

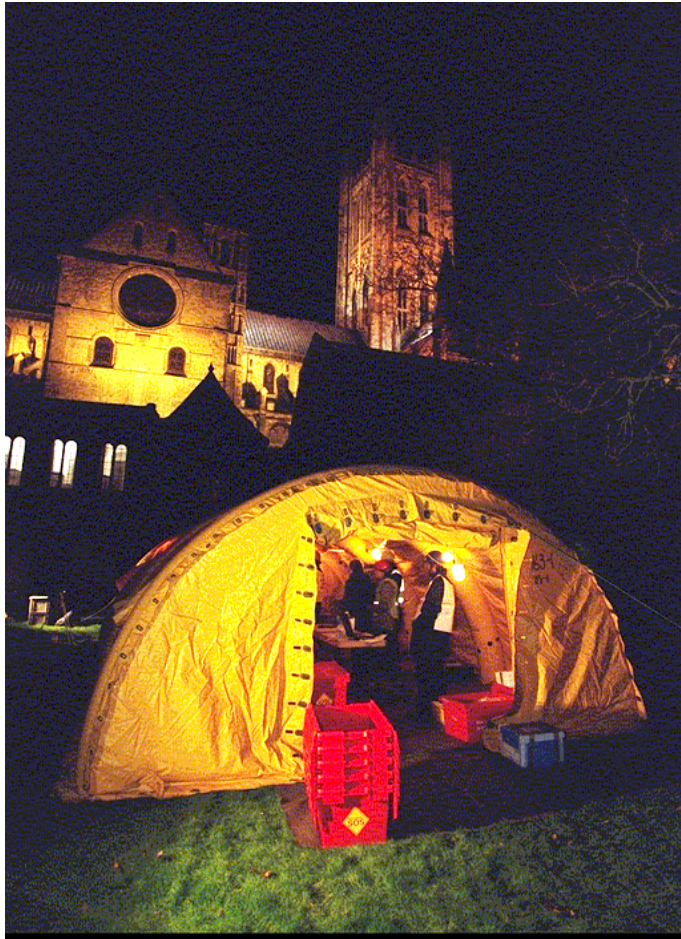
# Canterbury Cathedral Fire



At 6.30 pm a large blaze was discovered by a workman in one of the towers of Canterbury cathedral. Luckily he had his mobile telephone with him and he was able to call for help. Within 2 minutes the first Kent Fire Engine arrived and within half an hour there were 20 pumps and 100 fire fighters. As it became apparent that the historical archives were at risk the archivist Heather Forbes contacted the Document S.O.S 24 hour emergency hotline. The SOS Disaster Response Team arrived half an hour later with exactly the necessary equipment which is the advantage of being a pre-registered member with Document S.O.S. the material salvaged was largely historical books and some flat items. The firemen had erected an inflatable tent in the gardens alongside the archives so that Document S.O.S could set up their triage centre and log the items removed. It was useful protection from the lashing wind and rain and subzero temperatures. Initial remedial treatments were applied on site to stabilise the damaged books before they were packed and taken to the Document S.O.S operation base at Dartford



Luckily for Canterbury this was only a simulated exercise and there was no fire at all! It had proved to be a very useful exercise and any weak spots in the disaster plan were highlighted. The fire brigade were very pleased with the opportunity to have a trial run of getting their



hoses into the roof voids and to integrate their disaster recovery alongside the Document S.O.S teams.

It is rare that an exercise of this scale is carried out but the benefits are unquestionable. Whilst many historical institutions may not be able to emulate this they can involve their local fire services as to their collections and their needs. Damage can be greatly mitigated if the fire services are familiar with the lay out and critical contents of any organisation.

The cathedral's insurers Ecclesiastical Insurance Group sent their surveyor Bob Johnson to observe the exercise. He said " I was really interested to see how the whole disaster recovery cascade worked and was relieved to see how successful it had been in mitigating any damage to the historical archives and the building!".



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