

Obituary

Sir Frederick Miles Warren ONZ, KBE, FNZIA 10 May 1929 – 9 August 2022

Sir Miles Warren (Fig. 1) was a distinguished architect based in Christchurch and Governors Bay in Canterbury.



Fig. 1 Sir Miles Warren, in his beloved garden at Ōhinetahi. Photo courtesy Ōhinetahi.

His life and accomplishments are well documented (see References below) and summarised here.

After completing his secondary education at Christ's College, he began his architectural training as an apprentice to Cecil Wood (the dominant Canterbury architect during his heyday). Miles Warren later moved from Christchurch to complete his studies at the University of Auckland.

He eventually worked for the London County Council where he was exposed to British 'New Brutalism'. This architectural style is characterised by minimalist constructions that showcase the bare building materials and structural elements over decorative design. This modernist style had a big influence on Miles Warren and featured in many of his Christchurch building designs to come.

After returning to Christchurch, he partnered with Maurice Mahoney to form the practice Warren and Mahoney in 1955. Miles Warren's first major building was the Dorset Street Flats (Fig. 2), designed and built from 1956 to 1957. Detractors called them prison-like due to their exposed concrete and small spaces, but they became much appreciated and are listed by Heritage New Zealand (as Historic Place Category 1), and in the Christchurch City Council Schedule of Significant Historic Heritage (as Group 1 Highly Significant). Like some other buildings he designed, Miles Warren's Dorset Street Flats

underwent extensive repair and restoration work following the 2010–11 Christchurch earthquakes.



Fig. 2 The Dorset Street Flats, designed by Sir Miles Warren. Photo: Murray Dawson.

65 Cambridge Terrace was constructed in 1962 to provide both a private apartment for Miles Warren and a studio for the Warren and Mahoney practice. The garden design featured a long reflection pond and sculptural vegetation elements (Fig. 3). Although the Warren and Mahoney practice has since moved on and expanded to other locations in New Zealand and Australia, it's fitting that the Cambridge Terrace site remains an architect's place of business.



Fig. 3 Sir Miles Warren, with house and garden during the early days at 65 Cambridge Terrace. Photo: 'Mattarmold1', CC0.

Other buildings featuring Miles Warren's distinctive design language include the Dental Nurses School (completed 1958), Harewood Crematorium (1963; Fig. 4), Christchurch College (now known as College House) (1964–67), and the Christchurch Town Hall (1972).



Fig. 4 Harewood Crematorium. Photo: Murray Dawson.

In 1966, Miles Warren and Maurice Mahoney won a competition to design the Christchurch Town Hall. Designing such a significant building was a major success for their practice, and also a major undertaking. Assistance in acoustics was obtained from Professor Harold Marshall and an outstanding and award-winning cultural centre was created. Due to significant damage sustained during the Christchurch earthquakes, the Christchurch Town Hall remained closed for eight years. Although demolition of all but the main auditorium was initially recommended, in November 2012 councillors unanimously voted to rebuild the entire hall. The restoration and refurbishment work to preserve this cultural and architectural legacy cost \$167 million dollars. In February 2019, Sir Miles Warren, then aged 90, returned to see inside the newly completed refurbishments (Fig. 5). In 2020, the town hall (Fig. 6) was registered as a Category 1 heritage building.



Fig. 5 Sir Miles Warren inspecting the newly completed auditorium. Photo: © Frank Film.



Fig. 6 The Christchurch Town Hall at dusk, October 2020. Photo: © Michal Klajban, CC-BY-SA 4.0.

Miles Warren retired from Warren and Mahoney in 1994 but continued to consult as an architect and maintain his historic home and garden, Ōhinetahi, in Governors Bay.

Development of the Ōhinetahi gardens, awarded a six-star maximum by the New Zealand Gardens Trust, and the restorations of the house, before and after the Christchurch earthquakes are well documented in Miles Warren's 2014 book *Ohinetahi: Garden, house and art* (reviewed in the *New Zealand Garden Journal*, 2017, Vol. 20, No. 1).

Miles Warren, his sister Pauline (an accomplished artist and plantswoman), and his brother-in-law, the late John Trengrove (a fellow architect) co-owned Ōhinetahi when all three purchased it in 1976. These talented designers and gardeners bought the property for the specific purpose of creating a grand garden.

Soon after moving in, they embarked on an extensive restoration of the house to make it more livable.

Taking inspiration from a visit to Hidcote Manor garden (Gloucestershire, UK), for Ōhinetahi they designed a garden of interconnected 'rooms' arranged along two axes. Six basic elements in the garden design were: a large lawn next to the house; a traditional rose garden framed by *Buxus* edging; herbaceous borders either side of a broad path; a white flowered garden; a swimming pool; and a hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*) walk, hedged to create a tall corridor. Building upon this plan came a potager, themed plantings, a native bush walk, and, more recently, park-like grounds and an amphitheatre following the purchase of neighbouring land (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7 The park at Ōhinetahi showing the house in the background. Photo courtesy Ōhinetahi.

Hard structures include the pool and pool house, swing-bridge, viewing tower (Fig. 8), sundial, folly, gazebo, garden walls, paths, steps, columns, and numerous garden sculptures (Fig. 9).



Fig. 8 Vista from the viewing tower showing the restored house and red garden. Photo courtesy Ōhinetahi.



Fig. 9 Sir Miles Warren, alongside one of his many installed sculptures at Ōhinetahi. Photo courtesy Ōhinetahi.

Pauline and John left Ōhinetahi after 12 years, but Miles Warren stayed on. Fortunately, he had assistance in maintaining and developing the garden from several talented plants people, including Mark Walker, Marilyn McRae, Ross Booker, and Mark Chandler.

Damage to the house, a Category 1 Historic Place, from the Christchurch earthquakes must have been hugely challenging to Miles Warren, then in his advanced years. Nevertheless, the house was largely repaired and strengthened within a year, which is a testament to his character and perseverance.

In 2012, Miles Warren gifted his house and garden to the people of New Zealand via the Ōhinetahi Charitable Trust. In the final pages of his book, he writes "I hope that Ōhinetahi will continue to be one of the best, most visited and enjoyed gardens, park, house and art gallery in New Zealand."

Over the course of his professional lifetime, Miles Warren and his practice gained many awards and much recognition. These include New Year (Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1974, advanced to Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1985) and Queen's Birthday Honours (Order of New Zealand in 1995), a New Zealand Institute of Architects (NZIA) Gold Medal to an individual (2000), an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Auckland (2001), and an Icon Award from the Arts Foundation of New Zealand (2003).

In March 2009, Sir Miles Warren was commemorated as one of the Twelve Local Heroes, with a bronze bust of him unveiled outside the Christchurch Arts Centre.

Sir Miles Warren died in Christchurch on 9 August 2022 at the age of 93. He has left an amazing legacy, in his unique buildings and gardens.

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