

**DISTRICT PLAN – LISTED HERITAGE PLACE
HERITAGE ASSESSMENT – STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
HERITAGE ITEM NUMBER 765
*FORMER MASONIC HALL - LODGE OF UNANIMITY AND
SETTING -
6 ST DAVIDS STREET, LYTTELTON***



PHOTOGRAPH : B. SMYTH, 05/09/2011

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 former Lodge of Unanimity hall has high historical and social significance as the home of the Lodge of Unanimity No. 3, the South Island's oldest Masonic foundation, for more than 130 years. The Lodge served as a formal institution of sociability, thrift, and charitable works in Lyttelton for more than 150 years, and through its history was associated with many of the port town's leading citizens.

Lodges and Friendly Societies were a central part of the fabric of male society in towns and cities throughout Victorian New Zealand. Lodges had a financial function, in that they provided sickness and funeral benefits to members, but also provided a venue for conviviality and fellowship. As such, lodges made an important contribution to the social, political and business life of the colony.

Freemasonry began in Canterbury when a Lodge of Instruction was formed in Lyttelton under the Provincial Grand Lodge of New South Wales in October 1851. The warrant for the Lodge

of Unanimity arrived from England in May 1853, making it the oldest Masonic Lodge in the South Island, and the third lodge to be formed in New Zealand. Lyttelton citizens also founded a second Masonic lodge, the Canterbury Kilwinning, in 1875.

The Lodge of Unanimity purchased their St David's Street site in October 1853, and laid the foundation stone for their first Lodge hall in 1855. This hall was designed by Lodge member Benjamin Mountfort and built by R. Taylor. It opened in October 1858. In 1875 Lodge members decided their first hall needed replacing. Designed once again by Benjamin Mountfort and built by Sutton and Weastell, the new hall opened in 1876. A refectory was added by Cyril Mountfort in 1898.

In addition to Benjamin Mountfort, other prominent Lytteltonians who were members of the Lodge of Unanimity include early medical professionals Drs William Donald and J T Rouse, businessman and Harbour Board chairman Peter Cunningham, lawyer Henry Nalder, vicar of St Saviour's Elliott Chambers, and stevedore and sometime Lyttelton mayor Nicholas Schumacher.

The lodge hall sustained significant damage in the Canterbury Earthquakes of 2010 and 2011, and as a consequence was unsafe to occupy. In 2014 the Lodge of Unanimity sold their damaged building to a private owner who intends to fully restore it.

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 former Lodge of Unanimity hall has high cultural and spiritual significance for its association with Freemasonry. The Masons are an association with a very particular character, defined by a founding tradition, a long and distinguished history, and distinctive ritual. These precepts underlie the more prosaic features of Masonic life, which include sociability and charitable work. The Masonic tradition A lodge hall embodies the history and traditions of its Lodge and is the venue for the performance of ritual.

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 former Lodge of Unanimity hall has high architectural and aesthetic significance as (in part) a Gothic Revival building by prominent Christchurch architect Benjamin Mountfort. Although the Lodge of Unanimity is no longer in use for its original purpose and has been cleared of its furnishings and fixtures, the architectural design and layout of the building still reflect its Masonic origins.

A central part of the mythology of the Masonic movement is its basis in classical antiquity, and especially its connection with the lost Temple of Solomon. Masonic buildings are thus traditionally designed with at least some elements of classical architectural vocabulary. The former hall of the Canterbury Kilwinning Lodge in Canterbury Street, Lyttelton, for example, adheres closely to this model, however for the Lodge of Unanimity hall the architect and Lodge member Benjamin Mountfort unusually chose to design in his preferred idiom, Gothic Revival. The interior however has been designed and furnished to the Masonic formula.

The windowless exterior of the 1876 building with its slate roof and large expanses of wall intersected only by heavy buttresses appears severe and forbidding. Although Masonic halls traditionally turn inwards to obscure the ritual within from public view, such an unprepossessing exterior is unusual. It has been suggested however that the brick and stone structure originally had a much more decorative, polychromatic appearance before it was later uniformly rendered in cement plaster. In contrast with the exterior, the interior of the hall with its steep diagonally-sarked ceiling and large gothic trusses was richly furnished and decorated in accordance with Masonic precepts.

Benjamin Woolfield Mountfort trained under Richard Carpenter, an important member of the Gothic Revival movement before immigrating to New Zealand in 1850. He subsequently became New Zealand's pre-eminent Gothic Revival architect, and has been credited with defining Christchurch's Gothic Revival character with a group of major buildings including the Canterbury Museum, the Provincial Council Buildings and Canterbury College (later the Arts Centre).

In 1898 Benjamin Mountfort's son Cyril Mountfort added a large timber refectory at right-angles to his father's hall. The refectory building is relatively plain but features Carpenter Gothic elements typical of domestic and public buildings of the period including fretted barges with a decorative truss detail and a large hooded twin sash window. The lofty match-lined interior has light gothic rafters. Cyril Mountfort worked with his father during the 1880s and 1890s, taking over his father's practice following the latter's death in 1898. Cyril Mountfort's best known remaining buildings include St Saviour's Church (recently relocated back to Lyttelton), and St John's Anglican Church, Hororata.

The original (front) porch was demolished and replaced with a cloakroom in 1959; the rear lobby was altered and refurbished for use as a cloakroom in 2001. The masonry lodge hall was severely damaged by the Canterbury Earthquakes of 2010 and 2011, and significant make-safe work has taken place. The building remains vacant. The volcanic stone retaining wall and gateway in front of the building also sustained serious damage.

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 former Lodge of Unanimity hall has high technological and craftsmanship significance as a rare surviving example of an early masonry building in Lyttelton, for the timberwork of its roof and refectory and for the detail of the interior. The building has the capacity to reveal information about the materials and construction techniques of Victorian masonry construction as well as timber framed and weather board buildings of that era.

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 former Lodge of Unanimity hall has high contextual significance on its site, and within its setting and broader context. The building is located on an elevated site across the full width of its section. The setting consists of the parcel boundary, a small rectangular section.

Along the road frontage is a volcanic stone retaining wall, also damaged in the Canterbury Earthquakes. Access to the building is provided by a path that climbs across the frontage. Behind the building is a steep grassy slope. This originally climbed to meet Reserve Terrace, but a rear section was subdivided off in the 2000s. The hall has landmark significance on its highly visible site overlooking both Lyttelton and the harbour. The lodge hall has contextual significance as part of an homogenous group of listed colonial period (c1860-c1880) buildings along St David's Street. These are mainly dwellings but also include the former Forresters Lodge hall.

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 former Lodge of Unanimity hall 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. The existing buildings date from 1876 and 1898, but there was a lodge hall on the site from 1857.

ASSESSMENT STATEMENT

The former Lodge of Unanimity hall has high heritage significance and value to Christchurch and Banks Peninsula particularly through its high degree of authenticity and integrity. The hall has high historical and social significance as the home of the Lodge of Unanimity No. 3, the South Island's oldest Masonic foundation, for more than 130 years. The Lodge served as a formal institution of sociability, thrift, and charitable works in Lyttelton for more than 150 years, and through its history was associated with many of the port town's leading citizens. The hall has high cultural and spiritual significance for its association with Freemasonry. The Masons are an association with a very particular character, defined by a founding tradition, a long and distinguished history, and distinctive ritual. The hall has high architectural and aesthetic significance as (in part) a Gothic Revival building by prominent Christchurch architect Benjamin Mountfort. The hall has high technological and craftsmanship significance as a rare surviving example of a masonry building in Lyttelton, and for the timberwork of its roof and refectory. The hall has high contextual significance as a large building on an elevated site overlooking the town and port which gives it landmark significance, and it is also set amongst other listed colonial era buildings. The former Lodge of Unanimity hall 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,

REFERENCES:

CCC Heritage File: Lodge of Unanimity, 6 St David's Street

REPORT DATED: 14/10/2014

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.

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