

Protecting, preserving & celebrating our heritage



Summer 2025



*Marco Creemers and Ryan Sanders with their Frenchies Jake and George,
at Earnsclough Castle*

Published by the Central Otago Heritage Trust
www.heritagecentralotago.org.nz

ABOUT US

The Central Otago Heritage Trust, established in 2008, comprises 35 member groups across the heritage community. The role of the Trust is to represent the collective interests of these groups in protecting, preserving, and celebrating our unique heritage. It is governed by trustees nominated and elected by members.

The Trust is the founding organisation of **Heritage Central Otago**. Our community-based initiatives are represented under the Heritage Central Otago identity.

OUR TRUSTEES

Marco Creemers, Jenny Dixon, Russell Garbutt, Kate Goodfellow, Warwick Hawker, David Hurd, Pene Morris, and Ross Naylor. Ann Rodgers (CODC Liaison). Ann Cowie (Heritage Coordinator).

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Cover image courtesy of Carmen Triisa

HERITAGE MATTERS

FROM THE TRUST

It's hard to believe we are already into December and Christmas is just a couple of weeks away. Another year has passed by in the blink of an eye. On the plus side, it's good to finally see some summery weather after a decidedly average spring!

It's been an eventful year for Heritage in Central Otago. The Riverside Park in Alexandra is taking shape, creating a welcoming public space looking out over the convergence of the Clutha and Manuherekia Rivers.



In Cromwell, work is progressing well on the replica Chinese village, which will be a fantastic community asset to assist in drawing visitors and sparking great conversations about the region's early Chinese settlers. And, after years of planning, the new Cromwell Museum in the Community Centre isn't far away. We are looking forward to this new museum space and community facility opening in the new year.

The fire that destroyed the Roxburgh cinema was a huge loss – not just of a building, but of the many memories that were created and shared by the community who used it. And, like many districts, some of our local heritage buildings are facing uncertain futures. Rising costs for maintenance and earthquake strengthening mean some difficult decisions are ahead, but these discussions are also sparking new ideas about community ownership, partnerships, and adaptive reuse. Perhaps the revised earthquake codes will bring some much-needed clarity.

Across all of this, one thing is clear: Heritage in Central Otago is alive and evolving. There's a huge amount of passion and pride out there, and a lot of interesting and useful work is being done by large numbers in our communities – from local volunteers documenting mining sites and early pastoral stories, to exhibitions and talks celebrating our region's creativity and history. It has been particularly rewarding and exciting to see those within the Heritage sector working together much more collaboratively.

Thanks to everyone who has contributed time, energy, and enthusiasm over the past year. Heritage work isn't easy but it's deeply rewarding, and it only happens because of people who care. Here's to another year of working together to keep Central Otago's stories strong and shared.

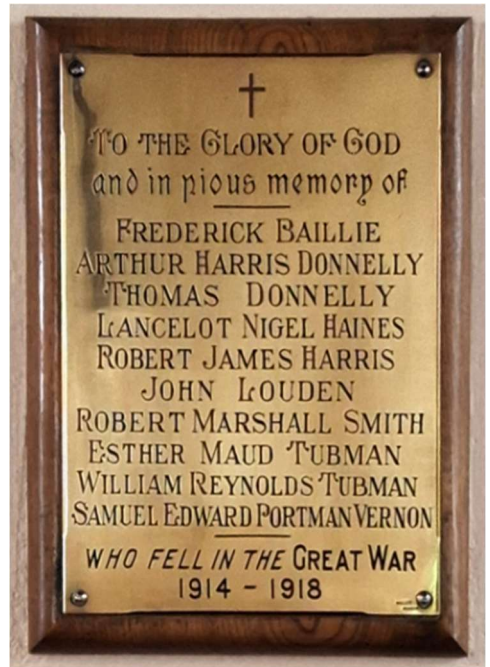
Russell Garbutt – Trustee, Central Otago Heritage Trust

CELEBRATING OUR HERITAGE

REMEMBERING ESTHER MAUD TUBMAN 22/517 (1887 – 1918)

On the east wall inside Roxburgh's St James Anglican Church is a brass plaque honouring the names of nine men and one woman who fell in the Great War. Recently, curiosity led me to research the history behind the name of that one woman.

Esther Maud Tubman was born in Moa Flat in 1887 and was the fourth of six children born to Irish early settlers Edward and Jane Tubman. Her father died in 1906. She trained as a nurse at Dunedin Hospital and passed her state exams in 1913. After completing her midwifery and infant care qualifications at Dunedin's St Helens Maternity and Karitane-Harris hospitals, she worked as a visiting nurse attached to Dunedin Hospital's tuberculosis department; a district nurse; a private nurse in various parts of the country; and was the matron of Denniston Hospital on the West Coast.



*Brass plaque
St James Anglican Church, Roxburgh
Source: Stephanie Sommers*

Her brother, William Reynold Tubman (the youngest family member), enlisted as a private in the Otago Infantry Regiment in January 1917 and was killed in action at Passchendaele, nine months later, on 12 October. He was 26. (His name is on the brass plaque beneath Esther's.)

In June 1918, Esther enlisted in the New Zealand Army Nursing Service. On 10 July, she departed from Wellington on the troopship HMNZT Tahiti. The Tahiti was built to hold 650 passengers and crew, but on this voyage, she was carrying 1,117 troops and 100 support staff and crew.

On 22 August, the Tahiti met up with her convoy at Freetown in Sierra Leone, West Africa. Upon arrival, they received reports that the second wave of the Great Influenza Pandemic had reached Freetown, and those aboard the Tahiti were prevented from disembarking. The Tahiti had docked near HMS Mantua, a British armed merchant cruiser carrying 364 Royal Navy personnel and passengers. The

Mantua had departed influenza-stricken Devonport on 1 August, and by the time she docked in Freetown on 14 August, 124 people were ill. Despite being under strict quarantine, the Mantua hosted a meeting of all the convoy captains and wireless operators, and both ships used local labour to refuel them with coal. These actions were most likely responsible for spreading the virus to those aboard the Tahiti and the civilian population of Freetown.



Esther Maud Tubman

Source: livesofthefirstworldwar.iwm.org.uk

The convoy of 14 ships left Freetown, bound for Plymouth, England, on 26 August. This was also the date when the first influenza cases were admitted to the Tahiti's hospital. Within three days, more than 800 people, including the medical personnel, were sick. Staff and facilities were overwhelmed as the number of incapacitated rapidly exceeded the available hospital beds and supplies. The outbreak's magnitude made quarantining the infected impossible. Eventually, 90% of those aboard were afflicted.

Burials at sea began immediately, and by the time the Tahiti reached Plymouth, on 10 September, 78 people had died; another nine died

ashore. The situation was so severe that special trains were sent to Plymouth to transport the ill to influenza hospitals. (The Tahiti's 7% death toll was more than the entire New Zealand rate.)

Esther was admitted to No. 3 New Zealand General Hospital in Codford, Wiltshire. Her condition deteriorated, and she was transferred to an isolation hospital in Salisbury. On 18 September, Esther entered into Eternal Life at the age of 31. She was given a military funeral and buried in Tidworth Military Cemetery.

From the Dunedin Evening Star, 26 September: *It is very difficult for the sorrowing relatives and friends of Sister Esther Maud Tubman to realise that she, who left these shores in the very best of health with the 40th Reinforcements, can never return to New Zealand.*

... Former patients, including many of our brave soldier boys, can testify to her capability and efficiency. If ever a woman was born for nursing, she certainly was. She had the nursing instinct – that ever-present impulse to benefit the sick and the suffering – and her greatest happiness was in actively doing good. Nurse Tubman was thoroughly well-trained in all the branches of her calling. She typified the genuine nurse in never being dismayed nor discouraged by any danger, or hardship, or unpleasant duty. She had that strong quiet nature that seemed to inspire her patients with the desire to get well in order simply to please her.

It is one of the sad tragedies of this war that death has taken its toll of splendid women who went to the front to nurse our wounded soldiers. From a high sense of duty, Sister Tubman volunteered her services, and now death has claimed her. She has given her life for her country.

[Sixteen New Zealand nurses died while in active service during WWI.]

Tidworth Military Cemetery in Wiltshire contains the graves of 99 men and one woman who served with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force and fell in the Great War: **That one woman is Esther Maud Tubman.**

Story by Stephanie Sommers



SAINT BATHANS
VILLAGE FETE
STEP BACK IN TIME

LIVING HERITAGE DAY
SATURDAY
17 JANUARY
10.00AM TO 4.00PM

TICKETS \$10
STBATHANS.NZ
FREE FOR UNDER 18

The organisers are still looking for artisans to demonstrate their heritage crafts!
Please get in touch at stbathansvillagefete@gmail.com

BUSY TIMES FOR UPPER CLUTHA HISTORY SOCIETY

The Upper Clutha History Society has been busy this year! In January, we launched our new website and social media channels for Wānaka History. The website has continued to grow, with an extensive *Timeline* feature, over 50 stories, 16 biographies, and over 250 images uploaded throughout the year.

We launched *Audio Stories* on our website in October, publishing over 100 audio clips organised into topics, and 31 storyteller pages with longer interviews. This achievement is thanks to our ongoing Oral History Project, which has been many years in the making. The launch of *Audio Stories* was marked by a well-attended celebration that included our incredible interviewers, interviewees, and members of our community. We are excited to see these stories available for the community to enjoy.

In January, we installed the first Wānaka History plaques at the Wānaka Hotel and Queensberry Inn. We have since installed plaques at St Columba's Church, the old Police Precinct on Dunmore Street, the White Star Garage, the White Star Hotel, and the Olympic Hall sites on Ardmore Street. We are currently working with Queenstown Lakes District Council to install another five plaques in Wānaka, and we are planning for more. These plaques mark historical sites and include QR codes leading to our website, where visitors can learn more about the region.

Our quarterly newsletter, 'Those Were the Days', includes stories about the people and places of our past. *Summer 2025* will be the 32nd issue. Anyone is welcome to sign up to our mailing list. You can do this on our website (see QR code below).

All our achievements this year have been made possible because of the dedicated volunteers of the Upper Clutha History Society and our funders: Central Lakes Trust, Otago Community Trust, Queenstown Lakes District Council, Graham & Olive West Trust, and Wānaka Masonic Lodge.

Visit our website by following the QR code, or you can follow us on Instagram and Facebook @WānakaHistory



UCHS President Ed Waddington opening the speeches at the Audio Stories Launch, October 2025

UNEARTHING THE STORY BENEATH ST BATHANS

Back in the 1870s, Scottish geologist Alexander McKay made an extraordinary discovery while visiting the goldfields along the Manuherekia River. As miners gouged out the hillside to create what is now Blue Lake at St Bathans, they unknowingly revealed fossil-bearing layers hidden beneath the gold-bearing gravels.

Fast-forward to the early 2000s, when Dr Paul Scofield picked up the story. His work began at two nearby sites – one on the bank of the Manuherekia River, and the other at Mata Creek. There among the clay and pebbles, the traces of a vanished world began to reappear.

If you scrape into the river and stream banks in just the right places, you'll find a thin clay layer, about 5 cm thick, streaked with fine pebbles. That's where the 14-million-year-old gold lies. A keen eye and a hand lens will reveal the tiny black glint of fossilised fish bones embedded in the clay.



*Dr Paul Scofield
Source: Canterbury Museum*

Paul's process of uncovering these fossils is somewhat industrial; it starts with a big digger, which carves a deep square pit through the thick layers of gravel and alluvium. Then comes the delicate part. The operator needs to follow an uneven, tilting seam of freshwater mussel shells, which is only a few centimetres thick. Underneath this is a dense, blue-grey clay 5 cm thick. This is the bed of the ancient Lake Manuherekia.

Next, the material – as much as four to six tonnes at a time – is wet-sieved down to about 100 kg of fine sediment. This is dried and rinsed again, leaving behind the fossilised bones. Experts around the world then begin the meticulous task of identifying which species each fragment once belonged to.

What has been preserved depends entirely on the geochemistry of the site. This means there's no single place where fossils of animals, fish, and plants are all found

together. Each site adds its own piece to the jigsaw of New Zealand's ancient landscape.

Today, New Zealand has only a handful of significant terrestrial fossil sites, and none from the time of the dinosaur extinction 66 million years ago. However, three remarkable locations from around 14 million years ago tell us much about life on land during that era:

- Foulden Maar – a volcanic site preserving plants, insects, and fish captured during eruptions
- Bannockburn – rich in plant fossils and some insects, once part of the Lake Manuhereikia system
- St Bathans – famous for its fish and animal fossils from Lake Manuhereikia

Lake Manuhereikia was vast and stretched from what we now know as the Waitaki Valley, through Central Otago to the Nevis Valley, and bounded to the west by the Southern Alps. As the land rose from the sea, water pooled in the valleys, forming a lake or possibly a network of lakes. Some of these, especially those closest to the coast, may have been saline.

The remains of an impressive selection of bones were washed into the lake and eventually deposited on the lakebed. Fossils show that about 14 million years ago, the area was home to: crocodiles (2 species), bats (9–10

species), skinks and geckos (6 species), tuatara (1 species), ducks (10 species), rails – wading birds of the family Rallidae, typically found in wetlands, marshes, and dense vegetation – (2 species), pigeon (1 species), parrots (2 species), wrens (1 species, and this one identified from a bone just 3 mm long!), songbirds (14



Fossil preparator Al Mannering (left) and Dr Paul Scofield at the St Bathans dig

Source: Canterbury Museum

species), a New Zealand currawong (1 species), six mystery mammal bones not belonging to bats, moa and kiwi relatives, and even a flamingo-like bird. And, as you'd expect from an ancient lakebed, plenty of freshwater fish. To date, 17 species have been found – all from fish families that still exist today.

A final surprise came in the form of around 20 tiny seashells thought to be relics of the Oligocene period – 23 to 34 million years ago. These were washed out of rocks long since eroded.

One mystery remains: in all the bones and shells found so far, there's been no sign of eels. Not yet, anyway. Perhaps they'll turn up in the next bucket of mud from St Bathans waiting to add one more piece to the ancient puzzle of Central Otago's past.



The St Bathans Dig Site

Source: Canterbury Museum

Story by Rach Baxter, based on Dr Paul Scofield's talk, *Two Decades of Fossil Discovery in the Māniototo*, at the Haehaeata Natural Heritage Trust AGM in September.

VISITING CENTRAL OTAGO MUSEUMS THIS SUMMER

We are lucky here in Central Otago to have five fantastic local museums with excellent displays. As you travel throughout Central this summer, why not stop in and check out some of these local gems, which are supported by passionate volunteers whose incredible efforts help keep our history alive.

Alexandra: Central Stories Museum and Art Gallery, 21 Centennial Ave

Open: Daily 10:00am – 4:00pm

Closed: 25 December

Late night: Friday 19 December open until 8:00pm. Santa will visit 5:30pm – 7:30pm

Clyde: Clyde Historical Museum, 5 Blyth Street – *see also page 15*

Open: Tuesday to Sunday 1:00pm – 4:00pm

Closed: 25 December

Cromwell: Cromwell Museum, 47 The Mall

Open: Monday to Friday 10:00am – 4:00pm, Saturday and Sunday 11:00am – 3:00pm

Closed: 25 & 26 December and 1 January

Naseby: Maniototo Early Settlers Museum, 3 Earne Street

Open from 13 December. Wednesdays 1:00pm – 4:00pm, Thursday to Sunday 10:30am – 4:00pm

Closed: 25 to 28 December and 1 & 2 January

Call-outs on request: Please call 027 476 7876

Roxburgh: Teviot District Museum, 11 Abbotsford Street, and the Lodge Museum, 77 Scotland Street

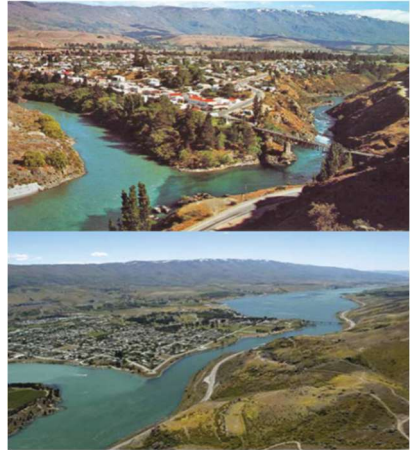
Open: Saturdays and Sundays 2:00pm – 4:00pm

Call-outs on request: Please call Annette (027 446 8210) or Barbara (027 442 8291)

WHAT'S IN A NAME – CROMWELL

Before Māori hunted and gathered food at the junction of two ancient fast-flowing alpine rivers, and long before a gold rush town was born there, the land was inhabited by many native palm-like trees. Māori named the rivers Mata-Au and Kawarau and the trees *tī kōuka*. They referred to the area as *Tirau* – the place of many *tī kōuka*. The first Europeans, who reached this area in the 1850s, depended on Māori knowledge and guidance, and they referred to *tī kōuka* as cabbage trees.

Christopher Reilly (Ireland) and Horatio Hartley (USA) met on the Californian goldfields, formed a partnership, and made their way to Otago. To avoid the crowded goldfields, they ventured further inland. In 1862, their discovery of gold near the confluence of the Mata-Au and Kawarau Rivers caused an estimated 18,000 people to flood into the area. The settlement that grew at the meeting place of the two rivers was given names that reflected its location: 'The Junction', 'The Point', and 'Kawarau Junction'.



*Tirau / Cromwell (before and after the dam)
at the Karamau and Clutha / Mata-Au Junction
Source: Courtesy of Lewis Verduyn*

In 1863, surveyor J. Aitken Connell (Scotland), a partner in the Dunedin-based firm Connell and Moodie, suggested to the Dunedin Lands Office that the name of the town be officially changed to Cromwell. Historical records are unclear as to why the Provincial Government agreed with them. Local legend claims Connell chose to put 'the curse of Cromwell' on the district because of a 'silly rivalry' over the religious differences between the Northern and Southern Irish miners.

The 'Cromwell' whose curse was evoked is assumed to be Oliver Cromwell, who was a Puritan (a group of radical Protestants who tried to purify the Church of England from its Roman Catholic practices) and leader of the Parliamentarians during the English Civil War. He was responsible for ordering the execution of King Charles I in 1649. Cromwell's anti-Irish Roman Catholic campaign resulted in the slaughter and deportation of thousands of Irish civilians. He ruled as Lord Protector until his death in 1658. On the 12th anniversary of Charles I's execution, the newly restored monarchy exhumed Cromwell's corpse, hanged and decapitated it, and placed the head on a 20-foot spike atop Westminster Hall as a symbolic reversal of his legacy and a warning to future dissenters. It remained there for over 20 years until a storm blew it down.

Another contentious Cromwell was Thomas, Oliver's great-great-great uncle and King Henry VIII's Chief Minister. His role in dismantling Catholic authority and advancing Protestant reforms ended in 1540 when he was beheaded after being declared guilty (without a trial) of corruption, heresy, and treason.

The name of Cromwell continues to spark debate and controversy in academic, cultural, political, and theological circles. Henry VIII later regretted having Thomas executed. Winston Churchill described Oliver as a military dictator; others viewed him as a hero of liberty. In 1891, J. Aitken Connell, Cromwell's surveyor, died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound. He was 51.

Digging deeper into the meaning of words can often uncover a goldmine of rich new insights: The exact etymology of *tī kōuka* and *Tirau* is not fully documented. What is known is that *tī kōuka* once served all the people who travelled through, or settled in, Tirau. Their edible parts tasted like cabbage and were a good source of food; the leaves were woven into baskets, sandals, ropes, and made into medicine for gastrointestinal ailments and ointment for skin problems; and beer was brewed from the roots. Early settlers made chimneys for their huts from the tree's fire-resistant trunks and turned the dried leaves into kindling. Because of their longevity, they marked trails, boundaries, births, and cemeteries. A strong root system allows them to thrive on wet ground as well as in bare or exposed places. They also grow alone and have come to symbolise stoic independence.

Cromwell is a combination of two Old English words: 'crump' (bent or crooked), and 'wella' (a stream or spring), thus Cromwell means 'a winding stream'. In Nottinghamshire, England, the village of Cromwell is the seat of the Cromwell family. It lies less than a mile from the banks of the River Trent. The etymological meaning of Cromwell could be aptly applied to the Otago town that sits on the land where the 'winding waters' of the Mata-Au and the Kawarau meet – the place Māori call Tirau.



Lake Dunstan's creation caused the original river junction to disappear, and necessitated the building of a new town, bridge, and road above the lake line in the gorge. The area's soil and water now bring forth new treasures of apples, apricots, cherries, grapes, nectarines, and pears, and its ancient landscape still beckons outdoor enthusiasts from other lands and cultures. Cromwell's growing resident population is currently estimated to be around 7,470.

Today, if you take the time to look for them, you can still find many *tī kōuka* silently watching over the place they have long known as Tirau.

PROTECTING & PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT UPDATE

Echoes of Naseby: Valerie Smith Remembers

Valerie's interview is an invitation to step back in time and experience Naseby as it was, through the eyes of someone who has called it home for decades.

Born and raised in Naseby, Valerie reflects on the transformations that have shaped this historical small town, from its bustling post-war community to its transformation into a holiday haven today. Valerie's early recollections capture a time when Naseby was a thriving, close-knit township. Her descriptions paint a picture of her childhood in the 1940s; of children walking to school, men working in forestry and on the rabbit boards, and women keeping busy with family, church, and community life. "Naseby," she recalls, "was a quiet little town with a big school and a lot of children."



Valerie Smith

Her memories offer a vivid snapshot of everyday life: the butcher who killed his own meat, her uncle's hairdressing and confectionery shop where fruit couldn't be displayed on weekends, and the Four Square store where you could buy everything from groceries to hardware. Valerie's stories characterise Naseby as a place of self-sufficiency and trust – milk left in town for people to collect on an honesty system, and a community that helped one another without hesitation.

The interview also explores Naseby's rich social fabric, from the Caledonian sports on New Year's Day to the annual school concerts that "brought the whole town out." Valerie speaks

warmly of the Presbyterian Church, where her family played an active role, and of her years as a Karitane nurse before marrying and returning to farm life near Danseys Pass.

Valerie describes some quirky local personalities, from memorable shopkeepers to the town's last gold



*Naseby Shops, undated
Source: Valerie Smith*

miners. As with many of the oral histories, humour shines through Valerie's storytelling. In one anecdote, she recalls the town's cobbler, who once repaired her mother's shoe and gave it a heel a full inch higher than the other one. To add to the story, she notes that when her father later visited the cobbler about an uncashed cheque, the man opened a tin full of cheques he had never banked. "He didn't know what to do with them," Valerie laughs, "so he just put them in a tin."

From tales of sledging down Church Hill in winter to memories of her father's inventive scarecrow contraptions in the raspberry patch, Valerie's stories offer both warmth and wit. Her voice preserves not only the rhythm of small-town life but also the resilience that has defined Naseby's people.

Valerie's interview is available via the oral history catalogue, thanks to the effort of volunteer interviewer Karen Brady, who has ensured that Valerie's stories, told in her own voice, can be shared and celebrated for generations to come. Follow this QR code to listen to Valerie's interview.



FROM FEATHERS TO FLOWERS: TWO FASCINATING EXHIBITIONS AT CLYDE MUSEUM

Visitors to Clyde Museum can explore two fascinating exhibitions that bring Central Otago's natural heritage to life, from giant prehistoric birds to the fragrant hills of wild thyme.

Giant Birds of Our Southern Land transports visitors to an era when enormous birds once ruled Central Otago's ancient landscapes. The exhibition reveals how these remarkable species lived, hunted, and eventually disappeared, leaving behind clues in the region's rocks and caves. Discover the mighty Haast's eagle, the largest bird of prey ever known, alongside the towering moa, the flightless South Island goose, and the powerful adzebill.

Step back in time to the age of the vast Lake Manuherekia, when flamingo-like birds, parrots, and crocodiles roamed the prehistoric wetlands. A highlight of the display invites visitors to pick up one of the old telephones and 'call the past' to hear what the moa, Haast's eagle, and South Island goose might once have sounded like.

A Wild Thyme in Clyde: From Hills to Harvest celebrates a more recent story of local enterprise and community spirit. Introduced to Clyde in the 1860s by French settler Jean Désiré Féraud, wild thyme soon spread across Central Otago's dry, rocky hills. The exhibition follows its journey from the hillsides to the Briar Herb Factory in Clyde, which grew into a thriving business exporting wild thyme across New Zealand and overseas.



*Packaging up Wild Thyme at the Briar Herb Factory in Clyde, 1948
Source: Clyde Museum*

Reaching its peak in the 1940s, the factory processed more than 40,000 pounds (around six tonnes) of thyme each season, with families from across the district joining in the annual harvest. Today, wild thyme covers around 2,000 hectares across Central Otago, blanketing the hills with lilac flowers each summer and serving as a vibrant reminder of our social and natural heritage.

"We're really proud to bring these exhibitions together," says Andy Ritchie, Chair of Clyde Museum. "They celebrate what makes Clyde and Central Otago so special, from our deep natural history and inventive community spirit to the incredible stories that connect us to the land."

Both exhibitions feature interactive displays that bring this rich history to life, offering an engaging and hands-on experience for visitors of all ages.

SPOTLIGHT ON: VOLUNTEER SUE MACKENZIE

This month, we are speaking to Oral History volunteer Sue MacKenzie about what drew her to the project and why this work matters.

What first inspired you to get involved with the Oral History Project?

In 2017, I was volunteering at Central Stories and discovered a drawer full of over 80 oral history transcripts. All the interviews had taken place between the 1960s and the 1990s. They were fascinating! Most were typed on old typewriters and recorded on tapes. The transcripts have all been retyped by volunteers and are available for the public to read. In 2019, I had an opportunity to attend a workshop on the Essentials of Oral History; I was hooked.

Can you share a particularly memorable moment or story from an interview you've done?

I've enjoyed all my interviews, but I'll always remember the first, in 2019, with Wilma Paulin (nee Jennings). Wilma attended Lauder School during WW2 and remembered her teacher going away to fight. When Wilma came back from boarding school in Oamaru, she worked in her parents' drapery shop in Clyde. The shop was where Olivers is now. Half the shop was a grocery and the other half a drapery. She married orchardist Peter Paulin and they had eight children. When two of their children died tragically at a young age, Wilma co-founded Compassionate Friends, an organisation for bereaved parents. For twenty years, she served at Dunstan Hospital as House Manager, overseeing the ordering of stores and some of the drugs. Wilma was a wise Central Otago woman who lived a full and interesting life.



What do you find most challenging about oral history interviews, and how do you approach that challenge?

Managing the recording equipment is a challenge for me. I'm always worried that I've forgotten to plug something in or that I've pressed the wrong button. I manage the problem by following a checklist and being well prepared on the day.

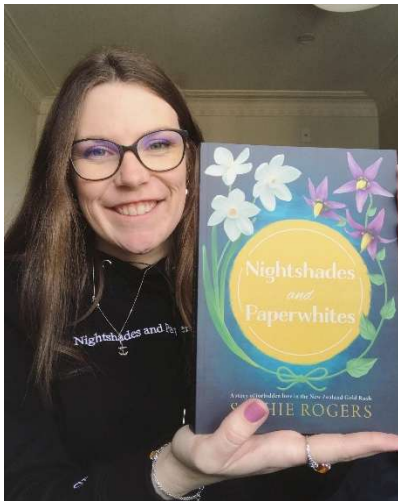
Why do you think oral histories are important for Central Otago's heritage?

The people interviewed have all lived through interesting times in Central Otago and New Zealand history. By telling their stories, they describe how those times affected them. For example, events such as the building of the Clyde Dam, the Clutha and Manuherekia floods of the 1990s, the development of the cycle trails, and the establishment of the wine industry. I believe Central Otago's history deserves to be recorded so future generations have some understanding of the past and are then able to develop attitudes to help them in the future.

HERITAGE TALKS UPDATE

November was a busy month for heritage talks. At Central Stories, Dr Jane Malthus talked **Couture and the Country: Eden Hore**. Jane, who is an author, a dress historian, the curator of *Eden in Dunedin*, and a long-time, self-confessed textiles nerd, gave some fascinating insights into Eden Hore's life and his renowned collection of fashion garments, which the Central Otago District Council now owns. It was a treat to see many behind-the-scenes images of the collection, the photoshoot for the book, his farm in the Māniototo, and of course the man himself.

A particular treat was the garments on display for the evening; they don't feature in the book, so it was the first time most people would have had a chance to see them.



Later in November, local author Sophie Rogers spoke at St Enoch's Church: **Rich History – Central Otago's Historical Gold mine**. Sophie talked about how a high school project evolved into a historical romance novel. Set in and around Alexandra in the 1860s, *Nightshades and Paperwhites* was published in 2022. The story follows an interracial relationship between a Chinese gold miner and a local European girl. Sophie shared some of the nuggets of information she unearthed while researching her book. Of particular interest to many was 'The Great Hoax'. Interestingly, the idea for this shocking act originated with John Magnus, who you may recall was the brother of Gus, whose

wonderful ice skates are on display at Central Stories and were featured in our Spring 2025 newsletter.

We are excited to share that in the new year Quinn Berentson will be returning to Clyde Museum to deliver a talk on **Haast's Eagle**. This Heritage Talk will be available to book soon on our website!

BOOK

Launch

VINCENT PYKE GOLDFIELDS GLADIATOR

by Russell Garbutt

*Join us to celebrate the launch of a
remarkable story about a man of rare
ability who made things happen*

Russell Garbutt's

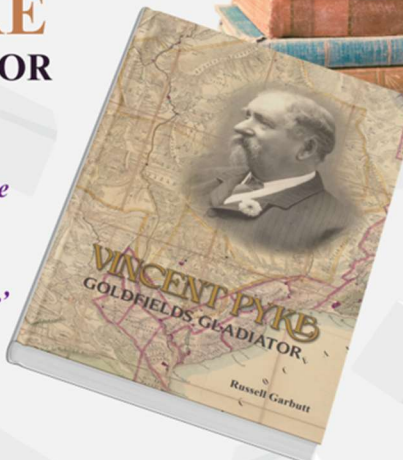
'Vincent Pyke: Goldfields Gladiator'



Sunday 14th December at 6.30pm

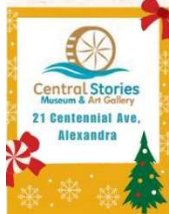


Central Stories
Museum and Art Gallery
21 Centennial Ave, Alexandra



CHRISTMAS

LATE NIGHT SHOPPING AT THE MUSEUM



Friday
19th
December
4- 8pm

Shop directly
from
Local Artisans!

Food - Cheeses - Crafts -
Pottery - Art - Books -
Calendars and so much more!

Get your photo
Taken with

Santa
5.30- 7.30pm



Lots of
Christmas activities
for the kids to do!

CELEBRATING CHINESE NEW YEAR ON THE GOLDFIELDS

Thanks to recordings by the New Zealand Broadcasting Mobile Service Unit in the late 1940s, we can gain some insights into Chinese New Year celebrations on the goldfields. In 1948, the mobile recording truck visited several locations in Otago, including Arrowtown, St Bathans, Naseby, Cromwell, Clyde, and Lawrence. Oral history recordings were made with elderly residents who reminisced about life as far back as the 1860s. Some of them had stories to share relating to the early gold miners in the province, including the Chinese miners.

One remarkable nugget to emerge from these recordings is that as early as the 1870s, Chinese communities invited their European neighbours to celebrate the Chinese New Year with them, despite the racism that was frequently directed at the Chinese immigrants.

Arrowtown women Helen Ritchie and Ellen Dennison recalled one Chinese New Year on the Nevis. As they tell it, the European miners

and their wives were invited to this big event, a celebration of such gravity that a Chinese man spent three full days cooking! There were many dishes, and a key recollection, decades later, was the amount of oil used. The tea was in “wee cups, more like little bowls, and would hold about half a teacupful, and it was drunk without sugar or milk.”

One of the clear highlights was the fireworks; the Chinese would cover a 20-foot pole with crackers. The bottom one would be lit first, and that one would set off each subsequent one, making for quite a sight!

The recordings offer fascinating insights into the relationships between Europeans in Central Otago and the Chinese miners. Interviewees’ fond reminiscences of such occasions demonstrate that a genuine level of affection and friendship existed.

A number of these 1948 recordings are available online at various sites, including some held in our Oral History catalogue. Follow the QR code to access the 1948 interviews with residents of Clyde.



Chinese miners and Rev. Alexander Don at Kyeburn Diggings
Source: Alexander Turnbull Library



REVIVING A CENTRAL OTAGO ICON: OUR JOURNEY WITH EARNSCLEUGH CASTLE

Hello from the heart of Central Otago! Ryan and Marco here, and we're delighted to share this personal update on our restoration adventure. It's hard to believe we've been pouring our hearts into this Category 1 Heritage New Zealand-listed gem since 2022, but the progress has been nothing short of transformative. With each step, we're not just reviving bricks and mortar – we're breathing new life into a piece of New Zealand's frontier history, ensuring it stands tall for generations to come.

Late October marked a pivotal moment for us; we finally moved into the castle itself and left behind our temporary home of the last few years – the Coach House. This 1920s structure was originally built for Stephen Spain's father (who couldn't navigate the manor's grand stairs) and was later used as a shelter for workers battling the estate's notorious rabbit plagues. The Coach House has now been respectfully restored to its full potential.



Coach House Exterior, Earnsclough Castle
Source: Carmen Triisa

As of 1 November, it's a full-time Airbnb listing, offering guests a luxurious 3-bedroom retreat that seamlessly blends heritage charm with modern comforts. You can view more details on the Earnsclough Coach House, and maybe book a stay, on our website. Follow this QR code to learn more.



Inside the Coach House living room, Earnsclough Castle
Source: Carmen Triisa

Our restoration philosophy has always been rooted in authenticity, guided by a profound respect for the castle's past. We unearthed the original architectural plans from Dunedin's Hocken Library – a treasure trove of New Zealand's historical documents – and they've been our blueprint for honouring Edmund Anscombe's Jacobethan design.

A highlight has been reinstating the castle's first-floor open-air balconies, conceived in response to the 1918 influenza pandemic to promote fresh air and health. We've added elegant glass French doors to shield the upper level from Otago's elements, preserving the manor's rare style – uncommon for a sheep station – while ensuring its longevity.

Inside, we've balanced heritage with practicality. All bedrooms now feature ensembles with period-inspired fixtures, and we've opened the ground-floor kitchen and lounge to create a light-filled and inviting space that echoes the estate's communal roots.



Penny Clarke, Caretaker Extraordinaire

The heritage gardens of Earnscleugh Castle are really coming back to life. Our wonderful caretaker, Penny Clarke, has been instrumental here. The gardens were masterfully designed by Alfred Buxton, New Zealand's pioneering landscape architect. Often called the 'father of landscape design', Buxton crafted over 350 gardens in the early 20th century, transforming barren lands into elegant sanctuaries. His notable works include the Victorian splendour of Oamaru Public

Gardens, with its ornate plantings and pathways, and the exotic grounds of Larnach Castle in Dunedin, where formal lawns harmonise with the dramatic topography.

The twists and turns of our journey have been well documented as we've been filming with Grand Designs for the past three years, capturing every triumph and challenge! Our final reveal shoot is scheduled for 19 and 20 February, with the episode set to air in late March or April 2026. It's been an incredible way to share the story of Earnscleugh Castle and Central Otago with a wider audience, showcasing how ambition and resilience continue to define this place.



*Marco Creemers and Ryan Sanders at the Fraser River boundary
Source: Carmen Triisa*

We document a lot of our journey on Facebook, so please give us a follow if you want to hear about our progress: [@Earnscleugh Castle](#).

CONNECT WITH US

Become a member

We can help you and your heritage organisation with:

- Applying for and accessing funding and grants
- Identifying opportunities for collaboration and resource sharing with other heritage organisations
- Promoting your project and initiative in the community
- Providing advocacy to members through our participation in heritage decision-making forums

Share your heritage news and events

Send your news and events for our website or next newsletter to Ann Cowie, Heritage Coordinator: ann@heritagecentralotago.org.nz

Our website

Get the latest news and events by following this QR code:



Our newsletter

You can find archives of our quarterly newsletter in the library section on our website.

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OUR SUPPORTERS

Heritage Central Otago acknowledges the generous support from the following organisations:



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34 Sunderland St Clyde 9330
info@heritagecentralotago.org.nz
www.heritagecentralotago.org.nz