Softening the edges of a modernist university campus

A Landscape History of the University of Canterbury at Ilam

Jeremy Thin
February 2007

This project was carried out as part of a Summer Studentship at the Social Science Research Centre, University of Canterbury, between November 2006 and February 2007. It was supervised by Prof Eric Pawson (University of Canterbury Department of Geography) and sponsored and co-supervised by Dr Kate Hewson (University of Canterbury Facilities Management).
Contents

Introduction: The Canterbury Campus ...................................................... 3

1. Ilam: pre-University (to 1950) .............................................................. 4
   Pre-human ........................................................................................................... 4
   Maori arrival ......................................................................................................... 5
   Pakeha arrival and settlement ........................................................................... 5

2. Building a modernist university (1950-1973) ....................................... 6
   University Town site and move to Ilam .......................................................... 6
   Planning the Ilam campus ............................................................................... 7
   The 1967 comprehensive landscaping plan ....................................................... 9

   Modernist or postmodernist? ........................................................................... 11
   Landscaping intentions ...................................................................................... 11
   Gradual implementation .................................................................................... 12
   Mounds .............................................................................................................. 14
   Architecture: enduring and new ..................................................................... 15

4. The University of the Plains (1998-2007) ............................................ 16
   Case study: the Arts North Lecture Theatres .................................................... 17

5. Water at Ilam ..................................................................................... 19
   Water features ................................................................................................... 19
   Waterways restoration .................................................................................... 20

Conclusion .............................................................................................. 22

Bibliography ............................................................................................ 23

Figures ...................................................................................................... 26

Note on photos: the full version of this paper, copies of which are lodged with
the Macmillan Brown Library and the Social Science Research Centre at the
University of Canterbury, is accompanied by a CD containing 155 images. This
condensed version contains a selection of these images, referenced in the text as
figures and found at the conclusion of the paper. To obtain access to the full version
of the paper, which contains the same text as this but with the addition of the
appendices, contact the Macmillan Brown Library via
http://library.canterbury.ac.nz/mb/.

Cover pictures: The Science lecture theatres, c. early 1970s (top) and 2006
(bottom). Photos courtesy of Eric Pawson and W. Hansen.
Introduction: The Canterbury Campus

Beginning in the late 1950s, the University of Canterbury migrated from its nineteenth century central city site to a new campus at Ilam, then a large, flat farm on the fringes of western Christchurch. The Ilam site has a landscape history that goes back thousands of years, including flooding by the Waimakariri River to the north of the city, occasional use by Maori in harvesting food and natural resources, a century of Pakeha farming from about 1851, and University construction and occupation from the mid-1950s. This paper seeks to chronicle how the landscape has changed and evolved through this time, particularly in its guise as the site of the University of Canterbury. As the University approaches fifty years’ occupation at Ilam, and begins the process of campus master planning for the next few decades, it is appropriate to look back and examine how the landscape has reached its generally mature state in 2007.

In examining this history, the paper is in five sections. The first deals with the pre-University history of the site, as a background to University development. The following three sections propose that a modernist campus, built between 1950 and 1973 (section two), has had its edges ‘softened’ through landscaping since this time, initially between 1973 and 1998 (section three), and in particular since 1998 (section four) under the title ‘University of the Plains’. Section five is a thematic study of water on the campus; important because the three waterways on campus are prominent amongst few natural landscape features, and because the treatment and place of them has changed significantly during the history of the campus.

Robert Hughes, in a history of modern art in the twentieth century entitled The Shock of the New, traces 'utopian' modernism, in a town planning-architectural sense, back to the fifteenth century. Florentines Leon Battista Alberti, Leonardo da Vinci and Antonio Filarete speculated how to build the ideal town, and the latter planned such a city in detail, with large squares and a rational layout standing in contrast the muddle and filth of contemporary, warren-like Italian towns. Rationality and planning became the essential elements of the twentieth-century version of this modernism, with architecture containing no decorative frills but straight, functional clarity. The generation of north European architects who came of professional age between 1910 and 1920 took this to its greatest height, only to be disillusioned by barbarity of 1930s fascism that ruined Europe. Fascism proclaimed itself as the ideology of the future; its downfall severely checked the ever-more fantastic visions of a modernist tomorrow. Concurrently, however, the destruction wrought by the Second World War left an unprecedented need for reconstruction after 1945 that ushered in a less fantastic, but just as idealist, era of urban construction that spread throughout the Western world.1

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of many people towards this project, which was carried out in the Social Science Research Centre at the University of Canterbury, as part of a Summer Studentship, between November 2006 and February 2007: my supervisors, Dr Kate Hewson (Facilities Management) and Professor Eric Pawson (Geography); archivists Dick Hlavac (University of Canterbury Archivist), Jeff Palmer and Murray Laughlin (both Macmillan Brown Library); Jeff Field,

---

University of Canterbury Registrar; Professor Brian Butterfield, Jeanette Colman, William Hansen, Associate Professor David Painter, Professor Eric Pawson, Duncan Shaw-Brown and Eve Welch of University of Canterbury Photographic Services for providing photographs; Trevor McLean for providing maps and plans of the University; Duncan Shaw-Brown for digitising non-digital images; John Adam, Neil Aitken, Colin Baumann, Peter Cadigan, Dr Chris Connolly, Graeme Dunstall, William Field, Lindsay Hampton, Professor John Hunt, George Malcolm, Simon McCarthy, Dr Vincent Orange and Professor John Ritchie for providing information. Without their assistance, this paper could not have been compiled.

1. Ilam: pre-University (to 1950)

Pre-human

Almost any excavation at Ilam, down to 3 metres or more, reveals large amounts of wood, consisting of the fallen trunks, roots and stumps of big trees.

So wrote Dr Colin Burrows, of the Plant and Microbial Sciences Department, in a 1992 issue of the Chronicle, the University magazine. The reason for this is that Ilam has, like the rest of Christchurch, been flooded by the Waimakariri River many times during the past 7,000 years, most recently on a large scale in 1868 (an event which prompted a higher priority to be placed on river-control measures, with an extensive systems of groynes, cuttings and stop-banks being constructed between 1859 and 1899). Such extensive works are justified by the fact that the river's natural floodplain actually covers the entire Christchurch urban area and extends well inland; the river can shift rapidly, without warning, and find additional outlets into the Avon-Heathcote Estuary and Lake Ellesmere. On each historic occasion of major flooding, layers of gravel, silt and sand were deposited that preserved elements of the flooded landscape below them. The present stream channels that run through the Ilam campus were formed during one of these floods: although they are fed by springs that rise in Avonhead, the gullies which they flow down extend much further to the west as dry channels.

The oldest radiocarbon date at Ilam is 6,980 ±100 years BP (before 1950AD), and was obtained from a drillhole for a well that encountered a peat bog 14m below the surface that records the burial of a swamp by alluvial gravel. On top of this was found evidence of a rich forest of matai, totara, kahikatea, and miro, with broadleaved trees, shrubs and ferns (similar to the later Riccarton Bush, although with more variety of large podocarp trees). Uncovered totara stumps from this period suggest that the area was relatively dry, although the miro and kahikatea to the north indicate moister conditions. This forest was again flooded 3,470 ±40 years BP, after which new patches of podocarp forest grew along the two streams at Ilam, possibly connecting with Riccarton Bush.

---

**Maori arrival**

The Waitaha tribe were the first Maori to claim the South Island through consecrating the land by planting their whakapapa (genealogy) on the landscape. When they arrived in Canterbury around 1,000 years ago, they encountered dense forests of totara and matai on the plains, inland from coastal wetlands. Much of this was burned, leaving smaller areas of bush at Putaringamotu (Riccarton) and Papanui when Ngai Tahu migrated to Waitaha from further north in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The relatively small population did little to impinge on the landscape of the river and swamp area around Ilam, Riccarton and Fendalton. No traces of permanent settlements have been found in the area, although people would camp in the area while harvesting plants, eels, waterfowl and flax.

**Pakeha arrival and settlement**

Flooding and fire (widespread in Canterbury after c. 1300 AD) resulted in the tussock-covered plains that the Deans family, the first European settlers in Christchurch, encountered in 1843. Ilam, before becoming home to Canterbury University from the late 1950s, was the home to some of colonial Christchurch’s leading gentry families for a century. John Charles Watts-Russell, one of the initial Canterbury Pilgrims of 1850, named his new farm Ilam after his previous home in Staffordshire. Watts-Russell built a grand house at Ilam that became a showpiece of Christchurch, using materials that he brought out from England in 1857-8. A.R. Creyke, Watts-Russell’s business partner (who is remembered in the name of Creyke Road, running along the campus’s northern boundary), married the latter’s widow after his death in 1875. Creyke built the Okeover homestead, naming it after one of his father’s (who had been Archdeacon of York) parishes. The farm then passed through several pairs of hands, before being bought by Edgar Stead, its last owner before the University, in 1917. He built the present Ilam homestead on the site where Watts-Russell’s house had earlier burnt down, in a similar style to the original (although in brick, rather than timber). Stead was responsible for much of the character of Ilam that existed until the University buildings began to change it. A report of 1950 outlines that there were many fruit trees and working vegetable gardens about both the Ilam and Okeover Homesteads, with apple, peach, pear, plum, and apricot trees, as well as good asparagus beds and tomato plants, suitable for immediate use in supplying the halls of residence and Student Union. There were also ‘Rhododendron and Azalea beds…in a fair state of maintenance [on the Ilam property]…A great deal of labour would not be required to put [these] in first class order.’ These were the renowned and visible legacy of Stead, a man deeply interested in plant and bird life. These flowers are still an important part of the plantlife of Ilam, with unique varieties recognised by the Royal Horticultural Society (London) and the Gardens are open to the public annually when in full bloom, a tradition that was

---


started by Stead and continues today.\textsuperscript{10} Gardner believes that it is ‘completely appropriate that Stead, a distinguished amateur scientist, should bridge the gap between Ilam as a symbol of early Canterbury society and the University of Canterbury as the fulfilment of many of the educational hopes of the founders of this province.’\textsuperscript{11}


\textbf{University Town site and move to Ilam}

Indeed, the Canterbury Association, formed in 1848 to establish a Church of England colony in New Zealand, envisaged a Canterbury College as an integral part of the new colony from the start. John Robert Godley, a graduate of Christ Church College of Oxford University, brought the ideals of the Oxbridge model with him to the infant colony in New Zealand, which he headed for its first two years.\textsuperscript{12} Eventually established in 1873, Canterbury College made up an educational ‘quarter’ in Christchurch, sitting in close proximity to Christ’s College, the Museum, and Christchurch Boys’ and Girls’ High Schools.\textsuperscript{13} By 1918, the initial neo-Gothic architecture of William Mountfort had been refined by Samuel Hurst Seager to centre the College around two quadrangles in imitation of traditional English colleges (although ironically not, in Seagar’s own words, the “bald open space of Christ Church, Oxford”).\textsuperscript{14} Figure 1 shows this architecture.

Well-suited to the size of the student population until after the Second World War, the post-war surge in enrolments saw 2,764 students studying on the same site in 1949 that had housed 878 students just nine years before. The post-war influx was not unique to Canterbury: the Education Department recommended to Auckland and Victoria University Colleges, as well as Canterbury, that they consider moving from their central city sites to larger campuses, in order to cope with this, but Canterbury was alone in proceeding with a move. The decision to move was taken in 1949, when the College Council voted to buy the block of land at Ilam, three miles from the Town site. This followed three years of debate and ultimate rejection – though not without difficulty – of a proposal to acquire the adjacent block to the north of the Town site (between Rolleston Avenue, Worcester, Gloucester and Montreal streets) and expand there. T.E. Carter, writing in the centennial history of the University, wrote that the College Council of 1946 was ‘conditioned by the past’ in desiring expansion in this direction, basing it on long-term planning for a college of 3,500-5,000 students that remained a part of the federal University of New Zealand.\textsuperscript{15}

Figure 2 shows a view of what became the Ilam site, taken in 1940 – showing that even though the decision to move was not taken until 1949, the site that would be...

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} W. J. Gardner, “Ilam's History: Nursery for the Social Graces,” \textit{University of Canterbury Chronicle}, 18 October 1974, 7.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 47.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 73-5.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 330-6.
\end{itemize}
used in the event of a move had already been chosen, presumably by the Government, and the Council was thus freed from the task of finding a new site – fortunately so, given the time it took to decide to move, it is reasonable to suppose that this would probably have been another lengthy process. Although the new site was only three miles from the old, Ilam was right on the fringes of suburban development, with very few streets and houses extending to the west.

**Planning the Ilam campus**

Yet even after the decision to move from a one-block city site to a 76-hectare suburban site on the fringes of Christchurch had been made in 1949, initial plans for the new campus were also conditioned by the past, this time in the opinion of architect John Hunt:

> It could be argued that the new [1951] plan is little more than its city counterpart, but with the two and three storey [Oxbridge] collegiate Gothic architecture of the city site reduced in height, simplified in style, and spread across the greater available site area.16

The Oxbridge style, defined by Hunt as *collegiate*, was quickly abandoned in favour of a more adventurous, spacious and modernist *campus* approach in the 1960 Ministry of Works plans for stages one (the School of Engineering, which opened that year) and two (the Science School, construction of which was about to begin).17 These plans featured the modernist slab-block buildings and elevated, covered walkways that remain to this day, landscaped with linear planting features to define the wide open spaces – ‘perhaps evoking the shelter belts that are a distinctive feature of the Canterbury Plains’, speculates Hunt. A described, but hardly drawn, “grassed and planted mall with open courts and buildings lining its major axis” is the central landscape feature of the campus, in place of what was previously planned to be a grand vehicular entrance avenue to the campus (which had itself been replaced with a less-obtrusive perimeter road).18 A January 1965 Ministry of Works site development plan, **figure 3**, shows this mall, with a long arts building, similar to the science buildings, enclosing it at the south end by the Avon and linking by walkway to the Students’ Union behind it, on the far (south) side of the river. In *The Shock of the New*, Robert Hughes writes that European architects of the 1920s were fixated on a new, utopian vision of city planning, grouped around the vertical: ‘the grid of tower blocks, laid out on a rectangular module, separated by patches of green space and joined by superhighways.’19 Anyone who knows the Science buildings at Ilam cannot help but see the resemblance when looking at architect Ludwig Hilbersheimer’s *Study for Ideal City* (1924), **figure 4**, with its slab-block buildings, linked over a mall (in this case, a superhighway) by elevated walkways.

The European architectural modernists after the First World War were dreamers in that they planned utopian cities but could only build within already-existing urban areas – wholesale urban destruction would not be unleashed until the next war – but the empty fields of Ilam provided the ideal blank slate for some of their disciples. Renowned Austrian modernist architect Ernst Plischke migrated to New Zealand in

---

17 UC Registry file 4958, folder 1.
18 Ibid., 316-7.
the late 1930s (along with others such as Heinrich Kulka, Friedrich Neumann, and Imi Pkrsolt) and worked for the Department of Housing Construction, providing a personal link for New Zealand Government Architects with the latest modernist trends in Europe. Plischke widely disseminated these ideas to soldiers who would later become Government Architects through his contributions to The New Zealand Services Current Affairs Bulletin during World War Two.²⁰ Hunt also points out that the Government Architects of the Ministry of Works kept abreast of international trends in their profession through its journals, pointing to Lionel Brett’s influential Architectural Review articles in 1957 and 1963 that reviewed a number of major ‘modernist’ building expansion projects in British universities, as obvious influences on those involved with the planning of Ilam.²¹

Although the Science buildings were constructed in a thoroughly modern style and opened in 1966, the collegiate approach was re-worked (in keeping with international trends, as identified by Brett) soon after the January 1965 plan for the third and final stage of initial development, the new Arts Faculty buildings. Much more compact than the eventual layout, the buildings were tightly-clustered to the west of the James Hight building, creating two linked courtyards that recalled the Town site’s cloistered layout with modern, brutalist (a term that refers to the French term for ‘raw concrete’, but which has definite connotations of ‘brutal’ design) architecture in place of Mountfort’s and Seager’s gothic style.²² See figure 5. However, Hunt sees a ‘lack of any clear philosophical and conceptual basis for directing the development of the Ilam campus’ around this point, as the Arts buildings were eventually dispersed and re-sited to the east of the James Hight building without any supporting commentary to be found in archival correspondence. Hunt believes that at this point, individuals’ personal preferences were allowed to shape planning, and the Chronicle of June 1967 simply states that the newly-revised layout will avoid crowding, give a ‘more pleasant proportion’ to the new development, and allow future extensions of both Arts and Science buildings.²³ The new Arts buildings, along with the James Hight Library (which housed some Arts departments in the Tower, before they progressively moved into their own buildings as these were completed, allowing the Library to expand), were duly constructed and opened in 1973 (see figures 6 & 7). This was followed by the final shift of departments to Ilam, reuniting the entire University on one site for the first time since the School of Art had moved out to the Okeover homestead in 1957.

George Malcolm, Ministry of Works Landscape Officer and responsible for the landscape construction of the campus through the building phase until his retirement in 1982, is critical of the lack of coordination between the people with differing areas of responsibility for planning and building the campus. Even within the architecture of the buildings, this is apparent through the differing styles of modernism employed across the different building stages. Stage One, the semi-collegiate School of Engineering, is clustered around a central courtyard with the different departments extending out in a modernist nod to efficient movement within the traditional inward-looking collegiate principle (figure 8). Stage Two, the Science School, is conceived

²² Ibid., 321-2.
on a much larger scale, with widely-separated buildings and efficient movement provided for by the overhead walkways linking all the departments with the lecture theatre block at centre (figure 9). Finally, the Stage Three buildings, Arts, Library and Administration, were designed in a brutalist style – a modernist layout, but radically different in look to the previous two Stages (figure 10). Malcolm strongly believes that a committee of the planners (ecologists, engineers, architects, landscape architects, and University representatives) and ‘doers’ (such as Hugh Baxter, who led the landscape construction under Malcolm’s direction) should have existed to provide some coherence in the massive task of building an entire university from the ground up. As it was, he believes that he and the landscapers did a very good job in a less than ideal situation, but that it could have been better coordinated.24

The 1967 comprehensive landscaping plan

Brett’s 1957 Architectural Review article, discussing the differing approaches of ‘campus’ and ‘college’, described the former as a ‘university in a garden…in a parkland.’25 A 1967 Chronicle article gives an overview of the early landscape philosophy at Ilam (largely developed by Malcolm), reflecting this sentiment (figure 11).26 The comprehensive landscaping plan that had recently been approved by the Council, ‘is aimed at the integration of buildings and trees rather than the normal “parkland planting” practised in New Zealand’. Mr J.R.P. Blake-Kelly, Assistant Government Architect with the Ministry of Works and the man with overall responsibility for the Ilam building project in the 1960s, reported to the Council that the “parkland planting” was appropriate for Christchurch suburbs, but could not be applied to a large campus without an undisciplined appearance that failed to integrate with the buildings (which were ‘often considerably larger than city street structures’). To ensure that the scale of the site did not dwarf people, buildings and planting should be grouped in areas of three to four acres at a time, an area that ‘could be appreciated with ease and intimacy’. ‘Bold’ and ‘large-scale’ planting would be required for open areas, while the small courts between buildings necessitated more subtle, visually interesting planting. Tree species were not given. Although the lime was selected as a “university tree” (because of its academic connotations),27 the important aspects of shape, leaf volumes, tones and height were outlined in accordance with the desired effect in different settings. Broad zoning of tree types was to radiate outwards from a small, evergreen and formal inner campus area; the broader campus complex of buildings with deciduous types ‘in order to heighten the change of seasons against the static building masses’; and back to evergreens at the peripheries of the campus.

There existed a ‘strong axis’ through the campus, created by the buildings running north to south from the Engineering School, through Science to the Student Union. The proposed Library, located on this axis, would act as a hinge to create an east-west line from the Arts buildings to the east, back to Ilam Road in the west. The “University tree” would help to define these two axes, with a formal layout in the centre and becoming less defined and more dispersed towards the periphery. Roads were considered a necessary feature of the campus but one which must not be allowed

24 George Malcolm, Interview at his home in Fendalton (Christchurch, 8 February 2007).
27 The bark of the lime tree was historically used to make writing paper. Peter Cadigan, Interview at University of Canterbury (Christchurch, 16 January 2007).
to dominate it, reflecting the thinking behind the earlier abandonment of the grand avenue roadway. However, University Drive was to be emphasised (although to a much lesser degree) as the major roadway on campus through being tree-lined on its south side along the Avon River, and these trees would ‘become more commanding [and be the University lime] as the two major planning axii were unfolded’ near the proposed Library. Although he was involved with the preparation of this plan, Malcolm ‘lost’ a battle over the Avon River, which he wanted to be further separated from the road in certain places, in order that its banks could be developed on both sides (rather than just the south side, opposite to the road). The ‘woodland’ style of tree-planting, which was preserved by the Clyde Rd entrance, could have been one way in which the river, one of the few interesting natural features of the campus, was featured.28

Interestingly, the ‘informal and domestic’ development around the Okeover homestead was considered inappropriate to be located so close to the core of the campus, which ‘demanded formality’. However, it was suggested that its informal, parkland style of planting could be reintroduced at the peripheries of the campus to help blend the University in with the surrounding suburbs, while the halls of residence could also be landscaped in the homestead style.29 As it eventuated, however, the area around Okeover did not become so central a part of the campus once the Arts buildings were shifted away from it to the east. The parkland style was retained around the homestead, from the Registry west to Ilam Rd, and today is probably the largest uninterrupted green space on the Ilam-Clyde Road portion of the campus. Professor John Ritchie, Deputy Vice-Chancellor between 1973 and 1983, recalls that the area around Okeover became sacrosanct once the decision to move the Arts buildings had been made, because the then Vice-Chancellor, Professor Neville Phillips, wanted to build a Great Hall there. Although the project was regularly turned down by the University Grants Committee as a low funding priority, the area was kept clear and planted in pine trees (quick-growing but easy to remove when the expected time came) for long enough that no other building has yet been sited there.30 Indeed, a proposal in 1998 to build a link road through the area was rejected as unnecessary and undesirable in that it would break up this established green space.31

By 1975, the University had completed its move to the new Ilam campus of 76 hectares (188 acres).32 When the decision to move to Ilam was made in 1949, the College’s roll stood at 2,764. In 1972, on the eve of the centenary of the founding of Canterbury College in 1873 and just before the move to Ilam was completed, there were 7,100 students enrolled.33 On the spacious Ilam campus, the University has continued to expand and consisted of 13,430 students (including 1,901 postgraduates),

---

28 Malcolm.
30 John Ritchie, Interview at his home in Merivale 18 December 2006).
with 656 academic and 932 general staff in 2006. However, the sharply modernist style of the campus has been softened in the years since its initial development.


Modernist or postmodernist?

A central tenet of modernism, in relation to university campus design, was the idea of zoning. Just as modernist urban planning sought to spatially divide the functions of a city, campus zoning meant locating the core functions in different localities in order to achieve their optimal functioning. As early as 1951, the concept of three basic zones for the Ilam campus was identified. Although a wide range and high number of campus plans were produced in the development period, these basic zones remained: academic (north of the Avon, between Ilam and Clyde Roads), student-recreational (the same block, to the south of the Avon), and residential/further recreational (Ilam to Waimari Roads). A map of the campus at the end of the initial development period (figure 7) clearly shows the further sub-zoning within the academic area, before later building began to break up the demarcations. Engineering, Science, Forestry, Arts and Fine Arts all had ‘their’ subsections of the academic zone, with the common elements (Registry and Library) roughly in the centre.

While postmodernist urban planning attempted to get away from such strict zoning practices, the existing layout at Ilam was not conducive to modification to create such ‘cities within cities’ and ‘complete and finite urban communities’, as British anti-modern architect Leon Krier called for in the 1980s. Although from one perspective, this kind of design (while modernists plan, postmodernists prefer to design) seems to imply the collegiate option, Brett sees both campuses and colleges as an ‘ideal town’: self-contained, limited in size, and with predominantly pedestrian circulation. In this way, even a zoned modernist campus like Ilam could be called a ‘complete and finite’ community. Using landscaping to create small ‘recreational’ zones, such as grassed areas for sitting in beside buildings in the larger academic area of the campus, is one way in which a more postmodernist approach has softened the strict zoning of modernism. The case study of the Arts North lecture theatres, below in section four, gives an example of this particular evolution.

Landscaping intentions

Regardless of whether or not the layout of the campus was modernist or postmodernist, the buildings were there to stay and could not be moved. To ‘soften the edges’, landscaping was used. This was the case under both the Ministry of Works and the University grounds staff. Works were responsible for large-scale construction and initial maintenance (generally for a season) of new areas, which were then handed over to the University to maintain, and George Malcolm recalls that ‘we did try quite...
a bit to soften the buildings’ using landscaping.\textsuperscript{42} Although a landscaping plan had been produced in 1967, it was apparently never transmitted to the University grounds staff, or at least forgotten by 1974: in the words of Superintendent of Grounds Peter Cadigan, who arrived at the University that year, the landscaping developed as an ‘as-built plan’ – that is, the plan followed the existing building and developed, to an extent, as time went on. When the grounds workers asked where the ‘plan’ was, the reply from Cadigan’s deputy was that ‘it’s in Peter’s head’. Cadigan’s strategy was to plant deciduous English trees along the main roads and pedestrian pathways (to fit in with the English-inspired planting of wider Christchurch), with native shrubs and trees around buildings. Although the 1967 Landscaping Plan had set down that the lime was to be the ‘University tree’, Cadigan received no official directive about this and did not go out of his way to plant lime trees. Instead, quite unofficially and gradually, the pin oak became the ‘campus tree’. Grounds staff carried on from the Ministry of Works landscapers, who had planted some by the Bookshop and in the Student Union car park, because it grew well in the wet, heavy soils of Ilam, as well as adding to the English parkland look. Adding the rhododendrons and azaleas of Ilam Gardens fame added colour and provided a further link with this look, as well as linking with the site’s past.\textsuperscript{43} The maintenance of Ilam Gardens to a very high standard has continued since the University took over the site. Although many people believe that there was an agreement between Stead and the Government that the University would maintain the Gardens in their then-current state in perpetuity when the land was purchased, no written evidence of any such agreement has ever been found. Roland Stead, Edgar’s son, impressed upon Cadigan that this was, however, a vital condition of the purchase, and Cadigan was quite happy to act on this basis and devote the necessary resources to the Gardens’ upkeep.\textsuperscript{44} The Gardens, under University management, have flourished and Cadigan’s personal interest in azaleas resulted in the development of a new hybrid – the Galaxy range – consisting of twelve unique varieties that are registered with the Royal Horticultural Society, London.\textsuperscript{45}

**Gradual implementation**

Like the architects two decades earlier, the University grounds staff were presented with a virtual clean slate in the academic area of the campus when they started work on planting the campus in the early 1970s, taking over from the Ministry of Works who had built the buildings and set out the large-scale landscape features, but largely left the details for the University staff to deal with.

*It was challenging. Development was the big word: no roads, no footpaths, new buildings. There were shrubberies and trees to plant and acres of lawn to establish. It took thirty-two people from the Labour Department a whole week to do one lawn.*\textsuperscript{46}

In those early days of the entire University being located at Ilam, there was a lot of grass: 15 acres of lawn, and a further 33 acres of playing fields, out of the total 174 acres of the campus.\textsuperscript{47} Although undeveloped sections of the campus had continued to be farmed in the 1950s and ‘60s as only part of the University population was located at Ilam, and paddocks rented out for stock grazing (figure 12), all the open areas on

---

\textsuperscript{42} Malcolm.  
\textsuperscript{43} Cadigan.  
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{45} Hunt, "Ilam Gardens - the Home of World Famous Azaleas and Rhododendrons."  
\textsuperscript{47} "Close to the Soil - Five Floors Up," *News Advertiser*, 5 August 1975, 21.
the campus had been either sealed or grassed by the completion of the Stage 3 buildings in 1974.48

Until the early 1990s, there followed a period of gradual development once the initial landscaping was in place. By 1975, it was reported that 5,000 trees and shrubs had already been planted on campus, with a thousand in 1974 alone. Although ‘more than 6,000’ were planned, this gives an indication of how quickly the landscape development phase followed the building development, and how dense planting was used to quickly ‘soften’ the bare landscape.49 In 1997, the number of trees on campus had settled at about 4,200, which was the number of trees over 4 metres in height that were catalogued in that year.50

Although the number of trees remained rather constant and declined once they reached maturity and could be thinned out without changing the effect created, early landscaping in general was rather different in intention to that in the 1990s and 2000s. The focus in the 1970s and 1980s, as befitting the modernist theme of the campus as a whole, was ensuring that movement between places was as efficient as possible. Landscape planting was strictly subordinated to this. In the Stage One (Engineering) buildings, the architecture was such that the common area was at the centre, with the different departments of the Engineering School radiating outward in straight lines so that the entire School was easily and quickly navigable without going outside (figure 8). Stage Two (Science) and Three (Arts) buildings were linked with overhead, enclosed walkways (such as all the Science buildings being linked to each other via the central Science lecture theatres (figure 9), and adjacent Arts buildings such as Geography and Psychology (figure 10) being linked to each other also).

While the landscape needed to be softened for aesthetic purposes, it was largely intended to be appreciated from indoors. When the concept of efficient movement was translated to the outdoor areas of the campus, it resulted in rather a lot of emphasis being placed on paths, to facilitate quick movement between two indoor points that could not be reached via internal access. Figure 13 shows clearly this emphasis, with wide paths crossing lawns that look, in light of later development, as though they are there solely to avoid paving the entire area. They are not the type of landscape feature that look designed to be appreciated up close, such as by sitting on the grass – people would have been expected, if they wanted to sit outside on a sunny day, for instance, to go to one of the designated areas for this purpose, such as along the banks of the Avon outside the Student Union (in the recreational zone of the campus, figure 14).

This phenomena was not restricted to Canterbury. Pedestrian paths are a very important part of planning a modern campus, wrote Richard Dober in his influential 1963 book, Campus Planning:

> Well-designed circulation systems are essential...eight times a day the faculty and student body on a typical campus move from one place to another. Much of this movement must take place within ten minutes, which is the average time span between classes...Major paths are...the most direct lines between origins and destinations for the heaviest pedestrian traffic. [They] are often designed to [also] allow access for emergency vehicles such as fire trucks.51

---

49 “5000 Trees and Shrubs Planted on Campus,” *University of Canterbury Chronicle*, 8 August 1975, 2.
While the major paths at Canterbury were planned from the start, as Dober prescribes, some lesser paths were only paved once the most natural and efficient route of movement through the area had been found. Graeme Dunstall, a History lecturer who moved to the Ilam campus in 1974, recalls that W.D.H. (Han) Smith, then Buildings Registrar, held off sealing paths across the grassed areas around the new Arts buildings for some time, in order to see where people naturally walked across the lawns. While this presumably led to more useful routing in the medium term, it resulted in a dirty, messy and muddy surround for the History building at first, as another History lecturer, Vincent Orange, recalls with distaste. Sealed pathways were later created once the most worn tracks, and hence, instinctive routes, became apparent. However, if this is true, the Vice-Chancellor of the time, Professor Neville Phillips, was unaware of the plan: in writing that a ‘sense of community is developing at Ilam’ in 1975, now that the entire University was on the one site, he complained that ‘some lawns [are] suffering from the normal human laziness of choosing the shortest route’.

### Mounds

The Canterbury campus has a number of grassed mounds as a distinguishing feature, created with spoil excavated from the foundations of buildings on the campus and destined otherwise to be dumped in the riverbed of the Waimakariri River. On a flat campus, they provide a measure of topographic variety, although there were more functional reasons behind their construction: the first to be built was located on the north side of the athletics stadium to form an embankment, while others initially screened car parking areas from the view of buildings and main roads. Later, mounds were constructed as part of the landscaping and car park around the new Law building in the 1990s to provide a measure of continuity, even incorporating existing trees by boxing around them so that the trunk was not buried by the mound. Although the impetus for creating the numerous grassed mounds on the Canterbury campus has variously been claimed for a committee of Music and Fine Arts faculty members and Han Smith, it seems that it came direct from George Malcolm and Hugh Baxter, initially to screen the car park by Clyde Rd. Malcolm hoped that this car park would be temporary, as he felt that an underground car park would be more suitable for the site, but the money for its construction was not available whilst so much other construction was taking place, so a double row of mounds (which car park expansions later reduce to a single row – the underground proposal has never been taken up) was constructed along the Clyde Rd frontage. He credits Baxter’s steady eye (no plans were drawn; spoil was simply put in place until it was ‘just right’, according to another senior landscape worker at the time, Neil Aitken) and the skill of the tractor driver, a Mr Kerry, for creating what a visiting top British landscape architect later told him was the best mounding that he had seen, anywhere in the world (figure 15).

Mounding was indeed popular throughout the world in the 1960s and 1970s, possibly through the influence of Ian McHarg, an innovative landscape architect in the US and

---

52 Vincent Orange. Interview at his home in Avonhead (Christchurch, 19 December 2006).
53 Graeme Dunstall. Interview at University of Canterbury (Christchurch, 15 January 2007).
54 “Sense of Community Developing at Ilam,” *University of Canterbury Chronicle*, 27 March 1975, 1.
55 “Han Smith Looks Back, with Satisfaction, on New Campus,” *University of Canterbury Chronicle*, 12 October 1979, 2, Ritchie., Cadigan.
56 Ritchie.
57 “Han Smith Looks Back, with Satisfaction, on New Campus,” 2.
58 Malcolm., Neil Aitken, Email communication (Wellington, 9 February 2007).
author of pioneering work on ecological land-use planning, *Design with Nature*.\(^{59}\) He taught briefly in Australia in the late-1960s and disseminated many of his ideas (including the use of artificial mounds) to a generation of landscape architects that subsequently went on to work in New Zealand, including Frank Boffa, whose firm is currently the consultant landscape architect for Canterbury (see section 4 below). Artificial mounds have been created elsewhere in Australasia due to his influence, such as in Sydney’s Illawarra Reserve and on the University of Auckland campus.\(^{60}\)

**Architecture: enduring and new**

Major new building projects in the 1990s, the first since the completion of the Stage Three buildings in 1974, followed a different style to those completed in the initial set-up period. The architecture was no longer so modernist, and the orientation of two of the buildings, the Commerce and the Maths, Statistics and Computer Science buildings, was rotated away from the north-south-east-west grid of the initial layout. Triangular tiles outside the latter building incorporates this aspect of its location by reflecting the angled orientation of the building, as well as providing an historic link with the Town site’s style of paving.\(^{61}\) Landscaping for these new buildings was designed in conjunction with the buildings themselves, unlike the earlier construction projects. Although this led to more integration, it did not work successfully in all cases: the third new building, Law, featured inappropriate landscaping due to its plant selection and layout. Not only were the plants not readily available or in keeping with the landscaping on the rest of the campus, but they were conceived from ground-level only, in the view of the grounds staff. This seems an interesting reversal of earlier landscaping practices, which resulted in landscaping designed to be appreciated from indoors. The plan for the courtyard in front of the Law building, however, was too-heavily weighted towards people appreciating it from up close, to the detriment of those in the building, where the view from the upper storeys would have been very bland indeed, in Cadigan’s opinion. Upon implementation of the planting, Cadigan replaced some of what he considered the most inappropriate species with ones more suitable to the site, including planting paulownia and oak trees to match the already-existing ones in the area. Mounds were also constructed around the eastern edge of the area to further integrate it with the rest of the campus.\(^{62}\)

When landscaping around earlier buildings, Cadigan generally consulted with the staff inside each building regarding any specific preferences they had for planting. This resulted in some famous campus features, such as the ‘Cherry Walk’, a pathway leading from the School of Music and lined with Japanese cherry trees, in response to a request by Professor Ritchie, then-Head of Department, for some of these trees around the building.\(^{63}\) Requests were initially made to cover the exposed concrete of many of the Stage Three buildings with ivy, considered by Cadigan as a weed, but which was done none the less. The Vice-Chancellor requested this be done to the James Hight Library, but it eventually grew into the heating ducts and was to be removed from all painted surfaces on campus. Cadigan says that the architects felt that this was missing the point in any case, as the idea of brutalism was to see the concrete, not hide it.\(^{64}\) The architecture has proudly survived, though. In late 2006, the


\(^{60}\) John Adam, Interview by phone (Christchurch, 8 February 2007).

\(^{61}\) William Field, Interview at offices of Boffa Miskell Ltd, Christchurch 20 December 2006).

\(^{62}\) Simon McCarthy, Interview at University of Canterbury (Christchurch, 15 January 2007), Cadigan.

\(^{63}\) Cadigan.

\(^{64}\) Ibid., Hunt, "From Flat Paddock to Landscaped Campus."
University’s James Hight Building was awarded a special ‘enduring architecture’ award by the New Zealand Institute of Architects. As a shining example of modernist brutalism, it was described in the award citation as an ‘iconic building etched in the memories of thousands of past and present Canterbury students’. Roger Warr, senior architect for the project, said after the presentation that the team involved with its design was pleased of it from the day it was opened, and that he was especially proud of how it had stood the test of time as a central visual focus for the campus, as befitting its central function for the University.65

4. The University of the Plains (1998-2007)

Canterbury University is the University of the Plains. It is part of the large alluvial plains from the main divide through to Banks Peninsula. The strength of this major space should manifest itself in the idea of landscape. The transition between mountain, rural carpet and sea should be demonstrated in the approach to the open space of the University.66

In response to a significant amount of new building over the previous half decade, some of which had been planned and sited ‘without consideration to the spaces left around them’, the University undertook a comprehensive landscaping planning process in 1998 to stop incremental encroachment of buildings and car parks onto open spaces by defining where the significant open spaces were, and where future development might be located.67 In addition, the title of ‘University of the Plains’ was provided by the University to the three landscape architects who submitted to the competition. This move marks a clear break with the universal, modernist approach to the initial campus design: the postmodernist reaction to modernism favours heterogeneity and difference over the earlier standardisation,68 and by recognising the surrounding environment of the Canterbury Plains, the University was able to incorporate more ‘local’ (place-specific) features to its universal design. While building projects in the 1990s moved away from the modernist and brutalist architecture of the 1950s-1970s construction, the vast majority of the campus look is still defined by the buildings of this period. Landscape architecture provided a way of taking the ‘softening the edges’ principle a step further and making the University of Canterbury a Canterbury university.

The winning landscape concept plan by Boffa Miskell Limited (figure 16) shows at a glance one way of dealing with this – by giving different areas of the campus landscape formal names with historic and regional links to the University. Hence, Connan Lawn by the English building,69 Ngata Plaza in front of Law,70 and

---

65 “Architecture Award for James Hight Building,” University of Canterbury Chronicle, 16 November 2006, 2.
66 “Canterbury - 'University of the Plains','" Campus landscape design proposal (Christchurch, Boffa Miskell Limited, 1998), sheet 1.
68 Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity, 9.
Jeremy Thin

Rutherford Courtyard near Physics and Chemistry, \(^{71}\) and Totara Lawn, Beech Grove, and Kowhai Prominade as areas featuring these native species. \(^{72}\) Furthermore, the judges of the landscape consultant selection competition commented favourably on how Boffa Miskell’s concept plan linked the landscape design with the existing buildings and character of the campus, to a much greater degree than the competing submissions. \(^{73}\) ‘Planting of the Plains’ was another way to make the regional identity explicit: the concept was for the campus to reflect the different areas of the Canterbury region, with alpine planting in the western section towards Ilam Road, species of Banks Peninsula towards Clyde Road in the east, North and South Canterbury species in the respective northern and southern parts of the campus, with planting of Christchurch in the middle. \(^{74}\) Although this spatial division has not occurred in practice (due to the need to take account of existing planting, as well as only taking place in one part of the campus at a time), the ‘planting of the plains’ concept has been retained in a wider sense, with Canterbury species and materials (such as cabbage, kanuka, kowhai, ngaio, and totara trees, with greywacke, limestone and volcanic rock) being used as much as possible. This adds up to a more distinctively ‘Canterbury’ experience for students, staff and visitors; especially overseas students who only reside in New Zealand during term time for the period of their study and therefore spend most of their time on and around the campus. \(^{75}\)

William Field, current consultant landscape architect from Boffa Miskell for the University, believes that there is now a good relationship between the buildings and landscape of the Ilam campus. While there was a period of rather ad-hoc site selection for new building projects in the early 1990s, the 1998 landscape concept plan has defined open spaces, green areas and circulation routes so that these can better be taken into account in future construction. He believes that the campus landscape will continue to move in the direction of a more distinctively Canterbury look, as more areas are updated in line with the underlying concept of the 1998 plan. New buildings will have more of a sustainable focus, in line with current trends and with a focus on water through such methods of rainwater harvesting, different drainage techniques and filtration garden beds. \(^{76}\)

**Case study: the Arts North Lecture Theatres**

Briefly examining the evolution of landscaping around the Arts North Lecture Theatres, located on the east side of the James Hight Library, reveals some of the changes that have occurred since the initial building phase. **Figure 17** shows the lecture theatres surrounded by (clockwise from left) the Library, Geography and Psychology, History and English/Education buildings in a cropped selection from a 1974 aerial photograph of the campus. It shows what the lecture theatres looked like toward the end of their construction before landscaping, with a few existing trees extending in a line towards the east, passing between the Psychology and History buildings. **Figure 10** shows the same area two years later, looking east from the north

---


72 “Canterbury - 'University of the Plains','" sheet 1.


74 “Canterbury - 'University of the Plains','" sheet 2.

75 Field.

76 Ibid.
side of the Library towards the Geography and Psychology buildings, with the north
side of the lecture theatres at right. A strong emphasis on paths is now revealed, with
some grassing, shrub planting and concrete walls to provide definition to the area.
**Figure 18** is a cropped section of a mid-1980s aerial shot, looking south-west with the
Library at right. This shows that the trees have matured significantly, but the area is
still essentially grassed and criss-crossed with paths. **Figure 19** shows this more
clearly, looking south with the theatres in the foreground and the English/Education
building in the background, in 1988. **Figure 20** is a cropped section of a circa 1990
aerial photo. While the area looks more mature in terms of its ‘greenness’, it is still
essentially a grassed area with shrubs around buildings, some trees, and many paths.

New landscape plans were produced for the area in 1993, when buildings were
being planned to the north-west (Central lecture theatres), north (Commerce) and east
(Law). As such, this area would see an increase in through-traffic, and this was
allowed for by paving most of the area in cobblestones (apart from the paths), with
planter-boxes containing shrubs and raised sections of lawn. This marks the start of a
more postmodern approach to the area, with the landscaping starting to encourage
recreational use for lingering off the paths. This particular plan was not implemented,
however, and the brief for the Consultant Landscape Architect competition entrants in
1998 included this area as one important and problematic part of the campus that
entrants were required to briefly propose a specific (written) concept plan. The
winning Boffa Miskell entry recognised that there were a variety of directions of
movement through the area, and that it was therefore hard to establish and maintain a
good lawn between the paths. It proposed an increase in hard paving, and more
planting of the area to encourage lingering and follow the 1993 dual-use concept for
the area. The manifestation of this is the 2001 landscape plan for the area, **figure 21**.
The paths on the south-east side of the lecture theatres are rationalised and tidied, with
main paths going east to west and north-east to south-west, and a few smaller ones
cutting between them in recognition that, as Vice-Chancellor Neville Phillips
complained of in 1975, people will always seek the quickest route between two
points, path or no path. The ‘yellow-brick road’ on the west side of the theatres
recognises that area as an even more important transit route, but also ‘softens’ it with
benches under trees to take advantage of its sunny orientation. Although very pleasant
now for sitting in as well as passing through, the was considerable opposition from
many staff when spending on the area was authorised at a time of significant
budgetary cutbacks for all academic departments of the University in the late-1990s.
While he recognises what an improvement the area is now over what it was before,
history lecturer Chris Connolly recalls that

1. and a lot of other staff, were outraged when [the Vice Chancellor] authorised the
expenditure of a goodly sum on paving, landscaping and general beautification just as the
university plunged into financial crisis some years ago, and at the same time announced all
sorts of other funding cuts.  

**Figure 22** shows the area around the lecture theatres now. Note the local planting and
rockwork with much lower planting against buildings with ground-floor windows, as
well as the many sitting areas to encourage (in direct contrast to earlier landscaping)

78 Echberg, Courtney, and Hunt, "University of Canterbury Landscape Architect Consultant Selection: Report of
the Consultant Advisors," 10.
79 Chris Connolly, Email communication (Christchurch, 18 December 2006).
loitering. Paths are still prominent, but the area is softened such that it is also a pleasant recreational area for staff and students in the surrounding buildings.

5. Water at Ilam

Water has always been an important feature of the Ilam campus, as it has in wider Christchurch (a coastal city built on wetlands) and the Canterbury Plains (which sit atop large underground aquifers and are crossed by some unique braided rivers). The main (academic) section of the campus itself is roughly bordered by two waterways, the Avon River near the southern boundary and Okeover Stream near the north, while the Ilam River flows into the Avon west of Ilam Road, near the Staff Club (see the map, figure 23). George Malcolm and the Ministry of Works landscape designers felt very strongly that these natural waterways provided a pleasant and unifying feature for the campus, and attempted to make as much of them as they could, within the confines of the needs of the campus as a whole. Hugh Baxter constructed the rockwork along Okeover Stream, visible in figure 24 – a very significant achievement, although quite a different treatment to the current practice of maintaining the campus waterways. The campus sits on a high water table, and a 1949 map of the site has handwritten annotations marking the eastern half of the Ilam/Clyde Roads section as wet and even containing a lake. The high water table at Ilam has plagued all major construction projects: as an indication of how high it is, the Commerce Building (built 1995) has foundations that go down to seven metres below ground level, and the first water was encountered after only 2.5m. In the construction of the Maths, Statistics and Computer Sciences building (also in 1995), the Chronicle reported that 300 litres of water a second were being pumped out of the ground due to ‘the old story of the high water table underneath the campus’. However, unlike earlier construction projects where water was simply piped into the nearest waterway, water from this construction ‘cascaded into the Okeover Stream over an anti-scour stone-filled mattress’ to avoid erosion of silt deposition in the stream. The Chronicle explained that Regional Council guidelines allowed as much water as necessary to be pumped from the ground, as long as it was treated (to avoid deposition) and disposed of so as to avoid erosion in the stream. Compare this treatment to the rather more basic practice in the 1960s in figure 25.

Water features

Water landscape features can be found in many building plans for Canterbury, although almost as many have ended up being cut because of cost overruns. A very early plan even envisaged diverting the Avon River to create a lake in the central part of the campus, emptying into Okeover Stream and hence creating a waterway that crossed the central part of the campus. Although it never even made it onto any surviving plans for the campus (it was ‘lost in the files’, according to Peter Cadigan), it indicates the prominent place water and water features had in the minds of modernist planners of the campus. The 1966 stage 3 development plan initially featured a History building (sited to the west of the Library) ‘raised above the ground level to form a cloister-like space underneath, flanked by a series of long, formal

80 Malcolm., Aitken.
83 Cadigan.
84 Ibid.
pools with fountains, and trees,' as well as a reflecting pool underneath a raised walkway to the south of the Library, and water gardens further out from the centre of the campus. All of these features disappeared without trace and none survived in the final (resited) plans, although the Library did eventually receive a water feature, but on its north-west corner. This was opened in 1977 (figure 26) and was first reported in the Chronicle in 1975 as part of the wider landscaping plan for the plaza between the Library and Registry buildings. Later water features include between the Maths buildings and Science lecture theatres (from the 1960s (figure 27), but drained and turned into bike stands in the 1990s), the Commerce building (mid-1990s, although closed as a feature early-2000s), and a spectacular fountain proposed for the circular lawn outside the Law School (which never eventuated, due to cost overruns: most of the plumbing was installed, but was then covered over with a lawn). The Boffa Miskell landscape design concept plan of 1998 envisaged merging water features and waterways by using open channels and pools to transport water from buildings to streams. While this was favourably viewed by the judges, one of the unsuccessful entries (by Peter Rough Landscape Architects) was deemed too complex in its proposal to build a number of new features, including raised channels (‘evoking irrigation channels of the region’), curving water courses and a water cascade, to create a conceptual link between the Library water feature and Okeover Stream.

Waterways restoration

As the University developed at Ilam, stream flows changed substantially. Groundwater springs reduced in output or dried up altogether as western Christchurch expanded and developed, while artificial inputs – stormwater drains and building discharges – became the main sources for streams, leading to warmer, more intermittent, and dirtier waterways. When the major development at Ilam was occurring, the Avon River was considered solely as a drain, in keeping with the 1941 Drainage Board Act. One of the big historical changes of the Ilam campus landscape has been the treatment and place of waterways within the University, reflecting the change in wider Christchurch from single-use drains to multi-use waterways that consider human and ecological aspects. From the late-1990s on, much work has been done on restoring and enhancing the University’s waterways, in keeping with this more balanced approach to waterways as a natural ecological feature.

About 1996, mowing of grass along river margins was ended (figure 28), allowing some vegetation to naturally re-establish itself. It had previously been actively discouraged, as a 1988 Chronicle article reveals; Peter Cadigan wrote that the construction of a new stone retaining wall, to stem constant erosion of the Avon River banks, was faced with ‘difficulties of soft foundation, natural springs, and riverside vegetation’ in construction. In 1997, serious restoration of waterways began, with 900 native trees and shrubs (including coprosmas, New Zealand iris, grasses, flax, a joint venture, with design and advice provided by the City Council; planting being carried out by members of the University student Environment Group Kakariki,

86 "Plans to Transform Concourse Landscape," University of Canterbury Chronicle, 8 August 1975, 1.
87 Lindsay Hampton, Interview at University of Canterbury (Christchurch, 20 November 2006).
90 Ibid.
University grounds staff and City Council staff; and ferns, kowhai, ribbonwood, kahikatea and some locally-rare varieties being supplied by Trees of Canterbury, the Department of Conservation, and the University) planted on the Avon banks, near the Student Union building, as part of a waterways restoration project (figure 29). The species were a mixture of those types that grew in Ilam before human settlement, and were planted in the hope of the river developing into a habitat for native birds, animals, and insects, being a beautiful link between the campus and nature, and creating a meaningful ecosystem for research and teaching. 92

This was expanded the following year in a proposal document, compiled by Leanne O’Brien, a PhD zoology student then working during the summer with the City Council. It covered the three waterways on campus: the Avon River, Okeover Stream, and the Ilam River. The document envisaged a sustainably self-maintaining, functional waterway system, while maintaining cultural and amenity values and use. 93

The partnership was formalised between the organisations that held the title to the stream beds (the University), those responsible for management of Christchurch’s surface waterways (the City Council), and water quality and quantity management in Canterbury (the Regional Council, now Environment Canterbury). The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Department of Conservation, North Canterbury Fish and Game Council, and Ngai Tahu were all listed as other interested parties. Students, represented by Kakariki and the Forestry Society have also been heavily involved. Trout are established in the Avon, and although responsible for the lack of native fish there, their presence is considered acceptable and is to be encouraged. Okeover Stream, by contrast, is free of trout, and the proposal advocates keeping it that way as a dedicated native-fish habitat; a joint CCC-UC project to make a stretch of Okeover cater for the native Canterbury mudfish was launched in mid-2003. 94 The Ilam River, then generally free of fauna, is also mooted as a potential dedicated-native fish habitat. All three waterways, with appropriate planting, could become habitats for native birds. Establishing a waterways ‘corridor’ between the campus and Riccarton Bush is suggested as a way of increasing this chance, as well as linking to other species in Riccarton, such as the gecko. 95

A decade on, the City Council website reports wide success for the restoration project:

\[\text{Ecology:} \] Habitat heterogeneity increased, riparian vegetation restored and aquatic plants now starting to thrive.

\[\text{Heritage:} \] Natural heritage of the stream restored.

\[\text{Culture:} \] Harvesting of water-cress is occurring, while cultural harvesting of harakeke (flax) is encouraged and provided for, adjacent to the Maori Department.

\[\text{Landscape:} \] Enhanced landscape quality. Natural process expressed. Recognition of Okeover Stream as an important element to the campus landscape character and identity.

\[\text{Recreation:} \] Enriched stream experience enjoyed by campus community.

\[\text{Drainage:} \] Drainage values improved. 96

\[92 \text{“Green Corridor” of Native Vegetation Created at Canterbury,” University of Canterbury Chronicle, 21 August 1997, 12.} \]

\[93 \text{O’Brien, Restoring the Waterways within the University of Canterbury, 3.} \]

\[94 \text{Lynette Hartley, “Stream Restoration May Help Save Mudfish,” University of Canterbury Chronicle, 12 June 2003, 5.} \]

\[95 \text{O’Brien, Restoring the Waterways within the University of Canterbury, 6-11, 22-5.} \]

\[96 \text{Waterways - Parks & Waterways - Christchurch City Council - Restorations - Okeover Stream (Christchurch City Council, [cited 3 January 2007]); available from http://www.ccc.govt.nz/parks/naturalareas/waterways_restorations_okeoverstream.asp.} \]
Note that the sole waterways value under the 1941 legislation (drainage) is now just one of six values considered by the Council, a shift in thinking that dates back to the 1991 Resource Management Act.\(^9\) A paper by the principal leaders of the waterways project also expresses satisfaction with progress made, while recognising that such work is necessarily long-term and must be evaluated as such.\(^9\) Figure 30 show the some of changes to Okeover Stream that have occurred over the last decade.

### Conclusion

The Ilam campus of the University of Canterbury has a remarkably mixed history over such a relatively short period of University occupation, barely half a century. Because it is flat and naturally rather featureless, the human influence on its development is perhaps more evident than might otherwise be the case on a more naturally varied landscape. Being the only university in the country to move from a central city site to a suburban greenfield campus, the Canterbury experience was pioneering in New Zealand and full of logistical and practical problems that needed to be overcome. On a site that was flat, rather damp, and featureless apart from three natural waterways and an established English garden around one of the two farming homesteads, a diverse landscape has been created that incorporates the flora of Christchurch’s heritage, both native and exotic.

This landscape, furthermore, has softened some of the more uncompromising aspects of 1960s modernism that guided the planning and architecture of the campus. While the overall zoning of the campus into academic, residential and recreational areas remains, and while the vast majority of the buildings are still distinctively modernist in their architecture, landscaping has been used to both break up the zoning somewhat and to draw attention away from the bareness of the building construction. The waterways of the campus have also undergone a transformation in the University’s approach, from essentially drains to more-rounded ecosystems that include distinctive flora and fauna in addition to the stream beds, which have themselves been paid more attention in order to maintain the quality and quantity of water flow.

As the University looks forward to its second half-century at Ilam that will inevitably require further building to accommodate more students, teaching and research, it can be confident that it has a mature and attractive landscape that reflects Christchurch’s dual heritage of Maori and Pakeha (particularly English) settlement.

---


98 K. Hewson et. al., ‘Restoring the Waterways of the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand,’ in W. L. Filho & D. Carpenter (eds.), *Sustainability in the Australasian University Context* (Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main, 2006), 216-7.
Bibliography


Adam, John. Interview by phone (Christchurch, 8 February 2007).

Aitken, Neil. Email communication (Wellington, 9 February 2007).


Cadigan, Peter. Interview at University of Canterbury (Christchurch, 16 January 2007).


Connolly, Chris. Email communication (Christchurch, 18 December 2006).


Dunstaff, Graeme. Interview at University of Canterbury (Christchurch, 15 January 2007).


Field, William. Interview at offices of Boffa Miskell Ltd, Christchurch 20 December 2006).


Hampton, Lindsay. Interview at University of Canterbury (Christchurch, 20 November 2006).


Hewson, K., et. al., 'Restoring the Waterways of the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand,' in W. L. Filho & D. Carpenter (eds.), *Sustainability in the Australasian University Context*. Peter Lang: Frankfurt am Main, 2006.


Softening the Edges of a Modernist University Campus


"Ilam Gardens Open Day continues a long tradition." *University of Canterbury Chronicle*, 26 October 2006, 3.


Malcolm, George. Interview at his home in Fendalton (Christchurch, 8 February 2007).

McCarthy, Simon. Interview at University of Canterbury (Christchurch, 15 January 2007).


"Open days at Ilam." *University of Canterbury Chronicle*, 31 October 1964, 3.

Orange, Vincent. Interview at his home in Avonhead (Christchurch, 19 December 2006).


Ritchie, John. Interview at his home in Merivale 18 December 2006).

"Sense of Community Developing at Ilam.." *University of Canterbury Chronicle*, 27 March 1975, 1.


Figures

**Figure 1:** Canterbury University College, 1960. Aerial view of the Town site, looking north-east. Rolleston Ave in foreground, Worcester St left, Hereford St right, Montreal St top (Chronicle photo archive: miscellaneous photo folder).

**Figure 2:** An aerial photo of the site that was to become the Ilam campus, 1940. North is up; Clyde Road runs north-south at right, Ilam Rd parallel at centre, Waimari Rd at left, Riccarton Rd along the bottom. Note the only significant groups of trees, clustered around Ilam (to west of Ilam Rd) and Okeover (to east of Ilam Rd) Homesteads, and lining the Avon River, Okeover and Ilam Streams. Urban development does not extend further out from the city (to the west) past the Ilam site (MB 1105, Macmillan Brown Library Photograph Collection, University of Canterbury Facilities Management aerial photograph 1940).
Figure 3: 1965 plan for the proposed Stage 3 development, just as Stage 2 (Science) was being completed. Note the Arts buildings to the west of the Library. (Chronicle Series 2/21, 1 February 1965, p 6).
Softening the Edges of a Modernist University Campus
(web version)

**Figure 4:** Study for Ideal City, by German modernist architect Ludwig Hilbersheimer (1924). (Akademie der Künste, Berlin. In Hughes, *The Shock of the New*, plate 125).

**Figure 5:** Stage 3 (Arts) model, 1966, looking north. Student Union in the foreground, with Arts/Library across the Avon, Science in mid-ground with Engineering at rear (*Chronicle* photo archive: loose photo).
Figure 6: 1972 aerial photo of the new Ilam campus, looking north-east with the Ilam Homestead and Student Union in the foreground (V.C. Browne, photographer, in Gardner, *A History of the University of Canterbury*, between pp. 336-7).

Figure 7: 1972 map of the campus as the initial development stage was completed, with the different faculty areas clearly marked (Gardner et al., *A History of the University of Canterbury*, end paper. Map prepared by the Ministry of Works).
Figure 8: School of Engineering looking south-west, mid-1960s. The playing fields and edge of Ilam Gardens (left) are in the background (Macmillan Brown Library MB1387/1/2/1: Photos by Eric B. Mangin, Physics Dept).

Figure 9: Science lecture theatres, with overhead walkway to Botany/Geology building, 1967 (W. Hansen).

Figure 10: Geography and Psychology buildings, looking east, 1976 (Professor Eric Pawson).
Figure 11: Model of the 1967 Landscaping Plan, looking west. The Stage 3 (Arts) buildings had been resited by this point (*Chronicle* photo archive: loose photo).
Figure 12: Science buildings looking west, circa 1963. The land to be used for Stage 3 buildings is in the foreground; note the sheep grazing (H.B. Painter, courtesy of Associate Professor David Painter).

Figure 13: Registry building, looking south-east, 1976 (Eric Pawson).
Figure 14: The amphitheatre at the Student Union on the banks of the Avon, looking north-east with the Library Tower in the background, circa 1988 (UC Photographic Services).

Figure 15: 1986 view of the sign at the entrance to the campus on Clyde Rd, looking west across the mounds to the Library in the background (UC Photographic Services).
**Figure 16:** Boffa Miskell’s overall concept for the campus, submitted as part of their entry for the 1998 Landscape Architect Consultant competition (Trevor McLean, UC Facilities Management Draughtsman).

**Figure 17:** Cropped section of a 1974 aerial photo of the University, showing the Arts North lecture theatres with the Library on the left (MB 1105, Macmillan Brown Library Photograph Collection, University of Canterbury Facilities Management aerial photograph 1974).
Figure 18: Cropped section of mid-1980s aerial photo of the University campus looking towards the south-west, with the Arts North theatres at centre at Library upper-right (Chronicle photo archive: Ilam photo folder).

Figure 19: The English/Education building behind the Arts North lecture theatres, looking south, 1988 (UC Photographic Services).
Figure 20: Aerial view of the Arts North lecture theatres with the Library at left, circa 1990 (MB 1105, Macmillan Brown Library Photograph Collection, University of Canterbury Facilities Management aerial photograph c. 1990).

Figure 21: The 2001 landscape plan for the surrounds of the Arts North lecture theatres, by Boffa Miskell Ltd (Trevor McLean).
Figure 22: The Arts North lecture theatre surrounds in 2007: looking across the lawn on the southern side of the theatres, towards the English/Education building (Jeremy Thin).
Figure 23: 1966 map of waterways at Ilam. The upper reach of Okeover (Waiutuutu) Stream is known as ‘Clarkson’s Drain’, and that it was proposed to pipe it into the now-Ilam Stream. The lower reach of Okeover Stream was also known as ‘Shakespeare Stream’ or (confusingly) ‘Ilam Stream’ (Trevor McLean).
Figure 24: Okeover Stream, 1969. ‘The art of the landscape designer. The Okeover Stream at Ilam makes a pleasing sight as it meanders through its new course between the School of Engineering and the Faculty of Science – a study by David Jones (Geology Department).’ (accompanying caption in the Chronicle) (Chronicle 4/5 (Nov-Dec 1969), cover).

Figure 25: Run-off of water pumped from the Science building foundations, circa 1963. Okover Homestead is in the background, surrounded by trees; the playing fields are back right, across Ilam Rd (H.B. Painter).
Figure 26: The water feature on the north-west corner of the James Hight Library when first opened in 1977 (Chronicle vol. 12, no. 2, 11 February 1977, p. 1).

Figure 27: The water feature between the Science lecture theatres and the Maths building, photographed with a fisheye lens in 1966 (J. Darby, photographer, Chronicle Series 3/7, June 1966, inside back cover).
Figure 28: The mown banks of the Avon River, running past the Student Union building, in 1976 (Eric Pawson).

Figure 29: Restoration work along the banks of the Avon in 1997 by the Student Union – planting of natives by grounds staff and members of the Kakariki student environmental group (UC Photographic Services).
Figure 30: The bridge over Okeover Stream, looking west with the Rutherford (left) and Engineering (right) buildings in the background, in 2007 (UC Photographic Services).