



In Commemoration of the 60th Anniversary of the Ashburton Historical Society

By the 2018 Committee

October 30, 2018 marked the 60th anniversary of the founding of the current Ashburton Museum and Historical Society. This brief history is based on the record preserved from the Minute Books which along with a large, object, document and photographic collection is now professionally curated in the Ashburton Museum/Heritage Centre. Seemingly often against the odds and with dogged determination and dedication, our Society predecessors would be thrilled to know that their hard work has reached fruition. Current members and the Ashburton District community owe these visionary people and their predecessors, their gratitude and appreciation in which, finally, a modern Museum to house and professionally curate at least 137 years of collecting has been achieved. But of course, social history is much more than collecting objects and archives it is also about people. This small publication is an abstract of a larger work in preparation and outlines some key events of this Society's journey. We look forward to a rich future Society and Museum history.

Although the Society's "stamp" was first mentioned in the Minutes of November 22, 1966, the triangular logo first appeared in the Ashburton Guardian in March 1977 and lasted eighteen years. Nineteen years after the change of logo in 1995, with a modern, purpose built and professionally managed Museum somewhat controversially established and now loved and admired, the Inaugural Society President Dr William Henry (Harry) Scotter (1905-1974) and the first committee would applaud these efforts and endorse today's different but close relationship between the Society and the Museum professionals.



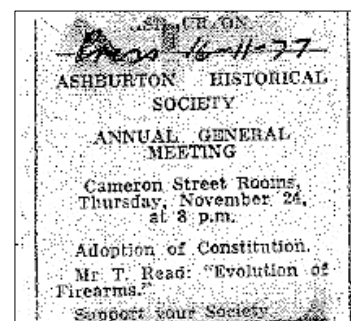
Mrs Ethel McQuilken
Convenor of the
inaugural meeting and
first secretary.



Dr W H Scotter
Author, teacher,
Canterbury University
lecturer and Society
initiator and first
President.



Mr E J Wood MA
Founding member,
teacher, Scouter and
long serving President.



Pre – Society Rumblings

The earliest public reference found mentioning a Museum in Ashburton was April 1, 1881 at the Annual General Meeting of the Library (Figure 1), where it was considered that a temporary room could be set aside for a Museum. It was in November 1884 at a special meeting of the Borough Council that money be used for library books “or in the formation of a museum”.

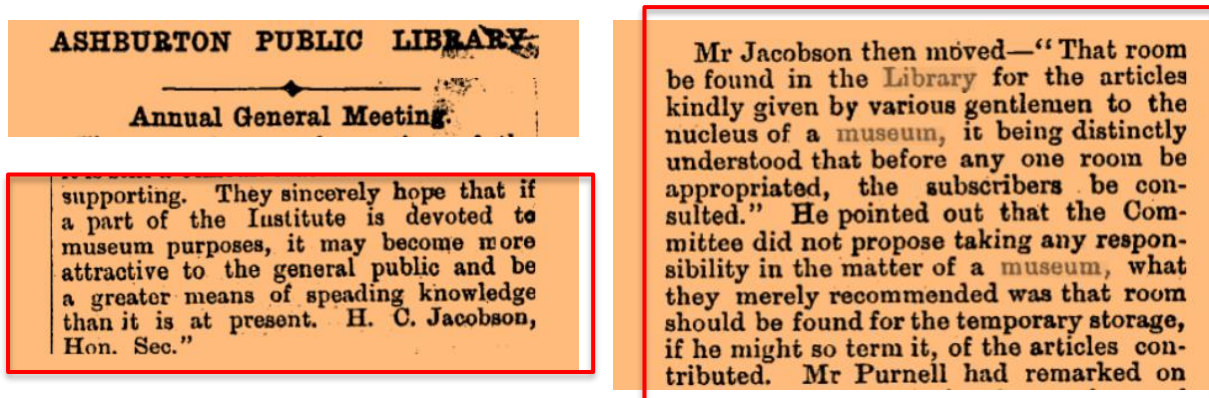


Figure 1. Excerpts from the Ashburton Guardian April 1st, 1881, suggesting that the current ‘Museum’ originated from an addition to the Public Library as a means of providing an ‘educational outlet’ for the public. An idea current today and enshrined in various Acts of Parliament.

Objects considered at the time to be of historical significance were already being given to the library-museum for display and storage. The first public record of a photograph being given to the collection was reported in the Ashburton Guardian (Vol.5 (1469) January 29, 1887. Today the photographic collection holds many thousands of images and is of national significance. In May, 1887, Mayor Henry Davis made the suggestion of the formation of an “Industrial Museum” to be devoted to the exhibit of “geological and other specimens already in the hands of the custodian” (Ash.Guardian Vol. V (1556) May 12, 1887), so collecting was already well established. The problem was that there was no storage place and the library was inadequate.

Mayor Henry Davis was publicly thanked for his generous donation to the ‘Library/Museum’ of two large glass show cases thus becoming one of the first to provide materials for the future growth of a Museum (Ashburton Guardian Vol VII. (2437), June 10, 1890). Thus, the seeds were sown for the next sixty-eight years of collecting and the coming battles for the establishment of a permanent and independent ‘home’ or Museum for a rapidly growing population and heritage collection. It is not clear what actually happened to the idea of an “Industrial Museum” but it did not appear to have come to anything.

ESTABLISHING THE ASHBURTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Although there appears to be a hiatus of activity 60 years between 1890 and 1950, local people were still collecting and storing local objects and of course taking lots of photographs, selling land and property and writing hundreds of pages of minutes in the many clubs and societies that formed especially just after the Second World War. The earliest public report found for a Museum **after** the First World War was in the Ashburton Guardian of 1918 (April, 10. Vol.XXXVIII, (9265)) where there was a call for the building of a County War memorial **and museum** to house “war relics” and to be sited near the library (Figure 2). Clearly, the Historical society grew out of the need to collect, store and curate Ashburton District artefacts, documents, photographs and objects and intimately

connected to the Public Library, but above all, it was a place to house a collection that was a priority – a Museum.

In a report of the Library Committee (Ashburton Guardian, Vol. XXIX (6740) December 5, 1905, there was a call for collecting any early records of the County from the older residents as well as the need to start keeping a register of what was in the 'Museum'.

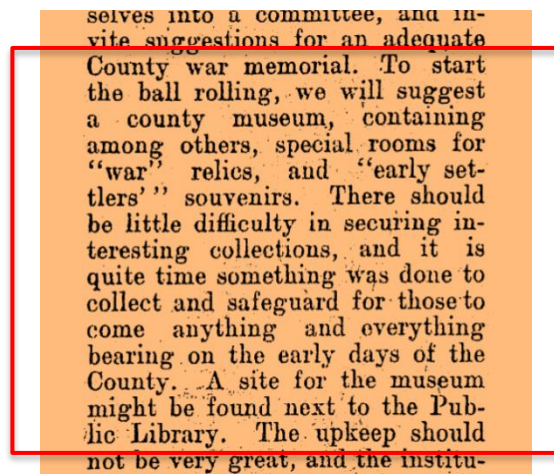
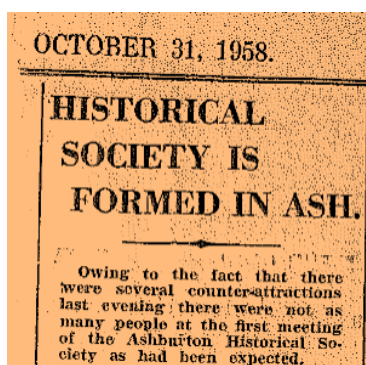


Figure 2. Under the heading of "A War Memorial", a 1918 suggestion for a County Museum is made for display of 'war' relics, early settlers' and souvenirs!

In short, the idea of a 'museum' to house a collection of historical objects in Ashburton has been around most likely since the very earliest establishment of the township but was firstly connected with the growth of public amenities such as the Library from the mid to late 1870s. This association also continued through the 1960s as shown by comments in the minutes in June 1963. The next phase of development was focussed on the realisation of a physical place to properly curate firstly, historical objects then images (first recorded in the minutes in September 1960 and then steered by Mrs Thelma McArtney at the town library), and documents. Between the end of WW1 and the 1950s, collection of Ashburton District history continued piecemeal and with little or no organisation but with a continual cry for a dedicated place to hold and display collected objects of interest. A 'strong room' in the Arcade was even suggested (In 1963) as a place to store materials.



The first annual report of President Scotter (Figure 3) outlines how Mrs McQuilken called for the formation of a Historical Society in response to a community request to hold an exhibition of "items of historical interest". Reading Scotter's annual report, a similar event had occurred some seven years earlier in 1951 but it took another ten years or so to firmly establish a Society to fulfil a social group need (and the wider community of the Ashburton District), and one which Scotter as a teacher of history at the Ashburton Technical College since 1955 (from Waitaki Boys HS) was keen to support. It was moved by Mrs McQuilken and seconded by Mr J B Cullen that the formation of the Society be made. J B Cullen was the first treasurer. A founding member and later to become the longest serving President through crucial times for 17 years, was Mr Ellis Wood MA, an historian teaching at the High School. Ellis Wood presided when it was recorded in the typed up 14th Annual Report of November 23, 1972 that in March that year, after 13 years of collecting and planning, the Museum was opened.

Mrs McQuhlin explained that her action was at least partly the result of the proposal of the Community Centre Committee to hold an exhibition of items of historical interest similar to that which had proved so successful seven years ago. A combined meeting of our society and of the Community Centre Committee was held to discuss the exhibition. It was agreed that the display should be held towards the end of March and in some substantial and safe building such as the Foresters' Hall. A committee of six, half from each organization was set up. The immediate effect of a study of the documents relating to the previous exhibition

I hope that during the coming year we may be able to establish this society firmly as a part, if not a small part of Ashburton life
 W.A. Scotter.
 President.
 10 December, 1959.

Figure 3. Part of Dr Scotter's first Historical Society annual report December 10, 1959.

Right from the start, it was decided to hold monthly meetings on the fourth Thursday of every month but of greater significance was the early beginning of a long association with the Borough Council (later the District Council) by asking for "aid in securing a room for the display of objects of historical interest", as recorded in the minutes of the inaugural meeting in 1958. In November 1958, the Council replied by saying that they had no room available but would let them know when they did! Subscriptions were 5/- (\$11.00 today) but this was doubled by the end of 1963. It was town librarian Mrs Thelma McCartney who began the photographic collection. In 1966 there was an exhibition (Later known as the Balmoral Hall) held over three days to showcase the materials collected by members of the Society. It also served to reinforce to the Council, the urgent need for a permanent building to house the collection for which Councils have always had statutory and moral obligations. A letter from the Borough Council in November 1966 confirmed the Council's 'sympathy' towards provision of adequate 'display' room. This 'sympathy' culminated in the 2014 opening of the Ashburton Heritage Centre.

Historical Society Museums of the Past

The remarkable achievement by the Historical Society of enabling the provision of a Museum housing the Ashburton Districts heritage and holding the collection in trust for the people of Ashburton has been a focus of the Society since its inauguration. The future challenge for the Society is to bring alive the hidden social history of its collection to the people of Ashburton (and nationally) so that this history can be learnt from, marvelled at and enjoyed as a part of what a 'living heritage' is all about.

The 'Self-Help Co-Op' storage house	'Pioneer Hall' First Museum	Technical College Second Museum	Baring Sq. East Third Museum	Baring Sq. West Fourth Museum
				