

# 78 Worcester Street

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In 1954, the newly crowned Queen Elizabeth II made an appearance on the Worcester Street balcony of the Clarendon Hotel, following King George VI's similar appearance in 1948.<sup>1</sup> The Queen Mother's appearance in 1958, similarly, drew adoring crowds from across the city.<sup>2</sup> These appearances were only outdone by the appearance of a very different kind of royalty: in 1964, the kings of popular music, The Beatles, who looked out over the crowds from the balcony at the 78 Worcester Street site during their 1964 World Tour.<sup>3</sup>

The first building on the site was constructed by William Guise Brittan, who purchased the Town Section for ten shillings.<sup>4</sup> In 1859 the site was purchased by Rowland Davis, a recently arrived Irish migrant, who established the Davis Hotel in the enlarged building.<sup>5</sup>

The site has a long association with high quality accommodation. George Oram purchased the hotel in 1866, renaming it the 'Clarendon'. In the royal visit of 1869, the Duke of Edinburgh stayed at the hotel, bestowing upon Oram the title, 'Hotel Keeper by Appointment to His Royal Highness Prince Alfred the Duke of Edinburgh.'<sup>6</sup>

The pleasant Avon River site of the building, however, has its drawbacks. There were fifty drownings in the Avon River between 1850 and 1900, and hotels such as the Clarendon near the river's edge were often used for the inquests.<sup>7</sup>

After Oram ceased control in 1873 there was a significant downswing in the site's history.<sup>8</sup> The premises became run down and its reputation waned. The building was demolished in 1903, in favour of an extensive three storeyed stone and plastered brick building.<sup>9</sup> Designed by J.C. Maddison, architect for *Mona Vale* and the Government Buildings (1909), it was one of the first examples in Christchurch of Renaissance revival style.<sup>10</sup> This new building returned the Clarendon to its place as one of the two high-end hotels in early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Christchurch, alongside Warner's Hotel in Cathedral Square.

The 1980s saw the end of the low-rise Clarendon Hotel as it had stood since 1903. A new office block was proposed, one of a number of inner-city high rises from that era, generating widespread opposition.<sup>11</sup> A compromise was reached, which involved attaching the well-known facade to the bottom few stories of the new seventeen storey tower; perhaps

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<sup>1</sup> NZHPT, 'Clarendon Hotel', p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 5-6.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

not surprisingly, the resulting building was not universally accepted. Noted Canterbury artist Bill Sutton quipped at the time, it 'looks like a boy with his trousers down around his ankles.'<sup>12</sup>

The Clarendon Towers, despite the seismic strengthening incorporated in the 1980s design, is set for demolition as a result of the damage caused by Canterbury Earthquakes.

**Facts:** <sup>13</sup>

- Site first occupied: 1851
- First hotel: 1859
- Reconstruction: Timber building demolished in 1903 in favour of new three storey stone and plastered brick building.
- Architect: J. C. Maddison.
- Reconstructed: 1986-7, incorporating facade, which was again modified in 1997.
- Demolished: 2012.

**See more:**

Christchurch City Libraries: [www.christchurchcitylibraries.com](http://www.christchurchcitylibraries.com).

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<sup>12</sup> Cited in *NZHPT*, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Article compiled by UC CEISMIC Programme Office, primarily from *New Zealand Historic Places Trust Register of Historic Places*, entry on Clarendon Hotel Facade