

**DISTRICT PLAN – LISTED HERITAGE PLACE
HERITAGE ASSESSMENT – STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
HERITAGE ITEM NUMBER 1313
COMMERCIAL BUILDING FAÇADE AND SETTING, FORMER A
J WHITES – 179, 181 HIGH STREET AND 238 TUAM
STREET, CHRISTCHURCH**



PHOTOGRAPH: M.VAIR-PIOVA, 5.12.2015

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 façade of the former A J Whites building has historical and social significance due to its association with two of Christchurch's leading furniture retailers – A J Whites and McKenzie and Willis. The building at 179 High Street was constructed in 1910-11 to an England Brothers design. It was designed and constructed for A J Whites, a firm that was one of New Zealand's longest established furniture manufacturing and retailing firms. The building traded as A J Whites until it was purchased by McKenzie and Willis, another leading furniture retailer, during the 1980s. A J Whites was established in 1863 by Alfred White who had arrived from England in 1861 and, with his wife Eliza White, established a second-hand furniture store in High Street. In 1870 White leased a two-storey wooden building on the site of the 1911 building. By the late 1870s the business had prospered and White was able to build the three storey brick and stone building at 236 Tuam Street which was demolished following the Canterbury earthquakes of 2010 and 2011. In 1902 the brick and stone building at 232 Tuam Street was built – also demolished following the Canterbury earthquakes. It wasn't until 1910 that the two storey wooden building was replaced by the three storey stone faced building designed by prominent Canterbury architects the England Brothers. A J

Whites continued to trade from this site until 1925 when the company was bought out by McKenzie and Willis. The firm McKenzie and Willis has operated in Christchurch for over 100 years. Founded in 1906 by Joseph Willis the firm remains one of the city's best known family businesses. McKenzie and Willis refurbished the building and continued to trade from there until the Canterbury earthquakes. The building was badly damaged in the Canterbury earthquakes and the façade is to be retained and incorporated into a new development.

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 façade of the former A J Whites building at 179 High Street has cultural significance as a reminder of the site's continuous use by noted furniture retailers since it was built in 1911. A J Whites and McKenzie and Willis are two of Christchurch's best known furniture retailers, both family firms that traded, and continue to trade, in the city for over 100 years. It also has cultural significance as a tangible reminder of the large retail department stores that once formed a significant part of lower High Street.

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 façade of 179 High Street has architectural and aesthetic significance for its Edwardian Classical design by the well known firm of the England Brothers. The firm was established by Robert England who was joined by his younger brother Edward in 1906. Following Robert's death in 1908 Eddie England continued the practice until 1941. The firm produced domestic as well as commercial buildings including McLean's Mansion, the 3rd stage of Riccarton House and the second masonry building commissioned for A J Whites at 232 Tuam Street – the last of these three being demolished following the Canterbury earthquakes. The façade at 179 High Street is a three storey Edwardian Classical building and was built in 1910-11. The first and second floors are dominated by large stylised attached columns that rise through the two upper floors. The large window openings have leaded fanlights with an oriel window at the corner. The first floor windows are squared whilst the second floor windows have segmental arches. The façade is a modern Edwardian interpretation of more traditional classical commercial buildings, restrained in its detailing and modern in its generous use of glass. The use of stone veneer lightens the facade, contributing to its modern appearance. The original parapet has been removed.

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 façade of the former A J Whites building has technological and craftsmanship significance for what it may reveal about early twentieth century materials, fixtures and fittings and building methodologies and its demonstration of early 20th century methods of construction, more particularly the craftsmanship employed in the use of a stone veneer, including carved decorative reliefs and decorative leaded windows.

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 setting for the façade of 179 High Street consists of the immediate land parcel. It has high contextual significance due to its landmark position on a splayed corner site created by the insertion of the High Street diagonal into the grid street plan of Christchurch and as part of the remains of a broader precinct of listed late Victorian and Edwardian commercial buildings that run along High Street. The importance of High Street as a public transport route to and from the city led to the clustering of commercial buildings in this area during the late 19th/early 20th century. As a group these stylistically confident buildings reflect the turn-of-the-century optimism in the commercial future of the city. In recent years this heritage character played a significant role in the revitalisation of this part of the inner-city.

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 façade at 179 High Street is of archaeological significance because it has 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. There was a two-storeyed 19th century timber building on this site prior to its construction in 1911.

ASSESSMENT STATEMENT

The façade of the former A J Whites building and its setting are of overall significance to Christchurch including Banks Peninsula as a significant Edwardian retail department store in the lower end of High Street. It has historical and social significance due to its association with two of Christchurch's leading furniture retailers – A J Whites and McKenzie and Willis. The façade of the former A J Whites building at 179 High Street has cultural significance as a reminder of the site's continuous use by noted furniture retailers since it was built in 1911. It also has cultural significance as a tangible reminder of the large retail department stores that once formed a significant part of lower High Street.. The façade of 179 High Street has architectural and aesthetic significance for its Edwardian Classical design by the well-known local architectural firm the England Brothers. The façade of the former A J Whites building has technological and craftsmanship significance for its demonstration of early 20th century methods of construction, more particularly the use of a stone veneer, including carved decorative reliefs. It has high contextual significance due to its landmark position on a splayed corner site created by the insertion of the High Street diagonal into the grid street plan of Christchurch and as part of the remains of a broader precinct of listed late Victorian and Edwardian commercial buildings that run along High Street. The façade at 179 High Street is of archaeological significance because it has 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:

Christchurch City Council, *Heritage File, Former A J Whites Department Store – 179-181 high Street*

Christchurch City Council, *Christchurch City Plan – Listed Heritage Item and Setting. Heritage Assessment – Statement of Significance. McKenzie & Willis/Former A J Whites – 179 High Street – 2011*

REPORT DATED: 02/12/2014

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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