

**CHRISTCHURCH DISTRICT PLAN – SCHEDULED HERITAGE PLACE  
HERITAGE ASSESSMENT – STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE  
HERITAGE ITEM NUMBER 1371  
*DWELLING AND SETTING - 51 RADLEY STREET,  
CHRISTCHURCH***



**PHOTOGRAPH: G. WRIGHT 18/05/15**

**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 dwelling at 51 Radley Street, Woolston, has historical and social significance for its connection with builder Charles Gasson and the Gasson family, and as a home which reflects the social position and aspirations of a skilled tradesman in Edwardian Christchurch.

Charles Gasson senior (1846-1905), a builder, and his wife Harriet shifted their family from Stanley Street, Sydenham, to the newly developed Normanby Street (Radley Street from 1910), Woolston, in the 1890s.<sup>1</sup> In 1902 their son Charles James Gasson (1879-1949), a builder and prominent rugby and cricket player, purchased a section near his parents at what would become 51 Radley Street. On 20 April 1904 Charles junior married Lilla Baylis (1883-1969). A little over a month later on 7 June 1904 he drew a first mortgage on his Woolston property. This is likely to mark the construction of a family home for the newly-weds.

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<sup>1</sup> Gasson Street in Sydenham, formerly part of Madras Street, was named after the family in 1948.

The first house Charles built for his family was modestly-scaled (with the four rooms typical of a square villa), but unusually detailed. The high degree of finish evident in the house could be seen as an expression of Charles' pride in his skill (he is remembered as something of a perfectionist by his granddaughter) and in his new family, but undoubtedly also served as a good advertisement for his trade. Initially working for his father, Charles spent his career building houses - primarily in the Linwood area. In the mid-1900s he was working with Albert Love in the firm of Love and Gasson, building contractors. The partnership lasted until July 1909; thereafter Charles worked for himself. Three months after the dissolution of the firm, Charles and Lilla sold their Woolston house and moved their young family to Lilla's home town of Leeston. By 1914 however the family was back in Christchurch, where Charles plied his trade until his retirement in the late 1930s.

The next owners of 51 Radley Street after the Gassons were John Hunt, his wife Eleanor (1879-1941), and their family of four. The Hunts had been farmers in South Loburn in North Canterbury, but when they moved to Woolston, John became a labourer. After Eleanor's death, the property was sold to insurance assessor George Shearman. In 1956 he transferred it to labourer William Shearman, who lived there until his death in 1979. After passing through just two families in the seventy years since Charles Gasson sold it, the property then began to change hands at a faster pace. Over the next fifteen years 51 Radley Street was sold four times. The present owners purchased in 1995 and have raised their family there. The property sustained moderate damage in the Canterbury earthquake sequence of 2010-2011 but remained habitable.

### **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.*

51 Radley Street has cultural significance for the capacity it has to illustrate the lifestyle of a skilled tradesman and his family in the early twentieth century. The formality of the house with its decorative parlour reflects the formality of Edwardian life. It could also be seen as a reflection of Charles Gasson's pride in his trade and his socio-economic aspirations in an era of when self-improvement was an admired value.

### **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 villa at 51 Radley Street has architectural and aesthetic significance as an otherwise conventional small Edwardian villa with a particularly high degree of ornamentation.

In plan and size, the house is a conventional small timber Edwardian square villa. There are four similar-sized rooms opening off a central hall, and a rear kitchen lean-to. Unlike many square villas built in Christchurch however, 51 Radley Street has an unconventional appearance and a high degree of architectural ornamentation and decorative finish. The front (western) elevation has twin gables with shingled and corbelled build-outs. Under each gable is a box-bay window. Between the box-bays

is a small gabled entry porch with a timber fretwork fringe and brackets. Each of the four principal rooms has a ceiling with plaster rose and coving, and a fireplace with surround and register. The corbelled chimney tops have been removed but the chimney breasts remain intact inside the house. The hall has a plaster arch. Most original interior joinery remains extant.

What makes 51 Radley Street particularly special however is the elaborately-painted ceiling in the parlour. The plaster coving is painted in alternating bands of shades of pink and green with stencilled motifs and corner bosses. Inside this frame, the ceiling is festooned with ribbons, garlands of flowers and swags of fruit. At the centre of the composition is a large plaster rose with its detail picked out in colour. Around the wall above the picture rail is a pastoral frieze with swans and cattle.

No other surviving comparable domestic decorative scheme is currently known in the city, and exactly why it features in this comparatively modest house is unknown. Wharetiki (1909), a much larger Manchester Street villa, had a not-dissimilar painted scheme but this house was destroyed in 2011. 196 Fitzgerald (1907) is a conventional small villa with an elaborately plastered (but not painted) interior. As Charles Gasson himself was not known as an artist, it has been suggested that the ceiling at 51 Radley Street was painted by (an unknown) decorator with whom he worked.

Modest alterations have been undertaken on the lean-to kitchen-living area at the rear. The house and its ceilings sustained moderate damage in the Canterbury Earthquakes in 2010-2011, but remain extant and retain a high degree of originality. Repairs have not yet taken place.

The whole interior of the building has heritage significance including the layout and spaces, structure and linings, fixtures, hardware, materials and finishes. The interior reflects the materials, design and aesthetics of the period, as well as the way of life of its inhabitants and changes over time.

### **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.*

51 Radley Street has technological and craftsmanship for its external architectural ornamentation and internal decorative finish, which are more extensive and of a higher quality than would normally be expected in an otherwise modestly scaled square villa in a working class suburb.

The stand-out feature in the house is the painted plaster ceiling in the parlour, which is a rare survivor in the city. The house was built by and for Charles Gasson junior, who evidently lavished considerable attention on his own home. Like nearby 37 Maunsell Street (a listed heritage item) - built by and for builder William Taylor in 1898 - 51 Radley Street would also have served as an advertisement of its owner's skill as a tradesman. The ceiling painter has not been identified.

### **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.*

51 Radley Street has contextual significance on its site in its suburban setting. The setting of the dwelling consists of its immediate parcel, an established standard suburban section. The house is located towards the front of the section, and is highly visible from Radley Street through a period style post and wire fence. A section of the front garden was lost to road widening in the 1990s. Radley Street consists of a mix of dwelling types from the first half of the twentieth century. To the rear of the house is a garage and sleep-out built in a sympathetic style in the mid-2000s.

### **ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND SCIENTIFIC SIGNIFICANCE**

*Archaeological or scientific values that demonstrate or are associated with: the potential to provide information through physical or scientific evidence and understanding about social historical, cultural, spiritual, technological or other values of past events, activities, structures or people.*

51 Radley Street and its setting are of archaeological significance because they have 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. The section was created as part of an extensive subdivision in the late 1890s; prior to this the area was farmland.

### **ASSESSMENT STATEMENT**

51 Radley Street, including the whole interior and setting, are of heritage significance to the Christchurch District including Banks Peninsula. The dwelling has historical, social and cultural significance for its connection with east Christchurch builder Charles Gasson, and as a home which reflects the social position, aspirations and pride of a skilled tradesman in Edwardian Christchurch. The dwelling has architectural and aesthetic significance as a conventionally planned but ornate small Edwardian square villa. The dwelling has technological and craftsmanship for its external architectural ornamentation and internal decorative finish, which are more extensive and of a higher quality than would normally be expected in an otherwise modest villa in what was predominantly a working class suburb. The dwelling has contextual significance in its setting, an established suburban section. The former dwelling and its setting are of archaeological significance because they have 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.

### **REFERENCES:**

Pers. comm. G. Wright, A. Fox (Charles Gasson's granddaughter) 22/10/15

Certificates of Title, Deposit Plans

**REPORT DATED:** 16/11/15, **REVISION** 24/11/15 **UPDATED:** 16 DECEMBER 2021

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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