

## Lessons in Ephemera: Teaching and Learning through Cultural Heritage Collections

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This article synthesizes an intern's experience assessing the University of Canterbury's (UC) theatre and concert music program ephemera collection for its teaching and research potential, and evaluating its storage and preservation needs. Held at the Macmillan Brown Library and Archive (MB), the collection comprises around 6,000 items and takes up seven linear meters of physical storage space. The ephemera functioned as a portal into the evolution of Christchurch's theatrical and concert music history, giving weight to the collection as a rich local historical resource worthy of keeping. The ephemera reflected how British, European, and American cultural practices were infused into colonial Christchurch's theatrical and concert music scene. The collection also revealed a tradition of UC teachers who, since its establishment in 1873 as Canterbury College, actively shaped, participated in, and facilitated the development of Christchurch's theatre and concert music heritage. Overall, the collection's research value was its localism. Different ways of engaging researchers with the ephemera were considered, in addition to identifying the transferable skills the intern gained. With growing interest from students about internships, the authors also address questions about long-term impact and scalability of cultural-heritage collection-based intern and/or classroom-based learning projects more generally. Our main message for higher education management and those charged with the custodianship of cultural heritage collections is that hands-on learning helps students appreciate and value these locally significant collections.

Academic archivists and librarians understand the value of working with cultural heritage collections, such as ephemera, yet the size and scope of these often uncatalogued, closed-storage collections can deter access.<sup>1</sup> Connecting teaching staff and

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1. The authors thank the Macmillan Brown Library and Archive team for their support throughout the project. Deborah Lee, "Classifying Musical Performance: The Application of Classification Theories to Concert Programmes," *Knowledge Organization*, 38, no. 6 (2011): 530–40; Helen Forde, "Access and the Social Contract in Memory Institutions," in *Preservation Management for Libraries, Archives and Museums*, eds. G.E. Gorman and Sydney J. Shep (London: Facet Publishing, 2006), 166–81; Jeannette Woodward, *Creating the Customer-Driven Academic Library* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2009), vii; Kathy Dempsey, *The Accidental Library Marketer* (Medford, N.J.: Information Today, Inc., 2009).

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students to their university heritage collections helps promote visibility and provides invaluable hands-on learning opportunities. From a teaching and learning perspective, interacting around objects facilitates powerful conversations about collection management, and teachers and students come to appreciate the research value in working with heritage collections.<sup>2</sup> Students then carry these object-based research skills into their postgraduate studies, future workplace situations, or personal lives such as tracing their family histories. Internships provide another learning opportunity for students to work with collections while gaining credit toward their degree. The internship model offers an applied learning situation combining the real-life complexities associated with managing, preserving, and promoting a heritage collection in an academic library with literature written by reflective practitioners.<sup>3</sup>

The intern's project brief involved assessing UC's theatre and concert program ephemera collection for its teaching and research potential, evaluating the collection's storage and preservation needs, and redrafting the webpage description. Given that only 20 percent of the intern's time was allocated to working on the collection, we were not able to advance web access to the collection, so we decided to place emphasis on how audiences could engage with the ephemera instead. Our decision reflected MB staff attempts to better connect users to their cultural heritage collections.

The intern project took place during the second semester of 2015 when there was growing interest from UC students to work on the MB's special collections and staff wanted to evaluate how they managed internship placements generally. Throughout the project, the intern and academic supervisor shared their fieldwork reflections with the MB team—a cohort of subject information librarians, curators, archivist, and the MB manager—and these informal conversations functioned as teachable moments, so we decided to share some of our findings for interns, academic librarians, archivists and teachers considering a similar project and for library administrators charged with the long-term oversight of these collections.

### **Christchurch's Englishness, the University of Canterbury and the Macmillan Brown Library and Archive**

Since its foundation in 1850, Christchurch was considered New Zealand's "most English of cities."<sup>4</sup> Englishness was represented in its public buildings, which included Canterbury College, built during the late 1800s in the Gothic Revival style. Englishness often morphs into "Britishness," evidenced in the importation

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2. Pablo Alvarez, "Introducing Rare Books into the Undergraduate Curriculum," *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 7, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 94–103; Anne Bahde, "Taking the Show on the Road: Special Collections Instruction in the Campus Classroom," *RBM* 12.2 (Fall 2011): 75–88.

3. Rebecca Altermatt and Adrien Hilton, "Hidden Collections within Hidden Collections: Providing Access to Printed Ephemera," *American Archivist* 75, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2012): 171–94.

4. Katie Pickles, *Christchurch Ruptures* (Wellington, N.Z.: Bridget Williams Books Limited, 2016).

and adaptation of British institutions such as the Philosophical Institute of Canterbury (formed c. 1862), the Canterbury Society of Arts (founded in 1880), and the Royal Christchurch Musical Society (established 1869). John Thomson, in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Music* (1991), wrote of a particular Anglican bent to Christchurch's evolving musical traditions due to the influx of "able English immigrant organists and choirmasters."<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Mane-Wheoki verified Thompson's assessment in his discussion on how Christchurch's literature, art, theatre, and music world reflected the cultural traditions of its migrants. Mane-Wheoki, UC art historian from 1975 until 2004 and active in the Church of St Michael and All Angels Christchurch choir, observed that British literature, painting, and Anglican liturgical and musical traditions deeply influenced the development of "local artistic culture" in colonial Christchurch.<sup>6</sup> Matthew Leese, whose 2012 PhD thesis examined the origins of New Zealand music traditions, argued that, while Thomson and Mane-Wheoki interpreted Christchurch's particular celebration of British cultural traditions as the city's "signature characteristic," European and North American influences were also embraced, especially post-World War II.<sup>7</sup> In the post-WWII period, an era of rapid decolonization, New Zealand universities became independent of British administration. In 1957, Canterbury College became known as the University of Canterbury.<sup>8</sup> In 1973, the university moved from the city center to a new, larger campus in the suburb of Ilam, five kilometers westward.

Our research project, centered on a cultural heritage collection held at the Macmillan Brown Library and Archive (MB), named in memory of Scottish-born John Macmillan Brown (1846–1935), Professor of English and Classics at Canterbury College from 1874 to 1895. Upon his death, Macmillan Brown left his personal library and an endowment to fund a library and the Center for Pacific Studies at UC.<sup>9</sup> The MB is located in a two-story 1980s concrete building, situated near a shallow stream and surrounded by native plantings. The customer service and public reading areas are on the upper floor. Published material, rare books, and artworks are housed in closed stacks on the ground floor, and some archival materials are held in another building.

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5. John Mansfield Thomson, *The Oxford History of New Zealand Music* (Auckland, N.Z.: Oxford University Press, 1991), 41.

6. Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, "The High Arts in a Regional Culture: From Englishness to Self-Reliance," in *Southern Capital Christchurch: Towards a City Biography 1850–2000*, eds. John Cookson and Graeme Dunstall (Christchurch, N.Z.: Canterbury University Press, 2000), 299, 303.

7. Matthew Leese, "British Influence on New Zealand Choral Traditions: A Study of the Relationship between Choral Festivals and Societies in the United Kingdom and in New Zealand, with Focus on New Zealand's High School Festival 'The Big Sing'" (PhD thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2012).

8. "The University: Chronology," University of Canterbury, available online at [www.canterbury.ac.nz/theuni/backgrnd/chronology.shtml](http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/theuni/backgrnd/chronology.shtml) [accessed 18 April 2017].

9. W.J. Gardner et al., *A History of the University of Canterbury, 1873–1973* (Christchurch, N.Z.: University of Canterbury Press, 1973).

The theatre and concert program collection is one of the MB's three separate uncatalogued ephemera collections. The "art files" ephemera collection includes exhibition invitations and programs, and "general ephemera" covers political flyers, as well as sports, church service, and festival programs.<sup>10</sup> The MB staff knew that manual retrieval methods created "unintended barriers to access,"<sup>11</sup> so they invited the intern, supervised by a New Zealand history teacher with a museum-education background, to evaluate the ephemera collection and reflect on the MB internship model more generally. This article reports the evaluation, illustrating the ways a large ephemera collection can contribute to the academic mission in an institution.

Our findings are synthesized into three lessons. Lesson 1 outlines how investigating the collection's provenance helped the intern realize how the collection evolved and understand its historical significance. Lesson 2 focuses on the importance of caring for cultural heritage collections. Lesson 3 uncovers the value of what can be learned from ephemera as objects of study as well as a portal into local history, the local print industry, and the theatrical or musical event itself.<sup>12</sup> The conclusion reveals why heritage collections should matter—to teachers, students, and researchers who work with ephemeral fragments, higher education decision-makers who approve the budget lines, and librarians, archivists, and curators charged with the care of these hidden treasures.



**FIGURE 1.** Different musical tastes fill the filing cabinets in the MB's storage area. Programs reflected the etiquette of the day: in the early twentieth century, women were reminded to remove their hats, 1970s audiences were asked not to smoke, and early millennial patrons were instructed to turn off their mobile phones. (Photograph by Duncan Shaw-Brown, University of Canterbury.)

10. "Ephemera Collection," University of Canterbury Library, available online at <http://library.canterbury.ac.nz/mb/mbephemera.shtml> [accessed 11 February 2017].

11. Lee, "Classifying Musical Performance," 530.

12. Michael Twyman, "The Long-Term Significance of Printed Ephemera," *RBM* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 19.

## Lesson 1: How Ephemeral Objects Refract Local History

Investigating how the MB theatre and concert program collection evolved helped the intern appreciate the collection's significance. The collection has multiple donors, collected over different timeframes; it is unclear when the collection first started. MB staff advertised for donations in local newspapers and UC staff newsletters. Even when the MB stopped advertising, staff continued to bring in ephemera. The MB now has a moratorium on collecting.<sup>13</sup> A number of UC library staff had worked on the collection over the years, to varying degrees of commitment, limited by time and driven by the interests of the person at the time. As staff moved on—to other jobs or retirement—they took their knowledge of the collection with them. In 2006, MB Assistant Librarian Jenny Owens said that the collection had national significance and contained “information that is not captured by other major library ephemera collections in the country such as those at the Hocken [University of Otago, Dunedin] or the Alexander Turnbull library [which is part of the National Library, Wellington].”<sup>14</sup> Some duplication existed between the region's two major collecting institutions—the catalogued Canterbury Museum (CM) ephemera collection and the uncatalogued yet sorted Christchurch City Libraries (CCL) collection. UC has a Memorandum of Understanding with both organizations. Consolidating MB's collection at CCL was considered; however, MB staff decided to retain the collection because of the perceived benefit to UC students, teachers, and researchers.<sup>15</sup>

Philip Jane, a former UC librarian, researched the collection for his doctoral thesis on the establishment of Christchurch orchestral societies to 1939. Jane, like Thomson, saw the ephemera as a reflection of the city's cultural development.<sup>16</sup> We took the view that the collection's significance was its “localism”—a term coined by H. Earle Johnson in a 1948 article for the Music Library Association of America. Johnson reasoned that theatre and concert ephemera were “untapped resources” that offered invaluable insights into the “local taste, home-grown talents, and evidences of an awakening culture” of a city, region, or nation.<sup>17</sup> The MB's ephemera collection refracted a fragment of Christchurch and UC's theatrical and concert music past.

The collection is held in closed storage on the ground floor. One cabinet with 15 slide-out drawers held ephemera dating from 1887 to 1956. Three four-drawer vertical filing cabinets contained ephemera from 1957 to 2015 (see figure 1). A rough

13. E-mail correspondence with Jill Durney, former MB librarian, August 11, 2015.

14. “Ephemera Collection Gathering in an Array of Overlooked Treasures,” *Chronicle Magazine* 41, no. 13 (2006): 9.

15. Durney, e-mail correspondence.

16. Philip Jane, “An Historical Survey of the Establishment of an Orchestral Tradition in Christchurch to 1939” (PhD thesis, University of Canterbury, 2009), vii–ix.

17. H. Earle Johnson, “Notes on Sources of Musical Americana,” *Notes*, Second Series, 5, no. 2 (Mar. 1948): 169–77.

count revealed a total of about 6,000 items—taking up seven linear meters of storage space. Stored elsewhere were ephemera connected to existing catalogued collections such as UC's DramaSoc (1926–) and UC's School of Music (1863–), which made the total number of items in the MB collection unknown. As the intern looked through the collection, she made notes about cultural influences: the type of show (such as touring shows or local productions), how Christchurch-based performances were packaged and promoted, and ephemera design. What we found was interesting.

Until the 1940s, most ephemera reflected the Anglican choral music tradition with items from homegrown choirs and ensembles such as the Christchurch Harmonic Society (established 1927) and the Christchurch Musical Society. The earliest item in the collection is a service book from the Christchurch Diocesan Choral Association's fifth choral festival (1887). British taste was predominant in the touring shows that visited Christchurch. In the early 1900s, the Alan Wilkie Theatre Company held Shakespearean productions at the *Theatre Royal*, and J.C. Williamson Ltd entertained Cantabrians with *Chu-Chin-Chow*, a blend of musical theatre and pantomime based on *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, and Gilbert & Sullivan light opera (see figure 2).



**FIGURE 2.** Theater program front cover designs were reused: the same fairy folk printed in soft pastel colors appeared on the programs of *Chu-Chin-Chow* and *Gilbert & Sullivan*. The shows performed at the Theatre Royal, Christchurch, in 1921. J.C. Williamson Ltd were lessees of the Theater Royal. Printed by A.E. Purse, 233 Manchester Street, Christchurch. 235 x 135 mm. (Photograph by Duncan Shaw-Brown, University of Canterbury.)

European theatre and music influences were also evident. Russia's historic male choir, *The Don Cossacks* presented by E.J. Carroll, is one example. *The Don Cossacks* New Zealand debut was held at the Christchurch Town Hall in 1926. The front cover of the program featured a woodblock print design with text claiming "their music has glorified the world."<sup>18</sup> Another example of European cultural influence was Karel Čapek's science fiction play, *Rur in Prague*, depicting a futuristic world of humans versus robots on a remote island, which was performed by the Canterbury Repertory Theatre Society at the Choral Hall. American cultural influences were greatest post-WWII; musicals such as Rogers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* were featured often.

The introduction of motion-picture cinema in the 1920s followed by the depression of the 1930s was said to have temporarily stalled Christchurch's theatre and music world. However, it did not stop new local initiatives appearing on the scene.<sup>19</sup> For example, Professor James Shelley (1884–1961), Chair in Education at Canterbury College, set up UC's DramaSoc in 1926 and the Canterbury Repertory Theatre in 1928. The Canterbury Repertory Theatre quickly became a major venue for amateur productions until the late 1960s when the next wave of locally produced theatre companies emerged. Elmwood Players opened in the 1960s and the Court Theatre opened in 1971, which showcased New Zealand's writers Katherine Mansfield, Ngaio Marsh (a queen of crime fiction), Janet Frame and the counterculture poet James K. Baxter. Children's theatre and pantomime productions grew from the mid-1960s when children were seen as citizens and consumers. *Peter Pan* performed at the Elmwood Players in 1965, and *Cinderella* played at the Court Theatre as a pantomime targeted at "the young at heart" in 1978.<sup>20</sup>

Reviewing was important. The collection held letters written by the Secretary of the Elwood Players and sent to Howard McNaughton, UC Professor in English and Cultural Studies from 1975 until his death in 2014, persuading him to attend the upcoming production by including free tickets. (Audience responses are discussed in lesson 3.) Reruns of populist international touring shows were also noted. *Chu-Chin-Chow* returned in 1976, and the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* first performed in Christchurch in 1970 and again in 1993 to new audiences.

Theatre and music performances were packaged and promoted in different ways: during World War I and World War II, ephemera captured patriotic events fundraising in support of the war effort. In November 1929, a recital of drama and dance entitled *Pot-Pourri* was put on at the Radiant Hall over three nights; proceeds

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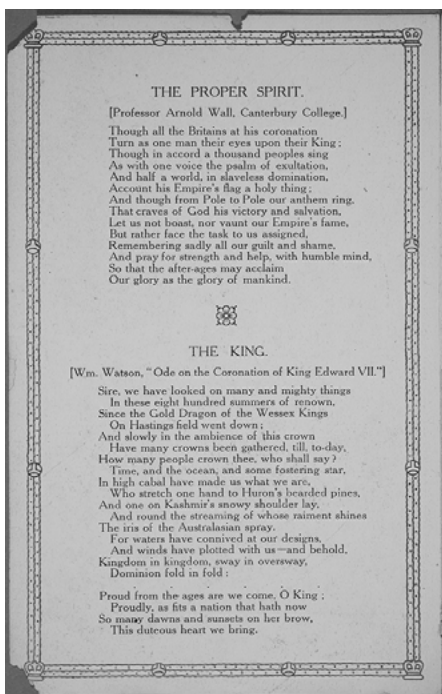
18. MB theatre and concert music program ephemera collection.

19. Mane-Wheoki, "The High Arts in a Regional Culture," 311.

20. MB theatre and concert music program ephemera collection.

went toward the Returned Soldiers' Benevolent Fund. Some ephemera emphasized imperial attachments (see figure 3), captured in a poem *The Proper Spirit* by Arnold Wall (1869–1966). Wall was Professor of English at Canterbury College from 1899 until 1924; his poem illustrates the role UC's teaching staff have in supporting and shaping Christchurch's cultural fabric. The front cover design juxtaposes portraits of George V and Mary with appropriated Māori motifs prevalent in New Zealand imagery from the 1890s until the 1960s–1970s, when there was a cultural awakening and urban-born Māori reclaimed their cultural traditions (see figure 4). Annual performances organized by Christchurch-based music teachers, such as Madam Josephine Ottlee's students' song recital at the Jellicoe Hall (1928), were another trend. One aspect of these recitals was to attract new students and, more subtly, to market the musical talents of Christchurch's potential brides. Music and theatre worlds were competitive, and Leese and Jane both commented on dissent and rivalry within Christchurch's musical community.<sup>21</sup>

21. Leese, "British Influence on New Zealand Choral Traditions"; Jane, "An Historical Survey."



**FIGURE 3.** *The Proper Spirit*, poem by Prof. Arnold Wall, Canterbury College, is a celebration of empire and reflects the close town-and-gown relationship. Inside page of *King George V Coronation Souvenir*, 1911. (Printed by Lyttelton Times Co. Limited. 210 x 135 mm.)



**FIGURE 4.** Front cover of *King George V Coronation Souvenir*, 1911. Printed by Lyttelton Times Co. Limited. 210 x 135 mm. The purple and gold represent Regency, the Maori motifs and natural fauna symbolize the Dominion of New Zealand, and the event itself demonstrated Canterbury's allegiance. (Photograph by Duncan Shaw-Brown, University of Canterbury.)



The way the MB collection grew is characteristic of other ephemera collections.<sup>22</sup> The volume of items in the collection grew considerably from the 1950s. Post-WWII reflected a form of cultural nationalism with the establishment of national and regional organizations to support literature, the arts and crafts, music, theatre, and other creative and performing arts. The MB's collection included ephemera of Christchurch-based performances from The Christchurch Symphony Orchestra (c. 1948–), the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra (NZSO) (1946–), and the Royal New Zealand Ballet (1953–).<sup>23</sup> The number of items in the collection peaked in the 1970s, mirroring the growth in local venues and niche audiences. This was represented by a rise in festivals and competitions that served a civic and/or national agenda. For example, proceeds from the 1972 Mobil Song Quest held at the Christchurch Town Hall went toward the 1974 Commonwealth Games Fund. The games were held in Christchurch in 1974. Christian religious celebrations such as Easter and Christmas were observed with themed choral performances. Anniversaries were also noted. In 1976, the Court Theatre celebrated the bicentennial anniversary of American Independence with *Gershwin's America* and Dorothy Parker readings. Tribal, ethnic, and nonWestern theatre and music traditions were almost invisible; exceptions include Ravi Shankar, who played in Christchurch in 1965 and the Te Awatea New Zealand Maori Theatre Trust, which formed in 1967 and toured nationally and overseas.<sup>24</sup> The number of items in the collection plateaued by the 1990s, when computer gaming started to have greater sway as a cultural practice and leisure activity. For comparison, we looked to the history of the National Library of Australia music ephemera collection, which reflected the same growth pattern as the MB's.<sup>25</sup>

The intern not only observed shifts in musical and theatrical tastes: ephemera design changed too, including variations in paper size, font, layout, design style, and color—pastels predominated in the 1920 and 1930s, while psychedelic colors shaped the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Through the process of handling the ephemera, the intern came to appreciate how the “textual, graphic and artifactual characteristics” gave printed ephemera its potency (discussed in lesson 3).<sup>26</sup> The intern also sensed that any increased demand for access to a heritage collection would trigger the need for preservation and gained a deeper understanding into why library, museum, and archive staff spent time educating users how to handle objects.

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22. Hermina G.B. Anghelescu, “A Bit of History in the Library Attic: Challenges of Ephemera Research,” *Collection Management* 25, no. 4 (2001): 61–75; Altermatt and Hilton, “Hidden Collections within Hidden Collections,” 172.

23. Jane, “An Historical Survey,” vii–ix.

24. Mark Derby and Briar Grace-Smith, “Māori theatre—te whare tapere hōu—Origins of Māori theatre,” *Te Ara—the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, available online at [www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/maori-theatre-te-whare-tapere-hou/page-1](http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/maori-theatre-te-whare-tapere-hou/page-1) [accessed 20 April 2017].

25. Robyn Holmes, “Musical Dialogues,” in *Remarkable Occurrences: The National Library of Australia's First 100 Years 1901–2001*, ed. Peter Cochrane (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2001), 213–33.

26. Twyman, “The Long-Term Significance of Printed Ephemera,” 30.

## Lesson 2: Caring for Printed Ephemera Collections

In 1975, Sharon Dell remarked in her address at a library and archive seminar held at the Hocken Library, Wellington, New Zealand, that ephemera collection management had more or less been neglected, even though she believed that these collections were integral to a region or nation's printed heritage and history. Dell believed that this "neglect" stemmed from the difficulties integral to collecting, processing, and storing ephemera.<sup>27</sup> Maurice Rickards, author of *The Encyclopedia of Ephemera* (2000), described ephemera loosely as: "Those minor transient documents of everyday life." Most ephemera stems from "jobbing printing" such as tickets, posters, and programs, usually printed on low-grade paper "with high acid levels, using cheap inks" and intended to have a "very brief shelf life."<sup>28</sup> Once these objects make their way into museum, library, or archive collections, their ephemeral nature is transformed into a cultural object to be preserved for future generations. Dell offered a series of recommendations regarding cataloguing and storing ephemera, which came in all shapes and sizes; namely, unfolding folded items, removing staples and cellophane tape, placing fragile items between sheets of Melinex (commonly known under its trademark as Mylar), and storing larger items flat in boxes or in map cabinets.<sup>29</sup> Printed ephemera still present challenges to collection managers today. For example, in 2003 the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) produced a report dedicated to the long-term preservation of ephemera collections,<sup>30</sup> while John H. Slate pointed out in *Collection Management* (2008) that ephemera required the same amount of care as rare books, manuscripts, and paintings yet had not featured widely in preservation and conservation literature.

One of the intern's project tasks was to review the collection's long-term preservation needs. As she sorted through the ephemera files, she gained insight into collection management practices of the past. In her field notes, the intern observed that some items in the MB collection, particularly pre-1950s, had staple stains or foxing—and the paper was fragile. Some ephemera were torn. The ephemera came in many sizes. Many, particularly from the 1980s, were almost too large for the filing drawer; some were placed on the base of the drawer and were difficult to access. Each time a file drawer was opened, the ephemera was potentially exposed to

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27. Thanks to Sydney Shep, Reader in Book History, Victoria University, for retrieving these proceedings from the library stacks. Dell is now Hocken Librarian at the University of Otago in Dunedin. Sharon Dell, "Ephemera," *Archives and Manuscripts: A New Zealand Seminar* (proceedings of a seminar held in Wellington, 21–26 September 1975), eds. R.S. Hill and M.D.W. Hodder, 68–72.

28. Maurice Rickards, edited and completed by Michael Twyman, *The Encyclopedia of Ephemera: A Guide to the Fragmentary Documents of Everyday Life for the Collector, Curator, and Historian* (London: The British Library, 2000); John H. Slate, "Not Fade Away," *Collection Management* 25, no. 4 (2001): 51–59.

29. Dell, "Ephemera."

30. *Ephemera: The Stuff of History*, Report of the Working Party on Ephemera set up by CILIP (the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals), January 2003.

damage. Storage space restrictions, as well as time restrictions, meant the collection could not be transferred to conservation boxes. When the intern encountered a number of items from the 1970s that had a UC Library date of issue stamped on it, she initially viewed the ephemera as vandalized and its visual appeal compromised. Yet, as other small things were noted, such as a phone number, address, or part of a recipe handwritten on the ephemera by someone as if it were notepaper before the item came into the MB's collection, or programs signed by the artists, led to a deeper appreciation of the need to ensure the long-term care of this cultural heritage collection. The intern's recommendations regarding care of the ephemera collection were: proper housing (such as archive boxes); culling duplicates to provide more room for the ephemera in the already overfull cabinets; and education of the user.<sup>31</sup> Tips for first-time ephemera users include: leave your bag in the storage area provided; work with clean hands; keep the storage room door shut; and write notes in pencil.

### Lesson 3: Connecting People with Ephemera

The third part of the intern's project focused on a very real challenge that most libraries, museums, and archives face—how to make a hidden heritage collection more visible.<sup>32</sup> Rather than concentrate on the collection from a catalogue perspective, as this topic was addressed by Rebecca Altermatt and Adrien Hilton in their case study about improving access to the Tamiment Library's growing yet hidden ephemera collection,<sup>33</sup> we took a "front-of-house approach"<sup>34</sup> and demonstrated to UC teachers, students, and library professionals the teaching and learning and research potential of ephemera at an in-house seminar.

Michael Twyman, Director of the University of Reading's Center for Ephemera Studies, has argued that, until recent decades, researchers had snubbed ephemera in favor of high-culture products such as books.<sup>35</sup> Researchers have to learn how to read and interpret ephemera. For example, Nancy Hadley, Collection Senior Archivist, College of William and Mary (United States), remarked that researchers from a wide range of disciplines—art history, advertising, graphic design, and geography—have used ephemera and were "charmed by the material."<sup>36</sup> While ephemera can hold important intrinsic and evidential value for researchers (especially for ephemera

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31. Slate, "Not Fade Away."

32. Altermatt and Hilton, "Hidden Collections within Hidden Collections."

33. Ibid., 171.

34. See Susanne K. Clement and Karen S. Fischer, "Introduction to the Special Issue 'We're Moving, Please Pardon Our Dust': Transformative Changes in Collection Management," *Collection Management* 39 (2014): 53–59.

35. Twyman, "The Long-Term Significance of Printed Ephemera," 20; Anghelescu, "A Bit of History in the Library Attic," 63.

36. Nancy Hadley, "Access and Description of Visual Ephemera," *Collection Management* 25, no. 4 (2001): 39–50.

and printing history scholars such as Twyman), Hermina G.B. Anghelescu of the Library and Information Science Program at Wayne State University believes that the ephemera is often not enough in itself and that researchers also need to draw from other sources.<sup>37</sup> How researchers use ephemera has also evolved. Barbara Brownlie, Ephemera Librarian at Alexander Turnbull Library, observed that researchers initially used ephemera as evidence for political and social history projects; more recently, “popular culture, material culture, print culture and graphic design” had become topics of interest, bringing in new types of researchers.<sup>38</sup> While our presentation focused on a particular collection, our message was to sell to students, teachers, and other UC staff the idea of using heritage collections more generally. As reviewers, performers, or producers, some UC teaching staff had music or theatre ephemera collections of their own, so discussion turned to what to keep and how they could be sorted or used. Information design was a topic that interested communications scholars.

After the seminar, the course coordinator of a graduate-level digital humanities course booked the intern and teacher for a lesson in ephemera for Semester One 2016. A selection of ephemera from across the decades were laid on a table, and the students were invited to conceptualize digitizing the collection; dialogue touched on classification, standardization, aggregation, description, and search. We found that transforming the library into an object-based laboratory provided the best way for teachers and students to engage with the MB staff and their collection holdings. This method works best for small groups and involves striking a balance between “maintaining the security and physical integrity of the items and providing access to them.”<sup>39</sup>

Summarizing our research project findings, the following teaching and research ideas can be applied to other printed ephemera collections: using the physical object to learn about information design, graphics, and advertising (see figure 5), which reflect contemporary ideas about gender, beauty, and culture, as well as capturing changes in technology such as the rise of the motorcar and radio broadcasting; reading printed ephemera as historical documents for understanding themes such as cultural transference, imperialism, and nationalism (see figures 3 and 4), as well as investigating audience experiences and the stories behind the events themselves. Contemporary newspaper accounts, although shaped by an editor and motivated by sales revenue, reflect the social attitudes of the day and proved useful

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37. Anghelescu, “A Bit of History in the Library Attic.”

38. Barbara Brownlie, “Treasure from Trash: Collecting Printed and Digital Ephemera in New Zealand” (paper presented at the Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa [LIANZA] Conference, 9–12 September 2007, Rotorua), available online at [www.lianza.org.nz/sites/default/files/brownlie\\_b\\_treasure\\_from\\_trash.pdf](http://www.lianza.org.nz/sites/default/files/brownlie_b_treasure_from_trash.pdf) [accessed 11 February 2017].

39. Anne Bahde, “Taking the Show on the Road: Special Collections Instruction in the Campus Classroom,” *RBM*, 12, no. 2 (2011) 75–88; John Feather, “Introduction: Principles and Policies,” in *Managing Preservation for Libraries and Archives: Current Practice and Future Developments*, ed. John Feather (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2004), 7; Slate, “Not Fade Away.”

for demonstrating how these local events were internationally connected. For example, *Chu-Chin-Chow* was first staged at His Majesty's Theatre in London in 1916 and played for five successful years. The skimpy, sumptuous Oriental costumes of the women actors proved popular with the allied troops. In 1919, *Chu-Chin-Chow* played in America and then toured to Australia and New Zealand in 1920–1921. The *Press* described *Chu-Chin-Chow* as a “fascinating and spectacular extravaganza” with “gorgeous costuming.”<sup>40</sup>

Histories of buildings, businesses, and commerce that support the local theatre and concert music world are topics worth exploring. For example, Christchurch

40. “Chu Chin Chow,” *Press*, August 25, 1921, 10, available online at <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/CHP19210825.2.102?query=chu%20chin%20chow> [accessed 24 April 2017].

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We respectfully invite you to give us a Trial Order.  
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**FIGURE 5.** Advertisements hold value for researchers. Advertisements for alcohol, such as this Watson's Whisky advertisement, were prevalent in the collection and provide some insight into New Zealand society's relaxed attitudes toward liquor. (Photograph by Duncan Shaw-Brown, University of Canterbury.)

historian Margaret Lovell-Smith wrote about the competitive nature of her family's business, Smith and Antony Press; pamphlets and lithographic prints were business staples throughout the early 1900s.<sup>41</sup> We did not see any ephemera from Smith and Antony Press in the MB collection; however, ephemera printed by Caxton Press were evident. Christchurch-based Caxton Press, formed in 1935, is best known for its focus on New Zealand literature; however, "jobbing work" must also have formed a large part of Caxton's business. According to Rickards, "jobbing work" was central to local printing businesses; books represented a smaller percentage of their custom.<sup>42</sup>

Our project focused on engaging people with ephemera. Through these interactions we came to appreciate the value of ephemera for providing a window into local history and local print culture. Examining ephemera in relation to their historical context brought them to life and highlighted why the collection was worthy of long-term preservation. While our project involved one student and one teacher, we saw benefits if more interns or a small class group worked on the same project. Additional project outcomes could include an online exhibition or an exhibition on campus or out in the community. Other factors that determine project outcomes are the size of collection and manageability in regard to what can be achieved within a limited timeframe. We also saw potential for ephemera to serve as a springboard for ideas for writers, fill a gap in someone's family history, or open up further investigation into the people who helped shape Christchurch's musical and theatrical world.

### **Conclusion: Appreciating the Long-term Value of Ephemera Collections**

Since the 1940s, archive and library literature have supported the argument that printed ephemera collections are an important part of a region or nation's cultural heritage and worth preserving.<sup>43</sup> Access is key to the long-term survival of such collections. Our research project centered on a low-priority cultural collection that would not be catalogued or digitized in the near future, so the intern focused on the collection's long-term storage and preservation needs, promoted the collection to teachers and students, and started drafting additional content for the ephemera webpage. The wider project objective was to promote the MB's heritage collections for teaching and research purposes and reflect on the internship model. We started the 10-week project wondering what the ephemera could reveal about the evolution of Christchurch's concert and theatre culture at the edge of the British

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41. Margaret Lovell-Smith, *Plain Living, High Thinking: The Family Story of Jennie and Will Lovell-Smith* (Christchurch, N.Z.: Pedmore Press, 1994), 126–29.

42. Twyman, "The Long-Term Significance of Printed Ephemera," 19–21.

43. Johnson, "Notes on Sources of Musical Americana"; Dell, "Ephemera," 68.

Empire. The collection provided a useful portal into local history. It reflected the ongoing role UC teachers played shaping Christchurch's cultural traditions.

Appreciating the textual characteristics added another layer to learning about ephemera. Reflecting on the internship experience, interviewing and liaising with library, museum, and archives staff on issues relating to collection management, preservation, and access to ephemera were important teaching and learning themes. The intern also gained transferable skills such as confidence in public speaking, running hands-on workshops, and report writing. Overall internships provide invaluable professional development opportunities for students, teachers, librarians, and archivists. We saw potential to extend the range of teaching opportunities to undergraduate, postgraduate, and community level researchers. From our experience, hands-on learning, at any level, helps students understand the value of the locally and nationally significant cultural heritage objects held by their alma mater.

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