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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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Isobel Claire Andrewartha

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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.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 How this research began...

I have always been interested in discrete, rewarding collections. As a child I was a keen philatelist and it is probably no surprise that I ended up working in museums later in life. So when the opportunity arose to work on a mysterious collection, full of minuscule objects, each with its own story, I could hardly resist. The Laing Seal Collection drew me in. To examine these diminutive illustrations etched into glass and try to discover their history seemed a unique challenge. I imagined Seals that would be typically proper, as their Victorian heritage would suggest: initials, names, or perhaps biblical verses inscribed. And yes, these things are in the Collection. But there is also a great amount of humour as well. One tiny Seal is inscribed “I’m quite unhinged” with the image of a broken gate. Imagine receiving a letter with such a Seal attached. This Collection has brought me nothing but joy as I have explored it and I hope to convey some of the original amazement I felt discovering this Collection within this research.

1.2 The Research Question, Methodology & Design

This thesis is an examination of low priority collections through a case study of the Laing Seals at Otago Museum (OM). The core research question framing this discussion is: Which factors contribute to the endurance of low priority collections and how can these collections be re-established? Below this overarching question are a number of inferred questions focused on the Laing Seal case study. These include what the current state of the Laing Seal Collection is, what its history is both during its time at OM and before its acquisition, and finally, how is this Collection representative of larger concerns in the galleries, libraries, archives and museums (GLAM) sector, around memory and data retention.

These questions are explored through a post-positivist methodology, which accepts the pluralism of method inherent in multidisciplinary studies (Wildemuth, 1993). By constructing a narrative of the Laing Seal Collection this research will examine the epistemological journey of the Collection as it functions as part of OM's wider collections. Within this research the subjectivity of observation is acknowledged, as I undertake a first-person experiential, phenomenological approach. This narrative case study is interpreted through the researcher's subjective lens and social constructs (Wildemuth, 1993) and acknowledges my agency. This kind of methodology is common within museums studies as researchers undertake case studies, such as Tapsell's deeply personal exploration of taonga (1997). The experiential methodology was chosen because it will illustrate many of the issues encountered with the Laing Seals, and will best frame the journey of discovery. These kinds of interpretive studies can suffer from conceptual difficulties as systematic representations struggle to mesh with analytical method (Hellström, 2008, p. 322). Thus, the methodology must be rigorously supported by methods that ground the narrative.

In parallel with the methodology of the research, the methods themselves support a naturalistic case study, which is not directly "defined by methodology or method" (Simons, 2014, p. 6) but is instead defined by the extent of the case study itself. To this end the case study has "rich description" (Simons, 2014, p. 22) to support the conceptual framework. However, uniquely, it also breaks away from the typical naturalistic approach that requires researchers to "hold in abeyance any of his or her prior political assumptions and theoretical commitments about what is happening in the world of the study" (Roman and Apple, 1990, p. 46). Rather, it is presented from a first-person view acknowledging my presence as a researcher and agent within the study. For example, Chapter 5 offers possible trajectories that the Collection could take after the conclusion of this thesis, facilitated by the work

undertaken in this research. However, this first-person account will be necessarily balanced by examining primary sources from Otago Museum – grounding phenomenology with factual evidence.

When examining collections in detail, it is customary to have a case study to support the core research question. For example, as this case study does, when examining a gown from the collection of the Turtle Bay Exploration Park Museum in Redding, California (2016), Lee framed her article as a narrative of exploration, documenting the process of discovering the dress' provenance. The case study of the Laing Seals presented here is crucial to understanding low priority collections because, as Voss states, low priority collections have “untapped research potential, waiting to be unleashed, [but this potential] quickly fades against the reality of conducting research on existing collection” (2012, p. 148). In other words, because existing collections have momentum in the form of provenance, stakeholder support, or associated resources, it is simply easier for research to be conducted, meaning lower priority case studies like the Laing Seals are scarcer.

To support this case study methodology, a number of interviews were undertaken with significant current and former staff members. These interviews acknowledge that the interviewees themselves help shape the knowledge being imparted. Called active interviewing by Holstein and Gubrium (1995), this process produces narratives and encourages in-depth answers. It asks hypothetical questions and gets interviewees to imagine future scenarios, not just recount information from the past. The interviews facilitate the meaning-making process and this helped the research to identify where holes in the Laing Seal Collection were already known, as staff identified issues they wanted to fix. These interviews highlighted how well staff understood the plight of the Laing Seal Collection and were glad an opportunity had arisen to address the Collection.

1.3 Ethical Considerations

The interviewees were chosen for their involvement or proximity to the Laing Seal Collection. Each of them sought and was assured of anonymity, and, accordingly, pseudonyms are used. However, it was noted early in the process that if interviewees were co-workers it would be difficult to provide total anonymity as a researcher's ability to "disguise an insider's 'turn of phrase' or verbal mannerism" (Tolich, 2004, p. 103) is limited. Labelled "internal confidentiality" (Tolich, 2004, p. 101), this issue arises in smaller scale studies that focus within a single institution or small sector. Here the researcher must still aim to fulfil the original objective of the confidentiality – namely to "do no harm" (Tolich, 2004, p. 101) to participants as a result of research. Therefore, on several occasions throughout the process interviewees have had the opportunity to see how their words appear in the text and to make amendments as needed.

It is important to acknowledge my own involvement within this research, not only as the researcher and an agent of change, but also as an employee of Otago Museum. I am not directly employed within the Collections, Research and Education team, under which collection care and interpretation falls. Rather I work for the Programmes and Science Engagement team. This places me outside the chain of command that is ultimately responsible for the management of the Laing Seal Collection. Part of this research requires me to be constructively critical of the Collections team and their role as caretakers of the Laing Seal Collection, but I anticipate this truthfulness will be beneficial to the Museum moving forward and, as shall be elucidated in the interviews in Chapter 4, the staff is sincere in their wishes to improve the Collection.

1.4 Scope & Rationale

This study hopes to benefit researchers from the GLAM sector by illustrating a case study that many may recognise within their own museum, exploring low priority collections and the endurance of such collections as provenance and acquisition information is forgotten. This case study demonstrates how difficult it is to go backwards and recover the pieces of a collection if information has been gradually lost over time. This will guide other institutions and hopefully reassure practitioners that they are not alone in struggling with difficult collections. However, this research will also have direct outcomes and benefits for Otago Museum. The Laing Seal Collection has now been documented and, as a result, any further work will not have to undertake this time consuming task.

Throughout this thesis, the scope of the research has necessarily changed as the historical data of the Collection was uncovered. Rather than attempting to present a full history of the Laing Seal Collection, which would require significantly more time and research to complete, this study instead looks at its current position and reasonable steps forward for the Collection. This research aspires to bring the Collection to light in the hopes that Otago Museum and other external researchers may pick up the baton once this research is complete. Thus, this thesis constructs a picture of the Seals so that others may continue the research and learn from the process undertaken here.

1.5 Chapter Outlines

Chapter 1 will finish by exploring sigillography, the study of heraldry seals, without which it is difficult to contextualise the Laing Seal Collection.

Chapter 2 builds the conceptual framework for the thesis. Through examining the two separate fields of material culture studies and organisational memory studies this chapter ties

the Laing Seal case study to broader concerns. It is the grounding in material culture that will support the examination undertaken of the Laing Seals, exploring collection policies, lower priority collections and their discoverability. The literature review defines and solidifies the concept of a low priority collection, that is, collections which do not conform easily to an institution's collection policy, and consequentially suffer. Organisational memory studies explore the informal information passed between co-workers within an institution, be that via word of mouth or documentation. It includes informal work habits, unconscious mental structures and behaviours, and within GLAM institutions it can go as far as to recall narratives around collections, filling the space between official, anecdotal and mythic narratives. By bringing organisational memory together with agency the staff involved with low priority collections are shown to be key actors in the fates of these types of collections.

Chapter 3 explores the multi-faceted context surrounding the Laing Seal Collection. It starts by briefly outlining its originator, Henry Laing, and exploring the context and reason for the Seals' creation. From there, it moves to look at the physical extent of the Collection, what is collected within it and what is missing, painting a detailed picture of a beautiful collection. Chapter 3 then examines the institutional context, building a background understanding of Otago Museum's policies and mission statement. These internal policies are one of the major factors controlling the trajectory of the Laing Seals. The chapter also looks at the organisational memory specific to the GLAM sector and the politics around remembering and forgetting institutional knowledge within museums. Finally, Chapter 3 looks at two specific contextual situations that affect the Seal Collection. These are that of resources, both in general and at Otago Museum, and the ethical standards Otago Museum is held to as a member of the international museum community. Each of these facets illustrates the difficult

nature of low priority collections and how priorities and stakeholders inevitably affect them. It is many of these factors that lead to the endurance of low priority collections.

Chapter 4 turns to the research conducted into the Laing Seal Collection. I interviewed a number of key current and past staff members to get a better understanding of the existing organisational memory and what the staff know about the Seal Collection now. Then, I looked directly at the Laing Seal Collection, hoping to learn about the Collection from the Collection itself. I also explored internal OM documents and archives, article receipt forms, annual reports and the card catalogue. In these ways this research began the process of defining what must happen to the Collection, including examining its current storage and organisation.

Chapter 5 broadens the discussion by analysing the Laing Seals as a case of organisational memory interacting with professional agency within a workplace. The Collection forms an object of focus, to be recalled, or forgotten, through both process and procedure. In this way the Collection becomes a larger examination of agency and how handover is fundamental in determining the success of museum collections and the continuity of organisational memory. This chapter also looks forward, imagining three future scenarios for the Laing Seals: deaccessioning, further research, or retention of the status quo. In all likelihood any forward path will be a hybrid of different suggestions, but to understand what might happen to the Collection is, in itself, a motivator of change.

This thesis concludes in Chapter 6 by discussing what this research could not achieve and explores some broader implications from this research. The objectives not achieved within this study themselves reflect the difficulties found within low priority collections and illustrate their enduring nature.

1.6 Sigillography

To understand and appreciate the Seals, a basic understanding of sigillography is required. The study of seals (or sigillography) is a broad, yet shallow field, with few comprehensive references available (Collon, 1992, p. 9). The study, nevertheless, ranges from seal invention which is “closely associated with the invention of writing” (Collon, 1992, p. 9), across both spatial and temporal categories through to modern interpretations of the seal. Within the medieval period and the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, sigillography tends to look at seals associated with high office or ecclesiastic seals (New, 2010: Laing, 1850), as they were more elaborate seals, often accompanying official documents to ensure authenticity (Williams, 1993, p. 1). However, this is not the full extent to which seals were used, and most of the intact seals today are from “ordinary people” (Rassweiler, 2011, p. 1). This research focuses upon these ordinary seals.

However, before exploring in detail the historic study and collection of seals, it is important to understand some basic terminology. A *seal* can refer to two different things, depending on the context (New, 2010). It can either be the matrix, also known as a “die” that has an intaglio design intended for imprinting onto wax (or equivalent), this is the portion often held by a handle or a piece of jewellery such as a signet ring (Williams, 1993, p. 4). Or, a *seal* can mean the impression itself, often attached to a document or used to seal a letter or envelope closed. I use the word *Seal* to indicate a seal matrix cast, which make up the overwhelming majority of the Laing Seal Collection. These casts are not the matrix themselves, but rather are glass casts used to create multiple identical matrices. Meanwhile, the wax impression will be referred to as a *sealing* - an archaic word no longer in fashion, but useful in this context to distinguish between the two. As New (2010) illustrates, a sealing can be used for two objectives - either to validate a document or to close a document off by

physically sticking it closed. Mainly, the sealings of validation survive intact, as sealings of closing tend to be destroyed when opening the document. Sigillography can study sealings specifically by analysing the material used to hold the impression, such as wax (Fabre, Durand, Bassel, et al., 2017). Historians can also analyse the impression itself and what is being communicated in the image in a form of content analysis (Collon, 1992), with some research combining both of these aspects (Cwiertnia, Ailes & Dryburgh, 2016).

Normally the seal imagery contains two elements - the words and the design (New, 2010, p. 7). It is this impression that can be studied from either the sealing or the seal itself. Despite seals going out of fashion by the end of the Middle Ages (New, 2010, p. 112), nineteenth century sealings proliferated in one use specifically - that of closing personal correspondence (New, 2010, p. 113). These seals were not necessarily designed to identify the sender but could rather be intended to communicate a multitude of messages. Seidmann suggests that while the intaglio-engraved seals were falling out of fashion in the nineteenth century, engravers similar to William Tassie and his apprentice, Henry Laing, devoted their careers to producing miniature busts, witty inscriptions and mottos (1997, p. 152).

Within the Laing Seal Collection there are personal seals that have names or initials, send well (or ill) wishes to the recipient, lament absence, or aim to bemuse, just to name a few themes. Laing notes in the introduction to his *Bill of Sale* that he can produce a seal matrix “from any original Seal, or even from an impression; thus in case of the original being lost” (Laing, n.d., p. v). Therefore, during Laing’s lifetime, seals such as these were not necessarily used for authentication since they were easily reproduced or restored. With this knowledge of seals and how they were utilised in the nineteenth century, the Laing Seal Collection can be better understood and this research can explore what it represents as both a low-priority and historic collection.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to begin framing which factors contribute to the endurance of low priority collections and how those collections can be re-established. The literature pertinent to the case study of the Laing Seal Collection draws on separate disciplinary fields: material culture studies and organisational memory theory. This chapter is organised by these two concepts. Firstly, I consider literature focusing on material culture studies and its interaction with collection management policies. Taking material culture studies further also frames an exploration of low priority collections and their discoverability. Secondly, by drawing on organisational memory studies, material culture is connected to studies of memory within the museum. Organisational memory helps to frame how agency functions within museums, both agency employed by staff members and by collections.

2.1 Material Culture Studies

Material culture studies look at the “‘things’ people come to know and possess” (Knell, 2007, p. 8) allowing reflection on the human condition (Pearce, 1989). It is inherently more concerned with “everyday artefacts of mass global consumption” than it is high art (Cannadine, 2018, p. 23). Material culture studies create a theoretical framework through which collections can be understood, positioning material goods as central to understanding the “real world” (Knell, 2007, p.8). Collection management policies put into practical terms much of what material culture studies argue, namely that culture and the social experience as humans relies upon materiality (Tilley, Keane, Küchler, Rowlands & Spyer, 2006). These policies also help to frame the stories everyday objects tell, by codifying a guiding narrative for the institution. Taking material culture studies from the conceptual policies to the practicalities of low priority collections, Knell notes that neglected collections “... perhaps

[hold] a more probable truth than a recently established neat and tidy store...” (2007, p. 12), connecting the theory of policy to the discoverability and re-establishment of low priority collections.

2.1.1 Collection Policies

Collection policies form a fundamental basis of museum practice. They create a framework for how an organisation builds and cares for the collections. As Gardner and Merritt state, through a collection plan “a museum seeks to gain intellectual control over collections” (2004, p. 294). Sometimes these tasks are separated into an acquisitions policy and a collection care policy (Matassa, 2011). However, good organisational practice recommends institutions have a written document stating what they collect and why, drawn from the vision and mission¹ of the institution (Child, 1999). In writing collection policies, museums choose specific objects to preserve, which in turn preserves specific culture and human phenomena. These kind of guiding documents also create “institutionally endorsed ritualized practices” (Huvila, 2013, p. 1377) which help retain institutional knowledge.

Pearce argues that collection policies illustrate the relationship between museums, the collections, staff, and the public, and that while a collection policy is written for the present, it is entirely based upon the past (1992, p. 135). The document reflects past curatorial decisions and inherited social traditions. Therefore these kinds of policies grow from the historical basis of many colonial museums, such as Otago Museum. As Otago Museum is a product of the past, “material and meaning must be translated into practical museum policies if it is to be kept from disintegration” (Pearce, 1992, p. 134). This is where

¹ The difference between vision and mission statements is subtle, but worth briefly outlining. Gurley, Peters, Collions & Fifolt define a mission statement as “why an organization exists (2014, p. 221) while a vision statement articulates “a preferred future for the organization” (2014, p. 222-223).

collection policies come in, to bridge the past and the present and to translate theory into practice.

Schlereth argues that, to develop collections, a museum must first know “precisely what [an] institution has” (1984, p. 24) and while a complete inventory is ideal, it is also idealistic for many museums with histories of diverse collecting. As Powell notes, the establishment of museums in Europe came about mainly as a result of “the vast collecting growth begun by European exploration” (2015, p. 6) and this explosion of museums was the basis for colonial museums that developed “with a proliferation that was smaller, yet similar, to that of their European counterparts.” (2015, p. 8). The tradition of collecting for many generations in colonial museums has led to current collections that are a conglomeration of decades of differing (or non-existent) collection plans. However, despite this historic tradition, “it is surprising [...] that collection planning is among the rarest of museum activities” (Gardner & Merritt, 2004, p. 292). It is precisely because of these eclectic colonial collections that planning can be daunting, because the collection has come not as a uniform, organised group but “it comes incomplete, imperfect, and with associated documentation and information, itself immensely variable in quality and quantity.” (Pearce, 1994, p. 194). Therefore, an institution must write a coherent plan to tackle decades of collections, which sufficiently accounts for their potential breadth and depth.

Hence, a museum must make hard decisions when establishing collection policies. It must decide how to prioritise past acquisitions for care and research. Often these decisions are not solely driven by the will of the institution or curators, but also by funding and resource management (Pearce, 1992; Powell, 2015; Gardner & Merritt, 2004). In this way the decisions are axiomatic, in that even if a collection policy were to not acknowledge prioritising explicitly, it would come about as a result of finite resources such as money, staff and time. Material

culture studies argue that consideration of mundane objects is key to social analysis (Tilley, 2006). This adds yet another consideration to this prioritisation, because it is consistently becoming harder to define “what to enshrine and preserve for posterity and what to let go to the scrapyard” (Jenkins, 1989, p. 120). Policy documents must account for a complex set of meanings when deciding object significance.

Prioritisation can be undertaken in any manner of ways. Some institutions grade the collections. For example the Glenbow Museum in Alberta, Canada (Ainslie, 2007) assigned four discrete categories for all the objects: the Core Collection, the Community Collection, the Interpretive Collection, and the Grade 4 Collection. From these, Grade 4 was entirely scheduled for deaccessioning and at the publishing date, 19% of the reviewed items fell into this category. The Glenbow Museum is not alone in attempting to grade the collection. The natural history museum, Naturalis, also went through a similar audit in which they found that 5% of its beetle collection was classified as level D, for “removal or disposal” (*Museum Practice*, 2005, p. 55). The Tank Museum in Bovington, UK has trialled a grading system for its vehicles (Wickham, 2009). Some larger institutions such as the Victoria and Albert Museum take separate acquisition approaches for each of its collections (2010), rather than the more holistic approach of the Glenbow Museum. These policies outline the flip side of acquisition: disposal or deaccessioning. Just as important in the contemporary era as acquisition, disposal “forces the curators to be explicit about the conceptual reasons for retaining or shedding” objects (Pearce, 1992, p. 136).

Collection policies outline the basis for contemporary museum collecting and they provide a framework and rationale for collecting and disposal. These are not easy decisions to make, and thus it is not unusual for museums to struggle to conceptualise their policies.

Then, once they have implemented these they must practically and consistently enforce them.

2.1.2 Low-Priority Collections

This case study extends the research done into what I term ‘low-priority collections’. The International Council of Museums (ICOM) Code of Ethics for Museums states unambiguously that it is a museum's responsibility to record collection information so it is “available for current use and will be passed on to future generations” (2013, p. 5) and that documentation should “include a full identification and description of each item” (2013, p. 5). However, as Buck states, “almost all museum collections contain some objects that have no number to connect them with documents” (2010a, p. 109). This research explores the space where ethics and practice meet, when practice “falls far short of these no-doubt admirable aspirations and goals” (Cannadine, 2018, p.29). Indeed, as Voss notes, any research done on low-priority collections is “often perceived as compromised by the passage of time [...] and the all too common separation of artefacts from field records and other documents that might provide contextual information.” (2012, p. 146). This makes research into such objects harder, as basics must be established before conclusions are drawn.

So what is a low-priority collection and how does it differ from traditional terminology? There are a number of different scenarios objects can find themselves in if they lack funding, support or safety. This can include orphaned collections, found-in-collections or endangered collections. Each of these apply to specific scenarios: for example, orphaned collections are “no longer wanted by the institution” and if they cannot find a new home are often discarded (The Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections, 2017). Interestingly, research of orphaned collections tends to focus on natural history collections,

including studies by Lane (2001), Kemp (2017) or Lallensack (2017), or creative, artistic collections Seidenberg & Allen (2011). This second category of orphaned collections is within a creative copyright context, when items are covered by copyright, but “where it has been impossible to identify, locate or contact the copyright holder” (Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision, 2017, para. 9). Whereas Buck (2010a) defines found-in-collections as collections whose ownership or status cannot be determined. The collection could be on loan with no documentation, or owned by the museum but not accessioned. Found-in also implies that the institution has no idea the objects were there. Finally a collection could be endangered by either human or natural threat (Tandon, 2016). In emergency situations collection priorities crystallise under threat of destruction. None of these scenarios perfectly encapsulates collections like the Laing Seals, hence I will employ the more specific definition of low priority, which focuses on a collections importance when evaluated by an institution’s collection policy.

2.1.3 Discoverability

Atwater defines discoverability as “the ease with which [...] web-based resources are found” (2012, p. 189). Put most simply, in order to research a collection “one must know that it exists and be able to locate it” (Keene, 2011, p. 52), even if the location is on a digital platform. This is a parallel idea to that of access, which is viewing the object itself rather than just the catalogue entry attached to it (Atwater, 2012). In other words, for something to be discoverable, the pertinent collection records should be online but the objects themselves not necessarily accessible. One should be able to search the museum collection and discover objects, be they on display or in storage. A digital collection creates autonomy that allows

researchers and the public to utilise it without directly contacting, or requiring assistance from, the Collections team.

Discoverability speaks to the Museums Aotearoa Code of Ethics, which states that:

Museum and art gallery staff will undertake the study of collection items, within the limits of their professional competence and the facilities of the museum. Accessibility to collections and exhibition-related research can be greatly enhanced through the regular maintenance of the museum's or gallery's web-site and, where practicable, increasing the digitisation of records. (Museums Aotearoa, 2013, p. 17).

This highlights two important things. Firstly, that staff have professional competencies which have limits. Secondly, that research availability can be "greatly enhanced" (Museums Aotearoa, 2013, p. 17) through digital access. Both of these points are tied directly to discoverability. Research can only be undertaken if researchers are aware of collections in the first place. As Morris points out, not only is it important to have the information, but to also have the ability to disseminate it (2005, p. 31). Morris rates accessibility and discoverability for researchers as more important than access for the public (2005). This is reasonable as it may be impractical to allow access to full collections to the public, while through researcher collaboration and field work, objects' histories can be reconstructed allowing the objects to "speak" (Frank, 2007, p. 60).

It is these experts that many collections, such as the Laing Collection, must rely upon. While museum staff have professional competencies, it is necessarily limited and they cannot hope to specialise in everything held within a collection of any reasonable size. Thus, museums turn to external experts to collaborate with the identification, recording, and research of the collections (Frank, 2007). This kind of accessibility and discoverability is key to the success of collections such as the Laing Seals. Because the current collections' staff hold

no expertise in heraldry, or sigillography, there is little personal impetus to work on the Collection. Perhaps it will be external collaborators that drive the research around this Collection, and currently there is no ability to discover OM has the Collection.

2.2 Organisational Memory Studies

As Stein and Zwass define it, organisational memory is “the means by which knowledge from the past is brought to bear on present activities” (1995, p. 89). More precisely, institutional knowledge is transmitted by word of mouth, documentation, or face-to-face training. It is “corporate culture, management, communications and decisions-making style” (Kransdorff, 1998a, para. 3). This specifically relates to staff members and their memories, namely how a single curator or manager can hold fundamental collection information that is not captured within institutional technologies. This is an important divide to recognise, that organisational memory can be held either within individuals, or translated into institutional systems such as a Collection Management System (CMS) or intranet. Crucial to understanding how organisational memory can affect collections is an acknowledgement of “the significance of the relational dimension” (Huvila, 2012, p. 1376) to workplaces and memory. It is the relationships and individual memories passed between colleagues that is a significant factor in the endurance of low priority collections. This structure of remembering could also be conceived of as part of Bourdieu’s *habitus*, or as “history turning into nature” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 78). Organisational memory is another way of expressing the second nature (Fyfe & Jones, 2017), or “rules of the game” (Lawler, 2004, p. 112) of a *habitus*.

Many individual memories are implicit, meaning that staff may not be consciously aware of their memories until stimuli remind them (O’Hara et al., 2006). This means organisational memory can fluctuate considerably when staff members leave, taking their

unconscious memories with them (Croasdell, 2001) and forgetting what they should record for posterity. Organisational memory studies argue that “memory is [...] transmitted through the methods and habits of staff and their recollections of colleagues and predecessors” (Byrne 2015, p. 261), and indeed if this memory is not transmitted it can result in corporate amnesia (Kransdorff, 1998b). This is the “unconscious frame of reference” (Fyfe & Jones, 2017, p. 4) passed down to new staff.

Huvila notes that when given options for how to seek out information “the most prominent source of information for almost all staff members was other colleagues...” (2013, p. 1380). The core of organisational memory comes from employees of an institution, rather than documents or new technologies, and context is key to their memories (Byrne, 2015; Huvila, 2013). Hence, as staff leave the organisational memory fades (Huvila, 2013) and as new staff are employed they bring their own interests and priorities to the collections.

Museums are institutions of memory, but their own internal meta-data is influenced by organisational memory (Huvila, 2013). Byrne argues that within the GLAM sector the institutional memory is enshrined within the databases “often offering insights into the personalities of the individuals involved” (2015, p. 261). While this speaks to the personalised nature of these records, databases cannot account for other information, that perhaps does not fit within its parameters but are still integral to the collections. For example, if an object is not recorded in the database, how is its information remembered? As Byrne goes on to note, these less tangible memories “often lapse into myth and legend, extending from the original fact or occurrence and taking on the force of belief and ritual” (2015, p. 261). Manžuch builds on the shift towards digital records, calling collection digitisation fundamental to reinventing “traditional heritage services” for contemporary societies (2001, p. 321), highlighting this as a key way to enshrine organisational memory.

The collection management system (CMS) is not the only avenue for maintaining organisational memory as intranets and shared clouds can be utilised by co-workers as well (Huvila, 2013). These kinds of systems are “likely to be heterogeneous” (O’Hara et al., 2006) to allow many types of access. Technologies now tend to form the basis of museum organisational memory, however Huvila argues that nothing “suggests that [digital technologies] would have had [a] revolutionary effect on work practices” (2013, p. 1383). Instead, people retain the mantle of hubs of information, with workplace social structures supporting much of the organisational memory (Huvila, 2013). Knell recalls that connoisseurship is “a vitally important curatorial attribute” (2007, p. 13) which technology cannot directly replace. This is echoed at Otago Museum, where key employees’ absences or silences create gaps in the Laing Seal Collection history.

Organisational memory can also be politicised and organisations can choose what to remember and what to forget (Nissley & Casey, 2002, p. S39). Politics of memory theory argues that history can be actively remembered, or indeed actively forgotten through “selection, politicisation and contestation” (Beaumont, 2015, p. 531). The politics of memory is often connected to historically fraught events, such as the aftermath of the Vietnam War in the United States of America (Vu, 2017), eastern European revisionist history (Marko & Milivoj, 2017) or even historical representation in video games (Hammar, 2017). It is the rewriting or obscuring of certain historical aspects in favour of others. Nissley and Casey (2002) looked specifically at museums enshrining private corporations’ histories, but it is just as applicable to public museums. As memory institutions, museums excel at telling stories of the past, including their own. Croasdell notes that “human biases may influence the interpretation of what is stored and presented” (2001, p. 9). This means forgetting is also a

fundamental element of the narrative. It is through this selective forgetting and remembering that organisational identity is formed (Anteby & Molnàr, 2012).

2.2.1 Organisational Memory & Agency

Typically organisational memory is defined as the informal knowledge passed on between co-workers, or handed over during initiation of new staff (Kransdorff, 1998). However this becomes problematic when organisational memory encompasses more than it should, namely, historical data that needs to be formally recorded. Within GLAM institutions this historical data manifests itself both externally as provenance, and internally as its history after accession. This internal data is just as valuable as the historical data, forming part of an object's history – especially if the object resides within a long-running institution. Thus, in museums, some organisational memory must be crystallised within a CMS. It is facetious to suggest that the museums do not already appreciate the need for paper trails – indeed the profession of registrar is built around managing collections and their data. But it is a valuable extension to this to examine where organisational memory meets the formal data and how staff members, as agents, can utilise this data.

To be an agent is to be “a factor or power held to cause change” (Smith, 2015, p. 3). To exert individual agency over a situation is to cause change through an individual's actions (Hewson, 2012). Agency in everyday life is the ability to make decisions free from coercion and using one's own judgement to exercise control over life events (Goller, 2017, p. 1). Employees in museums are agents who decide the direction and fate of collections. However, not only are they individual agents exerting control they are also “proxy agents” (Hewson, 2012, p. 13). To be a proxy agent is to act on behalf of another agent (Hewson, 2012). In this case study museum staff members are a proxy for the museum's board in that they are hired

under the presumption they will make judgements that the board would condone, for the greater good of the collection, following guidelines of professional responsibility and conduct (ICOM, 2013). They are professional agents within their workplace who are held to personal and professional ethical standards, to “uphold the dignity and honor of their profession” (ICOM, 2013, p.12).

Importantly, professional agency goes beyond the routine of day to day employment, to when handover occurs and improvisation is required, as generated through habitus (Fyfe, 2017). Agency is “connected with the way professionals recognise what is demanded of them in work, particularly when such demands are nonroutine” (Hopwood, 2017, p. 121) and this kind of agency transfer must be facilitated through organisational memory and can be adversely affected by the politicisation of certain memories. Hopwood goes further to connect agency directly to the action of handover between new and old staff members. Because “institutional practices, social norms, professional knowledge and individual experiences” (Hopwood, 2017, p. 127) all shape the object of focus, how this is translated to a new agent is crucial to the object’s future. This is the point where the structure of habitus is reinforced, as individual meaning helps form ongoing dispositions (Shimoni, 2017). This means if during transitional periods certain portions of memory are omitted, intentionally or not, agency is diminished. The agency required for the Laing Seal Collection must respond to “the epistemic demands of a situation in order to move forward, expand the knowledge resources at hand, and create possibilities” (Hopwood, 2017, p. 128).

Agency also reaches further than just the professionals surrounding the Laing Seals. The Laing Seal Collection itself can be considered an agent. Material culture studies hold that objects can be the “concrete embodiment of an idea” (Tilley, 2006, p. 60) and this distorts the

“dyadic distinctions between object and subject worlds” (Tilley, 2006, p. 64), changing the Seals from being a collection that is acted upon, to being an agent of change itself. The Seals can inspire staff actions, utilising them again as proxy agents (Hewson, 2012). For example a staff member could be inspired to make improvements to storage, to explore collections’ provenance, and collection images can suggest usage within exhibitions and research. In no small way, what the Seals are and how they represent a time and place gives them some agency over their future. They have purpose which is one third of the key properties leading to agency (Hewson, 2012). With collection staff acting as proxy, the Collection can also achieve power and rationality, the two other core properties required (Hewson, 2012). Therefore the Collection should inspire change, staff should identify themselves as agents of possible change, and if my handover is sufficiently supportive, use that as an opportunity to progress.

2.3 Conclusion

The literature pertinent to this research not only focuses inwards, on museum collection policies, discoverability, and material culture, but also outwards, upon the wider field of organisational memory studies and agency. Material culture informs the development of collection policies within museums which creates a trajectory for collections, and coupled with organisational memory, ultimately controls its success. It is the collision of collection policies, organisational memory, and low-priority collections that form this case study. In Chapter 3 a historical context of the Laing Seal Collection is developed by examining OM’s specific collection policies in detail and how history has shaped this Collection. Chapter 4 returns to considerations of organisational memory and agency by analysing staff interviews and the research undertaken into the Laing Seal Collection.

Chapter 3: Collection Context - The Collection and Otago Museum

Context is the house within which any collection lives. The context provides not only support and basic survival needs for a collection, but it also draws a narrative around it – it helps illustrate the life of a collection, as art and home décor gives one hints into the occupants. Without context a collection can become lost, abandoned, and even struggle for survival. Within it, the object makes meaning and actively contributes to the context it is housed within (Knell, 2007), in a symbiotic relationship. This chapter explores the context of the Laing Seal Collection, in some hope of giving a place to this Collection. But as Knell noted, to look at an object by itself, being influenced by its context but not considered as a tangible part of that context is “to underestimate the extent and complexity of its baggage” (Knell, 2007, p. 11). This chapter begins by introducing Henry Laing himself, the *mise en scene* from which the Collection first came. Then it presents the specifics of the Laing Collection – not *how* the research was undertaken, for which see Chapter 4, but rather what is held within it and why this may make a difference to its success.

Context shall then be drawn from the history of Otago Museum itself, examining the institution housing the Laing Collection. Here, key questions arise: How has Otago Museum’s history shaped the trajectory the Laing Seals took? How do Otago Museum’s current policies propose to move forward with collecting in general and with the Laing Collection in particular? Then, by exploring organisational memory within a museum context, this chapter will show that while museums store historical memories, staff members’ memories are imperfect. Though structures are in place to retain data the Laing Seals have fallen prey to corporate amnesia.

This chapter will also look at one of the most pervasive and inescapable contexts, namely, finding the balance between time, money, and priorities. The finite resources that all

museums struggle to garner in a consumerist marketplace inescapably impacts upon collection care. This will include an examination of Otago Museum's priorities and where the resources dedicated to collections are being spent.

Finally, the chapter will examine wider museum ethical concerns – specifically in the Aotearoa context in which OM operates. OM should function within these ethical constructs to fulfil all requirements of the ethical bodies of which it is a member. In examining these facets of the Laing Seal Collection the objects become “more than [their] material self” (Knell, 2007, p. 14) and they can be understood in a broader picture from their construction, through to the current resting place at OM.

3.1 Henry Laing

Henry Laing (1803-1883) was born in London but worked out of Edinburgh from 1829 as a “gem-engraver and maker of glass seals” (Gray, 1984, p. 67), or as he is described in his Will & Testament Inventory a “Heraldic Artist” (National Records of Scotland, 1883, para. 2). He was apprentice to the engraver William Tassie (1777-1860), whose seals were used by noted figures such as John Keats (Seidmann, 1997).

Laing produced two booklets on Ancient Scottish seals published in 1850 and 1866 which were called “a learned and accurate compilation such as probably no other country than Scotland can boast of possessing” by his contemporary, John Gray (1894, p. 68), the then Curator of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery (National Galleries Scotland, n.d.). These booklets comprise lists of famous historic seals and descriptions of their impressions. They were published by the Bannatyne and Maitland clubs for the interest of their members. These clubs were formed to “print [...] a series of Works, illustrative of the History, Topography, Poetry, and Miscellaneous Literature of Scotland in former times” (Bannatyne Club, 1823, p.

52) for their members' enjoyment. The Seals created by Laing were "then in great demand" (Gray 1894, p. 67), though Gray does not elaborate on who his eager customers were. Nevertheless, this demand supports New's argument that the use of personal seals in the late seventeenth to nineteenth centuries as "an essential part of proliferating private correspondence" (2010, p. 112-113).

The themes that Laing's work covered were varied, exploring neoclassical imagery through to contemporaneous figures. To Williams (1993), Laing fulfilled a role of making replica seal impressions with the objective of aiding seal collectors. Gray notes that his "main work lay in antiquarian directions" (1894, p. 68). This is supported by the Otago Museum Collection, which holds numerous Seals of neoclassical figures and scenes. This includes not only busts of famous politicians, philosophers and leaders but also scenes from mythology and history - such as the assassination of Julius Caesar (see fig. 3.1), or the trials of Hercules. These themes are curious as Seidmann suggests that classical imagery was out of fashion for late nineteenth century seals (1997, p. 152). During the late nineteenth century neoclassicism was declining, having been prominent since the 1750s (Palmer, 2011). This shift away from neoclassical imagery towards what would come to be known as romanticism (Palmer, 2011), supports Seidmann's suggestion that Laing's primary focus on neoclassical images spoke to a declining fashion. However he was not entirely restricted to the neoclassical form; there are also a number of contemporary sets. For example there is a group of Kings and Queens of England up to Victoria, or a set titled The Early Reformers of influential theologians such as John Calvin, Martin Luther or John Knox, who brought about the protestant reformation of the 16th century.



Figure 3.1: Assassination of Julius Caesar

After Laing's death in 1883, the British Museum acquired the moulds of the Seals catalogued in his Scottish Seal manuscripts (Gray, 1894, p. 69), however they no longer have records of them (personal communication, April 8, 2018). Research for this thesis has revealed that in his will Laing left to his son John the sum of £450 via the Bank of New Zealand, and this document specifies that John resided in Dunedin at the time (Laing, 1883). John arrived in New Zealand aboard the *Nelson* in 1862 and began trading as a lapidarist (Matthews, n.d.), one who works with gems, stones and pounamu (Conly, 1948). This is the mostly likely avenue through which the Seals reached Dunedin (See also Appendix 1.3).

3.2 The Henry Laing Seal Collection

This research uses the Collection attributed to Henry Laing as a case study to examine the endurance of low priority collections. Thus, an important place to start is with a

comprehensive understanding of the Laing Collection itself. Because these Seals represent Laing and the styles of the late nineteenth century they function in material culture as “breaking down simplistic dyadic distinctions between object and subject worlds” (Tilley, 2006, p. 64). In other words, the Seals are an active subject of history, effecting change and being affected by their surrounds. Chapter 4 will expand upon exactly *how* the Collection was discovered and uncovered, but first a contextual basis of the Collection’s contents allows for vivid visualisation of the subject matter.

The best way to comprehend the Laing Seal Collection is through a number of accompanying books that list the collected Seals. The first two books are identical pamphlets published by Laing, advertising his ability to create personal Seals for use in correspondence:

H.L. takes this opportunity of informing the Public, that Glass Seals can be made from any original Seal, or even from any impression; thus in the case of the original being lost, and nothing but an impression remaining, a Glass Seal can be made from it at moderate expense, possessing all the usefulness of the lost original. (Laing, H., n.d., p. 1)

These booklets are titled *Catalogue of Heads, Figures, Devices and Mottos for Seals (Bill of Sale)*. The *Bill of Sale* corresponds to a number of the Seals found within the Collection.



Figure 3.2: *Catalogue of Heads, Figures, Devices and Mottoes for Sale*

These *Bills of Sale* are delicate miniature books, the pages aged and set in place. The title page has been hand edited to update Laing's address from Clyde Street to Elder Street. The *Bill* itself is priced at sixpence (Laing, n.d., p. i) and whilst it focuses on Seals, it also advertises "designing and engraving of Arms, Crests, Mottoes, Devices, &c., &c., upon Seals, Stamps, Book-plates, &c. Visiting, Marriage and Address Cards, engraved and printed." (Laing, n.d., p. iv). The entries for Seals are full of quirks, such as idiosyncratic capitalisation. For example figure 3.3 is a typical page from the *Bill of Sale*, outlining a number of proverbs and their accompanying images. Note the noun capitalisation of entry 636. *An Owl and Tea-pot*, whereas 621. *The world* or 639. *Victory in a chariot* do not see fit to capitalise all nouns.

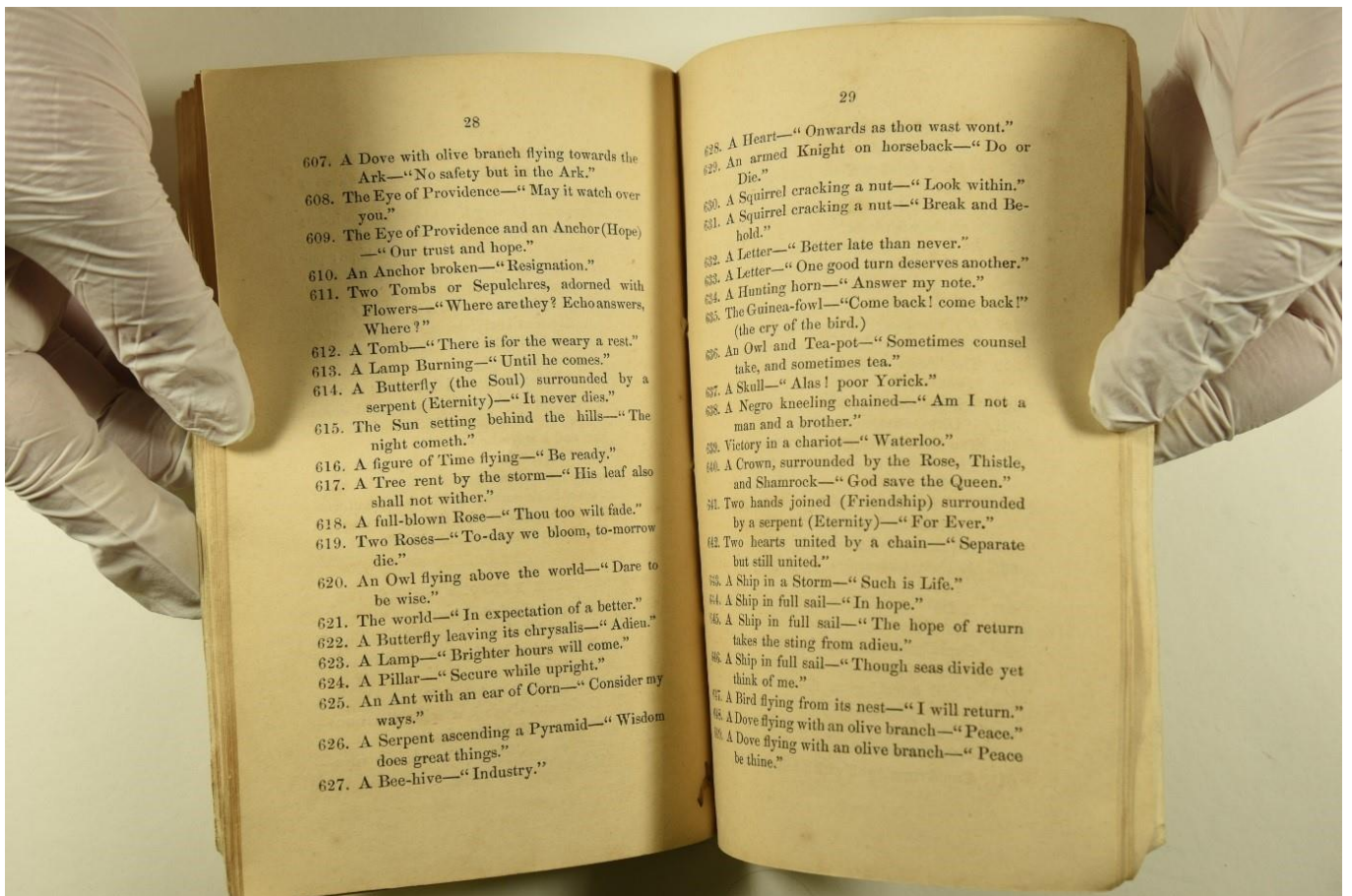


Figure 3.3: Bill of Sale p. 28-29

On the final pages of the *Bill* Laing offers not only Seals, but a whole set of 1,248 Seals from his book *The Descriptive Catalogue of Ancient Scottish Seal* complete in a “well-finish, superior Oak Cabinet” (Laing, n.d., p. 43).

Along with these two *Bills of Sale*, there are also two hand written books accompanying the Collection. Larger and more robust, these two hardcover books pertain to different collections of Seals. Rather than being for public consumption these appear to be private books outlining Seal collections. One, a dark blue hardback, contains a list of Seals, with names of either the person or scene depicted, titled *Catalogue of Heads, figures, Ancient & Modern (Catalogue)* (see fig. 3.4). A number of the Seals OM holds correspond to the Seals listed in this book, rather than the *Bill of Sale*. These Seals tend to be larger and more ornate, whereas the *Bill of Sale* Seals tend to be smaller and have clearer text. The *Catalogue* has

neither preamble nor introduction explicitly explaining the purpose of the Collection. Instead, it begins the list of Heads with Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – “the four evangelists [sic] from Medals” (Laing, unpublished manuscript a). Towards the end, the *Catalogue* shows signs of human error, with portions of lists being crossed out and rewritten to include forgotten names (Laing, unpublished manuscript a).

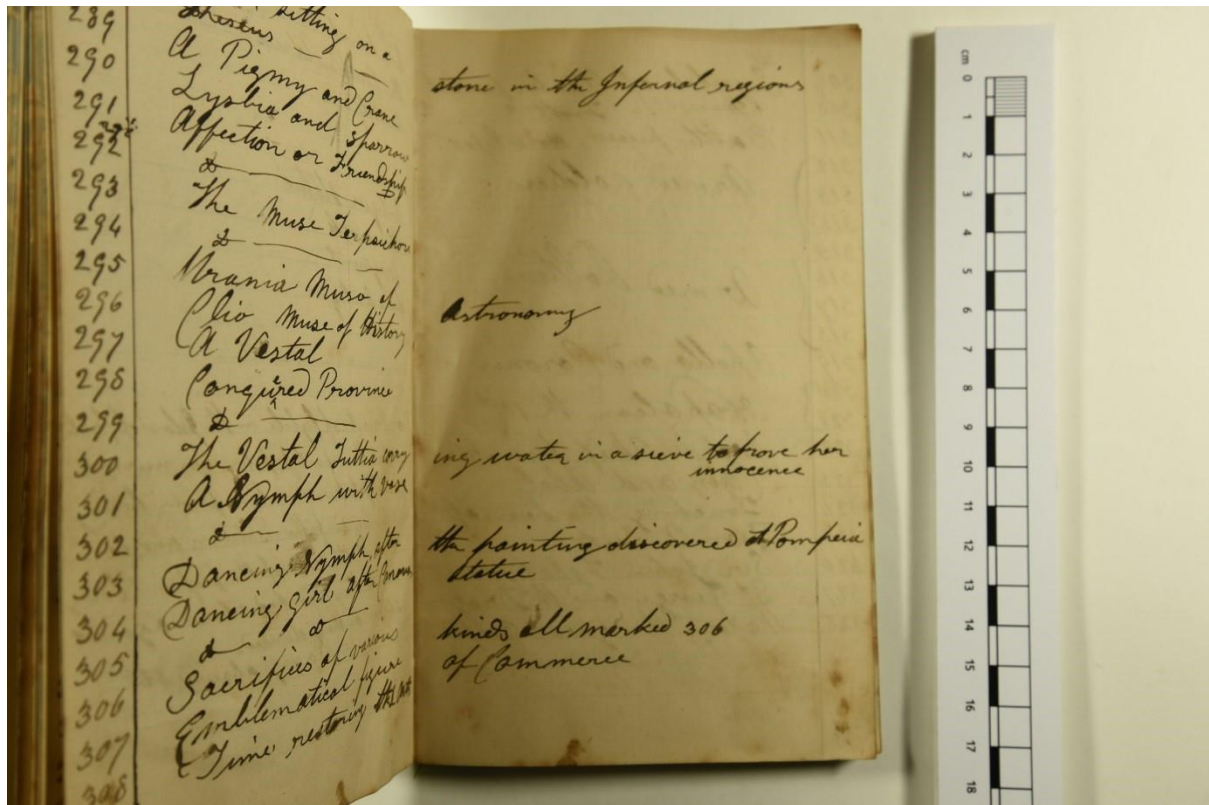


Figure 3.4: *Catalogue of Heads, figures. Ancient & Modern*

The next book is a larger hardcover with intricate hand drawn images of Seals, titled *Manuscript Book of Drawings of Seals in the hand of Henry Laing, c1850 (Manuscript)*. This title has been drawn from a loose note within the text which appears to have been added much later. The book itself has elaborately coloured end papers and a heavy weight of page. The handwriting matches that of the *Catalogue*, connecting all three documents. The images vary from rudimentary sketches to intricate detail. These images are not from the Collection

Otago Museum holds, but rather are royal Seals of Scotland, and Europe. The *Manuscript* depicts many Seals also described in Laing’s two published books on Scottish Seals.

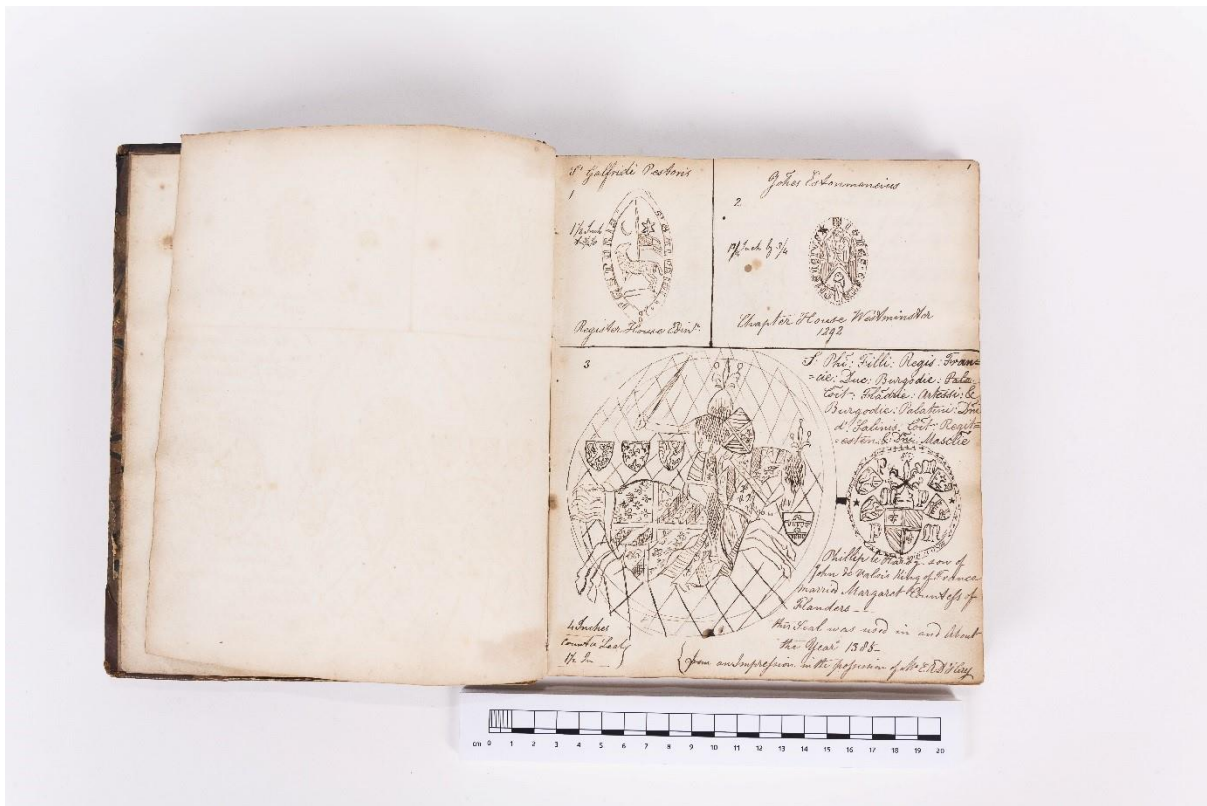


Figure 3.5: Manuscript Book of Drawing of Seals in the hand of Henry Laing, c. 1850

Finally, a handwritten addendum (*Addendum*) was found within the *Catalogue*. It contains another list of Seals, this time a set of medals. At the top of the *Addendum* there is an illuminating passage that reads:

The 24 “originals” as we call them, or Glass Casts which we always keep for the purpose of making other casts from; wither in Wax Plaster de. de. - These 24 are a set of Medals engraved by Lassier a celebrated French Medalist [*sic*]. And are portraits of the early religious Reformers. The numbers in the following list are cut on the back of each “original” and may thus be easily identified. (Laing, H. unpublished manuscript b)

The writer of this *Addendum* worked either with these Seals or was an engraver in general, shown by the passage “we always” which illustrates his involvement with the craft.

The writer also mentions the number carved into the backs of many of the Seals, connecting this *Addendum* to the *Catalogue* as the style of those engraved numbers match the *Catalogue* entries.



Figure 3.6: No. 242: Reverse of Ganymede carried off by the Eagle

The Laing Seal Collection was relatively unknown before this research. The staff knew the Collection existed and that it, of all the collections at OM, was most in need of examination.

The Seals can be separated into subsets based on various topics within the books. These topics provide a good opportunity to visually explore the Collection. Before each Seal is listed the theme the Seal is representative of (for example, fig. 3.7 is an example of the Heads) and how many Seals are listed in this category (for example seals 1 to 159 are all Heads). Thus, Seal number 62 is part of the Heads chapter of the *Bill of Sale*, and is a representation of the goddess Diana.

Bill of Sale:

Heads: 1-159



Figure 3.7: Heads - No. 62: Diana, with the bow.

Figures: 160-277:

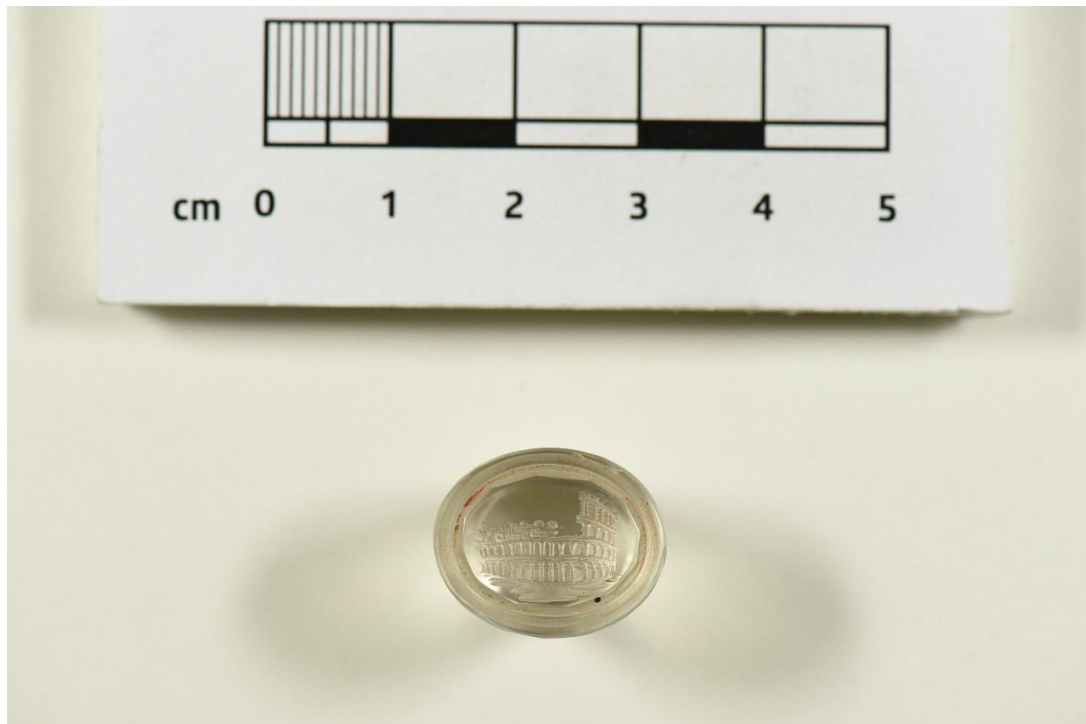


Figure 3.8: Figure - No. 176: Coliseum [sic], The Ruins of the.²

² Unless otherwise noted, the *Bill of Sale* seals are all roughly the same size as No. 176: Coliseum, The Ruins of the.

Sporting and Miscellaneous Subjects: 278-416



Figure 3.9: Sporting & Miscellaneous Subjects – No. 311: A Greyhound sitting.

Names: 417-531³



Figure 3.10: Names – No. 432: Beatrice. In the Italic character.

³ When carved the seal text is back-to-front. When photographing if the glass is clear enough a photo can be taken through the seal, flipping the image, as is shown with the name Beatrice. However for many of the seals the quality of glass did not allow for such images – thus for consistency of images the photos here are presented as they are carved, as mirror images.

Single Initials (Unnumbered)



Figure 3.11: Single Initials – V, N & H

English Mottoes: 532-564



Figure 3.12: English Mottoes – No. 536: Beware of Writers and Accountants.

The Following Devices are Expressed in Hieroglyphics: 565-584



Figure 3.13: The Following Devices are Expressed in Hieroglyphics – No. 580: Time flies but Friendship stays.

References to Scripture Texts: 585-600



Figure 3.14: References to Scripture Texts – No. 596: Romans xii. 12.-("Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer.")

Devices with Mottoes in English: 601-713



Figure 3.15: Devices with Mottoes in English – No. 621: The world – “In expectation of a better.”

Scotch Mottoes & Devices: 714-738



Figure 3.16: Scotch Mottoes & Devices – No. 737: A Deer – “Scotland for me.” – (Dear Scotland for me.)

Irish Devices and Mottoes: 739-744



Figure 3.17: Irish Devices and Mottoes – No. 742: An Irish harp, entwined with Shamrock – “Innisfail,” one of the ancient poetical names of Ireland.

Welch Mottoes and Devices: 745-746



Figure 3.18: Welch Mottoes and Devices – No. 745: “Cofiwch fi.” – surrounded by a serpent – Forget me not.

French Mottoes: 747-752



Figure 3.19: French Mottoes – No. 751: “Une Lettre adoucit les peines de l’absence,” inscribed on a Letter. – A Letter soothes the pains of absence.

Devices with Mottoes in French: 753-821



Figure 3.20: Devices with Mottes in French – No. 758: Ivy twining round an oak – “Je meurs ou je m’attache.” – I die where I attach myself.

Italian Mottoes: 822-829



Figure 3.21: Italian Mottoes – No. 824: “Debbo credere a quel che veggo.” – I must believe my eyes!

Devices with Italian Mottoes: 830-835



Figure 3.22: Devices with Italian Mottes – No. 831: A Watch – “Cheto fuor commoto dentro.” – Quiet without, active within.

Devices with Motto in the Spanish Language: 836



Figure 3.23: Device with Motto in the Spanish Language – No. 836: A Sunflower turning to the Sun – “Espero a mi Sol.” – Hope is my Sun.

Latin Mottoes and Devices: 837-854



Figure 3.24: Latin Mottoes & Devices – No. 848: Some books on a Table – “Vita, sine literis, mors est.” – Life without literature is death.

Greek Mottoes and Devices: 855-859



Figure 3.25: Greek Mottoes & Devices – No. 858: The Genius of Death descending – “ΓΑΡ Η ΖΩΗ ΥΜΩΝ?” – For what is your life? – (James iv. 14.)

Hebrew Mottoes: 860-861



Figure 3.26: Hebrew Mottos – No. 861: לְחַיִּים וְשָׁלוֹם Lechayim Shallum, Health, Peace.

Catalogue of Heads, Figures Ancient & Modern:⁴

Heads (Ancient): 1-159; 273-366 & Heads (Modern): 160-272



Figure 3.27: Heads (Ancient) & Heads (Modern): Unidentified Seals

Figures (Ancient): 1-316 & Figures (Modern): 317-328



Figure 3.28: Ancient Figure: No. 223: Neptune & Amphitrite in car

⁴ Because this book is handwritten the numbering system is more idiosyncratic, for example the Modern Heads are listed within the Ancient Heads.

The Early Reformers: 1-24



Figure 3.29: Early Reformer

Kings and Queens of England: 1-38



Figure 3.30: Kings and Queens of England: Henry 1st and Elizabeth

A count of these numbered titles suggests that the Collection contains 1,523 Seals, however many are duplicated numerous times, especially of names and figures. Originally all of these sets were mixed together, some with identifying numbers, some not. This made the first task a clear one – to organise the Seals. Many of the duplicate Seals, especially in the *Bill of Sale* are of differing quality, with some only partially complete (see fig. 3.32).

Physically, the Seals are diverse in construction and appearance. Some of the designs are less than 2cm round, while others reach almost 15cm in diameter. The minute size of many of the Seals suggests Laing had the steadiest of hands. Some of the images created on these Seals measure only a few millimetres and must have required absolute precision to engrave. Indeed, Williams notes that “a long line of engravers suffered from incessant brainwork and financial anxiety. One prolific Brooklyn engraver and modeller, G.H. Lovett (1824-94) died of nervous prostration...” (1993, p. 13) suggesting the work Laing undertook was not for the weak-willed. Mainly made of clear glass, a small number of Seals are made of coloured glass, ranging from dark blue through to yellows and deep reds. Some are opaque with others have pleasing translucency. The coloured ones are not distinct from the clear, with some designs being present on both clear and coloured glass.



Figure 3.31: Coloured Seals

A number of Seals appear half finished, or damaged during the carving process, along with a number that are yet to have any engraving, leaving a blank glass cylinder. As well as the glass Seals, there are a number of metal and plaster casts of individual Seals.



Figure 3.32: Metal, plaster, unfinished and damaged Seals

Many of the Seals have residue in them from use with a sealing agent, or have dirt within the crevices, as can be seen above in fig. 3.28. Currently, outside the scope of this research, there are plans to analyse these agents to ascertain their composition.

In conclusion, the Collection is exceedingly diverse. Similarly, the level of completeness, quality, and size of the Seals varies considerably. Without having the space in this thesis to fully document the Collection, it is difficult to articulate the quantity and variety

of the Collection here. Nevertheless, this overview is intended to offer an indication of the breadth and depth of the Laing Seals.

3.3 Otago Museum - A Brief History

Te Wai Pounamu, or the South Island of New Zealand, was first settled “seven centuries or more ago” (Evison, 1993, p. 1) by Polynesian explorers who would develop into the Kai Tahu iwi. On July 31st, 1844 the Otago Peninsula along with southern coastal land totalling 215,702 hectares was purchased from Kai Tahu for the foundation of a New Edinburgh (Evison, 1997). In 1848 the city of Dunedin was founded by Scottish settlers who had been arriving since the purchase. Indeed, a Scottish influence can be seen throughout Dunedin, as the founders sought to “reproduce as far as possible the features of the Scottish capital [Edinburgh]” (McDonald, 1965, p. 3). Originally a small settlement, the “whole concept of a museum for Dunedin was quiet nebulous” (McRobie, 1966, p. 4) and it was not until the gold rush of 1861 that the town flourished, with the population recorded as 15,000 by the end of the 1860s (McKinnon, 2015).

Originally intended as part of a geological survey, the basis for the formation of the Otago Museum was a collection of rocks and minerals sourced by Dr. James Hector (Hocken, 2008; McRobie, 1966) who was then director of the Otago Geological Survey (Dell, 1990). In 1865 this mineral collection was included as part of the New Zealand Exhibition under the title “Otago Museum” with an estimated 4,338 objects, including birds, fish, dried plant specimen, and miscellaneous objects (*Otago Daily Times*, Feb. 13 1865). After the success of the New Zealand Exhibition the mineral collection was retained by the Otago province and would form the beginnings of Otago Museum (McRobie, 1966). Beginning on 12th September 1868 Otago Museum, then known as the Otago University Museum, began to allow public

access to the collections on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays (Otago Daily Times, Sept. 8, 1868). Through this time, OM grew and in 1877 was moved into a purpose built site on Great King Street where it remains today.

Colonial museums, including OM, were based on a European model, having been brought to the New Zealand colonies by settlers from the British Empire (Simmons, 2016; Sheets-Pyenson, 1988). While critiques of the colonial museum have been well covered in the literature (e.g. Gosden & Knowles, 2001; Mesa-Bains, 2004; Aldrich 2009), the colonial influence upon OM's history and how it has affected the type of collecting undertaken within the institution cannot be ignored. Collecting during the late nineteenth century had a general focus on difference, with material objects being used to illustrate this separation, especially between colonisers and the colonised (Lipset, 2016). There was also a sense that the ethnographic collections of such museums captured disappearing information, with the expectation of colonised peoples dying out (Gosden & Knowles, 2001). Consequently, many regional museums focused on "aboriginal peoples, technological implements, and examples of native flora and fauna" (Sheets-Pyenson, 1988, p. 11) as a starting point rather than "importing the European art and classical artefacts that then dominated European museums" (Simmons, 2016, p. 167). This focus helped preserve the local history and was designed to celebrate colonial resources and industries (McRobbie, 1966). More specifically, museums supported by universities also focused on the "animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms" (Sheets-Pyenson, 1988, p. 12). This is seen in the New Zealand Exhibition where Hector's original minerals were supported with other natural history objects. This display reflected a "trend repeated worldwide" (Crane, 2017, p. 62) as growing museums in the late nineteenth century shifted scope from geology to include zoological collections (Crane, 2017).

As it was formalised into a substantial museum, OM was administered by the University of Otago and, as a teaching institution, widened its focus to natural sciences and anthropology, bringing in large European collections from early curators such as Professor T.J. Parker FRS (Crane, 2017) or major benefactors such as Willi Fels or Dr. Hocken (Peat, 2004). When it settled in the current location in 1877, OM reported an official total collection of 3,674 items (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2014c).

From these beginnings OM expanded its acquisitions into Māori collections (Cameron, 2014), and by the 1960s the museum had “several times its original floor area, and the ad hoc development had produced a layout confusing to visitors.” (Peat, 2004, p. 5). Thus, Peat hints at a larger system of choices based not only in the architecture of the Museum, but in its collecting as well. This kind of museum is termed by Simmons a “universal museum” (2016, p. 221) one that has extensive, diverse collections thanks to its long history. These universal museums are simultaneously “the legacy of imperialism,” no longer a form of power retention but nevertheless shaped by it historically (Simmons, 2016, p. 221).

This universality is reflected in the leaders of OM. Often development within OM was based on the interest of the current Director. For example, Dr. Hutton, the first Curator focused on geology (Crane, 2017). Dr. H.D. Skinner, Director from 1937 to 1953 was an anthropologist and thus anthropology became a major factor in the Museum's collection (Cameron, 2014). When business manager Shimrath Paul was Director, from 1995-2012, the Museum focused on building the science centre Discovery World, and when astronomer Dr. Ian Griffin took over in 2013 a planetarium was constructed (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2016). By this stage the count of objects at OM had risen to 1.5 million (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2017a). This evolution of OM embodies the “discontinuity, rupture [and] displacement” of history (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, p. 10) a series of staccato shifts, broken up

by changing employees and directions. These changes reflect the role of human experiences within decision making, as the interests of Curators and then Directors shaped the focus of the Museum.

This modest overview suggests that OM embodies a number of fundamental characteristics of a colonial museum, coming from a European settler background and holding an eclectic, historic collection. Through its past, different themes and collecting ethos have built up a collection that tells a story of the history of not only the world, but Otago Museum as well.

3.4 Otago Museum - Policies & Mission Statements

As with many museums that have grown from colonial beginnings, OM has a collection based in fluid history, informed by the people employed in collections. This is not unique to New Zealand. For example, Aldrich highlights how the colonial *Musée des arts africains et océaniens* struggled to rebrand itself in a postcolonial world due to the vast diversity of its collections, ranging from across Africa and Oceania (2009, p. 146). And while colonial museums have made moves to help with “cancelling out, neutralising or indeed critically exposing colonial roots” (Bodenstein & Pagani, 2014, p. 53) they do this through historically colonial collections. Unless major repatriation or deaccessioning has occurred, these museums have to contend with the practicalities of holding many decades worth of collections, often obtained under a colonial mind-set.

This means the institutions Strategic Plan and Collection Policy are vital for organising these historical collections. As museums have changed throughout history (Livingston, 1996, p. 2) these documents are some of the only hard evidence explaining how disparate collections have come to be held within one organisation. Sheets-Pyenson writes that for the

colonial museum the two most elusive goals were “long-term planning and a steady income” (1988, p. 45), two goals that are still indubitably relevant.

In order to understand the Laing Seal Collection, and its context at Otago Museum, an understanding of the current internal policies are key. By examining the current Strategic Plan broadly, and four key sections of the Collection Policy specifically, it is possible to understand exactly how the Laing Collection has existed at OM, and how it may play a more active role within the collection in the future. This will also help later to illustrate how collections are bound under the purview of policies and missions, but realistically are controlled by human inclination.

Introduced in 2015, *Te Ara Hou: The Road Ahead* is OM’s current Strategic Plan through to 2020, which outlines the broad key concepts for understanding OM’s approach to its collections. Within *Te Ara Hou*, OM functions under both a vision and mission statement, forming a lens through which to make decisions.

Our vision: To be an inspirational Museum of which the people of Otago and Aotearoa are proud.

Our mission: To inspire and enrich our communities and enhance understanding of the world through our collection, our people and the stories we share. (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2014a p. 5).

These two statements create the philosophical basis around which practical policies are structured. They emphasise the people that OM works for and highlight that the collections are a central part of how OM will inspire and enrich their lives. These two ideals are referenced within the Collection Policy itself. However, these aspirational statements are combined with some important legal ones as well. The Collection Policy is fundamentally based on the mandates set out in the Otago Museum Trust Board Act 1996 (OM Act). The OM Act highlights that the key objective of the museum are:

to collect, preserve, act as regional repository for, research, display, and otherwise make available to the people of the present and the future, material and information relating to the natural, cultural, and scientific heritage of the peoples of the world. (OM Act, 1996, p. s3).

This objective comes prior to any other objectives or policies. It is the legislative keystone for OM. Second only to this is the legal requirement that OM functions under the purview of a collection policy. Thus, OM is given relative autonomy to acquire and dispose of objects and data, required only to do so “in accordance with its policy and recognised Museum practice, taking cognisance of its trusteeship role in the community.” (OM Act, 1996, s5). Therefore, OM self-monitors its policies, under the jurisdiction of the Board of Trustees. It is through this combination of aspirational internal statements and legislative requirements that the Collection Policy approaches the collections.

Within the Collection Policy there are four sections key to this research: the Vision and Mission Statements, the Policy Statement, the Collection Focus, and the Selection Criteria. These four sections will contextualise the Laing Seal Collection from a governance point of view.

The first two sections, the Vision and Mission Statements, and the Policy Statement are drawn directly from the corresponding Strategic Plan and OM Act. To start the Collection Policy with these broad umbrella concepts foreshadows everything that follows, namely that the Collection Focus and Selection Criteria are controlled by both legislation and the OM Board of Trustees Strategic Plan.

As OM is the only museum controlled by national legislation in Otago, it defines Otago as its “primary spatial focus” (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2014b, p. 7) and uses this to define its Collection Focus. This focus lays out six characteristics that OM will use to filter collection

decisions. Along with the Selection Criteria, this portion of the Collection Policy is important to understanding where the Laing Collection fits into the collection scheme of OM. The six foci are:

1. Spatial and temporal characteristics,
2. Contemporary relevance,
3. Historical significance,
4. Research,
5. Collection focus &
6. Tāoka collection considerations.

This limits the collection interests of OM to objects of significance to the region, looking at Otago items which have relevance either today or as historically important. However, from this basis and despite having six ways to limit collecting, these foci provide broad possibilities. For example, while the foci acknowledge that “ever diminishing resources have forced museums to reassess their position” (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2014b, p. 8) and thus narrow focus, the policy lists twenty-one subjects the Museum will focus on: terrestrial invertebrates, marine invertebrates, ornithology, herpetology, mammalogy, ichthyology, geology, palaeontology and botany for Natural Science. Tāoka Māori, indigenous material from the Pacific, indigenous material from the rest of the world, Europeans, Māori and indigenous costume and textiles, decorative arts, antiquities, stamps and postage, medals, numismatics, technology (cameras and firearms), New Zealand history and prehistory in Humanities. As one staff member pointed out “the thing about collections is you can always make a link somewhere if you need to” (Smith, personal communication, June 2, 2017). With another noting that “most things we wanted to collect would fit into it, but it was also easy to make exceptions” (Butcher, personal communication, July 14, 2017). These lists

demonstrate that OM will consider objects from just about any conceivable topic if they conform to the other selection criteria, suggesting that the word “focus” misrepresents what the policy attempts to accomplish. Instead of topic focus, the document realistically looks to collect significant objects from any theme.

From this broad basis, OM undertakes both passive and active collecting: passive, through donation for example, and active where the museum might seek out and allocate funding for purchasing an item. Such acquisitions are based on the final section of OM’s collection policy highlighted here - the Selection Criteria. Accepting for “exceptional circumstances” (Otago Museum 2015, p. 9), collections will only be acquired if they have “adequate contextual and/or scientific data”, full title and no encumbrances (Otago Museum 2015, p. 9). Once these have been fulfilled, the item will be assessed by significance criteria and a statement of significance developed to justify its acquisition. This section of the Collection Policy is influenced by the foundational document *Significance 2.0* produced in Australia (Russell & Winkworth, 2009). As one OM staff member noted, “the really good thing about collection policies these days is there is so many around that it’s really - don’t reinvent the wheel - you can adapt for purposes” (Smith, personal communication, June 2, 2017).

Thus, OM uses a standard set of criteria to “define the meanings and values of an item or collection” (Russell & Winkworth, 2009, p. 10). These are drawn directly from *Significance 2.0* which allows the significance assessments made at OM to be more than a “tick-box” system, as Butcher called the previous collection policy (personal communication June 30, 2017). Rather *Significance 2.0* aims to build “a reasoned argument, based on research, analysis and comparison” to define a collection’s significance (Russell & Winkworth, 2009, p. 47).

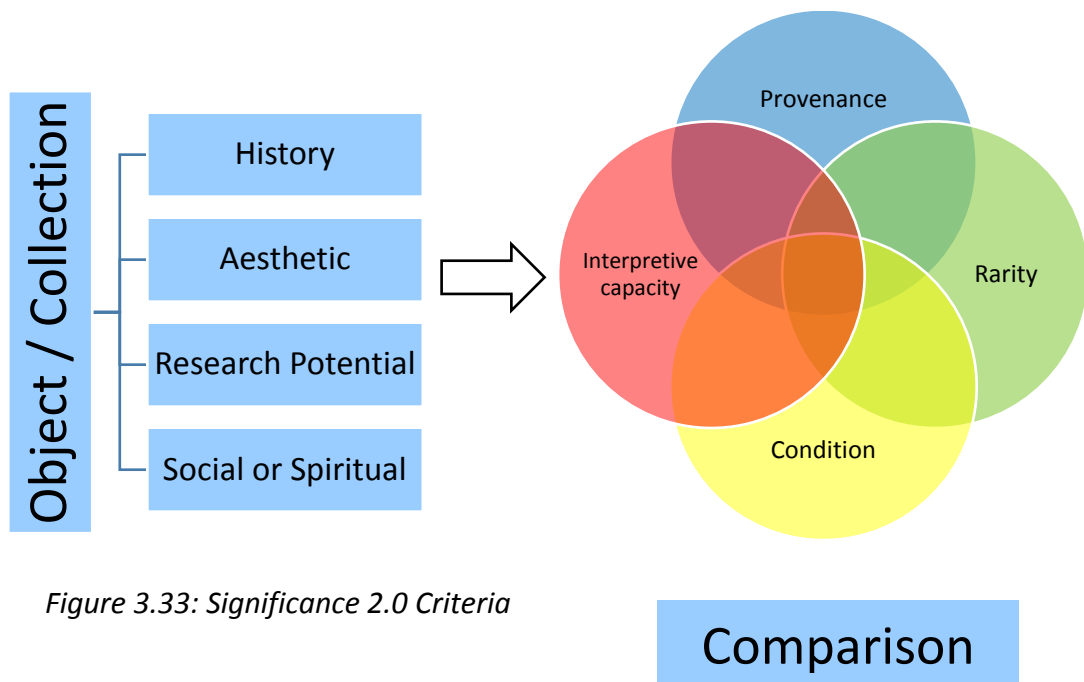


Figure 3.33: Significance 2.0 Criteria

First an object (or collection) is determined to have either historic, aesthetic, research or social/spiritual importance. This factor is the reason it has been collected. Then the object is compared to other similar objects to determine which one best represents the narrative being told. Here the *Significance 2.0* system compares provenance, rarity, condition, and interpretive capacity. Whichever item best provides one or more of the factors is the most significant. For example, an item can be aesthetically significant and be of particular note because of its rarity or completeness. This kind of significance assessment “helps focus resources on the most significant items and collections, giving them priority in curatorial, conservation, exhibition, research and access programs.” (Russell & Winkworth, 2009, p. 12). It is these significance modifiers that realistically determine what OM collects, rather than a hierarchy of foci as suggested by the Collection Policy.

By combining these broader Significance Criteria with the Collection Foci, OM’s Collection Policy creates a screen through which to analyse potential acquisitions. However, this is also a useful set of criteria for evaluating previous acquisitions for deaccessioning and

helping prioritise work on the collections. It is through this Collection Policy lens that the Laing Collection will be studied in the Chapter 4.

3.5 Organisational Memory within GLAM

Museums are repositories of knowledge. Their primary purpose is to store not only objects, but also the information they contain and then disseminate it. As Lord and Markert put it, museums are “repositories of art and artifacts, places of lifelong learning [...] storehouses of knowledge [...] and more.” (2007, p. 14). However, reflecting upon their own histories is a separate issue. Often when companies memorialise their own actions, it can be termed a “corporate museum” (Nissley & Casey, 2002). Yet, when a museum reflects on itself, the self-reflection can be much harder than one might expect, given the primary purpose of a museum. Museums are designed to recall factual histories of objects. Examining the organisational memory of museums is challenging because these memories are not the public facing ones found in exhibitions, but are rather meta-data, or memories about memories.

In order to retain collection information, museums previously used card catalogues (Longstreth-Brown & Buck, 2010) or ledgers to record accessions. These days computerised CMS are the norm (Quigley & Sully, 2010). Otago Museum has used the Vernon Database system since 2000 (Vernon Systems, n.d.). This database should hypothetically hold all the information for Otago Museum’s collections and has an “endless number of fields that are able to contain an enormous amount of data.” (Jones, personal communication, July 14, 2017). As Quigley & Sully outline, a computerised CMS should allow for “sophisticated searching, comparison possibilities, instant retrieval of related information and statistical reporting” (2010, p. 169). Yet, as Byrne notes, organisational memory that is translated into a CMS also offers “insights into the personalities of the individuals involved” (2015, p. 261).

The CMS can recall information about the collection, as well as museum staff involved with the collection; they are an intrinsic part of the process, and indeed no management system can fully combat poorly managed information, inconsistent entries, and human error. The systems are only as powerful as the organisation of the people using them. This was highlighted in one staff interview when the participant noted: "I'm hoping we can continue being consistent in our recording of things" (Jones, personal communication, July 14, 2017). The data entered into these systems "should be considered just as valuable and priceless as the object(s) they represent" (Quigley & Sully, 2010, p. 169). This is highlighted when the data is missing entirely, making the database impotent.

So it is clear already where institutional systems of remembering can begin to fail collections, with information literally disappearing if a CMS is used incorrectly. The information lost is not only information pertinent to the collection items, it is historical information about the museum itself, from exhibition usage and research papers based on the items, to accession and acquisition histories. Hence, within Otago Museum, as Jones states "we just need to paperwork the sh*t out of everything" (personal communication, 14 July, 2017).

Nissley & Casey (2002) examine the corporate museum, which displays the history of a company. In this context they note the "politics of memory" (Nissley & Casey, 2002, p. S41) when a company chooses to only display a certain version of history. Some museums aim to present a narrative as an idealised, or reshaped memory - for example a number of museums in Mexico aim to reframe the historic perception of the Mexican police force (Buffington, 2012). Importantly, these memories (or lack of) help to shape unconscious structures that will produce policies and narratives within an institution and will thus impact the collections within.

This is also an important idea within the Laing Seals case study. Rather than a reshaping, there is a silence or absence surrounding information on the Seals and acknowledgment of forgotten knowledge. This is especially noteworthy, since OM is an institution professionally dedicated to remembering, as now there must be a remembrance of forgetting. This remembrance is an acknowledgement of lost information, and that the Laing Seals represent a particularly bad example of corporate amnesia. There is also an understandable uneasiness when it comes to discovering why the information has been lost. It is perhaps too far in the past to know where the absence of information occurred and so through this research begins a “politics of remembering” (Nissley & Casey, 2002 p. S43) where to remember past institutional failings takes acknowledgement and acceptance. Normally the politics of remembering is considered in light of exhibitions, what the museum chooses to show, versus what was left in storage. However, it can also be applied to reflection on an institution’s past. Jones noted during his interview that “the professionalism of museums has only been relatively recent” (personal communication, July 14, 2017). This professionalisation can be seen in the formation of structures such as ICOM in 1946 (ICOM, 2018). It is because of this professionalisation that, were the Collection accessioned today, Jones argues that this loss of data would be incomprehensible (personal communication, July 14, 2017).

The politics of remembering normally paints a dichotomous picture between the sanctioned history, or official narrative (Nissley & Casey, 2002), and reality, where the two are mutually exclusive. However this also suggests animosity, where the corporation actively ignores or hides information (Nissley & Casey, 2002). Within this case study the stakes are considerably lower. Yet the politics of memory still apply. For example, as information gets filtered through memory, prioritised topics are remembered and lower priorities forgotten.

This is the “dynamic character of the social world” (Lawler, 2004, p. 112), reproducing a habitus through what agents remember or forget.

Anteby & Molnár argue that “forgetting is as integral to collective memory as remembering” (2012 p. 516) and the Laing Seal Collection was most likely passively collected and has not been prioritised, making it a prime example of forgetting through corporate amnesia (Kransdorff, 1998a). Thus, there is also a politics of remembering when an institution’s actions are not malicious. In other words, the institution knows it has previously forgotten data and searches for ways to work within the reality at hand, invoking forward-looking policies to remedy lost or ignored information. This approach is consistent with the aspirations of GLAM because they are committed to revealing accurate information, rather than shrouding it. The epistemological position of the staff is fundamental for understanding the institution’s history. For example, when discussing the Laing Seals, staff openly acknowledge the lack of information – and regret that it is missing. This highlights not only the politics of memory, but also the power of memory. Remembering information requires active agency, rather than an assumed status quo (Anteby & Molnár, 2012).

Otago Museum has taken steps to acknowledge and preserve its own history. An honorary curator was appointed in 2014 to look at the history of OM’s science collections (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2015b). The goal is to identify the associations between collections and particular curators, thus contributing to the preservation of the Museum’s history. However, it is worth noting that as an honorary curator this position is unfunded and driven by the enthusiasm of the individual. Current staff readily acknowledge that “those sorts of things should be encouraged, to build that corporate knowledge” (Smith, personal communication, June 2, 2017), and realise there are few resources dedicated to such

endeavours. The issue of resource management that leads to these kinds of situations is discussed in section 3.6.

As outlined, organisational memory is a concept through which the Laing Collection, Otago Museum and more generally low-priority collections can be analysed. As Stoyko (2009) notes organisational memory is not simply constituted of facts (that in a GLAM context manifest themselves in the CMS). It also contains common knowledge, 'tricks of the trade', shared assumptions and mind sets, and most importantly for this research, workplace lore (Stoyko, 2009, p. 7). This lore is when a story gets transmitted as an oral tradition would, memory serving to recall "methods and habits of staff" (Byrne, 2015 p. 261) along with factual information. While stories with narrative and plot provide powerful tools for remembering information (Stoyko, 2009) they also risk distortion as information is manipulated to provide causation, and temporal sequences that make narrative sense. Unfortunately, creating a story easy to retell can lead to factual errors.

As will be explained in Chapter 4, rediscovering dates connected to the Laing Seal Collection has been problematic with a number of contradictory memories coming to light. Similarly, it is tempting when rebuilding the history of a collection to fill in gaps with ideas which build the most cohesive, interesting narrative, rather than facts. The Laing Collection has so little information attached to it that what remains has taken on a mythic quality. By examining the Laing Seals this research will show how workplace lore can be used to partially reconstruct a basis from which the history of the Laing Seals can be better understood.

Within my research there was an inexplicable absence of available information. Linde (2009) uses "silence" to discuss institutional stories that are deliberately obscured. However "absence" is more applicable in this situation, because, were the history of the Laing Seals known, OM would be keen to share it, as that is the institution's purpose. So there is an

absence, a story untold. Linde suggests the best way to begin building an understanding of these absent institutional stories is through comparison:

a counterstory, comparison of earlier and later accounts, comparison with other sequences of events of the same sort, comparison with another record, or comparison of the story with what one knows independently about how such matters usually work in the wider world. (Linde 2009, p. 197.)

As Linde puts it, comparison can lead to a most likely scenario based on past experience. It will not give the exact account, but may suggest the most likely trajectory. By comparing differing accounts, along with contextually adjacent information from OM, this research can propose a *most likely* history of the Collection, a *most likely* account of the absence. Finally, because staff members who worked with the Collection have left OM it is important to recognise not every voice has been available to contribute to the narrative. This makes my contribution to the narrative quite important. How this case study is concluded, by handing back the information learnt here about the Laing Seal Collection, will either support staff agency and give them the tools and motivation to keep working on the collection, or it will become another set of data that becomes decontextualised over time.

This idea of handover being key to agency is not theoretical for the Laing Seal Collection. After this research finishes, one of the most crucial steps will be handing the discoveries and forward momentum created here back to OM. So what does the current paper trail from this research look like?

Information about the Seals in the Collection has been collated into a single spreadsheet, broken down by box number. There is also a page in the spreadsheet dedicated to listing the Seals in *Book of Sale* and *Catalogue* order which lists the current location of that Seal – expressed as box and layer within that box. The front page of the spreadsheet contains

instructions explaining the system used for counting the boxes, layers and Seals. It will also reference this thesis as further information regarding the Collection and the current state of knowledge. Therefore – should someone come to this spreadsheet with no prior knowledge, they should be able to understand what the Collection is, how it is organised, and what exactly is included within the Collection. There has not been scope within this research to begin rehousing the Seals except in a very superficial way, so the spreadsheet presents (in the first ‘introduction’ page) planned future undertaking, including reorganising the Seals into *Book of Sale* and *Catalogue* order, numbering and photographing them and rehousing the Seals so the layers are safer. This spreadsheet will act as the database for the Collection until it can be transferred into OM’s Vernon CMS. Until then, a copy of the front page (including a link to the complete spreadsheet on the intraweb) will live physically with the Collection. All of these steps will allow agency to continue after this research concludes. They are the formalisation of new organisational memories created throughout this research. Indeed, this is the solidification of organisational memory into process and quantifiable data.

3.6 Museum Resources

Museum resources are finite. There is not enough money, space, time or staff. Moses notes that “the toughest challenge museums face is balancing the often competing missions: educating the public [...] serving researchers and scholars, and properly preserving the holdings.” (2008, p. 4). This is not a new problem, having been traced to the mid-1970s by Alexander (1996), and identified in Otago Museum’s early years as well (McRobie, 1966). Sheets-Pyenson notes that funding for colonial museums came “rarely at an adequate level or on a regular basis” (1988, p. 16). Today, more than ever, museums must fight for every revenue source possible, and a gap grows between museums that can source funding and

those that cannot (Australasian Registrars Committee, 2007). The problem is widespread: Hudson & Legget (2000) document that in New Zealand, university collections also suffer from a dearth of research and support. Across the GLAM sector, institutions struggle, and when this affects museums' abilities to showcase the most cohesive exhibitions, it certainly leaves no room for the lower priority items. Thus, this chapter will now explore OM's financial landscape and the consequences for the Collections team and the Laing Seal Collection.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, museums in general began to seek new funding sources from "corporations, foundations and government agencies" (Alexander, 1995, p. 1). These new bases of funding also brought with them new spheres of influence that would eventually shape museums and fundamentally change how they functioned, politicising them. Museums began to do business. This business solidified in the 1990s with the key message that "museums were not free from social, economic and political influences" (Prentice, 2001, p. 5). The focus began to shift from the collections and become more outwards-looking, to consider the context of the museum, its communities and socio-economic influence. Legget highlights that at this time museums in New Zealand scrutinised "'value for money' and 'user-pays'" (2009, p. 214) as institutional maxims.

The new millennium brought the competitive consumer model to museums. Since then, financial concerns have escalated. The global financial crisis of 2008 intensified the competition for resources. Lindqvist (2012), for example, demonstrated just how connected GLAM institutions stakeholder relationships are to financial fluctuations. The variety of stakeholders to which museums were now accountable exposed a dependency on grants that were rapidly becoming less available (Scott, 2013). Since the financial collapse, museums have had to adjust to less revenue available to a growing number of institutions. No longer is it enough for museums simply to exist, they must now demonstrate relevancy to their

communities, function as tourist attractions and in some scenarios, assist in supporting the local economy (Woodward, 2012; Scott, 2013). The creative industries were incorporated into “political, cultural, economic and social projects” (Prince, 2010, p. 4) through policy. Within New Zealand this focus manifested itself through cooperation with government cultural policies to further “national identity and economic capital” (Abasa, 2014, p. 235). Lindqvist articulated this same idea when she said “the most daunting financial challenges facing a museum are the complexity and lack of control over some sources of income.” (2012, p. 6). The world is as uncertain as it has ever been and Woodward argues that “social subjects and concerns [are increasingly replacing] objects as the focus of museum operations.” (2012, p. 17). Thus, by the early 2000s, museums’ focus was firmly on outward facing policies that emphasised the visitor.

These worldwide trends are clear even within a single institution such as Otago Museum. It is telling that between the 2007/08 and 2013/14 annual reports that the first strategic goal of OM was to either engage their internal staff, or to “expand joy” of the community by increasing participation and visitor numbers (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2013). Before 2007/08 the first strategic goal of the museum was “to provide the best stewardship of the collection” (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2008). This directly illustrates Kreps’ points that “objects, once thought to be the defining feature of museums, have lost their centrality. Museums have shifted to emphasising services to their public” (2003, p. 312). Collection care was consistently the second or third strategic initiative of OM until the 2014/15 report when an inaugural Director of Collections, Research and Education was appointed, and the Material Conservation department re-established. Similar to “expand joy”, to “demonstrate relevancy” was one of OM’s strategic initiatives from 2011 until 2014, based upon building the Museum’s profile in international markets and “communicating

relevancy” (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2014b, p. 30). Here OM speaks to the need to compete within a finite market for funding. OM also recognised its place within a competitive market when the current Director, Dr. Griffin, said that the 2013 reopening of Dunedin’s other major museum, Toitū Otago Settlers Museum, affected OM’s visitor numbers (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2013). In the 2013 annual report Griffin notes explicitly that “with no increase in levy for the third year in succession, the Museum’s business units worked extraordinarily hard to generate extra income needed to cover increasing costs...” (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2013, p. 3). In 2014 Trust Board chairperson Graham Crombie wrote “like all institutions, we continue to operate in a difficult financial environment at present” (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2014d, p. 4). The point was reiterated almost verbatim in 2016 (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2016). Thus, Otago Museum’s message has shifted in the past fifteen years. From the early 2000s where collection care was foremost, a swing to a more public focused strategy, directed to community relevancy and entertainment followed. However, in the past five years there has been another refocus onto collections care, with more collections staff being hired and OM’s “world class collection” (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2017b) being reinstated as the first strategic goal of the museum.

The OM Collections team acknowledges that resources are stretched. They are “not a huge team” (Jones, personal communication, July 14, 2017), and as a result their focus must be on collection accessibility and discoverability, in making the collection accessible for others and perhaps as a result downplaying in-house research. This means considerable staff time and resources go towards a few very large priority projects, such as the digitisation of the tāoka collection (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2017b). This in itself is working towards the larger goal of accessibility and discoverability, highlighted by staff as an overarching goal. As Moses noted, work such as this allows “future scholars, curators, and visitors to explore...”

(2008, p. 152), and it could be argued that OM's current focus is on future researchers, as much as contemporary ones. One staff member suggested that the Laing Collection may have been brought into the museum "along the lines of decorative arts" (Smith, personal communication, June 2, 2017) to fit into the collection policy priorities. Given this stretch, OM's "remit is Dunedin and Otago, so our focus for our collections should be there" (Smith, personal communication, June 2, 2017). Until there is convincing evidence that the Laing Seals give insight into that thematic priority, it will endure as a low priority collection.

There is also the question of staff specialisation, another finite resource. Each staff member has their own research interests, be it broad like textiles, or more specialised, such as a certain donor. While it is this specialisation that compels staff into museum careers, it also helps determine what is displayed within museums. Moses says "museums are more than the stuff they store and the exhibits they stage. They're also about the people who work in them. The most distinctive type is the curator, the ruler of a collection" (2008, p. 59). It is these 'rulers' that have a large impact over what collections get worked on or researched. Their agency determines which collections are remembered, and which are forgotten. It is on the shoulders of curators that the power of memory ultimately falls. They perceived as founts of esoteric collection knowledge (Huvila, 2013), and are therefore a major part of "ongoing historical constructions and collective memories" (Anteby & Molnár, 2012, p. 517). Indeed, OM's aspirational statements, such as the vision and mission, are open ended. Therefore many of the choices of how they are fulfilled is left entirely up to the curatorial team. While full-time staff who work in museums may not have competing external conflicts of interest, they will prioritise what they specialise in internally. As the agents of the collection it is these staff that reside within the habitus of OM, it is their actions that will continue to reinforce or

challenge the norm. They express the “objective structures” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 79) formed through socialisation that is built up over time through strategic forgetting and remembering.

Coote recognised the importance of personal agency in the rediscovery of a collection of *Endeavour* items. This important collection has emerged as one part of the Pacific collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford because of “the personal interests of a number of the Museum’s staff” (2004, p. 2). The *Endeavour* voyage is one of the “most famous voyages of all time” (Coote, 2004, p. 1) and even its artefacts were not immune from absorption and consequential loss into the Museum’s wider collections. In discussing this discovery with Coote, he noted that this collection only came to light at all because “one day in the reserve collection [he] happened upon a tiheru, a Māori canoe baler, that was obviously ‘old’” (personal communication, 11 December 2017). The tiheru already had an entry in the Pitt Rivers database giving it a date, which began the trail leading to the eventual uncovering of a variety of items from the *Endeavour*.

So, what does the example of the tiheru suggest about the Laing Seal Collection? It shows that even objects from internationally renowned historic events can fall prey to organisational memory loss. There has been little staff interest in the Laing Seals in the last few decades and there is little immediate importance to the broader OM collections as it has little discoverable paperwork or history. It does not directly speak to any of OM’s key remits or stories. There is also a large amount of work to be done to the Collection to make it accessible or discoverable for other researchers.

However, were basic steps to be taken with the Collection, such as records being within the CMS, then the Collection has a “better chance” (Jones, personal communication, July 14, 2017), of being considered when time comes to populate an exhibit. It is telling that

with the appearance of an opportunity, in the form of this thesis, the Laing Seal Collection was immediately raised as the collection in need.

3.7 Ethics Requirements

The ICOM Code of Ethics sets “minimum standards of professional practice and performance for museums and their staff.” (ICOM, 2013, p. ii) and while minimum guidelines are important, museums should, as a whole, aim above that. Section 2.18 is most relevant to this study:

2.18 Collection Continuity: The museum should establish and apply policies to ensure that its collection (both permanent and temporary) and associated information, properly recorded, are available for current use and will be passed on to future generations in as good and safe a condition as practicable, having regard to current knowledge and resources. (International Council of Museums, 2013, p. 5)

This clause speaks to the requirement that museums transmit both the objects and associated information to future generations, highlighting that a museum's obligation is not only to its current visitors, but to visitors in perpetuity.

This ideal is refined in the Museums Aotearoa (MA) Code of Ethics:

... there is a strong presumption that all items, once accepted into a given collection, will be maintained in optimum conditions, protected by good record-keeping and security systems and held in trust for the public and/or on behalf of iwi. (Museums Aotearoa, 2013, p. 9).

Thus, MA raises the bar from minimum standards to optimum conditions. However, there is also a sense of a more practical acceptance of the ability of museums to meet these ideals. The MA Code of Ethics puts focus on the practicality by saying that collections should, whenever possible, be accessible to their audiences and should provide accurate data via

digital platforms (2013). It also requires that “all reasonable effort” (2013, p. 9) be made when seeking items’ provenance. So already there is a refinement from the international standards to a higher level of expectation, but also an acknowledgement of the physical limitations of institutions.

This ideal is reinforced by McCormick who states “never before have museums been held to such high standards of transparency and best practice.” (2010, p. 300). She argues that there are three basics museums must attain: “know what stuff you have, know where it is, take good care of it” (2010, p. 300). At OM, somewhere in the history of the Laing Seals these basics were temporarily waylaid and data was forgotten.

Once again there is conflict between ideal standards that museums seek, and the practical elements of resources. McCormick’s suggestion would imply that OM is not fulfilling the basic requirements of a museum within the Laing Collection. However, as this case study is examining, the space between the ideals and practices is one that must be a space of compromise and, most importantly, realism. OM staff must be realistic about their time and resources and it is only when opportunities arise, such as a master’s thesis, that some collections will receive further work.

Thus, while OM does conform to many of the international and national standards for museums, there is a gap between the idealistic standards and the historical data available. Preventive conservation proves the most effective way to combat this, having a standard level of care for all objects. However, for lower priority collections these standards can drop as the collections are more rarely utilised. Paradoxically, as discussed in Chapter 4, in the research of the Laing Seals the current internal storage solution endangers the Seals if they are moved from within their boxes. As the OM Conservation and Collection Care Policy dictates “any movement of a collection item should result in the item being placed in matching or improved

conditions” (2015a, p. 7) and so as this Collection continues to be rediscovered, this storage will need to be upgraded. Through my research with the Collection and these outlined ethics guidelines it becomes clear that to conform to both the Museum’s own standards, and those of the wider museum community, OM should prioritise rehousing the Laing Seals.

3.8 Conclusion

Thus a context is created. It is a context built of many facets that foreshadows what was discovered throughout my research. The Collection itself is wildly diverse, illustrating the time that Henry Laing lived. The history of Otago Museum echoes these same traits, as a museum that grew in many directions throughout its history. This sporadic growth is powered by the interests of those at its helm. Thus, the Otago Museum policies are broad when it comes to acquisition and can be used to justify the acquisition of most desired objects. However, while broad, the policies create a hierarchy of objects, with the Laing Seals not directly fulfilling any of the Significance Criteria. This context is part of OM, predisposing staff agency through unconscious structures. In Chapter 4 this context, coupled with organisational memory, will illustrate the current state of the Laing Seals. This will further highlight how Otago Museum’s history has impacted upon the Seal Collection and contributed to the current state of affairs. By exploring, as much as is possible, the history of the Collection within Otago Museum, the care of low-priority collections can be explored. With this context drawn, the house is built. Chapter 4 will explain the research undertaken and how this context wholly affected the process and what, in the end, is known about the Laing Seals.

Chapter 4: My Research

Rows of brown boxes, handwritten labels read *DRAWER 11*; *DRAWER 15*; *DRAWER 6*.

Stacked alongside helmets, chest plates and pieces of human-worked technology, these boxes seem out of place - don't they? This is the Technology Store, I suppose a link can be drawn. Are those boxes stacked two deep? Are the contents organised? Each box is a mystery until it is hefted down. Some are as light as air, some clearly packed to the brim. Some without even a label on the exterior - did they come from a drawer at all? Or somewhere else? One has *Seals* written in pencil on the box. This is the collection I have been asked to look at because staff are concerned about its status. I know nothing about it, nor what to expect. I had envisioned red wax sealings, aged on old paper documents, or attached to lengths of fabric tape.

On opening the first box and seeing inch-long glass cylinders all individually sealed into zip-lock bags, I get nervous. That isn't wax. It isn't red. My imagination has already led me astray. A colleague and I open another box. It is full of these glass cylinders packed into foam, handwritten lists of words between layers of unnumbered, unsorted objects. The next box is full of massive Seals, three or four times the size of others, depicting whole scenes, rather than just a single image. Some are made of metal now, not just glass. We find a tiny Seal, no more than an inch long, in the shape of a coffin with a tiny skeleton inside. We find a massive Seal depicting Napoleon. Some boxes have clearly been tended to, but it feels as if work was left unfinished, as if interrupted half way and never resumed.

The name Henry Laing was thrown about, and in order to describe the Collection to myself, in my head I call them the Laing Seals.

We go into another store room - the Furniture Store, full of antique tables and cabinets. In the centre of the room, behind a table and in front of a stack of chairs we stop at

two waist height cabinets. They are old and not in good condition, the doors are askew and the polish has worn off the exterior. They have dozens of shallow drawers inside, perfect for displaying a collection of small things. Stacked on top are some plaster replicas of the larger glass Seals we saw in the Technology Store. This is the Henry Laing Seal Collection.

That was my first encounter with the Laing Seal Collection. It was an informal exploration of the Collection after a meeting suggesting it as the topic for this thesis. In that first meeting, no one could tell me how many objects were in the Collection, nor where they originated from, nor why Otago Museum held the Collection. There was a chaos to the Collection, reinforced by the lack of documentation attached to it.

All I had was a name, Henry Laing, and four books; two pamphlets, identical bar condition; a handwritten hardcover book full of lists, and finally a large book full of hand-drawn Seals and notations. None had accession numbers or were in the online database. The Collection was separated into two storerooms, the Technology Store - where the Seals themselves are boxed, and the Furniture Store - where the display cases are stored, along with extra shelving and paraphernalia. It was only thanks to a very observant colleague, with a good memory, that these two collections were even identified as one and the same.

So far this research has discussed the context of the Collection, its place at Otago Museum and the history of the institution itself. This included an examination of OM's policies and mission, and the resources available to museums. This context has been illustrated through organisational memory within Otago Museum, and how it can affect a collection irrevocably. Now this thesis turns to my own research on the Laing Seal Collection, what has been discovered and the journey undertaken to exhume the Collection from its dormancy. In

this process I became an agent for change for the Laing Seal Collection and began to restore agency to the Collection itself.

It is axiomatic that all GLAM institutions are going to have objects that do not correspond perfectly to their collection policy, that perhaps do no longer represent the stories they want to tell. As discussed in the previous chapter, long standing institutions come with historical collections and this will, by necessity, create lower priority collections. However, this is not to say that these types of collections are not valuable and worth caring for. OM approaching me to do this research illustrates how much it cares about all of the collections and take advantage of opportunities to look after them. Nevertheless, despite best intentions, “every museum has a cupboard of something” (Jones, personal communication, July 14, 2017) - a collection that struggles to be utilised. In Otago Museum that collection is the Laing Seals.

In this chapter I narrate the research journey I took to better understand this Collection. I document what has been learned about the Collection by exploring staff interviews, the physical state of the Collection and undertaking a detailed search for relevant collection records.

Currently the Laing Seals makes staff apprehensive, a feeling deadly to a collection’s survival: although they know of it, no staff member has the time nor resources to attend to it or improve access to it. But in order for the Collection to become more accessible, it must become more discoverable; researchers must have the physical ability to discover the Collection. Presently the Seals are neither of these; one cannot access the Collection nor even discover it is there to begin with. Through this research, the first few steps have been taken towards opening this Collection up and making it discoverable.

4.1 Evidence

To show the Laing Seal Collection needs to be discoverable and accessible, and what work has been done already towards this goal, my research strategy involved interviews with present and past staff; examining the physical disposition of the Collection; and searching Museum records for traces of the Collection. The remainder of this chapter details each of these strategies and the outcomes.

4.1.1 Interviews

The first key question for the Laing Seal Collection is: when did it enter the Museum and when it was accessioned? Because no CMS records for the Collection were found, I considered staff recollection to be an important resource. Therefore, I began my initial investigation through informal conversations with staff, followed by semi-structured interviews.

The earliest hint of an accession date was in an informal email to a previous staff member, who suggested that the Collection was brought in during the mid-2000s. A current staff member, saying they were certain it was significantly earlier than that, quickly corrected this. Here is a prime example of memory lapses and trying to recall old information, easily confused with other experiences.

My aim was to interview both present and past staff members to elicit information recalled, but perhaps not necessarily recorded officially. I was hoping to test the extent of their organisational memory.

Originally six staff members were approached for interviews. However, the two with the earliest association with the OM, declined to be interviewed. As a result there were four people who could possibly answer the critical questions surrounding the Laing Seals, three of

whom agreed to be interviewed. All the interview participants were guaranteed anonymity. For this reason I use pseudonyms in Chapter 3 and the narrative that now follows.

First there is Gwen Smith. Smith is a seasoned professional, having worked in museums across the globe. She is thoughtful, reflective and realistic when it comes to the Laing Seal Collection, making strong connections between Otago Museum's future plans and potentially where the Seals could fall within these plans. Smith has worked with collections of all shapes and sizes but came to this project with virtually no knowledge of the Laing Seal Collection, despite her experience.

Secondly, there is Elijah Jones a relatively new staff member, with a passion for collections. With a professional history in art and humanities collections, he is open to, and excited about, new research and opportunities presented to the Collections, Research and Education team. He approached the interview with a realistic point of view, eager to have tangible outcomes arise from his input.

Finally, there is Quentin Butcher. Quentin has worked at OM for over a decade and was instrumental in the collection auditing process. He was restrained on questions around the future of the Collection, preferring to focus on the audit as a whole process. Of the interviewees Quentin had the greatest working knowledge of the Laing Seal Collection.

The current staff, Smith and Jones, have limited knowledge of the Laing Seal Collection. When asked what they knew of the Collection before this research began, their answers came tinged with resignation. Smith was characteristically direct – what did she know? “Virtually nothing” (personal communication, June 2, 2017). Exhaling and relaxing back into her chair, Smith's countenance speaks to her forbearance of a discouraging situation, a toleration of the intolerable. It had been mentioned in passing to her that the Seal Collection existed – so much

so that her interest was piqued: “I thought, oh, are they cylinder seals? [...] But they’re not so...” (personal communication, June 2, 2017). Smith’s personal interest could have been enough to take this Collection somewhere, had they been the right kind of Seals. Yet, they were not.

Jones is humble about his knowledge - “I did not know anything about the Seals. I knew that they were there. I knew they looked cool” (personal communication, July 14, 2017). Yet only he, of all the interviewees, had actually picked up and opened one of the boxes prior to this research beginning – “I had just thought ‘Oh, that looks scary’” (personal communication, July 14, 2017). So he at least knew from the start vaguely what the Collection comprised, a seeming wealth of knowledge in a desert of unfamiliarity, “I knew they were these lovely wee things that might be quiet nice to sort out” (personal communication, July 14, 2017).

Butcher had been involved in shifting the whole Collection “having moved it from its old storage to the new storerooms” (personal communication, June 30, 2017). Even this interaction did not lead to any more personal knowledge – the boxes were moved, and left unexplored.

From these short excerpts, it is clear that the staff knew the Collection was there, and indeed knew it needed work: yet resources and other internal demands simply prevented such work.

Looking to organisational memory, and what had been passed down through the generations of OM employees, the picture does not get much clearer.

Smith was told nothing by exiting staff. I enquired if any information was passed on. Her emphatic response was: “Not at all” (personal communication, June 2, 2017). No more can be said when you are told nothing. Jones had enquired about the Seals to his predecessor “...and was told ‘Oh, we don’t know much about it’ or something like that” (personal

communication, July 14, 2017). Butcher has a similar experience: “It certainly wasn’t left as any sort of project or file. More casually mentioned by the Collection Manager than anything” (personal communication, June 30, 2017).

Again, the answers were slim. These responses, while almost non-existent, speak to the lack of knowledge staff actually had to pass on – if they knew nothing, how could they tell their new staff anything of value?

These questions, of what had been passed on regarding the Collection and what they knew about the Collection before my research began, form a picture of the state-of-mind of staff regarding the Collection. They are all aware of the Seals, having been told off-handedly about their existence. However, through inaction over generations of employees, all pertinent information regarding the Collection has been lost.

I could sense an overwhelming frustration within some employees, a frustration that the Collection was so neglected. For example, Jones said at one point:

See, the low priority thing. It is a low priority, but that’s a terrible way of describing it, because it should be.... All our things should be a priority. But you know, I’m just being...

He trails off, then starts anew:

Well, in theory, I would have thought that we should treat the tiniest piece of rock the same as we would treat a gold statue, from Mesopotamia or something. Because they are all our treasures. So I think... (personal communication, July 14, 2017).

The thought ends here.

Jones is unable to fully articulate what frustrates him. But the intent is obvious; museums need to care for all the objects in the collections; paradoxically sometimes they cannot. Jones does not have the information he needs to move forward with the Collection, nor the time to acquire such knowledge.

Looking to the future of the Laing Seal Collection, OM staff are practical and realistic. They acknowledge the restrictions of museum resources and paint a picture of improvement to the status quo. Smith suggested that:

In reality it will probably stay in the stores. But if it's available and accessible and it's known about, then it would make it easier for people to come and access it and research it if they wanted to. (personal communication, June 2, 2017.)

This highlights Smith's focus upon discoverability. Perhaps accepting that, within her department, work is unlikely to move forward without outside impetus, her focus is on making the Collection more discoverable and accessible. This is probably the most realistic approach.

However, as always, Jones was more optimistic:

We could even then, if they remained in boxes and were never looked at again, then people would be able to access the information, know that we have them. We could write a wee blog about them, we could do an online thing about them. I don't imagine they'd be in an exhibition. Just because I don't think there would be anything really, in any of the galleries that would be particularly cool for them. But even then, a nice display in the stairwell cases. But practically, yes I imagine they will sit in boxes for a long, long time. But at least we will know they are there. (personal communication, July 14, 2017.)

Nevertheless, both Jones and Smith turned to outside resources as a most likely course of action. Smith commented that:

If there is someone interested in working on it, then we should facilitate that process because it's a win-win whoever does the research on it gets a research piece out of it and we get knowledge out of it. (personal communication, June 2, 2017).

Jones noted that:

we tend to do a lot of projects based on requests, external requests [...] and then we are like, 'Great! We can get that out and sort it out now.' So that kind of spurs getting onto that. Nobody has ever asked about the Seals. (personal communication, July 14, 2017)

When it comes to the future, Butcher just hopes that they get seen to in due course:

I think it will get worked on eventually under Otago Museum's ongoing collection audit project (provided momentum is kept up). As records online is an outcome of that project I would expect it will generate some interest in the future. (personal communication, June 30, 2017.)

This echoes the ideas of Jones and Smith, that the Collection will become discoverable for others, however there is hesitancy in Butcher's statement around the momentum of the auditing.

As these interviews illustrated there are major issues around recapturing information once it has been lost. The absence of memory suggested by Linde (2009) is evident, as much of this information may now be impossible to recover. In the past, staff have forgotten to remember, reinforcing a habitus that generates no impetus to work with the Seals. Anteby and Malnár note that "staying the same requires efforts and work" (2012, p. 516) and twice this effort to retain memories has lapsed. Once, originally, when the collection arrived and accession information was not well documented or retained, and again when it was rehoused into the current boxes, but no paper trail clearly left. Thus, questions remain, such as: Why was the Seal Collection semi-organised? What prompted this organisation? Why was it halted? Current staff are more than willing to help, but are unable to do so through no fault of their own. The information they have has been supplied by predecessors is incomplete, the power of memory has been denied to current staff. At best, only portions of information have survived through numerous staff changes.

The Laing Seals are not unique in this respect. For example, Hamby's research into aboriginal baskets from a 1948 Arnhem Land expedition concluded with a similar sentiment, that "it is unlikely that researchers now will ever know the origins and maker of every piece..." (2011, p. 238). In this case, data was lost in similar circumstances to the Laing Seals. Once the objects were collected little to no documentation was retained, effectively destroying the historical expedition information. While I remain more optimistic about the chances of recovering Laing Seal information, it is also realistic to imagine that some information has been lost permanently.

The inconclusive outcome of the interviews meant turning away from staff knowledge and turning towards the Collection itself and its storage – and then, finally to archival sources to seek contextual documentation.

4.1.2 Boxes

While the Laing Seal Collection is within OM storage one of the most important factors in its maintenance is preventive conservation. Preventive conservation in OM's eyes is "the most cost and resource effective way to care for collections in the long term." (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2015a, p.7). Most preventive conservation for the Laing Collection is consistently going on around it, such things as controlling the surrounding environment, effective pest management, and security of the building (Te Papa National Services, 2001). These aspects meet prescribed standards of preventive conservation.

However, one portion of the Laing Seal's preventive conservation bears a closer look - that of meeting standards for good storage and customised housing for objects. For many museums, where to put something is one of the largest challenges facing all collections, not just the low priority items (Te Papa National Services, 2001). The standards for storage of glass

objects require that they be contained within acid-free tissue and boxes held on sturdy, level shelving that prevents “bumps and jarring” (American Institute of Conservation, 2018). The Seal collection also contains metal and plaster Seals, which need stable temperatures to prevent corrosion or water permeation (National Services Te Papa, n.d.).

The Seals are currently housed in cardboard boxes, supported by ethafoam inserts. Some boxes had polyethylene foam barriers between layers. Between each layer of foam is an A4 handwritten list, on printer paper. These cardboard boxes are adequate: they fulfil the basic charge of keeping the Seals contained and safe on shelves. Glass is significantly more susceptible to overcrowding and breakage (Ambrose & Paine, 2006) therefore the ethafoam inserts are a crucial component of this storage. In a few cases the boxes are bereft of foam however, with Seals stored individually in plastic ziplock bags. However, the boxes are not labelled in any systematic way. When first unpacking the Collection I decoded small handwritten notes on each box. They listed the boxes by drawer and box, for example, “Drawer 5, Box 2” or “Drawer 8, Box 1”.



Figure 4.1: Photo of drawer labelling: Drawer 10, Box 11

It eventuated that these handwritten labels corresponded to the two cabinets associated with the Collection. At some stage in the past, the Seals were moved out of these cabinets (one can only presume in an attempt to house them more safely). The notes correspond to the drawers the Seals were removed from. This in itself was an important factor because it suggested that the boxes of Seals and the two cabinets did in fact belong together, as there is no formal paperwork or CMS entry to demonstrate as much currently. These cabinets are not stored with the Seals, rather they are in the Furniture Storeroom. The Seals are in the Technology Store which currently holds mixed-media items, such as metals and marbles, thus storage is taking place by medium (Lord, Lord & Martin, 2012).



Figure 4.2: Cabinets & how they store Seals.

Looking inside the boxes, the storage solution becomes significantly more problematic. Each box has handwritten notes for each layer, explaining what is within the boxes – however, these vary wildly in quality of description: some lists have correctly transcribed Latin and are relatively legible, but other are only listing numbers found on the reverse of the Seals. These lists are written on recycled modern photocopies, suggesting that they were written in the recent past, however no staff members could identify the handwriting to suggest authorship.

162	164	176	188	201	210	220	229
169	165	177	189	202	211	221	229
151	168	178	189	203	212	222	?
152	169	179	190	204	213	223	230
154	170	179	191	205	214	224	232
155	171	181	192	206	215	225	233
156	172	182	193	207	217	226	234
157	173	183	194	208	218	227	235
159	174	184	195	210	219	228	236
160	175	186	196				
161		187	197				
163			198				
163			199				
Bottom							
237	245	257	302				
238	246	259	-				
239	249	260	-				
240	250	263	199				
241	251	264	198				
242	252	268	197				
243	254	269	196				
243	255		195				
244	256		194				
Draw 4							

Figure 4.3: Handwritten note: Drawer 4, list of contents of 3 layers

Many of the boxes of Seals are stored in layers, with each Seal having a hole cut in the foam especially for it. However, the quality of this storage varies. As I lifted one layer of Seals,

for example, it became clear there was no backing behind the holes, allowing the Seals to slip from their casing. For the smaller Seals, static friction keeps them firmly in place. For some of the larger, heavier Seals this system of storage meant that as I lifted the layers the Seals slipped out, contacting the layer below. In lower numbered boxes there is only two or three layers of Seals in each box, leaving space for each layer to have a backing plate of foam and several of these boxes have cardboard handles that can be used to lift each layer the Seals making them easy to stack and reducing the danger to themselves or others. High numbered boxes have backing plates but no handles, making it tricky to grasp the layers. Some have no backing plates at all, allowing for the slippage and impact of Seals.



Figure 4.4: Packing with “handles” for lifting layers of Seals

Some boxes are filled to such a level with layers holding Seals that interim safety layers would not fit. It seems that space became an issue as the collection was rehoused and more Seals need to fit into each box – but realistically the reasoning behind these decisions will

never be known. To solve these storage issues many whole boxes must be emptied and the Seals refitted into a more appropriate storage. This means, ironically, while the Seals are not being utilised this storage works well – keeping them safe and static. However, as soon as someone wants to access the Collection they will be endangering the objects potentially leading to the need for remedial conservation. It is a lose-lose dilemma– you cannot safely access the Collection to work on them, thus the Collection will not be worked on and will not be moved into more appropriate housing.



Figure 4.5: Layers without “handles”



Figure 4.6: Typical contents of a single box

These issues were only discovered when this research began and need to be remedied to conform to OM’s policies and practices. The Conservation and Collection Care Policy states that “the risk to the collection will be minimised through the use of specified standards for display materials, mounts, packing cases, transportation...” (2015a, p. 6) and it would not take much work to improve this internal storage to a standard which does not endanger the Collection. However, even simple fixes such as this require time dedicated to the Collection.

This concludes all the data discovered from the storage and notes left with the Collection. There is work to be done on the Seal’s storage to better prevent objects contacting when moved. Unfortunately little information regarding a timeline of the work done can be derived from the storage or lists. From here I turned to examining the Collection itself for clues.

4.1.3 Sleuthing & citizen science

A major aim of my research into this Collection has been a kind of “sleuthing”, using diverse means to identify and match Seals to entries within the *Bill of Sale* and *Catalogue*. When this research began, OM did not know how the books and the Seals interrelated. Nor that the Collection was divided between the Technology Store and the Furniture Store.

Thus, the first breakthrough of the research was identifying that these separated objects belonged to the same collection. While storage separation is appropriate to account for the material differences between the wooden cabinets and the glass Seals, due to the Collection’s lack of data there needs to be a formalised link between these two portions of the Collection. It was luck that the cabinets were discovered to begin with. Currently there is no paperwork linking the two halves and they were only connected thanks to a staff member, who spotted Seals in the Furniture Store and thought to mention that there might be connected items in there. When these were discovered, the *Catalogue* book was also found along with them. This discovery, along with the labelling of the boxes, firmly linked the two collections and the *Catalogue* has proved to be one of the most valuable for identifying the Seals.

Another important discovery regarding the storage history of the Seals came during the process of evaluating the boxes and Seal storage. During a routine examination of one of the Seal boxes I found a new type of handwritten note on the exterior of the box. It read “Found with F48.132. Found in gunstore 2001.” This was the first written record of the Collection that included a date. I was ecstatic. This might hold the key to finding from when and where these Seals came. Perhaps F48.132 was an accession number for part of the Collection. Why were they stored in the gunstore? Were they more valuable than first imagined?

F48.132 is listed as an Etruscan bucchero dish that was accessioned in 1948, however there is no reason to imagine that it is connected to the Seal Collection in any way except that they were stored in the same location. The gunstore itself is designed not to store dishes or Seals, but firearms. Had the Seals been valuable, they would have been in the vault, not the gunstore. Indeed, in 2001 OM was beginning the process of auditing the whole collection and it would not be surprising if this box was were simply discovered in the gunstore and moved alongside the rest of the Collection in the Technology Store. Whoever made this move thought this was a pertinent piece of information to record, while frustratingly not giving any context or paperwork for the shift in location. These days many items within OM have a radio-frequency identification (RFID) tag and if they are shifted this is recorded digitally so it can be monitored. However in 2001, a handwritten note to future generations seems to have sufficed. Ultimately, why the Seals were held in the gunstore was never uncovered and this note becomes another isolated historical note in a disconnected timeline.

Next, I moved on to examining the Seals themselves, beginning by photographing every page of the *Bill of Sale* and *Catalogue* in the hopes that these would somehow describe the Collection. Indeed they did, yet within each box there was no rationale for the Seals' organisation. It seems that either within the cabinets, or as part of the move from the cabinets to the boxes, the Collection got mixed together. Thus, Seals that were found listed in the *Bill of Sale* could be found amongst totally separate containers. This became even more complex when it was discovered that the Seals within the *Catalogue* were numbered, and sometimes it was unclear if the Seal originated from the *Bill of Sale* collection, or the *Catalogue*. Nonetheless, the research undertook to identify as many Seals as possible within the Collection. These identifications ranged significantly in difficulty, depending on the type of

Seal, the collection from which it came, and, in some cases, the legibility of the handwritten entries.

At the simplest end of the scale, there were identifications from the *Bill of Sale* that had text associated with them in English. For example, a Seal such as “Peace and Plenty” (see fig. 4.7) was extremely easy to locate. It was just a matter of looking through the “Devices with English Mottoes” section of the *Bill of Sale* until the correct wording was located. Within the entry there is a description of the image (in this case, a “fat” woman without a head) and the exact wording of the inscription.



Figure 4.7: Peace & Plenty

Things got a little harder when inscriptions were in other languages. For example, the inscription of fig. 4.8 is in French and reads “Votre amitié fait ma félicité” which means “Your friendship constitutes my happiness.” Trying to decipher the scripted handwriting was difficult, but once transcribed, the task was simply finding an identical inscription in the *Bill of Sale*, without the need to translation.



Figure 4.8: French Mottos: No. 752

Identification then became increasingly harder. Without exact wording to rely upon, distinguishing images becomes a matter of isolating the most likely candidate and a process of elimination. For example, within the “Sporting and Miscellaneous Subjects” section there are ten entries pertaining to a horse, and five that are listed as “A horse standing” (see fig.

4.9). Thus, for accurate identification all of these standing horses must be distinguished based on size and shape of the Seal itself, using a process of elimination to confirm identifications.

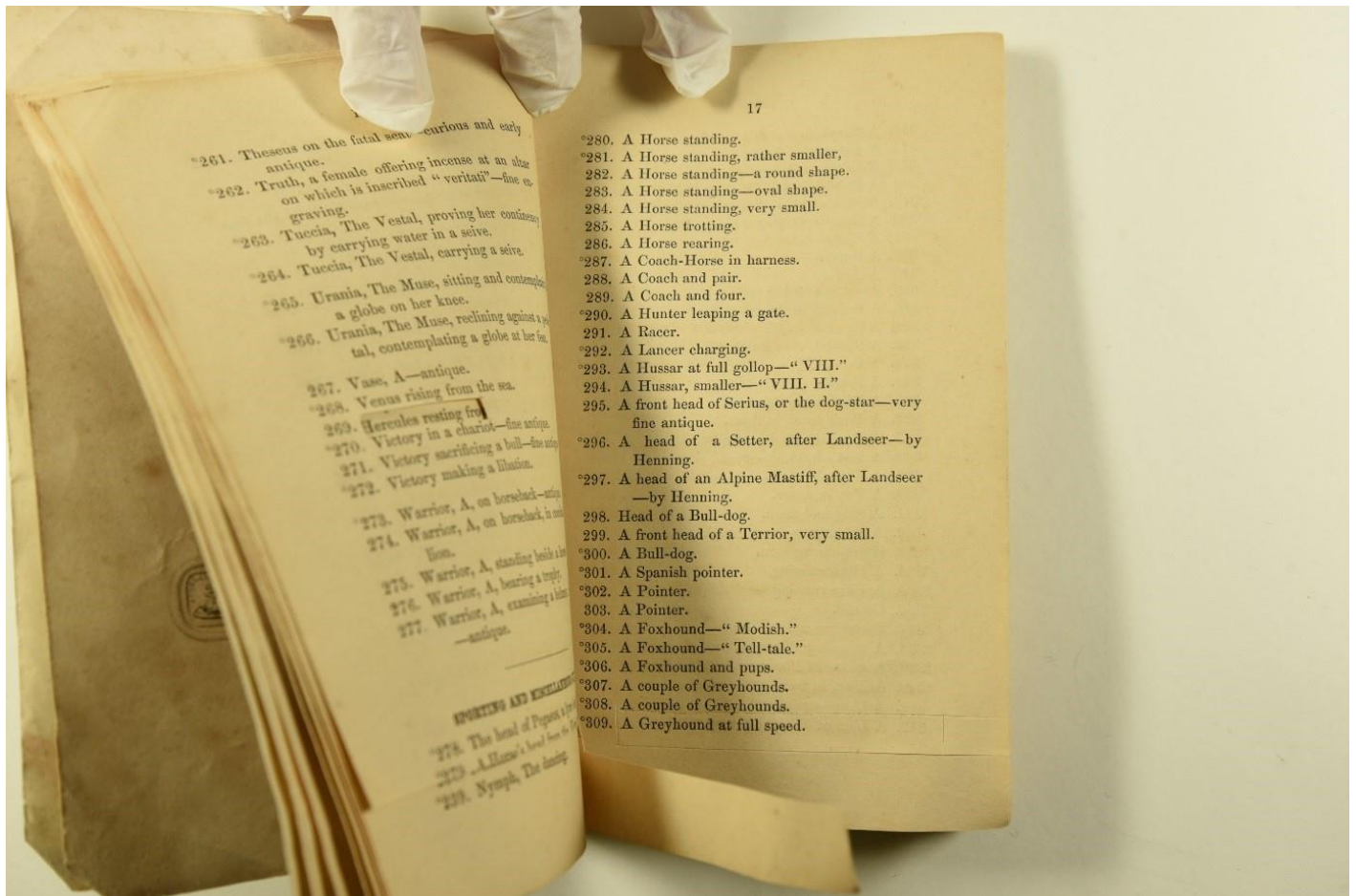


Figure 4.9: Bill of Sale p. 17: Horses standing

It gets more difficult when entries 295 through to 325 are all dogs of various breeds, with very few of these Seals measuring more than three or four centimetres across. Is the image a tiny Pointer (entry 302), or perhaps a Setter (entry 312)? A Poodle (entry 323) could be ruled out, but what about a Spaniel (entry 321)?

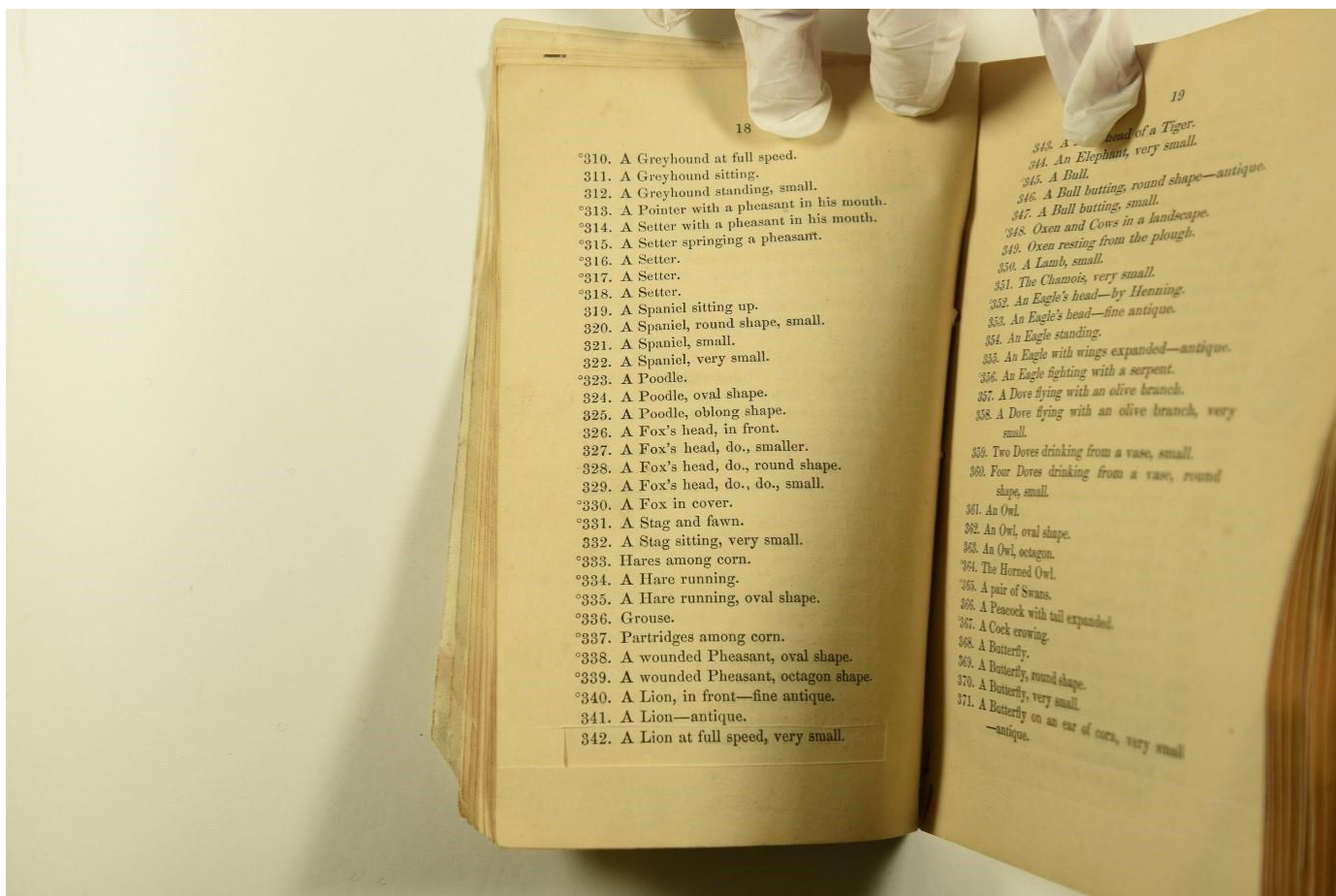


Figure 4.10: Bill of Sale p. 18: Dog breeds

Finally, within the Bill of Sale, pages five to sixteen, are all dedicated to Heads or Figures. Identifying 277 historical figures based on miniature profiles is not simple and it became harder when the text I worked from was defaced (fig. 4.11). These redactions seem to be removal of particular words specifically, leaving a sort of impossible puzzle where one must consult the secondary copy of the Bill of Sale, which is in significantly worse overall condition yet remains more intact.

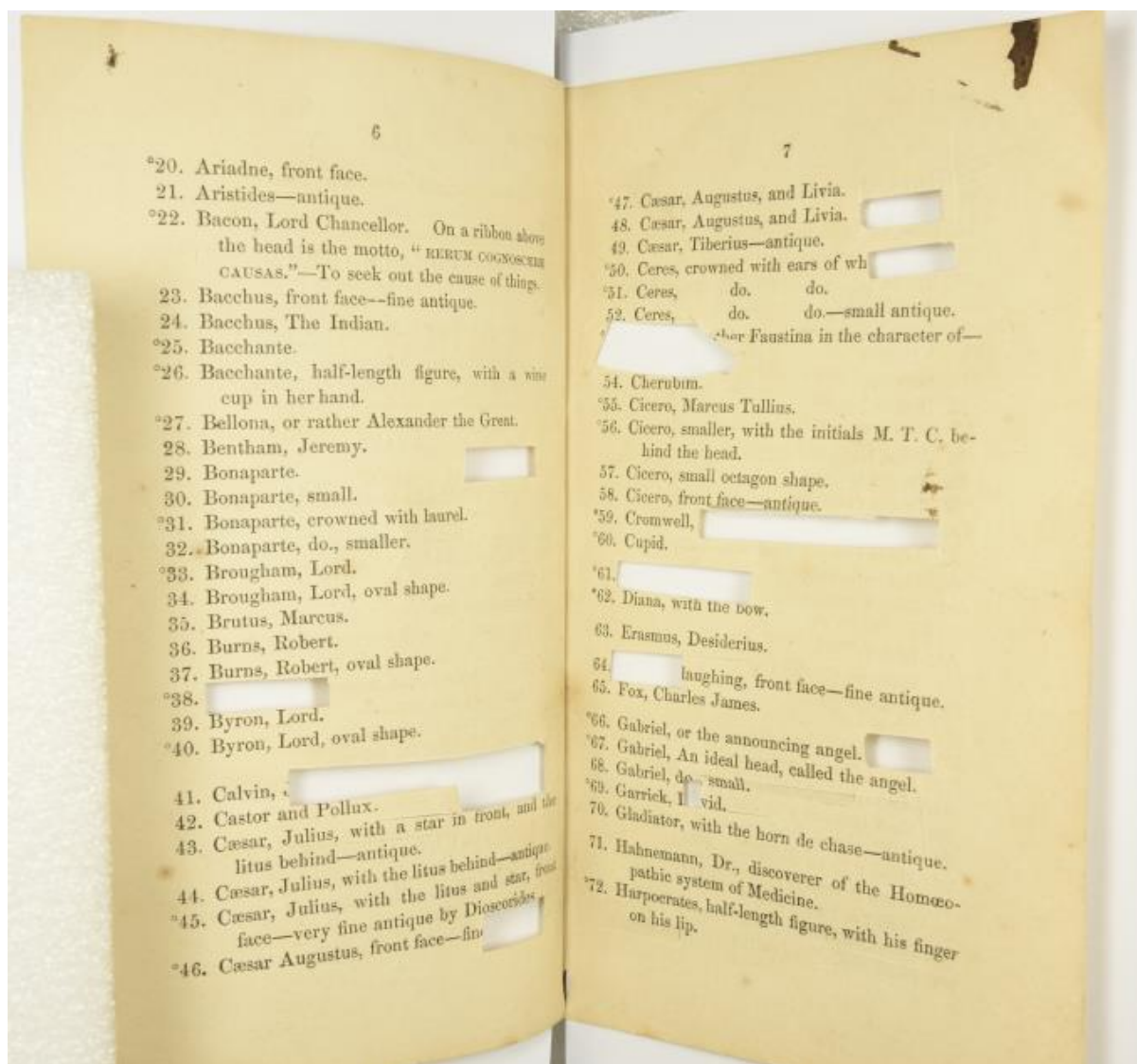


Figure 4.11: Bill of Sale pp. 6-7: A section of redacted text

It became clear in the process why perhaps these Seals were never catalogued by number, as many are historically esoteric. However, it is easy to physically see the difference between the *Bill of Sale* and *Catalogue* Seals. The *Bill of Sale* Seals are a purer, clearer glass, with a taller handle and all being relatively similar in size and composition. The *Catalogue* Seals however, differ greatly, not only in size, but in colour of glass and quality of composition. For example in fig. 4.12 is an Early Reformer Seal, front on, compared to a *Bill of Sale* Seal, side on.



Figure 4.12: Example of Catalogue Seal vs Bill of Sale Seal

The *Catalogue Seals* are numbered, and a previous owner has inscribed these numbers onto the reverse of the Seals themselves (see fig. 3.6). This makes a level of identification easier. Yet, the numbers start anew with each new section. So the question becomes: is this No.11 of the Heads: *Achilles 2 copies*, No. 11 of Figures: *Venus in various attributes*, No. 11 of the Early Reformers: *Nich. Ridley Bis of London burnt at Oxford 1555*, or indeed No. 11 of the Kings of England: *Edward the 3rd*. Some are simple to deduce – others not so. Also, some numbers etched onto the backing plates are incorrect, where human error has transposed some numbers.

One explicit example will illustrate a set of Seals and the process by which they were identified. The two Seals in fig. 4.13 depict the same angelic figure carrying a child. In one the child sleeps and in the other it holds a torch aloft. On the reverse side the inscribed numbers are the typical *Catalogue* numbers, added after production.



Figure 4.13: Thorvaldsen's reliefs & reverse

Fig. 4.14 shows the entry for these two images:

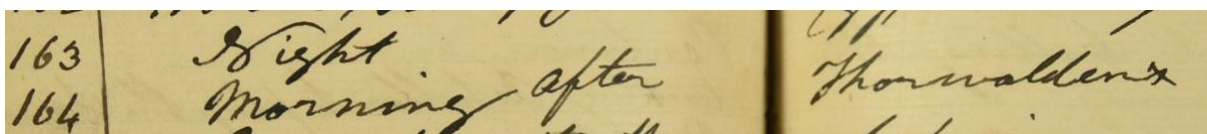


Figure 4.14: Night & Morning after Thorvaldsen's

This appear to read “Night after...” and “Morning after...” The final word, seen over the book spine, is difficult to decipher. Originally I had interpreted it to read something like Thorwaldens or perhaps Thoruoldenx (the final letter of the long hand ‘s’ with a cross through it is used elsewhere as an ‘x’ symbol, as seen below in fig. 4.15 in entry 168, Castor & Pollux.).

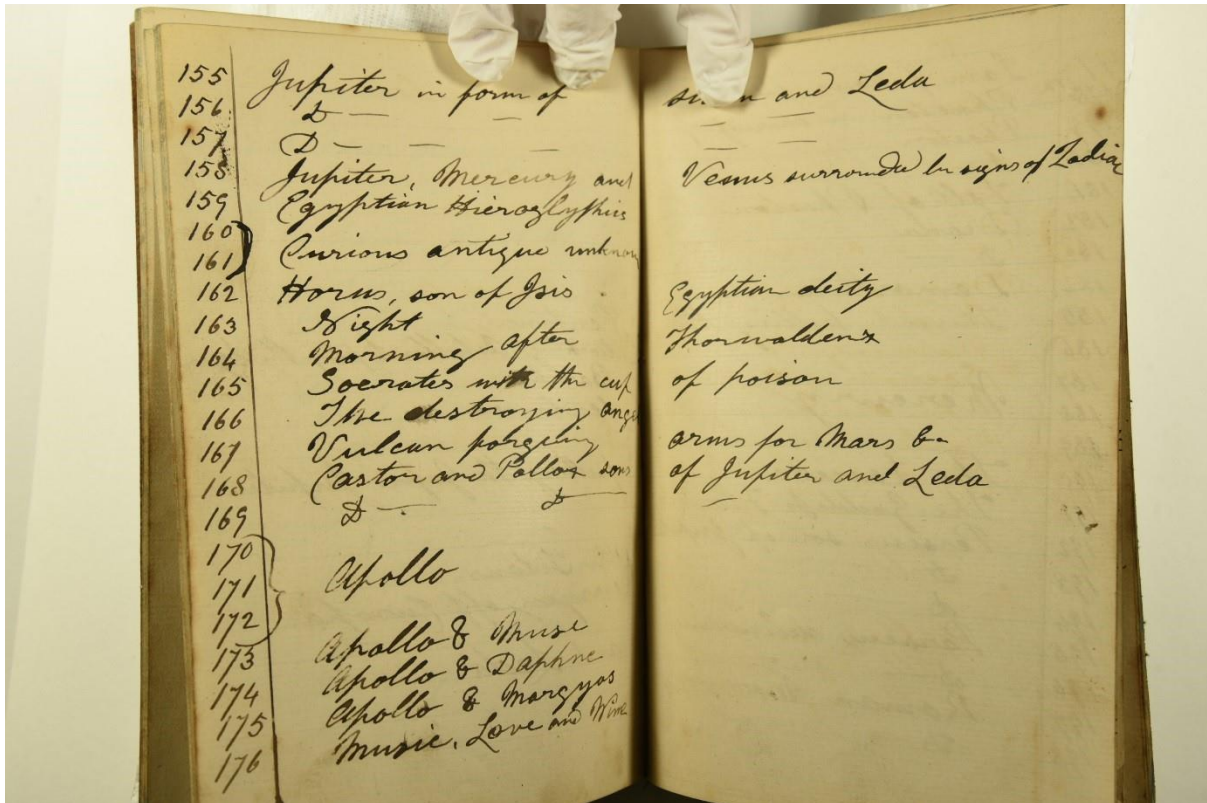


Figure 4.15: Context of the Thorvaldsen entries

Therefore I interpreted that perhaps these images were of the Night and Morning after an event, the celebration of Thoualdenx perhaps? The context of the entry suggested a classical connection. The entry is preceded in the Catalogue by references to ancient Egyptian culture (see fig. 4.15, entry 162 regarding Horus and Isis for example) and is followed by a number of ancient Roman entries (see entry 167 regarding Vulcan). I asked a number of Classics Studies colleagues if they had heard of such a thing, perhaps a celebration or ritual, especially within Roman mythology, but nothing eventuated. So I turned to the internet. After some creative “googling” I came upon a Pinterest page displaying a relief identical to the

“Morning after...” image, captioned as a relief carved by Thorvaldsen. It then became a trivial exercise to find the Thorvaldsen Museum online and confirm the reliefs as “Thorvaldsen’s most popular reliefs” (Thorvaldsen’s Museum, n.d.) which hang in the museum – the originals are 80cm in diameter and are carved from marble.



Figure 4.16: Thorvaldsen’s marble reliefs
Credit: Bertel Thorvaldsen, Night & Morning, 1815, Thorvaldsens Museum,
www.thorvaldsensmuseum.dk

So, these 3cm diameter Seals are copies of carving by Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770-1844), a Danish sculptor and contemporary of Henry Laing (1803-1883). A most fulfilling discovery and, I think, illustrative of the level of dissection that a number of these identifications require. This exploration reflects what must happen for the Collection as a whole - namely, a concerted effort to fully identify the Seal Collection.

My research continued: examining internal document belonging to OM to seek some sort of historical basis for the Collection. Thus, I turned to the archives.

4.1.4 Archives, ARFs, Card Catalogue

Throughout this research one fundamental aspect of discovery has been the search for documentation. This was a high priority. I worked systematically through a range of

internal documents, including article receipt forms (ARFs) used for the acquisition of items into OM collections from 17th July 1989, through to 30th Dec 2005 (see fig. 4.17 for an example document). I also explored annual reports from 1878 to 2018 (see fig. 4.19 and 4.20) and the historical card catalogue (see fig. 4.21). I anticipated finding within these documents clues to the donors or acquisition of the Laing Seals. However no documentation was located. Examining these appears to eliminate the idea that the Seal Collection came into OM's possession during these periods, or at least shows that the acquisition was not recorded through the ARF system, nor was it high profile enough to appear in an annual report.

The archives were likely to hold other kinds of documents needed to illuminate the Laing Seal's history, such as acquisition agreement, or letters discussion donation of the Seals. Staff suggested that potentially information existed there, but warned me not to raise my hopes. Nevertheless, I entered the archives optimistically. These hopes were short lived. The power of archives is that they highlight the grand items, magnifying the already brilliant and minimising the ordinary (Abasa, 2014), with large undertakings well documented. But at the same time low priority collections list the Laing Seals are untraceable.

The OM archives have not had the benefit of an archivist. Smith notes that "our archives, we don't know what we've got in our archives at this stage, that is another big element that we need to do" (personal communication, June 2, 2017). There is little organisation of documentation and without the discerning eye of an archivist it is difficult to penetrate the system of organisation. As Steedman noted, archives are "made from selected and consciously chosen documentation [...] and also from the mad fragmentations that no one intended to preserve that just ended up there" (2001, p.68). My time in the archives brought about a realisation that I could spend as long organising that space as I was searching

for the history of Henry Laing. The space is limited by staff engagement, needing, as the Seals do, an acceptance of agency and engagement by staff.

OTAGO MUSEUM
GREAT KING ST. PO BOX 6202
DUNEDIN, NEW ZEALAND
Telephone (034) 712-372.

ARTICLE(S) RECEIPT FORM
IMPORTANT: BEFORE COMPLETING THIS FORM, READ THE GUIDE.

(1) SERIAL No. 0015 (2) DATE 29 September 1990

(3) ARTICLE(S) RECEIVED FROM (Block Letters Please) [Redacted] (4) OWNER OF ARTICLE(S) (if different from (3))
NAME
ADDRESS
Telephone (day) (evening)

(5) ARTICLE(S) RECEIVED ON BEHALF OF THE OTAGO MUSEUM BY:
Signature [Redacted] Name D. Anson Position Curator

(6) DESCRIPTION OF ARTICLE(S) - As appropriate, include: object type, material, size, colour, where it is from, who found it and when, what it was used for and by whom (see also Guide Note 6).
 1) Eastman Kodak Red leather fold out camera
 2) Kodak & Brown large format 5.48 camera body with 100mm lens
 3) ACDIS Vna fold out camera and five metal plate holder
 4) Brownie No.2 camera Kodak Box camera
 5) one Huka Antiknox clockwork Lion & Fox
 6) Filmmaker boxes of sundry photographic chemicals & film
 7) one Kodak magnesium ribbon holder
 8) three photographic tools/manipulators (one on camera body)

(7) CONDITION OF ARTICLE(S) (Tick Boxes)
 INCOMING: Excellent Good Poor As shown in Sect. 6 As per attached Condition Report #
 OUTGOING: Excellent Good Poor As shown in Sect. 6 As per attached Condition Report #

LOAN (8) PURPOSE OF LOAN (Tick Box) * For use where ownership is uncertain (see 12a, below).
 Identification Study Reporting under Act of Parliament Consideration for Gift* Consideration for Purchase
 Other (specify):

(9) PERIOD OF LOAN: Article(s) on loan until (date)

(10) SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS (for variations to Conditions of Acceptance of Loans, see Clause 9, overleaf).

(11) DECLARATION I have read and agree to abide by the Conditions of Acceptance of Loans (see overleaf), with variations as specified under (10) above.
 Lender's Signature [Redacted]

GIFT (12) DONORS PLEASE NOTE:-
 (a) The donor must be the Owner of the article(s), or the Owner's authorised representative. If in doubt enter under 'Consideration for Gift' in (8) above.
 (b) That the Otago Museum cannot accept conditional gifts.
 (c) That before gifts will be accepted by the Otago Museum the article(s) will be assessed for suitability for inclusion in the collection in terms of its Collecting Policy.

(13) DECLARATION
 I declare that I am the Owner or the Authorised Representative of the Owner of the article(s) described above and that to the best of my knowledge it is (they are) unencumbered and no person but the Owner has any legal or beneficial interest therein.
 I declare that the Owner's intention is to gift the article(s) to the Otago Museum absolutely to be used or disposed of as the Otago Museum thinks fit. In the event that the Otago Museum decides not to accept the gift I direct that the Otago Museum proceeds as follows:
 (Cross out either Clause (a) or (b))
 (a) That the article(s) be disposed of for the benefit of the Otago Museum in whatever way the Otago Museum decides.
 (b) That the Owner be requested to uplift the article(s), and while in the custody of the Otago Museum the article(s) be subject to the Conditions of Acceptance of Loans (see overleaf).
 I am the authorised representative of the Owner and my relationship to the Owner is as follows:
 The reason I am completing this Declaration on behalf of the Owner is as follows:

CROSS THROUGH THIS SECTION IF IT DOES NOT APPLY

Figure 4.17: A typical article receipt form

Examining the ARFs represents nearly 800 pages of documents, each with a unique item form gift or loan purposes. Some would raise hopes, when they mentioned many boxes, as in fig. 4.18.

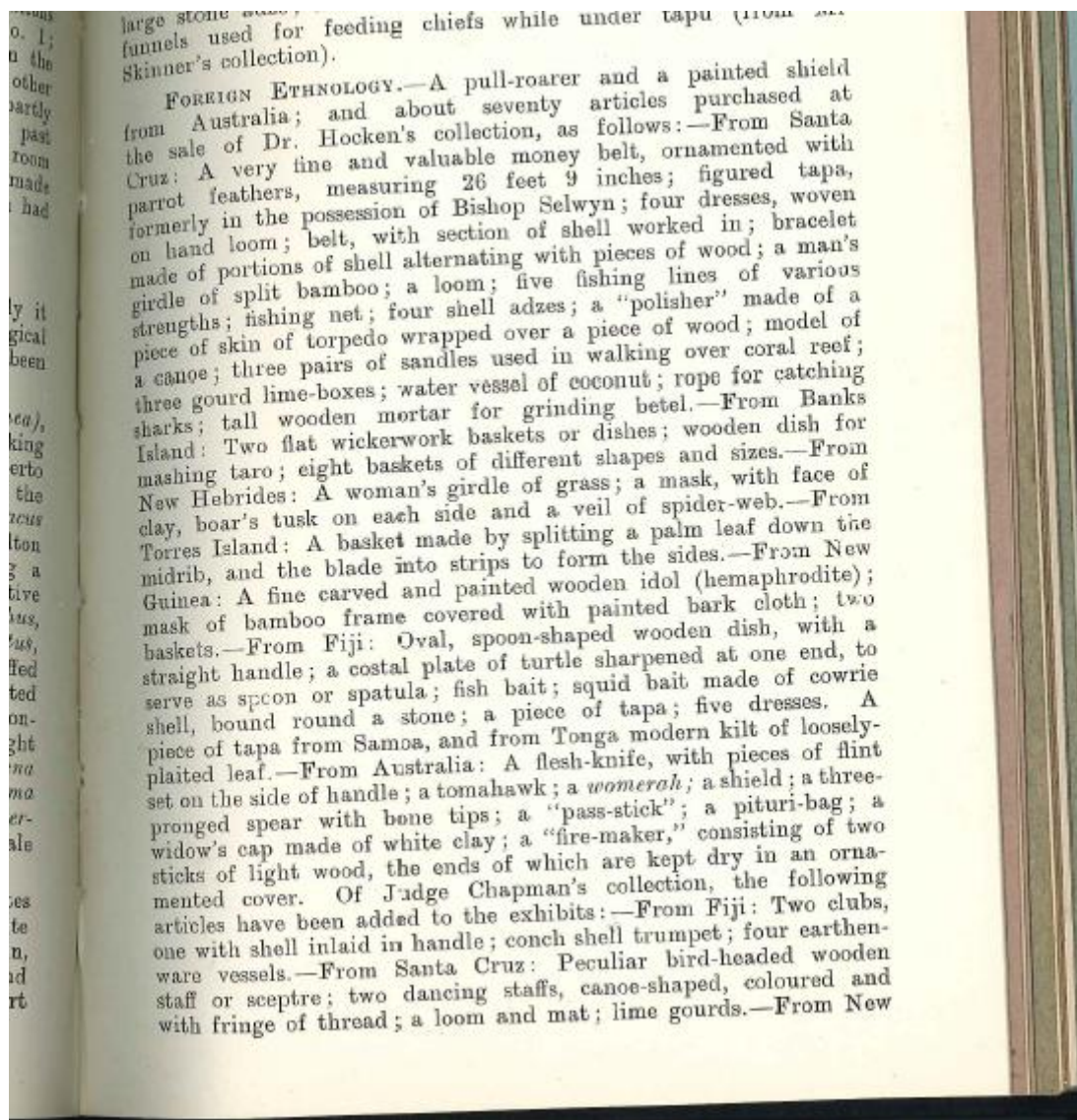


Figure 4.19: An example of the Ethnographic acquisitions in 1912

As time passes the focus of the reports gradually changes from the late 1910s through to the 1950s. No longer do the reports list items acquired. Instead, focusing on listing donors (see fig. 4.20). These annual reports do not mention a collection of glass Seals.

"D" Register

Anthropology (511 entries)

Material from the following donors:—H. S. McCully; Mrs. Alice Mackenzie (41 pieces); Bruce Adam; J. Law; Phillip R. Parker; Rev. D. N. Mackenzie; H. E. P. Matheson; G. B. Fullwood; Felix Mitchell; Dr. Gordon Dempster; Rev. Graham Miller; G. R. McNutt; C. A. Hart; J. R. Eyles; L. Lockerbie; C. McArthur; Miss Bessie Parata bequest; A. S. Scott; F. K. Pope; J. D. Bell; K. A. Webster; Mrs. Hilda Moen; Noel Reynolds; James A. Jenkins; Elliott W. Dawson; W. Lennon; Miss Nees; A. Samuel; W. N. Jacobsen; J. Gawn; D. Teviotdale; H. N. Urquhart; G. Smith; A. C. Cameron; W. Bird; E. E. Nicolson; J. D. Lockett; Mrs. D. E. Pankhurst; Mrs. J. Goulter; D. G. L. Millar; R. L. Collet; Cook Islands Administration; K. C. Kidd; W. J. Kidd; Education Service; Mrs. Cuthill.

Purchased:—Two spears, Atiu, through W. Allison; H. L. Lewis (136 pieces); W. W. Bird, M.A.; Salisbury Museum (toki-poutangata); Parata mere.

Exchanged:—Material was secured from American Museum of Natural History.

Figure 4.20: Registrations, Annual Report 1951

The card catalogue was examined last. Housed in the old Collection Manager's office, situated in the basement storage area, this office is no longer utilised on a day-to-day basis by staff. Rather it is a storage area for documentation. I was not directly looking for the card catalogue when shown into this room. Rather a colleague and I were searching for old ARF documents, but instead I spotted the drawer system. Within, we found a section dedicated to glass objects. Hope of finding a link to Henry Laing and the Seals rose again. Vases dominated the list: and my hopes sank.



Figure 4.21: Glass card catalogue

The archives and paper records of OM are very much a work in progress - one staff member noting that “we also need to have a consistent and secure way of storing paper based things” (Jones, personal communication, July 14, 2017) which there has not been in the past. Therefore, any further research into the dates around the Collection will have to be undertaken outside the scope of this thesis. Daly notes that when it comes to provenance research “for most museums, the most substantial amount of time is required to establish and document what is already known about its collection” (2010, p. 64). This certainly holds true for the Laing Seals, with the research of its history being significantly harder to pin down than the history of Henry Laing and his work.

Within OM, my research attempted to discern the history of the Laing Seals, but at every turn these efforts were stymied with lack of paperwork and of forgotten memories.

4.2 Summary of the Research

This trail of research has been built up from minimal plot points, such as the “found in gunstore” note and abductive reasoning. Abductive reasoning is when one looks at all the facts and finds not the *only* possible explanation, but rather the *most likely* (Aliseda, 2006). Unlike standard deductive reasoning, abductive reasoning is open to “retraction in the light of further evidence” (Aliseda, 2006, p. 53). Abductive reasoning does not guarantee the conclusion. Instead, it paints an impression of the Collection and gives a sense of its trajectory over the past decade.

Morris states that “the idea that museums could make more of objects in store is not in question” (2005, p. 28) and indeed, the idea of utilising the Laing Seal Collection, even if it were to stay in storage for the foreseeable future, is an appealing one. With digitisation of the Collection comes significantly more possibilities for its use. OM’s key priorities within collections, as laid out by Smith, are currently “digitisation and accessibility. And discoverability, really.” (personal communication, June 2, 2017). This could be achieved with a collaborative, citizen science effort. Through this research I have begun to see myself as forming part of the habitus, as my agency as a researcher impacts upon the Laing Seal’s context, building towards a better utilised Collection. Stepping into this space and bringing my own social agency forward has materially changed the relationship between OM and the Collection.

Provenance research is fundamental for the future of the Laing Seal Collection, to recreate forgotten data and to ascertain ownership. While a more detailed search and history are outside the scope of this thesis, further research is part of OM’s responsibility to the Collection. As Daly points out, it is part of a museum’s mandate to “ensure that all collections in its custody are lawfully held and rightfully owned” (2010, p. 62) and this can only truly be

ascertained through more research into OM's records. However, there is another facet to the Laing Seals' story that the quote from Daly (2010) alludes to: that of ownership. The Otago Museum cannot currently produce documentation showing the official accessioning of the Collection. Hence it is possible it is a loan collection. Were this the case, the loan would be a long-term loan, or an "old loan" as DeAngelis puts it (2010, p. 85). This kind of loan would be problematic because often the lender has left the objects unclaimed, and moved, died, or generally "failed to maintain contact with the museum." (DeAngelis, 2010, p. 85). Policies for loans such as this would be covered under OM's Inward Loan Procedure Operational Guidelines (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2014b), but this document is currently under construction. However, an old loan scenario is unlikely, as any formal loan procedure would have documentation crucial to the loan agreement that would have been kept. Therefore, deploying abductive reasoning, this research proposes that the most likely scenario is that Otago Museum does in fact have ownership over the Collection, but the details of the gift have either not been adequately recorded, or have been lost. To adequately establish title would require more dedicated exploration of the archives. Under the current Collection Policy, it is extremely unlikely that OM would agree to bring in the Seal Collection as a loan. The policy explicitly states:

...loans to the Museum will be sought and accepted only in special circumstances, such as where an item has special relevance and can be used immediately for temporary display or research within a finite time period. (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2014b, p. 14)

The Seal Collection complies with none of these requirements. It is not for immediate use, or research; there is no known time limit on its storage, and it holds little relevance to OM's remit. While it may be naïve to apply the current standards for incoming loans to a

collection acquired decades ago, this nevertheless suggests that similar considerations may have been in place historically as well. The likelihood of this being a loan is low. Thus, it seems probable that the Collection is a gift.

This unresolved status does not preclude Otago Museum utilising the Collection. Indeed, utilising it and making it available to the public may be one way of shedding light on the collection's history.

4.3 Conclusion

The principal objective of this thesis is to explore factors associated with the endurance of low priority collections. The absence of key documents, dates and knowledge, including provenance, is one of those factors.

This chapter explored the interviews undertaken with OM staff. These highlighted how little current staff know and how much they wish they knew. It also examined the Seal Collection itself, and its storage. It outlined the detailed search through the OM's archives and collection management documentation designed to find records that could reveal how and when the Seals came into the Museum. The history of the Laing Seals remains inconclusive for the time being. However, the Museum now has a much better idea of what is contained within the Collection.

This chapter also suggests what needs to be done next - more research. There needs to be dedicated staff to look at the archives (in general and in relation to the Laing Seal Collection). There also needs to be a concerted effort after this research has concluded to continue the work in rehousing and identifying Seals. This could come in the form of citizen science, a funded project, or internal work as part of the overall audit of the collection. The

next chapter will take the information gleaned about the Laing Seal Collection and look forward, to potential futures for the Collection.

Chapter 5: Discussion & Analysis

The purpose of this thesis is to explore which factors contribute to the endurance of low priority collections and how these collections could be re-established moving forward. The main factor that has been revealed is the impact habitus has on low priority collections as unconscious structures reinforce selective forgetting and the consequences for collection management practices. Through the lens of material culture studies and organisational memory studies the following discussion will include analyses of future options for the Collection. These “What Next?” questions suggest that there are three options: deaccessioning, rehousing and researching, or maintaining a status quo for the Collection.

5.1 Chapter Outlines

In Chapter 2, the foundations were laid for answering the research questions by discussing the two key concepts of material culture and organisational memory. These two overarching frameworks manifested themselves in collection policies, discoverability and the agency with the habitus of OM. Within these frames the Seal Collection reflects the human condition as forgetting and socialisation is embodied within the cases study. In losing information, through time and memory loss, OM suffers corporate amnesia. Agency allows staff to advocate for the Collection by choosing to engage with it. However, the longer left, the harder it is to recreate the historical data.

Chapter 3 set out to establish context: firstly of Henry Laing as the creator of the Seals and the Seal Collection and secondly, of the surrounding milieu of OM, its history, policies, and resources. Historically, OM focused on nature and science, and the Henry Laing Seals are only justified through a link to decorative arts. By tracing these histories, my aim was to examine how the Seals exist within OM and what contextual clues could be used to assist in

the Collections re-establishment. Here the politics, and power, of memory highlighted the link between staff agency and remembering – or indeed forgetting to remember.

Chapter 4 turned to the original research question by looking to re-establish research into the Seals. Through this exploration, OM's records were checked and interviews with staff undertaken. However despite the variety of data accessed, including article receipt forms, annual reports, the archives, and interviews with staff, little information came to light. Nevertheless, this research has highlighted the scope of the Laing Seals. A biography of Henry Laing has been developed, including the movement of his descendants to New Zealand, a number of Seals have been rehoused as part of the process making progress towards safer storage for the collection, and a variety of photographs have been taken that will help illustrate the collection to new researchers. Future research will be imperative to sustaining the Collection's momentum and therefore this research needs to provide guidance for these future projects. Thus, this low priority collection has been re-established as a part of the wider OM collections. Discoverability has increased and meaningful collection research has begun.

5.2 What's Next?

For a reassessment of the Laing Seal Collection to proceed it is pertinent to consider what is next. The first option is deaccessioning, removing the Collection from OM permanently. Second, by completing the cataloguing of the Collection transmute it from a "low priority collection" into a functioning collection that can be displayed and used by researchers. Third, retaining the status quo as a low priority collection. Each of these three scenarios have advantages and disadvantages. I now consider each in turn.

5.2.1 What Next? Deaccessioning

One of the trajectories for the Laing Seal Collection is deaccessioning. The OM Collection Policy allows for broad thematic acquisition based around collection foci (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2014b), but it rarely suggests divestment of objects as there is a “strong presumption against [...] disposal” (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2014b, p. 15). Here, I examine the literature surrounding deaccessioning, OM’s approach towards deaccessioning and how this strategy could be applied to the Laing Seal Collection.

Deaccessioning is the opposite of accessioning and, as Vecco & Piazzai (2015) note, defining the term itself is still a valid point of discussion in Museum Studies literature. They take a broad approach, stating that deaccessioning is not only intended removal from the collection through sale, transfer or destruction. Deaccessioning also includes involuntary loss through theft, unintentional destruction, or shifting an object to being used differently by the museum, such as taking an item out of the collection for education programmes, or destructive sampling. In some literature disposal and deaccessioning are considered separate actions (Morris & Moser, 2010; Simmons, 2006), or ‘disposal’ is used in lieu of the term ‘deaccessioning’ (*Museum Practice*, 2005). However, most definitions (Genoways & Ireland, 2003; Simmons, 2006) intrinsically tie deaccessioning with a purpose or decision to deaccession and disregard “thefts or misplacements, and accidental or deliberate destruction” (Vecco & Piazzai, 2015, p. 222) as a separate issue. For example, both *Museum Practice* (2005) and Te Papa National Services (2003) provide guides for deaccessioning that contextualise it as a decision taken under certain circumstances with several defences. The salient point is that an institution has a reason and justification for deaccessioning. Tam calls deaccessioning the refinement and enhancement of a collection to increase “quality, use and character” (2012, p. 859), making it a “proper exercise of collections stewardship” (Simmons,

2006, p. 52). This stewardship speaks to the creation of a holistic institutional identity through deaccessioning.

Otago Museum approaches deaccessioning within the Collection Policy (2014b) and processes defined in an Operation Guideline (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2011). For this discussion, deaccessioning is defined using the OM Collection Policy: “the formal process of removing an item from the permanent collection” (2014b, p. 3). This means for an object to be viable for deaccessioning it must be an acknowledged part of the collection, and the process of deaccessioning must be “thoughtful [and] rigorous” (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2011, p. 1). In other words, there must be a conscious choice on OM’s behalf to deaccession an object. These two points are central when considering the Laing Collection for deaccessioning.

Within museum studies literature there is general agreement that deaccessioning is an important collection management tool (Malaro, 1997; Simmons 2006; Morris & Moser, 2010; Simpson, 2012; Mann, 2017) that must be backed up by solid reasoning and transparent processes. If it is not coherently presented to the public the power of deaccessioning is liable to be misunderstood (Burgess & Shane, 2011). As Malaro notes, there is a disparity between “the amount of controversy we see on the subject of deaccessioning as compared with the general apathy concerning the issues of mindless collecting or collecting with negligible documentation” (1997, p. 47-48). There are certainly case studies of deaccessioning gone wrong, leaving reputations damaged and the public feeling betrayed (for examples see Mann, 2017 or *Museum Practice*, 2005). This leads to a requirement that museums have robust deaccessioning policies, not only to adhere to ethical contracts, such as the ICOM Code of Ethics, but also to ensure institutional safety and accountability if deaccessioning occurs. While there are no legislative frameworks that bind museums to hypothetical deaccessioning

laws, museums are public trusts, expected to preserve collections for future generations and therefore must axiomatically include a disinclination for disposal of items.

One significant reason to undertake deaccessioning is to streamline the collection to focus on primary collection themes and in doing so making the Otago Museum collections work as a coherent, scholarly collection, along with freeing up storage space. Here it is time to acknowledge that forgetting is not axiomatically a negative action. Rather it is “integral to all human systems, including organizations” (Anteby & Molnár, 2012 p. 518) as it helps maintain identity endurance over time. Within a museum this focused forgetting manifests itself through deaccessioning. Examples of how museums refine collections through deaccessioning and grading are presented in Chapter 2 (see also *Museum Practice*, 2005; Ainslie, 2007; Wickham, 2009). One of the most important factors of material culture that is crystallised in deaccessioning is that collections must actively work to inform about the past, and not simply be “purveyors of nostalgia” (Jenkins, 1989, p. 120). In other words aberrant collections that do not contribute to the collective identity of an institution must be acknowledged and critically considered for deaccessioning.

While Otago Museum has a framework and procedure for deaccessioning (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2011) it is not a favoured choice. Importantly, both OM’s policy and guideline begin with a “strong presumption against the disposal of any items in the Museum’s collections...” (2014b, p. 15; 2011, p. 1). OM does not deaccession regularly nor quickly. The process for deaccessioning any object requires the sign off from the Director of Collections, Research and Education, the Museum Director and approval by the Board of Trustees. Here again there is a structural disinclination reinforced through agents of power and their influence on policy. Nevertheless, OM defines parameters through which items qualify for deaccessioning. This includes items that are to be repatriated, exchanged, or used for

destructive analysis, if the item is damaged, counterfeit, a danger or health risk, or if the item is to be used as a “service material” (2014b, p. 15). There are two other conditions for deaccessioning which are most applicable to this case study, specifically, if “the item does not fall within the collections policy” or if “full title in the item cannot be established” (2014b, p. 15). These two criteria can be applied to the Laing Seal Collection to argue that the Collection is a prime candidate for deaccessioning.

Firstly - there is an argument that the Seal Collection does not fall within the Collection Policy, or at least that it would fall better within another museum’s collection areas. As discussed in Chapter 3, OM’s Collection Policy is flexible enough to encompass the Laing Seal Collection, allowing it to be held within a decorative arts focus, as suggested by Smith in her interview (personal communication, June 2, 2017). This foci is aimed at broadly illustrating “cultural diversity and representativeness” (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2014b, p. 8). But Jenkins argues that central to a coherent collection policy “must be selectivity and almost ruthless discarding of irrelevant material” (1989, p. 120) and there is an argument to be made that a collection like the Laing Seals, with historic Scottish links, may fit better into an institution focused specifically on Pākehā culture and social history.

Secondly, as it currently stands, the legal title to the Collection has not been located. It is not in the Vernon CMS system, nor was it found during the course of archive searches during this project. As discussed earlier, OM staff, probably correctly, are of the view that the only thing preventing the location of the title documents is time. However, until this title is found the Collection sits in limbo. This is problematic because without full title, it is difficult to deaccession the Collection. Buck deems undocumented objects at the most risk of errors occurring when deaccessioned (2010b). As *Museum Practice* points out “you can’t dispose of anything until you catalogue it, because you must assess its importance” (2005, p. 46). Thus,

OM must obtain these documents before any further discussion of deaccessioning could occur. Similarly, part of OM's own deaccessioning procedure includes keeping the Vernon CMS file and documentation of the deaccessioned item permanently, which is currently impossible because a Vernon file does not exist for this Collection, alongside the elusive paperwork.

Finally, deaccessioning is unlikely in the current climate at OM. When asked about the possibility of deaccessioning the Laing Seals, Smith said "I think the bottom line is, it doesn't really matter where anything is, so long as it is accessible and known about" and only if "it was a case where [another institution] has a greater purpose for it, then that might be a matter for deaccessioning" (Smith, personal communication, June 30, 2017). Staff acknowledge that while the Collection does not fit the OM remit perfectly, the fact is it came to the collections and as such they have a responsibility to care for it. This means without the correct paperwork or impetus to find the Collection a new home, the Laing Seals look destined to stay at OM.

5.2.2 What Next? Rehousing & Research

The second option for the Laing Seals is turning it into a fully functioning, contributing member of the OM collections. In accepting that collections have agency, as discussed in Chapter 2, then when correctly supported a collection can influence how a person acts, what decisions are made about it, and how likely it is to be utilised – just as any human does for themselves. This agency could be granted in a number of different formats, but there are key elements that have to be achieved for any momentum to be created.

Firstly, the Laing Collection needs to be accessioned, or at least given temporary numbers so the Collection can be included within the Vernon CMS and catalogued, shifting

its data from informal organisational memory, to a more formal structure. While the Laing Collection does not have documentation proving full title, even temporary numbers similar to the process used for incoming loans would ground it. After this step, there are a number of avenues open to make the Laing Seals more accessible and bring its care up to an level equivalent with other OM collections. Currently stored in cardboard boxes, the collection only needs re-housing, numbering, labelling and entry into the Vernon CMS to meet OM's minimum collection acquisition standards (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2014b).

Since the 2011/12 financial year OM has undertaken a full audit of the collections (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2012). This has since been scaled back and broken down into projects such as the Taoka digitisation project, which began in 2015. Nevertheless, part of this overall audit is a goal to photograph and enter into Vernon records for each object. Digitisation such as this would be a significant boon to Laing Collection and a major stepping stone in identifying all the Seals. Indeed, the staff at OM recognise this as being a particularly worthwhile venture for this Collection. Smith comments that "I think the most important [objective] is to have it all digitised, well adequately recorded, in a system that is future-proofed in terms of its standards." (personal communications, June 2, 2017). Jones concurs: "Obviously it would be nice if it were catalogued [...] we could write a blog about them, so an online thing about them" (personal communications, July 14, 2017).

These sentiments reflect a desire to bring the Collection online, even if the actual objects were to stay in storage. This kind of digitisation would offer exciting possibilities for the Collection. As Rosenbaum notes, "museums have to find a way to present antiquities intelligently and engagingly, despite gaps in knowledge..." (2009, p. 132) and this holds true for the Laing Seal Collection. These kinds of small collections made up of numerous diverse objects can be displayed through entirely online galleries. For example, the National Museum

of Australia hosts an online gallery of convict love tokens, which allows a user to browse a huge number of items, which are materially similar and minute, but aesthetically different. It allows for close up photography capturing the fine details and providing notes on the descriptions and significance of individual tokens (National Museum of Australia, 2012a). This online gallery also allows for community involvement as visitors can comment and discuss the different tokens. This has led to discussions of personal collections and has added value to the database (National Museum of Australia, 2012b). This style of online gallery could be built from the photographs taken for the Vernon CMS catalogue entries, along with data drawn from the *Bill of Sale* and *Catalogue*. Data could be collected, especially regarding the Seals depicting busts, through crowdsourcing, or a kind of citizen science, similar to how the Library of Congress utilised volunteers to analyse images and identify geographic locations in documents (Ashenfelder, 2015).

Crowdsourcing has become a key tool utilised by the GLAM sector across the world (Ridge, 2014) which can be extremely powerful especially when the required job is very time consuming but needs little expertise, such as transcription. These kinds of projects not only achieve goals for the institution, but can also be “immensely effective for engaging audiences with the work and collections” (Ridge, 2014, p. 2). In the case of OM when one of the key resources lacking is staff time, this kind of utilisation might be key to bringing the Laing Seal Collection to light. Even my own limited attempts at identification have been the most rewarding part of this research so far and I can envision that the public could also become enamoured with the Seals. By photographing every Seal and making sure there is a vetting system for any identifications the public could be utilised as the powerful engine it is. This is one of the most exciting and interesting outcomes that could come about for the Laing Seals.

Once photographs have been taken it becomes a question then of how much time should be invested in identifying each Seal. With a full list of what should be found within the Collection (in the form of the *Bill of Sale* and the *Catalogue*) it is almost as simple as mixing and matching Seals until the correct alignment is reached. It is difficult not to get excited when imagining that the whole Collection could be explored and appreciated online with no need to constantly access the physically shelved items. It is such an expansive, exciting collection that once halfway there, through numbering and photographing, it is easy to justify continuing the work.

By taking these steps the Laing Seal Collection could move from a “low priority collection” to be a functioning part of the wider OM collections. Defining when a collection loses “low priority” status is a subjective judgement based on the specific conditions of the collection. However if the Laing Seals Collection were to be in such a state where it is discoverable by external researchers, which would require its accessibility through Vernon, then it could no longer be considered “low priority.” This standard conforms to the requirements for any new acquisition at OM (Otago Museum Trust Board, 2014b) and should be retroactively required of the Laing Seals.

It is hard not to get overly ambitious and excited when it comes to the idea of making the Laing Seals a functioning collection. To take the first step of numbering them is almost to argue that the Collection should be fully identified. However, the hours needed to dedicate to this task are not insignificant. Such a plan would require the full support of OM, which currently has forward plans that leave little time or space for the Laing Seals.

5.2.3 What Next? Status Quo

This raises the third option the Laing Seals may take – the status quo. It is conceivable that after this research concludes, the Seals return to the Technology Store and wait there. With no staff specialisation and collections priorities focused in different areas, the Seals will struggle to make headway.

The Laing Seal Collection is currently in a liminal space. This is a term reserved for literary, cultural, or social anthropology studies, but meaning a space of “transition, experimentation and tentativeness” (Sun Lim, Bork-Hüffer & Yeoh, 2016, p. 2149). There is currently work being undertaken on the Seals because of this research, but once it is concluded, without internal pressure or inspiration the Seals will likely languish once more.

There are minor positives to come out of not working on the Seals – for example, there is a smaller risk to the Seals themselves if they are not moved nor handled. They are not currently degrading when they are static on the shelves, so they are safe to wait in ‘stasis’ as long as it takes for someone to become interested in them. However, as this research illustrates, the longer a collection is left without its information being recorded, the less likely it gets that the information will be remembered and acted upon. They may return to the miasma of collections with no priority and no direction. The mental unconscious structures are predisposing staff to forget, rather than to remember. The “specific local contexts or ‘fields’” (Lawler, 2004, p. 112) favour retaining the pre-existing *modus operandi* and it is easier to forget the Seals in favour of retaining a more coherent organisational identity.

The status quo is perhaps the most realistic way forward, if nothing happens to the Laing Seals after the conclusion of this research, and will be a frustrating reconfirmation of issues raised in this thesis. Namely, that there is an inescapable amount of collections work, that grows as time passes and more history needs collecting. Historical collections situated in

museums with different priorities will always exist and without staff as a driving agent behind these collections, nothing will happen to them.

5.3 Conclusion

The Laing Seal Collection is a case study that illustrates organisational memory within the specific context of the OM. It explores the transitional, liminal space between the tacit organisational memory of individuals and the explicit formalised data developed, managed and maintained by museum staff. Thus, the research begins to articulate the tensions between agency of staff motivated to conduct collection research and the loss of information through factors such as inadequate documentation, forgetting, inertia, or revised organisational priorities. This is the perennial dilemma between aspiration and reality.

Within this path forward there are three main avenues that the Laing Seal Collection could take. They could be deaccessioned entirely from the collection. However, this is unlikely given the current state of paperwork and the attitude towards deaccessioning within OM. They can stay static, not progressing and existing in a liminal space, where transition is desirable, but unrealistic. Until staff interest, funding or a major change in policy forces a collection forward there is no real reason for any low-priority collection to shift the habitus and become a priority. Nevertheless, just having one person identify and seek out the collection can change this trajectory. Staff interest is a crucial factor in moving these kinds of collections forward, but it must be combined with rigorous documentation as well.

Accordingly, agency in the museum context is always facilitated or constrained by structures. Some of these structures are physical, such as the CMS, which retains data, or the material needs of a collections. However, many structures are mental, be they conscious

decisions, or unconscious dispositions. The cultural disposition towards the seals has been one of disinterest – they simply do not hold the same cultural capital as other collections.

The Laing Seals have clearly had interest exhibited in them previously, with the storage solution and handwritten notes helping to bring the Collection up to standard. Yet the staff member, or volunteer, retired or resigned, leaving no formalised data behind. One important time that agency is open to improvisation and reinforcement is during transition of staff – handovers, or lack of knowledge transfer, are directly responsible for the loss of much of the historical data surrounding the Laing Seal Collection. Thus a dual approach is needed, where staff are excited to work on a collection, retain information about any work undertaken, document it fully and ensure new staff are well briefed. This work can lead to a collection functioning as a part of the wider collections of an institution, possibly being displayed or available for research. Or it can lead to deaccessioning – moving a collection that simply does not fit the *raison d'être* of a wider collection policy. This could be to an institution that it better aligns with, or alternatively, moving the collection back to the original donor's family. While these are broad suggestions, they do encompass the main ways forward for low-priority collections. The Laing Seals are just one example of such a collection.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This thesis sought to examine a low priority collection – the Laing Seal Collection – and bring it to light. The term “low priority collection” denotes the phenomena, prevalent in many museums, of objects that have no registration details to connect them with collection management documents (Buck, 2010) or, which have lost curatorial support (Voss, 2012). As a result, little is known about them, the context in which they were made or used, and through whose hands they passed. Whether by neglect, deviation from accepted collection management practices or “corporate amnesia” (Kransdorff, 1998a), this separation and loss is also the experience of the Laing Seal Collection. While there is evidence of several human interventions to the Seals, they have maintained an isolated life confined, most recently, to the OM Technology Store.

The core research question was which factors contribute to the endurance of low priority collections and how can these collections be re-established? This led to a number of sub-questions exploring the case study specifically. These included: what the current state of the Laing Seal Collection was, what is its history both during its time at OM and before its acquisition, and finally, how is this Collection representative of larger concerns in the galleries, libraries, archives and museums sector, around memory and data retention. Material culture and organisational memory formed a framework through which this thesis attempted to answer these questions.

The Laing Seal Collection is a case study that illustrates organisational memory within museums. It acknowledges memory and unconscious structures, exploring the liminal space between organisational memory and formalised data, and also between agency of staff and loss of information through inaction and forgetting. Here agency is facilitated and allowed through process and documentation. Collection management systems give agents within

these institutions the ability to influence the trajectory of objects. These agents also have the power to remember or to forget and to employ memory strategically to reinforce the collective institutional habitus. However, CMS and collection management practices are structured apparatuses and methods that define, and are defined by, professional expectations, mores, and institutionalised norms. The apparatus and the socialisation of employees into museum collection management culture is designed to resist the contingent, tentative, and anecdotal. These aspects are often associated with the individual's tacit organisational memory. Therefore, agency is placed under strain during transition of staff – handovers, or the lack thereof, are directly responsible for the loss of much of the historical data surrounding the Laing Seal Collection. Through developing a coherent paper trail this research hopes to end the cycle of lacklustre handovers, providing OM with a structured path forward for this particular Collection.

The initial aims of this research were to outline a history of the Laing Seals at Otago Museum and bring the Collection back to light. This has been partially achieved, with roadblocks to many of the historical facts. The same factors that have hampered the Collection in the past held back this research as well – time was a critical factor and more research is needed to clarify how and when the Collection entered the Museum. Nevertheless, it is my sincere hope that from here the Collection becomes more interesting to staff and is given an opportunity to shine for the beautiful, distinctive collection it is.

It is also my hope that case studies such as this encourage researchers to bring to light collections that already exist within GLAM institutions. These types of low priority collections embody material culture: they are the remaining remnants that give us windows into the past.

However, in this case the Laing Seals' provenance existed almost entirely within memories of staff members and, if anything, this case study has illustrated how fundamental

humans are to the museum processes. As the majority of processes shift to digital formats, there is a danger that information crystallised only within staff memories and informal organisational memory will never get captured. What this illustrates is that no matter the power of digital systems they cannot replace staff. The research shows that without adequate staff handovers significant lapses in organisational memory transfer occur. Such lapses are detrimental to collections that are not well documented. There are pieces of information regarding the Laing Seals' time at Otago Museum that will never be recaptured because they were not documented. This loss speaks to the broader concept of agency within the workplace and how a staff member's decisions, guided by policy and procedure but ultimately their own agency, influence what humans understand of their past and how this translates into the present. Records of human history are controlled by GLAM employees and the choices they make.

Agency is also found within the collections themselves. It is collections that inspire staff members and the objects' materiality is part of what motivates action. Collection policies look to guide institutions' collections and priorities. But in reality, if the collection policy is broad enough, it is staff enthusiasm and research interests that will drive collections' success. Frank argued that "far too often, however, objects enter into museum collections surrounded by silence, their stories lost to an unknown past" (2007, p. 60). This research represents one small step towards rectifying these silences.

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Appendices

1.1 Interview Information Sheet & Questions

1.1.1 Information Sheet

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

INFORMATION SHEET

This information has been compiled by Isobel Andrewartha as part of competition of a Masters in Museum Studies.

This research is examining the Laing Seal Collection held at Otago Museum. The purpose of the research is to better understand how contemporary collection practices impact upon collections and how the history of a collection can be lost in the process. As part of this process, I would like to invite you to participate in an interview exploring the topics of collection policy, organizational memory and the Laing Collection itself. You are under no obligation to accept this invitation.

You were chosen for this research because of your specific relationship not only to Otago Museum, but to the Laing Seal Collection as well. As a staff member of Otago Museum, Isobel was already aware of your connection to these topics and this invitation is issued as a result of that prior knowledge.

If you decide to participate in this interview, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study before the 1st of September 2017
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- ask for the recorder to be turned off for any portion of the interview;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

These interviews will be conducted in person, on-site at Otago Museum. The interview shall take no longer than an hour and a half (which can be undertaken as two 45 minute sessions if desired), with an option for a follow-up thirty minute interview to be scheduled to take place before the 1st September 2017. If there are any questions you do not wish to answer, you are well within your rights to do so. Once the interview has been transcribed you will get an opportunity to review and make any amendments you desire.

Isobel acknowledges at this time that she is an employee of Otago Museum, but her role does not create a conflict of interest within the parameters of this interview.

Your answers to this interview will be used within a single thesis. The content of the interview will be stored digitally on a password protected computer. The interview will be stored until completion of the Master's thesis (predicted to be February 2019), then all digital and physical copies of the interviews will be destroyed.

If you wish to see a copy of the completed thesis, please contact Isobel, or it will be available online via the Massey University Library.

Please feel free to contact Isobel Andrewartha with any questions about this project. Similarly, you are welcome to contact my supervisor, Dr. Susan Abasa if you have any questions or concerns.

Isobel Andrewartha

isobel.andrewartha@otagomuseum.nz

ph: xxxxxxxxxx

Supervisor:

Dr. Susan Abasa, Programme Co-ordinator, Museum Studies, Massey University

S.F.Abasa@massey.ac.nz

LOW RISK NOTIFICATION

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named in this document are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Dr Brian Finch, Director (Research Ethics), email humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

1.1.2 Interview Questions

General Questions

1. How long have you worked with collections?
2. What type of collections do you have the most experience with?
3. What kind of experience do you have developing/revising Collection Policies?
4. Do you have any history working with orphaned/low priority collections?

Collection Policies

5. Tell me about the Otago Museum Collection Policy, in your own words.
6. How will the new Collection Strategy affect low priority collections?
7. How does Otago Museum's current/future collections strategies priorities collections?
8. How does this policy impact upon day-to-day decisions you make?
9. How do your personal Collection interests compete/harmonise with the Collection Policy?

Laing Collection

10. Before I started this project, what was your knowledge of the Laing Seal Collection?
11. Where does the Laing Seal Collection come in Otago Museum's Collection Priorities? Why?
12. What are Otago Museum's obligations to a collection like the Laing Seals?
13. What do you see for the future of the Laing Seal Collection? Ideally? Realistically?
14. Were the Laing Collection fully accessioned, do you think the case would change? Why?

Organizational Memory

15. As staff have changed, was any information of the Seal Collection passed on to you? If so, what?
16. How does Otago Museum combat corporate amnesia?
17. What kind of induction does Otago Museum undertake for beginning work with the Collections?

1.2 Otago Museum Copyright Agreement

Proposal Number:

USE OR FILMING OF OTAGO MUSEUM IMAGE

DESCRIPTION OF IMAGE:	<i>Laing Seal Collection + Related items.</i>
PURPOSE: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Photography <input type="checkbox"/> Filming	DETAILS: <i>See attached list. For inclusion in Masters Thesis.</i>
COST (excluding GST):	

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- Otago Museum, as the copyright holder, charges a fee for any reproduction of any item. Depending on the requirements of the request there may also be photography, processing or staff time charges.
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1. I undertake to use this image only for the purpose described above.
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SIGNATURE	
NAME	<i>Isobel Andrews/Tha</i>
ADDRESS AND POSTCODE	<i>110 D Canongate, Dunedin Central</i>
PHONE	<i>021 310 549</i>
EMAIL ADDRESS	<i>isobelsaddress@gmail.com</i>
DATE	<i>08/03/18</i>

OTAGO MUSEUM CONTACT

SIGNATURE	<i>AH</i>
NAME	<i>ANNE HARLOW</i>
PHONE	<i>022 3539655</i>
EMAIL ADDRESS	<i>anne.harlow@otagomuseum.nz</i>
DATE	<i>9/3/18</i>

1.3 Henry Laing Last Will & Testament
 Crown copyright, National Records of Scotland

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belonging to me at the
 time of my death for her
 own personal use & benefit during
 her life & at her death to be
 equally divided among my three
 children vizt. John Laing now in
 Dundee New Zea. Sarah Laing or
 Fraser Wife of A. J. Fraser, Preston
 Lancashire - & Janet Laing betrothed
 Wife to Thomas Pughhead now
 residing with me. Having had
 above 50 years experience of the
 Love & devotion of May, Sarah or
 Laing my Wife I have every
 confidence she will fulfil to
 the utmost my wishes vizt.
 I wish my body to be buried
 in as plain & inexpensive manner
 as possible - I wish all my
 Books & every other kind of
 property to be sold excepting
 such as Janet or herself may
 wish to retain for their own
 use and pleasure; & the money
 so raised to be deposited
 on

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Deeds &c in the Books of
 Council and Session on this
 and the three preceding pages
 by Mr Assistant Register of said
 Register holding commission to that
 effect from the Lord Clerk Register
 of Scotland one word on page
 signed Geo. Young.
 Edinburgh 31st December 1883. This is
 the Extract Register General Discharge
 and Settlement of Mrs Catherine
 Walker or Younger referred to in
 my Affidavit to the Inventory
 of her Personal Estate made by
 this date (signed) Wm Ferguson
 of Glasgow J. P.

I Henry Laing now residing at Henry Laing
 No 7 Leiston Place Edinburgh do hereby
 hereby give Grant & Assignation to
 Margaret Tribick or Laing my
 lawful & beloved Wife all property
 whether consisting of money or
 any other description of property
 belonging

do
 Geo Young
 Notary Public
 31 Dec 1883

on loan to the National Bank of New Zealand & this sum with the amount (—) already in the same bank & the £100 Insurance with the Colonial Office will I hope be sufficient to ensure the necessities & comforts of life for my dear Wife during her remaining years & whatever remains at her death I wish to be divided among my three children as stated above. I also wish the sum of Five pounds to be given to the Church of Christ Meeting in Bristol Place under the pastoral care of C. Anderson & to Grant for the relief of the poor and support of the Sabbath School connected with that Church. I hereby appoint the above Janet Laing my daughter to hold my Executive & sole death of her Mother & in consideration thereof hereby bequeath to her the

the sum of Five pounds. This I declare to be my last Testament & wish it to be signed by me at No. 7 Saratona Place Edin. this twenty second day of October One thousand eight hundred & eighty two years. (Signed) Henry Laing.
Edinburgh 27th December 1883 Referred to in my deposition of the 2^d date (Signed) Margaret Laing James Laing.

Andrew Phillips J. Andrew Phillips sometime Clerk
Thomas Anderson
Phillips Son?
See Record in Robert Place Kirkcaldy Considering
of Inverness
Vol 229 p. 115
31st Dec 1883. Me for the purpose of my family
to settle my affairs in case of
my death. To hereby under the
declarations aforementioned give Grant
Laing and Dugan to and in
favour of Andrew Phillips Trusts residing
in Sunderland, Margaret Phillips, or
William Wife of William Hopton
Robert Place Kirkcaldy, Elizabeth Ritchie
Phillips or Taylor Wife of James
Johnston