

A history of the founding of KPMG in Christchurch as seen through the eyes of Bruce Ullrich

KPMG in Christchurch arose from the merger of two of the major accounting firms in Christchurch coming together in the 1980s.

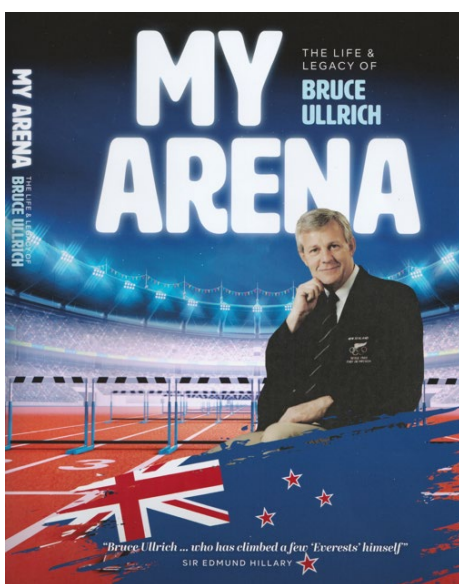
They were Pickles, Perkins and Hadlee and Burt, McGillivray Mann (latterly known as Morris Patrick and Co which was a loose amalgamation of accounting firms in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin).

Senior partners were Jack Pickles, Carl Perkins in PPH and Keith Burt and Athol Mann in BMM. Keith Burt who was a Captain in the 23rd battalion in WW2 and Jack Pickles were bowls mates. Keith Burt was President of NZ Tennis. Carl Perkins was also very distinguished and for a while was Chancellor of the University of Canterbury. Athol Mann was prominent in NZ Society of Accountants affairs, medical research, and musical circles.

Other prominent partners were Walter Hadlee (former NZ cricket captain), Dr Bernard Battersby (part time head of the accountancy department of the UC) and Bert Bullen who I befriended and had worked for Peat Marwick – the PM in KPMG and he was the initial connection to Peat Marwick.

I joined BMM straight out of CBHS in 1957 where I worked full time and they outbid another accounting practice for my services by offering me 6 pounds 10 shillings per week – which was 10 shillings per week more than another firm had offered me. Both firms had an excellent sporting culture which appealed to me. By the end of 1961 I had finally qualified with my professional accountancy qualifications and was immediately admitted to the firm as a partner then over the next few years, completed my B. Com degree which had initially started as a University of NZ degree with its constituent colleges, but all were given university status in 1961.

This coincided with me being elected as treasurer of the UC Students' Association and the following year 1962 as president having been persuaded by the engineering students, I played rugby with for the UC, if I accepted their nomination, they would block vote me into office. We also had Barry and Martin Hadlee working in our office who returned to PPH and duly became partners.



I received great practical experience in BMM – thrown in the deep end in my second year when one of our senior clerks went overseas for a year and I looked after his clients. Along the way, I played senior rugby for the UC and HSOB and division one squash rackets for UC which I took more seriously when I gave up rugby. I also variously played cricket and tennis for UC teams. I became a member Rotary in 1973 (where I was a member for 43 years) and Bert Bullen was also a member filling one of the other accountancy classifications. Being a commerce student, I had become a target for the position of treasurer or secretary and did various sporting roles at club and provincial level. Other well-known sporting partners at BMM were to be Graham Dowling (NZ Cricket Captain) and Stuart (known as Buddy) Henderson, a

Canterbury Rugby star and goal kicker of the 1960s.

Offices of the time had a large typing pool of women using carbon paper for copying – we slowly moved into electric adding machines and Burroughs Sensimatic accounting machines. All communications were by letter and at the time of the change to decimal currency on 10/7/67, we changed from rendering bills in guineas, to dollars and cents. Photocopy machines and faxes had not yet arrived.

Bert Bullen had returned to NZ after a stint at Peak Marwick in London. In 1968, I was invited to join a group called Commonwealth Games Promotion Inc and resigned from all my other sporting links. In 1970, I was also elected to the University of Canterbury Council and had been selected by CGP to be one of a six persons delegation to try and outmaneuver Melbourne, who were also bidding and were travelling direct to Edinburgh to pick up the vote. Although we had a 6-man delegation going to Edinburgh in 1970, we split into 3 teams of two and visited 30+ Commonwealth countries on our way to Edinburgh. Perhaps the elephant in the room were the All Blacks who were touring South Africa in 1970 and their government had given Māori and one Samoan honorary white status which we argued was perhaps the start of a breakthrough on apartheid.

When I was in London immediately after the 1970 Edinburgh Games, Bert Bullen had arranged for the partners in PM to host me for a luncheon and this was after we had defeated Melbourne by 36-2 and now had the challenge of hosting the 1974 Commonwealth Games in Christchurch.

On our return to New Zealand, I held the title of Vice Chairman of the Organising Committee, was acting Director of Organisation for 18 months until a full-time appointment was made, established the structure and terms of reference the O/C would take and took responsibility for the Opening and Closing Ceremonies. This was while still working as a partner in the firm which had now become Morris Patrick and Co. After 12 years as a partner and after the Games, I decided to retire from the firm to focus on business governance and mentoring but still retained my links to MP and Co by renting office space from them. In 1973, I was admitted as a Fellow of the Institute of Directors (UK) and founded the Canterbury branch office in 1975.

Other appointments followed - I was elected to the NZOC in 1975, Sir Edmund Hillary flew to Christchurch to invite me to become chair of the organising committee for the 1975 NZ Himalayan Expedition. I was subsequently appointed to be the NZ Chef de Mission of NZ teams to Brisbane in 1982 (probably as a safe pair of hands after the 1981 Springbok rugby tour of NZ) where NZ was expected to come under fire, Edinburgh in 1986, and Seoul in 1988.

In 1971, I had also been appointed to represent the UC on the Christchurch BHS Board and was the catalyst in stopping the demolition of the Main Block at the school. I remained on the board until 1981 and retired from the UC Council after 21 years representing alumni. After my Chef de Mission roles, I decided to go back to university and enrolled for an MBA at Massey University, graduating in 1992. Simultaneously, in the 1990s I was President of the UC Alumni Association and Chaired its 150th Anniversary celebrations. In 1998, I was the inaugural national president of the huge Massey MBA Alumni and in 2006, I was invited to stand for the one male person position on the Massey University Council, a position I held until 2015 when my term expired. Since 1975, probably between 30% to 40% of my time has been on a 'pro bono' basis.

I am still active in business and sport. I have traveled to China around 40 times over the past 25 years. As a result of a group thesis at Massey, I came close in the late 1990s with several others, in trying to bring the Winter Olympics to the South Island which I am currently trying to revive with the concept of a bid. We have just been celebrating the 50th Anniversary of staging the 1974

Commonwealth Games in Christchurch where because of my youth at the time, I find I am now the sole survivor of the inner group that ran those Games. In 2011, I established a Charitable Trust to establish a National Sports Museum of NZ in Christchurch.

It is amazing what can be achieved along the way, from being a humble Chartered Accountant where one thing often tends to lead to another, but the skill set learnt can prepare you for almost anything. Over the years, I have been approached to write a book on my life and just last month, we finally launched “My Arena” – the life and legacy of Bruce Ullrich.

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