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## The Canterbury Cultural Collections Recovery Centre – a brief history of a temporary storage facility during the Christchurch quakes

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Canterbury Cultural Collections Recovery Centre main storage floor 2013

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4.35am, Saturday 4 September 2010. It's dark, the room and its contents are shaking. As the ground below starts to settle, rumbling begins in the distance followed by another jolt that sends the heartbeat racing. Looking back, we can see that this earthquake was the beginning of a journey that the museum sector in Canterbury never expected to encounter, one full of trials and tribulations as well as hope and camaraderie.

In the aftermath of the February 2011 earthquake, the Air Force Museum of New Zealand found themselves in a position to be able to help those institutions who had nowhere else to go. Just days after the earthquake, the Museum opened its doors not only to visitors, but also to groups such as the IRD, the SPCA, Warren and Mahoney Architects, the Family and High Courts and the Christchurch Symphony Orchestra.

In those early stages, the contents within buildings from the heritage and cultural sector became our forgotten gems, as in some cases access to collections was denied and the supply of temporary storage quickly outstripped demand. The Air Force Museum's fortuitous location away from the devastated Central Business District not only brought essential services knocking, but also our fellow cultural and heritage colleagues, in the search for safe and secure storage for their collections.

In the beginning the Air Force Museum made room within their own collection stores to help groups such as the Centre of Contemporary Art (CoCA), the New Zealand Antarctic Society and Canterbury University's College House. One of the larger groups that moved their artefacts into this space was Lyttelton Museum, whose building was flagged for demolition after the February 2011 earthquake. A co-ordinated team effort between the

Lyttelton Volunteer Fire Brigade, Lyttelton Museum and the Air Force Museum saw artefacts rescued from the building, packed on the street and ferried to safe storage at the Air Force Museum.



Collection items from Lyttelton Museum being salvaged from the damaged building by Lyttelton volunteers, Air Force Museum staff and Lyttelton Volunteer Fire Brigade

When space within the Museum's collection stores ran out, shipping containers from various organisations were transported onto the Museum's tarmac.

As time rolled on, the Air Force Museum Trust Board decided to take a calculated risk within this uncertain earthquake environment and push ahead with the construction of a new exhibition hall and conservation workshop for their aircraft collection. However, instead of making use of this space straight away, the Museum decided to offer a section of the new complex to those cultural and heritage groups affected by the earthquake.

In February 2013 the Air Force Museum, in partnership with a number of organisations and museums across the country, opened the "Canterbury Cultural Collections Recovery Centre (CCCRC)". Support from these other organisations provided groups in the CCCRC with shelving, computer and internet access, pest management treatment, professional advice and assistance and collection care workshops as well as some baseline

archival materials so they could make a start on the road to recovery. In the beginning, the half dozen 'homeless' groups dotted around the Air Force Museum were the first to move into the space, but after a few months this number quickly grew to 38 organisations, largely through the power of word of mouth. Over three years, the CCCRC not only provided an interim storage solution for groups affected by the earthquakes but also access to workspaces, some materials, workshops, technical support and guidance for groups who chose to move into the space. As you can imagine, there was a wide variety of organisations and collections - from artworks to boats, Antarctic jackets to rugby balls and first aid kits - the assortment under one roof was astounding. The majority of groups within the CCCRC were volunteer-run and while maintaining complete independence and control in the management of their collections, they had the free use of the space until the end of 2015. While in the CCCRC, each individual group managed the reorganisation of their collections in their own way, with guidance and support on request from the CCCRC Administrator and the rest of the Air Force Museum team.

One of the major processes groups within CCCRC worked through was an initial collections triage assessment. During this procedure groups created an inventory of their collections isolating hazards and highlighting damage as they went.



Members from the Order of St John during the triage process  
After this process was complete, the cataloguing, photographing and packaging of artefacts began. As various groups had different collection management systems already in place, post-disaster some chose to just do an inventory, while others have chosen to overhaul the management of their collections by creating collection policies, introducing donor documentation systems as well as computer-based collection management systems such as eHive. Some groups have also included public programmes within their scope of works while their collections are in CCCRC storage, holding commemorative events and exhibitions to keep connections with their community alive.



Members from Kaiapoi District Historical Society during a workshop with textile conservator

During the last few months of the CCCRC, a number of groups relocated into new premises or other storage facilities. However there are 16 groups who are still working on securing a permanent home. For them, the CCCRC will continue to operate to a lesser extent by providing 1,000 sqm of storage-only space on the Air Force Museum site until the end of 2018, by which time we hope everyone would have found independent facilities to store, preserve and present their legacy.



**The Canterbury Disaster Salvage Team**  
(Disaster Preparedness, Education and Training for Heritage and Cultural Institutions)

**Hands on Fire and Flood workshop**  
in conjunction with the NZ Fire Service and  
**National Services Te Paerangi**



Venue: Woolston Fire Training Facility Christchurch  
Cost: \$150.00 for the two day workshop  
Limited to: 30 participants max  
Date: Either July 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> or Oct 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>  
2016