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Corporate Plan Output: City Design and Heritage	

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide information with respect to the history of the Fitzgerald Statue and the recent proposals to move the statue from its current site in Rolleston Avenue to either Cathedral or Latimer Squares.

INTRODUCTION

The debate about where to place the Fitzgerald statue began in 1934 when the statue was offered to the City Council by its donor Mr R E Green. Though the Council initially approved Latimer Square as the site for the statue and despite the commission being site specific for Latimer Square, the Fitzgerald statue, through a series of unforeseen circumstances, ended up being accepted by the Domains Board in 1939 and being placed at the western end of Cashel Street on what was then Domains Board land.

The issue surrounding the statue's site appears not to have been raised again within the Council until November 1993 when a report to the Hagley-Ferrymead Community Board recommended that the Board support the relocation of the statue to Latimer Square as part of the Council's improvement programme for this area.

In 1994 the Hagley-Ferrymead Community Board put the proposal to the Metropolitan Committee for consideration. A working party of the Metropolitan Committee resolved on 9 May 1994 to endorse "...the proposal in principle by the Working Party, subject to a report on design details and costings." (*Committee Minutes, 9 May 1994, p.25*)

In 1997 it was mooted that the statue be moved to Cathedral Square to "...a site behind the Cathedral...." as part of the Square upgrade (*The Mail, 4 August 1997*). The current debate appears to have gained momentum from about this date.

In July 1998 a submission by Mr Roger Barker, General Manager of the Christchurch Press Company, seeking to relocate the Fitzgerald statue to a site outside the Press Company building, was received by the Council. The basis for this proposal is Fitzgerald's link with the Press Company as its founder in 1861 (see attachment).

HISTORY OF THE STATUE

The statue of James Edward Fitzgerald (1818-1896) was executed by noted Canterbury sculptor Francis Shurrock (1887-1977) between 1934 and 1936. The commission was to be Shurrock's first and only large scale public work for Christchurch; it was also to be a commission fraught with problems when Shurrock got "...caught in the cross-fire between the disputing parties." (*Stocker, M. "Francis Shurrock Revisited", BONZAH vol.18 1997 pp.76-77*)

James Edward Fitzgerald was the first editor of the *Lyttelton Times*, founded *The Press* in 1861, was the first Superintendent of the Canterbury Provincial Council (1853-57), was arguably the first Prime Minister of New Zealand in 1854, was, in 1867, the first Controller-General of Finance, later Auditor-General, was a founder of the Public Service Association and first President of the Incorporated Society of Accountants and the architect of Big School at Christ's College. He was one of Canterbury's most illustrious and energetic early colonists.

On 27 January 1934 an offer was made to donate a statue of Fitzgerald. At this point the donor, Mr R E Green wished to remain anonymous. A sub-committee of the Council approved the Latimer Square site on 27 April 1934 and on 22 August 1934 the Council agreed to the erection of the statue in Latimer Square. "Art Notes" in *Art in New Zealand*, in September 1934 announced that "Christchurch is to have a statue of James Edward Fitzgerald.... The commission has been given to Mr F A Shurrock, of Christchurch. The donor, who prefers to remain anonymous, has arranged with the City Council to have the statue, which is 8ft 3in high and will be set on a pedestal some 11ft high, erected in Latimer Square" (p.50).

However, in November of that year the Council withdrew its acceptance of the statue because a dispute had arisen between the donor and his family over the gift. The Council had no wish to become involved in the donor's private matters. Mr Green for his part stated on 22 November 1934 that he intended to hold the Council to its original acceptance.

A further approach to the Council to accept the statue for Latimer Square was made by Mr Green in July 1936; this also met with refusal. In the interim the sculptor had executed the work which had subsequently been cast in England and was being held in storage accumulating bond charges.

In the December of 1936 R B Owen of the Christchurch Beautifying Society suggested that the Minister of Lands be approached to allow the statue to be placed in the grounds of the Provincial Buildings. Given Fitzgerald's connection with the Provincial Council this suggestion seemed appropriate. However, the sculptor, Francis Shurrock, stated that at the time of the commission the Council had had a plan drawn up of the Latimer Square site and that "...the work was definitely planned with that site in view. The requirements of a particular site ...had to be carefully studied by the sculptor" (*The Press*, 8 December 1936, p.8). Thus it would seem clear that Shurrock modelled the work to suit the location conditions of its exposed Latimer Square site where it was intended to be viewed in the round.

Discussion and debate over the fate of the work continued until the statue was placed in the hands of the Domains Board and erected on the Board's land in February 1939. The location, backed by trees and on a restricted site did not flatter the statue rendering Shurrock's careful modelling for the open conditions of Latimer Square superfluous (see: Stocker, M. "Francis Shurrock Revisited", *BONZA*, vol.18 1997, p.77).

The current submission by the Press Company to relocate the statue outside its building in the North-East quadrant of Cathedral Square is based on Fitzgerald's association as founder of that company. While this relationship is significant it must be remembered that he was never associated with the Press Company on this site; his physical association was related to the Cashel Street site of the Press - the building still stands today. The Cathedral Square building was built a decade and a half after Fitzgerald's death.

Consideration must be given to the fact, as previously stated, that the statue was conceived as a work of art for an open green-space site. In my opinion it would be lost within the strong hard surface, highly articulated architectural elements and aesthetic detail of the buildings in this quadrant of the Square, in particular the verticality of the Press tower combined with the bulk and weight of the Government buildings and the Cathedral. Equally the diagonal vehicular way through this area intrudes into the space and would, in my opinion, not allow the statue "room to breath" so to speak, thus removing any contemplative elements we associate with statues.

While the Godley and Rolleston statues are associated with particular buildings both were conceived as site specific by the artists and in relation to the buildings. While the Godley statue was erected before the Cathedral (1867), it must be remembered that Sir George Gilbert Scott's plans for the Cathedral had been drawn up some years before and thus the Godley statue was given its own legal plot (now demarcated by the four trees) affording it clear space within the Square as part of the overall design for the Cathedral and statue within this public space.

In relation to the above discussion, I have sought the advice of Dr Mark Stocker, a Senior Lecturer in Art History at the University of Canterbury and an expert in 19th and 20th century sculpture (see attachment).

CONCLUSIONS

Research to date would suggest that the significance of honouring Fitzgerald's memory and the fine quality of the statue as a public work of art were lost in the 1930s debate causing the sculptor, Shurrock, to state in *The Press* of 16 February 1936. "I am fed up with the whole business ... it has made me hate the statue and for my part I would rather see it broken up and sold as scrap metal." (*Press, op.cit. p.10*)

The current debate provides us with a forum to re-evaluate the present site of the Fitzgerald's statue. It also provides us with the opportunity to address the issues lost in the 1930s debacle; to honour Fitzgerald's contribution to the Canterbury settlement and the aesthetic appropriateness of the current or any future site of this work of art.

In my opinion, and given the above discussion, consideration should be given to moving the statue from its current site in Rolleston Avenue to the originally intended site in Latimer Square.

For the reasons discussed above I would not consider the Press Company site in Cathedral Square appropriate to this work of art.

I would further argue that the views of the late artist in this matter should be of prime consideration. It must be remembered that this statue is not simply a memorial to Fitzgerald, but a carefully conceived and executed work of art. Noted New Zealand Art

Historian Professor Michael Dunn interviewed Shurrock in 1972 for his article “The Life and Works of Francis Shurrock” and states:

“The statue was to be seen against open sky in Latimer Square near the city centre. To compensate for the refraction of light around the forms the sculptor made modifications to his model. Unfortunately the statue was not erected on the intended site; instead it was placed against a leafy background so that it is only possible to see it from one direction instead of from all sides as the sculptor intended.”
(BONZAH vol.7, 1979, p.28.)

RESOURCE CONSENT MATTERS

The Fitzgerald statue is a Group 2 listed heritage item in App.1, Part 10, Vol.3 of the City Plan. The removal of a Group 2 heritage item is a discretionary activity. Any proposal to relocate the statue would require a Resource Consent. Thus the any proposal to relocate the Fitzgerald statue would be subject to the matters of this planning process.

If the statue is to be proposed for removal from its current site in Rolleston Avenue I would recommend that any proposals for relocation be put to the Art in Public Places Sub-Committee for discussion prior to any Resource Consent application.

Recommendation: That the relocation of Fitzgerald Statue to Latimer Square be considered as a new project for the 1999/00 budget, in conjunction with existing plans to remodel Latimer Square.

Chairman’s

Recommendation: For discussion.