

## **Simplicity of Form: a tale of two cathedrals and interiors lost?**

### **Hamilton Founders Memorial Theatre (1962) and St Joseph's Catholic Church Morrinsville (1964)**

Laura Kellaway

**ABSTRACT:** St Joseph's Catholic Church, Morrinsville, was designed in 1958-62 by Doug Angus of Angus, Flood & Griffiths of Hamilton. Built in 1964-65, the design was radical, had simplicity in form both externally and internally. The simple external upturned parabola defied the level of innovation and detailing, creating both the exterior and interior form with the use of pre-stressed concrete ribs, and pre-cast panels between. The parabolic form was 49' 6" in height, designed by engineer Thomas Flood. The 8,000 sqft church accommodated 600 people. It was said to be New Zealand's largest single-pour concrete roof of the time. The Modernist interior was of a grand scale with the specially-designed fittings - only seen by parishioners. And this was part of its demise. The scale was for a cathedral not small-town New Zealand. Regionally significant in terms of architecture and engineering technology, an iconic Waikato church, and the work of an important Modernist architect and engineer, yet it was demolished in 2014.

In the Waikato, at the same time as the church was being designed, the new regional theatre and "town hall" was on the drawing board of architect Aubrey de Lisle, of White, de Lisle and Jenkins of Hamilton. The Founders Memorial Theatre opened in November 1962, inspired by Coventry's Belgrade Theatre, which was the first civic theatre built in Great Britain after World War Two. The 1,249-seat theatre, built a decade before Christchurch Town Hall, has hosted international performers of note to local theatre and music productions within its "gently sloping wood panelled confines." Jazz great Louis Armstrong arrived for shows on 20 March 1963, but due to payment issues he almost didn't play at all. From Louis Armstrong to Cilla Black in 1965, to the home of the Finns, the theatre for over 60 years has been the focus of many from the new teenagers of the 1960s to classical music and the performance of the young ballet students. Closed in 2016 from lack of maintenance and ongoing strengthening, with the Hotere mural removed for the new Waikato Theatre, the interior now only used in the dark for police exercises as its fate awaits. Two very different cultural interiors – a cathedral for faith and a "cathedral" for performance – a church and a theatre.

In 1962 the new regional hall, the Hamilton Founders Memorial Theatre, designed by Aubrey de Lisle, opened in Hamilton. Two years later in the small town of Morrinsville the new St Joseph's Catholic Church, was opened. It was designed by Doug Angus. Two very different architects and two very different buildings. The interior of the theatre is now closed, subject to a demolition consent. St Joseph's interior, built in 1963-64, is only seen in photographs and held in memories, was demolished in 2014.

The Founders Memorial Theatre was inspired by Coventry's Belgrade Theatre, the first civic theatre built in Great Britain after World War II. Seating 1,158 people it opened in 1958 and was designed by Arthur Ling.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Theatres and Hamilton Founders Memorial Theatre**

From the seventeenth century in Britain drama was performed in buildings used for entertainment of all types, ranging from

banqueting halls, to country houses and town hall, with only a few theatre buildings – the Theatre Royals in Drury Lane and Covent Garden in London. Eighteenth-century theatres were generally simple auditoria with a pedimented front.<sup>2</sup> New large variety theatres were built by entrepreneurs producing both Victorian and Edwardian theatres. These were also seen in New Zealand during this period until the war in

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<sup>1</sup> "Belgrade Theatre" np.

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<sup>2</sup> Historic England *Culture and Entertainment Buildings* p 13.

1914. In Britain in the 1920s and 1930s the focus was on the more modern style: "A fan shape was fashionable for auditorium at this time, which in places like Stratford created problems of acoustics,"<sup>3</sup> and

The theatre (in Britain) enjoyed a great revival in the post-war era, as local authorities built repertory theatres under the 1948 Act, often creating a more intimate space for small ensemble playing, with theatre in the round its ultimate expression.<sup>4</sup>

In New Zealand both theatres and town halls were designed and used for a variety of entertainment. Theatres were built in Nelson in 1878,<sup>5</sup> Dunedin and Christchurch and in small towns by the turn of the century. There were grand town halls, but it was not until 1928 that an auditorium was added to Dunedin's Town Hall.<sup>6</sup> Halls included those at Christchurch, and Wellington, followed by Auckland Town Hall in 1911. Hamilton had the nineteenth-century Volunteer Hall in Knox Street.

In small towns, the town hall was one of the first symbols of status. Even Hamilton Borough was to have a large town hall built in 1905 when the population was only around 2,150.<sup>7</sup> A town hall was also built in the adjacent borough of Frankton. An array of theatres were built in both Hamilton West and Frankton, most surviving into the late twentieth century. The theatres had stages and a full fly tower; these included the Regent and Richard O'Brien's favourite: the Embassy. For the citizens of the small town of Hamilton there was theatre life and large interior spaces, which were then adapted into early picture palaces. By the 1930s there were five private large theatres, used for theatre and cinema, along with the two town halls for civic receptions. All of Hamilton's early twentieth-century theatres and picture palaces were demolished: three owned by Hamilton City Council,<sup>8</sup> and the two early twentieth-century town halls (Hamilton in 1967 and Frankton in 1987). Two later private smaller performance theatres are still in use.

From 1905 until the 1950s, the Hamilton Town Hall in Victoria Street was the city's town hall.<sup>9</sup> Its interior form was a typical rectangular shape with stage. Tiered seating would have been unlikely at ground level to allow for hall uses. It was a centre available to the local community and national and international acts. It was then converted into the Civic picture theatre, until it was demolished in 1967.<sup>10</sup> There was a proposal to build a new Modernist civic hall to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the town's foundation and its founders, in essence a replacement town hall.<sup>11</sup>

In 1945 Hamilton formally gained city status with a population of 21,982. By 1966 the city population was 63,000.<sup>12</sup> It had become a government and agricultural centre. A number of young architects began arriving in the new city.

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<sup>3</sup>Historic England *Culture and Entertainment Buildings* p 14.

<sup>4</sup>Historic England *Culture and Entertainment Buildings* p 14.

<sup>5</sup>"Theatre Royal Nelson" np.

<sup>6</sup>"Dunedin Town Hall" np.

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<sup>7</sup>"Population of Counties and Boroughs" np.

<sup>8</sup>Civic Theatre (Hamilton Town Hall) demolished 1967.

<sup>9</sup>Regent Theatre demolished in 1990s. Former Theatre Royal/ Embassy Theatre (1915-94).

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<sup>9</sup>The Frankton Town Hall was built by the Frankton Borough, although transferred to Hamilton council ownership later.

<sup>10</sup>"Civic Theatre [photograph]" np.

<sup>11</sup>"Work on Founders Memorial Theatre Has Commenced" p 2.

<sup>12</sup>Swarbrick "Waikato places - Hamilton" np.



Figure 1: Perspective of Hamilton Founders Memorial Theatre in 1961 by Aubrey de Lisle. de Lisle Family Collection.

Leigh, de Lisle and Fraser were formally known as the city architects.<sup>13</sup> The firm had begun in the 1930s as Edgumbe and White; they designed the Hamilton Central Post Office, with its grand dome, in 1940. By the

1940s the firm was well established and one of the largest Waikato architectural firms. In the 1950s the partnership changed to White, Leigh, de Lisle and Fraser. Aubrey de Lisle, one of the partners, was the architect who designed the new theatre including the interiors and fittings. George Leigh was also

an architect partner and is likely to have been involved. Fraser was the engineering partner.<sup>14</sup>

Aubrey and his wife Mary both studied at the School of Architecture in Auckland, and by the 1950s were well established in Hamilton. Aubrey, the son of a clergyman, worked for Christchurch architect Colin Lamb and then moved to Hamilton. Aubrey would have been versed in the history of English architecture and the classical styles of theatre and town halls, as part of his studies at the School of Architecture in Auckland, before he joined the architectural firm in Hamilton.<sup>15</sup> His projects included the Hamilton Airport, the AMP Building and University of Waikato buildings, and a number of houses completed with Mary. Both Aubrey and Mary were significant contemporary New Zealand artists, as well as architects. They investigated theatres in the United Kingdom and United States.<sup>16</sup> Visiting the new 1958 Belgrade Theatre in Coventry, both architects would have thoroughly researched the design and details of the first post war civic theatre.<sup>17</sup> Aubrey believed that

<sup>13</sup> Much of the information for this paper regarding Aubrey de Lisle was obtained from Brinkworth "Architectural practice in Hamilton" and Brinkworth "Interview with Aubrey de Lisle" np.

<sup>14</sup> Brinkworth "Interview with Aubrey de Lisle" np.

<sup>15</sup> Brinkworth "Interview with Aubrey de Lisle" np.

<sup>16</sup> McEwan "Hamilton Founders' Memorial Theatre" p 131.

<sup>17</sup> McEwan "Hamilton Founders' Memorial Theatre" p

"it was the same sort of size we wanted ... and it had all sorts of features that we were able to import."<sup>18</sup> As a result of his work, and the theatre in Hamilton, Aubrey was a member of the judging panel for the 1970s Christchurch Town Hall.

### **The proposed new theatre**

Aubrey de Lisle designed the new theatre with the experiences of Belgrade Theatre in mind. The site was on the edge of town, but set in a triangular park, allowing for the forms of a new urban model of civic theatre, compared to Belgrade's constraints set within the town square. Hamilton was thriving and a young population was eager for night life and entertainment, like Auckland. Drawings in 1961 show the building forms and well-developed plans.

FT Hawkins Limited won the tender, and was to construct the reinforced concrete and structural steel frame.<sup>19</sup> The estimated cost was £242,586 for the building, fittings and furniture.<sup>20</sup> The capacity of seating was to be

1,250, increased from the original brief. The auditorium was designed as a fan shape and had a stadium type single sloping floor. But instead of a large gabled roof over the main auditorium the form followed the required three-dimensional shape. Both the shape and slope were important. To allow for a variety of audience sizes a heavy curtain at the mid point could make the main auditorium space smaller for 560 people in live theatre.<sup>21</sup> The entrance foyer could also be used as a reception room. There was a coat check counter and a coffee bar. Coffee had become popular in the 1950s after the influence of American soldiers in Hamilton in the Second World War.

Celebrating the 100th anniversary of the foundation of Hamilton in 1864, the theatre was a significant city memorial to the settlers (and therefore the militia). Today a founders' hall would be seen very differently as the city approaches 160 years since the land was confiscated from Ngāti Wairere.

From the initial design, the memorial entrance hall, to be used for civic (town hall) functions, was to include a 25 feet (7.6 metres) founders'

memorial mural. The smaller hall and foyer spaces were to provide promenading areas for theatre goers. A balcony overlooked the hall for receptions, and mayoral use.<sup>22</sup> The design included landscape design but also opened out into Boyes Park for outdoor meetings. Internally an entrance stair led from the foyer up into the centre of the auditorium.

The main auditorium was constructed with concrete steps as the structure of the building. The historical design form and shape of auditoria had been tiered for centuries. The fan shape remained and continued to be used, including for the Founders Theatre. But it was noted by the 1940s there were issues with acoustics and fan layouts.<sup>23</sup>

The ceiling of the auditorium, with its acoustic panels, is similar to that of the Belgrade Theatre, and this is followed through with the Founders Theatre's interior walls. The auditorium side walls have mahogany panels with acoustic ply panels above, as shown on de Lisle's rendered coloured sketches, in tonal colour. Seats similar to the Belgrade Theatre lined the floor space. Notably the 1960s'

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<sup>18</sup> Brinkworth "Interview with Aubrey de Lisle" np.

<sup>19</sup> "The Founders' Memorial Theatre, Hamilton" p 256.

<sup>20</sup> "Hamilton Founders' Memorial Hall to be Built for £242,586" p 2.

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<sup>21</sup> "The Founders' Memorial Theatre, Hamilton" p 256.

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<sup>22</sup> "The Founders' Memorial Theatre, Hamilton" p 252.

<sup>23</sup> Historic England *Culture and Entertainment Buildings* p 4.

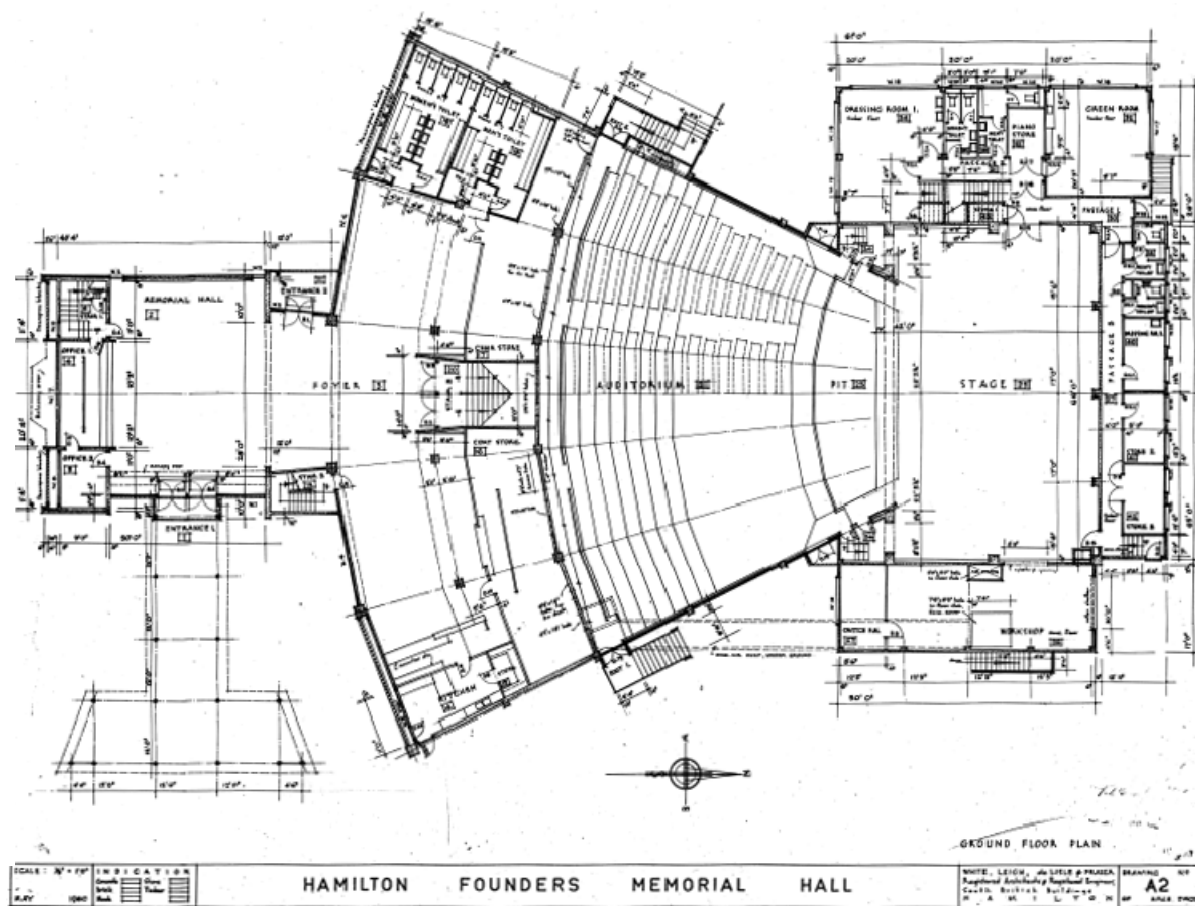


Figure 2: Floor plan of Hamilton Founders Memorial Theatre. de Lisle Family Collection.

images show pale-coloured seats, while many remember deep coloured seats prior to the change in the 2000s. The auditorium sloped down to the sunken orchestra pit suitable for

40 musicians, and up to the timber stage, to the area of stage spaces of the dressing rooms,

Green Room, and stores.<sup>24</sup> The height of the stage is 51 feet (15.55 metres) to scenery grid.<sup>25</sup> The stage was 63 feet wide (20.12 metres) by 43 feet deep (13.11 metres), with a proscenium 22 feet high (6.7 metres) that could be varied in width.<sup>26</sup> A turn table within the stage allowed the live rotating performance of plays while allowing concerts and recitals.

Acoustics were always paramount, whether a theatre or a church. Both architects, de Lisle and Angus, would have known about acoustic design and the theatre design included acoustic engineers as specialists. Bell and Associates took on this task.<sup>27</sup> It was not until the 1970s that acoustic design in theatres was taken to a new international level, combining the work of the engineer, architect with acoustic design. New Zealand had its own architect and international acoustician Harold Marshall. Marshall trained at the School of Architecture in the mid 1950s, and specialised in the art and science of acoustic design

<sup>24</sup> "The Founders' Memorial Theatre, Hamilton" p 256.

<sup>25</sup> "The Founders' Memorial Theatre, Hamilton" p 256.

<sup>26</sup> "Hamilton Founders' Memorial Hall to be Built for £242,586" p 2; also "The Founders' Memorial Theatre, Hamilton" p 256.

<sup>27</sup> "Hamilton Founders' Memorial Hall to be Built for £242,586" p 2.

working internationally in acoustic design for concert halls before realising shape was important in concert halls (in 1966). This led to working with Warren and Mahoney on the Christchurch Town Hall opened in 1972, a decade later.<sup>28</sup>

In visiting the Belgrade Theatre, de Lisle would have taken great interest in the interior design details and acoustics. The undulating, curved ceiling of Belgrade Theatre shows the work of acoustic engineering for sound. It is possible that this was considered for Hamilton. The Belgrade Theatre was designed with vertical timber side panelling. de Lisle used mahogany timber panelling and acoustic panels.

The Belgrade Theatre was designed with traditional box seating of the two side walls like many traditional theatres.<sup>29</sup> The Founders Theatre did not, but instead had the New Zealand National Broadcasting box on one side and there were three different floor pitches for good sight-lines.<sup>30</sup> It was full of the

latest sound technology including hearing loops.<sup>31</sup>

In modern design form follows function, and de Lisle was trained as a Modernist architect. In a more traditional gabled theatre the interior form is typically a large rectangular volume. The form and shape of the Founders Memorial Theatre mirrors its internal form including its lantern fly tower. The three-dimensional fan form of the main auditorium is hidden externally at ground level due to its height off the ground. It can only be seen from above.

### Opening and Awards

The building's construction started in March 1961<sup>32</sup> and the Founders Memorial Theatre was officially opened on 17 November 1962 by the Mayor Doctor Rogers. It opened debt free<sup>33</sup> and was hailed as the most modern in the country and the first theatre for live performance built in New Zealand for 50 years, and possibly the Southern Hemisphere.<sup>34</sup> It received the New Zealand

Institute of Architects (NZIA) Award of Merit in 1964.<sup>35</sup>

While it was proclaimed that the Founders Theatre was the first in 50 years in New Zealand, including for live theatre, there was potentially another hall. This is the Whanganui War Memorial Hall (1960) designed by Gordon Smith of the Auckland architectural partnership of Greenhough, Smith and Newman. It was begun in 1956 and the building opened in April 1960:

Following the war, the government offered subsidies for the construction of war memorials around the country, with a strong preference for "living memorials," such as community centres. The government offered the Wanganui Council £50,000 for the new memorial hall.<sup>36</sup>

The concert chamber within the building form was much smaller, with the hall the main space. It was part of a New Zealand-wide war memorial.

### Interior design

de Lisle was responsible for the design of the interior including colour schemes and furniture and fittings. Images from the early

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<sup>28</sup> "Sir Harold Marshall Receives Highest Honour in Acoustics" np.

<sup>29</sup> "[Belgrade Theatre boxes]" np.

<sup>30</sup> "The Founders' Memorial Theatre, Hamilton" p 256.

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<sup>31</sup> "The Founders' Memorial Theatre, Hamilton" p 256.

<sup>32</sup> "The Founders' Memorial Theatre, Hamilton" p 256.

<sup>33</sup> "The Founders' Memorial Theatre, Hamilton" p 252.

<sup>34</sup> "Hamilton Founders' Memorial Hall to be Built for £242,586" p 2.

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<sup>35</sup> "The Founders' Memorial Theatre, Hamilton" p 251.

<sup>36</sup> McCracken "War Memorial Hall, Queen's Park, Whanganui" np.

1960s show the design elements of the entrances, the main lobby and the main auditorium, with associated 1960s furniture. The foyer lighting is of particular note. Stylist chairs and coffee tables can be seen. A strong patterned carpet lasted for many years, and was replaced by an equally colourful carpet. The technology of sound and communication was carefully placed with the latest equipment.

### **Landscape and the Dame Hilda Ross Fountain**

The site for the new theatre was specifically chosen, set in the 1864 reserve belt. Aubrey was commissioned to design a pool and fountains, which framed the entrance to the theatre and provided a pool for many Hamilton children to paddle in. Its three distinctive open shallow cup forms spill into a large rectangular pond. It was dedicated to Dame Hilda Ross, Hamilton's first woman councillors.<sup>37</sup> The Dame Hilda Ross fountain remains one of Hamilton's two surviving city fountains, with de Lisle's modernist Garden Place pool and fountain seriously modified.

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<sup>37</sup> "The Founders' Memorial Theatre, Hamilton" p 254.

### **Coffee at Interval**

It was broadcast that coffee was available at the interval (at the opening)<sup>38</sup> and with the cafe included in the design, this marked a significant change in Hamilton's culture-promenading and coffee meant a degree of sophistication. Promenading in one's finery was now part of Hamilton's social scene whether for a show, a school concert, a recital or a Split Enz concert.

### **Arts**

The main foyers included art works from Waikato artists and craftspeople including weavers. Both Aubrey and Mary de Lisle were significant New Zealand artists, and with a number of artists in Hamilton, the inclusion of significant works was important and provided for on the internal walls.

The Founders Memorial Mural was proposed for the main foyer but it was another decade before a competition was held and New Zealand artist Ralph Hotere selected. Ralph Hotere completed his work in 1973,<sup>39</sup> and this was to become part of his black series. It was

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<sup>38</sup> "Hamilton Founders' Memorial Hall to be Built for £242,586" p 2.

<sup>39</sup> McEwan "Hamilton Founders' Memorial Theatre" p 131.

hung in place of honour across the entrance to the main auditorium made up of layer upon layer of black lacquer paint buffed up to give a marble effect, shot with fine lines of colour. The mural was his first large scale commission at 24' 9" by 16', with a central panel and two side panels.<sup>40</sup>

The interiors of the Founders Theatre were the height of style in 1964. Changes to the interior auditorium involved new seating and changes to the stage. There were alterations and additions however the experience of the theatre remained central to urban life whether a child at prize giving, a ballet, a recital or the international and national touring shows and concerts. A temporary venue at the Claudeland's Event Centre now houses the events, however it was never designed to provide a quality theatre environment and the range of acoustics needed for shows as a replacement. The interiors of the Founders Theatre remain a cultural experience in many generations of the Waikato community. The interiors today are closed from view. Only the police and their dogs are regular visitors.

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<sup>40</sup> "Saturday opening for art exhibition" p 9.

### **St Joseph's Catholic Church Morrinsville 1964**

Aubrey de Lisle and Doug Angus were contemporary architects and colleagues based in the new city of Hamilton in the 1950s. Both architects designed iconic buildings in the early 1960s, some 50 kilometres apart - but very different in form, use and in interior. One set in a park in a new city, the other an urban scale radical concrete church in a small rural town. St Joseph church was a replacement design for the Catholic parish, but located in a small rural Waikato town. In 1961 the population of Morrinsville was just over 4,000 people. Angus and Flood were selected as the architects. Father O'Connor was the representative of the client.

### **Angus Flood and Griffiths: Architects and Engineer<sup>41</sup>**

Angus Flood and Griffiths designed significant buildings such as the Kimiora whare kai at Tūrangawaewae Marae in Ngāruawahia in 1974, and the buildings for the world rowing championships at Karāpiro.

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<sup>41</sup> "In The Beginning ..." p 11; "History of the Proposal" p 2. Much of the information in this paper about Tom Flood and John Griffiths is from Corcoran "Interview with Tom Flood" and Corcoran "Interview with John Griffiths."

They produced an extensive catalogue of strong built forms, both small and large, with open strong interior forms using just a few materials, and in collaboration with other architects.<sup>42</sup> Douglas H Angus grew up in the Hawkes Bay where his father William had an extensive building business and he learnt drawing by working in his father's firm.<sup>43</sup> He was a Fellow of NZIA and a significant Waikato architect in the 1950s and 1960s. He moved to Auckland continuing in practice while completing a degree in town planning.<sup>44</sup> Angus died in 1986.<sup>45</sup>

Angus was working in Hamilton in the 1950s with Tom Flood, his partner. Their work included monitoring the old Catholic church at Hamilton, which was in urgent need of repair and replacement. On St Joseph's design and construction, Angus was the concept designer, Flood the engineer. John Griffiths was engaged in the contract drawings, and was to join the firm as an architect partner of Angus, Flood and Griffiths. Flood was a New Zealand engineer who loved architecture. A Fullbright scholar, his work testing new

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<sup>42</sup> Griffiths. Pers Comm.

<sup>43</sup> Griffiths. Pers Comm.

<sup>44</sup> Griffiths. Pers Comm.

<sup>45</sup> "[untitled]" p 2.

designs with Angus' ideas resulted in a very successful practice that included international work. Flood's work included engineering strong forms and the innovative use of materials, particularly concrete and concrete blocks. The parabolic form was an exemplar of his work, and chosen for St Joseph's main structure.

### **Morrinsville and its Modernist church**

Morrinsville was a very small place in 1913, a farming district on the road between Te Aroha and Hamilton, when a wooden church was opened on 15 June 1913. The building was relocated in 1923 from beside the railway yards to the site on Thames Street, and was enlarged.<sup>46</sup> Administration of the parish was from Auckland. The only large Catholic church in the region was the second St Mary's built in Hamilton in 1905 to service a very large Catholic community in Hamilton East.

The proposed new rural church was to replace the 1913 church. The church building was to be removed and the existing site on the corner main street site in front of St Joseph's school was to be the new site. However, the brief was for a very large church, not of the design or

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<sup>46</sup> "St Joseph's Morrinsville" np.



scale that would seem more appropriate for a small farming community. The scale between the congregation of Hamilton and Morrinsville could not have been more extreme. Both St Mary's in Hamilton, of plastered brick, and the small gabled Morrinsville church building had the same traditional church interior layout of nineteenth-century churches with altar against the end wall.

### The concept

St Joseph's church was initiated at the end of the 1950s and designed in the early 1960s by Angus of the Hamilton architectural firm DH Angus and TH Flood, for the Waikato Catholic Diocese. The Waikato Diocese was one of Angus' long-term clients, and retained this role until the new St Mary's was built. A new Catholic church had just been completed at Te Aroha. The early concept drawings show a dramatic use of the arch as the main form with the form coming down to the ground, and smaller arches coming off the sides.

The new St Joseph's church was 42m long and 19m wide, and covered 8,000 sq ft. The simplified parabolic form was 49.5 ft in height. It seated 450 people in its body, with 150 in the mezzanine choir gallery above the

main floor looking towards the altar. Form, architecture and engineering were combined. The main floor sloped 600mm from the back of the church to the sanctuary. (A sloped floor was common in churches and was translated into theatres in the nineteenth century).<sup>47</sup>

The simple external upturned parabola defied the level of innovation and detailing, forming both the exterior and interior form as a concrete shell with the use of pre-stressed concrete ribs, and pre-cast panels between. This allowed a wide opening between each rib. *In situ* concrete panels fitted between the rib arches. The interior result was a soaring vaulted ceiling, with fine refined ribs; the concrete internally forming the simple finish. The structure and its construction, engineered by Tom Flood, was said to be the largest single pour concrete roof of the time in New Zealand.

The original main gable design, traditionally stained-glass windows in church architecture, was designed for translucent coloured glazing in an irregular mosaic in the very apex of the parabola, similar to Le Corbusier's famous chapel at Ronchamp in France. Comprising

small pieces of decorative glass, it was designed by artist Martin Roestenburg.<sup>48</sup>

On 14 November 1965 the second St Joseph's Church was opened, "a distinctive brick and concrete structure which ... attempted to translate into modern idiom the soaring arches of the medieval Gothic."<sup>49</sup> The construction detailing and process of erecting the concrete form was very much a commercial construction and was watched by the Morrinsville community. Tom Flood's engineering would have been intriguing. In the final design the entrance to the church was changed by adding a single-storey form in front of the main arched form, bringing the entrance down to a more modest scale with first a covered canopy and then foyer, before opening to the main space. The gothic arch form was modified.

### St Joseph's Interior

The interior concept sketches show a strong similarity to being in a cathedral, although the final revised design gave a greater lightness to the cloisters with the thin concrete portals open between each bay. The pointed arch

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<sup>47</sup> Wakeling "A Room Nearly Semi-circular" p 265.

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<sup>48</sup> Griffiths. Pers Comm.

<sup>49</sup> "St Joseph's Morrinsville" np.



Figure 3: The interior of St Joseph's Church, Morrinsville in 2009. J W Kellaway (2009)

spines became a much softer parabolic form in the final design. In these early sketches for Father O'Connor the altar with large crucifix cross with Christ is the central focus above the altar. In the final construction the symmetry of the interior design was retained by the use of the form, altar. The confession rooms were off to one side, near the side entrance.

The dramatic deep green marble altar with its inverted triangular form sat on a large slab of green Milan marble almost 3.5 metres wide. It was set in the middle of the predella with low level steps falling out down to the parishioners. It was of a monumental scale but in proportion to the space. It was a very innovative form.

### **Times of change**

It was a time of great change in the early 1960s in the organisation of the international Catholic church and how priests would conduct parish duties. The proposed interior layout of St Joseph was very much traditional in general layout however with changes in Catholic church doctrine in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the proposal, in increasing engagement with parishioners, was to have the priests behind the altar facing out rather than have the altar against the sanctuary wall.



Figure 4: Specialised furniture designed for St Joseph's. J. W. Kellaway (2009)

Father O'Connor wanted not only a modern design but also the interior to be significantly modernised, and to face his parishioners. It was likely an uncomfortable time of change for some parishioners.

Angus and Flood's design was radical, both externally in form and construction, with the shell forming both the exterior and interior. The sheer scale of the interior of St Joseph's with its thin concrete arches and concrete finish was likely a shock to the parishioners. It would not have been what the small rural parish were expecting, and they may have had no say in it. Father O'Connor was the parish priest at the time, and was "very fixed in his views as to the design of the church."<sup>50</sup> There was a tension on what may have seemed like imposition of a building much beyond the scale and economics means of a small community.

While the interior of St Joseph's was like a cathedral, to the parishioners it seems to have been cold, difficult to warm, and would continue to be too big and too costly to maintain, including heating the space. According to the late John Griffiths, architect,

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<sup>50</sup> "St Joseph's Morrinsville" np.



Figure 5 Roestenburg's windows for St Joseph's. J. W. Kellaway (2009)

the lack of funds to complete the works meant essentials were left out during the construction stage such as the waterproofing of the concrete structure which formed the roof and interior. Additional solutions were sought for heating and acoustics and later some waterproofing was applied, but issues remained.<sup>51</sup>

#### **Art works and Roestenberg**

Angus engaged artists in many of his projects including for his own office in Hamilton in the 1950s. And like many architects he designed the interior, fittings and furniture if able. In St Joseph's the altar furniture forms a significant part of the design with use of strong forms and materials.

As part of the overall design new church furniture was specifically designed including a marble altar, a striking baptismal font, priest chairs, a marble pulpit, Christ on a timber crucifix, and even silver ceremonial items. Each a Modernist work of art and craftsmanship.

Angus wanted to install coloured light into the church, in the apex of the front arch. He

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<sup>51</sup> "St Joseph's Morrinsville" np.

engaged with New Zealand artists, and one of his favourites was Martin Roestenberg (1909-66). Roestenberg's works form a significant contribution to New Zealand's mid-twentieth-century art and in New Zealand buildings of the mid century. He was a Master Painter attending the Munich Academy of Fine Arts. In 1951 with post war conditions in Holland he came to New Zealand.<sup>52</sup> He is known for Our Lady of Lourdes, a monumental statute created in 1958 above the Kapiti Coast at Paraparamu, at 14 metres high on a hill.<sup>53</sup>

Mastering painting, sculpting, lead lighting, photography, mosaic application, and mural construction, Roestenberg was also innovative in stained glass work in both subject and design. In 1957-58 Roestenberg was commissioned by Angus to design and make a mosaic for the front façade of his new Hamilton architectural office.

The coloured glass in the main gable of St Joseph's was to have been a larger design, but resulted in a mosaic of irregular coloured light that specked the interior. Originally believed to have been glass, when demolished it was

found to be coloured perspex, which was used in architecture at the time such as in John Scott's 1961 Futuna Chapel.<sup>54</sup> Roestenberg's art work in St Joseph's church in 1964 is likely one of his last commissions.

### **St Joseph's Church in the twenty-first century: a mid-century Modernist interior**

Surprisingly St Joseph's was not well known in the architectural community, although, when driving past, it was a strong urban form in a quiet main street. Fifty years of difficulties continued with leakage, condensation, ineffective heating, poor lighting and draughtiness. Its Modernist architectural form was not recognised. Seismic strengthening was potentially required, although it seems the original engineering drawings were not viewed and the architect was not contacted.

In 2009 the interior fittings were repositioned by the local priest to the original design. An attempt to put forward the place for enduring architecture was not appreciated by the Catholic Diocese. In March 2014, St Joseph's was demolished to make way for the present church.<sup>55</sup> Transferred to the new much

smaller church was the crucifix with Christ, the baptismal font and priests' chairs. The inverted marble altar has gone.

St Joseph's was a regionally-significant Modernist church, despite its difficulties, and one of a small group of Modernist, highly sculptural, and elegant 1960s New Zealand churches at the leading edge, and in line with many other world churches of the same period. Its interior was unique, the only one of its type in New Zealand. It was designed by Angus and Flood, a leading Waikato Modernist architect and an important New Zealand engineer known for his innovative architectural engineering.

While St Joseph's interior was traditional in plan, little different from the early twentieth century, it provided the potential for an urban-scale cathedral for worship, with its internal form and use of bare concrete and brick with parabolic arches. The altar facing the congregation was radical, and could match other 1960s Modernist designs. The elements designed within the space would, in the twenty-first century, still be considered contemporary over 50 years later.

<sup>52</sup> "Roestenberg, Martin, 1909-1966" np.

<sup>53</sup> "Our Lady of Lourdes" np.

<sup>54</sup> Walden *Voices of Silence* p 82.

<sup>55</sup> Edwards and Thomas "Morrinsville's Catholic church demolished" np.

## Demolition

St Joseph's Church was demolished in 2014.<sup>56</sup> Some of the original fittings were transferred to the new church. There was no full documentation of the church. The skill of the engineering of structure could be seen in the last photograph of the building during demolition.

The Hamilton Founders Memorial Theatre was closed abruptly in February 2016. It had some alterations and additions over the last 20 years, with several extensions on both the main foyer and stage working areas. But very little appears to have been spent over the last 60 years on maintenance or any significant refurbishment to its construction. Improved seismic strengthening is needed to parts of the structure, including the roof and fly-tower, as with a few other 1960s buildings.

As the closure was meant to be temporary, the art works remained in place. Concern led to the proposal to remove Ralph Hotere's mural and put it into storage, and then into the proposed new regional theatre.

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<sup>56</sup> Edwards and Thomas "Morrinsville's Catholic church demolished" np.

As Hamilton city's civic theatre, the Founders Theatre predates the Christchurch Town Hall by almost a decade. Nationally significant, it came as some surprise to some that the building was an important Modernist place and was well loved by generations of Waikato people of all ages. It was nominated for a Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga listing but remains unscheduled by Hamilton City Council. It is yet to be recognised as a nationally-significant Modernist building and as a regional icon representing Waikato architect Aubrey de Lisle's work.

The similarity of the design of Founders Theatre compared to the Grade 2 Belgrade Theatre in Britain, is to a degree ironic. The Belgrade theatre was listed in 1989, but Hamilton Founders Memorial Theatre in 2022 awaits demolition, despite its community status. There is a remote possibility it may be redeveloped. Its 1960s interior has been diminished to a degree over six decades but it does retain its original form, and could be refurbished to reflect its original interior design. The interior spaces of the theatre, while modified in part retain much of de Lisle's original design. Perhaps too Ralph Hotere's Founders Memorial Mural will be returned along with the interior design that

marks Hamilton's town hall and grand Modernist Theatre.

## A place of worship and a place of theatre

St Joseph's architect was very much aware of the design of ecclesiastical spaces and performance as a "theatre of workshop." Similar to de Lisle's Founders Memorial Theatre, designing for music and voice was important with acoustics foremost alongside retaining the special environment within the space. Specially-designed furniture was designed as part of the central focus of the church and for the rituals within, but in a very elegant simplified form. Acoustics was soon to become an art form, which would have been beneficial for both church and theatre design, but was just a few years too soon for New Zealand innovation in this field.

Hamilton Founders Memorial Theatre was designed as a place of performance, with voice, music and speech central to the rituals of the place and spaces. The advantage of a regional theatre, twice the size of the Morrinsville church and funded by the citizens and Hamilton City Council, gave the ability to furnish in a more elaborate way.

Both buildings were steeped in the rituals and procession from one space to the next, and into the central inner space. With the theatre the focus was on the performance on stage [and within the main auditorium], with the flexibility to make the grand space smaller. At St Joseph's the focus was also on the sanctuary. The nineteenth-century use of a steeped floor was common to both.<sup>57</sup>

Contemporary works of art, including furniture, were central to both places, and created by the architects, significant artists and craftspeople. But each set of art had a very different purpose. Use of colour and texture was important in the theatre spaces, but with St Joseph's colour was restrained with the physicality of the construction materials that were important in terms of texture and back drop.

Two contemporary Waikato architects, de Lisle and Angus were skilled in Modernist design, who with their teams and artists provided two iconic Waikato buildings with important grand interiors. A tale of two cathedrals and simplicity of form.

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<sup>57</sup> Wakeling "A Room Nearly Semi-circular" p 273, fnote 2.

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