

News in Brief

Cathedral Square Buildings

The continuing threat to the heritage buildings of Warner's Hotel, Lyttelton Times and Christchurch Star is again coming to a crisis. A meeting was held recently of various interested parties including the Christchurch City Council, Historic Places Trust, Civic Trust, New Zealand Institute of Architects and representatives of businesses based in the Square.

The whole meeting was very supportive of retaining this entire group of buildings. Architect, Peter Beaven, presented plans for developing the complex to include economic residential units upstairs and business activity on ground floors.

Recent indications are that the owner has other plans, particularly for the Warner's site.

This precinct is of the highest importance to the historical ambience of the Square. This was strongly emphasised by the manager of an international hotel business. He stated that the unique character of Christchurch was important to retain. Any city that hoped to succeed in attracting visitors must have an attractive image that differentiated it from the commonplace international cityscape.

The Civic Trust has for many years stressed the importance of Cathedral Square as the most important space in the city. To emphasise our ongoing commitment to this, the Trust has invited several notable speakers to our next meeting on June 24 to give us current perspectives on developments in the Square.

A Heart Transplant for the Central City?

When the University of Canterbury finally moved from its "town site" twenty-five years ago, it produced a profound effect on Christchurch city. It created an immediate crisis by vacating the historic stone buildings it had long occupied and finally neglected. The site was to be cleared for development.

We need to remember our community then placed less value on run-down historic buildings than we do today – and the Civic Trust was only just established. A huge effort was required to save this unique historic complex, to find an alternative use, which would enable the city to maintain and enjoy its special qualities.

The Arts Centre was born and subsequently has become a major community asset that contributes greatly to the city's character. It is now a significant tourist attraction and consequently has provided jobs and business opportunities for many people. The City Council has recognised this success by redesigning and rebuilding Worcester Street (now Boulevard) to further enhance this city treasure.

We can be grateful to the University for making this landmark available to the public. However, moving the campus to Ilam had another, less immediate effect that has had an even greater impact on Christchurch – it began the migration of people and businesses out of the central city.

Christchurch had, on world standards, a large city centre for such a small city – largely due to a very centralised city design. This has now broken down and the result is clear to see. The Central Business District (CBD) is commercially quite marginal and is probably about one-third the size it was. The once proud businesses and architectural gems contained within the city now struggle for survival. The city is being "repurposed" (like so many Edwardian and Victorian

cities) with leisure pursuits, the café society and tourism now the most visible sign of business activity. Long gone are the numerous factories, warehouses, government departments and large cinemas. Long gone also are the many stately private homes – many of these too have been "repurposed". It has been reported that thirty percent of the CBD's office space is empty. Thank goodness that a number of these vacated buildings have now been successfully converted into hotels!

The University of Canterbury is currently undergoing one of the biggest periods of change in its history. It is looking for creative ways to attract more students and to provide a wider range of suitable facilities to provide for their needs. Recently the new Vice-Chancellor of the University of Canterbury raised the prospect of the University re-establishing a presence in the central city.

Over the last few years, an extensive building programme has been proceeding on the Ilam campus to accommodate greater numbers of students. This has been a great financial burden to the University, so any further developments will have to be done differently. The various departments of the University have a diverse range of needs and will require a range of different properties. With so much space readily available in the central city, Varsity is now prospecting for suitable alternatives.

This makes a lot of sense and could be just what the central city needs – to have a heart transplant! Maybe, just maybe, the return of residents and students to the city will save what is left and revitalise the CBD. Let us hope that town and gown can, once again, come together to mutual advantage.

The Civic Trust will encourage all parties to work to this end.

Ronald Fussell

Thoughts on the Proposed New Art Gallery

Whether or not the contract for building the new Christchurch Art Gallery has been signed by the Council, it is time to reflect where, in the opinion of many, the design was wrong.

"Stage One Guidelines" of the Christchurch Art Gallery competition speaks of the philosophy behind the gallery. The aims and objectives are, to quote the Brief, "to promote public appreciation of Canterbury Art. Provide a gallery that helps create a sense of Christchurch identity and belonging to a community" and again "Provide a landmark building that reinforces the cultural precinct while stating its function clearly".

At that point the architects departed from the Brief, although from the above it is obvious the focus should be on the Canterbury art collection in the new gallery.

A different concept is Te Papa in Wellington. This large \$360 million gallery houses both nationally and internationally acquired treasures. Te Papa is New Zealand's national gallery, whereas the proposed Christchurch Art Gallery ought to accent the regional aspect. Our gallery's permanent international art collection is, regrettably, modest and of small interest to world travellers who have seen the great artworks overseas. As world famous works and artists are unaffordable, this situation is unlikely to change. What visitors and local viewers are generally interested in is the growing collection of Canterbury art, along with other New Zealand work.

The new gallery must explore its strength as a regional art gallery rather than a would-be international one as the exterior puffery of this proposed, out-of-scale building would have the public believe. This is something the overseas architects failed to address.

The Brief speaks of a gallery that helps create a sense of Christchurch identity and promotes appreciation of Canterbury art. The building's exterior then should be the visual link between that regional art and the precinct. Thus a connection between the trio – Canterbury art, the gallery's facade and nearby historic buildings – would be established.

The term "cultural precinct", used in the Brief, conjures up Gothic Revival icons in the area including the Provincial Council Chambers, Canterbury Museum and the Arts Centre. The architectural unity of the Arts Centre seems remarkable in that this group of buildings were designed piecemeal from 1876 by three architects over the following fifty years. This displayed cooperation beyond the ability of modern ego driven designers, particularly in the case of the new art gallery, that shows scant respect for established buildings in the vicinity.

Gothic style developed between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries, with the Victorian Gothic Revival in the nineteenth century and adapted here to local needs, including wooden Gothic. Seen throughout the cultural precinct, Gothic Revival buildings are something most Cantabrians can identify with, meanwhile attracting the overseas dollar for the reason tourist operators say is "the point of difference that is Christchurch". This small difference within the large

Pacific area should be exploited and where those remaining buildings of interest to foreign visitors are retained, new public buildings of contemporary temporary style must be stopped from dominating the existing historic precinct.

The new gallery design ought to be, as the Brief prescribes – "timeless so that in 2030 it does not obviously feel turn of the century". The chosen submission does not meet this criterion and might well be dated before completion, whereas the timelessness of the Gothic influence cannot be denied.

It is not suggested a replica building be produced, but one wishes that the architect might at least display some taste and good manners so that the gallery's facade would look towards its historic neighbours in the matter of proportion, scale, exterior surface materials, roof pitch, fenestration and so forth. Such was the hope.

Instead, future reality stares from the newspaper in the form of the new gallery computer generated, much revised elevation that failed the Brief. Refining the design, fine tuning, whatever, the "silky-screen" can never be other than a sow's ear.

Alas, the shopping-mall barbarians are at the gate!

Norman Barrett

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Friends of the Trust

We gratefully acknowledge the continuing support of Mr Rit Arunrugstichai (Civic of Canterbury).

New Members

We would like to welcome the following new members to the Civic Trust:-

Jenny May, Trudy McLean, Ann Lewis, Jacqueline and Don Smith, Rhys Taylor

*All members and friends of the Civic Trust
are cordially invited to attend our*

Annual General Meeting

Thursday 24th July, 1999

to be held in the

**Hurst Seager Room
Christchurch Arts Centre
Cnr Rolleston Ave & Hereford St**

Light refreshments will be available from 5.30pm

The AGM will commence

at 6.00 p.m.

*and at approximately 6.30 p.m., will be followed by an address
by*

Stephen Rainbow

recently retired manager of the
New Zealand Historic Places Trust's
Heritage Conservation section

“Heritage Conservation in Christchurch”.

Supporting speakers will include

Architects Ian Athfield, Peter Beaven, Stewart Ross and
landscape architect Robert Watson,

All members are welcome – bring a friend.

Save Our Square's Heritage Buildings

Remember the United Services Hotel? The Savoy Theatre? Now two other historic landmarks in the Square are threatened. Enough is enough. We must stop the shortsighted destruction of our heritage buildings.

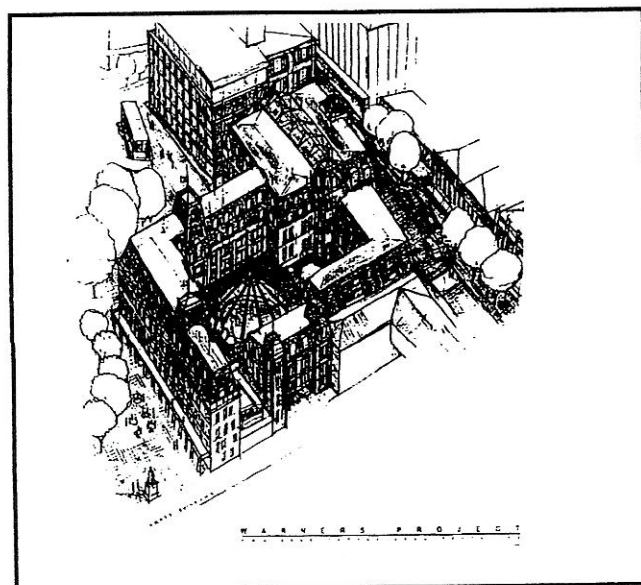
The Environment Court has ruled that the façade of the Star building must be saved. The historic Lyttelton Times and Warners Hotel buildings have been given a six months reprieve - until October. We must act NOW and we need your help to save them.

You CAN make a difference:

- **sign the enclosed letter or write your own submission and post it to the City Council THIS WEEK. It must reach the Council by 18 June.**
- **sign and circulate the enclosed petition. Make sure it is returned to the Canterbury Regional Office of Historic Places Trust, PO Box 4403, Christchurch, before 18 July.**
- **write letters to the editors of our local newspapers**
- **air your views on talkback radio.**

In its draft annual plan, Christchurch City Council proposes to set up a \$41 million economic development fund with about half the special dividends it has received from its trading companies. If the Council is serious about nurturing this City's unique character and restoring our Square as the vibrant heart of Christchurch, it must use a small portion of this fund to retain the three heritage buildings. Innovative designs show how they can revitalise and enhance our City Centre.

With the economic development fund we now have the means to retain this historic corner of the Square. Tell the Council these buildings must not be destroyed simply because we lack the imagination and foresight to appreciate their worth and save them.



ABOVE & BELOW: TWO ARCHITECTS' IMPRESSIONS OF REDEVELOPMENT OPTIONS



Invitation from Timaru Civic Trust

The Christchurch Civic Trust has been invited to visit Timaru by the Timaru Civic Trust with a view to looking at the work that they are involved in and seeing what has been accomplished. The details of the visit have yet to be decided, but we would like to get expressions of interest from our members who may wish to participate.

The three dates that are available are 25 September, 2 October or 9 October. It has been suggested that we may hire a bus for this venture and that members of the Akaroa Civic Trust will be invited to join us.

Yes, I am interested in participating in an organised trip to Timaru with the Christchurch Civic Trust. I am available on the following dates

25 September 1999	
2 October 1999	
9 October 1999	

Not interested in Timaru trip	
Interested in other Trust activities	

Please suggest items you may be interested in.

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Name: -

Address: -

Phone: -

Reasons for Christchurch Civic Trust Objection to Proposed New Art Gallery Design.

The Christchurch Civic Trust presents below the reasons why it believes that the prize-winning art gallery design is an unworthy design and is not suitable to its setting in that important central part of Christchurch. This objection is in six parts: –

- A. Form of the building.
- B. The glass screen.
- C. Siting of the building.
- D. Interior requirements.
- E. Changes to the plan.
- F. Conclusions.

A. Form of the building

The building is basically a box of the kind we are familiar with in supermarket and retail complexes. The building does not relate to its surroundings but ignores the brief which states: *"The building is required to satisfy an expectation that it will enhance the existing fabric and heritage of Christchurch city while making its own contribution as a vital addition, a landmark building."* – *The Brief (page 29, 6.0)*.

The Worcester Street precinct – with the Cathedral at one end and the Museum and Arts Centre at the other – is, architecturally and historically the most important civic part of Christchurch. It is a focus of our civic pride. This building has none of the qualities required of a contemporary building that is to be put among old buildings. It is in conflict with the scale and the proportions of the other buildings there and is badly sited.

B. The Glass Screen

The glass "wall" on the Montreal Street side is not a true wall but merely a screen. We question the screening of an indifferent elevation with wilful glass screens – wilful because they seem to be designed to conceal the elevation behind. Certainly they do not reflect the koru or create a metaphor of the gentle flow and grace of the intimate Avon River.

Has the architect researched the nature and extent of the possibility of distorted reflections from the finely detailed carpenter built houses opposite on to the curved glass screens?

One section of the glass screens is, in effect, an extension to the gallery foyer atrium and will create a large heat mass. Has this been researched?

The architects mention that the glass wall is of a new system. So far no clear and complete drawings have been produced to enable anyone to understand the architects' intentions with regard to the actual components of the wall structure.

C. Siting of the building

The building fronts on to Montreal Street, which has a one way system. It ignores the brief that says: *"Location of the entrance should be visible from and relate strongly to Worcester Boulevard"*.

It indicates neither a welcoming entrance, as required, nor does it do justice to the all important Worcester Boulevard - Montreal Street corner; an important consideration in any art gallery plan for that site. It does not establish the corner.

D. Interior of the Gallery

Traditionally an art gallery is a planned series of connected spaces in which the art work is displayed. The art work is intended as the focus of our attention. There should be no distractions. The surroundings may be rich in detail or fluently simple. Either way the viewers concentration and focus on the art work displayed should be effortlessly maintained. **This is a basic requirement that the proposed plan does not fulfil.**

The plan does not fulfill normal or traditional art gallery philosophy. Instead, a market philosophy is sustained where the design and the flow of the spaces is directed to ensure the consumer, in this case the viewer, is continually distracted towards the active public space of the atrium rather than towards the quieter reflective viewing areas. It is a disruptive distraction to what is a major part of the purpose of visiting an art gallery.

The Civic Trust hold the view that linking all the gallery rooms to the atrium results in the art work seceding to the atrium. The art work is no longer the focus of a pleasurable journey.

E. Changes to the plan

At a recent meeting in the Great Hall of the Arts Centre, Mr Coles outlined "refinements" which have been made to the plan: –

1. Facing the walls with stone or stone conglomerate,
2. Moving the shop to the Worcester Boulevard side,
3. Extending the café to the Worcester Boulevard side,
4. Addition of a vertical recess and an oriole window on the Worcester Boulevard side.

We wish to highlight the shortcomings of these changes.

1. Changes to the surface of the building do not alter the building's proportion and scale and it is those elements which are the main subject of complaint.
2. Extending the café to the Worcester Boulevard side will cause the café to always be in the shade. At the meeting Mr Coles admitted this.
3. The addition of a vertical recess and an oriole window appears to be an attempt to create divisions on what would otherwise be a blank wall. That wall would be the full height of the building – which Mr Coles has said would be about the height of a five storey building. The newly added vertical recess and oriole window are merely a patching up of a faulty design. Trying to patch up a problematic building only results in more problems.

Reflections on the first 12 years of Mt Vernon Park

Marette Taylor, recently retired Chairman of Port Hills Park Trust Board, and representative of the Civic Trust on the Board, reflects on her extensive involvement with this ambitious community project.

Remember the “The Appeal of the decade for the Park of the Century”? There are some of us who will never forget it, but memories fade – so where and what is Mt Vernon Park?

Mt Vernon Park occupies an area of 223.8 hectares on the Port Hills. On its eastern boundary is Rapaki Track and Montgomery Spur, on the west it is bounded broadly by a gully at the base of Huntsbury Spur – the upper third of which adjoins Bowenvale Park. The Summit Road bisects the upper slopes, and the property extends a short distance down the harbour side of the hill. The main access point is off Hillsborough Terrace, St Martins. From the Summit Road there are two access points – one close to where Rapaki Track meets the Summit Road, the other further south at the commencement of “Farm Track”.

The land was purchased from the Bowenvale Farming Co in January 1986, after a public appeal which lasted an exhausting two years. Over \$400,000 was raised by the Port Hills Appeal subcommittee of the Christchurch Civic Trust. It was a huge achievement from an organisation that has such limited resources and rightfully one of which the Civic Trust can be justly proud.

In November 1987, the Civic Trust formally ceded it by trust deed to the Port Hills Park Trust Board at a ceremony held in the Trust Bank Centre Building. This board first met on 26 June 1987. Those present were former mayor Sir Hamish Hay, Barry Rich representing the people of Canterbury, Marette Taylor nominee of the Civic Trust and Eric Beardsley nominee of MP for Lyttleton (Mrs Anne Hercus).

A management committee consisting of volunteers with known expertise was established to run the day-to-day affairs of the Park.

While progress has been slow but sure over the last ten years, such was governed by the availability of finance and time that volunteers were able to donate.

Other milestones that followed include: –

- 1989 First management plan completed.
- 1991 Barry Rich completed his term as chairman; Marette Taylor was appointed.
- 1992 Sarah Gerard & Associates completed landscape plan.
- 1993 First tree planting undertaken following a \$16,500 grant from the Lottery Commission.
- 1994-98 Further annual tree planting funded by grants and assistance from Lottery, Spreydon-

Heathcote Community Board and Riccarton Rotary.

- 1997 Completion of off-street parking area funded by grants from the Christchurch City Council Community Board and our own resources. Cost about \$42,000.
- 1997-98 Research programme initiated. A Trustee, Dr Glen Stewart of Lincoln University was in charge.
- 1997-99 Ongoing review of Management Plan.
- 1998-99 Planning a track for people with disabilities as a “Port Hills 2000” project.
- 1998 Heritage Week (Oct 17 - 23). The Park held an Open Day and reunion of past and present trustees, committee members, supporters and donors.
- 1998 At December meeting Marette Taylor stepped down as Chairman after eight years in that position.
- 1999 Grant from the Community Trust of \$52,000 for toilet facilities and shelter. Mr Oscar Alpers, Chairman of the Spreydon-Heathcote Community Board and the new City Council nominee to the Trust was appointed Chairman. Mike Thomas, of Studio 33, is preparing working plans for the Track for the Disabled thanks to a grant from the Spreydon-Heathcote Community Board. Bruce Alexander, surveyor and Civic Trust board member, kindly gave time to help peg out the track.

The new chairman, Oscar Alpers, has had a long association with Mt Vernon and will guide the Trust as we move towards a closer relationship with the City Council. Our concerted efforts over the past five years seeking a coordinated approach to planning and management of the Port Hills is paying dividends.

The Christchurch City Council has adopted a strategy for land acquisition on the Port Hills with a long term goal of a large Regional Park. A dream come true! Let us hope so and a just reward for twenty years of hard work by many.

One such helper was Bill Dukes, who was featured in an article in the Press last year. Bill, who recently died, was one of our loyal volunteers who turned up every week to lend a helping hand. The fact that he was past mid-80's was no deterrent. Well done Bill Dukes.

A number of Civic Trust members have given donations, for which we are very grateful. Any other contributions would be appreciated. Contact Marette at 332 2797, or post to Port Hills Park Trust, P O Box 12-033, Beckenham, Christchurch.

Marette Taylor.

THE CHRISTCHURCH CIVIC TRUST INC.
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The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Christchurch Civic Trust Inc.