

**DISTRICT PLAN – LISTED HERITAGE PLACE
HERITAGE ASSESSMENT – STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
HERITAGE ITEM NUMBER 415
*FORMER MUNICIPAL CHAMBERS AND SETTING – 159
OXFORD TERRACE, 142 CAMBRIDGE TERRACE,
CHRISTCHURCH***



PHOTOGRAPH: M.VAIR-PIOVA, 4/12/2014

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 Municipal Chambers (aka Our City, Municipal Offices or Municipal Buildings, 1886-87) has high historical and social significance as the first permanent, purpose built civic offices designed for Christchurch City Council. They are on the site where in January 1851, following the Canterbury Association's decision to make Christchurch the capital of the province, the association erected a timber land transfer office on Reserve 1. The City Council later also had administrative offices in this building. By 1879 the Council had decided that the Land Office was too cramped to serve as Council offices, but it was not until 1885 that a design competition was advertised for new premises. The competition was won by Samuel Hurst Seager with a Queen Anne Revival design. The foundation stone was laid by Aaron

Ayers, the Mayor of Christchurch, on 16 March 1886. The contractors were Messrs England and Martin. In March 1887 Mayor Ayers announced that there would be no opening for the Municipal Offices in view of the depression occurring at the time. Instead the Mayor said he would spend the money that might have been used on an opening ceremony to buy coal to give to those in need at the beginning of winter.

The building functioned as the Municipal Chambers until the City Council moved to new premises in Manchester Street in 1924. The former Municipal Chambers were then leased by the Canterbury Chamber of Commerce, who remained there until 1987. The building was subsequently used as the Christchurch Information Centre before becoming Our City O-Tautahi in 2002, a venue for exhibitions and events relating to the city. Alterations were made to the ground floor including some structural strengthening and accessibility ramps internally and externally. The building has remained in the ownership of the City Council since it was constructed. It was badly damaged in the Canterbury earthquakes of 2010-11 and has been made safe through temporary securing, deconstruction of areas including the corner turret. Proposals for repair and restoration are being considered.

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 Municipal Chambers has cultural significance for its association with the local governance of Christchurch and as an expression of civic pride. The continued ownership of the building by the local council and its pre-earthquake use as a public venue for exhibitions and cultural events adds to its cultural significance within the community. It was also on this site that the 1851 Land Office stood. This building was for several decades associated closely with the early political settlement activity and meetings that set in place initial social cultural mores.

According to a *Press* report of the day describing the laying of the foundation stone of the building, it was on this site 'that the brethren of the Masonic fraternity first met in solemn conclave in Christchurch'. Cultural significance may therefore also arise out of the site's association with the practice of Freemasonry in the city.

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 Municipal Chambers has high architectural and aesthetic significance as an exemplary expression of Queen Anne Revival architecture in New Zealand by leading Canterbury architect Samuel Hurst Seager and as stylistic departure from the prevailing Gothic revival architecture of this period. Seager (1855-1933) played an important role in the development of Christchurch and he is a major figure in the history of New Zealand architecture. The former Municipal Chambers was Seager's first major commission following his return from London in 1885.

With its picturesque composition, constructional polychromy and asymmetrical design, the Municipal Chambers was a controversial building when it was built, not least for its use of

exposed brick on a public building. Queen Anne in style, the building integrates a variety of historical structural and decorative motifs, including two terracotta statues. 'Concorde' and 'Industry' were designed by British sculptor Sir George Frampton (1860-1928), a leading proponent of the late-19th century New Sculpture movement. Frampton was also the sculptor of the famous Peter Pan Statue in Kew Gardens, London.

In 1935 the rear lobby of the building was extended and a boiler room added. Some interior alterations have been carried since the 1960s at both ground and first floor level, including the installation of an elevator. A wheelchair access was added to the south front entrance of the building by local architects Sheppard and Rout in 1994. This was later removed and a new entrance with accessible access was added in 2002 as part of the alterations designed by architect John Vial to accommodate the Our City Otautahi use.

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 Municipal Chambers has high technological and craftsmanship significance due to the integration of decorative detailing in the construction of the building. The building was constructed with bricks from the Glentunnel Brickworks and has limestone facings. The wrought iron gates over the entrance, and the floral terracotta panels, also fired at the Glentunnel Brickworks, were both designed by Seager. As well as the structural integration of decorative detailing the south façade features two terracotta statues Concorde and Industry, designed by George Frampton.

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 Municipal Chambers has high contextual significance as a landmark and due to its location at the heart of the city within a precinct of heritage buildings. The building sits beside the Avon River, the main entrance facing Worcester Boulevard, with a secondary entrance on Oxford Terrace. The rear of the building backs onto the riverbank with large mature trees between the river and the north and west facades of the building. Within the immediate vicinity of the building are other scheduled heritage items, including the Worcester Boulevard Bridge, over which the Canterbury Club (1874) sits diagonally opposite the Municipal Chambers. To the north is the Gloucester Street Bridge and immediately to the south is the Captain Scott Memorial Statue. To the north of the building is the Kate Sheppard Memorial which was unveiled in 1993.

The building also has contextual significance for its kinship with other local and central government buildings in the city including, most notably, the adjacent Canterbury Provincial Council buildings, which are also situated overlooking the River Avon and as a point of departure from the prevailing Gothic revival architecture of this period in the immediate vicinity.

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 Municipal Chambers 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. Before the Municipal Chambers was built the Land Office, Survey Office, Resident Magistrate's and Supreme Court occupied this area). TS Lambert's 1877 map of the city shows the outline of buildings on the site at this date.

ASSESSMENT STATEMENT

The former Municipal Chambers is of high heritage significance to Christchurch, Banks Peninsula and is important nationally. It has high historical and social significance as the first purpose-built premises for use by the Christchurch City Council. The building has cultural significance as an expression of civic pride and the central role played by the city council in the development of Christchurch. The former Municipal Chambers has high architectural and aesthetic significance because it was designed by leading New Zealand architect Samuel Hurst Seager. The Queen Anne styled building was the first of its type in New Zealand and represented a break from the predominant Gothic Revival style of major public buildings in the city. The building has high technological and craftsmanship significance for the quality of its construction and decoration, which combines local Canterbury materials with imported statuary by a leading British sculptor. The building has high contextual significance as a landmark within the city due to its location, architectural style, use of materials and history of public use. Archaeological significance arises out of both the construction of the Municipal Chambers and the earlier occupation of the site by a number of other local government structures.

REFERENCES:

CCC Heritage files – Former Municipal Chambers

Historic Place Item # 1844 – Heritage New Zealand List

<http://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/1844>

Christchurch City Libraries

<http://christchurchcitylibraries.com/Heritage/Places/Buildings/MunicipalChambers/>

The Star 5 March 1887, p. 3

The Press 24 March 1886, p. 2

(*The Press* 24 March 1886, p. 2

REPORT DATED: 1 NOVEMBER 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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