

**CHRISTCHURCH DISTRICT PLAN – SCHEDULED HERITAGE PLACE
HERITAGE ASSESSMENT – STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
HERITAGE ITEM NUMBER 571**

***FORMER DIGBY'S COMMERCIAL SCHOOL /
WORCESTER CHAMBERS AND SETTING – 69
WORCESTER 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.

The former Digby's Commercial School building is of high historical and social significance for its construction in 1928 for Digby's, a prominent and successful private secretarial college. The school was established in the Triangle on High Street as the Christchurch Shorthand and Technical School by Miss A. M. Carr in 1892. It offered tuition by day, evening and correspondence lessons in shorthand, typewriting, bookkeeping, commercial practice and business correspondence. In 1898 Carr took her star ex-pupil Henry Digby into partnership. Known for his brilliance as a shorthand writer and typist, Digby became the school's principal. In c1905 he took over the business, renaming it Digby's Commercial School. The school shifted to new purpose-built premises on Worcester Street in 1928, where it operated until c1950.

In 1950 the property passed out of Digby family ownership. Subsequent owners have included the Totalisator Agency Board (TAB, 1950-58), Bruce and John Britten, Worcester Chambers Ltd., and Trustees of the New Zealand District of the Hibernian Australasian Catholic Benefit Society of Wellington (1971-1981). The National Mutual Life Association occupied the building from 1981-1998. The lower floor contained an artist's studio from 1995 until c.2002, while from 1995 until the Canterbury Earthquakes the upper floor was utilised for English language tuition.

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 Digby's Commercial School building is of cultural significance for its association with vocational training, first as a purpose-built commercial college in the first half of the 20th century, and in more recent times for English language tuition. The secretarial training provided by the School was evidence of the growing participation of women in the workforce at the time.

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 Digby's Commercial School building is of high architectural and aesthetic significance for its design by Cecil Wood, a leading New Zealand interwar architect who favoured the Georgian Revival style for commercial and residential buildings from the late 1920s. Wood also designed Weston House (demolished), Bishopscourt in Park Terrace (demolished) and the Dining Hall at Christ's College. The building is comparable to Helmore and Cotterill's Georgian Revival style Cook and Ross, on the corner of Armagh and Colombo Streets (1926-27).

The two-storey brick building has a hipped roof, which is clad in slate facing the street, whereas the rear of the building is roofed with iron. The Worcester Street façade is near symmetrical, with four evenly spaced multi-paned sash windows topped by cement keystones on the first floor, which are aligned with a door and three similar windows on the ground floor. The windows on the east, west and north walls in comparison have a more variable arrangement, and less detailed decoration. The ends of the Worcester Street façade are also articulated with cement quoins, and urns above parapet level, and the entrance door has a decorative fanlight above and is sheltered with a hood supported by corbels. A decoratively scalloped cement band is located just above ground level. The school originally had a bicycle house and area of open yard to the rear, but the latter was subsequently built on.

Alterations were carried out to the building in 1958, including a substantial addition to the rear, by Miles Warren. Alterations for internal office fit outs were carried out in 1963 and 1987, and there were further internal alterations in 1981, 1995-6, 2000-1 and 2006. After the earthquakes of 2010-11, a chimney on the east wall was partially dismantled and capped at roof height, while there was some strengthening of the external brickwork, and repair of internal plasterwork. As a consequence of the many alterations to the interior, little heritage fabric, features or layout remain other than the stair, some radiators, and a handful of doors with transoms in the front section of 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.

The former Digby's Commercial School building has high technological and craftsmanship significance for its masonry construction and façade detailing. The contractor for the building was Neil McGillivray. The joinery shows evidence of past techniques and skills and the brickwork shows an attention to detail and high level of skill, particularly in the treatment of the angled bricks above the windows. Modern lettering above the entrance has replaced the original lettering which spelt out the name of the school across the middle of the façade.

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 Digby's Commercial School building is of high contextual significance for its contribution to a group of heritage buildings in Worcester Boulevard and for its landmark status. The building is located in Worcester Boulevard between Cathedral Square and the Canterbury Museum, Arts Centre of Christchurch and Botanic Gardens. It is a landmark due to its distinctive style and prominence in the streetscape.

The setting consists of a rectangular area of land, most of which is built over at present. The building shares a similar height and degree of architectural detailing as its neighbour to the east, the Harley Chambers building. It is across Worcester Boulevard from the Canterbury Club and further to the east are the Avon River and the former Municipal Buildings.

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 Digby's Commercial School building and its setting is of archaeological significance because it has potential to provide archaeological evidence relating to past buildings and other human activity, including that which occurred prior to 1900. Structures on the site can be seen in both the 1862 and 1877 maps of the central city. The site sits within the immediate vicinity of the Ōtākaro-Avon River, this section of which is scheduled as a site of Ngāi Tahu Cultural Significance in the Christchurch District Plan as the location of Puāri Pā.

ASSESSMENT STATEMENT

The former Digby's Commercial School building and its setting has high overall significance to Christchurch, including Banks Peninsula. The building is of high historical and social significance for its association with the Digby's Commercial School and its former staff and pupils and for its ongoing use as a facility for training and education. The building has cultural significance for its association with education and vocational training during the mid-

20th century and again in more recent decades. The building has high architectural and aesthetic significance for its Georgian Revival design by nationally renowned architect Cecil Wood. It has high technological and craftsmanship significance because it provides evidence of contemporary construction techniques and high quality architectural detailing. The building has high contextual significance as a landmark on Worcester Boulevard and proximity to numerous other listed heritage buildings and places. The building has archaeological significance because it has the potential to provide archaeological evidence relating to past buildings and human activity on the site prior to 1900.

REFERENCES:

Christchurch City Council Heritage files - *69 Worcester Street*

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Survey map of Christchurch, Fooks, 1862

Survey map of Christchurch Strouts, 1877

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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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