

CHRISTCHURCH CITY COUNCIL CIVIC OFFICES





FROM THE 1860s TO THE 1980s

1. 1862-1887

Christchurch was founded in 1850 on the arrival of about 800 settlers from the United Kingdom, and became New Zealand's first city, by Royal Charter, in 1856. Responsible local government began when the first meeting of the Christchurch Municipal Council, established under a provincial ordinance, was held on 3 March 1862.

From 1862 until April 1887, Council meetings were held in the first public building erected in Christchurch on the banks of the Avon River in Worcester Street. This had first been used as the Land Office on 17 February 1851 and subsequently served many public purposes — government buildings, survey office, resident magistrates court, supreme court and library, as well as municipal chambers.



Photo courtesy Canterbury Museum

2. 1887-1924

In 1886 the Council decided that the time had arrived to have a building more worthy of the growing city. It was designed by S. Hurst Seager, the contractors being Messrs England and Martin. The building was erected on the cleared site of the old Land Office, and completed on 24 March 1887. The first meeting of the Council took place there on 4 April.

This building (the only offices built specifically for the Council) remains in the city's ownership.

By 1919 the building had become too small and overflow offices had been taken in Worcester Street. A bill was introduced in Parliament seeking power to enlarge the building (erected on a reserve) but the suggestion to encroach further on the banks of the Avon met with so much opposition that it was withdrawn.



3. 1924-1980

In 1920, the Canterbury Hall Company offered to the Council its site in Manchester Street containing the remains of the Canterbury Hall erected in 1900, but gutted by fire in 1917. A loan to purchase the site was approved by the ratepayers, and competitive designs were called for the reconstruction of the interior. Messrs Greenstreet and Anderson were the successful architects and in 1922 a contract was let to W. Williamson. The new offices were opened on 1 September 1924 and the Council met there for the first time a week later.

This building, which served the Council and its staff well for 56 years, was designed on the American banking chamber system, all departments facing a common public space served by a continuous counter, horseshoe in shape.



4. 1980

After World War II, the functions of the Council expanded, with consequent increase in staff. Gradually, overflow offices were either bought or leased in other premises in the Manchester Street/Gloucester Street area, until by 1978 the staff occupied all or part of nine separate buildings. The Civic Offices, which are the subject of this brochure, bring the staff together under one roof for the first time since 1943. All departments are located here with the exception of the Municipal Electricity Department, firmly established in its own building at the corner of Manchester and Armagh Streets. The airport, public library, and art gallery are necessarily located elsewhere.

The Civic Offices were officially opened by H.R.H. The Duchess of Kent on 12 November 1980.



CIVIC OFFICES REDEVELOPMENT 1978-1980

When it became known in March 1978 that the Millers Building was for sale, it was not at first thought it would be suitable for an office building. But a walk through it gave a renewed appreciation of its solid construction and how little it had dated over 40 years.

The need to bring all Council departments together under one roof had been apparent for a long time. In 1962, approval had been given for a Civic Centre on the river at Victoria and Kilmore Streets. Stage I of this scheme, the Christchurch Town Hall, had been completed in 1972. Stage II was to be Council offices combined with a car parking building astride a closed Victoria Street, then programmed to be built between 1981-1985 with an estimated cost (at March 1978) of about \$13.5 million. This would have increased the total city debt by nearly two-thirds.

Conversion of the Millers building had a number of advantages. Re-housing the staff from nine separate locations to provide a better service to the public, enhance efficiency and improve staff working conditions was obvious enough. But additionally, some millions of dollars would be injected into the local construction industry at a time when it was most needed. Also, just as the Town Hall had provided an impetus for development north of the Square, the new Civic Offices would do the same for the south. As far as public buildings were concerned, the south-eastern quadrant of the central business district had been neglected in the past. Finally, there seemed to be considerable virtue in re-cycling a sound existing building.

The City Architect, G. S. R. Fenton, and his staff undertook the main design responsibility, but through a suggestion scheme which attracted over 200 replies, every councillor and staff member had the opportunity of contributing to the design process.

The Council obtained possession in August 1978, but Millers Ltd retained tenancy of the ground and first floors until August 1979.

BUILDING DESCRIPTION

In the District Planning Scheme the building is listed as having architectural and community significance, and scientific interest. Originally designed as a retail store, factory and warehouse, it was completed in 1939. It is notable for its structural design concept of beamless floor slab construction in reinforced concrete, where the design loads, including earthquake forces, are transferred to the hexagonal columns by mushroom-shaped heads and drop slabs.

This concept was originated by a French Swiss engineer, Robert Maillart around 1912 and further developed in the 1920's by the modern movement of the German Bauhaus under Peter Behrens and Walter Gropius.

To obtain the utmost economy in materials, waffle floor slab construction was used to accommodate the very heavy superimposed floor loadings anticipated in the building.

To accommodate the Council staff with maximum flexibility for future change, the design brief demanded office planning on the open principle, as developed in Germany in the 1960's, suitably modified to meet specialist needs such as a Council Chamber, committee rooms and reception areas. There are only

The project management firm of M. D. Woods Ltd filled the role of main contractor, managing about 150 separate contracts. A really pleasing result of this arrangement has been that smaller local firms have participated in the project to a much greater extent than would have been likely in a conventional new-construction contract.

At the peak of activity, 100 people were working on the site. A major role was played by the Municipal Electricity Department as complete rewiring was necessary.

With a gross floor space of 160,000 square feet, or 3½ acres, the Civic Offices are estimated to have a residual life of at least 60 years. The low-rise nature of the building (only five levels, and those all linked by escalators) is ideal for the Council's purposes, enabling whole departments, in the main, to remain on one level.

Including the purchase price and the site, the project cost \$5.9 million. This figure includes air conditioning, escalators, furnishings and furniture, floor covering and telephones. At \$38 per square foot, this is cheaper than a good quality home without site value or contents. It is less than half the 1980 cost of new construction, a fact borne out by the known cost of nearby bank premises recently completed at \$80 per square foot. For the outlay mentioned, the citizens have acquired an asset with a replacement value of \$12.5 million in which they have a substantial equity. The loan indebtedness is \$3.25 million, reducible by about \$900,000 when premises which have become redundant by the move into the Civic Offices are sold.

The move into the building took place progressively over a four week period, with all departments finally open to the public in the new premises on 22 September 1980.

28 fully partitioned offices in the building, and the remainder of the 380 staff are housed in landscaped open-plan work stations.

Optimum working environment in the interior has been achieved by the installation of air handlers for temperature and ventilation control, supplemented by the use of solar heat reducing glass on the north and west walls and the provision of sound-absorbent surfaces for walls, dividing screens to work stations, ceilings and floors. Painted wall surfaces have been used sparingly. Liberal use of fabric wall linings helps to soften and humanise the interior spaces, and widespread placing of plant foliage offsets the utilitarian geometrics of building planes.

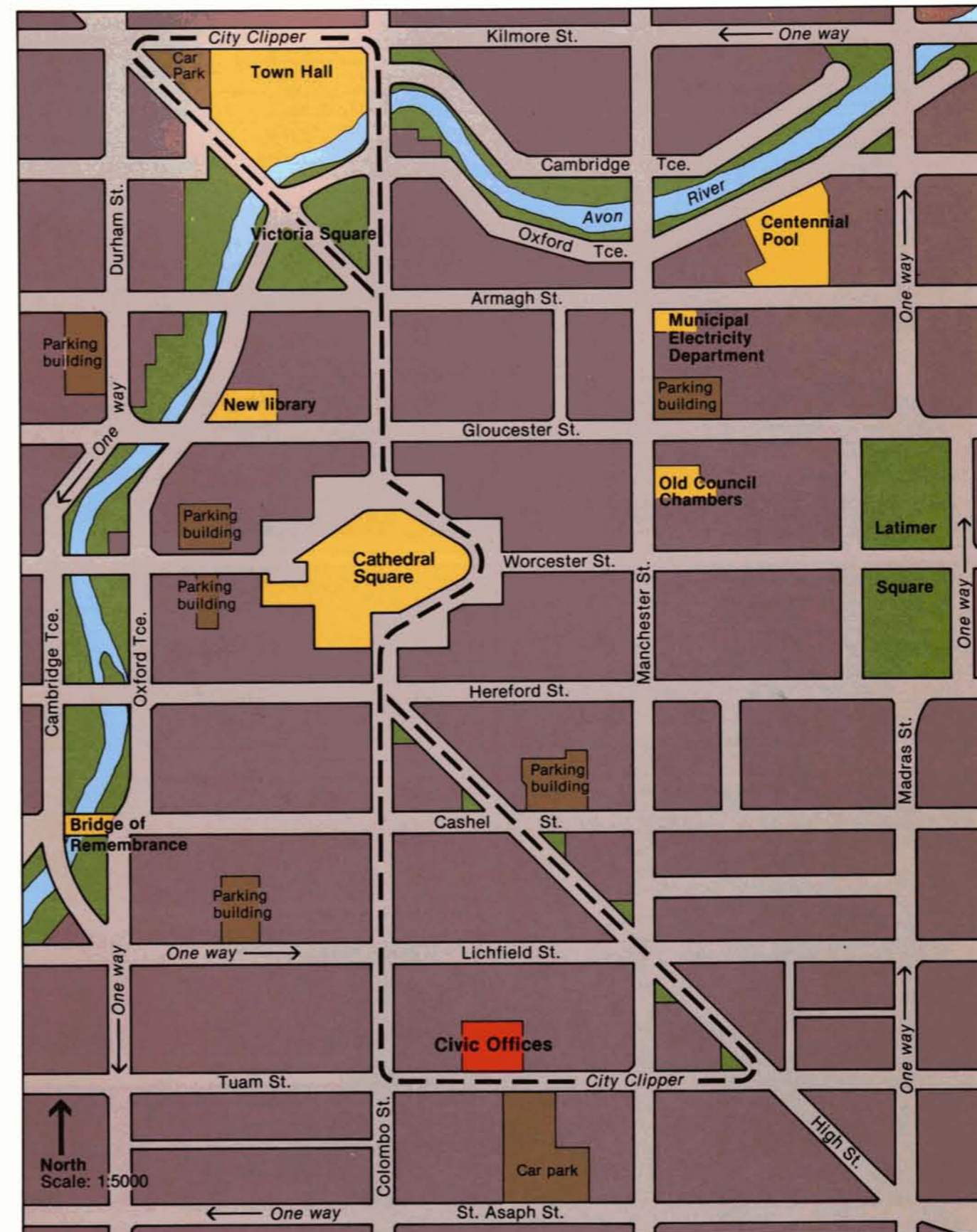
Services such as air ducts, electricity, telephones, plumbing, and fire control are housed in the ceiling spaces so that they are accessible for future modification.

A very flexible specialist office building has evolved, incorporating on average 20% expansion space in each element, with potential for considerable future enlargement, and provision for future re-arrangement of departments with a minimum of cost and inconvenience.

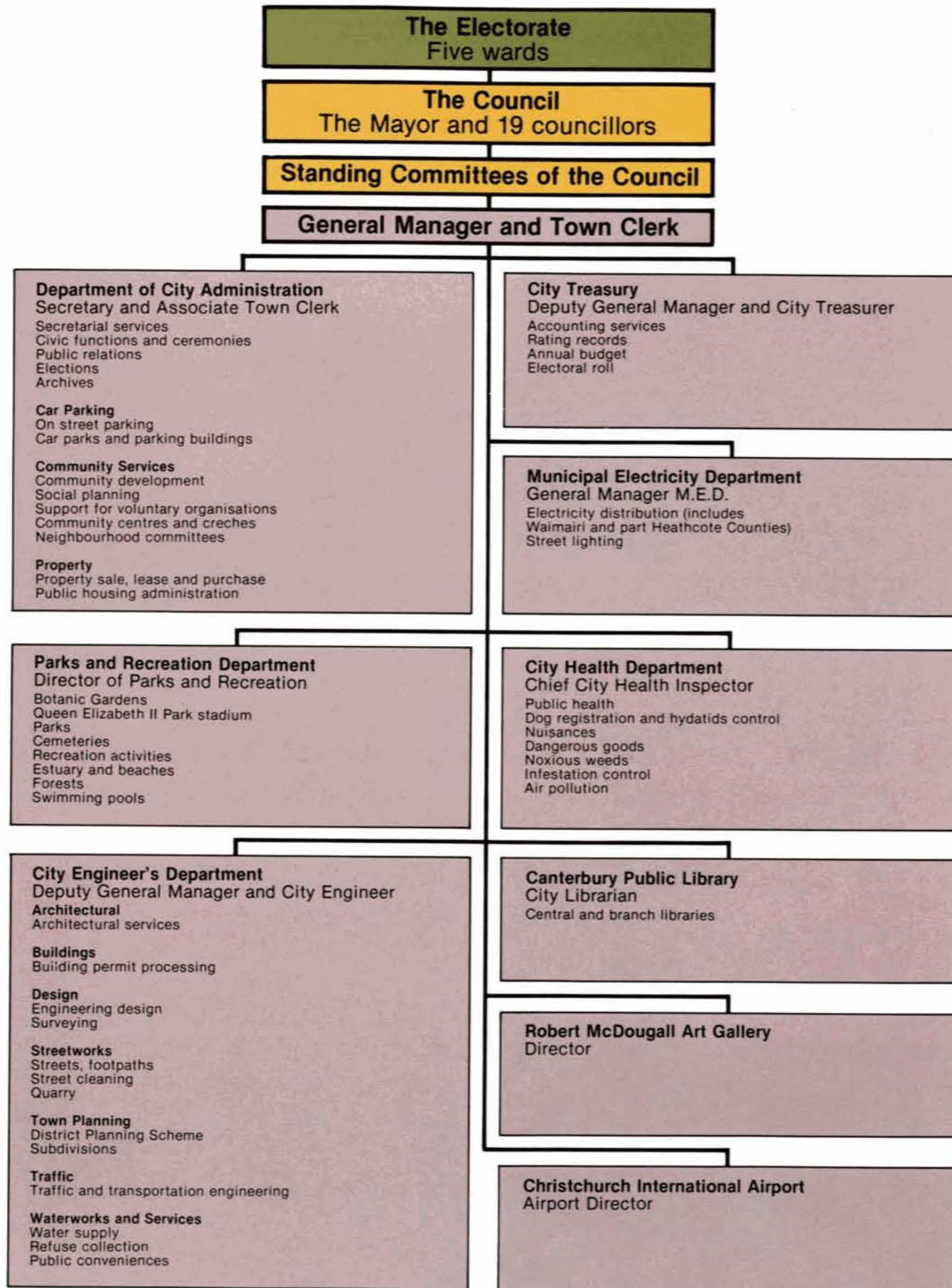
LOCATION

Midway between Colombo and Manchester Streets at 163 Tuam Street, and also midway between the St Asaph Street (west bound) and Lichfield Street (east bound) pairs of the one-way street system, the Civic Offices are readily accessible to both pedestrians and motorists.

The southern terminus of the City Clipper free bus service is directly opposite the building (the Town Hall is the northern terminus) as is the surface-level car park which has over 200 spaces available to the general public.



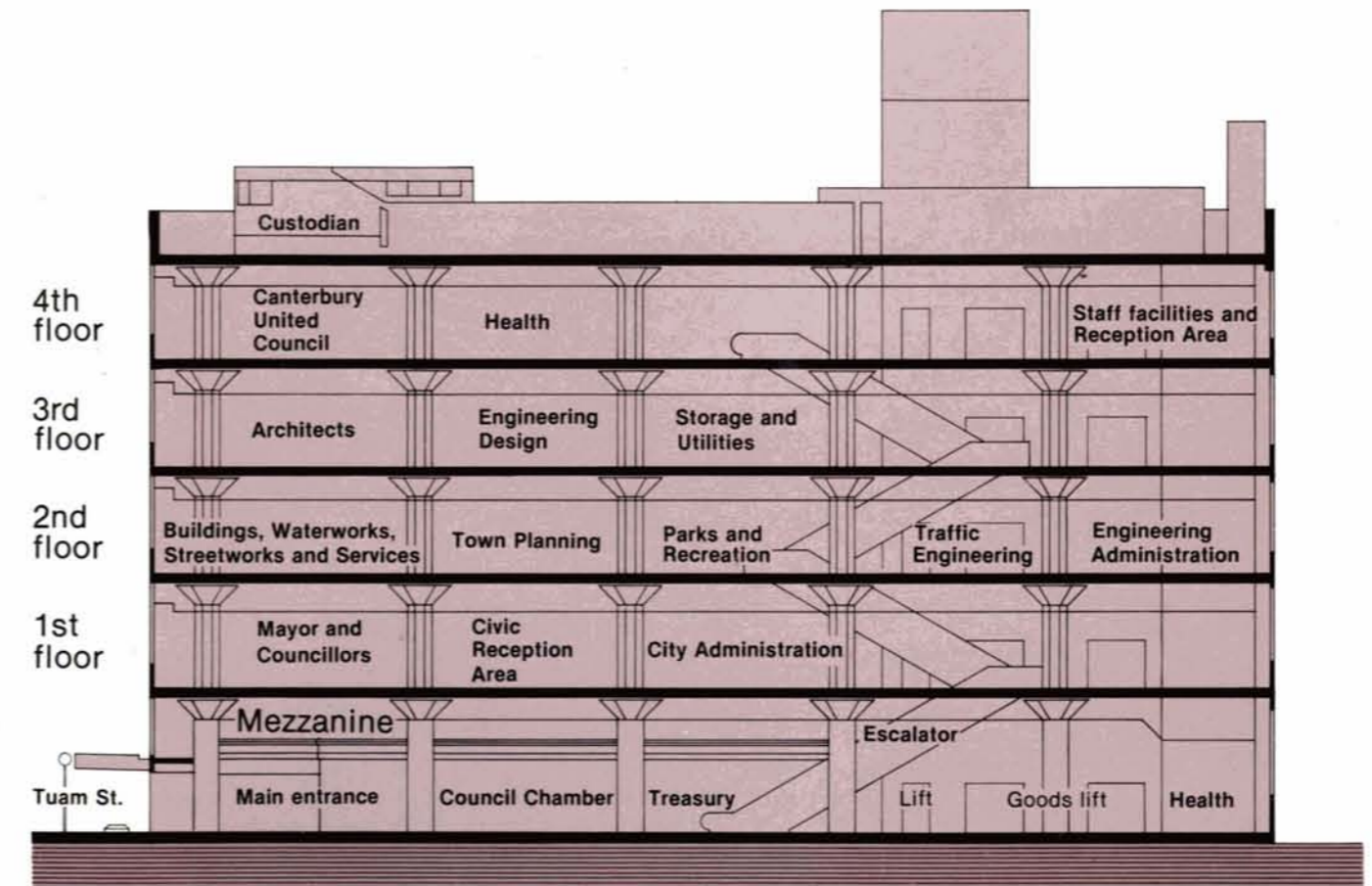
CHRISTCHURCH CITY COUNCIL ORGANISATION AND FUNCTIONS



Traffic enforcement: Ministry of Transport function

Civil Defence: Christchurch joint civil defence scheme

CIVIC OFFICES: INTERNAL LAYOUT Cross-section looking west

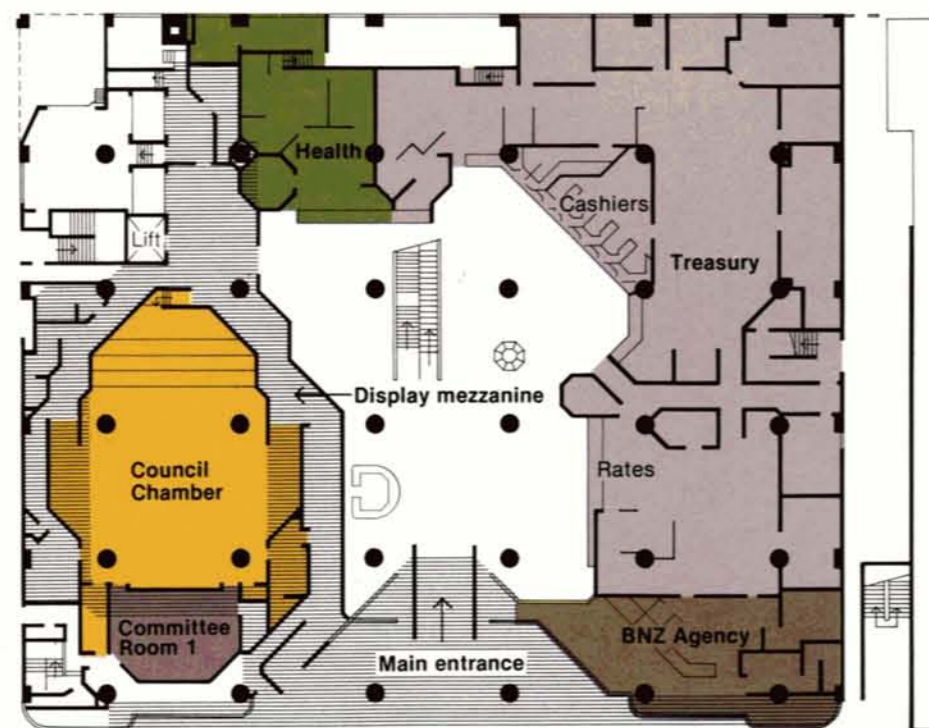


This plaque in the ground floor foyer records the building's original construction and its redevelopment as Civic Offices.





Entrance foyer



Tuam St.

GROUND FLOOR

The ground floor features a recessed main entrance and a public foyer paved in Takaka marble. It incorporates the areas of greatest counter activity such as cash receiving points, rating inquiries and the public counter of the City Health Department which caters for dog registration and general licensing. An agency of the Bank of New Zealand has both external and communicating access.

The Council Chamber is a principal feature of the building as a whole. It has total seating in three galleries (one at ground level and two in the mezzanine) for 150 members of the public. The dais and councillors' table and chairs made in 1886 (at a cost of £478) for the Oxford Terrace building and transferred in 1924 to Manchester Street, have been refurbished for further service.

Both the Chamber and the nearby Committee Room No. 1 have separate external access for night time use.

Council Chamber





Civic reception area



Committee Room No. 2



FIRST FLOOR

The Department of City Administration provides central secretarial services and is located on this floor next to the main committee rooms and Mayoral and Councillor accommodation, which includes a small reference library, interview rooms for use by individual councillors and a reception area for small-scale civic functions. Community Services and Housing and Property are specialist functions of the department, which also houses the administration offices of the Christchurch Combined Civil Defence scheme.



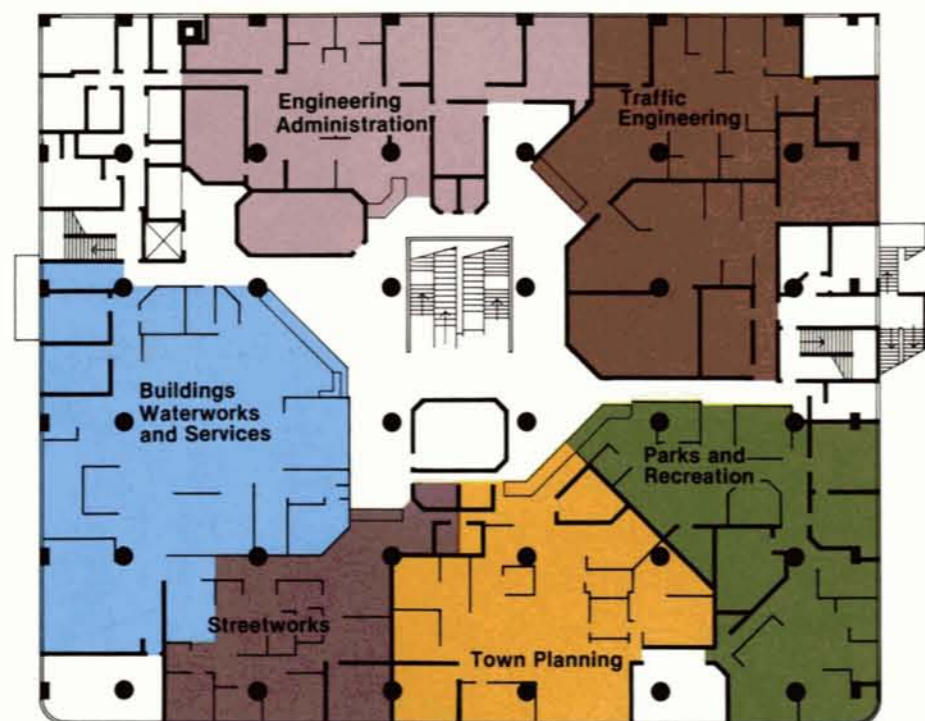
Typical landscaped office



Area traffic control computer



Third floor public counters



SECOND FLOOR

This floor is allocated to the City Engineer's Department as well as the management element of the Parks and Recreation Department.

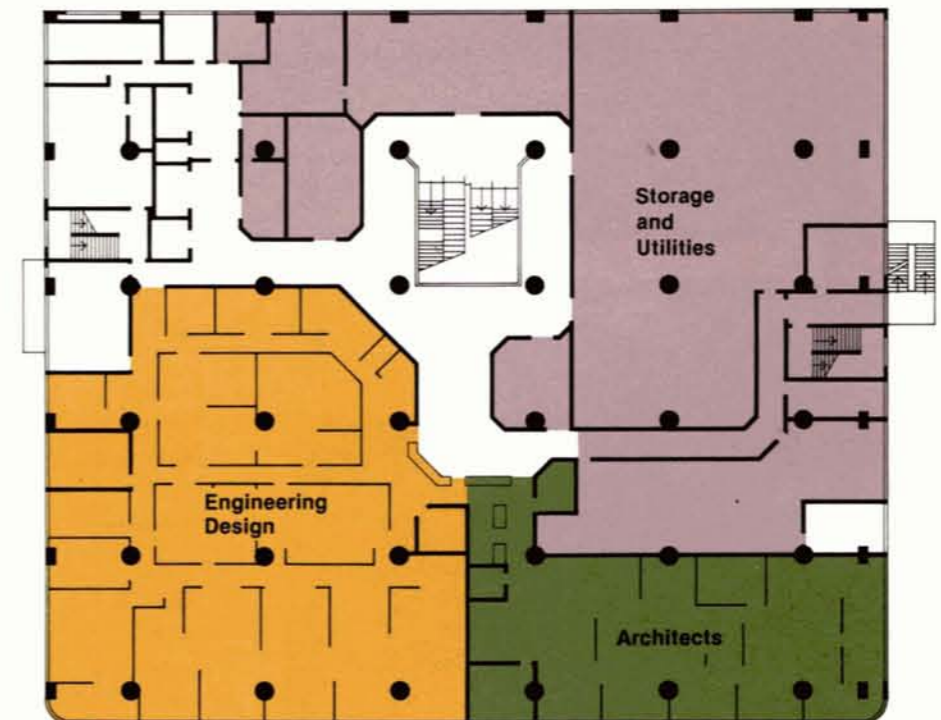
Of particular interest is the control centre pictured above. This is the nerve-centre for the area wide traffic control system which comprises 67 signal controlled intersections, mostly on one-way streets.

A PDP11/40 Minicomputer selects and transmits signal-setting plans, and modifies them to best handle the traffic conditions as sensed by buried detectors on street.

Four TV screens present a selection of views from eight cameras mounted on buildings and poles at strategic places in the city centre. This closed circuit television helps the operator to check what is happening on the street, modify plans, and observe special conditions such as road works, or congestion caused by fires.

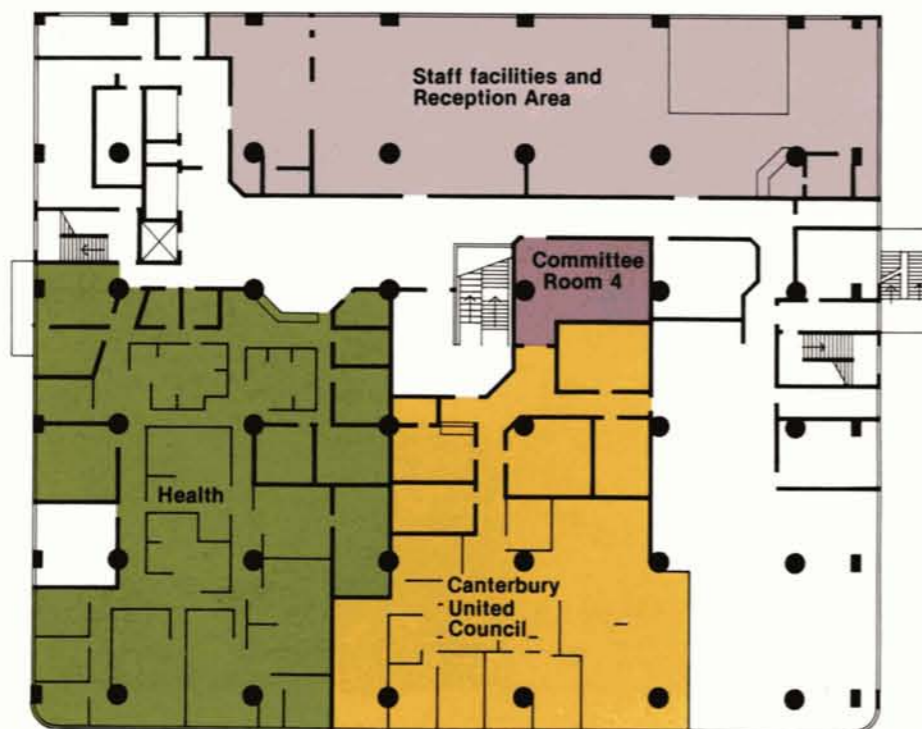
THIRD FLOOR

The architects and design staff of the City Engineer's Department occupy much of the third floor, but it also houses the main archives and bulk storage area. Getting this facility off valuable ground floor space has been made possible by the excellent goods lifts and hoists with which the building is equipped. Since this space is undivided, it provides scope for future expansion as well.





Looking west over the roof area to the Southern Alps.



FOURTH FLOOR

Staff employed by the Christchurch City Council on behalf of the Canterbury United Council (mostly engaged in regional planning) are housed here at the terminus of the escalator system. Adjacent is the greater part of the City Health Department, near the lift to assist communication with its public counter similarly located on the ground floor.

The staff cafeteria and adjoining social club rooms are divided by folding doors which enable a single space to become available for large-scale civic receptions, serviced by nearby kitchen facilities adjacent to the goods lifts.

Lift access is available to the flat roof on which is constructed the custodian's quarters and which also provides recreation space and an area for future expansion.

MILLERS DEPARTMENT STORE 1939-1979



Millers Ltd was established by the late L. B. Miller in 1921 and by 1939, when these premises were built, it was a large retail and manufacturing concern with 23 branch shops. The new building was designed to house the head offices, factory and main retail store.

The ground and first floors were used for retailing and offices, and the second and third floors for manufacturing. The fourth floor and the flat roof were for staff recreation purposes. The company was a leader in this field with as much as three-quarters of an acre of space taken up with staff dining room, recreational facilities and a wide variety of indoor games. There were, for example, three tennis courts on the roof alone.

The building featured the first escalator in the South Island and one of the first in New Zealand. It is noteworthy that this escalator was still running when the building was purchased by the Council in 1978 having, by that time, travelled an estimated 500,000 miles. It is a further tribute to the workmanship of the 1930's that the original linoleum still covered the ground floor.

The accompanying photographs show the building shortly after it opened in February, 1939.

Millers Ltd still continues in retailing with the present store in the "Cashfields" development between Cashel and Lichfield Streets, and branches at Bishopdale, Ashburton, Dunedin and Invercargill.



Photos from top clockwise:
The exterior at night.
Millers pride and joy, the "electric escalator"
Ground floor, looking east.
The second floor workroom

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The new Christchurch Civic
Offices...a new location for
Bank of New Zealand.

Civic Offices Agency

Bank of New Zealand congratulates the Christchurch City Council on the opening of their new building. We are proud to include this new mid-city building as the location for the new Bank of New Zealand agency.

It brings added banking convenience to the people of Christchurch, and we invite new and existing customers to call in and take advantage of the range of services we offer:

Cheque accounts
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Time deposits
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Travellers' cheques
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