

HERITAGE ASSESSMENT – STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
FORMER EXHIBITION STATE HOUSE –
52 LONGFELLOW STREET



Photo: 52 Longfellow Street - November 2010

The former Exhibition House at 52 Longfellow Street is listed as a Group 3 Protected Heritage Building in the Christchurch City Plan and is registered by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust Pouhere Taonga as a Category II Historic Place.

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

The house at 52 Longfellow Street has historical and social significance as a former Exhibition State House. The house was exhibited in Hagley Park at the International Exhibition of 1906-07 and then relocated to the Camelot workers' dwelling settlement in Sydenham in 1907. This housing scheme was established by the 1905 Workers' Dwelling Act to provide low-cost, good quality houses. The working class suburb of Sydenham was chosen as one city site for the scheme. A competition was held by the government to attract established architects to design homes for a workers' settlement. Samuel Hurst-Seager and Cecil Wood designed 'Comfort' which won first place in the South Island section of the competition. Despite the intentions of the scheme most of the houses passed fairly quickly into private ownership as the cost of renting the houses was beyond the means of most lower income workers.

The first leasee of 52 Longfellow Street was William Lucas, a gardener who was married with six children. He remained at the house until c.1930 by which time he had purchased the property. In 1972 the house was purchased by Harold Kean, a school teacher and his wife Shirley. They owned the house from 1972 - 85 during which time the house was known as the Beckenham Pottery. The current owners are musicians Paul Kean and Kaye Woodward, who have owned the property since 1985. Several well known New Zealand bands have recorded/produced music at 52 Longfellow Street.

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The house has cultural significance as it is representative of an architecturally designed model of workers housing from the early 20th century. The house was part of one of the New Zealand Government's early schemes for low-cost workers housing and, as an exemplary model, was exhibited at the International Exhibition in 1906.

ARCHITECTURAL AND AESTHETIC SIGNIFICANCE

The house has architectural and aesthetic significance as it was designed by two of Christchurch's leading architects Samuel Hurst-Seager (1855-1933) and Cecil Wood (1878-1947). 'Comfort' was much smaller than the usual larger houses Hurst-Seager and Wood designed but had many of the hallmarks of their style. The two-storeyed house was designed in an English Cottage/Mock Tudor style, the only two-storeyed workers house in the South Island. The house had a half-timbered jettied upper floor with tall Arts and Crafts style chimneys (since removed). Some additions have been made to the house including an addition to the north side of the house.

Samuel Hurst-Seager played an important role in the development of New Zealand architecture and had achieved national renown for his domestic architecture by 1900. Cecil Wood was a leading inter-war architect, with particular prominence in Christchurch domestic architecture. Wood and Hurst-Seager were in partnership from 1906 until about 1912.

TECHNOLOGICAL AND CRAFTSMANSHIP SIGNIFICANCE

The house has technological and craftsmanship significance as a house that was prefabricated for the 1906 International Exhibition. The craftsmanship is evidence of the early 20th century ideal for workers' housing.

CONTEXTUAL SIGNIFICANCE

The house has contextual significance as it was part of the Camelot Settlement of workers' houses that was established in this part of Beckenham, formerly Sydenham, under the Workers Dwelling Act 1905. The Camelot Settlement was centred around Seddon Street, named after Richard Seddon, the Liberal Prime Minister until 1906, and Longfellow Street, one of several streets in Sydenham named after poets. The house was placed at the far end of the settlement near the Southey Street intersection with Longfellow Street. The house has landmark significance as a two-storey house with a distinctive architectural style, the prominent board and batten gables clearly visible from the street.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The house has archaeological significance because it has the potential to provide archaeological evidence relating to human activity on the site, possibly including that which occurred prior to 1900.

References: Wilson, J. (ed) (1987) *The Past Today. Historic Places in New Zealand*. Pacific Publishers, Auckland.

Assessment Completed: August 2010