

**Issue 24**  
August 2023



# Auckland Council Archives

## Auckland begins at the Archives

### Kia ora

Welcome to this issue of the Archives newsletter, keeping you up to date with what's happening at Council Archives and sharing some of the interesting stories we uncover working with Auckland's records.

In this issue, Aline reports on a conservation project off the coast of Canada, James researches a mayoral portrait, and Lene learns of some unusual goings on at Auckland's Civic Theatre.

Finally, we say goodbye to several longstanding members of the Archives team and welcome two new faces.

We hope you enjoy it.

In this issue:

- Conserving the Archives of Saint-Pierre et Miquelon
- A portrait of Sir John Allum
- Presto – Archive's new database
- The haunting of the Auckland Civic Theatre
- Archives staff news

# Conserving the Archives of Saint-Pierre et Miquelon

Aline Curtis, Conservator/Kaiatawhai Whakaora Taonga

Before joining Auckland Council Archives in September 2022, I was a freelance conservator with ongoing projects in France. One of them, paused due to the Covid-19 pandemic, was to support, train and supervise the Archives team at the Museum of Arche in Saint-Pierre et Miquelon in how to care for the collection during a planned building renovation project.

Saint-Pierre et Miquelon is a French archipelago in the Atlantic Ocean near the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador, with a population of around 6000 people.

The Museum is in Saint-Pierre, the main town of the Archipelago, and it holds the Museum collection (a diverse collection covering the Arts, Social History, Ethnology, Geology and Natural sciences) as well as the Archives of the territory. An inventory of the Archives never really existed and a fire in 1992 destroyed many of the records.



The Museum and Archives building in Saint-Pierre

The Archives collection is mainly composed of administrative and legal documents from different institutions of the archipelago, gifts, or acquisitions from private donor families from the archipelago, as well as a large collection of maps, plans, posters, and photographs. It is difficult to know what the oldest record would be as no real inventory exists at this stage, and after the fire no inventory was made of the records that had been destroyed.



Records held in the Archives

I first visited the Archives in October 2019, to give basic training to the two agents taking care of the collection: four days were spent on the fundamentals of preventive conservation, including environmental conditions, handling and the storage requirements needed for archival documents. Also, I was physically there to answer their questions and understand the unique circumstances caused by being in such an isolated and rough location. The week went quickly but it was a good starting point for a multi-year project and ongoing relationship. Indeed, the other purpose of my visit was to survey the needs of the collection in preparation for future investment and building work.

After a few exchanges during the Covid-19 pandemic, I finally went back there in November - December 2022. I was pleased to see that they had created a dedicated space for a studio where they could clean and pack items (and not in the storage spaces as before); they had acquired conservation packing materials and were following practical guidelines both in conservation and health and safety. Following the training they had received and my visit three years earlier, I could see that the agents had a greater awareness of many issues in conservation and collection management.



Records burnt in the 1992 fire stored in unfinished enclosures



Staff are trained in cleaning and basic enclosure for records

A third agent has now joined the team and the focus is on inventorying the collection, quantifying it, and ensuring that moving it for the duration of the building renovations is possible. The logistics behind this move will depend on these tasks and the information they will get from it.

They have acquired new software which will be used to create a database and produce the inventory (previously they had been using Word lists and some Excel spreadsheets that were not being updated). We discussed material and physical description as well as condition and rating.

My task was to support them and guide them in implementing a process for creating the inventory alongside the mechanical cleaning, material consideration and re-packing processes.

We organised the space, learnt the technical skills needed for cleaning and packing, and listed the priorities as there was only a short time to get everything ready before the building work started and the collection moved.



The original small conservation room



The new dedicated conservation space



The storage room as it was originally



The storage room after re-organisation and preventive conservation training

Finally, I was consulted about the requirements for the new design of the building, along with the Project management team working on the Museum collection (contracted conservators Kiriaki Tsemmeloglou and Julia Becker, from France). Building materials, design of spaces, monitoring

environmental conditions, display, and storage of collections; everything had to be examined in order to provide specifications suitable for this unique space, collections, and land.

We continue to keep in touch via online meetings, discussing how they can achieve their goals within the timeframe, answering their questions and supporting their work and decision-making. The staff at the Archives of Saint-Pierre et Miquelon are not trained archivists. They are learning by teaching themselves, having received some training in France or from professionals visiting their island.

This context, in addition to the remote location, makes this project very challenging but extremely enriching at the same time. It has also been very good preparation for the upcoming relocation of Auckland Council Archives to new premises, where everything must be adapted to suit the needs of our collections.

My next visit to Saint-Pierre et Miquelon is scheduled for the end of 2023.

## Presto – an update on our new database

Archives Online, the family history indexes, and online exhibitions (all created using the DBTextworks programme) were temporarily removed from the council website on 8 August 2022 for remedial work. Council Archives is not currently able to provide a date when they will be restored to the council website.

The team is currently using (and testing) Inmagic Presto, the upgraded information management software programme created by the Lucidea company to replace its DBTextworks programme. It is expected that the online version of Presto will provide a very similar experience for customers to its predecessor programme.



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## A Portrait of Auckland Mayor Sir John Allum

James Armstrong, Team Leader Archives Management



A surprising discovery was recently made during preparations for moving the council's archives, civic gifts and council artefacts to a new location on the North Shore (scheduled for next year). A mayoral portrait which had no plaque, label or identifying text, other than the artist's signature (J C Hill) had been transferred in 2003 from storage in another council building to Auckland City Council Archives. There it had at first been misidentified as Sir Dove-Myer Robinson. However, comparisons with published photographs and cartoons suggested that it was of one of his predecessors, long-serving mayor of Auckland City Sir John Andrew Charles Allum (1889-1972) [Civic Gift and Council Artefact number 2003 13 1].

The portrait was painted on board enclosed in a silver-coloured unglazed wooden frame. When temporarily

removed from its frame, an unsigned, unfinished painting similar in size of an unidentified woman was found concealed underneath the mayoral portrait (see illustration below).

On commercial art board for oil paint and in a style not dissimilar to the mayoral portrait, it seems reasonable to assume that it was an abandoned work by the same artist re-purposed as packing material for another painting that he valued more highly. Pasted on the back of the mayoral portrait were two torn, partially obscured labels evidently written by the artist.



Following treatment by our conservator, it was possible to read or reconstruct most of their text. One helpfully confirmed the identity of the sitter, referred to his mayoralty and knighthood, which was conferred in 1950, and noted 'Not for sale'. This and the other label, directing the painting's packer to take care with its frame, indicated that the portrait had once been exhibited.

Exhibition catalogues from the early 1950s confirmed that Hill's portrait of Sir John Allum was included in an annual exhibition of the Auckland Society of Arts held at Auckland Art Gallery from June to July 1952 (catalogue number 40, noted as 'Not for sale'). Hill had exhibited a portrait of Brigadier Ronald Park at the society's annual exhibition in 1950, and went on to show a self-portrait in 1953, and the following year a portrait of solicitor Otho

Martelli. All three portraits were most likely commissioned as they were exhibited as not for sale, unlike most other works shown at the society's annual exhibitions. Hill's life-size portrait of Sir Edmund Hillary probably painted around the time of his Mount Everest ascent is held by the National Library of New Zealand.

Sir John Allum was an electrical engineer born in London who emigrated to New Zealand with his wife and young daughter in 1909. After working for several years in Dunedin, he returned to Auckland and in 1922 founded the Allum Electrical Company Limited, remaining for several decades as its managing director. Allum served as an Auckland City councillor throughout the 1920s and was returned to office in 1938. He was mayor of Auckland City from 1941 to 1953. Also a foundation member and first chairman of the elected Auckland Transport Board in 1928, Allum served as president of several local and national employers' organisations, including the Auckland Manufacturers' Association and the New Zealand Employers' Federation. An active office-holder in up to 60 organisations, including school boards and cultural societies, Allum must have spent a sizeable portion of his adult life in meetings and surely among other sterling qualities, possessed an uncommonly high boredom threshold. He was a strong supporter of technical education and responsible for creating much-needed transit housing in Auckland after the Second World War using surplus American military buildings.

As chairman of the Auckland Harbour Bridge Authority from its establishment in 1950 until 1971, Allum oversaw the bridge's construction and side-lane extensions. It was sometimes jocularly called 'Jack Allum's Bridge'. For part of that time, he gave more than a decade's service as chairman of the Auckland Metropolitan Drainage Board. Allum's character was such that he was disparagingly known to some in Parliament as 'His Imperial Highness'. Dr Graham Bush, historian of Auckland City Council noted, 'At the town hall he was regarded as a martinet, impatient of opposition, but his battered countenance, Cheshire-cat grin and bristly moustache made him beloved of political cartoonists'.

Sir John Allum is arguably no more remarkable than the self-taught artist responsible for his portrait. John Cecil Hill was also a British subject born in 1889 in St Petersburg, Russia. His father worked for the Cammell Laird shipbuilding company. He was educated at Dulwich College, a fee-charging English public school where notable former pupils include Sir Ernest Shackleton, Raymond Chandler and P G Wodehouse. Hill served in the British Army as an infantry officer in the York and Lancaster Regiment, resigning his commission in 1913. He was a tea planter in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) on holiday in New Zealand at the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914. He enlisted that month in the New Zealand armed forces and was commissioned as a lieutenant in the Canterbury Infantry Battalion. New Zealand military personnel records available online note four tattoos on his forearms, including a regimental badge (presumably that of the York and Lancaster Regiment, which features a tiger) and Japanese dragons, perhaps in those days unusual for a commissioned officer.

Hill embarked with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in October 1914. He suffered a serious gunshot wound to his lower jaw on 25 April 1915, the day the ANZACs landed on the Gallipoli peninsula. He was invalided first to Egypt then to the United Kingdom. An army medical board later assessed the wound as a permanent disability that rendered him initially unfit for further general (active) service. Invalided back to New Zealand in November 1916, Hill was appointed as the country's first Assistant Provost-Marshal to the Forces in April 1917. He commanded some 250 wharf guards and military police, whose duties included the arrest of deserters and those defaulting on military service.

Hill married Isabel Watson, daughter of a director of the Bank of New Zealand, in Wellington in September 1917. He was redesignated Provost-Marshal to the Forces in September 1918 with responsibility for inspection of detention barracks and the guards on quarantine islands. He saw brief post-war service in 1919 with New Zealand's Samoan garrison, retiring from the army with the rank of major in December 1919, and then with the civilian police in Samoa. Thereafter, his occupations included working as a commercial turtle hunter.

In 1927, Hill was appointed as staff cartoonist for the *Auckland Star* newspaper, a role he held for about a quarter of a century, though less well known than another English cartoonist, Gordon Minhinnick, who was employed for almost twice as long by the *New Zealand Herald*. According to Ian Grant's history of the New Zealand cartoon, 'Hill's lack of training or flair for draughtsmanship was obvious; his skill lay in his ability to grab a likeness, and in the ingenuity of his ideas'. Skill in creating a likeness must have assisted him as a portraitist. Auckland Art Gallery has five of his drawings. Hill died in 1974 in Rotorua.

The provenance of Archives' portrait of Sir John Allum remains unclear at the time of writing. Silence in the subject files of the Auckland City Council Town Clerk's Department (Archives' series ACC 275) suggests that it was not commissioned by the council. The files nevertheless give details of various gifts by the council and its staff to Sir John and his wife. The portrait was not listed among pictures displayed in 2000 in the council chamber at Auckland Town Hall. It seems likely that it was presented to Auckland City Council by the Allum family after Sir John Allum died or following the death of his widow Lady Annie Allum (in 1982), but this is yet to be confirmed. It would be interesting to learn the identity of the woman whose unfinished portrait has lain hidden in archives for the last twenty years.

### Sources:

Archives New Zealand – Military personnel files (series 18805): [Military personnel file John Cecil Hill](#) and [Military personnel file John Cecil Hill](#)

Archives New Zealand – Rotorua probate files (series 4492): [Rotorua probate file John Cecil Hill](#)

Auckland Council Archives – Auckland City Council Town Clerk's Dept subject file on Councillor J A C Allum, 1939-1958 [ACC 275, record no 39-308, box 245]

Auckland War Memorial Museum online Cenotaph database: [Cenotaph record John Cecil Hill](#)

G W A Bush, *Decently and in Order: The Government of the City of Auckland, 1840-1971* (Auckland: Collins for Auckland City Council, 1971)

Graham W A Bush, 'Allum, John Andrew Charles', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, first published in 2000, updated February 2006. Te Ara: The Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, [Te Ara Biographies John Allum](#) (accessed 4 August 2023)

*Catalogue of the Annual Exhibition of the Auckland Society of Arts* (Auckland: Auckland Society of Arts, 1952), p.17

'Cost of Defence', *Evening Post* [Wellington], 17 April 1918, p.8

Dulwich College pupils' record cards, Dulwich College Archives, London (provided by Freddie Witts, Archivist, 14 August 2023)

Ian F Grant, *The Unauthorized Version: A Cartoon History of New Zealand*, revised edn (Auckland: David Bateman in association with Fraser Books, 1987)

*National Centennial Exhibition of New Zealand Art Catalogue*, ed by A H McLintock (Wellington: Dept of Internal Affairs, 1940), p.42

*New Zealand Parliamentary Debates* [...] *Legislative Council and House of Representatives*, 7 December 1921, Vol. 192 (Wellington: Marcus F Marks, 1921), pp.904-905

# The Haunting of Auckland Civic Theatre

Lene Aiono (the unsent email transcript of a missing Archivist)

It sat on my table. An old carton. It wanted to be opened.

It felt eerie to perceive, let alone approach. At first, I thought it said, 'Miscellaneous', which was how every nightmare begins for an Archivist. However, it was scribed with the word, 'Mysteries'. I



let it percolate while I retrieved my coffee. Be it 'Miscellaneous' or 'Mysteries', an Archivist knows that neither will be explored without a flat white or a strong black.

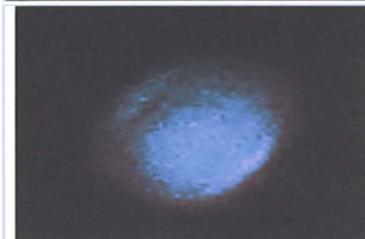
Inside, I was greeted by a swarm of cockroaches. Although dead, their stink made themselves welcome. It was a prelude of dreadful delights to come. But it was the file that held my interest. I blew off the dust and read: '*Investigation Report: Auckland Civic Theatre 17<sup>th</sup> February 2012*'. This was not a standard Council document, but an entire report by *Haunted Auckland* - a motley crew of *Ghostbusters* - on their Class Two Investigation into what was believed to be the *Haunting of*

*Auckland Civic Theatre*.

The crew began their investigation between the haunting hours of 8pm and 12pm, which was usually when the dead arose or clubgoers got busy. They had access to the entire building



To the left is a cropped section of the above photograph, showing the light anomaly or orb located directly above our investigator Tanya (facing the camera), while looking out from the stage of the main auditorium. The anomaly is not perfectly spherical, which may indicate movement.

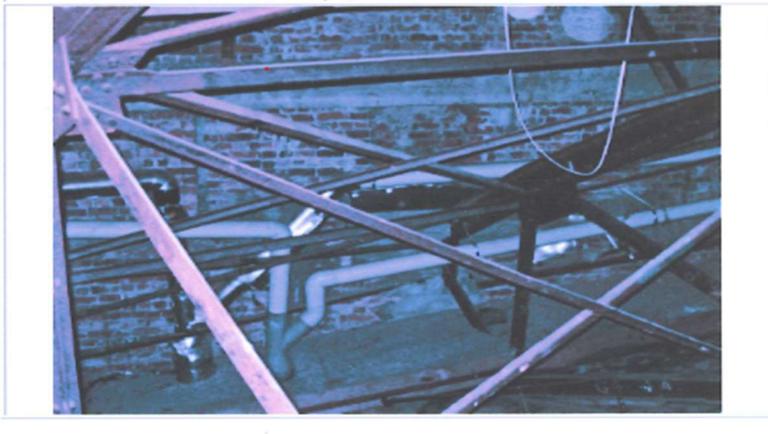


This image shows the same light anomaly, at 3x zoom.

including the Wintergarden basement area. Using photographic sweeps, ambient sound recordings, and EMF monitoring, they obtained one thousand photographs capturing spectral orbs and several hours of video and audio recordings, evidence of a presence making itself known to the living.

One psychic believed that there was more than one ghostly resident present, though a Civic staff member who did not wish to be identified, possibly fearing reprisal, stated he had not personally observed any phenomena relating to a haunting in all the time he had worked there. *Haunted Auckland* concluded that there were indeed some kind of residual phenomena, not surprising considering the wide range of artistic activity that took place in the 83 years it had been in operation.

Photograph #2: Roof Orb\*



To tell you the truth... the conclusion left an empty hole. I needed to delve more obsessively into this. But that was the end of it. Nothing more. I said, "I'd give my soul to find hard evidence of a haunting." I regretted uttering such a definitive proclamation. Out popped a CD and hit my shoe, as if a wraith stamped its cloven hooves upon it. Something from beyond the grave wanted me to venture further.

If you have the heart, follow this link to the [Mysterious Recording](#). I, on the other hand, have not mustered up the courage to find the truth of the *Haunting of the Auckland Civic Theatre*. In fact, I mean not to. I am easily spooked turning corners in my building in broad daylight. I often turn up

to work early when no one is around. The building is shrouded in darkness, only where I step is illuminated. I wait for staff to arrive, wait for someone to come, and for dawn to break.

Yet my eyes never leave that carton of 'Mysteries,' not even in the dark, by myself. The label is apt, for indeed it is a mystery as to how it came into my possession.

I could not abide it much longer. I needed to rid myself of this terror from the unknown abyss. Yet I sat there. Watching It. I had come to even tolerate...enjoy its ethereal presence. The shadows had crept in through the window and dined at the table of my sanity, or devouring whatever sanity remained. I stared at it.

It sat on my table. An old carton. It wanted to be opened...to be let loose.

Photograph #4: Wintergarden Orb\*



[Editor's note: This file was given to Lene by a member of the Corporate Records team, who found it in a carton transferred from Tātaki Auckland Unlimited].

## Staff news



We say goodbye to Jane Ferguson, Archivist, who was recently appointed to the position of Archivist at the University Archive, located in the General Library of the University of Auckland. She joined Council Archives in the position of Archives Support, where her duties including managing the Archives database. We wish Jane all the best in her new position, and we will all miss her fabulous baking skills.



We also farewell Keith Stuart, Senior Archivist, who left Council Archives in May to take up the position of Archivist/Archives Manager and Privacy Officer for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Auckland.

Keith has had a varied career to date, including nine years as a Franciscan friar, six years as a counsellor working with people affected by HIV/AIDS and drug addictions, as well as eleven years in adult education. We wish Keith all the best in his new role and look forward to visiting him in Ponsonby.



We welcome Becky Hawes who joined us in November 2022 from Auckland Zoo where she was a member of the Visitor Operations team. She studied at the University of Auckland, gaining a BA (Hons) in Anthropology specialising in Archaeology. After completing further study in Archives Management through the Open Polytechnic she gained her first archivist position with Auckland Council Archives.



Also joining the team is Paul Chapman, Digital Archives Imaging Specialist. With an MA in Art and Design, he was recently employed by Auckland Art Gallery as a Collections Photographer, documenting artworks for publication & conservation needs. He is highly experienced with digitising collections and in managing the associated digital archives.

<https://www.chapmanpaul.com/>



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