

APRIL 2026

REMEMBERING THE LOSS OF A CHRISTCHURCH HERITAGE ICON



It is now almost a decade and a half since Christchurch lost one of its iconic twentieth century commercial heritage buildings, the former New Zealand Express Company offices, that stood on the south east corner of Manchester and Hereford Sts.

Dubbed after completion in 1906 as being earthquake proof, and one of the safest buildings in New Zealand, it later went through the effects of the 1929 Murchison earthquake without any damage, but 81 years later it was quite different. Although the Civic Trust fought a valiant last minute campaign over several weeks in October 2010 to save the building, it was not heeded, and it was quickly demolished. **(Read about this early casualty of the 4 September 2010 earthquake on page 3)**

From the Chair

The future of heritage buildings in Christchurch?



It's worth pondering this question in the wake of radical changes to the RMA and heritage funding facing significant shortfalls.

These two factors mean that Christchurch's heritage buildings are likely to face a more uncertain future.

Although the Council's District Plan acknowledges and favours retention, repair and restoration where possible, new reforms to the RMA have made it possible for councils to use their discretion to remove heritage listings, deschedule properties, and walk away from difficult heritage buildings where councils consider protection too onerous either for themselves or private property owners.

Local authority funding for heritage has actually decreased over the last five years, pointing to heritage being undervalued when left purely to the market. This leaves little to incentivise owners who can simply under-invest until buildings are unsafe - 'demolition by neglect'. Daresbury House, The Peterborough Centre and Victoria Mansions may well be examples of this.

The question about how and when the Council chooses to use this new flexibility from the government is an interesting one.

In the case of the main heritage projects in Christchurch: Christ Church Cathedral, Canterbury Museum, Canterbury Provincial Chambers and the Christchurch Arts Centre, the City Council has agreed that these are buildings worthy of restoring in the name of 'Public Good Heritage'. But the 'Fast Track' measures afforded councils don't address the problem of who will pick up the shortfall between what the Council is prepared to spend on these buildings and the estimated cost of these projects. \$290m is Council's last figure.

Of course, by the time any of these restorations have begun, that figure may well have blown out considerably. In the case of Canterbury Museum, Council have contributed generously but The Museum board has indicated its projected completion cost at \$262m; \$88m

already spent, a further \$32m sought from the Council and \$32m from Central Government.

Council, to their credit, have committed \$20m to the Provincial Chambers, and \$10m to the Cathedral. Eyewatering amounts for sure, but still woefully inadequate (in my opinion.)

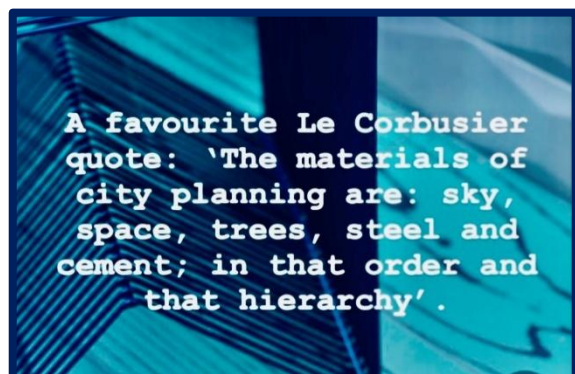
Unsurprisingly, these decisions are contentious. Many Christchurch residents argue that core infrastructure - wastewater treatment, water and sewer pipes, roads and footpaths, particularly in the city's east, should take priority before further heritage spending which may increase rates.

But without long-term planning and funding commitments from Council and Central Government and without stronger funding tools and incentives, councils will remain torn between fiscal limits and heritage obligations, condemning some buildings to demolition because the economics do not work for owners. Heritage projects will be delayed, or down-scaled, their survival doubtful.

Restoration brings jobs, small-business support, central-city activity, tourism benefits, and protection of prior public and philanthropic investment. Heritage restorations may not be commercially viable at first, but they are vital to Christchurch's identity even though the cost maybe high. Buildings like the Town Hall now clearly add beauty and social cohesion. The Christ Church Cathedral should now be top of the list.

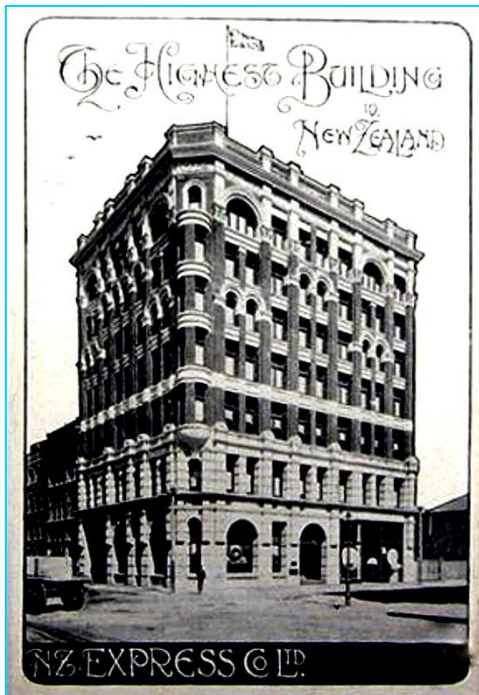
As chair of Christchurch Civic Trust, I remain hopeful that Christchurch's world-class cultural Taonga can be restored and completed for the future benefit of all.

Hamish Gilchrist
Chair, Christchurch Civic Trust



Christchurch Heritage

Manchester Courts



I'm sure we all remember the stunning multi-story building that stood on the corner of Manchester and Hereford Streets.

The "Chicago" style skyscraper (described as a blend of Chicago influence and Edwardian/British commercial architecture) was designed by the Luttrell Brothers for the New Zealand Express Company. Construction incorporating a steel frame tied by steel columns, started in 1905 and was completed in 1906 - an extraordinary feat I believe. Just look at the size of the building and it only took one year to build, at a cost of £19,000.

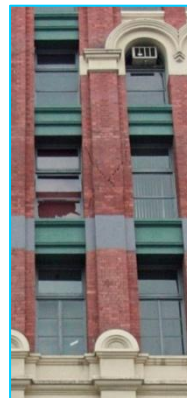
At the height of 130 feet (39.65m) with seven floors, it was the tallest building in Christchurch.

New Zealand Express Company was a freight-forwarding, customs, shipping and express forwarding agents, with a head office in Dunedin. In the early 20th century they were major employers.

Name change happened when the NZ Express Co. was no longer, and it became the MLC (Mutual Life & Citizens Assurance) and by 1991, the building was known as Manchester Courts.

In 1991 it was given a Category 1 listing with New Zealand Historic Places Trust. Manchester Courts, suffered significant damage in the 7.1 magnitude, 4th September 2010 earthquake and was slated for demolition just days after the quake hit.

On October 14th 2010 a group of heritage advocates, including past chair of Christchurch Civic Trust, Ross Gray, Heritage New Zealand (then NZHPT) and Christchurch Heritage Fund, attempted to stop the demolition by applying for a High Court Injunction. Justice Chisholm ruled the building was unstable and posed a danger to people, and surrounding businesses could not reopen, so sadly the injunction was dismissed.



Damage and Demolition

As a last ditch effort, Christchurch Civic Trust and ICON Residents' Association launched a bid to save the building including a full-page advertisement in The Press on October 18th calling for a halt to the demolition. The heritage campaign was widely considered to be "too late" because it was happening after the building was already committed to demolition.

The destructive February 2011 quakes hit while demolition was underway.

The Manchester Courts building became one of the first of a very long list of victims of the earthquakes, and of the lack of will to try and save some of the 250+ heritage buildings that were eventually demolished.

Written by Sandra Shaw





Open Christchurch is on again from **Friday 1st to Sunday the 3rd May.**

This year is another fabulous line-up with 52 buildings open to the public, guided walks and new this year - cycle tours.

A total of 33 buildings that do not require bookings, for example:

- Santa Barbara (open Saturday 11am to 4pm)
- Mona Vale Homestead (open Sat & Sun 10am to 2pm)
- Sumner Post Office (open Sunday 12 to 4pm)
- Te Raekura Redcliffs School (open Sunday 10am to 2pm)



Te Raekura Redcliffs School

There are a couple of special events, for example:

I'd die happy once I saw that - a tour of Harewood Memorial Gardens Crematorium, Friday 7 to 8.30pm (cost is \$20 plus booking fee)

Youth & Whanau Activities

Exhibitions & Workshops

Walks and Tours



Santa Barbara 169 Victoria St



Mona Vale 63 Fendalton Rd



Post Office 40 Nayland St Sumner

For more information on what is always a great weekend - visit <https://openchch.nz/>

Written by Erin Oakley



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

On Tuesday 16 June 2026

at the

WEA CENTRE

56 Gloucester St Christchurch

Light refreshments commence at 5.30pm

Followed by the AGM at 6pm

The Guest Speaker will be

from Underground Overground Archaeology

Underground Overground of Archaeology provide a wide range of heritage services to variety of both government and private agencies

THE ORIGIN OF THE BOOK CITY & PENINSULA

In June 2007, Christchurch hosted the 31st session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. The conference, which was held from June 24 to July 2, 2007, saw the participation of over 600 international delegates and senior UN representatives.

The production of City and Peninsula was a joint venture between the Akaroa and Christchurch Civic Trusts and the City Council. The council under wrote the cost and presented each delegate to the UNESCO World Heritage Conference with a copy of City and Peninsula.