

Media release

9.00am, 20 November 2014

Akaroa Powerhouse building restored to former glory

Akaroa township celebrates a further step forward today with the reopening of the recently repaired and renovated Orion Powerhouse Gallery. The 100 year old brick building has a Category 2 Historic Places Trust listing and was closed in September 2010 following the Christchurch earthquakes.

Built in 1911 as a power station, the Powerhouse Gallery building is owned by Orion New Zealand Limited. It was used pre earthquake as a community facility and housed the museum of technology and the original hydro generating plant for Akaroa township.

Orion CEO Rob Jamieson is proud to be returning the building to the community.

“The Powerhouse Gallery is an essential part of the history of both Akaroa and Orion. The earthquakes taught us all that a strong sense of community is essential during times of disaster and it was important to both Orion and the wider Akaroa community that the building be repaired and restored. We expect that it will continue providing valuable service to the community for a considerable time to come.

“The Canterbury region lost so many historic buildings during the quakes and so we are extremely delighted to play a part in this restoration,” said Jamieson.

The Powerhouse Gallery was originally built to house one of the South Island’s early hydro generating sets, with electricity generated using a water driven Pelton wheel linked to a dynamo. The plant remained on standby use for the township after Akaroa was connected to the national grid in 1923. In 1955 it was taken out of service and the hydro generator was sold in 1965 to generate electricity at Maruia Springs. In 1974 the empty Powerhouse building started a new life as a gallery and community performance space. The old hydro plant was returned to Akaroa in 1997 and underwent significant refurbishment before being reinstalled in the Powerhouse Gallery in 2013.

Visitors to the Gallery might recognise some of the fixtures and fittings in the restored building. Historical street lights previously used in the Mega Watt café in the old MED building on Manchester Street, Christchurch, have been installed in the building.

The Orion Powerhouse Gallery and historic Hydro generator received a 2014 Vero Canterbury Heritage Award.

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About Orion

Orion New Zealand Limited:

- owns and operates the electricity distribution network in central Canterbury between the Waimakariri and Rakaia rivers
- distributes electricity to more than 190,000 homes and businesses
- is owned by the Christchurch City Council (89.3%) and the Selwyn District Council (10.7%).