

# **DISASTER SALVAGE TEAM**

Working Towards Saving Cultural Collections

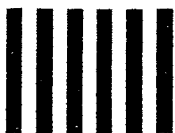
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# **NEWS LETTER**

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**Disaster Response Planning  
at the University of  
Canterbury Library  
by Andreas Eng  
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## **Disaster Response Planning in the University of Canterbury Library**

### **Structure of the Library**

The University Library occupies, or part occupies, five buildings on the Ilam campus: the Central Library in the James Hight Building, the Physical Sciences Library, the Engineering Library, the Law Library and the Macmillan Brown Library. The Library also has a storage building at Ilam known as the Warehouse which houses little used monograph and serial material in one half of the building and the Library's Archives Collection in the other. (The Archives Collection is administered as part of the Macmillan Brown Library and is physically very close to that Library.) The University Librarian, Deputy University Librarian, administrative and management support staff, collection services staff and a substantial number of public services staff are located in the eleven storey James Hight Building. The nature of the collections in the four Branch libraries are suggested in their names, with the exception of the Macmillan Brown Library which is a research library specialising in New Zealand and Pacific materials.

### **The origins of the Library's disaster response plan**

The Library had no disaster plan of any sort until 1992: more accurately the subject of disaster response planning was not on the Library's agenda until that year. At the end of January 1992 a two part Preservation Seminar conducted by Ross Harvey from the Graduate Department of Librarianship, Archives and Records at Monash University, was held in the Library. The Library was keen to introduce staff as a whole to the theory and practice of conservation and preservation in the library setting. In the correspondence between Deputy University Librarian Gail Pattie and Ross Harvey about the content of the proposed preservation seminar, disaster planning was mentioned. The first half-day of the seminar, was pitched at staff at all levels in the Library and concentrated on preservation, with an emphasis on everyday routines. The second half-day was aimed at senior staff (library management, departmental heads and deputies) and concentrated on how to plan and implement a preservation programme. Ross Harvey's *Basic Preservation Bibliography*, which was prepared for the seminar, reflected the preservation focus of both half days but there were several disaster preparedness information sources listed, including *The Library Disaster Preparedness Handbook* of the American Library Association (1986).

In June 1992, Gail Pattie, established a small group of staff to assist her with the preparation of a disaster response plan for the Library. Gail got the

project started by preparing a draft *Library Disaster Manual* for discussion by this group. She intended the *Manual* to be both a policy document and a document, which established basic principles with which all staff should be familiar. In her memorandum to the staff chosen to assist with the project, Gail indicated an intention to establish a disaster response team for the Library and that the primary task of the disaster response team was to develop a "detailed response plan". The team was also to "establish training guidelines, establish contacts with local services/businesses, identify basic equipment required and make lists of especially valuable resources and indicate the location of these on floor plans."

For a variety of reasons little progress was made with the disaster response plan until 1994. In November that year Gail took a large group of Library staff, including most of the group brought together in 1992, to a Flood Workshop organised by the Canterbury Disaster Salvage Team at Weedons. For many participants from the Library this was a real turning point and marked the beginning of some understanding of the realities of recovery from disaster. The workshop exercise made it very clear that disaster recovery could be messy, confusing and very stressful. It also taught that without a plan the Library would be critically handicapped.

In mid February 1995 two members of the Library's fledgling disaster response team, Vicki Clark and Max Burrows, attended a disaster recovery workshop at Mooroolbark east of Melbourne. This two day event was organised by CAVAL (Cooperative Association of Victorian Academic Libraries) and featured lectures on day one and a disaster simulation on day two. It seems that the disaster simulation on day two was almost deliberately under organised and this had the effect of emphasising the need both for a plan and a disaster response team which was trained and prepared for a recovery role.

### **The 1995 Plan and material preparations to deal with a disaster.**

In the early months of 1995 Vicki Clark and another Disaster Response Team member, Mary Cain, drafted the *Disaster Response Plan*, which Gail had foreshadowed in 1992. This document is really the manual of the Disaster Response Team. Its cover sheet declares that its aim is "to provide a clear, comprehensive, step-by-step plan for disaster recovery." It complements the *Library Disaster Manual* which provides an overview of the issues.

The *Manual* incorporates a series of seven Fact Sheets which summarise essential information under the following headings: emergency

procedures (response to fire flood, earthquake); emergency personnel; emergency equipment (small quantities of essential salvage materials including absorbent paper, scissors, tape etc, to be held in each library building); priority salvage items; general salvage guidelines (a basic list of Dos and Don'ts); contacts for services and supplies; library floor plans including the location of hazards. The Library Disaster Documents are packaged in a small folding box and the seven Fact Sheets are duplicated as laminated sheets in loose form for easy reference in an emergency.

The Library budget in 1995 set aside a substantial sum for the purchase of emergency supplies including a "disaster cart" for each library building. The "disaster carts" contain a first aid kit of items likely to be useful when collections are damaged by water and are intended to provide the means to begin recovery procedures as soon as conditions allow. In the case of a major disaster, much greater quantities of absorbent paper, cling wrap, plastic crates etc, are likely to be required and suppliers of these things are listed in Fact Sheet 6 (Contacts for Services and Supplies).

Late in 1995, at repeat sessions for all Library staff, Gail reviewed the Library's newly developed disaster preparedness plans. A disaster cart and its contents were displayed and the role of the Disaster Response Team explained.

#### **A catalogue of library "disasters".**

In 1975 when the Library vacated the buildings which it occupied in what is now the Christchurch Arts Centre, it left premises where leaks were common and buckets were kept handy as a matter of routine. Especially in the early years, the new buildings at Ilam were not completely leak free but they were a huge improvement on the old buildings on the town site. However the James Hight building does have one serious weakness and that is the location of the plant room in the base of the tower at Level 5 and this has been the source of several minor floods over the years.

In recent years at least three minor disasters (or adverse events?) all involving water are worth recording. In March 1996 a rainstorm overflowed gutters in the Physical Sciences Library and wet, in varying degrees, several hundred volumes in one corner of the building. In February 1997, while contractors were building a major addition on the roof area at Level 5 of the James Hight Building, water poured through a newly drilled hole in the roof above bookstack on Level 4. This incident illustrates the greatly increased dangers which exist when renovations or alterations are undertaken in a library building. The Library's most significant recent disaster, although still in the minor category, occurred in the Macmillan Brown Library in mid August 1999. In this case a flood was caused when

a tap was left open over a basin while water was briefly shut off to the building. When water was restored the Library was closed and the open tap overflowed the basin for approximately six hours until discovered by a routine security check. Water spread out over a very large floor area on Level 2 and then began to penetrate through cable holes in the floor to the main storage and closed stack areas below. Fortunately the water penetrated along the line of the main corridor on Level 1 and little had penetrated to the main stack area when the flood was discovered. A substantial amount of periodical and other material stored on the floor on Level 2 was made thoroughly wet. Water on Level 1 spread out under large cabinets used to store architectural drawings but the prompt removal of the water by cleaning staff and the lifting of the cabinets saved the drawings from significant harm.

A common feature of the response to the three incidents described has been a reluctance to call out the Disaster Response Team. In each case one or more Response Team members have been involved at an early stage in the recovery process but there has been a tendency for the staff of the affected area to undertake most of the recovery work. In each of these incidents staff from the Library's Bindery have played a key role in drying and restoring wet materials.

#### **The development of the Disaster Response Team and its role in the future.**

In 1998 a comprehensive review of the Library's committee structure was undertaken and a Disaster Preparedness Subcommittee was established. The Subcommittee is merely the old Disaster Response Team under another name and locates disaster response planning within the Library's committee structure. The Subcommittee meets twice a year in order to keep the Library's disaster preparedness under regular review. In the event of a disaster the members of the Subcommittee constitute the Disaster Response Team. The Convenor of the Sub-committee is the Buildings Librarian and the responsibility fits neatly within the job description for that position which includes security and the integrity of the Library's buildings.

In November 1999 the convenor of the Disaster Preparedness Subcommittee (and the author of this paper) attended a two day disaster recovery workshop offered by CAVAL in Melbourne. The Workshop was led by Jeavons Baillie a New Zealander who works in Australia and New Zealand as a consultant on the preservation of cultural material. Discussion was wide ranging and some important lessons were learnt.

1 The Disaster Plan. In a sense the disaster plan is never finished because it must be regularly

updated. It should be in a ring binder or some other form which allows for the easy removal and replacement of superseded pages. The names and addresses of key personnel change and the names and addresses of suppliers of goods and services also change over time. Members of the Disaster Response Team should be involved with reviews of Plan contents as one means of maintaining familiarity with it.

2 The whole Disaster Response Team should train or exercise regularly but if this is not possible individual team members should attend workshops or disaster simulations such as those offered by the Canterbury Disaster Salvage Team.

3 All members of the Library's staff should be aware of the role of the Disaster Response Team. Copies of the Library's disaster documents (Manual, Plan and Fact Sheets) are held in each department and staff should know where they are kept. The Convenor of the Disaster Preparedness Subcommittee should be responsible for organising a yearly contribution to the Library's Staff Development Programme on some aspect of disaster prevention or recovery as a means of keeping staff aware of the issues.

4 Heads of library departments and branches should have a full understanding of the role of the Disaster Response Team. Senior staff should understand that in the event of a disaster in their own area of the Library, the Disaster Response Co-ordinator or another member of the Disaster Response Team is best equipped to co-ordinate response and recovery.

5 In the event of a disaster the role of the Disaster Response Co-ordinator is critical. In the immediate aftermath of a disaster a whole range of issues must be dealt with including security, media relations, staff welfare and salvage and recovery. Tasks will be delegated to members of the Disaster Response Team and easy communication and understanding among Team members as a result of past exercises or training will be invaluable in times of crisis.

## **Conclusion**

There is nothing like a modest disaster to focus attention on the role of the Library's Disaster Response Team. This is not to suggest that we need the odd disaster to keep us on our toes but to draw attention to the fact that in the absence of such events the challenge for the Team is to maintain a sufficiently high state of preparedness. We face the dilemma of preparing for an event, which, it is hoped, will never occur. Disaster preparedness planning is now being undertaken in at least two other tertiary libraries in the area, namely,

Christchurch College of Education and Lincoln University. Because there are many similarities in the nature of our collections it is very desirable that we should discuss our various plans and to consider how we might assist one of our number in the aftermath of a disaster. In this way we can develop mechanisms to provide assistance to colleagues and we will be stimulated and encouraged by contact with staff from libraries with very similar concerns.