

Media statement – 4pm, 5 April 2013

Akaroa Gallery to reopen once earthquake repairs completed

The way has been cleared to save the historic Akaroa Gallery.

Resource and building consents have been granted and structural designs for the repair work are now complete. Richdale Builders Ltd is set to begin the work which is expected to take two months.

Built originally in 1911, the building, formally known as the Orion Powerhouse Gallery, is one of Akaroa's rare brick buildings and is one of the oldest buildings in Orion's ownership. It has a category 2 Historic Places Trust listing.

Now a museum of technology, an exhibition space and concert venue, the main part of the Gallery was originally constructed to house one of the earliest power generators in the South Island. A Pelton wheel – a water turbine used to generate hydro-electricity – was used until the 1950s. It was returned to the building about 10 years ago and, with the support of the local community, restored to working order.

Earthquake damage to the building has meant the Gallery hasn't been used for the past two years. But that didn't mean it had been abandoned.

"The wider Christchurch community has had to make some tough calls on the future of a number of historic buildings. We've worked closely with the Historic Places Trust to look at the options for the Gallery. We're very pleased that we've been able to save the Akaroa Gallery," said Orion CEO Rob Jamieson.

Mr Jamieson said that what makes this particularly significant is that the Gallery repair plans are similar to those Orion used back in the 1990s to reinforce many of its electricity substations against possible earthquake damage.

"Given the Gallery started its life as a power station it's fitting that the structural repair plans are very similar to what we used in our seismic strengthening programme for buildings containing essential electrical equipment. We know that this previous work was the reason we were able to prevent serious damage to so many of our heritage substation buildings and importantly, to keep the lights on to our community."

"This is great news for Akaroa," says Steve Lowndes, chair of the Akaroa Civic Trust. "So many of Akaroa's public buildings have been closed for such a long time that to hear of Orion's commitment to getting the Powerhouse up and running again is a real tonic."

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