

# ARLINGTON HOUSE (FORMER CAMDEN TOWN ROWTON HOUSE)

## Official list entry

Heritage Category: **Listed Building**

Grade: **II**

List Entry Number: **1396420**

Date first listed: **24-Jan-2011**

List Entry Name: **ARLINGTON HOUSE (FORMER CAMDEN TOWN ROWTON HOUSE)**

Statutory Address 1: **ARLINGTON HOUSE (FORMER CAMDEN TOWN ROWTON HOUSE), ARLINGTON ROAD**

This List entry helps identify the building designated at this address for its special architectural or historic interest.

Unless the List entry states otherwise, it includes both the structure itself and any object or structure fixed to it (whether inside or outside) as well as any object or structure within the curtilage of the building.

For these purposes, to be included within the curtilage of the building, the object or structure must have formed part of the land since before 1st July 1948.

[Understanding list entries \(https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/understanding-list-entries/\)](https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/understanding-list-entries/)

[Corrections and minor amendments \(https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/minor-amendments/\)](https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/minor-amendments/)

## Location

Statutory Address: **ARLINGTON HOUSE (FORMER CAMDEN TOWN ROWTON HOUSE), ARLINGTON ROAD**

The building or site itself may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County: **Greater London Authority**

District: **Camden (London Borough)**

Parish: **Non Civil Parish**

National Grid Reference: **TQ 28767 83974**

## Reasons for Designation

Arlington House, formerly the Camden Town Rowton House opened in 1905, was recommended for listing at Grade II for the following principal reasons: \* Architectural: an imposing landmark of a thoughtful design with richly detailed terra cotta dressings and distinctive roofscape; its scale and attention to detail reflect both its function and the idealism of its origins. \* Historical: the last and largest of London's well-known Rowton Houses, built to provide accommodation for single men in the late C19 and early C20. Its origins and development through the C20 illustrate a little-recognised aspect of working-class history. \* State of external preservation: the best-preserved of London's Rowton Houses, representing Measures' recognisable Rowton House design. Recent restoration work has further revealed the quality of its elevational treatment. The interior is now much altered to suit modern requirements, but the plan and character of the arched corridors survives. \* Comparative quality and significance: it matches the interest of one other former men's hostel designed by Measures in Birmingham (Grade II), the two listed LCC men's hostels of the period (Carrington House and Bruce House, both Grade II) and the listed women's equivalent, Ada Lewis Women's Lodging House (Grade II).

## Details

798-1/0/10363 ARLINGTON ROAD 24-JAN-11 Arlington House (former Camden Town Rowton House)

II Men's Lodging House, opened in 1905, refurbished 1983-88 and 2008-10. Designed by Harry Bell Measures FRIBA. Refurbished 1983-8 and 2009-10 by Levitt Bernstein Architects.

**MATERIALS:** Leicester bricks with Fletton brick and buff Ruabon terracotta dressings; roofs are steel and concrete with green slate covering; the roofs of the rear wings were transformed into 'green' roofs in the 2009-10 refurbishment. Timber sash windows, double-glazed and with horns, were all replaced in the 2009-10

refurbishment.

PLAN: E shaped; basement with five storeys and attics; front range with corner towers, continuous basement floor above which are three rear wings terminating in towers.

EXTERIOR: The main west elevation is symmetrical, with an additional section to the south bridging the entrance to Early Mews. The brick and terra cotta throughout this elevation was cleaned, repaired and replaced in 2009-10. On each side of a central entrance bay, built mainly in a variegated red brick, is a wide red brick bay with gable, a narrower slightly recessed bay and a tower with slightly concave pyramidal roof with finial. The division between the gabled bays is marked by octagonal ribs which rise above the line of the eaves, surmounted by cupolas in buff terracotta. In the centre of the entrance bay is a slightly projecting section two windows wide, rising to attic level, with pediment. The brickwork to the ground floor is rusticated. Fenestration is absolutely regular, with arched windows with terracotta hood moulds to the ground floor, and rows of narrow sash windows to the floors above, including in the gables and at the top of the towers. The porch is entirely of terracotta, gabled and flanked by octagonal turrets capped with cupolas. Perched on the central finial is a cherubic yet muscley boy carrying a globe on his shoulders. Within this are clear glass sliding doors with side lights and overlight, added in the 2009-10 refurbishment.

The side elevation is very plain, with two gables breaking the roofline, and with a regular arrangement of windows similar to the front. There is access to the basement at the rear; above the basement are iron railings containing the roof terraces between the three rear wings. The wings terminate in towers, the east facing elevations of which contain semi-circular windows. The top of the towers are stepped back, and are fronted by a scrolled terracotta pediment. The inward-facing side elevations of the rear wings are very plain, relieved only by bands of red brick at sill and lintel level; they contain a regular arrangement of tall narrow windows. Where the wings meet the rear elevation of the front block, the corners have small external balconies of triangular plan to each floor, lined with glazed brick and shallow segmental arched heads.

INTERIOR: The entrance is at ground level, and leads into a modern reception area with lifts, opened up in the 2009-10 refurbishment. To the north of reception are offices, and up a half flight of stairs are the former superintendent's rooms, now largely replaced with fully-glazed modern office partitions; no original features survive. The raised ground floor contains the former reading room in the south wing, the new recreation room (formerly cubicles) and the other rooms at this level are now used as offices.

The plan of the basement consists of two main corridors that give access to communal rooms and workshops, with two connecting corridors. The corridors and other areas without windows are lit from above by large skylights in original locations. The main corridors and stairs up to ground level formerly had chocolate and cream

chequered glazed brick dados, now painted over in white. The former smoking room on the north side of the north wing is now the canteen with all modern fittings (on same footprint), and the central locker rooms and lavatory have been converted to modern toilets. Smaller rooms at the south-east end of the north corridor included the porter's room, now a workshop. The large former dining room (now partly the building trades training room) retains regular rows of half fluted columns; these are found in others of the larger rooms in the basement.

The main staircases in the towers at the end of the wings are of cast iron, and the stairwells are lined with glazed bricks, now painted. The upper floors of the front range have been converted to offices. No original bedroom partitions survive and indeed the residential wings have been fully reconfigured so that the corridors run along one side of each wing, with bedrooms taking up the rest of the width. The bedrooms (some studios) now take the space of approximately three original bedrooms/cubicles. All fittings and partitions are modern and not of special interest.

**SUBSIDIARY FEATURES:** To the front of the building are cast iron area railings, plain stick balusters with mesh backing, interspersed with sections of decorative scrollwork.

**HISTORY:** Rowton Houses were the inspiration of Montagu Corry, Baron Rowton, one-time secretary to Benjamin Disraeli. The institutions titled in his name were conceived as alternatives to the shockingly inadequate and often insanitary accommodation provided by common lodging houses for working men in London in the late C19. Lord Rowton invested £30,000 of his own money in the scheme, and the first Rowton House was built in Vauxhall, London, in 1892, with room for 484 men. Five further hostels in London followed, built between 1884 and 1905, at Kings Cross, Newington Butts, Hammersmith, Whitechapel and finally Camden Town. This hostel, now known as Arlington House, opened in 1905, and was the largest to be built, accommodating 1103 men in 985 cubicles and 118 bedrooms. The latter were an innovative feature of the Camden Town Rowton House, providing larger and better furnished rooms for those able to pay 6s. per week rather than the 3s. 6d. charged for a cubicle. The hostel was well-endowed with facilities that allowed the lodgers to keep themselves and their clothes clean and safe, with bathrooms, lavatories, a wash house and lockers; but other services were also provided, including a barber, tailor and shoemaker. All these were housed in the basement (referred to in contemporary descriptions as the ground floor), as well as the kitchens, dining room, smoking room and staff accommodation. The entrance floor contained the administrative areas, the superintendent's rooms, the special bedrooms and the reading and writing rooms, the latter occupying the whole of the south wing. The allowance of space for social interaction, and for recreation and self improvement was generous and thoughtful; the walls of the main recreational rooms hung with framed prints - and occasionally hunting trophies - at the insistence of Lord Rowton (the Whitechapel Rowton featured a series of painted panels in the reading room designed by H.F. Strachey), who also personally considered the finest detail of all other aspects of the men's accommodation. From the entrance level there was

access to an 'outdoor smoking lounge' on the roof over the dining room. The remaining five floors (including the attic storey) contained sleeping cubicles.

Harry Bell Measures FRIBA was the architect commissioned to design most of the Rowton Houses, although it is possible that this did not include the first at Vauxhall (the style and form are different, and it is omitted on the list of his work on his 1901 FRIBA nomination papers). Measures had already undertaken work for (and was probably recommended by) Mr R.E. Farrant of the Artisans, Labourers and General Dwelling Company. Most of his buildings which are now listed, of which there are about thirty, date to his earlier career in the 1880s and were designs for housing schemes for the builder/developer William Willett in Hove, East Sussex, and Hampstead; although his later work as Director of Barracks Construction is also represented by buildings at Sandhurst, Berkshire, and Aldershot, Surrey. He also designed a hostel in Birmingham, which opened in 1903, modelled on the Rowton Houses, but operated by a local company; this follows the same pattern as the London Rowtons, and is the only one to be listed (at Grade II, now a hotel).

In 1983 Arlington House was taken over by Camden Council, and between 1983 and 1988 it was refurbished by Levitt Bernstein Associates. The size of the bedrooms was doubled, and the total capacity of residents more than halved; some basement rooms were altered to provide further recreational spaces, and the exterior and interior were brightened by artwork, including murals lining a passage connecting the basement corridors, depicting scenes and details that would have had particular meaning for the residents. The recent programme of renovation reflects new social and political initiatives with regard to homelessness and housing, reducing the accommodation and including social enterprise/workspace units, training facilities and a conference centre. The only other Rowton House to retain its original purpose is the first, in Vauxhall. Of the remaining four, Whitechapel has been converted to luxury apartments and the three others have been demolished.

Initially the residents of Arlington House were drawn from a wide class of men, from City clerks and artisans and labourers in regular employment, to unskilled casual labourers as well as the poor and unemployed. Famous occupants include George Orwell, who describes Rowton Houses in the early 1930s in 'Down and Out in Paris and London' as 'splendid buildings', the best of the lodging-houses, where the 'special' rooms are 'practically hotel accommodation'. The writer Brendan Behan and the poet Patrick Kavanagh both stayed here and were representative of the significant number of post-war Irish residents, for whom the Camden Rowton was the first stop in their migration to find work in England. In the 1990s Irish men constituted almost half of the hostel's population, and for many this became their permanent home.

A major refurbishment, again by Levitt Bernstein Associates, for One Housing Group was completed in 2010 and involved internal alterations to accommodate 130 residents (in contrast to the original 1000). The new building, which features a building trades training centre and 13 artists' studios, was opened by London Mayor Boris

Johnson and artist Tracey Emin in June 2010.

SOURCES: Rowton Houses Ltd, 'Rowton House, Camden Town, London NW - A Description with Illustrations' (1905). Cornes, James, *Modern Housing in Town and Country* pp 29-35 (1905). Orwell, George, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933). Cherry, Bridget & Pevsner, Nikolaus, *The Buildings of England - London 4: North* p 385 (2002).

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## Legacy

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System number: **505028**

Legacy System: **LBS**

## Legal

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.



## Map

This map is for quick reference purposes only and may not be to scale.  
This copy shows the entry on 06-Sep-2023 at 11:05:29.

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