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**Sealed Up Tight: The Endurance of Low Priority Collections.
A Case Study of the Laing Seal Collection at Otago Museum**

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Abstract

This thesis is a case study examining a collection of Victorian era glass seal matrix casts, titled the Laing Seal Collection. Held by Otago Museum (OM), these glass casts make up what this research terms a “low-priority collection”: a collection that does not place highly within the collection policy and as a result receives no resources or research and little staff attention.

By examining internal documents from Otago Museum, and interviewing key staff members, the objective of this research was to divine why these low priority collections endure. By examining the history of the Seal Collection this research aims to better understand how collections come to be decontextualised. Through tracing both the provenance of the Seal Collection and its history at Otago Museum this research hoped to discover how and why the collection became unknown. The lenses of material culture and organisational memory are used to better understand how staff memories become the last bastion for historical collection data that is not recorded. This makes that information susceptible to forgetfulness and staff transitions.

The research shows that the Laing Seal Collection has no discoverable accession documentation, nor historical records indicating when or why it came to Otago Museum. However, this research did succeed in beginning the process of cataloguing and identifying the Collection and revealed a connection from Laing to Dunedin. It also argues that for the Laing Seal Collection to flourish as a collection, agency must be taken by staff members and the collection be fully integrated into Otago Museum’s Collection Management System. The future of the collection will entirely depend on how many staff resources are dedicated to it.

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Abbreviations

- ARF – Article receipt form
- CMS – Collection Management System
- FRS – Fellow of the Royal Society
- GLAM – Galleries, libraries, archives and museums
- ICOM – International Council of Museums
- OM – Otago Museum
- RIFD – Radio frequency identification device

Reader’s Note

The titles and descriptions of Henry Laing’s publications and Seals are accurately reproduced. Readers are to note there is little consistency within Laing’s system of labelling and descriptive terms. For example, sections might be titled *Irish Devices and Mottoes*, *Welch Mottoes and Devices*, or even *Devices with Motto in the Spanish Language*. All titles have been faithfully reproduced including grammar and spelling errors.