,560 visitors, created six new displays and delivered 32 events. Our volunteers contributed more than 900 hours, supporting everything from collections work and research to events and visitor engagement. Behind those numbers is a museum where people come not simply to look, but to participate, ask questions, share knowledge and make connections.

A great deal of work has also been happening behind the scenes. Our team, particularly Karen and Kate, has been

looking closely at the collection, strengthening the information attached to it and asking careful questions about what we hold and why. That work helps us to be more accountable for the collection entrusted to our care, while also preparing us for a future in which digital access and AI will increasingly shape how people discover and use museum collections.

Over the coming year, we will focus particularly on our photography archive, improving our collection facilities and developing Cambridge Museum more consciously as a destination.

These priorities are closely connected. A stronger and better understood collection gives us better stories to tell. Those stories strengthen our exhibitions, research, education and digital work, and give people more reasons to engage with, support and invest in their Museum.

We look forward to your visiting soon.



Karen Payne, Jane West and Jo Barnes celebrating ten years of service as staff at the Cambridge Museum. Photo: Michael Jeans

Elizabeth

A warm welcome to our new members

Lynley Allison, Beverley Bell, Susanne Dargaville,
Kathy King, Lisa Truttman, Rachel Posa



Lives well lived:

Rediscovering the Hewett Collection

Since its inception, the Cambridge Museum has frequently received large collections from family estates with every item requiring careful assessment. With limited staff resources, the Museum has sometimes accepted these collections *en bloc*, to be worked on when time allowed.

Our Collection Assessment project is now giving us that opportunity. Items in our Archive are being examined individually, researched and given the attention they deserve. The Hewett collection has been a particular highlight.

Farming at Roto-o-Rangi

The Hewett family story reaches back to the earliest years of European settlement in New Zealand. Ellen Hewett's voice is heard through her autobiography *Looking Back*¹ about her emigration to New Zealand in the 1850s, her marriage to James Duff Hewett and her early widowhood. Their son Charles married Jane, and had five children: Mildred, Audrey, Basil, William (Bill) and Cynthia.

The family moved to a farm in Roto-o-Rangi in the 1920s. When Cynthia Hewett passed away aged 91 in 2003, a collection of photos and memorabilia was donated to the Cambridge Museum. If we consider the objects in this collection with information in our research files, we get an idea of how the Hewett children lived, worked and passed their time.



CM3503/85: The Hewetts' Roto-o-Rangi home

Basil and Bill attended boarding school at Wanganui Collegiate. Eldest sister Mildred married Geoffrey Goodwin and moved to Lower Hutt in the 1920s. By the time World War II broke out, Basil and Bill were running the Roto-o-Rangi farm. They were successful enough to purchase an additional farm in Tauranga to plant eucalyptus trees. Both brothers soon left for Europe on active service. Bill was killed in 1942.



CM3503/102: William Upton Hewett

Why did the brothers plant eucalyptus trees in Tauranga? Their brother-in-law Geoffrey Goodwin had interests in forestry, and they would have seen it as a financially viable investment that would aid the development of New Zealand's infrastructure in the 1950s. The timber was durable,

stiff and strong, particularly ideal for posts, poles and heavy structural timbers, as well as wharves, jetties, bridges and rail sleepers.²



CM3503/30: Minhinnick cartoon dated 1948. The first plantation burned down while Basil was on active service overseas.

Audrey and Cynthia had returned to Roto-o-Rangi to look after the family farm while Basil and Bill were serving overseas. Basil, Audrey and Cynthia continued to live there until around the mid-1970s when they moved to Cambridge.



CM3368: Lid of a croquet equipment box c.1920s found at the Hewetts' farm by the Garrett family who purchased the property

Pastimes and hobbies

The Hewetts had a wide range of pastimes to keep them busy. Basil was good at sport, particularly tennis and golf. They enjoyed fishing and sailing, staying in bachs with friends and family.

¹ A copy is held in the Museum's collection CM4674

² NZFI, Nicholas and Millen, 2012





CM3503/70: Basil (right) with a friend on a successful day's fishing.



Above: CM3503/113: Photo op with the Captain

Below: CM3503/115: Fancy a dip, anyone?

Basil travelled to and from Europe, and his 1950s photographs of life on board ship are telling – from the rock star status of the Captain, to an onboard swimming pool which looks like it was put together as an afterthought by the crew.



Along with the photographs are unique and quirky objects, such as:

- a dance card for a 1920s ball held for the future King of England on which one of the Hewett sisters wrote "Second night - I danced with HRH Prince of Wales 28/4/1920".
- a handout advertising one of Audrey's Dancing Classes for Children, printed when she was living in Rotorua pre-World War II.
- a disc recording amateur solo singers from 1946
- "Susie's Bath Night" – a naughty cartoon tame by today's standards, and
- a 1950s pin-up calendar.

Preserving native flora and fauna

Perhaps the most enduring part of the Hewett story is the family's relationship with the land.

The Hewett family developed a commitment to regenerating native forest and wetlands. In 1991, Basil and Cynthia paid tribute to their brother by funding the **William Upton Hewett Memorial Reserve** of 242ha just north of

Whangārei. The **Basil Hewett Memorial Reserve** is 360ha of mature hill country forest between Te Kuiti and Awakino, and the **Cynthia Hewett Memorial Reserve** is 90ha of regenerating forest eight kilometres north of Thames.

According to their great-nephew Jeremy Goodwin, Basil and Cynthia were among the first people to covenant part of their land which had native bush on it.



CM3503/57: Basil at one of his tree plantations, Nov 1940



CM3503/124: From left, Cynthia, Audrey, Basil and Mildred

Mildred and Audrey passed away within two years of each other in the 1980s. Basil died in 1998 aged 96 and Cynthia, in 2003 aged 91. Perhaps some of our readers remember them?

Karen Payne

*The family's legacy continues through the **B and C Hewett Charitable Trust**, a philanthropic trust that supports environmental and community enhancements. Among its work has been the restoration of the organ at St Andrew's Anglican Church in Cambridge, and a native planting project at the 6th hole of the Cambridge Golf Club.*

It is clear that the Hewett Collection's story is not confined to the Museum shelves. The family's interest in land, planting and conservation continues to resonate today.



What's On

LISTEN TO VINCENT O'MALLEY



"Defining Conflict - The New Zealand Wars"
Tuesday 13 October 2026
Raleigh Street Christian Centre, 24-26 Raleigh Street
\$10 FOR CHS FRIENDS

Hear one of New Zealand's leading historians bring the Waikato Wars to life, connecting people, places and events with the history that continues to shape our region today. Book here: <https://www.u3acambridge.org.nz/13th-oct-registration/>.

U3A/CHS PARTNERSHIP LECTURE



Rod Smith, *From Galway to the Waikato War - A peerage family's connections*

What connects an Irish peerage family with the Waikato Land Wars? Family historian and writer Rod Smith stumbled across that connection while researching his latest book, *Clancarty*. Join us on **Tuesday 27 October 2026 10.30 am at The Woolshed, Te Awa Lifecare Village**. RSVP by 17 October.

MATANGI FACTORY SITE TOUR

with owner Harry Mowbray.



Mr Mowbray will share the fascinating history of the site, tracing its key milestones through to the present day. You will also have the opportunity to hear about his vision for its future and see the progress already underway to develop it as a destination.

Join us on **Saturday 21 Nov, 11 am**. RSVP by 16 November

KA WHAWHAI TONU FILM SCREENING

Friday 23 October | 6.30pm | Regent Theatre, Te Awamutu

Ka Whawhai Tonu is a historical drama set during the New Zealand Wars in 1864, focused on Ōrākau and told largely through te reo Māori with English subtitles. *Rated M, suitable for mature audiences 16+*

Free tickets via the Regent Theatre website, with bookings opening Friday 16 October at 1pm, Regent Theatre. For group bookings, please contact the Te Awamutu Museum Team in advance: 07 872 0085 or museum@waipadc.govt.nz

New Accessions

Map of Matamata County 1971

Covid-19 Signage for Museum

Cambridge postcards

Cambridge Chamber Music Festival programme 11-13 September 2026

L G Olson Ltd, colour print of trucks loading carbonettes - digital file

Manual pump insecticide sprayer from Dutch company Geesa

Astro Wars Grandstand Leisure computer game 1981, and 1980s portable TV

Vest Pocket Kodak with brown leather case and five photos of Sid Peppercorn and family

Cambridge Transport Ltd Minute books x2, advertising plates x2, negatives of trucks

St John's Ambulance Associated minutes 3/9/1915

Photographs of building of Cambridge Swimming Baths and Hague family home, pine plantation

Reminiscences of Sid Craw on Cambridge neighbours

Peppercorn Postcard Collection

Leamington Domain

Board Annual Accounts and Reports 1948-1954

Aerial photograph of SPND office and sheds, Cambridge railway

White's aerial photo of Horahora Hydro

CM4873/1: Vest Pocket Kodak
Autograph Camera c1920s

