




© Christchurch Club

Christchurch recovers

The cathedral, art gallery and a reciprocal club were among the quake's casualties. **Samantha Whitaker** finds out how residents are coping

Having already suffered two earthquakes in 2010 – on 4 September and 26 December – Christchurch was devastated by a 6.3 magnitude quake at 12.51pm on 22 February. "The events unfolded very fast and so dramatically, literally in front of us, that it is still very difficult to even think about," says violinist Natalia Lomeiko, who was having lunch with her fellow musicians before a rehearsal in Christchurch Cathedral.

They were due to begin at 1pm, but violinist Yuri Zhislin's soup was delayed and the group waited patiently for him to finish. That act of courtesy may have saved their lives. At 12.51pm the ground began to sway; the group grabbed their instruments and raced out into Cathedral Square. In front of them they saw the fallen tower of the cathedral in a sea of dust. "Maybe because of the shock, we didn't hear much noise around but the atmosphere was really eerie and frightening."

The shattered cathedral, with its broken spire, became one of the most striking images of the catastrophe. At the time, it was feared there could have been up to 22 people inside, but no bodies were found in the rubble. It is estimated that up to a third of the buildings in New Zealand's second biggest cities have been, or will have to be, demolished.

Following the Boxing Day earthquake, the Christchurch Club – a ROSL reciprocal – had to cancel accommodation bookings for several months. In February, they lost approximately 40% of the clubhouse. Some of the damaged parts were demolished by the Urban Search and Rescue team for safety reasons, which will make it more difficult and expensive to restore some of the finer architectural details.

The future of the club is very much in the air; they are currently seeking temporary premises while they consider their position. "It is important to maintain the spirit of the membership and continue the social activities that the club offers," said its President, Ben Tothill, in a statement to members. "The club is in great heart, as is witnessed by the almost overwhelming messages of support."

On the other side of Cathedral Square, the Christchurch Art Gallery also closed for business and became the primary base for some 400 civil defence staff. According to Director Jenny Harper: "Emergency operations staff is occupying ground and first floor exhibition spaces, offices, meeting rooms, the auditorium, education spaces and staff rooms. Normally used for incoming and outgoing works of art, our loading dock now handles a constant flow of civil defence supplies, while the gallery café has been set up to feed hordes of fluoro-coated workers."

"The gallery's loading dock now handles a constant flow of civil defence supplies"

Thankfully, damage to works of art was minimal, and a back-up generator maintained humidity and temperature levels. The gallery will be one of the first major public buildings to reopen in the city centre: "We want to give people a sense of optimism and renewal when that occurs. Already, we're thinking of how best to do that; it's clear, however, that community spirit is going to play a strong part.

• *Within the first three months of 2011, natural disasters had ravaged many parts of the world, including Fiji, Tonga, Pakistan and Japan. In the New Year, Australia suffered devastating flooding, which affected nearly 35% of Victoria and 75% of Queensland. Rivers in several catchments in New South Wales remain in flood. This was compounded by the effects of cyclone Yasi, which hit Queensland in February.*