

Heritage Item 25

Chinatown, Allens Road



Location

Address:	144 Allens Road, Allenton
Co-ordinates:	Northing 5702065, Easting 2409553
Legal Description:	Lot 1 and 2 DP 13291
Owner:	Ng G B & King Charles & Boe George & King James & Ying Took & Yau Ng King

Purpose

Current Use:	Remnants of community/recreation reserve
Original/Past Uses:	Chinese community

Heritage Significance and Category

Heritage Significance:	Physical; Historic; Cultural
Heritage NZ:	Not registered
Ashburton DC:	Category A

Site Assessment

Assessed by:	Arlene Baird, Davie Lovell-Smith Ltd.
Date Assessed:	12 December 2014

Detail	
Description:	<p>This item consists of an area of approximately 2.3 hectares of land on which there sits a group of historical buildings and facilities which once made up Ashburton's Chinese community. The land is still owned by a number of the descendants of the original Chinese families who lived and worked in this community.</p> <p>There are a number of buildings on the site, most of them clustered closely together – these were once used as living accommodation, shops, sheds, food preparation and packing areas, laundry and other businesses. The buildings are constructed of timber walls with corrugated iron roofs – most low and small in size. The buildings have been vacant for a number of years and are in a state of disrepair.</p> <p>One of the most important items remaining on the site is a large rare Chinese oven. It is a cylindrical structure, lined with firebricks and has a gantry on which food was lowered by pulley for cooking. This oven served the community. Apparently on Sundays the men all cooked, with families coming from across Canterbury for generous lunches. The oven was restored in 2013 by the Council with funding from the Chinese Poll Tax Heritage Trust.</p> <p>The remainder of the land is currently vacant but was once a fully established market garden.</p>
History:	<p>Chinese immigrants</p> <p>Chinese labourers first arrived in 1866, having been invited by the Otago provincial government to re-work the gold fields of southern New Zealand. They were not assisted immigrants, so there are usually no immigration records. Most Chinese came to New Zealand via Australia. In the 1870s, when strong anti-Chinese feeling first appeared in New Zealand, many were still living in Otago, but more than 1000 were also on the West Coast goldfields.</p> <p>The Chinese Immigrants Act 1881 levied a £10 entry or poll (head) tax on Chinese newcomers and decreed ships were to carry no more than one Chinese for each 10 tons of the ship's weight. The Customs Department issued exemption certificates and poll tax receipts, but the records are now held in Labour Department archives. Poll tax payment allowed Chinese to land and gain permanent residency, but they remained aliens, except for the few who were naturalised. Many further acts restricted Chinese immigration to New Zealand, such as the raising of the poll tax to £100 in 1896. The ability of Chinese to become British citizens in New Zealand through naturalisation was prevented in 1908.</p> <p>There were three other periods when Chinese were allowed into New Zealand in significant numbers: after World War I 1918-1920, at the beginning of World War II 1939-1940 as refugees, and for a few years after World War II 1948-1951, but otherwise restrictions remained. Many of those who came were students or relatives of Chinese already living in New Zealand.</p> <p>The poll tax was abolished in 1944 and in 1951 the government permitted the naturalisation of Chinese in New Zealand again. However, the number of Chinese immigrants remained relatively small – mostly chain migration of family members – and it was not until 1986 that the immigration status of Chinese and Europeans was made the same.</p>

Detail	
	<p>Chinatown</p> <p>This Chinese community in Allenton was first established in the 1920s. The buildings included living accommodation, shops, sheds, food preparation and packing areas, laundry and other businesses. The land around the buildings was worked as a market garden and at one stage also as a poultry farm. Produce from the market garden would be sold from a truck which drove around the town weekly and later they opened a shop on Burnett Street. One of the main features of the community was a large communal Chinese oven with gantry and pulley system.</p> <p>The community was at its peak during the late 1940s and mid-1950s. At this time there were about 12 houses in the settlement and as many as 80 people living in the community, including the children. Most of those living here came from Southern China and worked in market gardening. One family had a laundry and another had a fruit shop. When they arrived in Ashburton, many could not speak English and there is reference of the headmaster of Allenton School having to teach the Chinese children the language. After the community's heyday, from 1949 to 1955, families began to disperse and the numbers living and working in the settlement declined steeply.</p> <p>Future</p> <p>In 2013 Ashburton District Council entered into an agreement to take over the control and management of the land, historical buildings and structures from Ashburton's Chinese community. They have entered into an agreement where Council will treat the land as a public recreation reserve, however the Title of the land will remain with the Chinese families.</p> <p>The Council recognises the historic value of the buildings and structures and are creating a community memorial to recognise the work of Chinese settlers in Mid Canterbury and their contribution to the district. The buildings and structures will be restored while the remainder of the land will be developed for recreation. This project will provide a living reminder of village life as lived by the early Chinese in Ashburton.</p> <p>In 2013, the District Council obtained a grant of \$7500 from the Chinese Poll Tax Heritage Trust to stabilise the old buildings, and to clear out the oven. The Chinese Poll Tax Heritage Trust was set up in 2004 and, before that, the New Zealand government formally apologised to the poll tax payers and their descendants for the actions of previous governments in imposing a poll tax on Chinese people entering New Zealand. Most Chinese came from a cluster of counties south of Guandong (Canton) province. The trust was paid \$5m as a gesture of conciliation and distributes approximately \$150,000 each year to a variety of projects and activities across the country which will help achieve the Trust's aims and objectives.</p> <p>Notable features: Building remains; rare Chinese oven with pulley system; location.</p> <p>Condition: The Chinese oven was restored in 2013 and is in good condition. The buildings are in a varying state of disrepair – some are still watertight whilst others have holes in the roof or missing sheets of iron. Some of the wall timbers are rotten and some buildings have lost their windows and/or doors. The buildings to the south-west of the group are in worst condition and appear to have sunk and become misshapen.</p> <p>Setting: This is the location of the original Ashburton Chinese community. It provides excellent historic reference to how this community lived and worked during these years. The setting is of high importance due to the activities which occurred here.</p>









