



Heritage @ Risk

Canterbury Provincial Council Buildings Christchurch

Jenny May

On 22 February 2011 the 1865 Stone Chamber of the Canterbury Provincial Council Buildings collapsed. This earthquake and the subsequent year of seismic activity have severely damaged other parts of the complex. The Armagh Street stone tower collapsed; the Bellamy's wing and the Durham street stone tower have been considerably damaged; chimneys have fallen or had to be removed.

The former provincial councillors' refreshments rooms of 1865, *Bellamys*, though strengthened, has suffered considerable damage due to both shaking and lateral ground spread toward the river. The timber

sections of the complex have also suffered some damage from falling masonry and ground spread but, in general, remain intact.



The Canterbury Provincial Council Buildings were designed by Victorian Gothic Revival architect Benjamin Woolfield Mountfort and built in three stages between 1858 and 1865. The complex is situated on a

high point on the banks of the Otakaro (Avon) River within the Puaari Pa site. They are the only remaining purpose built Provincial Government Buildings nationally.

A careful programme of deconstruction to make safe and retrieve material is being undertaken. This work is being supervised and undertaken by a team experienced in heritage work and spread over a number of disciplines including archaeologists, historians, a conservation architect, engineers, stone masons and construction workers.

As has been the case with the deconstruction and make safe works of all Christchurch's major heritage buildings damaged or destroyed by the earthquakes, the retrieval of significant features and materials for later reconstruction or interpretation has been undertaken in a manner to ensure that all material is photographed, accurately recorded, conserved and appropriately stored.



At the Provincial Buildings the principal focus to date has been on the stone chamber, the area of the most catastrophic collapse and undoubtedly the area of the greatest architectural, craftsmanship and technological significance.

The site has been marked off into numbered grids. Material from each grid is identified and numbered, recorded and crated before being placed into storage.

Large sections of the ridge and furrow ceiling have been retrieved. Stone corbels in part and some almost complete have been found within the rubble and where possible identified through existing photographic records as to their exact position.



Interior photos: Jenny May

Little has remained intact of the chamber's stained glass windows however every found fragment is carefully collected, recorded and stored for examination by a stained glass conservator.

The encaustic tiles on the east wall have remained largely intact in situ;

large areas of the tiling on the west wall also remain.

Major items retrieved have included some of the furniture (designed by the architect of the complex, B W Mountfort), and the rare double faced clock that graced the northern entrance to the stone chamber.



Photo: David Reynolds