



**DISTRICT PLAN – LISTED HERITAGE PLACE
HERITAGE ASSESSMENT – STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
HERITAGE ITEM NUMBER 41
*FORMER MAGISTRATES' COURT AND SETTING – 85
ARMAGH STREET, CHRISTCHURCH***



PHOTOGRAPH : M.VAIR-PIOVA, 9/12/2014

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.

The former Magistrates' Court has high historical and social significance as the oldest purpose-built court building remaining in Christchurch - the only portion of the original court complex still extant – and for the fact that it is still in use for judicial purposes. The land was transferred to the Crown in 1863 and the first stage of the present building was built in 1880. The court opened 5 July 1880. In 1881 an office and waiting rooms were added and in 1909 additions to the south were completed. Courts were established in New Zealand in 1841 following a Royal Charter (1840) which gave Legislative Council the power to make laws in the country. By the 1860s a three tier system of courts had emerged – Resident Magistrates' Courts, District Courts and Supreme Courts. The Magistrates' Court had "ordinary and extended jurisdiction within the city of Christchurch and district". District Courts were abolished in 1925 leaving a two tier system – the Magistrates Court became the District Court, and the Supreme Court became the High Court. The building has been associated

with use as a courtroom for the Christchurch community for over 100 years. The building was damaged in the Canterbury earthquakes and has been 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 former Magistrates' Court has high cultural and spiritual significance as a public building associated with New Zealand's judicial system. This building is now the Family Court, following conversion from the District Court in 1997. The District Court hears most of all criminal trials. The Family Court, is a division of the District Court and makes decisions on a number of family related matters including when people can't agree about caring for children. The courts play an important role in New Zealand and Christchurch society to determine disputed questions of law and fact in civil and criminal cases. The building is located on the site of the ancient Waitaha pā of Puari which stretched from the banks of the Ōtākaro (Avon River) at Victoria Square out to Bealey Avenue in the years between 1000 and 1500. The loop in the river that encompassed the site was an important mahinga kai. At its height the pā would have been home to about 800 Waitaha people. Later during the Ngāi Tahu period a large variety of food was gathered in the Puari pā area including tuna (eels), inaka (whitebait), kokopū (native trout), koukoupāra (cockabullies), pārerā (grey ducks) and pūtakitaki (paradise shelducks). Unlike Waitaha before them, Ngāi Tahu did not make their homes in the area but rather travelled there from other settlements in order to gather kai. Nearby Market Square (today known as Victoria Square), became an important market and meeting place for Ngāi Tahu from all over the region. (Puari, Tī Kōuka Whenua, Christchurch City Libraries)

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 Magistrates' Court has high architectural and aesthetic significance as one of Christchurch's internationally important pool of Gothic Revival buildings, as a building designed in part by pre-eminent Gothic Revival architect, Benjamin Mountfort and as a building which is an example of the design of the Public Works Department.

Mountfort trained as an architect in England under Richard Carpenter, an important member of the Gothic Revival movement. He immigrated to New Zealand in 1850 and became New Zealand's pre-eminent Gothic Revival architect. He 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). Mountfort designed the 1880-81 building. Additions facing on to Armagh Street were made in 1908-09 by the Public Works Department, designed by A F Macrae, they were a sensitive response to the earlier Mountfort portion and neighbouring Provincial Buildings. The building was externally conserved and sympathetically altered in the 1990s, when it became the Family Court. However the internal alterations lessened to some degree its architectural integrity internally by subdividing some of the internal spaces.

Repairs following the Canterbury earthquakes include the reinstatement of the chimneys and the partial deconstruction, strengthening the reinstatement of the gable ends.

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 Magistrates' Court has high technological and craftsmanship significance for the quality of its architectural detailing and the nature of the stonework, which consists of a number of different types of stone. The building features a base course of Heathcote trachyte, walls of Port Hills trachyte and facings of Oamaru limestone. Some offices are plastered, others are lined with brick and stone. The roof of the earlier portion is not now clad with corrugated iron and the 1908 addition is clad in slate.

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 building has high contextual significance as part of Christchurch's current and former court complex, including the Provincial Government Buildings across Armagh St - which were used intermittently for court purposes for over a century; as part of an immediate heritage precinct centred on the Avon River, including the Provincial Government Buildings, the Armagh Street bridge, various features in Victoria Square and the Town Hall; as part of Christchurch's internationally significant collection of gothic revival structures; as part of the work of architect Benjamin Mountfort, relating particularly to the Provincial Buildings; and as an example of Edwardian public architecture in New Zealand. The setting of the former Magistrates' Court stretches eastwards to the public footpath beside the river and contains some large mature trees.

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 Magistrates' Court and its setting have high archaeological significance for the potential to hold evidence of early Ngai Tahu occupation in the vicinity, and of early European activity, including that which occurred prior to 1900.

ASSESSMENT STATEMENT

The former Magistrates' Court and its setting are of overall high significance to the Christchurch District including Banks Peninsula. The former Magistrates' Court has high historical and social significance as the oldest purpose-built court building remaining in Christchurch - the only portion of the original court complex still extant – and for the fact that it is still in use for judicial purposes. The former Magistrates' Court has high cultural and spiritual significance as a public building associated with New Zealand's judicial system. The former Magistrates' Court has high architectural and aesthetic significance as one of Christchurch's internationally important pool of Gothic Revival buildings, as a building designed in part by pre-eminent Gothic Revival architect, Benjamin Mountfort and as a

building which is an example of design by an architect from the Public Works Department. The former Magistrates' Court has high technological and craftsmanship significance for the quality of its architectural detailing and particularly the stonework, which consists of a number of different types of stone. The building and setting have high contextual significance as part of Christchurch's current and former court complex; as part of an immediate heritage precinct centred on the Avon River; as part of Christchurch's internationally significant collection of gothic revival structures; as part of the work of architect Benjamin Mountfort and (with the 1909 portion) as an example of Edwardian public architecture in New Zealand. The building and setting are also of high archaeological significance for the potential for evidence of Maori and European activity including that which pre dates 1900.

REFERENCES:

Christchurch City Council, *Heritage File, Former Magistrates' Court, 85 Armagh Street*
Christchurch City Council, *Christchurch City Plan – Listed Heritage Item and Setting. Heritage Assessment – Statement of Significance - Former Magistrates' Court – 85 Armagh Street* – 2011

Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Magistrates Court List Entry information,

[WWW.HERITAGE.ORG.NZ](http://www.heritage.org.nz)

Puari, Tī Kōuka Whenua, Christchurch City

Libraries,><http://my.christchurchcitylibraries.com/ti-kouka-whenua/puari/><

Ministry of Justice website >www.justice.govt.nz<

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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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