

Hidden away in a Bunker, the city's collection of historical items waits for a dedicated museum.

Cindy Ngo

BENEATH the city centre lies a treasure trove full of items that tell the story of Liverpool.

To the dedicated volunteers who maintain this massive collection of artefacts, it is called "the bunker", named after one of Liverpool's founding pioneers Eber Bunker.

The cache is also named thus because it is an underground space, with no natural light and no fresh air.

Under these conditions, members of the City of Liverpool and District Society work to keep the history of Liverpool – the fourth oldest town in Australia – alive.

The society has been collecting items since it was first established in 1959.

They were left without a permanent home in the 1990s and forced to relocate to the bunker, provided by Liverpool Council.

But with no shopfront and the lost potential of bringing Liverpool's history to the public, president Glen op den Brouw says it is a struggle to create awareness and appreciation of the area's rich history.

"We're one of the oldest settlements in Australia," he said.

"People know we've got a few old buildings, they don't know necessarily what they are," he said.

Mr op den Brouw said "the ideal outcome" was for the society to have its own space.

Most of the 10,000 items are in boxes because there is no room to exhibit them.

Among the society's most significant items is a model ship, *Calliope*, built by an inmate of the Old Liverpool Men's Asylum between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a col-



The items are kept in boxes. Picture: Melvyn Knipe

AT A GLANCE



- » The City of Liverpool and District Historical Society has about 10,000 items in its collection
- » They include old books, household items and clothing from different periods
- » The society needs a permanent home for its collection

onial washing machine and a jacket belonging to famous Australian aviator Sir Charles Kingsford Smith.

"I go to all these museums and I just come out envious," Mr op den Brouw said.

"They can do it, how can the fourth oldest town not do it?"

The humid conditions in the bunker also mean they have to watch for mould.

A bonnet belonging to the first drum major of the Liverpool City Pipe Band had to be restored a couple of years ago because it was covered in mould.

Liverpool Council's chief executive Kiersten Fishburn said it had a "critical role" in conserving the city's rich heritage.

She said the council was engaging with historical and community groups to provide "a series of rotating exhibitions and public engagement activities" at the Liverpool Regional Museum and Liverpool Library.

Ms Fishburn said options for a permanent home for the society would be considered as part of the council's Heritage Assets Strategic Plan.

In Parramatta – Australia's second oldest city – the Parramatta and District Historical Society is the custodian of Hambledon Cottage, owned by Parramatta Council.

The society manages the Cottage House Museum.

In Fairfield, a vintage village showcases the area's history at the Fairfield City Museum and Gallery.

A Fairfield Council spokesman said it provided ongoing support to the gallery.