

**DISTRICT PLAN – LISTED HERITAGE PLACE
HERITAGE ASSESSMENT – STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
HERITAGE ITEM NUMBER 46
*CATHEDRAL OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT – 136
BARBADOES STREET, CHRISTCHURCH***



PHOTOGRAPH : M.VAIR-PIOVA, 15/12/014

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 site of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament is of high historical and social significance as the principal place of Catholic worship in Canterbury since 1860, and the seat of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Christchurch since its establishment in 1887. The foundation stone of the present building was laid in 1901 and the building was opened in 1905, replacing the previous church which had become the pro-cathedral in 1887 with the establishment of the Christchurch Catholic Diocese. This building had in turn replaced the original, small timber church that was on the site, in order to accommodate the growing congregation. The Cathedral has served the diocese for over a century and is particularly

associated with the Diocese's first Bishop, Joseph Grimes, who conceived of and drove its construction, after discussions with the Pope who supported the proposal. The opening day was attended by the Governor of New Zealand, Lord Plunket, and the Premier, R. J. Seddon.

The building was seriously damaged in the Canterbury earthquakes and has been partially deconstructed.

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 Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament has high cultural and spiritual significance as spiritual home of Canterbury's Roman Catholic community since 1905. It remains the only New Zealand cathedral to have been visited by a Pope - John Paul II in 1986.

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 Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament has high architectural and aesthetic significance as an outstanding neo-classical building, designed by prominent New Zealand architect W. F. Petre, and one of the finest churches in Australasia. Petre was a prolific Dunedin-based architect, and is most recognised for his church designs and his pioneering use of concrete. After completing the Gothic Revival style Cathedral Church of St Joseph in Dunedin, Petre designed neo-classical basilicas for Oamaru, Timaru, Waimate and Wellington. The most ambitious of these however was Christchurch's Blessed Sacrament

The Cathedral is constructed of poured concrete faced with Oamaru and Mt Somers limestone. The final design varied from the standard plan of early basilicas in that the central dome rose above the sanctuary rather than the junction of the nave and transept. Some changes to the interior, including the removal of the 1912 high altar, were made in the 1970s in line with the revised approach to church liturgy mandated by the Second Vatican Council. Extensive structural strengthening was carried out in 2005, but this did not prevent severe damage occurring during the Canterbury Earthquake sequence of 2010-2011. The most public manifestation of this damage was the collapse of both belltowers on the eastern, principal elevation. Extensive deconstruction of the building took place subsequently, including of the dome and drum, which were also threatening collapse. This effectively destroyed the eastern end of the Cathedral, including the sanctuary, ambulatory and vestries, which remain only as ruins. The transept and the nave with its two-tiered arcade of columns and coffered zinc ceiling are however still largely extant and are being considered for restoration. In spite of the destruction wrought by the earthquakes therefore, the remnant building maintains sufficient of its fabric and character to retain its high architectural and aesthetic significance.

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 Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament has technological significance as one of the most advanced construction projects in New Zealand at the time. Petre was a keen exponent of the relatively new material of concrete, and the Cathedral employed the material on a large scale with a concrete inner clad in stone facings. In an early use of the technology, the contractors, Messrs Jamieson and Co. also employed steam cranes on the building site. The building's limestone dressings and internal fittings exhibited craftsmanship significance and the Cathedral held a wealth of artworks within its interior including stained glass windows, tile mosaic and sculpture.

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 Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament has contextual significance in its setting amongst the precinct of Catholic buildings on Barbadoes Street, including Cathedral College and the diocesan offices. Post-quake however this has been reduced with the loss of the convent buildings. The Basilica was a landmark in the southern central city and the remnants of the building are still striking in the streetscape. The building is part of the significant ecclesiastical works of Francis Petre, which include basilicas in Oamaru, Timaru, and Dunedin.

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 Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament site has archaeological significance because it is a central city site which has the potential to provide archaeological evidence relating to past human activity on the site, including that which occurred prior to 1900.

ASSESSMENT STATEMENT

Despite severe earthquake damage the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament is of high overall significance to Christchurch, including Banks Peninsula. The site of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament is historically and socially highly significant as the principal place of Catholic worship in Canterbury since 1860, and the seat of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Christchurch since its establishment in 1887. The Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament has high cultural and spiritual significance as spiritual home of Canterbury's Roman Catholic community since 1905. The building has technological significance as one of the most advanced construction projects in New Zealand at the time. The Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament has contextual significance amongst the precinct of Catholic buildings on Barbadoes St, including Cathedral College and the diocesan offices. In spite of the damage and deconstruction that has occurred to the building following the Canterbury earthquakes the building still retains enough authenticity and integrity to retain its meaning and sense of place, as well as enough physical fabric to demonstrate the criteria outlined above, to be deemed of enough significance to remain listed in the schedule.

REFERENCES:

Christchurch City Council, *Heritage File, Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, 136 Barbadoes Street*

Christchurch City Council, *Christchurch City Plan – Listed Heritage Item and Setting. Heritage Assessment – Statement of Significance. Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament – 136 Barbadoes Street - 2010*

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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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