Nurses Memorial Chapel Heritage Significance

Situated at 2 Riccarton Avenue, in the grounds of Christchurch Hospital, facing Riccarton Avenue, the Nurses' Memorial Chapel is listed in the Christchurch City Plan as a Group 2 protected heritage item. NZHPT registers the Chapel as a Category 1 Historic Place and a Heritage Order is in place over the building. The building adjoins the new Christchurch Women's hospital and the Former Nurses' Home (Group 3 heritage listing) to the west.

The Nurses' Memorial Chapel is of particular social and historical value. It was built during 1927 and 1928 in memory of the nurses who died in the sinking of the World War I transport ship, the Marquette in the Aegean Sea in 1915, three of whom trained at Christchurch Hospital. The chapel also commemorates the nurses who died in the 1918 Influenza Epidemic. Research indicates that the building is the only purpose-built hospital chapel in the world which commemorates nurses who died in the First World War. It is also New Zealand's only memorial chapel to women who died in any war or the 1918 influenza epidemic, and New Zealand's first hospital chapel, as well as being a repository of memorials to local, national and internationally known medical men and women. Its cultural and spiritual value arises from its function as a place of worship and remembrance for the lives of medical staff who served in World War One and the Influenza Epidemic.

The building is architecturally significant. Designed by John Collins of prominent Christchurch firm Collins and Harman, the chapel has a late Gothic Revival structure and Arts and Crafts Movement-inspired interior that incorporates significant works of art, including stained glass windows by Veronica Whall and carving by influential local carver and sculptor, Frederick Gurnsey and his apprentice Jake Vivian. The building has contextual value as a landmark within the hospital precinct. The chapel is one of a number of listed heritage buildings and structures in the vicinity of Hagley Park and the Botanic Gardens including the Umpires Pavilion, Hagley Oval (South Hagley Park); the former Nurses' Home, the Band Rotunda, Cunningham House, the Curator's House, and the Antigua Boatsheds, as well as a number of listed statues. The varied use of brickwork, timbers and Oamaru stone, and interior stained glass and carving contribute to this building's technological and craftsmanship significance.

Sources:
Christchurch City Council heritage files

The Council's previous involvement with Christchurch Nurses’ Memorial Chapel

In 1989, the Canterbury Area Health Board, which owns the Christchurch Nurses’ Memorial Chapel (Nurses' Chapel")and the surrounding land, advertised its intention to demolish the building to make way for internal road and car parking as part of the hospital’s Stage Three redevelopment. Subsequently, the Council resolved to support the retention and restoration of the building and for the site it is on to be vested in the Council as a historic reserve as part of Hagley Park. The Minister of Conservation issued a Protection Notice for the building in August 1989.

That same year, a land exchange was proposed by Department of Conservation officers for about 1,200 m² of land containing including the Nurses Chapel to be vested in the Council as a Historic Reserve under the Reserves Act 1977. In return, the Board was to receive a similar area that is part of Hagley Park and being used for car parking. In 1990, the proposed land exchange was agreed by the Council and
the Canterbury Area Health Board. This proposal was included in a Heads of Agreement in November 1990 that was signed by the Council, Health Board and Nurses' Memorial Chapel Trust. One clause provided that, in recognition of the loss of parking facilities by the Board the Council would make available a substantially equivalent area (approximately 1,200 m²) of the adjoining Hagley Park land, and that the exchange was to be subject to approval by the Minister of Conservation to the vesting of the Nurses' Chapel site as a reserve in exchange for an equivalent area of Hagley Park.

In 1994, Council legal advice was that the transfer of land comprising any area of Hagley Park could only be achieved by Parliament through an amendment to the Christchurch City (Reserves) Empowering Act 1971 ("Empowering Act") or through a clause in a Reserves and Other Lands Disposal Bill. Council and Department of Conservation legal staff agreed that the appropriate mechanism would be for the Council to promote a Local Bill to amend the Empowering Act by deleting from the legal description of Hagley Park the 1,200 m² of land proposed to be transferred to Canterbury Health Ltd. This would be sponsored by the Christchurch Central Member of Parliament, Lianne Dalziel.

Council soon after resolved to promote a local Bill to amend the Empowering Act involving removing 1,520 m² (corrected from 1,200 m²) of land from what is legally Hagley Park, land that had been used for approximately 75 years by Christchurch Hospital and, in recent years, as tennis courts for Hospital staff, and now for public car parking. In return, the Council would acquire an area of 1,063 m² containing the Nurses' Chapel.

The Council resolved to:

1. Prepare a Heads of Agreement under the same terms and conditions to be signed by the Council, Canterbury Health and Nurses' Memorial Chapel Trust allowing the continued use of the Chapel and surrounding land by the Trust and the City Council.

2. Survey both parcels of land and undertake the legal procedures necessary to formalise the exchange of land - as provided in the Council resolutions of June 1989 and the Heads of Agreement in 1990 - by promoting a Local Bill to amend the Empowering Act.

A valuation in August 2000 gave a current market value, exclusive of chattels, of $526,000 for the Nurses' Chapel land to be transferred to the Council, and a current market value of $524,000 for the land to be transferred by the Council to Christchurch Hospital.

In November 2000, given the length of time since the 1994 resolution was passed, the City Manager and the Legal Services Manager considered it appropriate that the Council should be given an opportunity to reconsider this matter and reaffirm its original resolution to promote a local Bill to give effect to the proposed land exchange.

Recommendations to the Council at this time included:

1. That the Council sign an Agreement for Sale and Purchase to give effect to the land exchange subject to a local Bill being enacted.
2. That the Council promote a local Bill to amend the Christchurch City (Reserves) Empowering Act 1971 by removing the 1520 square metres of land from Hagley Park.

The Council resolved that the issue be deferred to allow other options to be explored in consultation with the other parties involved.

In 2006, the draft Hagley Park/Botanic Gardens Master Plan proposed potential land exchange options, including, firstly, the exchange of the ex-caretaker's house and grounds in Hagley Park on the western side of the Hagley Hostel with the hospital's Riverside Grounds, and, secondly, exchanging the hospital car park area on Hagley Park with the Nurses' Chapel and land.

With adoption of the master plan in 2007, the Council resolved to delete the first exchange option (involving the ex-caretaker's house) from the plan, and for the Canterbury District Health Board to be notified of the Council’s wish to reclaim the part of Hagley Park being used for hospital car parking for outdoor recreation purposes and for discussions to be held with the Board on feasible win-win solutions for the Park and the Hospital, including land exchange options.

The current situation is that the Nurses’ Chapel and the land it is on is legally owned by the Canterbury District Health Board. The Board leases the Nurses’ Chapel building to the Council, which in turn sub-leases the building to the Nurses’ Memorial Chapel Trust. The Trust is responsible for the Chapel’s administration. The Friends of the Chapel care for the building on a day-to-day basis. The land surrounding the Nurses’ Chapel is the responsibility of the Council and is maintained by staff of the Council’s Botanical Services Operations Team.