

NEW ZEALAND

The Christchurch Earthquake of February 2011

Blue Shield Statement, March 3, 2011

Following the recent earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand, the Blue Shield expresses its great sorrow for the loss of lives and the destructions the city's cultural heritage sites and institutions suffered.

The city of Christchurch has been rocked by a major earthquake (magnitude 6.3) on last Tuesday, 22 February 2011, half a year after the 7.1 earthquake of 4 September 2010. Besides the serious casualties, the toll on heritage is to be high. It appears that there is very important damage to the historic area of the city and its built heritage.

Among others, the Anglican cathedral, the Catholic basilica, and the Victorian Gothic Provincial Buildings, symbols of the city's cultural heritage, have been severely damaged. Some major cultural institutions and conservation places, such as museums, libraries and archives, are also reported to be significantly affected. What happened in Christchurch once again underlines the vulnerability of cultural institutions, sites and monuments in case of natural disaster.



In addition to the tragic loss of human lives and the country's prevailing state of shock, the loss of these significant aspects of Christchurch's heritage will have profound and lasting consequences on the self-conception and the collective memory of its inhabitants. The intangible values of a people's cultural heritage can support the processes to regenerate normality and help people to move forward. Cultural heritage is a fundamental aspect in the rebuilding of community identity and dignity, as well as in keeping up hope after such a catastrophe.

Christchurch, Canterbury Provincial Council Buildings, exterior after the February 2011 earthquake (photos: A. Marriott; O. White)



The Blue Shield trusts that the emergency authorities will take appropriate measures to ensure the preservation of heritage features of the city in the aftermath of the disaster.

The Blue Shield Mission is “to work to protect the world’s cultural heritage threatened by armed conflict, natural and man-made disasters”. While it strongly supports the priority to find the missing, and to help the injured and homeless; it places the expertise and network of its members at the disposal of their New Zealand colleagues to facilitate their work in assessing the damages, and, for subsequent recovery, the restoration and repair measures.

Case Study: Canterbury Provincial Council Buildings, Christchurch

On February 22, 2011 the 1865 Stone Chamber of the Canterbury Provincial Council Buildings collapsed. This earthquake and the subsequent two years 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 were considerably damaged; chimneys fell or had to be removed. The former provincial councillors’ refreshments rooms of 1865,



Canterbury Provincial Council Buildings, damaged interior (photo: Jenny May)

The Blue Shield calls on the international community, responsible authorities and local population to give the fullest support to all efforts underway to protect or rescue the heritage of Christchurch and avoid further damages to museums, libraries, archives, monuments and sites.

The member organisations of the Blue Shield are currently liaising with New Zealand colleagues to obtain further information on both the situation and on the possible needs and types of help required so as to mobilise their networks accordingly. A more complete report on damages, needs and actions will be published subsequently, in order to facilitate coordination.

Bellamys, though strengthened, 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 remained intact. Over the last three years a four-stage programme to secure and stabilise the building has been taken and was completed in April 2014. The next stage will involve the planning process for the future restoration work.

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 Puari Pa site. They are the only remaining purpose-built Provincial Government Buildings nationally.

A careful programme of deconstruction and stabilisation to make safe, watertight and retrieve material was undertaken and

supervised 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.

The principal focus was initially based around the 1865 Stone Debating Chamber, the area of the most catastrophic collapse and undoubtedly the area of the greatest architectural, craftsmanship and technological significance. The site around the Stone Chamber was marked off into numbered grids. Material from each grid was identified and numbered, recorded and crated before being placed into storage. Large sections of the ridge and furrow ceiling have also 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.

Tragically, little has remained intact of the Chamber's stained glass windows; however, every found fragment was carefully collected, recorded and stored. 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 19th century 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. The Chamber now has a temporary structure built over the top of it to ensure it is fully protected and watertight.

The remaining areas of the complex, including the 1865 Belamy's wing, have been carefully secured and considerable engi-

neering work has been undertaken to provide the required temporary stabilisation and weather tightness to ensure the buildings will remain well protected until the conservation and restoration programme is developed; a monitoring and securing programme for this period is currently being established.

Two major grants have been received for the future restoration of the Provincial buildings complex. A grant from the New York-based World Monuments Fund was received in 2012 to help fund the restoration of recovered historic furniture from the Stone Debating Chamber, in particular the speaker's chair and double-faced clock, and also to interpret and promote the future restoration and conservation of the heritage structure. This work is currently being undertaken. In March 2014 the Christchurch Earthquake Appeal Trust and the Ministry for Culture and Heritage provided funding of \$2.5 million for the Canterbury Provincial Council Buildings, to be used towards the restoration and reconstruction of the Armagh Street and Durham Street stone towers. The Durham Street tower was severely structurally compromised in the 2011 earthquake and has been deconstructed to approximately two metres above ground and the Armagh Street tower fell in February 2011 – the remnants have been secured. When completed, this work is intended to enable the adjacent timber sections of the complex to be restored and re-opened. This work will form part of the overall programme being developed for the future work on the Canterbury Provincial Council Buildings. The total cost of restoration and reconstruction of the Provincial building complex is yet to be determined, but it is estimated to exceed the total insurance pay-out of approximately \$30 million.

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