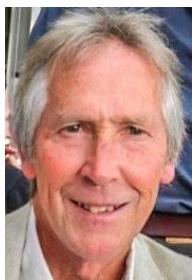


President’s Report

As we continue with the plans and fundraising for our new museum, one man will be greatly missed, and he is **Chris Currie**. I expect sadly that not many of you will have had the opportunity of meeting Chris (pictured). He has been a rock in providing us with advice in planning the museum and has supplied us preliminary sketches for potential museum displays, focusing on the pre-European and early European settlement of our District.



An excerpt from Chris’s obituary in the Rotorua Daily Post reads: *Chris died peacefully at his Cambridge home on Saturday 29 December 2018 after a courageous battle with cancer. He was regarded as one of New Zealand’s most experienced exhibition designers. His peers described him as “a man in a league of his own”, a great story teller*

through the way he arranged the words, the pictures and the objects; saying that the museum industry will never find another like Chris, he leaves a lasting legacy to our museum and art world.

Chris is well known for his museum design work at Rotorua, Waipu, Mangawhai and Ashburton. His last project was the new museum at Waikaia, Southland which opened in December last year. At the time of his death Chris was working on museum designs for Cambridge and also Stewart Island. For a short newsclip on Chris’s last work at Waikaia, go to: <https://www.stuff.co.nz/southland-times/news/features/108914687/the-little-town-that-could--waikaia-opens-its-17m-museum>.

Our thoughts are with his partner Lyndall, who moved with Chris to Cambridge late last year.

We are now moving into the exciting phase of fundraising for our new museum, and from time to time we will be seeking help from all our Society members. We’d love to hear from you if you have time to assist as we plan future activities.

Grant Middlemiss
President

ADDRESS LABEL FOR DELIVERY OF HARD COPIES (ON REQUEST)

Museum Manager’s Report

Chelsea Tairi has returned to the Cambridge Museum. Chelsea began volunteering here in 2009, soon becoming a casual Museum Host and eventually the Museum Assistant, before leaving for three years to work at the Waikato Coalfields Museum in Huntly as Registrar.



Chelsea (pictured) is working towards a Bachelor of Arts Degree, majoring in History with Massey University, and hopes to sit the Diploma of Museum Studies when this is complete.

Keen to work closer to home, and with strong links to the Cambridge area as a descendent of Ngati Koroki-Kahukura, Chelsea relished the opportunity to come back to the Museum and be a part of the team in Cambridge. Staff are busy at present inventoring the collection, and Chelsea is providing valuable support in her position as Museum Assistant.

On display in the eight-drawer cabinet in the Gallery are artefacts found during the archaeological dig that took place at the site of the Star Redoubt in 2010. A new activity has been devised for children based on this display

Matthew Harms has given us a copy of his 2018 PhD thesis *Culture and Collaborative Conservation? Inter-cultural Difference and the Maungatautari Project*. **Jenny Cave** has donated eight books including the two volume set *Landmarks of Tainui-Nga Tohu o Tainui, The Great adventure ends: New Zealand and France on the Western Front* and *Māori paintings by Gottfried Lindauer from the Partridge Collection* along with books on photographic history and horse racing in New Zealand. We may be able to lend them out on short term loan to Society members.

The Society has recently joined the National Oral History Association of New Zealand (NOHANZ) and we have copies of their journal and newsletters if you are interested in reading these and finding out about oral history projects.

Kathryn Parsons
Museum Manager

WANTED: PLAN CABINETS

If you have a plan cabinet that you no longer need we would be very grateful to receive it for storing maps, plans and large format publications such as posters and newspaper supplements. Please contact me at the museum if you can help.



REECE DISCOMBE

RACING CAR DRIVER &
UNDERWATER EXPLORER



Reece Discombe was a racing car driver who became a leading salvage expert specialising in undersea operations. He was one of the first divers in the Southern Hemisphere to use the aqualung.

Early life

In 1919, Reece Discombe was born in Cambridge on 17 February. He attended Hautapu Primary School. He started life as a motor mechanic. He attended Hamilton Tech, and worked in the sawmills around Taupo in the days of steam.

Early reports of Reece Discombe in the Waikato Independent in 1938, when he was 19 years old, show that he was fearless on the road. He was involved in two road accidents: one where his breakdown truck overturned near the Cambridge Raceway (trying to avoid another vehicle), and another when he broke his leg in a motorcycle accident as a pillion passenger.

Reece's wife Jean once told of when they met at a wartime dance. "It was a disaster," she joked. "There were seven or eight of us in a party. The handsome chaps walked in – and I got the short, fat one." "I'm built for comfort, not speed," Discombe agreed.

He was manpowered out of the Army to repair ships which had been hit by torpedoes. During that time, he took on car racing, becoming New Zealand's champion midget car racer at Speedway in 1948-49. He received a contract to compete in Australia, but after racing continually at night time for nine months, he retired from the sport. Around this time, he settled in Vanuatu where he and Jean raised four daughters.

In 1958, Discombe made one of the major Pacific discoveries of the century. With three companions, he relocated the wreck of one of **La Pérouse's** two ships, lost in the Santa Cruz Islands in 1788.

To top this success, Discombe became the first man to discover the remains of *La Boussole*, La Pérouse's second ship, lying in over 30m of water near the reef at Vanikoro.

La Pérouse: the French "Captain Cook"

In 1785, La Pérouse (pictured) was appointed by French King Louis XVI to lead an expedition around the world. The expedition's aims were to correct and complete maps of the area, establish trade contacts, open new maritime routes and enrich French science and scientific collections. His ships were *L'Astrolabe* and *La Boussole*.



He explored Chile, Easter Island, Hawaii, Alaska, California, East Asia, Japan, Russia and Samoa, before arriving in Australia on 24 January 1788. He took the opportunity to send journals, charts and letters back to Europe with the British merchant ship *Alexander*.

On 10 March, the French expedition left New South Wales bound for the Solomons. La Pérouse and his crew were never seen by Europeans again.

Discovery

In 1826, Irish sea captain **Peter Dillon**, found enough evidence to piece together the events of the tragedy. He bought some swords in Tikopia. He made enquiries and found that they came from nearby Vanikoro, where two big ships had broken up years earlier. Dillon sailed to Vanikoro where he found cannonballs, anchors and other evidence of the remains of ships. He brought these artefacts back to Europe where they were identified as belonging to *L'Astrolabe*. Dillon was awarded the Cross of the Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, 10,000 francs and a pension of 4,000 francs annually for life.

Peter Dillon was notorious in New Zealand in the 1830s for selling muskets and powder to Māori, in exchange for flax, pigs and potatoes. Archdeacon Brown blamed Dillon for much bloodshed between warring Maori tribes. He wrote that Mr Dillon styled himself as "French consul" but engaged in "unconsul-like" work.

To read about the probable fate of La Pérouse and his men, go to Wikipedia and search for Jean-François de Galaup, comte de Lapérouse.

(cont. on next page)



The Discovery of La Boussole

In 1958, an expedition visited the site of the wreck of *L'Astrolabe*. Reece Discombe had a good knowledge of the site. Having interviewed the inhabitants of Vanikoro and the last employees of the Kaori Timber Company, who had discovered objects which came from the remains of a ship, he was convinced that the southwest reef was where *La Boussole* lay. In February 1964 he returned to the site with the French Resident Commissioner in Port-Vila, who confirmed that items discovered at this new site were indeed from one of La Pérouse's ships.

In 1964, Reece Discombe led a major French Navy expedition to the site of what proved to be the place where *La Boussole* broke up and sank in May or June 1788.

A few years later, General de Gaulle (pictured) visited Vila as President of France and personally invested Discombe with the insignia of officer of the National Order of Merit, France's civilian equivalent to the Legion of Honour. The General was a bit miffed, though, that the fate of one of France's most celebrated explorers had been revealed by a mere New Zealander. "It's a pity you're not a Frenchman", he said as he hung the ribbon around Discombe's neck.



Life in Port Vila

Reece Discombe's participation in the search for the wrecks of numerous warships, lost aeroplanes and the bodies of servicemen led to his being particularly well-known and honoured by the US Navy. He became a correspondent of the famous Missing in Action Hawaii group, which specialised in searches.

According to a report published about him in the Waikato Independent in 1963: "*Habitually clad in singlet and shorts, he has the air of a happy man. When he's not making an underwater survey of dumped US war materials, or patching up disabled cargo ships, you may find him making a documentary for the BBC, or making a film record of fast-disappearing customs and dances.*

At home, he spends most days in his engineering shop. He rides around town on the bare board seat of a vehicle that is little more than four wheels and an engine. 'No crazy driver can damage this,' Discombe grins."

Reece Discombe died on 2 June 2007, aged 88.

*From the files of the Cambridge Museum
Visit <https://laperouseheadland.com> for more on this story*

Cambridge Raceway Centenary Meeting

The Cambridge Raceway held a Centenary meeting on 11 January 2019, with donation proceeds towards the proposed extension to the Cambridge Museum.

The meeting was well supported, and most enjoyable, with lots of interest in children's activities and Fashion in the Field. The theme was 1920s – and plenty turned up in character.

Our very own Museum Manager, **Kathryn Parsons** was shortlisted for the Fashion in the Field prize, and impressed with her bright turquoise confection and the use of her lognette. Here she is pictured among the finalists.



Among the many activities for children on the night was a colouring competition. The entries are currently on show in the entranceway to the Museum, including the winning entries from 6 year old **Denim Roper**, 7 year old **Luke Williamson** and 11 year old **Ivy Chiplin**.

The Museum has paid tribute to the Centenary with a display of ephemera from 1940 through to 1979.

Upcoming Event

Māori and early-European History of Kairangi

A personal tour of Bill Garland's farm at Dillon Road, Kairangi

Visit the site and hear the stories

Saturday 30 March at 9am-12noon
Meet outside the Cambridge Museum
Call us at 827 3319 to register



Joseph McCafferty of the Armed Constabulary

The **Armed Constabulary** was formed in Cambridge in 1867, after the passing of the Armed Constabulary Act disbanded the Waikato Militia. Its general duties were keeping communications open and making roads, keeping the peace, law and order, guard duties, as well as digging gardens, wheeling gravel, fencing paddocks and planting trees. Approximately 22 men were stationed in Cambridge.

In 1869-1870 the force was increased to 200 because of the presence of Te Kooti and in April 1870 Lieutenant-Colonel William Lyon (pictured) took command of the New Zealand Armed Constabulary which took over from the Auckland Provincial Police. Its first job was to repair the telegraph communications between Cambridge and Te Awamutu, and Cambridge and Hamilton.



William Lyon

From 1877-1886 the New Zealand Constabulary Force had jurisdiction. The new Bill enabled the constabulary "to act as constables in and throughout the colony, for putting down rebellion, quelling disturbances, preserving the peace, preventing robberies and other felonies and apprehending offenders against the peace."

The Waikato Times of 4 September 1880 reported, "The constabulary are doing good work on the streets in Cambridge. Fort Street has been very much improved within the past few weeks. It has been levelled and a number of the force is at present busily engaged in laying on gravel. Alpha Street west is also undergoing a change. This street has for years sadly been in want of improvement and the present alterations in the level of Victoria Street renders it necessary that something should be done at once.

"Although many of the back streets are sadly in want of attention it must be satisfactory to know that the work of improvement is steadily going forward. The engineer Mr Hoskins is just now taking levels of that part of Victoria Street between the English church and the Government paddock with a view to forming a permanent roadway as well as for the purpose of perfecting the drainage arrangements.

"The circumstance of the newly planted trees being on the present road induces this step more directly, but the work has long been regarded as one of the greatest importance.

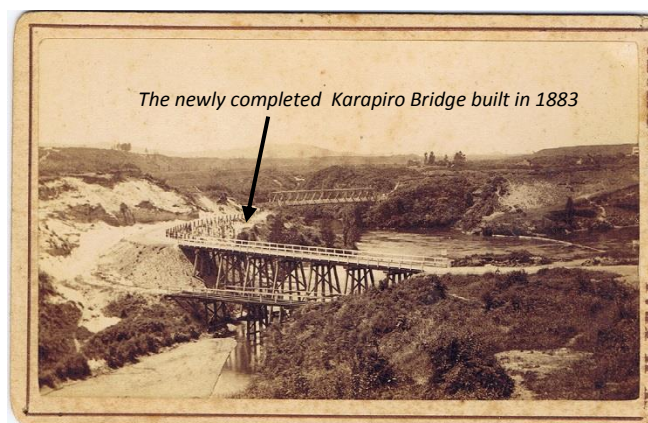
"At one time it was almost decided to carry the surface water lying on the roads in the upper portion of the township into a huge well which was to have had subterraneous communication with the lagoon, but the scheme now almost to be adopted is, to our mind, much to be preferred.

"It is also intended to form Lake Street from Mr Carter's stable to Whitaker Terrace, thus affording additional means of access to the Domain. When the Domain Board shall have planted this portion of their trust, it will be a very desirable neighbourhood."

During 1883 the Armed Constabulary force worked on the Cambridge cemetery, the Karapiro bridge, the town square and Thornton, Rotorua and Oxford Roads.

Joseph McCafferty was a member of the Armed Constabulary in Cambridge at this time. Very little is known about him, but we can glean some details of his final days from a letter dated 11 April 1883 sent by Lt Col Lyon to McCafferty's sister, Mrs French. The original letter has recently been donated to the Cambridge Museum by Leonie Molloy, his great-great-grandniece.

The letter describes Mr Cafferty's work in building the new Karapiro Bridge (pictured), at which time he suffered a splinter in his hand near the base of the thumb. He took little notice of it at the time, but it refused to heal and medical aid was called in. It appears he died of blood poisoning, although the letter also mentions that he was suffering from acute bronchitis. He died at 10.30pm on 22 March 1883. The funeral took place two days later and was attended by the Constabulary and many civilians.



His estate, handed to his father Patrick on 14 May 1883, consisted of one Savings Bank book with £6 in credit, one pocket book containing six photographs and one envelope "containing letters, etc". His constable's kit was later sold at auction, with the proceeds added to his estate.

