

## ITINERARY n.15

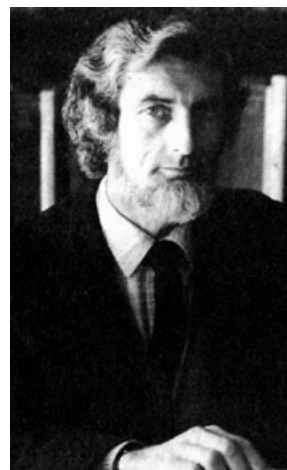
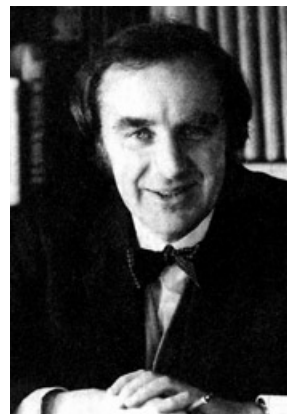
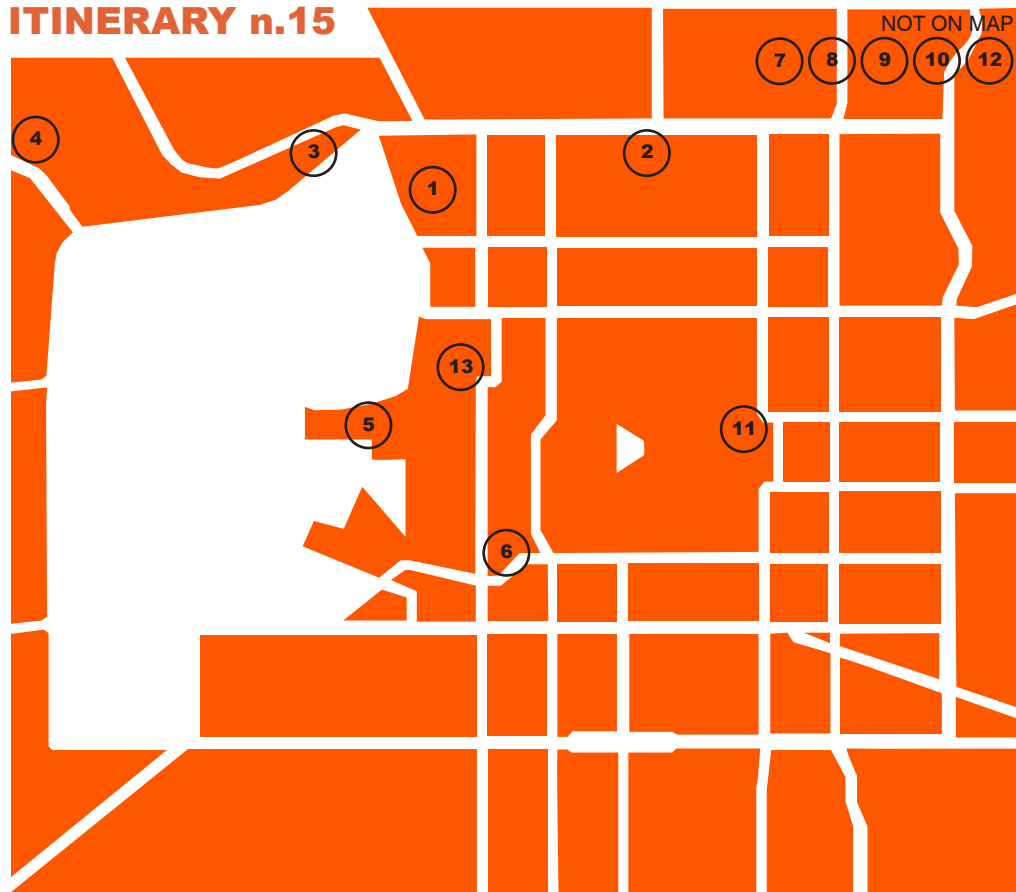


Photo: Mannering & Associates

## Warren & Mahoney in Christchurch 1

In a 1966 article on Warren & Mahoney's work in the British journal *Architectural Design*, Norman Sheppard wrote of Christchurch: "This city, the most conservative in a fairly conservative country, has in its recent public and domestic buildings shown a direction which, if pursued and developed should make it a concrete example of what current planning and design theories propound." This direction was vigorously pursued, and the flowering of architectural invention in Christchurch in the 1960s became a high point in the history of New Zealand architecture. The "Christchurch School" involved a host of architects - Peter Beaven, Don Donnithorne, Charles Thomas, and Trengrove & Marshall were key figures, but the scene was dominated by Warren & Mahoney.

Miles Warren carried the seeds of W&M's phenomenal growth back to his home town in 1954, returning from Britain with the ideas then percolating around the avant-garde "New Brutalist" movement. Joining forces with Maurice Mahoney, the pair found a point of intersection between the concern for truth-to-materials and structural expression that characterized Brutalism, and the low-key, Kiwi-fied commitment to "straightforwardness" that obsessed many young architects here in NZ. Side-stepping the lightweight, rationalized wooden structures that dominated the thinking of the Group, W&M developed a tectonic and material vocabulary that derived from New Brutalism but reflected the more solid architectural heritage of the Christchurch context. This vocabulary appeared seemingly fully-formed in Warren's first building: the Dorset Street Flats. The astonishing skill behind W&M's early work is demonstrated in the effortlessness with which they could adapt this domestic vocabulary to different building types - the perpendicular volume of the Christchurch College chapel and the spreading landscape of the Crematorium are each only one step removed from Dorset Street. With the addition of pre-cast concrete and more adventurous roof structures to the palette, W&M were able to create much more complex buildings, such as the Canterbury Student Union and Christchurch Town Hall.

W&M became a remarkable success story. They rode the wave of the post-war economic boom and quickly stepped up to large scale work. Winning the high-profile competition for the Christchurch Town Hall in 1966 cemented their position among NZ's premier firms. In the same year - less than a decade after the firm was established - W&M also won the American Institute of Architects' Pan Pacific Citation, an award also given to such luminaries as Kenzo Tange and Harry Seidler. By the time the Town Hall opened in 1973, much of W&M's work was high-rise commercial buildings for developer clients. These changing briefs and the sense that Modernism was exhausted led W&M to shed their earlier approach and explore the postmodernist language that was rising in Europe and America, a shift that paralleled that of many of Warren's international contemporaries, including fellow former Brutalists such as James Stirling. Through the 1980s, W&M's early work was regarded with some unease, critics suggesting that the Christchurch Town Hall was the moment the firm really found its feet. With Kiwi architects now eagerly reworking mid-century modernism, W&M's early work is again revered, and it is now the firm's post-modern work that tends to be passed over in silence: even the recent *New Territories* monograph, assembled by W&M itself, includes key projects from the 1960s and early-70s but almost nothing from the 1980s. It may be another decade before the merits of this later work are again recognised. *Andrew Barrie*

## Biography

F. Miles Warren was born in Christchurch in 1929. After working for Cecil Wood and several other Christchurch architects, Warren studied architecture at the University of Auckland, eventually working at the London County Council where he was exposed to British "New Brutalism".

Maurice Mahoney was born in Christchurch, and like Warren trained at the Canterbury Arch. Assn's Atelier. Mahoney, after working in a number of Christchurch firms, joined with Warren to take over the practice of G. T. Lucas, with the firm of Warren & Mahoney being established in 1958 for the Dental School project. The practice achieved remarkably rapid success, quickly moving up in the scale and complexity of their projects and earning four NZIA Gold Medals between 1959 and 1973. Warren received a CBE in 1974, a knighthood in 1986, and in 1995 was made one of the 20 living members of the Order of NZ. He received the NZIA Gold Medal in 2000. Mahoney retired in 1992 and Warren (officially at least) in 1994.

1

1956-57

Dorset Street Flats  
2-12 Dorset Street, City



These eight flats were produced for three young bachelor owners (including Warren himself), each having one flat to occupy and the others available to rent. Designed before W&M was officially established, it employs the ideas he brought back from Britain. The result is a simple but elegant composition of concrete block, in-situ RC floor structures, full-height openings and low-pitched timber-framed roofs. The first conscious use of concrete block and fairface concrete inside a NZ house, the building was dubbed "Fort Dorset" by scandalized locals. See *Home & Building* Jan. 1959 and Sept. 1959, and *Arch. Design* Dec. 1961. Take a look at W&M's 1973 Dorset Towers – two mid-rise apartment towers – next door at 110 Park Terrace.

2

1958-59

Dental Nurses Training School  
888 Colombo Street, City



Photo: Mannering & Associates

Warren and Mahoney's first official project, this complex consists of two complete children's dental clinics, an administration block, and a block of classrooms. The project set the pattern for the firm's early public buildings – clearly articulated planning, extensive use of concrete block, shallow and flat roofs detailed with no eaves to create prismatic volumes. However, expressed steel portals and very large windows give the project a lightness and delicacy that stands in contrast to W&M's later, more solid work. The project received an NZIA Gold Medal in 1959. The complex is now a private academy. See *Home & Bldg.* June 1960 and *Arch. Review* Feb. 1961.

3

1960

Carlton Mill Road Flats  
64 Carlton Mill Road, City



Following on from the Dorset Street project, W&M produced a number of blocks of flats along similar lines. Flats in these low-rise structures were all constructed in the same vocabulary of load-bearing concrete block and exposed in-situ concrete. They were made eminently livable by recessed balconies and north-facing, lushly-planted private gardens enclosed with concrete block walls. See *Home & Building* June 1961. Other housing blocks include the R. Hysop Flats (1960-61) at 324 Oxford Terrace, the J.J. Connor Flats (1960-61) on Papanui Road, and the B.A. Broderick Townhouses (1962-64) at 40 Rhodes Street.

4

1960-61

M. B. Warren House  
9 Queens Ave, Fendalton



Designed for Warren's parents, this house is the best known of a series of projects later dubbed the "pixie" houses. Picking up on both historical cottage patterns and then contemporary Danish models, these houses were composed of crisp boxes of concrete block, with punched openings and no eaves or verges on their gabled roofs. At the M.B. Warren House, each main room is surmounted by a steeply-pitched wooden roof – this breaking down of the house into small volumes, each with its own roof, was later extended by Ian Athfield and Roger Walker (creating what came to be described as the "noddy" houses).

5

1960-61

Chapman Block  
Christ's College  
Rollestone Avenue, City

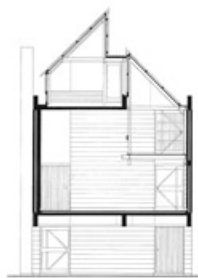


Described by Warren as New Zealand's first Brutalist building, this is a four-storey stack of laboratories, classrooms and support spaces. Squeezed between two existing structures, the building makes a number of gestures to its context – the side walls are finished in brick veneer, and the arrangement of precast elements on the main façades reflect the scale, rhythm, and colors of Cecil Wood's adjacent Big School. W&M designed other buildings on the College campus: the Big School Library (1971), a sports hall and science block (1976-77), the adjacent Wigram Park complex of terrace houses at 1 Park Terrace (1983-85), and an administration block (1988). See *NZIA Journal* Aug 1962.

6

1962-89

Architect's Office & Flat  
65 Cambridge Street, City



Built to house both the W&M office and Miles Warren's flat, the building was gradually extended as W&M grew, with Miles' flat being displaced first onto the roof, and then into the garden at the rear. The building became hub for a series of W&M projects on adjacent sites, including the Robin Smith Photography Studio at 59 Cambridge Terrace (1970). In 2006 Warren generously gifted the building, now occupied design-related firms including Athfield Architects, to a trust established to fund architectural education. The building received an NZIA Silver Medal in 1969, an NZIA National Award in 1980, and an NZIA 25 Year Award in 1995. See *Home & Bldg* June 1969 and 5/1980, as well as *NZIA Journal* Jan. 1969 and *Arch NZ* May/June 1995.

7

1962-63

Harewood Memorial  
Gardens & Crematorium  
109 Johns Roads, Harewood



Located on a large flat site in a semi-industrial area, the project's key element is a large rectangular garden enclosed on three sides by concrete block walls. The glass-walled chapel sits within this enclosed space, and the crematorium functions are discretely accommodated "beyond" the far wall. The bold butterfly roof of the chapel and canopy float over this composition of walls, this seemingly simple composition producing a surprisingly rich sequence of spaces. The original entry canopy has now been enclosed and a new entry added. The complex received an NZIA Gold Medal in 1964, and a 25 Year Award in 1990. See *NZIA Journal* March 1964, *Home & Building* Aug. 1964 and *Bldg. Progress* April 1965.

8

1962-64

Christchurch Wool Exchange  
7 Whiteleigh Avenue, Riccarton



Located adjacent to the showgrounds, this building was designed as a venue for wool auctions, sales taking place on only 10 days a year. The main building employs a square plan organized almost symmetrically around a diagonal axis. The auctioneer's podium stands at the origin of this axis, and arranged around this is a steeply-raked auditorium. Above, a large skylight has been inserted into the auditorium's sloping roof, and a series of buyers offices cunningly arranged around its periphery beneath the rake of its seating. The building is now used by a Chinese church, but is still in remarkably original condition. See *NZIA Journal* Mar. 1964.

9

1964-70

Christchurch College  
100 Waimairi Road, Ilam



Loosely adapting Oxbridge models, three-storey stacks of bedroom-studies, dining and common rooms, a chapel, and a library have been tightly grouped around a grassed quadrangle. The buildings employ a vocabulary developed from the relatively modest Dorset Street Flats – in-situ concrete, load-bearing concrete block, and timber. Here, however, they have been elevated into a masterful composition that is undoubtedly one of NZ architecture's finest ever buildings. The project was awarded an NZIA Gold Medal in 1969, and a 25 Year Award in 1999. The College's astonishing collection of NZ art makes a visit all the more worthwhile. See *Home & Bldg* July 1969, as well as the *NZIA Journal* Dec. 1968 and June 1969, and *Arch* NZ May/June 1999.

10

1964-73

University of Canterbury  
Students' Union  
90 Ilam Road, Ilam



Functionally the most complex building W&M had yet undertaken, this building is characterized by a highly sophisticated concrete structure with expressed joints and junctions. Extensive use was made of precast concrete – columns, beams, and exposed aggregate panels – a material that became a feature of W&M's later buildings. A substantial addition was completed in the early 1970, when W&M also completed students' union complexes for Auckland and Massey Universities. See *NZIA Journal* Nov. 1968 and *Home & Building* Nov. 1973.

11

1966-69

SIMU Office Building  
29 Latimer Square, City



Now occupied by AMI, the SIMU Building was the first of a series of medium-rise office buildings W&M built around the city in the 1960s. These buildings were similar in many ways – based on similar client requirements, they all employed similar structural and architectural techniques: stiff service cores to resist earthquake loads, and boldly modeled façades assembled from precast concrete units. Other early office buildings include the CFM Office Building (1969) at 199-200 Cashel Street and the CMLA Building (now the Mainstay Hotel) at 66 Cathedral Square (1977). See *NZIA Journal* Sept. 1972.

12

1968-1970

St Augustine's Church  
3-5 Cracroft Terrace, Cashmere



St Augustine's original gothic building dates from 1908, and had a shingled spire added in 1914. The building was renovated and substantially enlarged by W&M, adding a square building that encloses a spacious sanctuary and seating area. The most remarkable aspect of the project is the seamless transition between W&M's Brutalist vocabulary and the existing gothic building – it demonstrates very clearly the way in which W&M's early work was aggressively modern and yet took very strong cues from local architectural heritage.

13

1966-72

Christchurch Town Hall  
100 Kilmore Street, City



W&M won this project in a high profile and somewhat controversial open two-stage national competition – it has been described as the key architectural commission of its decade. The completed building was remarkably similar to the competition scheme, and went on to receive an NZIA Gold Medal in 1973. The citation read: "This is an impressive building that has been designed with great competence. It is consistent throughout, from the well organized planning to the coordination of the structural elements. The multi-functioning building works well and has acoustic excellence with good spatial qualities and a fine relationship to its site." See *Home & Bldg* May 1973 and *NZIA Journal* Oct. 1966, *Concrete Const.* Dec. 1973, and *NZ Local Govt.* Aug. 1966.

## Other Addresses:

**Hays Store and Supermarket**  
**Cnr Riccarton Rd & Hansens Lane, Riccarton** (1960)

This suburban department store and supermarket, one of the first in Christchurch, was demolished in 1993 to make way for a bigger box. See *NZIA Journal* May 1961.

**J. Ballantyne & Co. Store**  
**Cnr Cashel & Colombo Sts., City** (1963)

**Christchurch Club** (1965)  
**154 Worcester Street, City**  
Mountfort's only Neoclassical building, this building became one of Christchurch's first conservation and restoration projects.

**M. E. Mahoney House** (1966)  
**8 Pentlow Place, Fendalton**  
Maurice Mahoney's house, which he still occupies.

**Northlands Shopping Ctr**  
**55 Main North Rd., Papanui**  
This was at the time (1967) the biggest shopping center in the South Island – redeveloped in 2004. See *Blg. Progress* Dec/Jan '67.



CMLA Building (1977)

## Elsewhere:

**British Secondary School**  
**Malapoa Estates, Port Vila, Vanuatu** (1964-66)

Now called Malapoa College, this school was the first in a series of W&M projects in the South Pacific. Others include the British Hospital in Port Vila (1970-76) and Government House in Honiara, Solomon Islands (1965-68). See *Blg. Progress* Dec 1966.

**Univ. of Auckland Students' Union** (1965-73)

**Princes Street, Auckland**  
The project was built in a number of stages, the cafeteria being extended and the Maidment Theatre added in the early 1970s. W&M added the adjacent Kate Edgar Information Commons in 2003.

**Massey University Students' Union** (1967-68)  
**University Ave., Palmerston North**

Only part of W&M's scheme was built. See *NZIA Journal* April 1967.

**Travelodge Hotel** (1970-75)  
**Beach Street, Queenstown**  
Now the Crowne Plaza Hotel.

**New Zealand Chancery**  
**37 Observatory Circle, Washington D.C.** (1974-79)  
See *Home & Building* No. 5 1979.

## Sources:

The photographs are by Andrew Barrie and the drawing is courtesy of W&M. Many thanks to Sir Miles Warren for his generous help in preparing this itinerary.

The best sources on W&M's early work are the two excellent books published on the firm: *Warren & Mahoney Architects 1958-1989* (Christchurch; W&M, 1989) and *New Territory – Warren and Mahoney - 50 Years of New Zealand Architecture* (Auckland; Balasoglou Books, 2005). The firm's early work was very extensively featured in the local periodicals of the day, and was often included in high-profile overseas journals – see "The Work of Warren & Mahoney, New Zealand" in *Architectural Design* August 1966. There is an informative interview with Warren in *Home & Building* Oct./Nov. 1983 in which he speaks extensively about W&M's development. See also Warren's interesting text on the role of the architect (*Home & Building* April 1973), and his often-quoted essay on "Style in NZ Architecture" (*NZ Arch.* 3/78). Ian Lochhead's review of the 1994 W&M retrospective exhibition covers the development of the firm from its early days (*Arch NZ* Nov/Dec 1994).