

Roving Museum Officer



Switzers (Waikaia) Museum Inc. 1956.1 Chinese composition boy doll in embroidered silk costume. Gift of Pat Turnbull.

6-monthly report

1 April – 30 September 2021

Introduction

Following the opening of Te Puka o Te Waka on 1 December 2021 RMO work has been focused on smaller collection-based projects and on-going reporting along with involvement in local and regional heritage initiatives including Project ARK interspersed with the changes and challenges of Covid lockdowns and level changes.

From April through June 2021 an inventory of collections at Lumsden was begun along with some interim housing and triage and I worked with the Switzers (Waikaia) Museum Inc. on a collection registration issue, began a project on their extensive bottle collection for their 'bottle house' story and initiated a public New Zealand Archaeological Association (NZAA) lecture event in Waikaia in support of the early cemetery.

From June I assisted with Project ARK registration documentation for Te Hikoi and was involved in discussions with the Oraka Aparima Runaka around taonga cataloguing and digitization protocols. I researched and updated the Riverton Heritage Society on the significance of their founding 'George Lewis Maclachlan' collection and assisted Laurence Le Ber in the design of specialized arms storage.

From the middle of June I assisted Otautau Museum with some collection housing and discussions regarding the resurgence and treatment of borer in Southland's museum collections were begun and a proposal to approach the issue regionally was discussed.

2021 was intended to be a year of getting back in touch with museums that had not had the level of assistance that those undergoing redevelopments had and a visit was made to the Waikawa & Districts Museum Inc and a proposal to work with them on their collections for three days a week for weeks months was suggested. As this work was during the Winter some time was spent in the area for health and safety reasons. In line with this not long after arriving at the museum a major hazard was identified by the RMO and dealt with and will lead to a resource for our museums as a refresher on some of the more common hazards in our generalized collections. Work here was halted due to lock down during which a few smaller projects such as the 'Māori Cloaks and textiles held by the Riverton Heritage Society Inc. (September 2021)' document finalized.

Some of our smaller museums have struggled as their ability to fundraise in traditional ways have been curtailed and some volunteers have been hesitant about returning for a variety of reasons but many museums have taken up hardship grants when on offer and a few have even thrived with changing visitor types and/or increasing visitation as many Kiwis seek to get out and about within Aotearoa / New Zealand. One comment from a museum was that "we've had fewer visitors but a lot more donations".

As RMO I have changed the way that I work with some museums and developed a 'Covid Plan' that will enable me to continue working with our volunteer-run museums for example distributing archival materials as required. The bulk storage initiative has been of great advantage during this time as supplies become increasingly harder to get.



Bulk materials previously temporarily stored at the SDC archive building have been moved to the Switzers (Waikaia) Museum Inc. secondary store where delivery and access will be easier particularly in varying levels of Covid / pandemic restrictions. During Level 3 archival materials were ordered and then delivered to the RMO's home address but in future deliveries will be made to Waikaia.

Otautau Museum

Suzie Best – Collection Manager at Otautau Museum has been engaged to carry out a complete cataloguing project of the collections of the Otautau Museum and as RMO I have been able to supplement materials they have already purchased for their project and to assist with the housing of collections and packing training for Otautau as the museum seeks to responsibly care for their local collections.

Other work that myself and Laurence Le Ber will be assisting with for Otautau Museum will be pest control and the set-up of their collection storage spaces over time. The Museum committee have undertaken major work on the building facing and dealing with the limitations of an older wooden building – in this case a courthouse that is also a listed building and I would like to acknowledge the assistance of the committee and in particular Chair Tania Beck.



The collection at Otautau Museum is not a large one but what is there will be well managed and housed/catalogued. Collection Manager Suzie Best has purchased materials for the housing of the collections through various grants and these will be supplemented by materials from the RMO Bulk Purchase initiative and assistance and advice over time provided by the RMO and conservator Laurence LeBer.

Otautau museum has an issue with borer beetle in its building fabric and with the collections being at risk Suzie has been tasked with removing the collections from the museum to a container so that the building can be fumigated while the collections are protected. Some items that may have active borer beetle damage have been wrapped and will be frozen as part of a regional approach to integrated pest management.

Waikawa Museum

In early June I had planned to start work at the Waikawa & Districts Museum. I had worked with them several years before on the storage of their photograph collection and was to continue this work and identify other areas of need with regard to their generalised collection. However, the day I arrived a major hazard on display was identified.

Picric Acid – a highly volatile compound when degraded but previously used as a wound dressing turns up in our museum collections from time to time most often in medical kits from around 1915 and was on display at Waikawa as part of a WWI medical kit.

Around 2015 we had checked the collections of our small museum for this hazard but the tin on display read 'Picric Acid' and immediately I advised the volunteer on duty and they the committee of a need to take immediate action, calling the local fire brigade, ultimately closing the museum and the New Zealand Defence Force Explosive Ordnance Disposal unit based in Christchurch was called in to assess the situation and dispose of the substance safely.

The incident at Waikawa was one of several up and down the country as these identifications are often catalysts for identification clusters but has been a prompt for the RMO to begin work on a basic resource for our small museums on the main potential hazards in their collections. It is also intended that the RMO and conservator Laurence Le Ber visit each of the museums and check with them for any obvious hazards and carry out basic training and give guidance where required.

As RMO I would like to commend the volunteers of the Waikawa & Districts Museum for their action in dealing with this issue.



Picric acid in the form of a powder in a tin at right as part of a WWI medical kit visible on display at the centre of the photograph on the right. The fire brigade was called and the area cordoned off with the museum evacuated and shut until the issue was dealt with by the NZDF Explosive Ordnance Disposal unit based in Christchurch.

There was quite a bit of media attention around this incident and several other museums identified similar issues. A positive outcome was an interview with the RMO by the Otago Daily Times on our small museums with the RMO taking a reporter to Switzers Museum Waikaia to talk about work that is carried out by our museums and the RMO. The intention was to travel from Waikaia to Waikawa but the weather on the day

precluded this. It is hoped however that further articles on our smaller mainly volunteer-run museums and their collections will result from this¹.

After this incident work was started on the photograph collections and also on the exterior storeroom collections. Waikawa has a significant generalised collection that is housed in a conglomerate of wooden buildings and is a priority for the RMO with regard to assisting with collection care and packing.



Original photographs from the collections of the Waikawa & Districts Museum were housed and given locations and packing of the generalized collections in the exterior storeroom begun. Items such as this early French 'S.F.B. J. 60 Paris' bisque headed and varnished plaster of paris articulated doll were given specialized housing.



¹ ODT 'Treasured Objects Hold Region's Stories' 28 August 2021 by Laura Smith.



Textiles currently on display at the Waikawa & Districts Museum Inc.

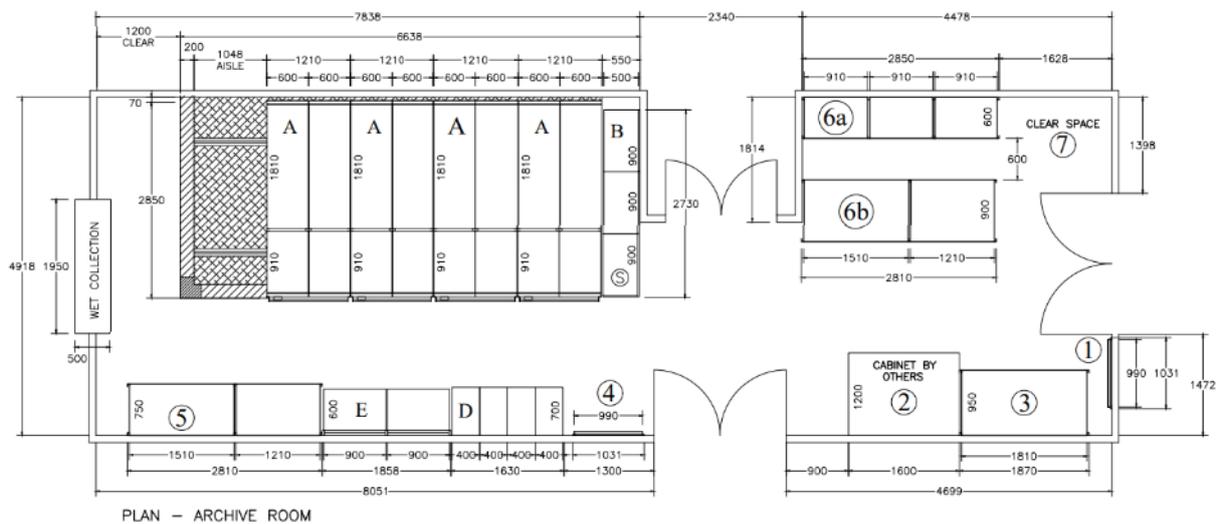
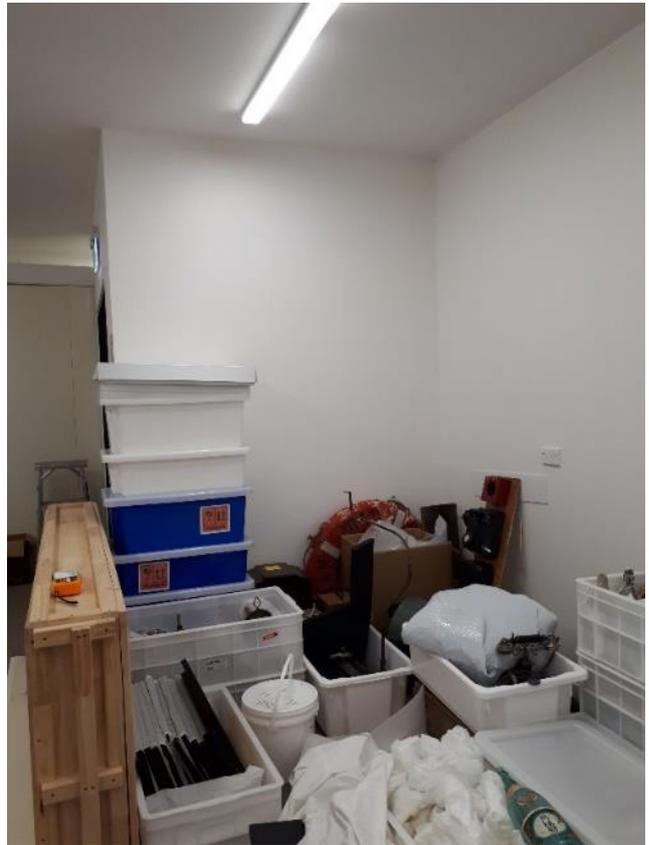
An area of particular interest to the RMO is the textile collections at the Waikawa & Districts Museum Inc. and it is intended that over time the cataloguing, storage and display of this significant collection can be improved. The RMO is looking at a regional approach to some of the at-risk textile collections and items of significance.

Te Puka o Te Waka / Rakiura Museum

The collections of Te Puka o Te Waka / Rakiura Museum not on display (inside and/or outside) are now housed in the new museum storeroom with lockable compactable shelving units, vertical slot housing and textile and map bolster units, in the hazard cabinet purchased specifically for storage of their wet collections (along with any flammable or otherwise volatile chemicals) or in the adjoining collection preparation room.

The RMO has assisted the museum committee in planning additional shelving and storage units for the collections not already housed with the intention of visiting at a later date to train the volunteers so that they might continue packing their collections and to also assist with the move of any remaining collections into additional storage units.

This work was originally planned for the end of 2021 but with Covid and a need for the shelving installers to concentrate on Project ARK's Te Hikoi project it is hoped that this will now occur in early-mid 2022.



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for more information



Hydestor plan for additional storage furniture at Te Puka o Te Waka / Rakiura Museum

Some of the larger objects such as whale bones need to be lifted from the floor and will be housed on heavier duty units (6b in the above plan). Longer items such as whaling implements and agricultural tools can also be housed with some of them supported and suspended on racking with every space available being used. 'Cabinet of Others' (2) in the above illustration refers to a purpose-built cloak storage unit that will be able to be moved from storage to display as required.



The collections have been housed in the new museum storeroom with lockable compactable shelving units on the left and vertical slot housing and textile and map bolster units.



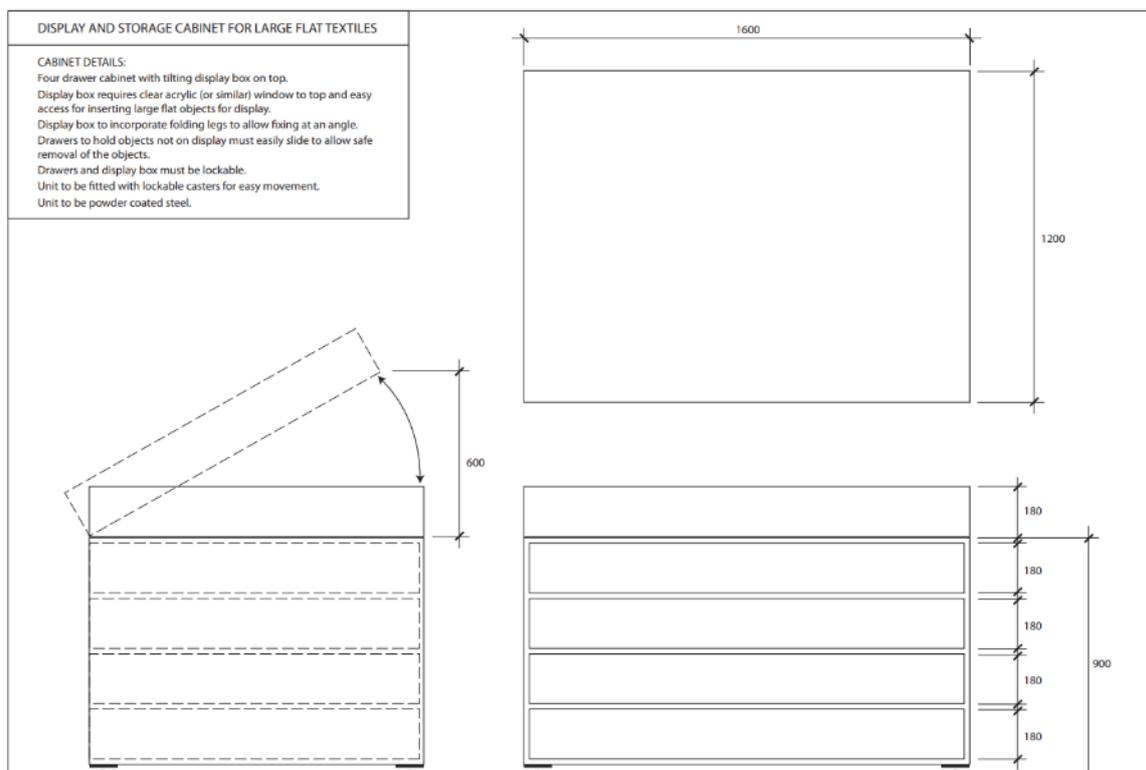
In-case (at left) and room environmental monitors installed at Te Puka o Te Waka, Rakiura Museum Stewart Island.

The museum redevelopment was a catalyst for the arrival of several significant collections and taonga via gift, long-term loan and deposit and I worked with Rakiura Museum on documentation for these negotiations. The RMO loaned the museum several environmental monitors so that they could meet the terms of their inward loan agreements but have now purchased their own room and in-case monitors as shown in the red circles in the case for the bow cover from Doughboy Bay and above the display cases in the Tangata Whenua display.

One inward loan of particular significance during the redevelopment and opening was a cloak from the Topi Whānau. This whitau (flax fibre) and wool-embellished korowai woven in the 1850s for paramount chief of Ruapuke, Topi Patuki that was presented to Mayor Ott when the first tram started running in Invercargill [1912] was returned to the Topi whanau by the Ott family in 2011 after they heard of the death of several Topi family members in the Foveaux Strait 'Kotuku' fishing disaster in 2006 and in July 2020 this was inwardly loaned by the family to Te Puka o Te Waka/Rakiura Museum.

Advantage was taken of a finally executed long-planned Maori cloak cleaning workshop at Te Hikoi Museum (Riverton) in August 2020 with textile conservator Tracey Wedge brought over to the Island at the same time to assess the Topi cloak for display and storage.

It was decided that this precious taonga was too fragile to go on display suspended in the new museum but a moveable storage and display unit was discussed and a prototype drawn by Stephen Davies after discussions with the committee and Topi whanau representatives.



Planning drawing for cloak storage / display unit at Te Puka o Te Waka / Rakiura Museum. Stephen Davies 2021.

This metal and Perspex/glass prototype with cloak drawers and purpose-built trays to support the cloaks will be built locally as soon as possible so that this significant taonga can be both displayed and cared for. It is intended that it match the display cases already at the museum and that it is both moveable and accessible as required by whanau.

This prototype or a version of it might be replicated at Te Hikoi Museum, Riverton. Currently a lack of storage/display space does not allow this however and storage/display of their significant Māori cloak and textile storage will depend on their future display and design plans and discussions with the Ōraka Aparima Rūnaka.



Stephen Davies, RMO, Anita Geeson, Textile Conservator Tracey Wedge, Jo Riksem (obscured) and Colin Topi assessing the whitau (flax fibre) and wool-embellished korowai made in the 1850s for paramount chief of Ruapuke, Topi Patuki (Waitaha).



Te Hikoi Museum

In August 2020 textile conservator Tracey Wedge returned to Riverton to complete a project on the Maori textiles that was begun while she was working at the Southland Museum and Art Gallery. The initial project (at a workshop held in 2015) involved an assessment of the collection and upon her return and funding gained from 2017 Tracey, assisted by her husband Stephen, froze (to treat for possible infestation), re-humidified, surface cleaned and stored this significant cloak collection.

Tracey and Stephen also travelled to Stewart Island in the middle of this two-week project to assess a significant cloak that had just arrived there before returning to Riverton to continue with the Te Hikoi taonga.

Materials were sourced and supplied by the RMO for the workshop and excellent storage solutions were made by Stephen for these significant textiles. The creation of these storage solutions (large boxes where some of the large cloaks could lie flat) has highlighted the growing need for a long-term solution for the storage of these taonga and a unit discussed on the island and referred to under Te Puka o Te Waka / Rakiura Museum may be created for Riverton as well.



Stephen Davies, Riverton Heritage Society collection volunteer Hugh Brown and Nola Fleck re-humidifying.

The RMO is currently working with people including Laurence LeBer on integrated pest management for several of Southland's museums and on the regional borer issue – including how we deal with the material left at Wyndham and any other collection based 'object' treatments (e.g. picture frames already identified at Te Hikoi) or other concerns that will crop up in this regard as Project ARK moves through the region.

I have been working on an arms storage solution with Chair Stephen Bradshaw, Laurence Le Ber and Pip Harrison of Hydestor shelving solutions and on research around the George MacLauchlan WESA (Wallace Early Settler's) 'founding' collection.

As RMO I am also involved in the development of significance criteria for Project ARK along with iwi liaison discussions around collection management and the creation of any registration documentation with Project ARK and the RHS/Te Hikoi, e.g. as this is largely beyond the official remit of Project ARK to pack and digitise the collections.



De-installed archive 'supermarket' shelving outside Te Hikoi museum ready for pick up.

Archive shelving removed from the main storeroom at Te Hikoi was picked up by the RMO and Mairi Dickson with some transported to Otautau Museum and remainder taken to a secondary storage space at Switzers (Waikaia) Museum Inc.

It is intended that this shelving be erected in the container at Otautau and also in their storeroom and/or other spaces under the guidance of Laurence LeBer as they work on the packing and storage of their collections and a smaller amount to the Waikaia Museum for their secondary storage space. The RMO and Otautau and Switzers Museums are extremely grateful for Te Hikoi gifting this shelving to them.

Switzers Museum



The old gully or 'Chinese cemetery' as it is often called dates from the late 1860s – early 1880s. We know that over 40 non-Chinese are buried there along with several Chinese gold seekers. It is unknown however how many remain and ongoing work on Switzers story by the Waikaia community has been undertaken.

At the end of April 2021 there was an event by the New Zealand Archaeological Association (NZAA) held at Switzers Museum, Waikaia for New Zealand Archaeology Week.

This free public lecture entitled 'Life and Death in Colonial New Zealand: The Southern Settlers Cemetery' by Dr Peter Petchey and Professor Hallie Buckley was about archaeological investigations that they had undertaken at historical cemeteries to locate unrecorded burials and to learn more about the first generations of immigrant settlers.

The idea to host the event was a follow on from the successful NZAA Conference on Rakiura / Stewart Island in 2019 and a desire to know more about the old gully cemetery just out of Waikaia that we believe dates from around 1860 to 1880.

Their lecture/talk held in the research room of the Switzers Museum, Waikaia was attended by around 25 people and followed by a site visit to the old Switzers Cemetery where Peter and Hallie described how they decide where to excavate, the process of excavation and exhumation of burials, and the challenges they can encounter.

Switzers (Waikaia) Museum Inc. always innovative and responsive to their community while seeking opportunities outside of their area catered the event and provided transport to the site.



On site at the old gully cemetery Waikaia during the NZAA Week event on 27 April 2021. Three headstones remain with one belonging to a Chinese gold seeker, one to a child not yet a year old and one to a European gold seeker/settler. Several of the names associated with the cemetery are still associated with the town and the people want to ensure that this area is cared for.

The RMO was based at Waikaia assisting the museum committee in a collection transfer and beginning work on their vast bottle collection. Switzers (Waikaia) Museum Inc intends to re-create the bottle story in the area attached to the bottle-house and work has begun by the committee on securing the bottle structure while the RMO has started inventorying the vast bottle collection. After this work themes and stories will be developed and new displays planned and designed. What began as a novelty for the community has become a comparatively significant icon and probably the last of its type (i.e. a bottle house that visitors can go into) in Australasia.



Part of the collection of approximately 1500 bottles in the Switzers Museum that will be processed leading toward exhibition planning in the bottle house (at left) and the range of visitors to the museum towards the end of their usual 'Winter' closing down period (at right).

The museum's collection continues to grow with significant items coming in, for example medals that support the story of Alexander Robertson currently on display and several that relate to the Chinese mission story. Switzers tells a story of Chinese gold seekers in Waikaia but also has an interest in the missionaries that went to China at the turn of the 20th century.



Chinese doll and writing box given by missionary Agnes Jane Pownall to her god-daughter Pat Turnbull.



One of the old Gully cemetery families cut ties with the area in August 2021 gifting a significant Victorian period 'hair work' and the uniform (including the flying suit) of Lancaster bomber pilot Flight Lieutenant Walter "Wattie" Stirling (DFC). Above is Wattie's son Tup Stirling as he said his final goodbye to these items. Switzer's (Waikaia) Museum Inc. is honoured to look after these items and intends to display the uniform on ANZAC Day 2022.

Other

The Wyndham and Districts Historical Society are in the process of planning their museum redevelopment and have fundraised, carried out community engagement and interpretation planning. In August 2020 they had a forward planning workshop facilitated by Heritage consultant John Coster as a lead in to a feasibility study (now completed). I will be reconnecting with this group from December 2021 as they seek to redevelop and resolve the issue of the storage and display of their significant collections.

A project brief for SBHS Museum inventory work was carried out for a scoping visit with a view to this museum having its collection captured. The scoping visit was funded by the SRHC and the museum is looking forward to the collection being fully captured by Paula Haines-Bellamy in early-mid 2022 once additional funding has been gained.

In the last 6 months I have also attended a 'Collection Rationalisation' workshop (at Central Stories, Alexandra presented by Jane Leggett) and liaised with Judith Taylor on Collection management – rationalisation (deaccession and disposal), Nyssa Mildwarers (Tū Tonu – Otago/Southland regional 15 month initiative) and several proposed and new Roving Heritage role candidates as other areas seek to assist their area museums.

As with 2019 my intention at the beginning of the year was to visit all of the museum but this has been interrupted at various times by Covid levels. I briefly met with Thornbury museums whom are carrying out some great projects and hope to spend time with them in early 2022 inventorying their 'Turnbull family' accession and looking for a display solution for their significant wool sample collection amassed by Derek Turnbull.



Part of the wool collection shown at right of the image as part of the Turnbull collection left to the Thornbury Vintage Tractor and Machinery Museum

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the Southland District Council for their continued support of this position and recognize the Community Trust South and the Southland Regional Heritage Committee in providing this opportunity for the smaller mainly volunteer museums around Southland through the establishment of the Roving Museums Officer position and their strategic approach that signals an ongoing commitment to the preservation of Southland's moveable cultural heritage (museums).

The ongoing assistance of Jim Geddes (professional supervisor) and Fran Mikulicic (SDC support) has also been greatly appreciated.

Finally, I would like to sincerely thank and acknowledge all of the volunteers in Southland's smaller museums who continue to care for their community's heritage and share our 'Southland' stories even in these challenging times.

Kia ora koutou,

Jo Massey - Roving Museum Officer (Southland Regional Heritage Committee)

September 2021

Mō tātou, a mō ngā uri kei te heke mai

For us, and, for the generations to come

