

## Heritage trail: Renwick

### Location 1: Museum and Watson family

#### The founding of Renwick

Renwick village was named after its founder Dr Thomas Renwick who never actually lived here. He emigrated to Nelson from Scotland and in 1846. That year he married a wealthy woman called Adeline Absolom, whose money allowed him to lease, then purchase, 8500ha of land in the Awatere Valley which he called Dumgree after his home in Scotland. In 1855 he purchased the 4800ha Delta Run and had the township of Renwicktown surveyed off and settled.



A key family in early Renwicktown were the Watsons, whose business enterprises included from stores to house and boat building; mid-wifery to funeral directing. They also made coffins! The saying was that they "brought Renwick citizens into the world, built the houses they lived in and then sent them out again"

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## BIRTH.

GIBSON.—On June 18, 1912, at Nurse Watson's Private Hospital, the wife of Mr John Gibson, Kaituna, of a daughter.



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## FUNERAL.

THE friends of the late Mrs SUSAN WATSON are respectfully invited to attend her funeral, which will leave Renwicktown for the Renwick Cemetery, at 2 o'clock TO-MORROW (Friday).

WALTER WATSON,  
Undertaker.

This museum and memorial library was established by Herbert Watson in 1931 in memory of his first wife Olga Englebrect, who died suddenly just three months after they were married. Later he collaborated with Norm Brayshaw collecting historic artefacts from the surrounding area and the building became a library and a museum to house many of the items. The original display outside the museum

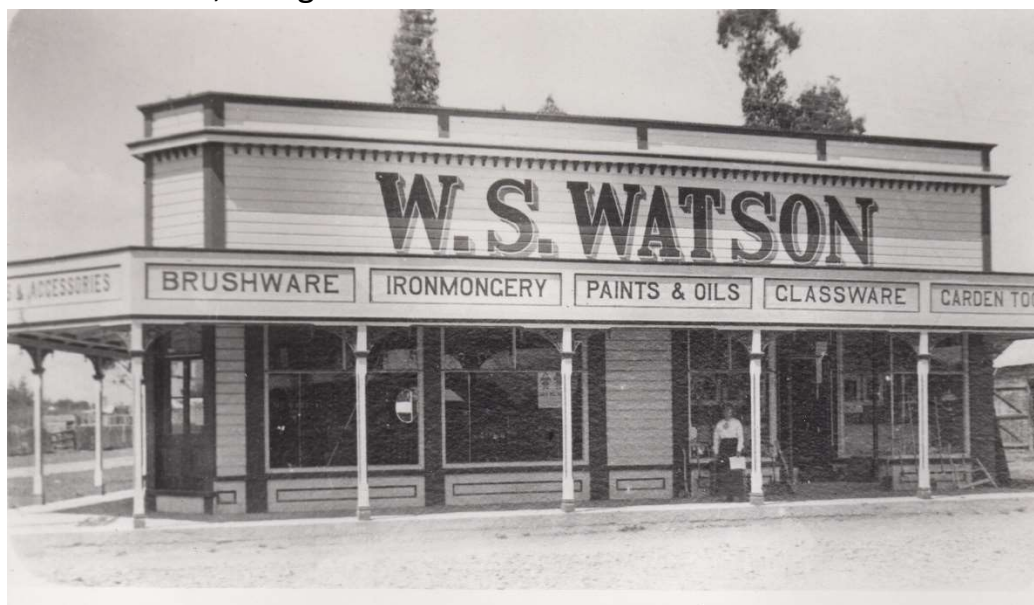


featured a cart pulled by a team of bullocks. Sadly, these were recently destroyed by a car accident and replaced by the "steam punk" style display built by a local artist. The mural behind depicts Dr Renwick and his land where the town was built.

Across the road is an original Watson home The Pines in which many Renwick babies came into the world.



Looking west along High Street where the petrol station is today, was the Watson General store, a large concern.



## Location 2: The Post Office

This building, next to the Museum, served the community as its Post Office from 1898 till 2022, when that service was relocated to the local pharmacy. This building was moved here in 1898. Before that, the Post Office had been located in various shops in the town centre, just as it is again today. Depicted is the first female postal delivery worker in the 1950's. The building behind is the old Brydon homestead that eventually burned down and made way for the Renwick Museum. The Miss Brydons ran the Post Office for many years. Brydons were another prominent family in the district.



## Location 3: Corner Uxbridge and High Streets

*Originally High Street, west of here, was known as Uxbridge Street.*

From here we look across to what was the heart of the business district in the early days. There was a mixture of retail and industry with the W S Watson and Gustaf Bary general stores, Cowards wheelwrights and McKays smithy. At one point there was a saddler here as well. This was all in the days before motorised vehicles so these businesses were the life-blood of the community. Many wagons hauling flax and timber from the Northbank of the Wairau River would pass through here. The roads



being extremely rough, there would often be broken wheels and straps to repair by the time they arrived. It was convenient to stop and leave the items to be repaired and retire to the tavern for a well-earned rest! There may have been too much revelry here at times as the Hotel burned down three times over the years.

General stores sold everything from boot laces to bed linen, pots and pans to staples such as flour, sugar and tea.

### Location 3a

This large concrete block building was built in the 1970s and is intrinsically linked with both Antarctica and New Zealand's House of Representatives. It was built to house the warehouse of W Graham Hitchens from England - an expert in timber laminates. He was one of the owners of the former Renwick General Store which burned down in the 1970s. He built his first paint, timber and veneers factory on the land behind it which had been tennis courts. Amongst the many products made here



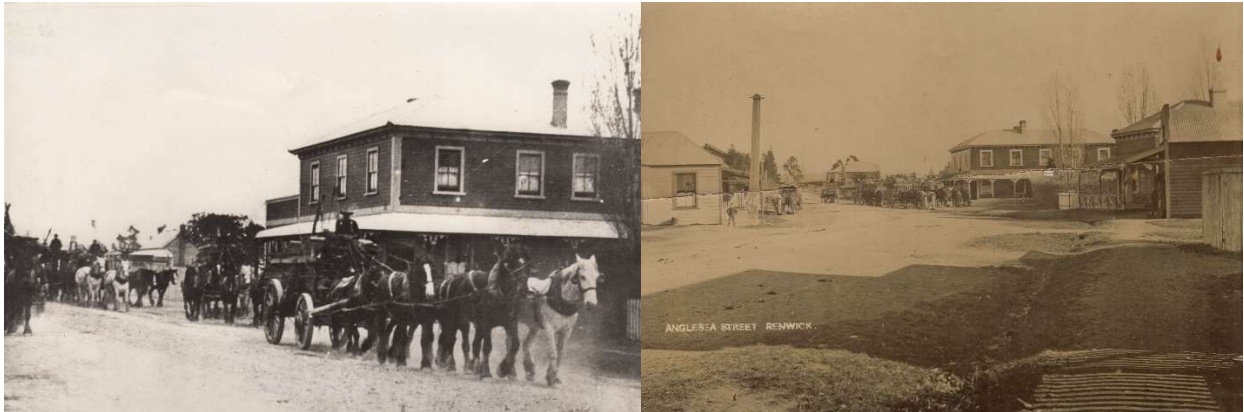
the specialised huts used for the New Zealand Antarctic Survey in 1958. In time more than 100 Hitchens protective and waterproof coatings were sold around the world.

Prior to the factory being built, this part of the High Street included a cobbler, a butcher and a couple of small general stores.

In the 1920's some of these were demolished to make way for the first War Memorial



In his writings, Herbert Watson describes a bustling lively town with the constant bellowing of bullocks pulling the carts, the clanging of metal from the blacksmiths and wheelwrights, and merriment from the taverns



#### **Location 4: by the Bowling Club, Uxbridge Street**

Soon after the first Polynesian people arrived at the Pokohiwi o Kupe (Wairau Bar) around 1280 they started exploring. They passed through here forging trails to the Waihopai Valley and lakes Rotoiti and Rotoroa and from there to the Matakītaki River. Stone implements found in excavations at Pokohiwi o Kupe, have helped archaeologists and historians trace the trails by following the movements of adzes (toki) made from different materials. Maori guides, including the legendary and intrepid Ngati Apa guide Kehu introduced European explorers to many of these trails. Across the river from here was an early Rangitane encampment.

Many of the streets in Renwicktown were named after famous British Generals or battles but Uxbridge Street is named after the street in London.

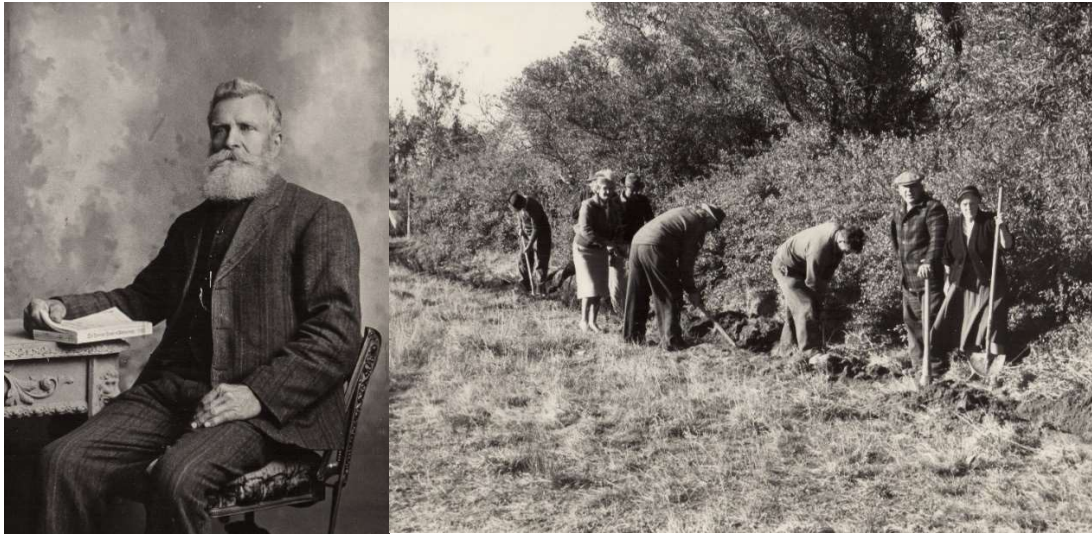


In 1851 John Godfrey built the Wairau Hotel, known as the Sheepskin Tavern on this site. He was the son of an Oxford surgeon and brother of Henry Godfrey who owned the Woodbourne Farm and flour mill to the south of the town. There are many differing descriptions of the tavern but it is thought that it probably began as a tent of sheep skins stretched over a frame of manuka tree branches. Walls were gradually built to raise it up until it became a cobb cottage with a sheepskin roof. The Sheepskin Tavern became significant in the history of the Marlborough province when, in 1857, gatherings were held there to discuss the separation of Marlborough province from Nelson, which eventuated in 1859.

Drovers travelled this way after crossing the Wairau River. Getting to here was no easy business as until 1913, there was no bridge. Instead travellers forded the river on horseback or caught a ride on the horse-drawn ferry. There were several drownings as a result.



The Renwick Domain and sports fields was gifted to the Renwick community by the Mills family estate



right: Alfred George Mills ; Left: Arbor Day 1961 Planting at the recreation grounds



### **Location 5: Wine Industry**

Renwick Village is at the heart of Marlborough wine country. In 1873 David Herd planted a small vineyard in brown muscat at Aunstfield in Fairhall, not far from here. One hundred years later, in October 1973, Montana Wines started planting vineyards in Marlborough, kick-starting what would become New Zealand's largest premium wine growing area.

The land around Renwick was some of the first converted from pastoral farming to viticulture. Early modern pioneers included Frenchman Daniel Le Brun and his wife Adele, Ernie and Jane Hunter, Allen and Joyce Hogan (Te Whare Ra), Allan and Kathy Scott (Alan Scott Wines) and German winemaker Almuth Lorenz (Merlen Wines).

These days there is an ocean of vines around Renwick, and dozens of cellar doors within a few kilometres of this spot. An off-road walking and cycling trail is a popular way to visit these cellar doors for a taste of Marlborough's finest. Many of the businesses in the town of today are there to service the grape growing industry.



## Location 6: The Woodbourne Tavern

This site has been a place of refreshments and social gatherings since early Renwicktown. The first hotel on this site was Shaws Hotel conveniently located opposite a blacksmith and wheelwrights shop. A view of early Renwicktown is displayed in the front window of the Renwick Museum and was taken from the upper story of Shaws Hotel. The information board at the Woodbourne tavern is carefully placed as this was the exact position of the corner of the original Shaws Hotel. We can see this from the photo of the view down the street from here in the late 1800's. We know that the group in the carriage are the Adams family from the Northbank. There is another figure walking in the same direction but otherwise the street is empty. It is surmised that this was a Sunday and the well-dressed folk who after church would go on down to the Wairau cemetery on what is now SH63 and visit the graves of their dead relatives to lay flowers.

## Location 7: The Globe



The Renwick Country Club formally the Globe Hotel, more commonly known as the "Top Pub". The Globe was established by Charles Watson in 1882 and in 1893 Kaleb and Lydia Higgs were the proprietors. Lydia was one of the first of 204 Marlborough women to sign the Suffrage Petition in 1893 at the age of 39. In November that same year New Zealand women became the first in the world to receive the right to vote.

The proprietor here was the first person in Marlborough to undergo a surgical operation under anaesthetic. It was performed in Blenheim by Dr Cleghorn, a pioneer in the use of anaesthetics.



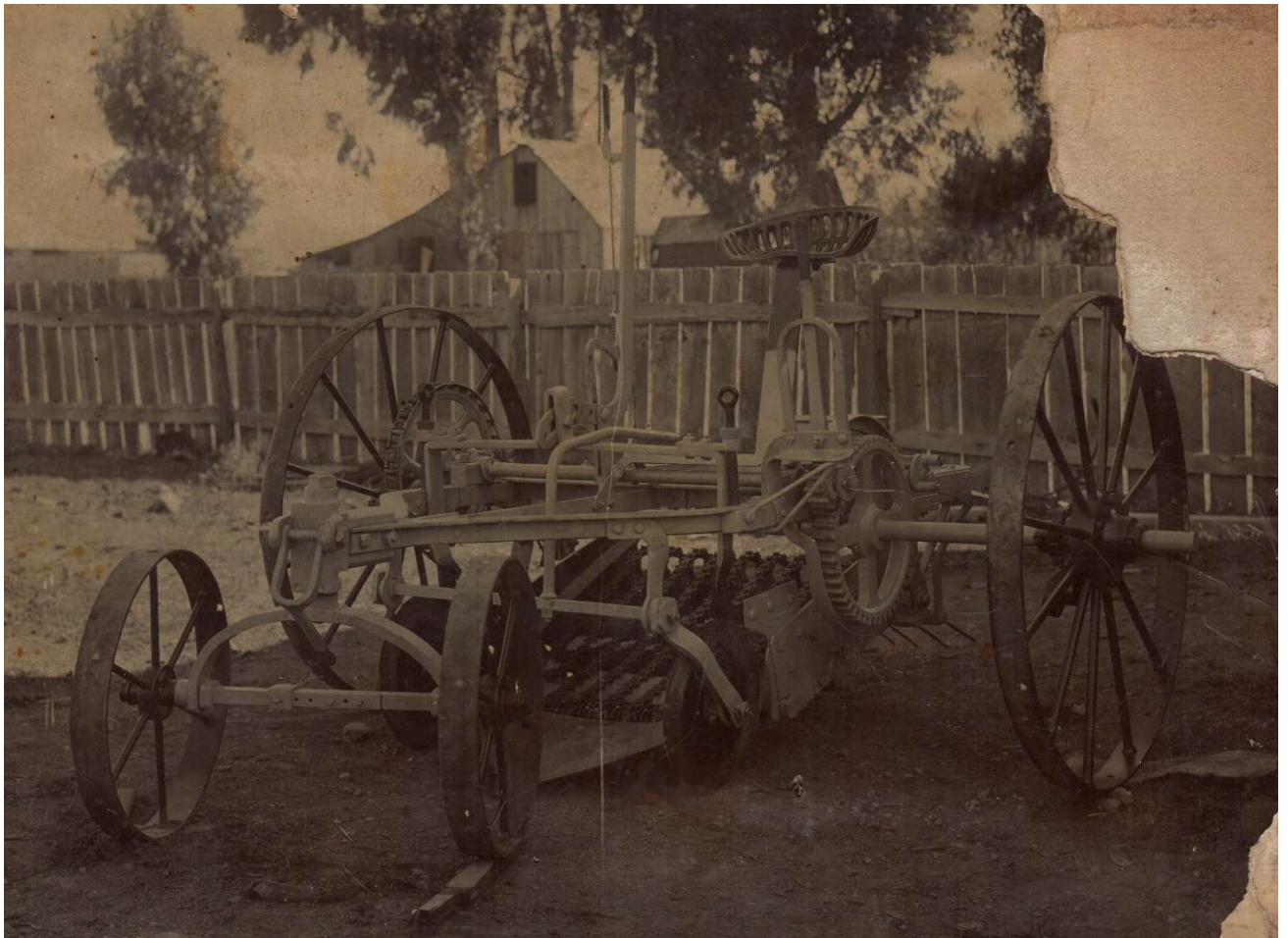
The hotel was owned by William Newman from 1899 to 1905. In 1915 the hotel's name was changed to the Renwick Arms.

## Location 8: The Current War Memorial

This memorial to the men who sacrificed their lives in both World War One and Two, was built in the 1970's after the removal of the original post-World War One memorial from across the road, next to the former Post Office. On this site once stood the Returned Serviceman's Association Hall, which was shifted from Delta Camp in 1942 on land gifted by Herbert Brooks.



Before that John Vorbach's blacksmith shop was here. John Vorbach was an inventive man and registered many patents including the first potato lifter made in New Zealand of which only a photo remains.



The Renwick museum contains a number of these items in their Vorbach smithy display.

## Location 9: Renwick Churches

When Dr Renwick planned out his new settlement called Renwicktown, he made provision for the spiritual needs of its inhabitants by setting aside sections for Church use.

He, being Scots Presbyterian, made sure his denomination had a fair stake in the new town, with a large block on Havelock Street from Nicholson Street all the way to what is now State Highway 6 set aside for church use. The first Presbyterian Church (c1857), which was also used as a school room, is on Havelock Street on the way to the Pioneer Cemetery. It is the oldest church in Marlborough. It was moved to its current site from the eastern end of Havelock Street the Pioneer Reserve, so named as it was once the Renwick Presbyterian Church cemetery. A second church on the corner of Nicholson and Havelock Streets was demolished in the 1980s, leaving the more modern concrete block Sunday School hall as the place of worship for Presbyterians today.



Those of the Roman Catholic faith were apportioned a corner section on Clyde and Alma Streets on which they built Francis de Sales Church which opened in 1907. It was still in use until 2022. Generations of Catholic families have worshipped here over the years, with it being the place for baptisms, weddings and funerals.



The Church of England block was in the north east corner of what is now the Renwick School. That church was moved onto its present site High Street Renwick in 1955. It burned down in 2003. The original stained glass window is now above the entrance to the current church.

