



Heritage Alert: Christ Church Cathedral, Christchurch, New Zealand

March 2015

Executive Summary

The Cathedral Church of Christ in Christchurch, New Zealand (more commonly known as the Christ Church Cathedral) was consecrated in 1881. It is an important physical and symbolic landmark for Christchurch. The building is considered a fine example of the Victorian mid gothic style. The cathedral was severely damaged in the two major earthquakes of September 2010 and February 2011. Most notably the distinctive spire and part of the belltower collapsed, and the main body of the building was damaged.

Current proposals (as at March 2015) are to demolish the cathedral. Work began on demolishing the building in late March 2012. Demolition was halted on the cathedral in December 2012, following the issuing of a judgment by the High Court of New Zealand which granted an application for judicial review of the decision to demolish made by the Diocese of Christchurch. However, in early December 2013, the Supreme Court rejected a final bid to halt demolition of the Cathedral.

ICOMOS New Zealand opposes this proposal and states the building should be repaired and reinstated.

- 1-0 Identity of Building/Artefact/Object/Place**
- 1-1 Current name and original name
Church Cathedral (Cathedral Church of Christ in Christchurch)
- 1-2 Location Town, Country, Street
Cathedral Square, Christchurch, New Zealand
- 1-3 Classification/ Type of place
Anglican cathedral

1-4 Current Heritage Protection Status
Category 1 historic place under the Heritage
New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014 (register
entry 46), Group 1 listed Heritage Item in the
Christchurch City District Plan

2-0 Statement of Significance and History

2-1 Statement of Significance

The Christchurch Cathedral has architectural, social, and historical value to the community of Christchurch. It is an important landmark building, defining the centre of the city and is a visual icon and symbol for the city. The building was designed by an English architect, but its building was supervised, and design modified, by a local architect, Benjamin Woolfield Mountfort. Particular changes made by Mountfort include using stone rather than timber for the spire, and modification of interior and exterior decorative elements. The cathedral's

Christchurch and Canterbury and its peoples over the past 164 years not only through its spiritual significance as the Cathedral church of the Anglican Diocese in Canterbury but also through its civic role as a centre for important cultural events since the beginning of formal European colonisation.

2-2 History of place

The Christchurch Cathedral is located in the centre of Christchurch City, in a planned open area known as Cathedral Square. The "square" is in fact a planned cruciform, with the cathedral located on its eastern edge. From its establishment in 1848, the Canterbury Association planned to make their settlement in Christchurch wholly Anglican. While this aim was not achieved, the Association always envisaged their colony as having a bishop and a cathedral at its centre.

Since 1851 the central square in Christchurch has been



Cathedral Square, 1952
Christchurch City Library CCL PhotoCD 11, IMG0052

construction was completed in 1904. The Cathedral contains significant tangible and intangible social and cultural history of the development and growth of

known as Cathedral Square, although it was not until 1858 that a specific area of land within the square was set aside for the erection of a cathedral. The realities of settling in Canterbury, and the lack of a bishop, meant that plans for the cathedral were delayed until 1856 when Henry John Chitty Harper (1804?-1893) was consecrated as the first

Bishop of Christchurch. Sir George Gilbert Scott, (1811-1878), the distinguished British Gothic Revival architect, was asked to draw up plans for Christ Church Cathedral in 1859. Scott had earlier drawn plans for a timber church, the plans for which arrived with the Reverend Thomas Jackson in 1851, but were never used. Choosing an English architect to design a colonial cathedral was common practice within the British Empire, as it reflected well on the status of the Church, and Scott already had a reputation for discerning what was architecturally possible in colonial circumstances.

Scott's original design was a severe thirteenth-century Gothic-style cathedral and was intended to be primarily constructed in timber, due to both the cost and the ever-present earthquake risk in New Zealand. Bishop Harper, however, argued that the cathedral had to be built from stone (also a matter of status), and by 1862 Scott's revised plans, as forwarded to the bishop, showed an internal timber frame with a stone exterior. The most interesting feature of Scott's design was the timber interior. According to architectural historian Ian Lochhead, the interior, if it had been built, *'would have ...surrounded [the congregation] by a forest of timber construction without parallel in the history of the Gothic Revival'*. Continuing pressure from the Cathedral Commission for an all-stone church, and concerns over the lack of timber in Canterbury, led to Scott providing alternative plans for a stone arcade and clerestory. These plans arrived in New Zealand in 1864.

Foundations for the cathedral were laid in 1864, after much fundraising in Christchurch, and under the supervision of Robert Speechly (1840-1884). Speechly, who had trained as an architect in London and worked for several leading Gothic Revival architects including William Slater and Alfred Waterhouse, was appointed resident architect to supervise the construction of the Christ Church Cathedral in 1864. The decision by the Cathedral Commission to appoint Speechly, rather than the leading local architect, Benjamin Woolfield Mountfort (1825-1898), led to an intense debate in the Christchurch newspapers. Scott supported the idea of appointing a local architect who would be familiar with the colony's conditions, and he was impressed by what he knew of Mountfort's buildings. However, the Cathedral Commission declined to accept Scott's advice, reiterating instead their concerns about the abilities of local architects. Conservative taste in architecture and concerns about Mountfort's known 'High Church' values may have also played a part in the commission's decision to appoint Speechly.

Lack of money halted construction on the cathedral in late 1865. Speechly then completed his four-year contract in New Zealand by acting as architect to the Anglican Church Property Trustees, supervising all buildings undertaken by them. In this capacity he was involved in

the design of a number of churches, houses and schools in the Canterbury settlement, assisted by his pupil, and then partner, William Fitzjohn Crisp. Speechly left New Zealand in 1868.

In 1873 interest in the partially complete cathedral was again renewed and Mountfort was finally appointed as supervising architect. Thereafter work progressed smoothly and the nave and tower were completed by 1881. The cathedral was consecrated in November of that year. As well as supervising the project, Mountfort made significant changes to Scott's design. These changes included the use of stone rather than timber for the spire; the addition of balconies and pinnacles to the tower; the raising of the south porch roof, the addition of a turret to the junction between the south porch and aisle; and the enrichment of the decorative elements on both the exterior and interior. Mountfort also chose to sheath the roof in slates of different colours arranged in repetitive patterns. His contribution to the interior of the cathedral was particularly marked. He made general recommendations about the type and colour of stained glass the cathedral should contain and designed a number of the windows himself. He also designed the font, pulpit, bishop's throne and the Harper Memorial of 1897.

Soon after the cathedral was consecrated in 1881, an earthquake loosened the stonework of the tower, and repairs and further strengthening were required. Seven years later a more severe earthquake brought down the top 29 feet (8.8 m) of the spire. This was eventually rebuilt with firebricks (to save weight), rather than stone, but a further earthquake, in 1901, damaged the spire again and the more successful solution was to reconstruct the upper portion of the spire in timber covered with copper.

When Mountfort died in 1898, the cathedral was still incomplete. His son, Cyril Mountfort (1852-1920), took over his father's role as supervising architect and oversaw the completion of the chancel, transepts and apse, all of which were finished by 1904. During the 1990s the addition of a visitors' centre and tearooms to the north façade of the cathedral aroused significant controversy.¹

As noted, the building had been damaged by earthquakes several times in its history, in 1881, 1888, 1901 and 1922. The magnitude 7.1 September 2010 earthquake caused some superficial damage. The magnitude 6.3 quake of February 2011 caused the spire to collapse and severely damaged the tower beneath it, damaged the gable of the west front, and collapsed the roof over the western section of the north aisle. Inspections revealed damage to supporting material and foundations. It was feared visitors had been in the tower when it collapsed, but this was found not to be so. The

¹ Melanie Lovell-Smith, 'Cathedral Church of Christ (Anglican)', Register no. 46, Register of Historic Places, Historic Areas, Wāhi Tapu and Wāhi Tapu Areas, updated 19 September 2001

building sustained further damage during the significant series of aftershocks that continued through 2011, the most significant loss being the damage and eventual collapse of the rose window in the west wall.

2-3 Date of project/ Date of construction/ Finishing of work

The first plan for a cathedral was drawn up by Sir George Gilbert Scott in 1859; these plans were revised in 1862 and again in 1864. Foundations were laid in 1864 under the supervision of London-trained resident architect Robert Speechly. Lack of money halted work, and Speechly completed his term in New Zealand and left. Local architect Benjamin Mountfort was appointed as supervising architect in 1873. The cathedral was consecrated in 1881, and completed in 1904 under the supervision of Mountfort's son, Cyril Mountfort.

2-4 Architect/Designers

Original plan designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott, revised by Scott, further significant revisions and additions by Benjamin Mountfort.

2-5 Architect/Designers still living? Residence, country of birth, contact details

Contributing architects are deceased

2-6 Original and current use of building/place

The cathedral has always been used for ecumenical purposes. It has also been a destination for tourists and visitors, and a venue for concerts.

2-7 Changes, additions

Changes were made to the original design of the building throughout its construction, most notably replacement of the original planned timber spire with a stone one, and changes to planned interior decoration and design. Later additions were made to the north and south of the chancel with the building of a Vestry and Choir accommodation designed by the then Cathedral architect Paul Pascoe who had been appointed to the position on the death of Cathedral architect R S D Harman in 1953. In the 1990s the Cathedral visitor's centre designed by architect Alun Wilkie and opened by the Queen in 1995 was built to the north. The Visitor's Centre while at the time a controversial addition, was built to help accommodate the more than 300,000 visitors who visited the Cathedral annually. In 2000 a standalone columbarium, a place to house the ashes of the dead, was built to the south.

2-8 Current condition and use

Since the 2010 and 2011 earthquakes the cathedral has been partially destroyed, and has not been safe for use. The Cathedral is subject to the Canterbury Earthquake

Recovery (CER) Act 2011 Section 45 notice prohibiting any entry into the site.

2-9 Original design intent and use

Built as a place of Anglican worship and to symbolise the Anglican settlement of Christchurch. The Cathedral was planned by the Canterbury Association as the physical and symbolic heart of the city.

3-0 Description (history and technology)

3-1 Physical description

The building is a stone and timber cathedral, built in the Gothic Revival architectural style.

3-2 Construction system used

A slate tile clad roof is supported on timber framing (sarking, rafters and beams) which is in turn supported by stone walls, strengthened with buttresses, on a probable stone wall foundation. The stone walls typically comprise internal and external facing stonework with rubble infill. In the early 2000s a programme of structural strengthening was designed and implemented by Holmes Consulting – this work employed the latest design technology of that time.

3-3 Physical context/setting

The context and setting of the building is intrinsic to its function and social status. It was deliberately designed and placed in the centre of the new settlement of Christchurch as a physical and symbolic marker of the centre of the settlement, both physically and spiritually. The centre of Christchurch was known as Cathedral Square since 1851, predating the actual construction or even establishment of a cathedral in the area. The "square" is actually a cruciform, continuing the spiritual theme. For many years the spire of the cathedral was the tallest element in Cathedral Square. Although it has been severely damaged by the earthquakes, the Cathedral is still a major landmark of central Christchurch. The Cathedral is also carefully sited with an axial relationship to the Gothic Revival style Canterbury Museum (also designed Benjamin Mountfort), at the west end of Worcester Boulevard.

3-4 Social and cultural context and value

The cathedral has enormous social and cultural context. It is very much the key landscape and conceptual symbol of the city, and is an important physical icon for the people of Christchurch. It has visual and symbolic associations for the Christchurch community well beyond its ecumenical functions. The Cathedral is a widely recognized architectural icon, and an icon of the city. The building has been extensively photographed and has

been widely utilized in images to represent the city of Christchurch locally, nationally and internationally.

Christ Church Cathedral has cultural and spiritual significance not only as the Cathedral church of the Anglican Diocese in Canterbury but also through its civic role as a centre for important cultural events over the life of the Canterbury Province since the beginning of formal European colonisation. It has been the venue for many important commemorative services including the weddings and funerals of many well-known Canterbury citizens since 1881. Since that date stained glass windows, internal furnishings, seating and the tower bells are among items given by families within the diocese, often as commemorative elements to family members – a practice that has continued within the community up until the 2011 earthquake. The many memorial items and plaques give this building particular commemorative significance. A number of commemorative items including most of the stained glass windows were removed from the Cathedral before the June earthquake. The Cathedral remains a symbol for the city and is a key physical identifier of the City of Christchurch along with the River Avon.

3-5 Materials/fabric/form/function

The cathedral is built from local basalt, limestone and timber finish. The Christ Church Cathedral has considerable technological and craftsmanship significance due to the high level of constructional and applied decoration. The ornate interior scheme, which included stained glass windows and decorative tiles, was designed by Benjamin Mountfort.

3-6 Aesthetic value

The Christ Church Cathedral is of aesthetic value for its scale, architectural rhythm and proportions; its visual richness of materials, texture and patterns; its sense of solidity and height, as well as its use of light and its acoustic properties. Its materials and style evoke a sense of time-depth.

3-7 ICOMOS New Zealand Charter

The ICOMOS New Zealand Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Heritage Value 2010 sets out the heritage philosophy for New Zealand Heritage. The preamble of the charter states

“New Zealand shares a general responsibility with the rest of humanity to safeguard its cultural heritage places for present and future generations.

The charter states that

“Places of cultural heritage value

- (i) have lasting values and can be appreciated in their own right;*

- (ii) inform us about the past and the cultures of those who came before us;*
- (iii) provide tangible evidence of the continuity between past, present, and future;*
- (iv) underpin and reinforce community identity and relationships to ancestors and the land; and*
- (v) provide a measure against which the achievements of the present can be compared.”*

The Christ Church Cathedral meets all these tests.

The charter goes on to state

“Conservation maintains and reveals the authenticity and integrity of a place, and involves the least possible loss of fabric or evidence of cultural heritage value.

Work undertaken at a place of cultural heritage value should involve the least degree of intervention consistent with conservation and the principles of this charter.

Intervention should be the minimum necessary to ensure the retention of tangible and intangible values and the continuation of uses integral to those values. The removal of fabric or the alteration of features and spaces that have cultural heritage value should be avoided”.

The ICOMOS New Zealand charter speaks strongly on the matter of degrees in intervention. The charter states that preservation, through stabilisation, maintenance, or repair is the first and preferred method of intervention, and that the extent of any intervention for conservation purposes should be guided by the cultural heritage value of a place.

4-0 Source of Alert

4-1 Proposer(s) of Heritage Alert, contact details

ICOMOS New Zealand
PO Box 90 851
Auckland Mail Centre
AUCKLAND 1142

Groups supporting Heritage Alert and/or nomination

The Great Christchurch Buildings Trust (GCBT)
Heritage New Zealand
IConIC
Keepthecathedral

4-3 Groups potentially against Heritage Alert action

Anglican Church Property Trustees (owners). The church has considered a range of options including maximum retention, disassembly and restoration as well as a new building of new design. In March 2012 the Bishop announced the decision of the Standing Committee and Church Property Trustees to bring the

Christ Church Cathedral down to between two and three metres in height, through extensive controlled demolition and controlled disassembly.

4-4 Local, Regional, International significance citations about the place

Christchurch City Council: Draft Assessment Statement, March 2014

The Anglican Cathedral of Christchurch is of national and international significance. The building and its setting have been assessed as making an important contribution to the identity, sense of place and history of the New Zealand and is primarily of importance to the nation for its heritage values.

Christ Church Cathedral is historically significant as the Cathedral planned by the Canterbury Association as the symbolic and physical centrepiece of the city. The Cathedral was constructed between 1864 and 1904 to plans by leading British Gothic Revival architect Sir George Gilbert Scott. Construction was largely supervised by leading Canterbury architect Benjamin Mountfort who made some changes in the course of construction, to the design. The Cathedral is the only building in New Zealand designed by Scott. The building has considerable contextual significance due to its position in Cathedral Square and is the landmark building in the city. The Cathedral has spiritual significance as the Cathedral church of the Anglican Diocese in Canterbury and cultural significance to the city as a whole as a venue for important civic and cultural events in the city. Following the considerable damage to the Cathedral as a result of the seismic activity between 2010 and 2012, controversy over its future still continues.

The level of tangible and intangible cultural heritage values as assessed in this statement of significance remains despite the considerable earthquake damage.

Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga has included the Cathedral on its List of Heritage Places, as a Category 1 historic place. The List entry can be found at

www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/46

4-5 Letters of support for Heritage Alert action, newspaper articles, etc.

- In its decision on an appeal against demolition, the Supreme Court of New Zealand stated the circumstances giving rise to the Greater

Christchurch Buildings Trust application were of "great general importance to the citizens of Christchurch. That importance arises from the history, function and iconic nature of the Cathedral²²". However the Court upheld the High Court decision to allow demolition to take place.

- An editorial in The Press of 4 December 2012 noted issues around the proposal demolition, including public feeling on the issue and support for retention of the building.

4-6 Publications that describe the work/place, bibliography, etc..

Lochhead, Dr. Ian, *A Dream of Spires, Benjamin Mountfort and the Gothic Revival*, 1999

Christchurch City Council Heritage files (as at March 2014)

Christchurch Cathedral Conservation Plan, Salmond Reed Architects, 2006

5-0 Recommended action

5-1 Heritage Alert: international/national distribution via ICOMOS
International distribution via ICOMOS NZ

6-0 Desired outcome

Retention of the current building
Reinstatement of disarticulated fabric
Necessary repairs, maintenance and conservation
Earthquake strengthening as necessary

Sources:

www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/46

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/the-press/news/city-centre/9467108/Christ-Church-Cathedral-free-for-demolition>

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/the-press/opinion/editorials/9472863/Editorial-Cathedral-demolition-is-sad-news>

² The Press, 2 December 2013