

GOOD CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION PRACTICE FICHE

Composed by working party of:

NEW ZEALAND

0. Christchurch Town Hall



Depicted item: Warren & Mahoney, Christchurch Town Hall, Christchurch, 1965-1972

Sources: Photographs by Julia Gatley

Dates: 8 April 2007 / 15 May 2021

0.1 **accessibility**

Publicly accessible according to venue use

• **Data for identification**

current name: Christchurch Town Hall

former/original/variant name: n/a

address/ number(s) and name(s) of street(s): 100 Kilmore Street

town: Christchurch

province/ state: Canterbury

post code: 8013

country: New Zealand

geographic GPS coordinates:

current typology: ADM REC

former/original/variant typology: n/a

comments on typology: A civic building (ADM) built for a recreational (REC) purpose (concert auditorium, theatre and associated facilities)

• **Status of protection**

protected by: Christchurch City Council – District Plan heritage item number 311

grade: highly significant / A

date: 1993

valid for: whole building; including interior

remarks: one built heritage element within a larger heritage setting identified as Victoria Square

1. **History of building(s) etc**

• **Chronology**

Commission/ competition date: 1965-66

design period (s): 1965-66

start of site work: 1968

completion/inauguration: 1972

• **Relevant persons/organisations**

original owner(s)/patron(s): Corporation of the City of Christchurch and associated councils of Waimairi County Council, Paparua County Council, Riccarton Borough Council, Heathcote County Council

architect(s): Warren and Mahoney (Sir F Miles Warren & Maurice Mahoney)

landscape/garden designer(s): n/a

other designer(s): Dr A Harold Marshall (Acoustics, Perth); Engineering Design Consultants (Acoustics, London)

consulting engineer(s): Structural: Holmes and Wood (from 1971 Holmes, Wood and Poole); Services: Maindonald & Associates

building contractor(s): Chas. S. Luney Ltd

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- **Other persons or events associated with the building(s)/site**

name: Patrick Hanly association: Artist of commissioned painting 'Rainbow Pieces' (1970-72) mounted on the outer walls of the conference rooms, suspended above the foyer.¹
name: Mr & Mrs CJ Ferrier association: patrons of Ferrier Fountain (installed 1972).²
name: Robert Woodward association: architect-designer of the Ferrier Fountain.³
name: Coleen O'Connor association: designer of donated embroidered wall panel 'Pegasus Panel' (c.1969-72) in the conference room.⁴
name: Sir James Hay association: President of the Town Hall Promotion Inc, 24 March 1958-c. March 1971, for whom the James Hay Theatre in the Town Hall is named.⁵

event(s): Xth Commonwealth Games, Venue for wrestling and weightlifting, 1974.⁶ Numerous art, theatrical and music performances, civic functions and other community events.

- **Summary of important changes after completion**

type of change: extension to the southeast, in the space between the James Hay Theatre, the Main Foyer and the Limes Room (Banquet Hall) and Kitchen

date(s): June 1974-May 1976⁷

circumstances/ reasons for change: the addition of a smaller, supplementary social room incorporating a dance floor initially called a 'supper room', later called The Cambridge Room, accessible to The Limes Room via three double doorways and also accessed off the first floor foyer. A small staff room and staff toilets were included in the extension at the mezzanine level.

effects of changes: While the addition broke the strict biaxial plan of the Town Hall, the extension was easily absorbed within the existing scheme and executed entirely within the existing architectural vocabulary

persons/organisations involved: Warren & Mahoney Architects; Holmes, Wood & Poole Engineers.

type of change: introduction of an acoustic 'doughnut' above the stage of the auditorium.

date(s): 1977-78

circumstances/ reasons for change: to improve the acoustics of the auditorium

effects of changes: negligible

persons/organisations involved: unknown but presumed to be the acoustician, Harold Marshall, who had earned much kudos for the original acoustic design.

type of change: Alterations to the ticket office

date(s): c. 1982

circumstances/ reasons for change: unknown

effects of changes: the replacement of the original rectilinear ticketing office with the current curved configuration introduced a new formal element into the foyer but kept within the range of

¹ *University of Auckland News*, vol. 3 no. 3, April 1973, p. 2.

² Brittenden, 1972, p. 58.

³ Ibid. Brittenden notes that the fountain was designed by the author of the Alamein Fountain in Sydney, the Australian architect Robert Woodward, see <http://www.smh.com.au/national/obituaries/armourer-and-architect-designed-the-el-alamein-fountain-20100315-g9i5.html> accessed 6 September 2025

⁴ Unreferenced newspaper clipping, 100 Kilmore St - Town Hall file, Heritage Unit, Christchurch City Council.

⁵ Brittenden, 1972, pp. 25, 57.

⁶ 'Christchurch Town Hall: Venue for Wrestling and Weightlifting', *Home & Building*, vol. 36 no. 3, November 1973, pp. 50-51.

⁷ Warren & Mahoney architectural plans, held by Warren and Mahoney, copies held by Jenny May, Heritage Management Services, Christchurch. *The Christchurch Town Hall*, promotion booklet, nd, 100 Kilmore St - Town Hall file, Heritage Unit, Christchurch City Council.

existing materials.

persons/organisations involved: Warren & Mahoney Architects

type of change: extension between the James Hay Theatre & the Cambridge Room

date(s): September 1984

circumstances/ reasons for change: additional storage at the first floor level

effects of changes: negligible, as it was contained within an area with no public access and limited views from Victoria Square on the other side of the Avon River

persons/organisations involved: Warren & Mahoney Architects; Holmes, Wood, Poole & Johnstone engineers

type of change: New building services addition along the length of the upper roof of the social wing

date(s): c. 1985

circumstances/ reasons for change: new and improved building services

effects of changes: disturbs the expression of the roof form

persons/organisations involved: unknown

type of change: extension to west end: a new enclosed footbridge at first floor level giving access to the new Parkroyal Hotel

date(s): c. 1988

circumstances/ reasons for change: create easy access between the Hotel and the Town Hall for the benefit of performers and conference attendees staying at the Hotel.

effects of changes: The footbridge was easily accommodated within the existing fabric of the building and constructed in the same materials and with the same treatment, however, as it connects to a commercial hotel, it physically links the Town Hall to a function outside its own civic and community concerns.

persons/organisations involved: Warren & Mahoney Architects

type of change: alteration and extension infilling the remaining space between the entrance/foyer block, the Cambridge Room Block and the James Hay Theatre

date(s): 1989-1992

circumstances/ reasons for change: addition of a new coffee shop at the ground floor, new offices at the mezzanine level and conversion of the staff room in the Cambridge Room block to office and reception space.

effects of changes: None of these extensions or alterations were executed with the aesthetic clarity and strict logic of the original design so have had a cluttering effect on the building. Most of these changes occurred out of sight of the public, the new coffee shop being the most visible discordant alteration.

persons/organisations involved: Warren & Mahoney Architects

type of change: alteration to the Victoria Square entrance. Entrance extended to the exterior with splayed walls, glazed roof with coloured glass decoration and brass signage.

date(s): 1989-1992

circumstances/ reasons for change: Allowed for a second set of doors to create an airlock to control temperature fluctuations and provided a greater emphasis to the Victoria Square entrance.

effects of changes: Adds a discordant note to the Victoria Square frontage as aesthetically

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inconsistent but does increase the visibility and legibility of the south entrance.
persons/organisations involved: Warren & Mahoney Architects

type of change: major alterations to restaurant bar and restaurant interior
date(s): c. 1989-1992

circumstances/ reasons for change: part of a refurbishment programme for café/bar/restaurant services

effects of changes: Significant alterations were made to the Town Hall's original Aquarius Cocktail Lounge and Cascade Restaurant in the early 1990s. The alterations were part of a refurbishment programme for the café and restaurant services and both coffee shop and restaurant featured a similar, and unsympathetic, decorative motif. The internal entrance to the restaurant from the Town Hall foyer was altered, with new steps replacing the original pavers which were the same as those used on the exterior terraces. The original meranti double doors were also replaced and the internal partition wall with an inbuilt fish tank separating the bar/restaurant from the foyer replaced with the current design. The original interior layout of the restaurant was stepped down to match exactly the forms and stepping of the copper and glass boxes that make up the restaurant; this early 90s alteration changed that seamless and logical arrangement. The first level was extended out towards the river. This level was originally used as the Aquarius Cocktail Lounge, the bar to the east was altered at this time and new steps down into the restaurant area introduced. The original shiplap ceiling was replaced by white plaster and the distinctive, architect-designed hanging globe lights removed. The second-to-last box of the restaurant originally had a dropped floor at the outer edges (to the east and west) – this allowed most of the floor to remain level with the first part of the restaurant, while acknowledging the stepped-down form of the box; in the alterations it was all made level. As part of the refurbishment the curtains and carpet with the 'town hall' motif were replaced and the original plastered walls were papered. On the east side, a toilet and storage cupboard were added between the restaurant and the kitchen, these pushed into the restaurant space, in addition new staff access to the bar was introduced from this corner of the restaurant. All these alterations to the restaurant undermined the logic and aesthetic of the original space and design.

persons/organisations involved: Warren & Mahoney

type of change: extension of the gallery from the north side of the foyer through the landing of the stairs to the west to meet the lift and alteration to the lift service
date(s): c. 1992

circumstances/ reasons for change: to allow for lift access to the mezzanine level

effects of changes: the extension was entirely within the existing architectural language and detailing, however, it created a visual busyness that disrupts the clarity created by the direct expression and dual role of the structural system to the west of the foyer, where the stairs are set inside the twinned columns.

persons/organisations involved: Warren & Mahoney

type of change: alterations to the Kilmore and Victoria bars
date(s): c. 1995

circumstances/ reasons for change: unknown

effects of changes: These two bars are on the mezzanine level above either side of the foyer space. Originally, both bars ran the length in the centre of these spaces to the north (Kilmore) and south (Victoria) of the foyer. The Kilmore Bar was below the pendulum lights and signs that signal

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the end of the interval, the lighting in the ceiling of the south mezzanine indicates the original placement of the Victoria Bar. Both bars were shifted to take their current positions at either end of those spaces, that is, to the west and to the east on both sides, sometime in the mid-1990s. The original bar timbers and footrests were reused in the new configuration. This alteration has had negative consequences; the most unfortunate being that the service end of the bars, meaning the backs of the fridges, can be seen through the fully glazed walls from the exterior of the building. Although this is not such a major problem for the west end of the Victoria Bar, where the glazed wall overlooks the publicly inaccessible internal courtyard, it is a significant detractor from the architecture and pleasures of the view of the other glazed walls. The original clocks are missing from either end of the Kilmore Bar. In the Kilmore Bar there is also a new electric supply introduced at floor level at the bottom of the balustrade overlooking the main foyer that interferes with the reading of the balusters.

persons/organisations involved: unknown

type of change: New interior schemes for the conference room(s), Cambridge Room and James Hay Theatre

date(s): c. 1995-97

circumstances/ reasons for change: unknown

effects of changes: Around 1995, several of the key spaces in the Town Hall saw significant changes to their interior architecture, including the Conference Room, the Cambridge Room and the James Hay Theatre. All of these re-workings included a dramatic change in colour and tonal range – from the original colour scheme of golds and browns to one of spearmint greens and teal blues. The lining timbers in the conference room were blonded and the Pegasus Panel covered over. The new scheme involved the making of a new carpet using the same Town Hall motif used on the original Town Hall carpets, but this time in intense greens and blues. The scheme is off key with the original approach to the Town Hall interiors but is reversible.

persons/organisations involved: Warren & Mahoney

type of change: Extension from north first floor promenade around auditorium in the form of a covered walkway giving access to the Christchurch Convention Centre across Kilmore Street.

date(s): 1997

circumstances/ reasons for change: to allow for easy access between the buildings over a busy road and allow the two to be used as one venue

effects of changes: a significant intrusion into the building and a dramatic change to the Kilmore streetscape, although reversible

persons/organisations involved: Warren & Mahoney Architects

type of change: New seating in the auditorium⁸

date(s): 1997

circumstances/ reasons for change: to improve the seating of the auditorium

effects of changes: negligible

persons/organisations involved: unknown

⁸ Christchurch Convention Centre *Press Supplement*, March 1997.

type of change: New Rieger Orgelblau (Austria) pipe organ inserted on the gallery behind the auditorium stage⁹

date(s): 1997

circumstances/ reasons for change: the auditorium was always intended to house an organ but the city could not afford a suitable one until the mid-1990s

effects of changes: no real change to the architecture as space had always been left in the original design for the organ, although this organ took up more space than originally allowed

persons/organisations involved: unknown

- **Summary of important changes after restoration**

type of change: 1098 interlocking 8-metre jet-grouted piles installed; new concrete floors; new concrete columns in foyer and Limes Room; replacement of copper roofs; new glazing; Carrara marble tiles reused or, where necessary, replaced like for like; new timber flooring except for where original auditorium bleachers were reinstated; seats refurbished; organ restored. Cambridge Room (demolished) replaced by purpose-built building for Christchurch Symphony Orchestra. Floor levelled and a buckling-restrained bracing system added to exterior of Limes Room wing; Avon Room thus created by flooring change.

date(s): 2015-19

circumstances/reasons for change: restoration necessitated by damage suffered in the Canterbury earthquake sequence of 2010-11, particularly the major earthquake of February 2011.

effect of changes: full restoration of building with steps taken to address future seismic resilience.

persons/organisations involved: Warren & Mahoney (architects); Hawkins Construction Ltd (contractors); Holmes Consulting (structural engineers); Tonkin + Taylor & Treadwell & Rollo (geotechnical engineers); Rutherford + Chekene (consultant structural engineers); Rider Levett Bucknall (quantity surveyors); Aurecon (hydraulic & mechanical engineers); Cosgroves Ltd (electrical engineers); Marshall Day Acoustics (acoustic engineers).

2. Description of building(s)

- **Site/building character**

The Christchurch Town Hall is sited in the city centre between the Avon River and Kilmore Street with the main axis of the building running parallel to Kilmore St for most of the block between Colombo and Durham Streets. Organised according to a biaxial plan, the Town Hall's main functions are laid out on the principal axis, with the 1000-seat theatre and 2600-seat auditorium connected by an entrance block. This is bisected by a secondary axis through the main entrance from Kilmore St extending through to the main social wing, which extends out over the Avon River with the banquet hall (The Limes Room) on first floor and a restaurant on the ground floor. A smaller block extending perpendicularly from the social wing to the east contains the kitchen. A pair of conference rooms is suspended above the main ground floor foyer space in a single volume, encircled by a series of mezzanine and first floor walkways opening to bar areas and giving access to the conference rooms and The Limes Room. These spaces and a broad promenade around the auditorium on the first and ground floors create places to see and be seen.

⁹ *The Press*, 11 June 1997, p. 1.

Each of the main functions is expressed with its own distinct geometric form: a tall, rectangular fly-tower and fan-shaped wedge of raked seating form the theatre, an octagonal lozenge for the entrance block and conference rooms, the elliptical auditorium with its slanted roofline and encircling promenade and the long horizontal rectangular social wing. The complex is unified by a rich architectural and structural vocabulary of paired blade columns in fair-faced concrete, pre-cast exposed-aggregate panels, extensive glazing with copper-sheathed window mullions and brise-soleil fins complementing the copper roof and flashings. Constructed in reinforced concrete poured in-situ, the thick solid walls allowed for sound-proofing, their U-shaped sections providing the strong rhythm of soaring paired blade columns and exposed aggregate panels. The spaces between the exterior paired structural members of the promenade contain secondary exits and correspond in a non-axial way to the paired columns of the auditorium drum, which provide access to the interior of the auditorium. Perimeter promenades, the foyer galleries and the social wing are fully glazed, protected by copper-sheathed brise-soleil fins. The restaurant is expressed as a series of copper and glass cubes that step down to the river, strung between the over-scaled structural T-shaped pairs of columns and beams that support the banquet hall above, contrasting with the full concrete walls of the subsidiary kitchen block. Stepped terraces in pale terracotta-coloured paving bricks connect the building to Victoria Square and allow public access down to the water's edge for a closer view of the sphere de fleur forms of the Ferrier Fountain.

The interior makes extensive use of high-quality materials, including meranti timber, white-painted and fair-faced concrete, laminated timber beams, and marble. The twinned balusters and roof trusses in meranti timbers echoed the visual theme of paired units dictated by the concrete structural members. Textiles (leather and cloth) for furniture and wall panels decorated with an abstract pattern of timber slats are a rich red; on the first floor is laid a specially designed carpet with a geometric motif based on the form of the auditorium; Marimekko patterned curtains are used to protect the north-facing glazed wall of the entrance block and signage is cast in brass. On the interior, the soffit and whole units of horizontal concrete elements (for example the rib floor slabs) are generally painted white, while vertical structural members are in fair-faced concrete. Local white marble is used as a revetment at the base of interior vertical structural members and marble slabs line the main ground floor spaces. The architects designed the long timber benches, globe lighting and the geometric, stalactite-like fibrous plaster ceiling panels in the main foyer to create a complete design.

The key technical innovation of the Town Hall was the acoustic engineering of the auditorium. Using his own research and recent technologies, including spark echograms and ray tracing computer programmes, Dr Harold Marshall, supported by Engineering Design Consultants (London), produced a design that gave rise to superb acoustic conditions. Working within the architects' design and accommodating their concern for good sightlines, Marshall helped refine the shape and height of the auditorium, paired the sectioned, layered seating with laminated timber reflectors, and treated high wall areas with diffusive elements. The resulting acoustic quality meant the Christchurch Town Hall became an international benchmark for auditoria design.¹⁰

¹⁰ John O'Keefe, "The New Understanding of Acoustics", *Aerocoustics*, 1998, <http://www.aerocoustics.com/papers/acou.html>, accessed 27 August 2009.

- **Current use**

of whole building/site: Performance venue
of principal components: Douglas Lilburn Auditorium used for large concerts and performance events, as well as other large civic and community functions. James Hay Theatre used for chamber concerts, plays and smaller theatrical and musical performances. Limes Room, Avon Room & Victoria Room used for lectures, workshops, meetings and social gatherings. CSO Centre houses orchestral rehearsal rooms, administration offices, music library and players' lounge
comments: The complex is central to Christchurch's public and civic life.

- **Present condition**

of whole building/site: Excellent
of principal components (if applicable):
of other elements (if applicable):
of surrounding area (if applicable):
comments: The re-opening of the building took place in stages between February and May 2019.

3. Evaluation of restoration/conservation

Give the scientific reasons for selection for docomomo documentation.

Intrinsic value

- **Technical evaluation:** Building materials and methods used in the restoration were a combination of reinstated or refurbished original features and new elements that respected with original scheme while at the same time bring the building up to 100% structural strength compared with standards expected for new buildings (100% New Building Standard or NBS). The heritage status of the Christchurch Town Hall directed attention to the use of repair and restoration materials and techniques that were as appropriate as possible in the circumstances. The construction of new foundations and floors underneath an existing building of this scale and complexity, necessary for the repair of the superstructure, was a major technical feat.
- **Social evaluation:** In August 2013 Christchurch City Council voted to fully restore the Town Hall after the 2010/2011 Canterbury earthquakes caused significant damage, especially to the building's foundations. The restoration of the Christchurch Town Hall was strongly advocated for by three groups of key stakeholders: Keep Our Town Hall, the Voice of Music, and the Friends of the Town Hall Organ. Community efforts to gain city council support for a full restoration of the building complex, rather than complete demolition or partial retention and restoration, demonstrated an awareness and appreciation of the Town Hall's Modernist design and world-leading acoustic accomplishments. The re-opening ceremony took place on 23 February 2019 and the 2024 documentary film *Maurice and I*, which tells the story of the architectural partnership of Miles Warren and Maurice Mahoney, highlighted the strong community feeling about the importance of the town hall in the life of the city of Christchurch. The film has met with both critical acclaim and popular success. Since its opening in 1972, the Town Hall has

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hosted concerts, performances, lectures, graduation ceremonies and numerous other events. This stopped in February 2011 as a result of earthquake damage but resumed again with vigour from 2019 when the building was reopened.

- **Cultural and aesthetic evaluation:** The original Modernist design of the building has been retained, repaired and celebrated by the restoration. The profile and success of the restoration project is recorded in both the Ian Lochhead-edited book, *The Christchurch Town Hall, 1965-2019: A Dream Renewed*, of 2019, and the 2024 documentary film, *Maurice and I*.

4. Documentation

- **Archives/written records/correspondence etc:**

Heritage Unit, Christchurch City Council (archives), 53 Hereford Street, PO Box 237, Christchurch 8140

- **Principal publications (in chronological order):**

WJA Brittenden, *A Dream Come True: The Christchurch Town Hall*, Christchurch: Christchurch Town Hall Committee, 1972.

Ian Lochhead [ed], *The Christchurch Town Hall, 1965-2019: A Dream Renewed*, Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2019.

- **Visual material (state location/ address)**

original visual records/drawings/photographs/others:

Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury, Christchurch (original drawings and watercolours)

Warren & Mahoney Architects (photographs)

Post restoration photographs and survey drawings:

film/video/other sources:

Rick Harvie and Jane Mahoney (directors), *Maurice and I – The Fragile Legacy of a Unique Architectural Partnership*, Belmont Productions, 2024, <https://www.mauriceandi.com>

- **List documents included in supplementary dossier** N/A

5. Fiche report

rapporteur: Dr Jessica Halliday [with input from Dr Ann McEwan & Dr Julia Gatley]

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