

Revivalist such as Mountfort, yet he recognised the potential of the system of ridge and furrow construction used for the glazed roof of the Crystal Palace and adapted it for the timber ceiling of the Council Chamber. There is no medieval precedent for such a roof and we can only conclude that Mountfort was imagining how a medieval architect would have approached the design of such a roof structure.³¹

The Provincial Council Chamber is a telling example of the way in which modern and ancient published sources could be synthesised in one design. Contemporary observers noted that the screen in the Council Chamber bore a striking resemblance to that in Gilbert Scott's Exeter College Chapel, Oxford, published in *Building news* in 1862. Mountfort's knowledge of this illustration was combined with details from the arcaded sedilia (a seat for priests usually found on the south wall of the chancel) in the medieval church at Rushden, Northamptonshire, a building he probably visited as a young man. The Rushden sedilia was illustrated in J. H. Parker's *Glossary of Gothic architecture*, of which Mountfort owned the 1850 fifth edition.³² On the completion of the Provincial Council Chamber in 1865, Mountfort presented his copy of this richly illustrated source book of Gothic details to the master mason who worked on the building, William Brassington (1837/41?-1905).³³ Brassington probably had the *Glossary* on hand throughout the construction of the building, the book acting as a substitute for contact with the real thing. The *Glossary* provided the model for the windows of the Council Chamber's side walls, their simple Early English Gothic details and free-standing internal tracery being derived from Parker's illustration of the nave windows of Stone Church in Kent.³⁴ Brassington used other illustrations, such as those of corbels (projecting blocks of stone supporting beams or other structural members), as the starting point for his own inventions in the medieval manner. Parker's publication was, in a very real sense, a paper museum for architects and craftsmen unable to study medieval buildings at first hand, and was an invaluable supplement to the architectural journals which offered up to date inspiration from the latest buildings 'at home'.³⁵

Mountfort was very conscious of the lack of visible history in New Zealand and would have shared the views which Archdeacon Henry Harper expressed in a letter to a friend in England in 1868:

In a country so new that it is completely devoid of any historical associations in the past, it is well nigh impossible to imagine any sort of ghost. Often . . . I have wondered what the general effect will be on the rising generation here, of a country without a past. Scenery there is, much of it splendid in its grandeur . . . but until the last few years, absolute solitude as far as any association with man is concerned . . . It seems to me the rising generation will miss much. The Historic Imagination, in their case, will have next to nothing to feed on . . . Imagine the gradual effect of a life spent in a country where you never