



**DISTRICT PLAN – LISTED HERITAGE PLACE
HERITAGE ASSESSMENT – STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
HERITAGE ITEM NUMBER 399
*RHODODENDRON ISLAND AND SETTING – AVON RIVER
BETWEEN MONTREAL-CAMBRIDGE /60, 78 AND 80
CAMBRIDGE TERRACE, CHRISTCHURCH***



PHOTOGRAPH: M.VAIR-PIOVA, 11/12/2014

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.

Rhododendron Island has historical and social significance as the former site of Christchurch's first public swimming baths, which were created with the dredging of a channel between the island and the riverbank. Christchurch City Council made the decision to establish public baths in the river in March 1876 but it wasn't until October of that year that the council passed a motion to call for tenders. The baths were opened in January 1877 and they are shown in T S Lambert's map of Christchurch of the same year. The records of the day note that *'When completed the high-fenced 45 metre pool was 2.7 metres deep at one end and 1.2 metres at the other. The entry fee was threepence and the baths were open from 6 am to 9 pm during the season, which lasted from the 1st of October until the 31st of*

March.... William Aitken was custodian of the baths and also proprietor of the nearby Montreal Street boat sheds (1875-1929)'.

A comparison between an 1862 map of the city and Lambert's 1877 map would appear to suggest that the island was reduced in size by more than half when the baths were created. The baths closed in March 1886, made less desirable by effluent released from the hospital upstream and the rise in popularity of beach bathing at Sumner and New Brighton. Subsequently the island was 'restored' with the use of fill from the banks of the River Avon, which were terraced in the late 1890s by gardener William Wickens and a team of mostly relief workers. Rhododendron Island, by which name the island was known by at least 1908, is said to owe its name to the Reverend Henry Jacobs (1824-1901), first Dean of Christchurch and incumbent of the nearby St Michael and All Angel's Anglican Church, 'who planted the island with the earliest Rhododendron specimens brought to Canterbury' (*Canterbury Heritage Blog*). The maintenance of the Rhododendron Island was undertaken by the Christchurch Beautifying Society (est. 1897) in its early years of existence. It is now maintained by the City Council.

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.

Rhododendron Island has cultural significance for its place within the recreational culture of the colonial city and as an example of an early effort to beautify the Avon through planting. The island has an early association with the Christchurch Beautifying Association, formed in 1897 to help maintain the city environment generally, and the riverbanks in particular.

Rhododendron Island also has cultural and spiritual significance for tangata whenua, in view of its location in Otakaro (River Avon), a mahinga kai area for tangata whenua.

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.

Rhododendron Island has aesthetic significance because of its informal planting scheme, which may date from the late 19th century, which gives it considerable visual amenity. It has design and form values and significance that remain indicating the outline of the original swimming pool channel on the north-west side,

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.

Rhododendron Island as limited technological and craftsmanship significance; it is a significance that is related to an ecological and landscaping context, for its planting. Further

research is needed, however, to identify plant species that may remain extant and relate to the activities of both Rev Jacobs and the Christchurch Beautifying Society.

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.

Rhododendron Island, which is located on a stretch of the River Avon as it traverses the central city between Cashel and Tuam Streets, has contextual significance for its relationship with the other Avon River islands, particularly Mill Island to the north, and the recreational banks of the Avon and those sites that were re-designed or 'beautified' by the Christchurch Beautifying Association in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It also has significance in relation to the Antigua Boat Sheds, as both relate to colonial recreational facilities in Christchurch,

The island is now part of the landscape of the Avon River, which is valued for the recreational and visual amenity it provides in the central city, and has been planted in an informal, mixed-species manner.

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.

Rhododendron Island and its setting has 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.

ASSESSMENT STATEMENT

Rhododendron Island has overall significance to Christchurch, including Banks Peninsula as part of the recreational and beautification of history and culture of the central city of Christchurch. It has historical and social significance as the site of Christchurch's first public swimming baths and site of early beautification planting. It has cultural significance for its location in the Otakaro/Avon River and as such has cultural and spiritual significance for tangata whenua as a mahinga kai area for tangata whenua. Rhododendron Island has aesthetic, design and form significance for the remnant of the original pool channel and contextual significance for its relationship to other heritage sites along the Avon. Rhododendron Island has archaeological significance in view of its location and late 19th century development, although the earthworks undertaken for the public baths and later in-river works may have damaged or destroyed evidence from before 1876.

REFERENCES:

Thelma Strongman *City Beautiful – the first 100 years of the Christchurch Beautifying Society* (Christchurch, 1999)

John Wilson et al *Christchurch Contextual Historical Overview* (for Christchurch City Council, June 2005)

New Zealand Herald 1 March 1876, p. 3.

‘Canterbury Heritage Blog’

<http://canterburyheritage.blogspot.co.nz/2009/02/christchurchs-first-public-swimming.html>

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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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