



Meet the Leach dynasty...

Cambridge family's amazing contribution to city art

■ CHRIS ELLIOTT

THE untold story of a family who helped to create the beautiful interiors of Cambridge colleges – as well as pubs and other buildings – is being revealed this weekend.

For three centuries, the Leach family made an 'unacknowledged contribution' to the city, first as college cooks and later as artists and craftsmen.

They will feature in Open Cambridge, the annual weekend when colleges, museums and other buildings open their doors to the public to celebrate the city's heritage.

A university spokeswoman said: "A string of famous architects contributed to the heritage of Cambridge – among them Christopher Wren, James Gibbs and George Gilbert Scott. Much less well known are the generations of craftsmen who helped to create both the town's domestic buildings and the masterpieces of design that attract thousands of tourists – stained glass windows, stone and wood carving, decorative design



FINE ART: Top, the Leach family; above, Queens' College Old Hall, painted by Leach workers
Picture: Hannah Boatfield

and painted interiors.

"At least half a dozen generations of the Leach family are known to have contributed to the life of Cambridge, both town and gown. A series of Open Cambridge events are the first steps to bringing the Leach family to public attention."

The Leaches' story begins with Richard Leach, who left Cambridge in the early 1800s on a 300-mile trek to Cornwall to look for work. He kept a travel journal, which became a fascinating record of the people and places he

came across. Half a century later, his son Frederick, founded a small decorating firm that worked with some of the country's best known designers and architects, including William Morris, father of the arts and crafts movement.

Frederick came to be regarded as Cambridge's finest master artworkman, and Richard Leach's journal is one of many items on show for the first time at the Museum of Open Cambridge as part of the Open Cambridge programme.

At All Saints' Church, the walls of which were paint-

ed by Leach craftsmen, the story of Frederick Leach will be told, focussing on his City Road premises, recently demolished for redevelopment. The David Parr House charity recorded and salvaged material before the developers moved in.

At Michaelhouse, an exhibition is being staged featuring photographs of the Leach family's decorative work around the city.

The Museum of Cambridge project, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, has been curated by historian Tamsin Wilmhurst, a trustee of David Parr House.

She said: "This is an exciting opportunity for the public to see a collection usually in private hands, including a striking portrait of his family painted by Richard Leach in 1849."

Volunteers who would like to help with further research on the Leach family can email david.parrhouse@gmail.com.

One Open Cambridge event, Girtonians and the two World Wars, due to have taken place at the Pitt Building on Saturday, has been cancelled.