

**DISTRICT PLAN – LISTED HERITAGE PLACE
HERITAGE ASSESSMENT – STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
HERITAGE ITEM NUMBER 165
*DWELLINGS AND SETTING, DORSET STREET FLATS –
2, 4, 4A, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14 AND 16 DORSET STREET,
CHRISTCHURCH***



PHOTOGRAPH: M.VAIR-PIOVA, 2014

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 Dorset Street Flats have high historical and social significance as a set of apartments constructed in the mid-1950s to provide economical and modern, inner-city accommodation for a group of bachelor owner-occupier friends and for their association with notable architect Sir Miles Warren. The block of eight one-bedroom flats was constructed in 1956-57 to provide accommodation for three bachelor owner-occupier friends, each with one to occupy and the others to lease. An existing stable block on the site accommodated a ninth flat, garaging and communal laundry facilities. The use of concrete block and fair-faced concrete for the internal and external walls of a residential building was not immediately accepted by parts of the community. Consequently the flats gained a degree of national and international notoriety and tour buses reportedly detoured past the flats to view what became dubbed

"Fort Dorset." Professions of the occupants in the 1960s included solicitor, surveyor, architect, lecturer, driver and restaurateur. Miles Warren not only designed the flats but also lived in one of them initially.

The concrete block walls that sheltered the terrace gardens of the ground floor apartments were damaged by and removed after the 2010 and 2011 Canterbury earthquakes. The stables block suffered the same fate. The apartments are still extant and able to be repaired.

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 Dorset Street Flats have cultural significance as they reflect the way of life, including the economic means and awareness of contemporary architectural trends, of the trio of professionals who commissioned and financed them. They also reflect the way of life of the people who have chosen to live in them since the mid-1950s.

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 Dorset Street Flats have high architectural and aesthetic significance as one of the most important examples of the early work of Sir Miles Warren, a leading New Zealand architect based in Christchurch, who co-founded the firm Warren and Mahoney. They also have significance for their highly influential modernist design in the manner of the New Brutalism. The New Brutalist style is demonstrated through the use of concrete block and exposed fair-faced concrete beams on the exterior and interior walls and the low pitched gable roof designed without eaves to emphasize the simple box-like forms which are broken up with the open stairwells. The design followed one of the basic tenets of modernism in that buildings should show their structure and materials to reflect how they were built. While open plan living is common in New Zealand dwellings today, it was a concept still gaining ground in the 1950s when the flats were designed with an open plan living room flanked by bedroom, bathroom and kitchen spaces.

The flats were designed upon Miles Warren's return to Christchurch after spending a year and a half in London, where he was influenced by English New Brutalist architecture and they are a pivotal work in his oeuvre. The flats possess many of the characteristics that were to become hallmarks of both the Warren and Mahoney style - white painted concrete block, fair-faced concrete beams, gabled roof without eaves, recessed door and window detailing as a counterpoint to rich furnishings and luxuriant planting. Warren and Mahoney subsequently undertook many major national and international projects, winning both national and international awards. Miles Warren was knighted in 1984 for his services to architecture.

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 Dorset Street Flats have high technological significance for their innovative use of concrete block construction, engineered by local engineer Lyall Holmes, which was the first of its kind in Christchurch and uncommon in New Zealand at the time. They also have craftsmanship significance for the recessed door and window detailing, and rimu ceiling battens and lining.

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 Dorset Street Flats have contextual significance as a townhouse development contained within two offset blocks running parallel to Dorset Street. The flats were intended to present a contrast between the richness of the garden planting and the starkness of the fair-faced concrete and block materials of the apartments. They are in a part of the central city in which there are a number of multi-unit dwellings, particularly in Dublin and Dorset Streets and the adjacent section of Park Terrace. They form a group with Santa Barbara and the Bealey Avenue Maisonettes as part of the chronology of apartment living in central Christchurch.

The setting consists of the immediate land parcel. The original design of the gardens included terrace gardens and a water feature.

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 Dorset Street Flats and their setting have archaeological significance because they have the potential to provide archaeological evidence relating to past human activity on the site, including that which occurred before 1900. The 1862 and 1877 maps of central Christchurch do not show any structures on the site of the Dorset Street Flats but there was quite a lot of residential development in Dublin Street and on the north side of Dorset Street by 1877. The pre-existing stables on the site were erected in 1902 and demolished in October 2011. The site has now been recorded as archaeological site M35/555.

ASSESSMENT STATEMENT

The Dorset Street Flats and their setting have high overall significance to Christchurch, including Banks Peninsula. They have high historical and social significance for their association with Sir Miles Warren as one of the original owner/occupiers and the evolution of inner-city housing choices in the mid-20th century. The Dorset Street Flats have cultural significance as they reflect the way of life of the group of professionals who commissioned and financed the flats. They have high architectural and aesthetic significance as one of the most iconic designs by Sir Miles Warren, one of New Zealand's most acclaimed 20th century architects. The flats have high technological and craftsmanship significance for the innovative use of concrete block construction, and the quality of their construction and detailing. The Dorset Street Flats have contextual significance within the immediate streetscape and the north-western sector of the central city in which they contribute to the

historic residential character of the city. The Dorset Street Flats and their setting have archaeological significance and the site is recorded as archaeological site M35/555.

REFERENCES:

Christchurch City Council, *Heritage File, Apartments, 2-16 Dorset Street*

<http://www.christchurchmodern.co.nz/2008/08/hello-world/>

Historic place # 7804 – Heritage NZ List. <http://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/7804>

<https://quakestudies.canterbury.ac.nz/store/download/part/423>

Julia Gatley (ed) *Long Live the Modern - New Zealand's New Architecture 1904-1984* (Auckland, 2008)

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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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