

# Discover The Delights Of Peeling Back History

## ISAAC LUCK (1817 – 1881)



Isaac Luck, the man destined to become the most forgotten architectural influence on Christchurch, arrived in Lyttelton on 9<sup>th</sup> June 1851, aboard the Canterbury Association's 9<sup>th</sup> ship, the 'Steadfast'. As Luck stepped ashore, the man who would play an interesting role in his future life was just a few buildings away, selling stationary and giving drawing lessons. His name was Benjamin Woolfield Mountfort.

Luck was born in Oxford England in 1817. After his schooling, he became a builder who also dabbled in architecture. By 1850, when the thoughts of immigrating to New Zealand were in the fore front of his mind, he had worked on and designed some of the most recognisable buildings around Oxford. Like Mountfort upon his arrival in New Zealand, he found the demands for an architect in early Canterbury were slim to none so Luck fell back on his building skills to make his living.

It was over the design and build of the 'Holy Trinity of Lyttelton' that the pair began to work together and formed a life time friendship. They soon became family as Luck married Susanna Mountfort – Benjamin's sister – in the new completed Holy Trinity on the 20<sup>th</sup> April 1853. As Benjamin was the head of the family in Canterbury, I'm sure he approved the match. Luck had arrived with already 150 acres of land in his possession. This land sat where the Heathcote River meets the Estuary. By all reports, little was done with this area, Luck purchasing further town sections, building his first home on the North West corner of Cathedral Square. The pair would go on to have five children.

Before he and Benjamin became partners in 1857, Luck was working as a builder in Christchurch. He was commissioned to build Christchurch's first lock-up, situated on the corner of Armagh Street and Cambridge Terrace, the south west corner of Market Place – now known as Victoria Square. Luck must have been very proud of this project as after it was completed, he held a ball inside the small structure. He also designed and built the first St Peter's Anglican Church at Peerwick Village – now known as Church Corner, Upper Riccarton. The stone church that we know today was designed by Mountfort in 1876.

The first project the brothers-in-law worked on together was the Canterbury Provincial Chambers. This was followed with the Christchurch Club, just to name a few. The partnership was dissolved in 1864 and Luck changed his career path completely. He was already three years into a partnership with Charles Clark as a land agent and auctioneer. He was also the chairman of the Canterbury Coal, Gas and Coke Company.

In 1863, Luck had become a councilor of the Christchurch Town Council, now our Christchurch City Council. In 1865, he proudly became the Chairman of this council, a position that predecessors the position of Mayor. Under this role, the exciting news of the discovery of gold on the West Coast hit the papers. This resulted in the robbing of over two thousand of Canterbury's working men within the first three weeks of the news breaking. Christchurch felt the crunch of this sudden production loss.

In 1866, Luck became a member of the Canterbury Provincial Council. This adventure did not last long as this was the same year Luck decided to retire to England for good. Mountfort decided to honour his brother-in-law and



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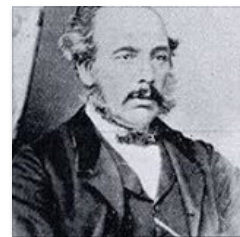
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friend with the design of what would become known as the 'Luck Building', built on the North West corner of Colombo and Gloucester Street, land belonging to Luck. The Luck Building was partially demo in 1973 to make way for the MFL Building (please click on attached photos for more info). This site has now been rumoured as the new site for Christchurch's Convention Centre.

Luck never forgot about Christchurch, keeping his eye on the construction of the Christchurch Anglican Cathedral, pouring his own money into the project. A memorial to Luck was erected in the church when it was completed long after his death in 1881.

\*Photo of Luck Building in 1912 courtesy of the Canterbury Public Library – <http://christchurchcitylibraries.com> – File Reference CCL PhotoCD 2, IMG0022\*

\*Photo of remaining section of Lucks Building courtesy of The Press – <http://www.stuff.co.nz>\*

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on November 3, 2014

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