

**DISTRICT PLAN – LISTED HERITAGE PLACE
HERITAGE ASSESSMENT – STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
HERITAGE ITEM NUMBER 540
*DWELLING AND SETTING – 2 WHISBY ROAD,
CHRISTCHURCH***



PHOTOGRAPH: M.VAIR-PIOVA, 21/01/15

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 former Macmillan Brown dwelling and its setting has high historical significance as the home of Professor John Macmillan Brown (1845-1935), his wife Helen (nee Connon, c1857-1903) and their two daughters. Macmillan Brown was one of the three founding professors of Canterbury College (later the University of Canterbury) and also served, after his retirement from the college, as Vice-Chancellor and Chancellor of the University of New Zealand. He married Helen Connon in 1886; she was the first woman in the British Empire to graduate MA with honours (1881) and was headmistress of Christchurch Girl's High School for twelve years (1882-94). In 1897 the Macmillan Browns purchased a nine-acre property on the Cashmere Hills to serve as a winter escape from their Fendalton residence. They commissioned Helen's brother-in-law, noted local architect Samuel Hurst Seager, to build them an Arts and Crafts bungalow. It was the third house constructed in the area and was built between 1898 and 1900. The Macmillan Browns' garden was of particular note and was at the time recognised for its collection in New Zealand of native ferns. The Browns were well known for their hospitality at both their Wairarapa Terrace home and up on the hill. Ngaio Marsh's family spent the summer of 1905 staying at 2 Whisby Road, shortly afterwards

commissioning a house from Samuel Hurst Seager to be built in Valley Road Cashmere. Samuel Hurst Seager was Rose Marsh's cousin.

In 1908 Brown, by now a widower, subdivided the property and it was gradually built upon through the 20th century. Macmillan Brown spent the last years of his life living at 'Holmbank' at 35 Macmillan Avenue, which was named for the family's earlier Wairarapa Terrace home. The house remained in the Macmillan Brown family until 1919 and has had other owners since, including the Kennett family, of Kennett's Jewellery, who purchased the house in 1929 and retained family ownership until 2002. Both the Macmillan Browns and the Kennetts made the move to the Port Hills for health reasons, seeking an escape from the cold and damp of Christchurch winters. The house has a Heritage New Zealand Heritage Covenant over it and remains in private ownership.

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 Macmillan Brown dwelling has cultural significance as an example of the early residential development that occurred on the Port Hills as a retreat from the city rather than a primary place of residence. It also has cultural significance due to the people who were responsible for its erection, the Macmillan Browns and Samuel Hurst Seager, all of whom made major cultural contributions to the artistic and intellectual life of New Zealand in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In the early decades of the 20th century Cashmere was a particular reflection of the cultural residential patterns of the city and was considered to have developed a distinct sense of community based on its early popularity with intellectuals, artists and university people. Thus the former Macmillan Brown dwelling has cultural significance as an embodiment of this suburban typology.

The site of the former Macmillan Brown dwelling also has cultural significance for Maori. 'Early Maori, Ngati-Mamoe and Ngai Tahu, knew the foot of Cashmere as Iringa o Kahukura, the setting-up of the Kahukura (rainbow god). The base of the Cashmere Hill and the Spur now known as Cashmere Hill formed part of a well travelled trail from Riccarton bush to Rapaki and possibly to the Pa at Ohinetaha (Governors Bay) during tribal wars between the Ngati-Mamoe, residents of the Lyttelton Harbour area and the Ngai Tahu from the north'.

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 Macmillan Brown dwelling has high architectural and aesthetic significance as one of the earliest bungalows in New Zealand and because it represents a significant stage in Samuel Hurst Seager's architectural development. Seager (1855-1933) has been considered a visionary in regard to his views on New Zealand architectural style and he made a considerable contribution to the built environment of Christchurch. Born in England, Seager arrived in New Zealand in 1870 and then returned to England in the early 1880s to study architecture. In 1887 he married Hester, the sister of Helen Connon. Samuel Hurst Seager's cottage for the Macmillan Browns is regarded as a milestone in the history of New Zealand domestic architecture and it was the forerunner to his garden suburb development at The Spur.

Seager designed a wide variety of buildings throughout his career and from the early 20th century was increasingly interested in the wider planning context in which people lived and worked. He contributed to the Workers' Dwellings programme of the early 1900s and was the organising director of New Zealand's first town planning conference in 1919. He was also the 'official architect of New Zealand's battlefield memorials' in the early 1920s and an acknowledged expert on art gallery lighting. In about 1929 he left Christchurch for Wellington and thence retired to Sydney where he died in 1933.

The cottage built 1898-1900 is a small single-storey building with a rectangular footprint, low-pitched gable roof forms, grouped casement windows and unlined panelled interior. It stands within a reasonably generous garden setting, which may still feature remnants of Helen Brown's original planting scheme. Although some alterations have been made to the dwelling, including the addition of a room at the northwest corner, and the extension of the living room window and the kitchen, the original form and character of the dwelling remain.

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 Macmillan Brown dwelling has technological and craftsmanship significance due to its unusual structure which has been likened to that of a log cabin. The single skin walls of the house were formed by interlocking 2"x4" boards which project at the corners of the house to create a buttressing effect. It has the ability to provide evidence of a particular building type at the end of the 19th 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 former Macmillan Brown dwelling has contextual significance for its siting to maximise those aspects of the property that could contribute to a healthy living environment. The dwelling also has high contextual significance within the oeuvre of leading New Zealand architect Samuel Hurst Seager, particularly as regards his Arts and Crafts bungalow designs, especially those at The Spur. The dwelling also has contextual significance for its association with the Macmillan Brown library at the University of Canterbury, which was established and endowed by Professor Brown, and his 1908 Cashmere subdivision that was centred upon Macmillan Avenue.

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 Macmillan Brown dwelling has 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 former Macmillan Brown dwelling has high overall significance to the Christchurch District, including Banks Peninsula, as the home of Professor John Macmillan Brown his wife Helen (nee Connon,) and their two daughters as well as a being designed by architect Samuel Hurst Seager. The dwelling has high historical significance as a winter retreat for the Macmillan Browns and as one of the first residential buildings to be erected on the Cashmere Hills. The former Macmillan Brown dwelling has cultural significance as a particular reflection of the cultural residential patterns of the city and was considered to have developed a distinct sense of community based on its early popularity with intellectuals, artists and university people. The former Macmillan Brown dwelling has high architectural significance for its association with Samuel Hurst Seager and landmark status within the history of New Zealand architecture. The dwelling has technological significance due to its unusual interlocking timber construction and contextual significance in relation to its garden setting and other houses designed by S H Seager, especially those at The Spur. The former Macmillan Brown dwelling has archaeological significance given the potential for pre-1900 evidence to be discovered on the site.

REFERENCES:

Historic place # 3674 – Heritage New Zealand List
<http://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/3674>

‘John Macmillan Brown’ *DNZB Entry – Te Ara The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*
<http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/2b41/brown-john-macmillan>

Christchurch City Council *Cashmere Village Green Management Plan* (Christchurch, 2001)

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Ian Lochhead ‘The Architectural Art of Samuel Hurst Seager’ *Art New Zealand* (44, Spring 1987, pp. 92-99)

Margaret Lovell-Smith *Easily the Best: the life of Helen Connon Brown 1857-1903* (Christchurch, 2004)

Thelma Strongman *The Gardens of Canterbury* (Wellington, 1984)

John Wilson et al *Christchurch Contextual Historical Overview* (for Christchurch City Council, June 2005)

REPORT DATED: 27 NOVEMBER 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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