



**DISTRICT PLAN – LISTED HERITAGE PLACE  
HERITAGE ASSESSMENT – STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE  
HERITAGE ITEM NUMBER 84**

***MOORHOUSE STATUE AND SETTING – 7 RICCARTON  
AVENUE, BOTANIC GARDENS, 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 Moorhouse Statue has high historical significance because it commemorates William Sefton Moorhouse (1825-81), the longest serving Canterbury Provincial Superintendent (1857-62 and 1866-68). Moorhouse was born in England where he trained to be a lawyer before immigrating to New Zealand with his two brothers in 1851. He was first elected to public office, with a win in the Akaroa electorate in 1854, and in 1855 he was elected to the Canterbury Provincial Council.

Moorhouse's successful efforts to raise funds for the railway tunnel between Lyttelton and Christchurch gained him much popularity but his own financial problems prompted him to resign as Superintendent in February 1863. The following month he was re-elected as a

council member for Kaiapoi. In 1865 Moorhouse was elected to national office as the first Member of Parliament for new seat of Westland. The very next year he returned to office as Superintendent of Canterbury and in this role he witnessed the opening of the Lyttelton rail tunnel to passenger traffic on 9 December 1867. In 1868 he resigned as both Superintendent and Member for Westland. Moorhouse was elected Mayor of Wellington in 1874 and once again held a seat in Parliament as a Member for Christchurch in 1875. He was still a sitting MP at the time of his death.

An appeal was launched by the then Mayor James Gapes for a commemorative statue shortly after Moorhouse's death in 1881. The work was funded by subscription and a public holiday was declared for the unveiling by His Excellency the Governor of NZ Sir William Jervois on 22 December 1885. The statue is also significant as a reminder of the Provincial Council era in New Zealand's political history. His name is also, as are the other three Provincial Superintendents, in the naming of the streets of the four avenues that bound the central city in Christchurch; by the the Moorhouse Range and Sefton Peak in the Southern Alps, and Moorhouse and Sefton Streets in Wellington also commemorate him as one of Canterbury's early politicians.

The statue is one of number of single figure commemorative works in the city - others include Captain Cook, Queen Victoria, R F Scott, J R Godley, J E Fitzgerald and William Rolleston.

## **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 Moorhouse Statue has high cultural significance for its commemorative value. The inscription on the stone plinth reads: 'William Sefton Moorhouse to whose energy and perseverance Canterbury owes the tunnel between port and plains'. The statue also has cultural significance as an example of the cultural societal habit, particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, of the use of single figure public statuary to memorialise significant local, national and international people generally after their death.

## **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 Moorhouse Statue has high aesthetic significance as an example of Victorian 'coat and trousers' realism by British sculptor G A Lawson (1832-1904). Lawson is associated with the New Sculpture movement in Britain, which sought greater naturalism and realism in sculpture. His first major work was the Duke of Wellington figure atop a large column in the centre of Liverpool (1866). Lawson produced a model for the Moorhouse statue based on photographs of his subject. The model was then cast in England and shipped to Lyttelton, arriving in August 1885. The contemporary clothing and seated pose of the figure are notable aspects of the modernity of Lawson's depiction. Conflicting reports at the time of the statue's arrival in Christchurch said that it was not considered to be a good likeness of William Moorhouse or was 'remarkably truthful'.

## **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 Moorhouse Statue has high technological and craftsmanship significance as an example of Victorian bronze casting and for the naturalistic skill with which the figure's contemporary dress has been rendered by the sculptor Lawson to suggest the bulk and drape of the clothing that Moorhouse is depicted as wearing.

## **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 Moorhouse Statue has high contextual significance for its location within the Botanic Gardens, in direct line with one of Gardens' Rolleston Avenue entrances. It is one of three statues sited on Rolleston Avenue that memorialise former Canterbury Provincial Council Superintendents; Moorhouse, William Rolleston and J E Fitzgerald. A statue to Superintendent Samuel Bealey was never erected. The Fitzgerald Statue to the south of Moorhouse is also cast in bronze, while the Rolleston Statue is carved from marble. In a wider context the Moorhouse Statue also has significance as a historic work in a large collection of public art that enhances the environs of the city.

## **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 Moorhouse Statue and its setting are of archaeological significance as they have some potential to hold evidence of human activity on the site before 1900. Prior to European settlement, a large area that included the eastern part of the Botanic Gardens was a mahinga kai (food resource area) for local iwi.

## **ASSESSMENT STATEMENT**

The Moorhouse Statue has high overall significance to Christchurch, including Banks Peninsula. The statue has historical significance because it is a sculptural portrait of a 19<sup>th</sup> century Canterbury politician who contributed to the development of the region with his support for the Lyttelton rail tunnel. The Moorhouse Statue has high cultural significance as evidence of the practice of commissioning statuary to commemorate notable public figures and aesthetic significance for its Victorian New Sculpture modernity. The Moorhouse Statue has high technological and craftsmanship significance for the technical accomplishment of its sculpting and casting and high contextual significance in relation to other public art works

along Rolleston Avenue and in the inner city more generally. The Moorhouse Statue and its setting have archaeological significance in view of the development of the Botanic Gardens from the late 1850s and the Maori association with the area in pre-colonial times.

#### REFERENCES:

'W S Moorhouse' Dictionary of NZ Biography entry – Te Ara The Encyclopedia of New Zealand

<http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1m53/moorhouse-william-sefton>

Christchurch Statues

<http://christchurchcitylibraries.com/heritage/places/memorials/statues/>

Public Art in Christchurch (1997)

[http://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/media/uploads/2010\\_07/PublicArt-ChCh-1997.pdf](http://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/media/uploads/2010_07/PublicArt-ChCh-1997.pdf)

*Colonist* 15 August 1885, p. 4; *Grey River Argus* 15 August 1885, p. 2

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