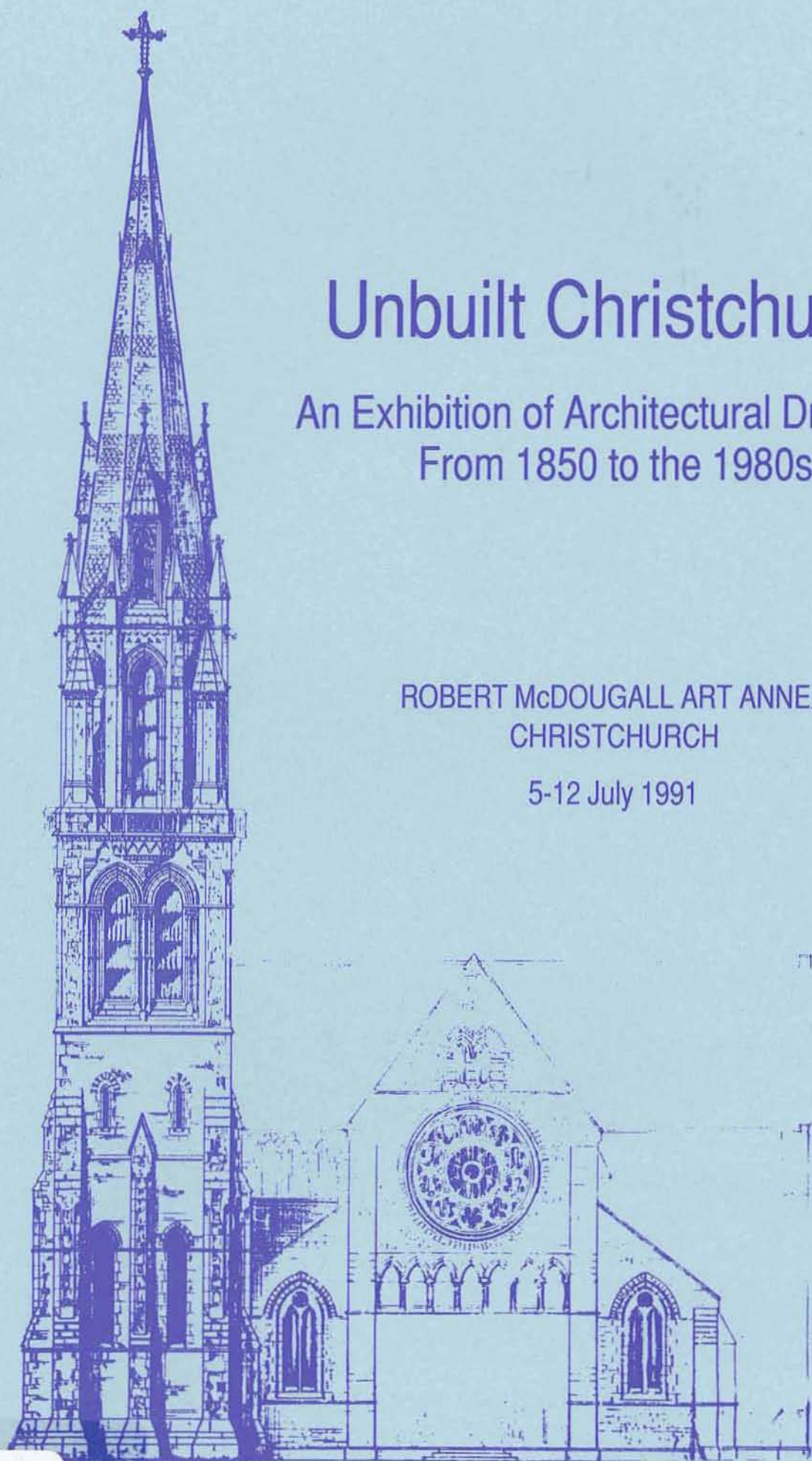


Unbuilt Christchurch

An Exhibition of Architectural Drawings
From 1850 to the 1980s

ROBERT McDOUGALL ART ANNEX
CHRISTCHURCH

5-12 July 1991



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Acknowledgements

From 6-8 July 1991 the Society of Architectural Historians of Australia and New Zealand is holding its annual conference in Christchurch. SAHANZ was founded in 1984 and since then annual conferences have been held in a number of Australian cities, most recently in Melbourne in 1990. A sizeable number of New Zealand architectural historians participated in that conference and at its conclusion an invitation was extended to hold the 1991 conference in Christchurch. This is the first time a SAHANZ conference has been held in New Zealand and *Unbuilt Christchurch* has been mounted to mark this event.

The Arts Centre of Christchurch, with its unique collection of Gothic Revival buildings, became the logical conference venue, and through the generous cooperation of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery, the Art Annex in the Arts Centre has been made available for this exhibition. We are particularly grateful to John Coley and the staff of Robert McDougall Art Gallery for making the exhibition possible, and for making an exception to the Gallery's normal exhibition policy by allowing an historical exhibition to be mounted in their contemporary art space. For their assistance with the realisation of the exhibition I especially wish to thank Lynn Campbell, Anna Crighton, Lara Strongman and Martin Young. Invaluable assistance was also provided by Richard Dalman of the SAHANZ organising committee. Thanks are also due to Duncan Shaw-Brown, Barbara Cottrell and Merilyn Hooper of the Audio-Visual Department, University of Canterbury.

Without the generous cooperation of the owners of drawings this exhibition could not have taken place. For their assistance in arranging loans I wish to thank Jane Davies at the Anglican Church House, Joan Woodward and Michael Purdie at the Canterbury Museum, Rosemary O'Neil at the Canterbury Public Library, Peter Beaven and Jocelyn Allison, Maurice Hunt of Collins Architects, Simon Pascoe of Pascoe, Linton and Sellars, and Sir Miles Warren of Warren and Mahoney.

Finally, we are especially grateful to the Canterbury Branch of the New Zealand Institute of Architects and to Resene Paints Limited for their generous sponsorship of the exhibition.

Ian J. Lochhead, School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury

Introduction

From the very beginning of the Canterbury Settlement the colonists had great ambitions for the city of Christchurch. Before the first settlers had even left for New Zealand in 1850 the Canterbury Association had approached one of the leading ecclesiastical architects in Britain, William Butterfield, to provide designs suitable for use in the colony. The Association's vision of an ideal English colony with a complete diocesan establishment included churches built on the best medieval models as recommended by the Ecclesiological Society. The first contingent of colonists included a young architect, Benjamin Woolfield Mountfort, who had been thoroughly grounded in ecclesiastical design principles in the office of R.C. Carpenter. During the course of his long career in Canterbury Mountfort designed many of the province's most important public buildings and churches, including the Canterbury Provincial Council Buildings (1857-65), the Canterbury Museum (1869-82) and Canterbury University College (1877-96). Although the Canterbury Association's utopian vision soon faded in the face of the realities of colonial life this remarkable group of Gothic Revival buildings continues to give visual expression to their founding ideal. Gilbert Scott's Anglican Cathedral, standing at the very heart of the city, remains as another potent reminder of these beginnings.

The designs of Butterfield, Scott and Mountfort set the pattern for the architectural excellence which the founders of Christchurch aimed to achieve and other architects quickly realised that in this environment something more than the routine was required. W.B. Armson, although a comparatively late arrival in 1870, quickly demonstrated that a Melbourne trained architect could compete on equal terms with his British trained contemporaries. In the brief period during which he practised in Christchurch, Armson transformed the commercial centre of the city, although sadly only a handful of these buildings survive.

The uncertainties of the colonial economy meant that the ambitions of architects and their patrons often far exceeded their abilities to realise their designs. Time after time splendid architectural visions were condemned to a shadowy life in the plan draws of their designers. Furthermore, the Victorian addiction to architectural competitions for public buildings of every kind produced dozens of projects which remained unseen by all but their assessors. The over use of competitions and the scarcity of properly informed assessors were subjects which the leader writers of *The Press* brought before the Christchurch public on several occasions during the 1860s and '70s, although to little apparent effect.

By the end of the nineteenth century Christchurch, in spite of its many fine individual buildings, still possessed the raw look of a frontier town. Several of the most spectacular buildings designed for the city, including Mountfort's Supreme Court (cat. 7) and Armson's Public Library (cat. 5) had been discarded in favour of much more mundane structures. Others, such as Holy Trinity Church, Avonside (cat. 10) had been begun but remained incomplete.

During the twentieth century, in spite of the dislocations caused by war and economic depression, the casualty rate amongst architectural projects does not seem to have been quite so high as during the colonial period. Competitions for

public buildings have been fewer in number, although those for the city's art gallery and town hall are notable exceptions. What has remained consistent is the commitment of Christchurch's best architects to extending the vision of their colonial predecessors. While the twentieth century has seen greater stylistic diversity the attractions of the Gothic Revival have remained strong, as seen in the projects of Cecil Wood for Christ's College (cat. 19) and R.S.D. Harman for Christchurch Cathedral (cat. 17). The responsiveness to local materials and the traditions of craftsmanship, established in the nineteenth century, have also endured.

Although international modernism made its first appearance in Christchurch in the 1930s it was only in the decades following 1945 that Christchurch architects began to search for a mode of expression that was both contemporary yet firmly based in their local environment and architectural tradition. Within the context of New Zealand architecture as a whole, architecture in Christchurch during the 1950s and 1960s developed a distinctive regional inflexion that is sometimes referred to as the Canterbury School. This movement culminated in Warren and Mahoney's Christchurch Town Hall design of 1966, a building which, while being unquestionable a product of the modern movement, could have been built nowhere else in New Zealand.

Although the tradition of western architecture in Canterbury is a relatively short one by international standards, it is none the less a vital one. Within this context, the buildings which make up the city of Christchurch today are the most important part of that tradition, but the unbuilt and often forgotten projects of the last 140 years can also play a role in enriching the fabric of our brief architectural history. At best, they reveal aspirations that are too easily forgotten as we contemplate the uncertainties of the future.*

* For a further account of the unbuilt architecture of Christchurch including illustrations see, Ian J. Lochhead, 'Forgotten Dreams: Unbuilt Christchurch', *Historic Places in New Zealand*, 33, June 1991, pp. 39-42.

Catalogue

WILLIAM BUTTERFIELD (1814-1900)

1 a-d *Plans of Chapel and House attached, c.1850*

- a. East and north elevations and cross sections
Pen and wash on tracing paper, 527 x 755
- b. Longitudinal sections and cross sections.
Pen and wash on tracing paper, 527 x 750
- c. South and west elevations and ground plan
Pen and wash on tracing paper, 514 x 630
- d. Details of fittings
Pen and wash on tracing paper, 535 x 763
Signed: Wm. Butterfield
Collection: Diocese of Christchurch

At a meeting in London on 8 December 1849 the Canterbury Association decided to ask William Butterfield for copies of drawings of a chapel and school recently erected to his designs in the Diocese of Worcester. In approaching one of Britain's most advanced Gothic Revival architects the Association was clearly concerned with obtaining ecclesiologically correct models for buildings in the colony soon to be established under its aegis in New Zealand. The drawings exhibited were only recently discovered at Holy Trinity, Lyttelton and presumably resulted from the Association's request to Butterfield. Butterfield's only other project for New Zealand, a design for St. Matthew's in Auckland (1858) also remained unbuilt.

SIR GEORGE GILBERT SCOTT (1811-1878)

2. *Church for the Canterbury Settlement, c.1850*

- Longitudinal section, south elevation, plan and sections of nave and chancel
Pen and wash, 531 x 746
Signed: Geo: Gilbert Scott, Archt., 20 Spring Gardens, London
Collection: Canterbury Museum

Like Butterfield's design (cat. 1), Scott's design for a church with a timber nave and stone chancel was probably commissioned especially for the Canterbury Settlement. It may have been brought to New Zealand by the Bishop designate, Thomas Jackson in 1851. In developing a design suitable for colonial conditions Scott turned to medieval English timber parish churches for appropriate models. With its timber arcade and exposed external framing, the design has much in common with R.C. Carpenter's contemporaneous church for Tristan da Cunha as well as with the many timber parish churches built subsequently in New Zealand.

3 a-b. *Design for Cathedral Church, Christchurch, New Zealand, 1861*

- a. Section through nave and lower looking west
Section through nave looking east
Pen and wash on paper with pencil additions, 569 x 875
Signed: George Gilbert Scott, Archt., London, England
- b. Longitudinal section looking north
Pen and wash on paper with pencil additions, 577 x 876
Signed: George Gilbert Scott, Archt., London, England
Collection: Canterbury Public Library

When Scott was asked to design the Cathedral that was to form the spiritual, geographical and symbolic centre of Christchurch he responded with a proposal that is unique amongst colonial cathedrals and which, in terms of the materials intended for its construction, has more in common with the great medieval tithe barns of England than with other Victorian cathedrals. Believing that good building stone was unavailable, Scott proposed an internal frame consisting of a massive timber arcade and clerestory. Stone was to be used only for the exterior walls and tower. Scott's design was described in 1862 as being 'worth a visit to New Zealand should it ever be executed'. In 1863, with good building stone now available, Scott redesigned the Cathedral entirely in stone, the material in which it was ultimately built.

BENJAMIN WOOLFELD MOUNTFORT (1825-98) and ISAAC LUCK (1817-1881)

4 a-b. *Episcopal Residence, Christchurch, 1857*

- a. Road front and river front
Pencil and wash on paper, 533 x 660
Signed: Mountfort & Luck, Architects, Christchurch
- b. Ground plan
Pencil and wash on paper, 323 x 530
Signed: Mountfort and Luck, Architects, Christchurch
Collection: Diocese of Christchurch

These ambitious plans for a Bishop's palace reflect the aspirations which the early Canterbury colonists had for their city. With its asymmetrical massing, Gothic details and vertical board and batten construction the design is clearly influenced by the ideals of the Ecclesiological Society. While the proposal reflects the status which the newly arrived Bishop Harper enjoyed in the colony it proved too costly. The Bishop made do with a modest timber house, designed by Mountfort in 1857, modeled on the English parsonage designs of Butterfield and Street.

B.W. MOUNTFORT

5. *Iron Clock Tower for the Provincial Council Buildings, 1863*

- Elevation
Pencil and water colour, 605 x 451
Collection: Canterbury Museum

Mountfort's earliest designs for the Provincial Council Buildings date from 1855 and included a tower with a pinnacled lantern. This was later replaced by an iron clock tower. The ironwork, made by Skidmore of Coventry, arrived in Christchurch in 1860 but proved too heavy for the timber base that was to support it. In 1863 the Provincial Council decided to commission a new council chamber and clock tower. Cat. 5 is the only surviving drawing to record this project, notable for the extensive use of constructional polychromy, also a feature of the north tower built in 1860. In 1864 Mountfort designed the stone Council Chamber that remains one of his outstanding achievements.

MAXWELL BURY (1825-1912) and B.W. MOUNTFORT

6 a-b. *The Supreme Court, Christchurch, 1864*

- a. Plan and elevations
Pencil, pen and wash on paper, 310 x 463
Signed: B.W. Mountfort & Maxwell Bury, Ch.Ch. July 1864
- b. Section through court room
Pen and wash on paper, 592 x 923
Collection: Canterbury Museum

Bury's wife, Ellen, writing to her family in England on 14 June 1864 records that 'Max has got one new job for the Government - to build a Court House. It will cost not less than 20,000 - perhaps more.' Bury had been appointed as assessor, along with the engineer, Edward Dobson, for the competition for Supreme Court designs held early in 1864, but when none of the designs were within the Provincial Government's budget, Bury was apparently awarded the contract. In the meantime he had entered a partnership with Mountfort. The symmetry of this design is uncharacteristic of Mountfort's work and can be compared with the bold irregularity of cat. 7.

7 a-b. *The Supreme Court, Christchurch, 1867*

- a. Ground plan and elevation of tower
Pen and wash on paper, 656 x 953
Signed: Bury and Mountfort, Architects and Surveyors
- b. Perspective
pencil and watercolour on paper, 464 x 590
Signed: B.W. Mountfort, Architect etc., Christchurch
Collection: Canterbury Museum

Although executed under the name of Bury and Mountfort this design is almost certainly Mountfort's work. One of the drawings in the set is dated 1867, by which time the partnership had dissolved with Bury's departure for England in 1866. Significantly the perspective view is signed by Mountfort alone. The asymmetry and angularity of this design is in marked contrast to cat. 6. The projecting corner tower recalls the bellry of G.E. Street's Church of St. James the Less, Thorndike Street, London (1859). When the Provincial Government finally approved the building of the Supreme Court in 1868, they chose a much inferior design by Alexander Lean.

B.W. MOUNTFORT

8 a-b. *Canterbury Museum, 1870-76*

- a. Sketch of Present Museum and Future Extensions, c.1872
Pen and wash on paper, 175 x 223
Signed B.W. Mountfort, Archt
Collection: Canterbury Museum
- b. South-East View Showing Additions, c. 1875
Perspective
Pen on paper, 393 x 563
Collection: Canterbury Museum

Although the earliest plans for the Canterbury Museum date from 1865 the first section was not opened until 1870. The rapidly expanding collection soon rendered the first wing too small and Mountfort was called upon to design extensions. Additions were made in 1872 and in 1875 including the east wing, tower and entrance porch. A number of drawings survive showing Mountfort exploring different options for the extensions. Cat. 8a probably dates from 1872 and reveals his preoccupation with finding a suitable home for the iron clock tower from the Provincial Council Buildings (see cat. 5). Cat. 8b shows an alternative version of the 1875 additions with the tower and main entrance facing the courtyard formed by the junction of the south and east wings.

10. *Holy Trinity Church, Avonside, 1873*

- Perspective
Pencil and watercolour, 400 x 563
Collection: Holy Trinity Church

This perspective was presented to the Vestry of Holy Trinity in 1873 but only the transepts (1874) and chancel (1876) were built in Mountfort's lifetime. When the nave was added in 1905 it was to a different design, less in keeping with the earlier portion. The chancel is the most richly embellished and complete of all Mountfort's parish church interiors and the perspective reveals his vision of an ideal church in the Early English style, complete with aisled nave and tower. As originally conceived Holy Trinity is the closest of all Mountfort's New Zealand churches to the Puginian models he so greatly admired.

11. *Christchurch Cathedral, c.1879*

- West elevation of tower and nave
Pen and pencil on paper, 733 x 500
Collection: Canterbury Museum

When construction of the Cathedral tower was imminent, Mountfort, the supervising architect, was asked to prepare revised designs to replace the austere spire of Scott's original plans. In addition to the executed design Mountfort proposed this considerably higher and more richly embellished version. The decorative elaboration of this spire contrasts with the simplicity of the Early French nave but Mountfort was probably attempting to recreate the stylistic diversity which characterised medieval churches. In view of the damage caused by earthquakes to the spire as built it was probably fortunate that this admittedly more spectacular proposal remained unrealised.

THOMAS JAMES CROUCH (1832-89) and RALPH WILSON (b. 1827)

12. *Design for a Lunatic Asylum, Christchurch, 1863*

- Front elevation and section
Pen and wash on paper, 578 x 914
Signed: Crouch and Wilson, Architects, Melbourne
Collection: Canterbury Museum

Among the many architectural competitions held in colonial Christchurch to obtain designs for public buildings was that held in 1863 for a lunatic asylum. While local architects enjoyed considerable success in these competitions in this case both the first and second premiums of 100 and 50 pounds went to Melbourne based architects, M.F. Kaweran, who took the first premium and Crouch and Wilson who were placed second. As was often the case, neither of the premiated designs were built. Later in 1863 Crouch and Wilson had greater success in Christchurch with their design for the Durham Street Methodist Church, built in a modified form in 1864.

WILLIAM BARNETT ARMSON (1834-1883)

13 a-b. *Design For Theatre, Shops And Offices, Christchurch, 1870*

- a. Front elevation
Pencil and wash on paper, 413 x 501
Signed: W.B. Armson, Archt., Colombo Street Ch.Ch, 12/12/ 70
- b. Longitudinal section and detail of roof construction
Pen and wash on paper, 519 x 673
Signed: W.B. Armson, Archt., Christchurch, 22/27/1
Collection: Collins Architects

Armson arrived in Christchurch from Hokitika in 1870 and these meticulously drawn plans document his first known architectural work in the city. The crisply designed classical façade reveals his familiarity with contemporary English architecture while the section provides a marvellous glimpse of a provincial Victorian theatre with its raked stage and intimate, galleried auditorium.



14 a-c. *Public Library, Christchurch, 1874*

- a. Elevation to Cambridge Terrace
Pen and pencil on paper, 448 x 803
Signed: W. B. Armson, Archt
- b. Front elevation
Pen and wash on paper, 596 x 957
- c. Longitudinal section
Pen and wash on paper, 596 x 597
Collection: Collins Architects

In 1874 Armson won the competition to design a new public library in controversial circumstances. Armson's entry was submitted late and his winning design far exceeded the estimates for cost. The modest, brick, Venetian Gothic library actually built bears little resemblance to the spectacular Flemish Gothic design, reminiscent of George Gilbert Scott's St. Pancras Hotel, London (1865-71), originally submitted. Armson can have had few expectations that his competition entry would be built, but it had allowed him to demonstrate his capabilities as a designer and had thus served its purpose in gaining him a prestigious commission. The practice founded by Armson in 1870 continues to this day as Collins Architects.

COLLINS AND HARMAN

15. *Proposed Salt-Water Swimming Baths for New Brighton, 1928*

- Perspective
Pencil and watercolour, 555 x 753
Signed: E[ric] U[ndrill]
Collection: Collins Architects

J.G. Collins (1886-1973) was the son of Armson's pupil and successor, J.J. Collins. R.D. Harman joined the firm in 1887 and retired in 1927. The swimming pool design was commissioned by the Public Works Department but the actual site is not known. The California Mission style of the pool seems particularly appropriate to its seaside setting and the subtly rendered, featureless background. The perspective was drawn by Eric Undrill who worked for Collins and Harman before entering on a career in radio.

RICHARD STRACHAN DE RENZY HARMAN (1896-1953)

16. *Proposed Art Gallery, 1928*

- Perspective
Pencil and watercolour on paper, 228 x 509
Collection: Warren and Mahoney

While architectural competitions for public buildings were commonplace during the nineteenth century, during this century they have been more sparingly used. The competition for the Christchurch art gallery, held in 1928, was won by E.W. Armstrong, a New Zealander then working in London. The Robert McDougall Art Gallery, named after its principal benefactor, was opened in 1932. Harman's design, with its colonnaded entrance court, recalls the seventeenth-century Trianon at Versailles and the Beaux Arts inspired gallery designs of American architects such as McKim, Mead and White. While more traditional than the crisp neo-classicism of Armstrong's gallery, Harman's version is the more expansive and welcoming design.

17. *Christchurch Cathedral: Chapter House and Extensions to Chancel, 1939*

- Perspective from south east
Pen on tracing paper, 489 x 665
Signed: R.S.D. Harman, Chartered architect, January 1939
Collection: Canterbury Public Library

Harman had a long association with Christchurch Cathedral designing furnishings and preparing proposals for a chapter house and extensions to the chancel. The overall character of Scott's original is retained but Harman introduced his favoured late medieval tracery in the chapter house and vestry windows, a feature that was 'corrected' by Giles Gilbert Scott when the plans were submitted to him for approval. The intervention of the Second World War meant that the plans were deferred and the need for extensions to the chancel has still to be met.

HEATHCOTE HELMORE (1894-1965) and GUY COTTERILL (1897-1981)

18. *Durham Court, c.1935*

- Perspective
Pencil and watercolour, 291 x 375
Collection: Canterbury Museum

The 1930s saw several large apartment buildings constructed in Christchurch including St. Elmo Courts (1930) by B.J. Ager and Victoria Mansions (1937) by Helmore and Cotterill. The design for Durham Courts probably precedes Victoria Mansions and may relate to another design for a block of flats in Gloucester Street. Although the exact location of Durham Courts is not known, it may have been intended for the intersection of Durham and Gloucester Streets. The stripped classicism and monolithic form of this design is closely related to the more traditional mode of flat building in contemporary Britain.

CECIL WALTER WOOD (1878-1947)

19. *Christ's College: New Frontage to Rolleston Avenue, 1945*

- Elevation
Pencil and watercolour on paper, 322 x 498
Signed: Cecil Wood, Architect, Christchurch, 1945
Collection: Sir Miles Warren

Cecil Wood's long involvement with Christ's College began in 1916 with the Hare Memorial Library and continued with the Memorial Dining Hall of 1925. The north wall of the Dining Hall remained unfinished until 1986 when Warren and Mahoney's Administration Building completed the east side of the quadrangle. Wood's proposal for College Offices, Board Room and Entrance Tower, conceived as a 1939-45 War Memorial, would have been a fitting climax to his work at the College but it was rejected in favour of a proposal to extend the chapel. With its squat arch, perpendicular tracery and diaper patterning, Wood's entrance tower would have been the perfect foil for Mountfort's pavilion-roofed tower on the neighbouring Canterbury Museum.

PAUL PASCOE (1908-1976) and WALTER LINTON (b. 1927)

20 a-b. *Christchurch Town Hall Competition, 1966*

- a. Cross sections
Pen on tracing paper, 748 x 1082
- b. Model
Kauri and mahogany, 140 x 380 x 635
Signed: Paul Pascoe and Linton, Architects, Model by Pat Mulcahy
Collection: Pascoe, Linton and Sellars

The Christchurch Town Hall Competition of 1966 was the largest and most important architectural competition to be held in New Zealand up to that time. The first phase drew 58 entries which were reduced to five for the final stage. These included the winning entry by Warren and Mahoney, completed in 1972, and that by another Christchurch firm, Pascoe and Linton. Models were also submitted in the final stage, Pascoe and Linton's being particularly distinctive as it is carved from solid blocks of mahogany and kauri. The design itself reveals Pascoe's allegiance to the 'Heroic Modernism' of the 1930s, with the principal elements of the complex subsumed in a single rectilinear block.

PETER BEAVEN (b. 1925)

21. *Christchurch Town Hall Competition, 1966*

- Perspective
Pen and pencil on tracing paper, 745 x 1185
Collection: Peter Beaven

Although not selected for the second stage of the Town Hall competition, Beaven's design was singled out by the assessors as 'one of the most adventurous and original submitted'. With its sweeping, sculptural roof forms, asymmetrical massing and organic relationship to the site, the design responds to the works of two of the most individual figures of European modernism, Aalto and Scharoun. These influences have been absorbed into a romantic and highly personal response to the brief.

SIR MILES WARREN (b. 1929) and MAURICE MAHONEY (b. 1929)

22. *Council Chamber and City Administration Building, c.1972*

- Perspective
Pencil and watercolour, 500 x 636
Collection: Warren and Mahoney

The Town Hall competition included proposals for a city administration building, although this was abandoned when the City Council converted the former Miller's Building to Civic Offices in 1980. Before this occurred Warren and Mahoney were asked to develop further this aspect of their successful Town Hall design. The tower block, which rises in marked contrast to the horizontality of the Town Hall itself, would have made the Civic Centre a landmark within the generally low lying urban environment. Such an assertive statement of the presence of local government may have seemed appropriate in the 1960s but from the perspective of the 1990s, with greater emphasis being placed on accountability and responsiveness to public opinion, such gestures no longer seem appropriate.

PETER BEAVEN and JOCELYN ALLISON (b.1934)

23. *Diocesan Centre, St Luke's Anglican Church, 1986*

- Perspective
Watercolour on paper, 594 x 655
Signed: Peter Beaven, architect and Jocelyn Allison, Dip F.A. (Hons.)
Dec. 7th [1986]
Collection: Peter Beaven and Jocelyn Allison

This scheme for a new Anglican Diocesan Centre was conceived as a joint project with the parish of St. Luke and would have included a new church hall. Nestling close to the northern flank of St Luke's, designed by Cyril Mountfort in 1906, the new complex is made up of a picturesque cluster of buildings assembled round a cloister. Although conceived in terms of contemporary building materials, the centre has a strong medieval character that is entirely appropriate to its setting. Without resorting to historicist pastiche, Beaven and Allison have preserved the spirit of the Gothic Revival architectural tradition established by Mountfort 140 years ago.