

**DISTRICT PLAN – LISTED HERITAGE PLACE
HERITAGE ASSESSMENT – STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
HERITAGE ITEM NUMBER 600
*MED SUBSTATION AND SETTING – RETREAT ROAD,
CHRISTCHURCH***



PHOTOGRAPH: M.VAIR-PIOVA, 7/01/2015

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 Retreat Road substation (1935) is of historical and social significance as one of many utility buildings (substations and pump houses) erected among the suburban homes they historically serviced and, in many cases, still service. The continuity of utility buildings such as the Retreat Road substation in the city's streetscape marks the introduction of drainage and power to the City. The Christchurch City Council had agreed in 1898 to establish a supply of electric power for public and private use and for street lighting. Limited supplies of electricity became available in Christchurch in 1903, after the city's rubbish destructor was commissioned in 1902 and then from the Tramway Board's power station at Falsgrave Street, which was commissioned in 1905. These small-scale beginnings eventually led to the Council's decision to generate electricity from Lake Coleridge - a progressive and innovative scheme which was taken over by central government in 1910 and became the first major hydro-electric power scheme in New Zealand when it opened in 1914. Christchurch became the first New Zealand city to benefit from construction of a major state hydro-electricity station, with power from the Lake Coleridge station reaching Christchurch in 1915.

Distribution to Christchurch consumers was managed via a network of substations throughout the city and suburbs connected by underground cables and power reticulation proceeded rapidly. Households connected to electricity and the sewage system were ushered into a new era of domestic comfort and efficiency - electricity was cheaper and cleaner than coal or gas and the benefits of electric household appliances were widely promoted. The retail distribution and sale of electricity became the responsibility of the Municipal Electricity Department of the City Council (MED), which had a visible presence throughout the city in the form of its many small ornamental substation buildings dating from the second decade of the twentieth century to the late 1940s.

The substation is also of historical and social significance for its association with the Municipal Electricity Department (MED) employee Ernest Marriner and architects Charles R Dawe and H Francis Willis. Marriner was part of the MED's draughting office staff and was responsible for the preparation of detailed drawings for most of the substations built in the 1930s and 40s. In the case of the 1935 Retreat Road substation design Marriner drew on plans prepared by architects Dawe and Willis for the Locarno Street pump house (1927). This design had also been employed by the MED in 1930 for a substation in Ford Road.

Christchurch's substations were maintained by Southpower when it split from the Christchurch City Council in 1989 and passed to Orion Ltd. when the retail and supply aspects of the business separated in 1999. The substation was relatively unharmed in the 2010/11 Canterbury earthquakes due to seismic protection works in the 1990s.

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 substation is of cultural significance as a tangible reminder of the introduction of reticulated electricity to the City, which changed subscribers' way of life by providing a clean and efficient energy source for domestic and business use. Despite the benefits, the proliferation of utility buildings in the city often attracted criticism and opposition from the public because of their impact on the suburban streetscape.

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 substation is of architectural and aesthetic significance for its design values. The designers of substations had to consider competing demands of economics, technical requirements and public opinion within a context of changing architectural fashions. This resulted in windowless buildings with classically detailed facade. The Retreat Road substation features a broken pediment moulding, re-entrant corners and relief mock window, with a parapet hiding a low-pitched roof. It is of brick construction, with a belt course of reinforced concrete, concealed with smooth plaster coating.

The design for the substation was prepared by MED draughtsman Ernest Marriner who drew on plans prepared by architects Dawe and Willis for the Locarno Street pump house (1927). The Retreat Road substation exterior differs from this pump house only in height and there is some variation in the relief detailing. Architects Charles R Dawe and H Francis Willis first

worked together in the draughting office of the Christchurch City Council. When Willis rejoined the Council as Assistant City Engineer in 1920, Dawe was City Surveyor and Engineer. In October 1924, having resigned from the City Council, the pair formed a partnership which lasted until 1928, when Willis went into practice on his own. Their work included the reinstatement of the Civic Theatre, Manchester Street (1928) and the Sydenham Fire Station, Colombo Street (1929).

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 substation is of technological and craftsmanship significance for its construction method, materials and detailing. It was built by GF Head at a cost of £317.

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 substation is of contextual significance for its relationship to the adjacent MED constructed Pump No. 8 (1927), which is of the same scale and materials and exhibits a similarity of design and detailing. The setting of the substation consists of the immediate land parcel. The substation footprint abuts the Retreat Road street frontage and the building's steps ascend directly from the pavement. A drive and timber fence to the west of the substation separate it from the adjacent pump house grounds and a low concrete block wall extends from the front of the building on its eastern corner to the adjoining property.

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 substation and setting are of archaeological significance for the potential to provide archaeological evidence of human activity, including that which pre dates 1900. Although the substation was not constructed until 1935 there is potential for the site to provide archaeological evidence relating to earlier human activity on the site including that which pre-dates 1900. Research to date indicates that Retreat Road was a well-used travel route prior to the formation of the road in 1880 (*Star*, 28/4/1877, p 2, *Star*, 24/4/1880, p 3) and the Avonside Drive stretch of the Avon River, which flows opposite the site, was a 19th century travel route for river craft travelling between New Brighton and the Bricks (Lamb, pp 18-26). The river was also an important pre-European transport route for tāngata whenua and its waters and environs a seasonal mahinga kai (Lamb, p 2).

ASSESSMENT STATEMENT

The Retreat Road substation and setting is of overall significance to Christchurch, including Banks Peninsula. The substation is of historical and social significance as one of a network

of early substations, which collectively and individually mark the establishment of reticulated power to the city. The substation is of cultural significance for its association with the introduction of reticulated electricity, which changed people's way of life by providing a clean and efficient energy source to power their household and commercial activities. The substation has architectural and aesthetic significance for its corporate classical styling and association with the Municipal Electricity Department draughtsman Ernest Marriner, the architects Charles Dawe and Francis Willis and builder GF Head. The building has technological and craftsmanship significance for its construction methods and materials and detailing and contextual significance for its relationship with the adjacent pump house and its contribution to the streetscape. The substation and setting are of archaeological significance for the potential to provide archaeological evidence of human activity, including that which pre dates 1900.

REFERENCES:

Christchurch City Council, The Architectural Heritage of Christchurch: 10. Pavilions, temples & four square walls - Christchurch pump houses and substations, 2003

'Heathcote Roads Board', *Star*, 28/4/1877, p 2

'Roads Board', *Star*, 24/4/1880, p 3

Lamb, R. C. (1981) *From the Banks of the Avon: The Story of a River*, p 2 & pp 18-26

Ti Kōuka Whenua, <http://my.christchurchcitylibraries.com/ti-kouka-whenua/otakaro/>

Wood, A.P., 'Temples to the Lighting', *Avenues*, November 2005

Wilson, J. (2005) *Christchurch City Contextual Historical Overview*, Chapter 6: Energy

REPORT DATED: 5 MARCH 2015

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.

PLEASE USE IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE CCC HERITAGE FILES.