

DISTRICT PLAN – LISTED HERITAGE PLACE
HERITAGE ASSESSMENT – STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
NGAIO MARSH HOUSE AND GARDEN, 37 VALLEY ROAD,
CASHMERE

Dame Ngaio Marsh (1895-1982) was a world-renowned crime writer and theatre director, and one of New Zealand's leading twentieth century literary and theatrical figures. Marsh was born, educated, and lived most of her life in Christchurch. She began her creative life in the visual arts, training at the Canterbury College School of Art, and then achieving moderate success painting and exhibiting with 'The Group', a collective of noted New Zealand painters. It was in the fields of literature and theatre however that she excelled. By the 1930s Ngaio's crime fiction had gained an international following, and she was considered one of the 'Queens of Crime' along with authors such as Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers. She was also a theatre director of note, specialising in Shakespeare. She received an OBE in 1948 for her services to New Zealand theatre, and was made a Dame Commander of the British Empire in 1966.

37 Valley Road (originally known as Marton Cottage) was designed in 1906 for Ngaio's parents, Rose and Henry Marsh, by Rose's cousin the prominent architect Samuel Hurst Seager. Apart from periods overseas, Ngaio lived in the house for the remainder of her life, extending the originally modest bungalow on several occasions. She particularly enjoyed her home's terraced garden, which she largely designed, planted and maintained herself. In 1992 the property was purchased by the Ngaio Marsh Trust. The Trust operate the house and garden as a museum dedicated to the memory of Dame Ngaio.

**DISTRICT PLAN – LISTED HERITAGE PLACE
HERITAGE ASSESSMENT – STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
HERITAGE ITEM NUMBER 522
*FORMER DWELLING AND SETTING, NGAIO MARSH HOUSE -
37 VALLEY ROAD, CASHMERE***



PHOTOGRAPH: B. SMYTH, 07/01/2015

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.

37 Valley Road (originally known as Marton Cottage) has high historical and social significance for its close association with Ngaio Marsh, one of New Zealand's leading twentieth century literary and theatrical figures.

Ngaio Marsh (1895-1982) was born, educated, and apart from some lengthy periods in the UK, lived most of her life in Christchurch. Initially she attended Canterbury College School of Art and painted with the noted 'Group' before WWII. Although a competent artist, it was in the fields of crime writing and theatre direction that Marsh made her name, gaining an international reputation in both of these fields of endeavour.

By the 1930s Ngaio's crime fiction had gained an international following, and she was considered one of the 'Queens of Crime' along with authors such as Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers. She was also a theatre director of note, specialising in Shakespeare. She received an OBE in 1948 for her services to New Zealand theatre, and was made a Dame Commander of the British Empire in 1966.

37 Valley Road was designed and built for the Marsh family in 1906. Ngaio lived in the house for the greater part of her life, extending the originally modest bungalow on several occasions. After her death in 1982, the house remained with the family for a further decade until the Ngaio Marsh Trust was formed to purchase the property in 1992. The Trust operates the house as a museum dedicated to the memory of Dame Ngaio. It remains much as she left it, with her household effects in-situ.

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.

37 Valley Road has high cultural significance for its association with leading crime writer and theatre director Dame Ngaio Marsh. Ngaio began her creative life in the visual arts, training at the Canterbury College School of Art, and then achieving moderate success painting and exhibiting with 'The Group', a collective of noted New Zealand painters but she excelled in the fields of literature and theatre. It was in this area that she made a huge contribution to the cultural life of the city through a particular period in time. Internationally with authors such as Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers, she was a major contributor to a particular epoch of crime writing culture.

The dwelling also has cultural significance as a building type – that of the New Zealand bungalow and one of a number designed by architect S Hurst Seager which reflected the life style of a particular period in 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.

37 Valley Road has high architectural and aesthetic significance as principally the work of noted Christchurch architect Samuel Hurst Seager.

The dwelling was designed in 1906 for Ngaio's parents, Rose and Henry Marsh, by Rose's cousin, prominent architect Samuel Hurst Seager. As a pioneer of the bungalow form in New Zealand, Seager built Rose and Henry a basic but contemporary home that expressed his ideals and stood out from the villas within the same epoch on the hills around it. Although the house has been altered and extended down the years, the essence of Seager's design remains. This is particularly evident in the Arts and Crafts detail in the dining room.

Samuel Hurst Seager (1855-1933) came to New Zealand with his parents in 1870, and took over the family construction business following the death of his father in 1874. After working for leading architect Benjamin Mountfort and studying architecture at Canterbury College and in London, he established his career in Christchurch with his prize-winning entry for the new municipal building in 1885. Seager was an innovative designer, at the forefront of architectural and planning theory and practise in New Zealand in the decades either side of 1900. He believed particularly in the potential of good design to change and improve society, and wrote prolifically on town planning, architecture and the built environment. Although he designed houses of many styles and sizes, including some of the city's most notable turn-of-the-century mansions, he is remembered particularly for introducing the radical informality of the bungalow style to New Zealand with his house for John Macmillan-Brown in Cashmere in 1898. Influenced by the new Garden City concept, Seager's *The Spur* development (1902-

1914) took his ideals a step further and introduced the country's first informal bungalow landscape. This manifested two strands of his philosophy – his search for an indigenous architectural expression, and his desire to promote new ways of living through architecture.

Later alterations were made to 37 Valley Road by respected architectural practices such as Helmore and Cotterill in 1948 and Don Donnithorne. Donnithorne adapted the house towards the end of Dame Ngaio's life to allow her to remain at home in spite of her failing health. Despite the later alterations the house retains a high degree of integrity and authenticity.

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.

37 Valley Road has craftsmanship significance for its Seager-designed Arts and Crafts timber detail, and a change of building technology and craftsmanship patterns of the time. The panelled dining room is particularly noteworthy.

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 house has high contextual significance on its site and in relation to the garden. The setting of the house is contiguous with its land parcel. The house is located in the south east corner of a large mature garden setting that descends to the north in a series of terraces. The garden had a central place in Dame Ngaio's life. The house and its garden setting are the two elements that comprise the Ngaio Marsh heritage place. The wider context of this heritage place is the hillside suburb of Cashmere, which contains a number of Seager dwellings.

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.

37 Valley Road 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.

ASSESSMENT STATEMENT

37 Valley Road (originally known as Marton Cottage) is of high overall significance to the Christchurch District, including Banks Peninsula. It has high historical, social and cultural significance as a New Zealand style bungalow and one of a number designed by architect S Hurst Seager which reflected the life style of a particular period in time. Its intimate association with Dame Ngaio Marsh, world-renowned crime writer and theatre director, and

one of New Zealand's leading twentieth century literary and theatrical figures is critical to its high historical, social and cultural significance. The dwelling has high architectural and aesthetic significance as principally the work of noted Christchurch architect Samuel Hurst Seager, who expressed his progressive design philosophy in the bungalow he designed for his cousin Rose Marsh and her family. 37 Valley Road has craftsmanship significance for its Seager-designed Arts and Crafts timber detail, and a change of building technology and craftsmanship patterns of the time. The house has high contextual significance on its site and in relation to the garden. 37 Valley Road 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:

CCC Heritage File: Ngaio Marsh House, 37 Valley Road

REPORT DATED: 09/09/2014

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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DISTRICT PLAN – LISTED HERITAGE PLACE
HERITAGE ASSESSMENT – STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
HERITAGE ITEM NUMBER 1283
NGAIO MARSH HOUSE GARDEN - 37 VALLEY ROAD,
CASHMERE



PHOTOGRAPH: CCC HERITAGE FILES, 2005

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 garden setting at 37 Valley Road (originally known as Marton Cottage) has high historical and social significance for its close association with Dame Ngaio Marsh and her parents. Dame Ngaio was one of New Zealand's leading twentieth century literary and theatrical figures.

Ngaio Marsh (1895-1982) was born, educated, and apart from some lengthy periods in the UK, lived most of her life in Christchurch. Initially she attended Canterbury College School of Art and painted with the noted 'Group' before WWII. Although a competent artist, it was in the fields of crime writing and theatre direction that Marsh made her name, gaining an international reputation in both of these fields of endeavour.

By the 1930s Ngaio's crime fiction had gained an international following, and she was considered one of the 'Queens of Crime' along with authors such as Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers. She was also a theatre director of note, specialising in Shakespeare.

She received an OBE in 1948 for her services to New Zealand theatre, and was made a Dame Commander of the British Empire in 1966.

37 Valley Road was designed and built for the Marsh family in 1906. Ngaio lived in the house for the greater part of her life and particularly enjoyed its garden, which she largely designed, planted and maintained herself. After her death in 1982, the house remained with the family for a further decade until the Ngaio Marsh Trust was formed to purchase the property in 1992. The Trust operates the property as a museum dedicated to the memory of Dame Ngaio. The house and garden are maintained much as Ngaio left them.

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 garden setting at 37 Valley Road has high cultural significance for its association with leading crime writer and theatre director Dame Ngaio Marsh. Most of her detective novels were written while Dame Ngaio was resident at 37 Valley Road.

The garden and setting also has cultural significance as a reflection of the interest in gardening and their reflection in the arts through artists such as Margaret Stoddart and poet Ursula Bethell who also lived on the Cashmere Hills as well as the culture of developing gardens in the first half of the 20th century in this area.

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 garden setting at 37 Valley Road is of significance as it is preserved as it was when Ngaio Marsh lived and gardened there, with its stone-walled terraces, lawn areas and rambling garden beds containing roses, shrubs and specimen and shelter belt trees. It is therefore a record of Dame Ngaio's taste, of the eclectic gardens traditionally characteristic of the hillside suburbs, and (more generally) of early and mid-twentieth century taste in gardens.

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 garden setting at 37 Valley Road is of technological and craftsmanship significance for the evidence it may provide of gardening and planting practices and plant stock from the nineteenth century.

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 garden has high contextual significance on its site and in relation to the dwelling it contains. The setting of the garden is contiguous with the land parcel. The large mature garden setting descends to the north in a series of terraces that mix lawn, garden and specimen trees. The garden setting and the dwelling are the two elements that comprise the Ngaio Marsh heritage place. The wider context of this heritage place is the hillside suburb of Cashmere, which contains a number of Seager dwellings with not dissimilar settings.

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 garden setting at 37 Valley Road is of archaeological significance because it has 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.

ASSESSMENT STATEMENT

The garden setting at 37 Valley Road is of high overall significance to the Christchurch District, including Banks Peninsula. It has high historical and social significance for its intimate association with Dame Ngaio Marsh, world-renowned crime writer and theatre director, and one of New Zealand's leading twentieth century literary and theatrical figures. Ngaio lived at the property for much of her long life and particularly enjoyed its garden, which she largely designed, planted and maintained herself. The garden has high cultural significance for its association with Dame Ngaio and her work. Most of her detective novels, for example, were written whilst she was resident at the property. The garden has high aesthetic significance because it is preserved much as it was when Dame Ngaio lived and gardened there. It is therefore a record of Dame Ngaio's taste, of the eclectic gardens traditionally characteristic of the hillside suburbs, and (more generally) of early to mid-twentieth century taste in gardens. The garden setting at 37 Valley Road is of technological and craftsmanship significance for the evidence it may provide of gardening and planting practices and plant stock from the nineteenth century. The garden has contextual significance in relation to its site, the heritage dwelling that it contains, and with the Cashmere Hills – which contain many Seager (and other) bungalows in not dissimilar settings. The garden setting at 37 Valley Road is of archaeological significance because it has 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:

CCC Heritage File: Ngaio Marsh House, 37 Valley Road

REPORT DATED: 09/09/2014

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