

**DISTRICT PLAN – LISTED HERITAGE PLACE
HERITAGE ASSESSMENT – STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
HERITAGE ITEM NUMBER 230
*SIGN OF THE TAKAHE AND SETTING – 200 HACKTHORNE
ROAD, CHRISTCHURCH***



PHOTOGRAPH: M.VAIR-PIOVA, 5/01/2015

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 *Sign of the Takahe* has high historical and social significance for its association with politician and conservationist Harry Ell (1862-1934) and as a key element within his visionary Summit Road scheme. The great life-long preoccupation of Ell, who served both as a central and local government politician, was the promotion of a summit road from Godley Head to Akaroa, providing public access to all parts of the Port Hills. Resthouses would be distributed along the route, offering refreshments and modest accommodation. The Summit Road Association was founded by Ell in 1909 to foster the objective, and although the ambitious project was incomplete at the time of his death, he had seen a substantial portion of his scheme to fruition, including the establishment of four resthouses: the Signs of the Kiwi, Bellbird, Packhorse and Takahe.

The *Sign of the Takahe* was planned from the beginning to be the largest and most important of the resthouses. Construction of the building, begun in 1918, was sufficiently advanced for

the Tram Terminus Resthouse, as it was then known, to open for business in 1920. Argument, financial difficulty, depression and war delayed completion, however, and it was not until 1948 that the building was finally finished. Six years earlier (1942) it had been taken over by the Christchurch City Council. The building remained in use for the purpose for which it was built, as a restaurant and tearooms, until the 2010/11 Canterbury earthquakes. In September 2013 the City Council approved plans to repair and strengthen the building to 67% of NBS. Work on this began in 2014.

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 *Sign of the Takahe* has cultural significance because it embodies the emergence in the early 20th century of new attitudes towards environmentalism, as well as contemporary habits of leisure and recreation. Harry Ell is said to have been New Zealand's 'strongest advocate for scenery preservation' in the early 20th century (www.nzhistory.net.nz) and his development of the Summit Road was a tangible expression of a growing modern awareness of the cultural value of scenery and historic sites. At the same time, as standards of living rose, increased leisure time meant that Christchurch residents could visit and enjoy amenities such as Ell's resthouses.

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 *Sign of the Takahe* has high architectural and aesthetic significance as an example of 20th century Neo-Gothic romanticism that was conceived by Harry Ell. It is also significant for its association with Christchurch architect John Goddard Collins, who was involved with the project by 1934. Collins, principal of the firm of Collins and West, was active through the first half of the 20th century, designing commercial, religious and domestic buildings in a variety of styles. Other notable buildings by Collins in the Neo-Gothic style include the Nurses' Memorial Chapel at Christchurch Hospital and the Christchurch Press building (demolished as a result of the 2011 earthquake). A *New Zealand Herald* article of 25 September 1934 reported that the completed plans for the *Sign of the Takahe* would result in a building in the 'pure Gothic style'; 'twice the size of the present one, but [they] will in style be an expansion of the principles of the portion constructed under the supervision of Mr HG Ell' (*NZ Herald* 25 September 1934, p. 12).

The building has aesthetic significance because of the quality of its decorative scheme and execution. According to Heritage New Zealand the *Sign of the Takahe* 'was saved by the Depression work schemes, which enabled Ell to use government-funded unemployed workers, many of whom were skilled artisans. These men produced the fine detailed carving in both wood and stone that typify the Sign of the Takahe both inside and out' (Heritage NZ List, online summary).

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 *Sign of the Takahe* has technological and craftsmanship significance for the quality of its construction and decoration and its use of local materials. The building's stone carving and interior decorative scheme, featuring heraldic devices, are particularly noteworthy.

Photographs published in the *Auckland Star* in July 1938 showed craftsman quarrying stone, carving and painting heraldic shields for the building (*Auckland Star* 2 July 1938, p. 1). Ell's *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* entry (see web link below) credits the relief workers, known as Ell's Angels, and 'expert carver Mary Sophia Douglas' with the fine craftsmanship of the *Sign of the Takahe*. An article in the *NZ Herald* issue of 13 June 1939 reports that a Miss M S Douglas was responsible for the tearoom in the building at the time (*NZ Herald* 13 June 1939, p. 12). Further information about her role in the project is not currently to hand. Also notable in the building are a pair of windows gifted by the Freemasons of Canterbury in 1938.

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 *Sign of the Takahe* has high contextual significance as the largest and most elaborate of Harry Ell's Summit Road resthouses. The building is positioned to enjoy extensive views of the city and is a defining element within the residential suburb of Cashmere. The elevation of the *Sign of the Takahe*, its large scale, distinctive architectural style and prominent site at the intersection of Dyer's Pass and Hackthorne Roads mean that it is an important city landmark, and acts as a gateway from this section of the Port Hills to the city. The use of local stone ties the building to its site and also establishes an association between this structure and other major city buildings such as the Arts Centre, Canterbury Museum and former Provincial Council 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 *Sign of the Takahe* 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.

ASSESSMENT STATEMENT

The *Sign of the Takahe* and setting is of high heritage significance to Christchurch and Banks Peninsula. The building has high historical and social significance for its association with Harry Ell. The building has cultural significance as an example of early 20th century attitudes to scenery preservation and personal leisure. The building's high architectural and

aesthetic significance is due to its Neo-Gothic style, which was conceived by Ell with input from prominent city architect J. G. Collins. The technological significance of the building lies in the quality of its construction and ornamentation, thanks in part to a skilled Depression-era workforce. The *Sign of the Takahe* has high contextual significance for its impact within the immediate locale and its relationship to the three other resthouses that were developed by Ell along the Summit Road. The *Sign of the Takahe* 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.

REFERENCES:

CCC Heritage Files – Sign of the Takahe

CHRISTCHURCH CITY LIBRARIES

<http://christchurchcitylibraries.com/heritage/places/buildings/signs-kiwi-takahe/>

HISTORIC PLACE CATEGORY 1, HERITAGE NEW ZEALAND LIST

<http://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/275>

BIOGRAPHY OF HARRY ELL, TE ARA ENCYCLOPEDIA OF NEW ZEALAND

<http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/3e4/ell-henry-george>

<http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/culture/scenery-preservation/the-scenery-preservation-act>

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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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