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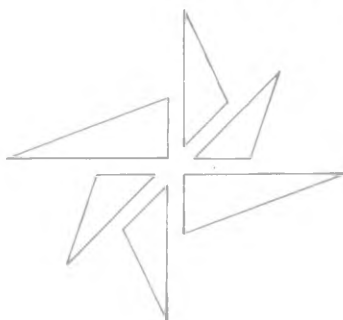
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Earthquake damage to University of Newcastle Libraries

The Earthquake which hit Newcastle on 28 December left much of the Auchmuty Library looking as though a cyclone had passed through it. The floors of four of the six main reading rooms were covered with thousands of books which had fallen from the shelves, together with hundreds of broken ceiling tiles and insulation batts. Other tiles were hanging loose from the ceiling with exposed wiring, and some end wall shelving had sprung loose from bolting and was swaying precariously. Everything was covered with layers of dust. Fortunately the library was closed for the Christmas break and so possible injury to library users and staff was averted.

Most books fell from the top two shelves, and the 'fallout' was worse on the top floors, especially at the extremities of the building. Fortunately only some fifty books were badly damaged. The fact that most of the shelving had been braced undoubtedly saved the library from greater damage, as it prevented the shelves from toppling over in a concertina effect across the Reading Rooms. Even with bracing, a number of the shelves 'walked' up to 5 centimetres.

The appearance of the library belied the amount of real damage that it had sustained from the earthquake. On inspection by the University engineers it was revealed that only relatively minor structural damage had occurred in the building. There are several cracked columns, and cracking of walls especially around stairways and near corner joints. Gaps have also appeared between walls especially near the ceiling.

Staff returned to work on Tuesday 2 January, and after engineers had inspected the building and declared it sound, they were able to set about restoring order. By mid-afternoon most of the debris had been cleared and books placed on holding shelves so that a team of cleaners could be brought in. The library was closed to users until Friday 5 January.

The Auchmuty and the Huxley Library, the library of the former Hunter Institute of Higher Education, are situ-

ated on the Shortland Campus of the University within five or so miles of Hamilton, one of the city suburbs almost completely devastated by the earthquake. It is about the same distance from the Tighes Hill TAFE Campus which sustained major structural damage to almost every building on the site.

The University was fortunate too that the Huxley Library sustained only minor damage. Some cracks appeared in parts of the library, and cement rendering fell away from some walls - all of which can be easily rectified.

The Newcastle Conservatorium since amalgamation has become part of the University of Newcastle. It is centred in Laman Street in the heart of Newcastle, an area which received widespread damage from the earthquake. The newer part of the Conservatorium sustained major structural damage, however, the library situated in an older part of the complex managed to escape almost intact. As with the Auchmuty Library, a number of books were thrown to the floor. The library is situated on the third floor of a 5-floor brick building and has concrete floors and plaster ceilings. It was built about 1930. Just how fortunate this library was to escape major damage is evident when compared to the damage received by the nearby Regional Art Gallery and adjoining Regional Library, and other buildings in surrounding streets.

Elizabeth Guilford



Thousands of books fall from the shelves: Auchmuty Library