

Warner's Hotel - Heritage Assessment

Historical and Social Significance

The presence of a hotel building on the Warner's site dates back to 1863 when John Coker established 'The Commercial and Dining Rooms' catering mainly to 'commercial gentlemen'. As early as 1864 ownership of the building passed to William White who renamed it the Commercial Hotel. Subsequently this - hotel has become associated with the name of its third owner - William Francis Warner - who took over the business in 1874. The hotel license passed to E. Cookson in 1879, Warner returning in 1882. Although the Warner family relinquished control of the building in 1900, the hotel continued to be known as Warner's, albeit 'more by common usage than by consent of the licensing Bench'.

The management and ownership of Warner's changed many times over the years. In 1934 the hotel underwent extensive refurbishment establishing it as one of the most up-to-date hotels in terms of interior design. In 1943 it was sold to the Christchurch Press Company Ltd., and in 1950 to Square Freeholders Ltd. The building was later used as a tavern with retail outlets on the ground floor which replaced the once formal lounges and kitchens. Today Warner's provides back-packer accommodation and bars.

Architectural Significance

The hotel buildings on the site 'document' the changing fortunes of the hotel. The hotel was first located in timber buildings on the site. By 1873 Warner's Hotel was a large two storey timber edifice with sample rooms and commercial rooms on the ground floor and sitting and bedrooms (*en suite*) on the first floor. The building was described as of " character credible to our street architecture."

A three storey masonry portion facing south was built in 1891, to a design by architect F. Strouts. This added a number of bedrooms and provided a 'family' dining room lighted by three windows facing Worcester Street. At night it was lit by artificial 'sunlight' under a central dome of cathedral glass and contained a space for banquets. The second floor contained bedrooms for bachelors.

In 1900 the timber portions of Warner's succumbed to fire and designs for a substantial new masonry addition facing west were prepared by noted architect Joseph

Clarkson Maddison. Construction was completed by 1903. (Attached photo c1908). Originally a two-storey design, it was subsequently altered to accommodate three storeys.

Maddison was born in Greenwich, England. Educated at private schools, he was later articled to George Morris, a London Architect. After setting up practice in London for a short period, Maddison emigrated to New Zealand, arriving in Lyttelton in 1872. By 1875 he had set up practice as an architect in Cashel Street.

In 1887 Maddison was elected a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects and by 1905 he was considered to be one of the leading architects in New Zealand having been elected a Fellow of the New Zealand Institute of Architects.

During the 1880s Maddison became a leader in the field of industrial design, developing a specialised skill in a new industry; the freezing works. For the most part his industrial works were designed in variations of the classical manner distinguished by a large scale and use of brickwork. This is equally true of his commercial architecture such as the former Government Building, now the Heritage Hotel, and hotels such as the Carlton and Clarendon; the latter building, was about as elaborate as Maddison ever allowed his buildings to become.

Although Maddison was a prolific and versatile architect, he was much less inclined to be innovative. He followed the first generation of Christchurch architects and was a leading member of the generation who rebuilt the central city in stone replacing the timber colonial buildings. Unlike the slightly younger architects of his epoch - Clarkson and Ballantyne, the Luttrell Brothers, R.W.England and Collins and Harman - who were experimenting with 'new' styles, he was basically a Classical Revival architect of the late 19th century. His work is characterised by reserve, restraint and 'economy of style'.

Other Canterbury works by Maddison include the homestead at Monavale and the Monavale Lodge, Holy Trinity at Amberley, the church at Port Levy and the Seddon Memorial Belfry at S. Mary's Church, Addington. He also designed the imposing, albeit temporary, 1906-07 International Exhibition buildings in North Hagley Park and the old Nurses home which until the early 1980's stood on the corner of Oxford Terrace and Riccarton Avenue.

While the bulk of Maddison's work was confined to Canterbury, he designed a number of buildings through out New Zealand:- freezing works at Ashburton, Pareora, Waitara, Puki Puki (Hastings) and Ngahauranga in Wellington; commercial buildings in Cuba and Willis Streets and Lambton Quay, Wellington; and, in Palmerston North he designed the Grand Hotel, commercial premises for A. Sutherland and his most outstanding domestic work, 'Merchiston'.

Warner's, a restrained yet monumental example of Victorian classicism, relies for much of its architectural effect on mainly regular fenestration with round headed arches on the ground floor, and rectangular on the first and second; the 1900 section repeats this pattern with segmental headed windows on the first floor. Maddison's original designs for this section was originally in a more elaborate French Second Empire style, but even as built in reduced form it represents a notable example of monumental Victorian classicism.

The Luttrell Brothers added another storey to the whole complex c1910 and they were also responsible, in 1917, for the demolition of the northern section of the building to make way for the construction of the Liberty Theatre. This was intended to act as a buffer to the noise of the printing presses which were keeping guests in Warner's awake at night. Removal of this section has disturbed the visual symmetry and balance of the building. Maddison had skilfully centred the ornamented entry balancing the open corner at one end and a building at the other.

While the Luttrell Brother's addition of an extra storey in 1910 increased the monumentality of the building, the subsequent demolition of the northern corner compromised its appearance. With the recent demolition of the Savoy the opportunities now present themselves to construct a sympathetic addition to Warner's - or to reconstruct the portion pulled down in 1917.

The south facing portion erected by the Luttrell Brothers c.1920, eventually established the existing architectural character of the whole complex. Recent research suggests that it was at this date that the timber Canterbury Music Hall, later Gaiety Theatre, was demolished and the south façade of Warner's was extended along this section. The Luttrell Brothers' designs dating from this period, unite the various alterations to Warner's into a unified whole. However, this has to some degree been compromised by the removal of the balustraded parapet in the 1970s and the chamfering of the south-west corner. This diminishing of the original architectural intent can be readily restored.

The current appearance of the building is currently compromised to some extent by the unsympathetic colour scheme, but even in its present state it retains some of its original architectural grandeur - its simple, classical forms contrasting with the more ornate, Gothic decorative elements of the Press building make an important contribution to the streetscape significance of the heritage and character group within the north-west quadrant of the Square. Historically, the building has become a landmark once as well known - as the Weekly Press commented in 1900 - 'as the Cathedral itself' (Weekly Press, 17 October 1900).

Cultural Spiritual Significance

For more than a century Warner's central location has established it as a meeting place for various Christchurch Societies. In the 1860s for example, it was the meeting venue for the Poultry Association and the Colombo Mining Investment Company. At one time Warner's was the transport terminus of the City; it was the Christchurch agent for the Cobb and Co stage coaches; the New Brighton tram left from outside the hotel; and the Christchurch - Hanmer Motor Service provided motor tours from the hotel. In its prime it was considered the 'smart' place to stay and hold receptions.

The changing pattern and fortunes of the hotel are a significant part of hotel, albeit 'pub' cultural history within our society.

Archaeological Significance

Archaeological evidence for this is assessed for the degree to which the "...heritage item and its relevance in respect of important physical evidence of pre 1900 human activities" is evident. Like the Lyttelton Times Company, a hotel has occupied the Warner's site since 1863 and as such evidence of pre 1900 human activity can be assumed from at least this date.

Technological and Craftsmanship significance

While the alterations and additions to Warner's presents a *pot-pourri* of building technology - the building retains remnants of Edwardian crafts skills found in many of the decorative elements of the façade notably the principal entry with its iron balcony and moulded embellishments.

Group and Landmark Significance of the Warners, Lyttelton Times and the Star Heritage Building Precinct

The former *Star* Building (Gloucester Street), the former *Lyttelton Times* Building, (Cathedral Square) and *Warner's* (Cathedral Square), are integral to reading the heritage fabric of the north-east quadrant and of the Square as a whole; they mark significant economic and social change in the history of Christchurch. Equally, these buildings are notable examples of the work of many of Christchurch's early and most talented architects - Collins and Harman (former *Star* Building), the Luttrell Brothers (former *Lyttelton Times* Building) and J. C. Maddison (*Warner's*). Each building is, in its own way, a fine example of the architecture of the late Victorian and Edwardian periods which help define the character of the north-eastern quadrant of the Square.

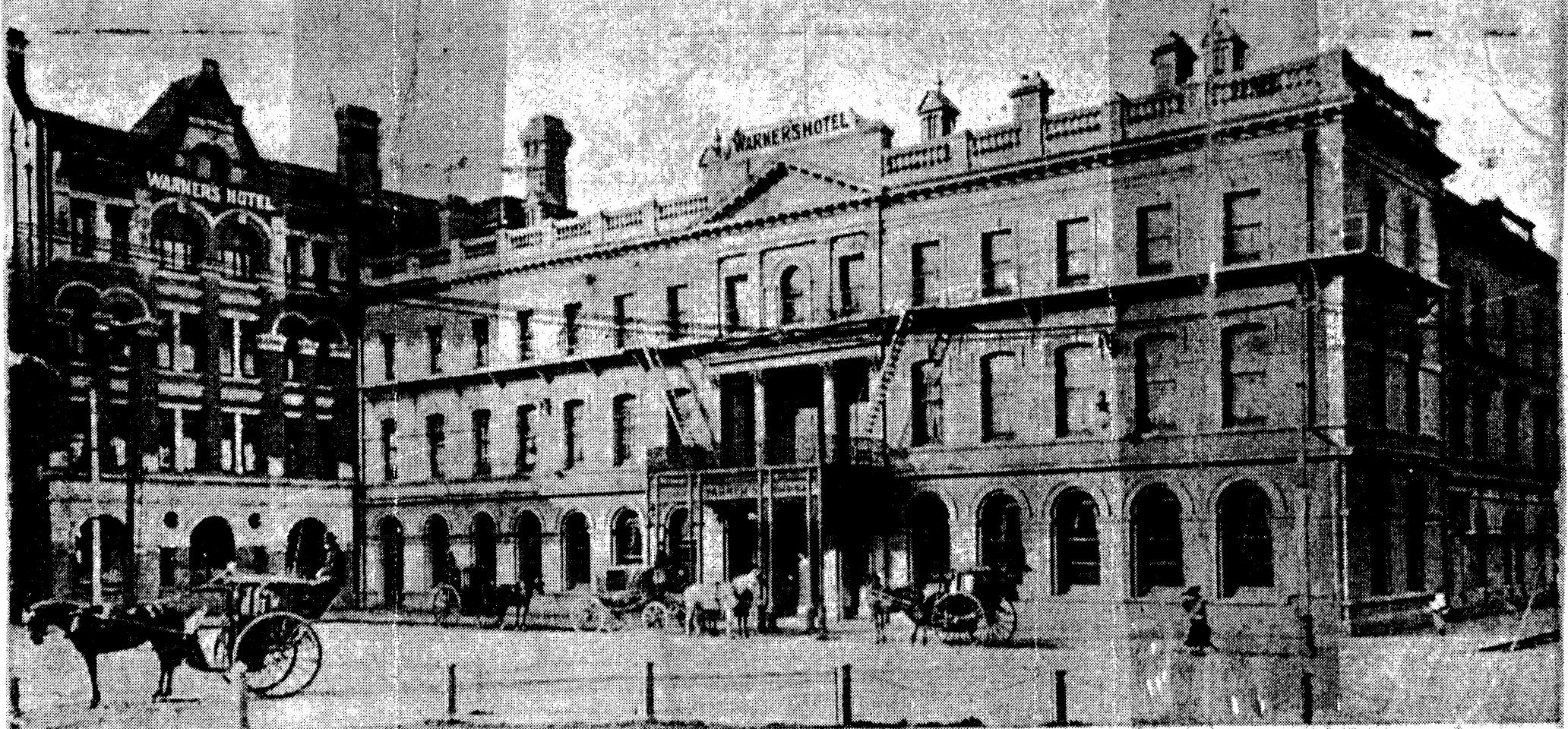
Together with buildings such as the former Government buildings, the Press, and the Cathedral; the Theatres Royal and the Coachman in Gloucester Street; and the former Trinity Congregational Church and State Insurance Company building in Worcester Street, they form the last significant precinct of late Victorian and Edwardian commercial and public buildings in the Central City, a precinct which is unrivalled for its streetscape qualities anywhere in New Zealand. The loss, in my opinion, of any one of these buildings, would seriously compromise the cumulative effect of this group on the heritage character of Cathedral Square. Their continued existence provides continuity within the community - that is a feeling of familiarity with in the area - a feeling of what makes our City different to other Cities. This area emphasises the significance of the retention of whole precincts within the city rather than the preservation of just one building alienated by new development.

Jenny May
Senior Heritage Planner

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150 ROOMS.

WARNER'S HOTEL, CHRISTCHURCH, N.Z.

E. E. DANIELS, MANAGER.