

Heritage Item 26

Holmeslee House and Garden



Location

Address:	41 Holmeslee Road, Mitcham
Co-ordinates:	Northing 5720863 , Easting 2424068
Legal Description:	Lot 4 DP 3389 (CT CB13B/598), Canterbury Land District
Owner:	T P and P A Seay

Purpose

Current Use:	Dwelling
Original/Past Uses:	Dwelling

Heritage Significance and Category

Heritage Significance:	Physical; Historic		
Heritage NZ:	Historic Place Category 2	List # 1757	Date Listed: 23 June 1983
Ashburton DC:	Category A		

Site Assessment

Assessed by:	Arlene Baird, Davie Lovell-Smith Ltd.
Date Assessed:	1 November 2014

Detail	
Description:	<p>Holmeslee House was originally built during or shortly after 1872 as a single storey 4 room cottage, of kauri, totara and rimu – this section is now a ground floor wing and has had some internal walls removed to form one large billiard room and one smaller store room.</p> <p>As the Holmes family made their money, they began to extend the property. Approximately two thirds of the ground floor of the main section of the house was constructed in the late 1880s/1890. This is on a slightly higher level than the original section. Then in the late 1890s/1900 this ground floor section was extended by two reception rooms, and the first floor and double verandahs were added. Also at this stage the stables were constructed and the gardens extended.</p> <p>The house is constructed of timber with a hipped corrugated iron roof. The windows are large, mostly sash-opening with some box windows in the ground floor reception rooms. All of the original brass window fastenings are still in place. A wide verandah runs around three sides of the ground and first floor – the verandah columns in the two storey section are plain with intricate wooden fretwork detail above (arched on the first floor, straight on the ground floor). The verandah of the original single storey section is narrower and has wider more rustic verandah columns with criss-cross wooden fretwork. The balcony balustrades are also constructed of detailed wooden fretwork, which adds to the grand appearance of the property. The first floor bedrooms all have access onto the verandah via large floor to ceiling sash windows. The chimneys were originally brick, however following damage which occurred during the September 2010 earthquakes, these chimneys were replaced (in 2012) with replicas constructed of hardiboard and fibreglass. The walls, chimneys, verandahs, windows and door frames are all painted white and the iron roof is painted red.</p> <p>Internally, the front door opens from the NE side of the building into a long central hallway, with rooms to each side. Ground floor ceilings are over 4m high and skirting boards are approximately 30cm deep. Each of the rooms in the house has a fireplace – these are not all still usable, but do still have their original fireplace in situ. All of the ground floor reception rooms have a ceiling rose, all constructed of detailed plasterwork and all of different designs. The first floor bedrooms all have built-in vents on the wall just below the ceiling, unusual for such an early building.</p> <p>The original 1872 single storey section of the house is subservient to the main section, but still manages to retain its individual character. The house is set on a raised level slightly above the ground around it, with steps leading up to the front floor. This results in fantastic views down over the surrounding gardens and also helps to increase the grand appearance of the house when approaching.</p> <p>The Heritage New Zealand listing also includes the Holmeslee Garden, which consists of a fine mature landscaped garden and lawns. The gardens span an area of 6 acres around the house and are perfectly manicured and maintained. There are a number of secluded areas of beautiful flat lawn surrounded by mature trees and an array of colour created by rhododendrons and camellias, all linked to each other by small well-kept paths. The mature trees include magnolia grandiflora, a large lime tree, many oaks and copper beeches. A very large and sweetly aromatic wisteria twines all around the lower verandah. Many fruit trees and rose bushes on the property date back to pre-1900 (with an apple tree which was supposedly grown from seed brought on one of the First Four Ships). Beyond the 6 acres of gardens lie a further 54 acres of land owned by the Seays - they are dedicated to maintaining and progressing these amazing grounds and over the past 17 years they have planted over 1800 trees in paddocks just beyond the main gardens, forming a beautiful park-like setting.</p>

Detail	
History:	<p>Mr. David Gordon Holmes was born in Ireland in 1836 and travelled to the southern hemisphere, arriving in Victoria in 1857 aged 21. Holmes came to New Zealand in 1862 to take charge of the construction of the Lyttelton tunnel for his uncle, Mr. George Holmes in his absence. On his uncle's return to New Zealand, Holmes went to Pigeon Bay to superintend the cutting, sawing, and shipping of the sleepers for the south line. With his uncle's health failing, he had to return and superintend the construction of the line himself.</p> <p>Mr. Holmes bought the Holmeslee land from the Crown in 1872, when it comprised 5000 acres and was all still in its native state. He grew this land to approximately 10,000 acres. The pastures here were considered to be extremely nutritious and the chief products were grain, wool, and mutton. Mr. Holmes had 2500 acres in grain in one season, and 800 acres in turnips. When the soil was in its virgin state it yielded up to sixty bushels of wheat per acre. Holmes had a small stud flock of Lincolns, which was established in 1884 by purchases from a neighbour Mr. Lockhart when he dispersed his flock.</p> <p>When Holmes bought this land he set about establishing his English country homestead and gardens. The first section of the house was built shortly after he arrived and as his wealth grew, he extended and added to the existing structure, with much grand detail. In 1877 Holmes was married to Miss Louisa Deamer, eldest daughter of Dr. Deamer of Christchurch. Louisa was apparently instrumental in planting and laying out the gardens. They had 12 children and a fruit tree was planted to mark the birth of each.</p> <p>Holmes was a well thought of gentleman. He held a seat on the local road board, and his knowledge of engineering was of much service to the district, and highly prized by his fellow members. He died on the 13th of November, 1902. Holmeslee remained in the Holmes family for 125 years, from 1872 until being sold in 1997 to the current owners.</p>
Notable Features:	<p>Original single-storey section of building with its lower floors and original verandah; Original sash-opening window frames and brass detailing, in particular the box windows to the north eastern elevation and the floor level windows leading from the bedrooms to the balcony; verandahs (in both sections) and their detailed wooden fretwork; Ceiling roses; Fireplaces; Gardens. Good example of the historic evolution of a building as the owner became more prosperous.</p>
Condition:	<p>Holmeslee house and gardens have been maintained in excellent condition. The current owners purchased the property 17 years ago and have undertaken a huge restoration project, based on the philosophy of retaining and restoring all the original features where possible. The roof structure, timber and paintwork are all in very good condition and well maintained. Externally the gardens are well tended and kept in immaculate condition.</p>
Setting:	<p>As described above, Holmeslee House is set in 6 acres of manicured gardens – these have been carefully sculpted in terms of the species of trees, shrubs and flowers planted and also in the colours used in different areas. These gardens are included within the Heritage New Zealand listing of the property. Beyond those 6 acres, recent planting has been undertaken to form an additional park-like setting.</p> <p>The setting is of high importance, due to the age of the planting and history of the garden linked to Holmeslee House and to David Gordon Holmes.</p>





