

Conservation

The Reynolds Research Project has been set up at the Wallace Collection in London to investigate the artist's techniques and materials. Reynolds's paintings are well known for the way they have darkened and deteriorated: it is hoped that the project will help future conservation. With collabo-

ration from the National Gallery, the project is examining 12 pictures in the Wallace Collection, including *The Strawberry Girl*, 1772-73. Along with high-resolution photography, x-rays and infrared reflectography, small paint samples are being taken. Christoph Vogtherr, the director of the Wallace, says

this will be the largest group of Reynolds's work to be examined together. Work on the first painting, *Mrs Elizabeth Carnac*, 1775 (right), has just been completed. Funded by the Paul Mellon Centre, the project will culminate in an exhibition at the Wallace in 2014



LaFarge uncovered

The conservation of Raymond LaFarge's drawing, *The Elevation of Christ*, around 1680, has revealed an unknown drawing by the artist hidden beneath the lining. The second drawing depicts a variation on the original. Further examination of the original, held at the Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas at Austin, revealed that the right and left corners had been lost and refilled with existing sketches, probably by the artist. In the right corner, a sketch of a kneeling figure had been added. According to conservator Ken Grant, the discovery raises questions about the custodians of the work. "Whoever applied the lining paper had to make a conscious decision which side to cover up. It is interesting to think about the aesthetic criteria they might have used to make the selection," he says. ■ E.S.

Frick enamels return



Visitors to the Frick Collection in New York will once again have a chance to examine the museum's collection of 15th- to 17th-century Limoges as the enamels are back on display after a year-long absence. The objects were removed so that the bronze and glass display cases, designed in 1935 by architect John Russell Pope, could be made airtight. Fluctuations in temperature and relative humidity had led to the minor crizzling and deterioration of the enamels. Conservators used this opportunity to treat the enamels normally on display. ■ E.S.

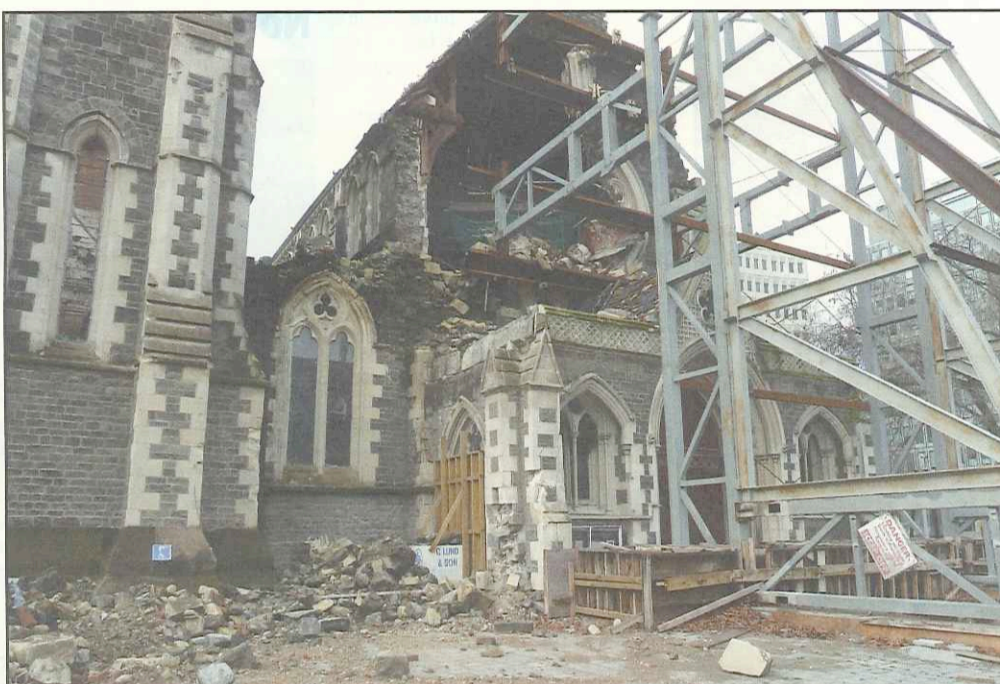
Fund for Japan

The Japanese organisation, the Foundation for Cultural Heritage and Art Research, has teamed up with other heritage organisations including the World Monuments Fund, to raise money for the preservation and restoration of the country's cultural heritage following the devastating earthquake and tsunami in March. As well as raising funds, the "Save Our Culture" project seeks to work at the local level to identify immovable, movable and intangible heritage deemed at risk. ■ E.S.

Christchurch's heritage faces demolition

Authorities plan to knock down 50% of buildings within the business district, including historic properties

CHRISTCHURCH. Conservation societies are up in arms over the widespread, and in many cases unnecessary, demolition of historic buildings in Christchurch, New Zealand, following a series of earthquakes in the region. The government's plans to demolish 50% of buildings within the city's Central Business District (CBD)—30% more than in poverty-stricken Haiti—has experts questioning the government's commitment to heritage and the competence of the bodies tasked with safeguarding these properties. Campaigners say that new disaster recovery legislation supersedes laws designed to protect historic structures, leaving them vulnerable to property owners who may opt to start from scratch rather than restore. They also say that this destruction will have a knock-on effect on historic properties throughout New Zealand as insurance premiums skyrocket.



Christchurch Cathedral, designed by Victorian architect George Gilbert Scott, is to be partially demolished

Earthquakes

Three large earthquakes have struck the region in the past 14 months: in September 2010, in February 2011, and in June 2011. Christchurch's CBD was the hardest hit area. The February quake toppled the tower of one of the most historic structures in the centre, Christchurch Cathedral, a mid-19th-century gothic revival building designed by George Gilbert Scott. Its rose window was destroyed in June. The church was deconsecrated in November following a decision to partially demolish the structure. Plans to rebuild the cathedral are being discussed, and Japanese

architect Shigeru Ban has proposed a temporary 700-seat cathedral built from cardboard. The Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority (Cera), established in February, is coordinating the rebuilding of Christchurch. Although the authority works with heritage bodies such as the government-run Historic Places Trust (HPT), as well as the building's owners, the decision to demolish is ultimately Cera's. So far more than 1,200 buildings have been slated for full or partial demolition. "It's incredible," says Kit

Miyamoto, a leading structural engineer who has worked in several earthquake stricken regions, of plans to demolish 50% of the CBD by April 2012. "There hasn't been this level of demolition in Haiti. They have a total loss of not more than 20% and this is with the worst conditions in terms of construction quality and seismic activity."

Hasty decisions

So far around 130 historic properties have been demolished or are slated for demolition and experts expect that figure to grow. Among these is the Manchester Court building. "It's a crime against humanity," says Miyamoto.

Many also feel that decisions are being made too hastily. "A determination has been made that all heritage must go other than a few key buildings, the selection of which seems to be largely *ad hoc* and a political one," says Jenny May, the principal heritage consultant to the city council's heritage earthquake recovery team. "There are buildings that have had to go—but it should not be viewed as an opportunity to provide a blank canvas and start again," she says.

"We have been left with no advocacy for public interest in the retention of heritage," says Ian Lochhead, a professor at the University of Canterbury. "Disaster recovery legislation overrules all existing planning regulations," including the

Resource Management Act, the principal means by which heritage is protected. "Support has not been forthcoming from the government," he says.

Christchurch MP Brendon Burns agrees. He was reported in national papers in September as calling the HPT "gutless" for not fighting to save more historic structures. As we went to press, the HPT released more than 100 reports to the local newspaper, *The Press*, showing that 27 heritage properties, including the Regent Theatre, were demolished against its advice.

Speaking to *The Art Newspaper*, Lewis Holden, the ministry for culture and heritage's chief executive, says: "We

are keenly aware that the people of Christchurch have strong feelings about the future of the city's heritage. Working towards potential preservation of these buildings is a group effort and must be done in an organised and coherent way with other ministries and stakeholders."

Insurance companies are playing a key role in deciding which structures to retain. "The

“We have been left with no advocacy for the retention of heritage”

cost of insurance for heritage buildings has skyrocketed. Premiums have gone up in some cases by 500%, which is influencing the decisions of building owners," says Lochhead, who adds that a number of damaged churches, including Holy Trinity Avonside, were demolished because the Anglican diocese was under-insured. Ansvar New Zealand, a major insurer of churches, has announced it will no longer provide earthquake cover after receiving \$700m in claims since September.

Lochhead notes that Christchurch boasts a distinct style of architecture known as the "Christchurch" or "Canterbury" school, which dates from the 1950s to the 1970s and grew out of the brutalism of postwar Britain, citing Christchurch's town hall as an example. "We are not just losing 19th-century buildings but the next generation of heritage buildings to be identified—those from the mid-20th-century," he says. ■

Emily Sharpe

Bolshoi raises its curtain

MOSCOW. The Bolshoi Theatre reopened on 28 October after a six-year renovation, which cost \$760m, according to Russia's ministry of culture. "The theatre is a unique restoration project in the new Russia," said Mikhail Sidorov, an adviser to the president of the Summa Group. The conglomerate stepped in to oversee the restoration of the neoclassical building after it became mired in delays. Sidorov compared the project to Soviet initiatives after the second world war, such as the renovation of St Petersburg's Peterhof Palace. The Russian president Dmitri Medvedev described the theatre



in more modern terms as one of the few "brands" that unites Russians. Conservators restored the Bolshoi's rotting foundation, regilded its interior and returned imperial symbols that had been ripped out by the Bolsheviks, while at the same time modernising the building. ■ S.K.

The devil is in the detail



ASSISI. Work on a 13th-century fresco by Giotto at the Basilica of St Francis of Assisi has revealed an unholy figure that has been lurking undetected in the clouds for eight centuries. A smiling devil was discovered by art historian Chiara Frugoni in a depiction of the death of St Francis. Sergio Fusetti, the chief restorer at the basilica, told Reuters that Giotto just wanted "to have a bit of fun". ■ E.S.



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