

**DISTRICT PLAN – LISTED HERITAGE PLACE
HERITAGE ASSESSMENT – STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
HERITAGE ITEM NUMBER 634
*SECOND WORLD WAR BUNKERS/ CRACROFT CAVERNS
64H HACKTHORNE RD, CHRISTCHURCH***

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 Second World War bunkers in Cashmere have high historical and social significance as a product of the perceived threat the Japanese posed to New Zealand in the early years of the Second World War. They were never completed or commissioned however.

As the Pacific War escalated in early 1942, the threat posed to New Zealand increased substantially. To facilitate the country's defence, the government set up a new system of Combined Operations Centres to enable the three armed services to coordinate their activities for the first time. Four Combined Operational Headquarters were created in each of the main centres. In order to allow the Centres to continue to function in the event of an attack, three of the Headquarters (Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch) were each to incorporate an underground operational shelter.

The primary Second World War defensive site for Christchurch was the Lyttelton Fortress Area, which including the Mount Pleasant anti-aircraft battery, the Battery Point Battery at Lyttelton, and the Godley Head Battery. These sites were fully operational during the war and still contain the majority of their key elements.

In Christchurch, Cashmere, the home of the Cracroft Wilson family, was requisitioned for the use of the Combined Operational Headquarters (Southern Districts) [officially abbreviated to CCHQ] in May 1942. Finance was approved in July 1942 for the construction of an operational shelter, and the excavation in the hillside below the house commenced. Before the shelter was completed however, the threat from Japanese attack had receded. Work at the Cashmere site was suspended in March 1943 and not resumed before the underground shelters project was officially abandoned in October that year. After a period in exclusive RNZAF control, the Headquarters itself were closed in December 1944 and the property was returned to the Cracroft Wilsons – minus their homestead, which had been destroyed by fire in November, a few weeks before they were to resume possession.

Around 1950 the Cracroft Wilson family blocked the entrances to the bunkers, and it was not until 1987 that they were 'rediscovered' by a television crew who descended through a ventilation shaft. In 1990 the University of Canterbury's Physics Department perceived the advantages of the stable environment provided by the bunkers and installed the first of a series of ring lasers to provide geodesic data. The Christchurch City Council assumed ownership of the bunkers in 1996, and leased it to the University of Canterbury between 1999 and 2014. Through open days the bunkers were also made available to the public periodically. Currently ring laser laboratory operations have ceased, as have open days, while the bunker structures await repair.

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 Second World War bunkers at Cashmere have cultural significance because they are a reminder of the level of disruption to the way of life of Christchurch's residents during wartime and the level of effort devoted to keeping defence institutions functioning during this period.

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 Second World War bunkers at Cashmere have some architectural value as they demonstrate, in part, the design of an underground military structure. The main chambers were 87 ft. long and between 21 and 27 ft. wide. The cross chamber was a little shorter. Also constructed were two adits (horizontal drives), two smaller chambers and a 350 ft. stair tunnel connecting with the basement of the Cashmere homestead. The ceiling and walls are a mix of exposed rock and pre-cast concrete ribs, while the access tunnel has shotcrete lining.

Within these caverns, the University of Canterbury has established temporary sheds which house equipment associated with the rings lasers and GNS measuring devices. During the 2010-2011 Canterbury earthquakes, some of the shotcrete lining came loose, and there were isolated instances of rock fall from the exposed ceiling where there were gaps in the concrete ribs.

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 Second World War bunkers at Cashmere have technological and craftsmanship significance as a significant wartime construction project undertaken by the Public Works Department, involving extensive excavation and specialised reinforced concrete construction. The shelter was the last of the three bunkers to be planned, the only one to involve tunnelling (Wellington and Auckland were 'cut and covers'), and was considerably larger than its northern equivalents as it was required to incorporate a broader range of functions. It therefore required considerably more excavation and consequently was the least advanced of the three shelters when work was suspended after just eight months. Although local residents were aware that blasting was going on, secrecy was maintained and few if any knew what was being constructed. To conceal its identity, the project was known simply as Underground Tank #4.

As proposed, the U-shaped Combined Operations Centre shelter was to consist of two large chambers linked by a cross-drive. An intermediate floor was to be inserted into these spaces to create two levels, which were to be partitioned into multiple rooms to meet the individual needs of each of the services. The chambers were partially lined with concrete before

construction was suspended; the pre-cast interlocking rib system used to support the ceiling was new to New Zealand and required the manufacture of specialty equipment to place it.

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 Second World War bunkers at Cashmere have contextual significance in relation to the former Cashmere estate on which they were built, to defensive works in the greater Christchurch area, and in relation to Combined Operations Centres constructed in other cities. The present entry to the bunker is at the end of a wooded gully to the rear of Princess Margaret Hospital. The bunker is otherwise concealed within the hillside.

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 bunkers are of high scientific significance for their association with the Canterbury Ring Laser project, conducted by the University of Canterbury, Professor Geoff Steadman of the University of Canterbury's Physics Department has described the Cashmere facility as 'internationally unique'. The Second World War bunkers at Cashmere are of some archaeological value because they have the potential to provide evidence of human activity during the Second World War.

ASSESSMENT STATEMENT

The Second World War bunkers at Cashmere have high overall significance to Christchurch, including Banks Peninsula. The bunkers have high historical and social significance for their role in the defensive planning for Christchurch and the wider South Island during the Second World War. They are the only remnant of the Combined Operations Headquarters Southern Districts (CCHQ), which occupied the Cashmere estate site between 1942 and 1944. They have cultural significance because they demonstrate the effort made during wartime to safeguard defence institutions. The bunkers have technological significance as a large underground excavation and for the innovative method of concrete construction employed in lining the chambers. They have contextual significance in relation to the other defensive sites around the city and as one of three Combined Operations Head Quarters shelters developed in New Zealand. The bunkers have high scientific significance, as the site of a leading international ring laser laboratory.

REFERENCES:

CCC Heritage File 64 H Hackthorne Rd – Cracroft Caverns

Geoff Steadman 'As the world Turns' *NZ Science Monthly* March 1998
<http://nzsm.webcentre.co.nz/article1669.htm>

<http://archives.govt.nz/exhibitions/currentexhibitions/chch/pc-cracroft.php>

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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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