



Audio Tour Transcript

Exhibition open now until January 2009

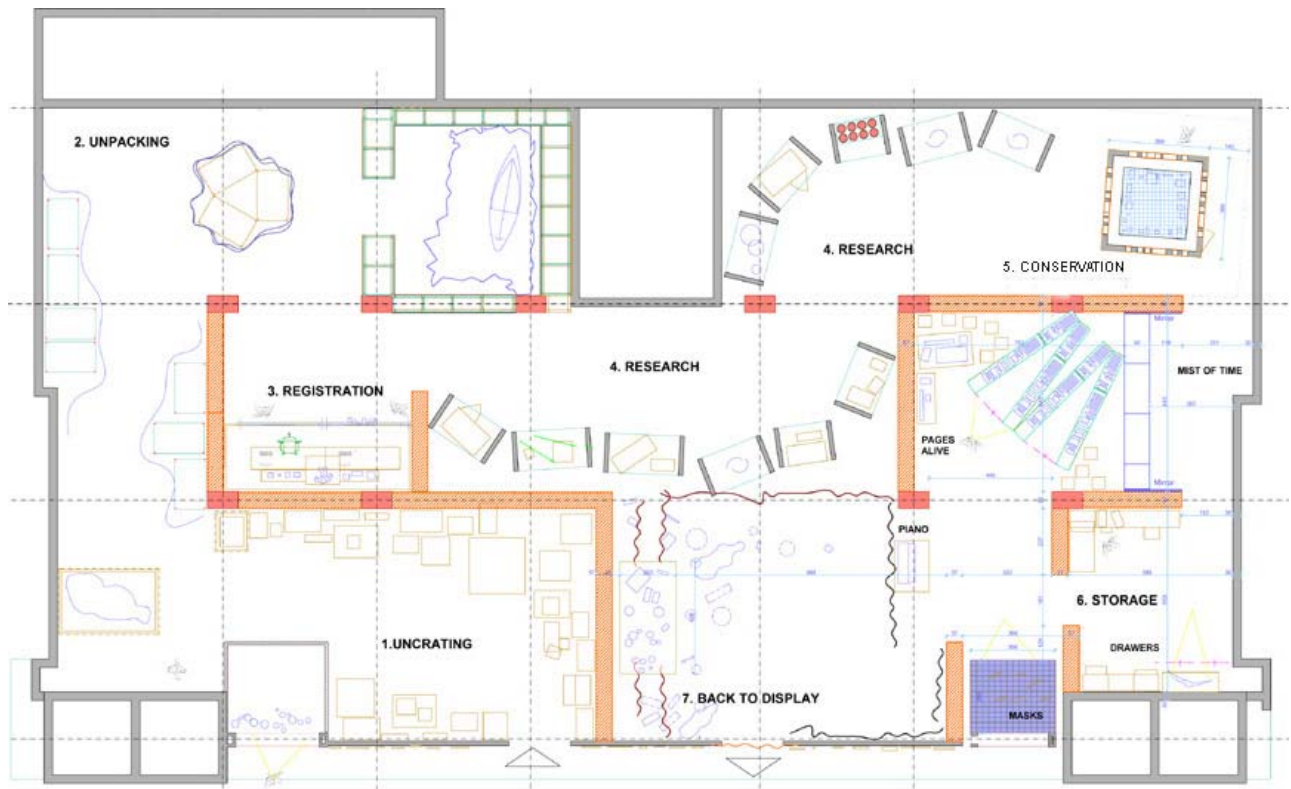
10am - 5pm daily

No charge (usual museum entry donation will be requested)

Download the Audio Tour from the Secrets website:

<http://www.aucklandmuseum.com/secrets> and save to your media player.

Exhibition Floor Plan



Tour starts here

Introduction

Kiaora and welcome to the highlights tour of **SECRETS REVEALED: The backstage mysteries of your Museum** exhibition at Auckland Museum.

Join Dr Tom Trnski, Research Manager at Auckland Museum, and John Early, Curator of Entomology and get closer to the stories, tales and historical information for this unique collection of objects

Did you know that only 2% of the museum's total collection is on display at any one time, and many of the almost 4 million objects, each of which has its own unique story to tell and history to share, have never been seen by the public?

Each section of this tour is divided into the key processing areas an object goes through on arrival at the museum.

Uncrating

Our tour starts off with the object's arrival in the **uncrating** area...

Ever heard the expression "to think outside the box"? At the museum that's how you have to think all the time. The objects in our collections come in boxes – or crates – to keep them safe during transport. They would never be stored long term in these crates – fumes or pests might ruin what's inside. But opening them on arrival is always a revelation. Long-hidden objects emerge into the half-light of the exhibition hall, reviving memory and asking silent questions: What am I? Where do I come from? How did I get here? Why have I been hidden for so long? What stories can I tell? The objects on display in a museum represent only a fraction of the total collection. So think of what you're seeing here as the iceberg, not the tip ... in other words, think outside the box!

Hello, I'm Tom; I'm the head of research and the former marine curator here at the Auckland Museum. I'll be walking through with John and giving you an introduction to the Secrets Exhibition. Hello I'm John; the curator of entomology here at the Museum. And as Tom said, we'll be taking a stroll through and looking at some of the very lovely, and interesting, exciting, sometimes strange and odd things that we have from our collections.

This is the area where objects when they first arrive into the museum come in various forms of packaging and where the objects are removed for further processing. Actually, this is how we like objects to arrive in the museum, securely protected in these sturdy wooden crates, to protect them from the dangers of transport, but it is not always the way that they come, sometimes it might be that they are brought in a cardboard carton in the back of someone's car.

*We are standing now in front of **object number 1** and these are Body Masks. Now just look on the label and you will see a podcast symbol on the label there and bear that in mind because that will help guide you through the rest of the tour. Now these body masks are really interesting things, they come from West Irian and no doubt they have incredibly interesting stories if only they could speak. One of the good things about these is that they were donated to us by a dealer in artifacts from Australia and it's great to know that people whose livelihoods, rely on the sale of these things still have it in their hearts to make sure that some of these are given to us and end up in collections to be seen and studied by other people. What I find interesting about these body masks, is firstly the rarity of these collections now, Irian Jiyah or West Irian is a place that is changing very rapidly. Traditional masks and body wear like this is becoming rarer and rarer and the benefit of having it deposited in the museum as John said, is that it will be used and available to the public and for researchers into the future.*

*We are now looking at **object number 2**, which is Colonel Haultain's uniform, his dress uniform. For me this uniform is stunning in its condition, for something that's 160 years old, but also it relates to how sometimes when collections arrive into the museum, the full provenance or history of the object, or the details of the object aren't fully known or they're not properly documented or recorded. And yet with some careful research, presumably by curators here at the museum, we've managed to find out where this uniform's come from, and its significance, and particularly its rarity, being the only known example of this type of uniform. Take a close look at the embroidery around the sleeves and around the collar, incredibly fine workmanship and detail, absolutely beautiful. I guess from looking at this too Colonel Haultain was not a particularly large man, quite slim if you compare him with today's army boys.*

Unpacking

Having uncrated our objects, we then need to unpack them, in the unpacking section...

It's the thought that counts – and a lot of thought goes into the packing and wrapping of a museum's treasured possessions. Apart from protecting the exhibits themselves, there is a psychological purpose to such careful and conscientious packing: the people on the receiving end will treat the package with greater respect. This was the philosophy of Margaret MacKean-Taylor, who was in charge of packing New Zealand's "Treasures of the Underworld" exhibition for the Seville Expo in 1998. Make the boxes "gorgeous on the outside" and "delicious on the inside", she would say, and they will be that much safer. And, like all presents, a museum's exhibits can be seen as gifts in their own right – either from a generous donor, or to an appreciative audience.

We're now in the section which deals with unpacking these objects from the crates. It's often quite a tricky and intricate business, because they've been packed incredibly carefully and with the variety of materials depending on the kind of object that it is. It takes a very delicate and steady hand, and of course it's very important that any information that comes in with the object in its crate is kept with that object and not lost.

*Looking at **object 3**, which is the mask and the doll, the interesting thing is that this is a rare find, because generally these would be disposed of, or left to drift down river and never rescued so to speak. Its role was to clear the village or the houses of evil spirits, so the fact that it was rescued suggests that the evil spirits are still contained in it.*

*We're now standing in front of **object number 4**. You'll see there's a lovely cocked hat and the tin box that it would have been kept in, and this has got a really interesting history. We know quite a bit about the man who owned this hat, and probably some of the events that he was in when it was on his head, and if this hat could see and speak, doubtless it witnessed all these things. But most of the significant activity was when its owner was in Burma. He was there when the British quelled the Burmese uprising, he went right up to the Great Dragon Pagoda, which is one of the most stunning landmarks in Rangoon, and not only did they deal with the rebellious Burmese, but he also purloined a few things and brought them back with him, spoils of war or plunder, I'm sure we would have a different view of his activities today. But the hat is a nice reminder of the imperial links between South Asia, New Zealand, Australia and a lot of the other countries that were part of the English Empire. We now contain visible evidence of this linkage in the history of New Zealand.*

***Object 5** is a brandy bottle. It's an old bottle that was found in Durham Street, Auckland. What is really amazing about this is for a 160 year old bottle to have its contents still in tact. Now we don't dare even open this bottle, as tempting as it might be.*

Registration

Once unpacked we need to take careful note of what we have in Registration...

Welcome to the nerve centre of the museum. Every object that passes through the doors – coming or going – must be accounted for. The registration process ensures we know what we own, what's out on loan, what's borrowed and even what we have to dispose of. When you're home to as many exhibits and collections as this museum, this is a huge and vital job. Is there room in the collection store for a new acquisition? Does it fit our collection policy? Does it need special conservation work? Are there any legal or copyright issues about displaying it? And when the museum decides that something is past its use-by date – known as "de-accession" – the whole process has to happen in reverse. If the museum has lent or borrowed objects, registration is responsible for the contracts, insurance and freight logistics. So much paper work, so little time!

The Registration section is quite a critical part of the museum's function, and all museums have some form of registration, and their role really is to coordinate the documentation, the transport, the movement, the inventory of all the objects that come through the museum. This is critically important because often in the past we've found we got things in our collections and where there's a lot of that vital information that wasn't recorded at the time- we hope that our procedures are a little bit better

these days. But, you're going to find one object in this exhibition where that definitely was not the case.

Here's **object number 8**, we're standing looking at one of the latest acquisitions to the museum's collection. This is a character and he has a name, Jerry Jaxon, don't you think he's looks a bit spookily like a faded pop star with a similar name? He's a ventriloquist's puppet, and he had a very colourful life in New Zealand, particularly during the Second World War. He was one of the most well traveled individuals in New Zealand at that time, I suppose, he entertained the troops during the Second World War, and certainly had an important role to play in keeping morale up during that time. He's also had lots of brushes with fame, including Betty Grable, and characters like that, and had his own radio show. It's really impressive that we've ended up with him in our collection, it's just a shame it's taken so long to get him here.

Here's **object number 7**, you might be asking why are we showing you the stuffed head of a moose, and the whole point of this is the fact that this is one of the valuable things in the collection, but we have no information about it at all, absolutely nothing. Strange to think that you can discover something of this size only twenty years ago in a storeroom, and not to have any information about it, but there it is, we keep it because it's a good example of a moose, and it's the only one we've got- and that's why we keep call this fellow the Moose on the Loose.

Research Cabinets

Once registered we need to know how to treat our objects- that takes Research....

People sometimes think of museums as places where time has stopped – where old things go to be looked at, but not much more. Nothing could be further from the truth. The museum is a living research institution, constantly investigating and updating its knowledge for the benefit of academic study and public appreciation. The curators of all our different departments are responsible for gathering and recording information about all the objects within their area and discipline. For the History Curator, the stories of people, places and events associated with an object will be important. For the Natural History Curator, it will be the scientific classifications and field collection details they focus on. All of that information is then captured, and becomes an invaluable resource for current and future generations to build on.

We now move into one of the very important and interesting aspects of life at the museum, and this deals with research. It's one thing to have objects and specimens in our collections, but we need to know about them, we need to be able to interpret them, to research them, to discover new information, and to present that to people who come to the museum, and in publications and in all kinds of other ways. OK, in this section we've got a whole lot of boxes which deal with the various curatorial disciplines that we deal with in this museum. I

(Object number 8)

The **Marine Biology** cabinet, the animals in this cabinet have been arranged in a taxonomic order of some sort, where all the animals that are related to each other are on one shelf, for example the molluscs are all sea shells, the crustaceans are all crabs and crayfish and their allies. What's really nicely displayed in this cabinet is the diversity, within each of these groups. There all share a common ancestor, yet they've radiated and diversified into a huge range and variety of body shapes and body forms that is the diversity of life.

(Object number 9)

Come and have a look at the one dealing with insects- **it's called Entomology**. One of the best things that we have is an old writing desk, which belonged to Major Broom. He didn't keep it to store his files and papers in- he kept his collection of foreign beetles in it. And so in this desk, in all those drawers, between there's just over 13,000 beetles. 13,000 beetles that he managed to get off various collectors all around the world. He was a really keen collector of New Zealand beetles, and he would exchange New Zealand beetles with anyone who was happy to give him stuff from somewhere else around the world. He didn't just do it for the sake of collecting through, he was a researcher. He's responsible for naming and describing 3,000 species of New Zealand beetles, and many of those still carry the names that he gave them, we still use them to this day.

(Object number 10)

Botany cabinet, these are the tools of the trade for Botanists. You'll see on the wall behind the final examples of what the Botanists plant specimens look like once they've been collected and prepared. But you'll see a plant press- the way they get them in those nice flat shapes to stick on the pieces of card. And look too on the desk, one of the most important pieces of equipment for all research in all of the natural sciences is the microscope- without that we couldn't see half the detail that we need to, to find out what these things are, to identify them accurately, to prepare the descriptions and illustrations needed to describe new species.

Conservation

Once everything's identified we move to Conservation...

A museum isn't just a big display case, it's a workshop too. A lot of the objects in our collections are old, fragile or damaged when they first arrive. Our job is to preserve them as best we can, sometimes even improve them, so they can be exhibited, studied, interpreted and enjoyed. As you will see, this isn't always easy. Some exhibits are simply beyond repair. Others have been mistreated or neglected. And some are so unusual or rare that knowing how to treat them is a challenge in itself. And then there's the question of whether to repair something at all – perhaps the damage or the missing parts tell their own story, every bit as important as an object in "perfect" condition. The museum conservator's role is to balance all these considerations and stay true to the purpose of the collection or exhibition.

Conservation is a critical part of all museums, and it's where objects are repaired, and also stabilized to prevent further damage either from the environment or from poor handling or accidental damage. The conservation unit also provides guidelines on long-term specimen care, and particularly the environment that specimens and objects need to be housed in. And that can include temperature, humidity, the container they are stored in, the materials that are touching the object.

***Object 11**, these old dolls are known around this place as the ugly dolls, and I think you can see why, they're certainly no pin-ups are they? They've had a hard life, presumably well loved by many children over their rather long lives, and you can see that they're quite the worse for wear. They're here in the conservation section, they're not going to be restored, but they'll be stabilized and kept like this. In fact don't you think they tell more of a story looking like this after being owned and loved presumably by generations, or several generations of children- rather than in the beautiful pristine condition they would have been in when they were bestowed upon the darling of some family?*

Take a look now at **object number 12**, the Ice-Baby. This is a baby orangutan still frozen. It's an example of the kind of thing that we often get, large animals that come into the collections before they can be processed, have got to be kept appropriately, and in this case the only way to do it is to freeze it. This particular one, looking uncannily like a sleeping baby, came to us from the Auckland Zoo. And at some stage when there's a need, when there's money, when there's time, this sleeping baby will be processed and will be put out on display.

Storage

Once an object has been appropriately conserved it makes its way to storage- in which there are four sections: *Mists of Time, Pages Alive, Drawers and Masks...*

With millions of individual objects in our collections you can imagine we need a bit of storage. Not just any old storage, of course, because everything has its own special needs. There are very large objects, very old and delicate objects, very precious objects – and living objects too. The temperature and humidity of our storage systems has to be strictly controlled and monitored. Just as important is that we can find and access an object when it is required for research or display. So you can see, we don't just throw things in a cupboard and forget them!

*The **Mists of Time** section is a representation of the range of objects that we have and their ages, and the history of these objects- not everything in our museum is old. The collections we have tell us quite a lot about the history of the museum, and the way that what we hold was*

developed over time. Some of the things that we collected way back in 1852 are not the kinds of things we would be collecting today.

Lets look at **object number 13**, this is a pearl shell fishing lure, known as the Tairua lure because that's where it was discovered, Tairua on the Coromandal Peninsula. And although it only came to the museum in the 1950s, we think it's actually about 600 years old, so it is probably one of the first artifacts that came to New Zealand with our original Polynesian settlers. And you know John, what I find fascinating about this lure, is that I was in French Polynesia about fifteen years ago, on a remote atoll, and a local fisher gave me one very similar to this as a gift. Although the only difference is that the hook on my lure is made of aluminium, I don't know what the original Polynesians would have used as a hook on this particular lure.

Object 14

But compare that to the tarantula- now this is not an old object- this is actually a living tarantula. But it will once it dies, in five, ten, maybe twenty years time end up in our collection, and in a hundred years time it will also be about as old as the pearl fishing lure.

In the section on **Drawers**, we're looking at just one form of storage for our collections, we can use shelves, and drawers have been an efficient way of storing smaller objects or flatter objects. Some of these drawers date back from the nineteenth century, and some of them are even built by the collectors, the people who collected the objects. As you wander through this drawers section, look at the magnificent objects on display, and listen to their stories.

Object 15, is just one of about 800 glass plate negatives. One of the component collections in the museum's very, very extensive pictorial collection, which includes things just like these negatives, photographs, paintings, drawings etc. It's an old collection, and it came to the museum about twenty years ago, but the donor who gave it to us was not the photographer. So as you can see, these are of quite of historic importance, recording life in New Zealand quite some time ago.

Object 16 is a collection of military medals. The Auckland Museum holds arguably the most comprehensive collection of military medals in New Zealand.

This section of the exhibition we call **Pages Alive**, and it deals with our very important library. The books, the manuscripts, archives and maps that are housed in the library, are actively used by researchers, by members of the public, to interpret our history, to interpret our collections- and so they're not just static objects that sit there, for decades or even hundreds of years, but they become essential reference material and resources for our research and increasing our knowledge. It's an incredible resource, you'll find a huge collection of books, about two kilometres or so of them, thousands of maps, real gold if you like from the literature. It's actively used by researchers today, it's not just kept here because they are old and precious things.

Object 17. This is an interesting map of Campbells Beach, it looks like its been rather chucked around a bit and had a bit of a hard life, and it was probably used by a land agent for their records, probably in promoting real estate up at Campbells Bay. Would this have been enough to make you write a cheque for a deposit on a section there for your holiday house? It looks like it dates from about 1930, and you can see from the lovely pictures of the Pohutukawa flowers, to give us some sense of summer by the beach and add to its appeal.

Object 18, is a book recording some of the voyages of the exploratory vessels that were cruising the Pacific in the late eighteen and early nineteenth century. France, as well as England during this era, were actively exploring the Pacific, the Astrolabe or L'Astrolabe, was just one of the many ships that participated in these voyages, and the book records the exploration of the Pacific in the 1820s. They invested a lot of energy in recording the natural world, as well as the human inhabitants and the societies that they lived in. Books such as this recorded their observations and made that knowledge available to the people of distant Europe that saw the Pacific as an exotic and magical place.

Secrets No More

Lastly we head into Secrets No-more, which sees selected objects put on display for all to see. And so we come full circle, from uncrating, through registration and research, to storage and finally display. Your journey through the many stages of the museum process is at an end, and for the tens of thousands of

objects now returned to the museum for on-site storage, their long journey is over too- home at last.

Object 19. *This is a dance mask from Indonesia. This dance mask is one of a kind that's rarely seen in museum collections, and this particular one that you are looking at now, this is the first time it's ever been put on display.*

Object 20. *If you look closely, on the stage, you will see a pretty ratty looking cat. This, in fact is the last feral cat that was collected on Little Barrier Island. It represents the end of the feral cat dynasty on Little Barrier and it paved the way for some rare birds like the Stitchbird and the Kakapo to be reintroduced to the Island.*

Thanks very much for joining Tom and I on this Secrets Exhibition audio tour. If you want more information, you can find it on the Museum's website, www.aucklandmuseum.com. We hope you enjoyed discovering the backstage secrets of your museum, and learning more about these objects, their unique stories and fascinating histories. As mentioned earlier these objects are only a very small percentage of the vast collection at Auckland Museum, much of which is still waiting to be seen. Over time many objects from the museum's collection have been loaned to other institutions, but for the first time in over ten years they all back under one dome. Thanks for joining us to celebrate the return of these objects and your museum's fascinating collection.

ENDS