

**DISTRICT PLAN – LISTED HERITAGE PLACE
HERITAGE ASSESSMENT – STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
HERITAGE ITEM NUMBER 529
VICTORIA MANSIONS AND SETTING – A-F/91, 1H-3H/91, 1J-
3J/91, 1K-3K/91, 1L-3L/91, 1M-3M/91 AND N/91 VICTORIA
STREET, 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.

Victoria Mansions have high historical and social significance as a 1935 central Christchurch apartment building and the largest of its type to have survived the Canterbury earthquakes. The building, originally containing 23 flats, was developed by Victoria Mansions Ltd, of which the architects, the contractor, and GT Weston, of Weston House in Park Terrace were among the shareholders. The 'mansion flat' evolved in late 19th century London and the name denotes a purpose-built luxury apartment. Victoria Mansions offered two- and three-bedroom flats, as well as bedsits, and a caretaker's flat was also included in the building. A coffee shop was originally located in a single storey annex overlooking Victoria Street, but this was relatively short lived, closing in 1940. The building's plans also included garages fronting Victoria Street adjacent to the coffee shop, reflecting the popular use of the motorcar at the time of its design.

Victoria Mansions were one of a number of apartment buildings erected in Christchurch in the 1930s to meet a demand for new types of inner-city residential accommodation. By 1950

the professions of occupants included: clerk, photographer, professor, dentist, land agent, custodian, manager and solicitor. In 1960 one of the residents was Nancy Northcroft, who had served as the city's first town planning officer and by this time was the chief executive and chief planner for the Christchurch Regional Planning Authority. Gradually tenancies changed to a mix of residential apartments and professional rooms for doctors and dentists. By 1970 occupants included a sales representative, orthopaedic surgeon, eye specialist, photographer, and electrical engineer. Before the 2010 and 2011 Canterbury earthquakes the building was still occupied by a mix of residential and professional owners, and the annex was in commercial use. Today the main block awaits repair, having received significant earthquake damage, and the annex has been demolished.

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.

Victoria Mansions have cultural significance as they demonstrate the way of life of past residents, including that of country visitors who would come to the city in the late 1930s for social or recreational reasons and required short-term accommodation.

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.

Victoria Mansions have high architectural significance for their Moderne style design in 1931 by Heathcote Helmore. Helmore was one of the principals of the firm Helmore and Cotterill, who were successful Christchurch architects between the world wars. Helmore (1894-1965) and Guy Cotterill (1897-1981) had both attended Christ's College, served articles under Cecil Wood, and then travelled to England, via the United States, in 1920. Their partnership, which began in 1924, ended with Helmore's death in 1965. They specialised in Colonial Georgian Revival houses but also undertook commercial commissions such as the Cook and Ross building in Victoria Square (1926), the Christchurch Golf Club clubrooms at Shirley (1927) and Hanmer Lodge (1930-32).

The building has an L-shaped footprint with its primary elevations facing north and west. It is four stories high, topped with a penthouse apartment. The northern facade is symmetrical with balconies extend across the elevation between projecting end bays. The roof is flat, the frame windows are of simple rectilinear form, and detailing is simplified and derived from classical stylistic elements. The western façade is a simplified version of the north, with three cantilevered balconies emphasising the symmetry of the design. The building is designed and oriented so as to maximize light and most apartments have access to a balcony. The entrance doors on the ground floor are of multi-paned curved glass. An Art Deco style Otis lift services the floors. The building was refurbished in 1982 and the majority of the steel windows were replaced in aluminium of the same profile in c1991. Internal changes have been made to some of the apartments over time for conversion to small medical rooms. Some original fixtures and fittings still remain throughout the building.

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.

Victoria Mansions has high technological significance for its reinforced concrete construction. J & W Jamieson were the contractors and the building was reported as approaching completion by Jamiesons in October 1935. Helmore and Cotterill began taking an interest in concrete construction in the late 1920s and as the building was designed in 1931, the same year as the Napier earthquake, it would have been subject to new national building standards for earthquake safety. Contemporary safety and stylistic considerations encouraged the omission of extraneous ornamentation, although the ironwork used for the balcony balustrades on the north façade and the relief detailing of the end bay pilasters demonstrate craftsmanship significance. The interior features decorative detailing and timber doors and panelling.

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.

Victoria Mansions have high contextual significance within the central city, in close proximity to a number of other listed items, including the former Teachers' College in Peterborough Street. The building is a landmark due to its prominent corner location overlooking a busy intersection in a popular shopping street. As the backdrop to the Jubilee Tower (relocated to its present site in 1930-31), Victoria Mansions have a high level of recognition.

The setting consists of the area of land on which the building stands, on the triangle formed by the intersection of Victoria and Montreal Streets. There are garden beds and plantings on the north side of the building. The building has further contextual significance in relation to the former dwelling Santa Barbara at 169 Victoria Street in terms of its style, materials and detailing. Victoria Mansions is also part of a cohort of other 1930s Art Deco or Moderne apartment buildings to the west of the central city, including the West Avon Flats in Montreal Street (1930) and the Bealey Avenue Maisonettes, which were also designed by Helmore and Cotterill (1939-40). It came closest in size and scale to the seven-storey St Elmo Courts in Hereford Street (1929-30, demolished 2011).

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.

Victoria Mansions and its setting has archaeological significance because it has the potential to provide archaeological evidence relating to construction methods and materials, and other human activity, including that which occurred before 1900. Victoria Street was a major thoroughfare and a centre of commercial and other activity in the early colonial period and the intersection of Victoria, Salisbury and Montreal Streets was very built up by 1877.

ASSESSMENT STATEMENT

Victoria Mansions and setting have high overall significance to Christchurch, including Banks Peninsula. The apartment building has high historical and social significance for its construction in 1935 to meet the demand for a new type of central city accommodation. Victoria Mansions have cultural significance as they demonstrate the way of life of past residents, including that of country visitors who would come to the city in the late 1930s for social or recreational reasons and required short-term accommodation. It has high architectural significance for its design by Heathcote Helmore in the Moderne style. The building has technological and craftsmanship significance for its reinforced concrete construction and simplified classical detailing and high contextual significance as a landmark due to its distinctive appearance and prominent location. Victoria Mansions and its setting has archaeological significance because it has the potential to provide archaeological evidence relating to human activity, including that which occurred before 1900.

REFERENCES:

CCC heritage files - 91 Victoria Street

Robert Esau 'Helmore and Cotterill: The Formative Years' MA Thesis, School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury, 1988.

Historic place # 3142 – Heritage NZ List

<http://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/3142>

<http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/5n15/northcroft-anna-holmes>

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