

**DISTRICT PLAN – LISTED HERITAGE PLACE
HERITAGE ASSESSMENT – STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
HERITAGE ITEM NUMBER 1094
*SIGNAL BOX AND SETTING - 1 NORWICH QUAY, LYTTELTON***



PHOTOGRAPH: M. LOVELL-SMITH, 30/12/2012

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

Historical and social values that demonstrate or are associated with: a particular person, group, organisation, institution, event, phase or activity; the continuity and/or change of a phase or activity; social, historical, traditional, economic, political or other patterns.

The Lyttelton signal box has historical and social significance as a key item of rail technology, representing the central role that the railways have played in the operation of the port of Lyttelton. It is one of a small number of extant signal boxes throughout the country.

Rail services to and from Lyttelton commenced with the opening of the Lyttelton (also known as the Moorhouse) Rail Tunnel in December 1867. From then until the mid-20th century, rail was the primary means by which the produce of Canterbury was shifted to the port for export. The geographical separation of Christchurch from its port, and the lack of warehouse space in Lyttelton meant that rail transport was comparatively more important for the operation of the port than in many other parts of the country. Passenger services were also an important part of rail operations between Lyttelton and Christchurch, partly because so many Lyttelton residents depended on Christchurch schools, workplaces and parks for education, employment and recreation respectively, and partly because Lyttelton was, for much of the 20th century, the terminus of the inter-island ferries. All of this activity meant that NZ Railways was traditionally a big employer in the town. Rail's importance to the wider

community decreased after the Christchurch-Lyttelton road tunnel was opened to vehicle traffic in 1964, and in 1976 passenger services to Lyttelton ceased, but bulk freight services are still central to the port's operations.

The signal box was constructed to accommodate new signals brought into operation on 29 July 1906. Replacing an earlier signal cabin, the building was originally located close to the portal of the rail tunnel. The Lyttelton signal box was one of many similar signal boxes constructed to a standard plan across the country during the early years of the 20th century. By 1986 however it was one of just eleven mechanical signal boxes still in use. It was closed on 15 September 1991. The Norwich Quay Historical Precinct Society instigated the relocation and restoration of the Lyttelton signal box on its present Gladstone Quay site in 1994. It is now cared for by the Christchurch City Council.

The Lyttelton signal box also has significance as a distinctive symbol of rail operations. Signal boxes with their accompanying signal towers were a vital part of any rail yard, ensuring efficient and safe train movement. The role of signal box operator was therefore regarded as important and attracted a degree of prestige within the railway community. The centrality of the signal box has seen it achieve some symbolic significance. The logo of the Rail Heritage Trust of New Zealand, for example, contains an early 20th century signal box.

CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

Cultural and spiritual values that demonstrate or are associated with the distinctive characteristics of a way of life, philosophy, tradition, religion, or other belief, including: the symbolic or commemorative value of the place; significance to Tangata Whenua; and/or associations with an identifiable group and esteemed by this group for its cultural values.

The Lyttelton signal box has cultural significance as a reminder of a former way of life when the railways played a greater role in transport and communication in New Zealand.

ARCHITECTURAL AND AESTHETIC SIGNIFICANCE

Architectural and aesthetic values that demonstrate or are associated with: a particular style, period or designer, design values, form, scale, colour, texture and material of the place.

The signal box has architectural and aesthetic significance as an example of the 'NZR Standard Signal Box – Design J', which was built around the country in the early years of the 20th century. This design, adopted in 1901, was derived from a standard British design 'McK & H'. The Lyttelton box was carefully restored to original specifications (save the stair balustrade, which is a contemporary design) in 1994.

George Troup (1863-1941) was appointed Chief Draughtsman of the New Zealand Railways in 1894 and he held the NZR's senior architectural post until his retirement in 1925. His best-known work is the Dunedin Railway Station (1904-7) and his standard designs for railway stations and auxiliary building, such as signal boxes, can be found all over New Zealand.

TECHNOLOGICAL AND CRAFTSMANSHIP SIGNIFICANCE

Technological and craftsmanship values that demonstrate or are associated with: the nature and use of materials, finishes and/or technological or constructional methods which were innovative, or of notable quality for the period.

The signal box has technological significance for the system of rail signals it contained. Prior to 1900 there were apparently few signal boxes, with signalling carried out externally. In

tandem with an expansion of rail infrastructure from the turn of the century, and in recognition of a correspondingly greater complexity of technology, a significant programme of signal box construction took place during the Edwardian period. The building has standard craftsmanship significance as an Edwardian timber construction.

CONTEXTUAL SIGNIFICANCE

Contextual values that demonstrate or are associated with: a relationship to the environment (constructed and natural), a landscape, setting, group, precinct or streetscape; a degree of consistency in terms of type, scale, form, materials, texture, colour, style and/or detail; recognised landmarks and landscape which are recognised and contribute to the unique identity of the environment.

The Lyttelton signal box has contextual significance in relation to the port of Lyttelton. It is located on a small reserve below Gladstone Quay. Besides the signal box, the vegetated reserve contains a 1940s coal wagon and the remains of an historic 1890s yacht (Kiaora). The unused 1960s railway station (built on the site of an 1873 station), and the remains of the 1870s Harbour Board Building are nearby. The Lyttelton Museum was previously across Gladstone Quay. The nearby junction of Oxford Street and Gladstone/Norwich Quay is a key historic intersection in Lyttelton; the first jetty into the harbour having met the foot of Oxford Street. The original location of the signal box is about 600 metres distant from its present site.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND SCIENTIFIC SIGNIFICANCE

Archaeological or scientific values that demonstrate or are associated with: the potential to provide information through physical or scientific evidence an understanding about social historical, cultural, spiritual, technological or other values of past events, activities, structures or people.

The Lyttelton Signal Box and its setting are of archaeological significance because they have the potential to provide archaeological evidence relating to past building construction methods and materials, and human activity on the site, including that which occurred prior to 1900. Although the box is not on its original site, it is located in an area of former railway operations reclaimed during the 1860s.

ASSESSMENT STATEMENT

The Lyttelton Signal Box has overall significance to Banks Peninsula and Christchurch. The building has historical and social significance as a reminder of the central role rail has played in the history of the port of Lyttelton and as one of the last operational signal boxes across the country. The signal box has cultural significance for its association with the distinctive way of life engendered by the rail network, for both railways staff and customers, and architectural and aesthetic significance as an example of a standard design, which retains a good deal of integrity. The signal box has technological and craftsmanship significance as an example of early 20th century railway technology and contextual significance in relation to the reserve on which it is located, the neighbouring historic rail site and its original site beside the Lyttelton Rail Tunnel. The Lyttelton Signal Box and its setting are of archaeological significance because they have the potential to provide archaeological evidence relating to past building construction methods and materials, and human activity on the site, including that which occurred prior to 1900.

REFERENCES:

CCC Heritage File: Gladstone Quay (Signal Box)

<http://www.railheritage.org.nz>

REPORT DATED: 23 February 2015

PLEASE NOTE THIS ASSESSMENT IS BASED ON INFORMATION AVAILABLE AT THE TIME OF WRITING. DUE TO THE ONGOING NATURE OF HERITAGE RESEARCH, FUTURE REASSESSMENT OF THIS HERITAGE ITEM MAY BE NECESSARY TO REFLECT ANY CHANGES IN KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF ITS HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE.

PLEASE USE IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE CCC HERITAGE FILES.