



ENGLISH  
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**VIA ON-LINE PORTAL - E-MAIL application**

London Borough of Camden  
Conservation Officer  
5 Pancras Square  
London  
N1C 4AG

**LBC: Cover Letter – HERITAGE STATEMENT**

29 February 2024

**Blue plaque to Joseph Lister (1827-1912)**  
**Location Address: 52 Maple Street, W1T 6HL**  
**London Borough of Camden**

Dear Sir or Madam

**The Proposal:**

I am writing to advise you that English Heritage's Blue Plaques Panel has approved the recommendation – subject to consents being forthcoming - that a blue plaque be erected to commemorate Joseph Lister, surgeon, at **52 Maple Street, W1T 6HL**; a Grade II (list entry 1113111) property and lies within Fitzroy Square Conservation Area.

**The proposed inscription** on the proposed blue plaque is:

**JOSEPH  
LISTER  
1827-1912  
Pioneer of  
antiseptic surgery  
lived here  
as a student**

**The inscription:**

The proposed inscription for the plaque gives Lister's most renowned achievement rather than simply 'Surgeon'. Lister is often referred to as the 'father' of antiseptic surgery; the ungendered 'pioneer', has been preferred. As the precise dates of residence are not known, it seems desirable to note that he was here as a student, which may make it resonate all the more with some of those who walk past.

**Plaque details**

The size of the proposed ceramic circular plaque is the standard 495mm (19.5-inch) diameter, depth 50mm; inset into the stucco and brickwork by a maximum depth of 50mm. The plaque making and material details are a separate document; the methodology for the installation of the plaque is described in the Design and Access Statement.

*Step into England's story*





### **Proposed position of the new blue plaque: front elevation of 52 Maple Street, W1T 6HL**

The plaque would be well placed at ground floor level, horizontally centred between the windows, vertical height set to symmetrically straddle the stucco band that visually aligns with the centre of the top-half sash window panes. Located as shown on the attached document surveyor orthophotos, scaled 1:50, and oblique views; **the submitted surveyor orthophotos take the role of architect drawings and the square-on view at 1-50 scale will print to scale at A1.**

The details of the elevation orthophotos and methodology for the installation of the plaque are considered in full under the accompanying Design and Access document.

### **Background information**

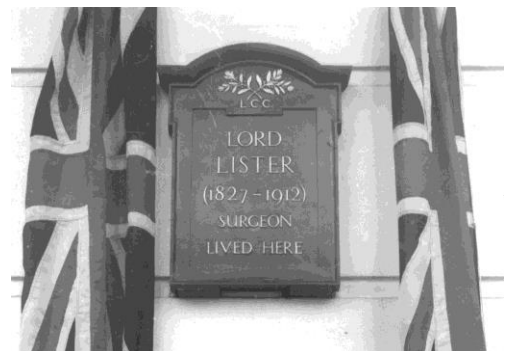
Joseph Lister was first awarded a plaque by the London County Council in 1915, a rectangular bronze tablet installed at his last London home in Park Crescent, Regent's Park.

After war damage the crescent was rebuilt in 1960 from the ground up. The plaque thought destroyed in the demolition, however the result of an exchange of correspondence in *The Lancet* discovered that the plaque had survived and was in private hands. Recovered and re-erected on the facsimile rebuild in 1966.

Recent building works at Park Crescent in 2017 again resulted in the loss of the bronze plaque; despite several attempts by the developers to trace it, the bronze has now been declared missing.

English Heritage makes every effort to place plaques on surviving authentic buildings of the period in which the person to be commemorated lived or worked there. The new building works of Park Crescent have effectively created a complete facsimile façade with new building fabric, and as the nearby statue of Joseph Lister in Portland Place means that he is not uncommemorated in this locale, this prompted further address research to be undertaken by an English Heritage historian.

[Bronze bust of Joseph Lister by the sculptor Thomas Brock, erected 1924, Portland Place]





The recent English Heritage research confirmed only one surviving address for Joseph Lister; 52 Maple Street (formerly 28 London Street); and that the early LCC bronze plaque was not a design or material that English Heritage would commission as a replica; the recommendation is therefore for a new standard blue ceramic roundel to be located on the last standing address associated with Joseph Lister – at 52 Maple Street.

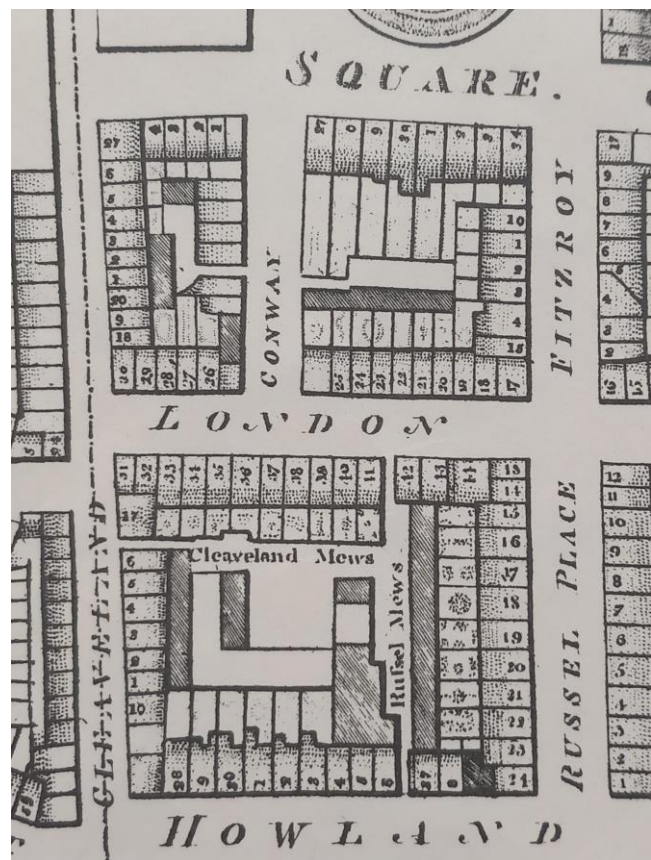
## BUILDING STATEMENT

### Building history - description

Maple Street, built in the late eighteenth-century on land owned by Charles Fitzroy, later Lord Southampton, was a secondary street laid out within a speculative development of housing for wealthy and middle-class residents.

The list description for number 52 Maple Street dates the two-bay terraced house to the decade after 1777-8, the date the street was laid out; originally numbered and named 28 London Street, renumbered in 1886 and the name changed to Maple Street in 1907.

This detail from Horwood's Map, 1792-1799, shows the west end of Maple Street, when named London Street and its completed terraced houses; original number 28 on the north side (just above the 'L' of London [Street]),



During the nineteenth-century many of the houses in the area were sub-divided, driven by the fashionable shift of the middle classes to the west; the downward social status of the area accelerated by its proximity to the new rail stations, and the demand for low-rent rooms and lodgings for railway workers, students and staff attending the nearby universities and hospital. During the Second World War the west end of Maple Street suffered minor bomb-blast damage from a V-1 Flying bomb, but it was only this western end that survived the war. The houses on the south side of this part of the street were by a 1954 map marked as 'Ruins' and have now gone.



### Current Building description

Maple Street lies on the south boundary of the Fitzroy Square Conservation Area, subsection 'The Surrounding Streets'; at its east end joining Tottenham Court Road, to run westwards to meet Cleveland Street. The north side of the street in which number 52 Maple Street lies, is one of a short group of terraced houses nos. 46-56 (evens). Number 52, Grade II listed (with its neighbour 50 Maple Street - list entry 1113111); of four storeys plus basement and mansard (possibly one of the 19th century alterations mentioned in the list description), with banded stucco at ground floor level; two bays wide, built of London stock brick, c.1780's; the entrance door set to the left with a semi-circular head and fanlight; sash windows of vertically proportioned receding size, a plain parapet band.



Current view of the front elevation of 52 Maple Street; further photographs of the house and terrace are a separate document.

**Nearby blue plaques and landmarks :** Maple Street, one of the secondary roads in Fitzrovia as the area is popularly known, has not, until this proposal for Joseph Lister, any blue plaques; however nearby on Fitzroy Street there is a plaque to the explorer and navigator Captain Matthew Finders; and on Cleveland Street, a plaque to Samuel Morse the inventor of the Morse Code. Fitzroy Square, partly built by Robert and James Adam in 1790-94, was the centrepiece of the planned area; many of its fine houses were later subdivided





to become a favourite low-rent refuge for artists, craftsmen and writers, and unsurprisingly has a strong collection of blue plaques – there are six here within the English Heritage scheme, to include members of the Bloomsbury Group, Virginia Woolf (née Stephen) at 29 Fitzroy Square and Roger Fry, art critic and artist at nos. 33, the site of the Omega Workshop; a plaque to the playwright George Bernard Shaw (also at nos 29); the chemist August Hofmann (nos. 9); the painter Sir Charles Eastlake (nos. 7); and the Prime Minister Robert Cecil (nos.21).

The British Telecom Tower, built 1961-4, has an elevation along the south side of Maple Street, and is a popular and well-loved skyline landmark.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

### Joseph Lister, 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Lister

**Portrait albumin print  
1866-1870 by John Moffat  
©National Portrait Gallery, London; NPGx27776**

Joseph Lister was born on 5 April 1827 at Upton House, Upton, Essex; educated in Quaker schools until in 1844, age 17, he enrolled at University of London (1844-47) to study for a BA, and then a second degree in medicine at University College (1848-1852) to become a fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons. In 1853 Lister secured a surgical post in Edinburgh, and by 1856 appointed an assistant surgeon at the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. Moving in 1860 to Glasgow, where he was appointed chair of surgery at Glasgow University and, a year later, surgeon to the Glasgow Infirmary.



It was in Glasgow that Lister brought to fruition his physiological and microscopical research on wound inflammation – then a major cause of deaths in hospital, including those that occurred during and after operations. In this, he built on the work of the French scientist Louis Pasteur on germ theory – that infections were caused by micro-organisms, and later corresponded with and met Pasteur, who expressed astonishment and admiration that a working surgeon could find enough time for research. Lister published his findings in *The Lancet* from 1867 in several articles, most notably ‘On the effects of the antiseptic system of



treatment upon the salubrity of surgical hospitals' (published January 1870). His 'antiseptic system' stipulated the management of wounds and surgical operations using diluted carbolic acid in lotions, oils, sprays and gauzes, and the sterilisation of surgical instruments. (Lister did not, however, wear a mask or gloves to operate.) He was not the first to use the term 'antiseptic'; nor the first to appreciate the antiseptic qualities of carbolic acid, but his application of it to surgery was new. Like most pioneers, he encountered considerable professional opposition; some of this can be traced to the fact that his papers offered empirical evidence of the appalling levels of hospital mortality, and therefore contained a strong implied criticism of the medical establishment. Improved hospital hygiene was indeed a contributory factor to improved mortality figures, but this did not disprove the benefits of Lister's system, which came to be generally accepted as the nineteenth century wore on.

Following work in Glasgow and then again in Edinburgh, in 1877 Lister returned to London, having been appointed professor of surgery at King's College, and he spent the rest of his active life in the city, retiring from his chair in 1892 and ending his ward supervisions the following year. Throughout this time, Lister continued his experimental work and to refine his antiseptic method. He made a number of other important contributions to general surgery: absorbable ligatures made of catgut further reduced the chances of infection, and a method of 'bloodless surgery' (raising a limb before operating). He also pioneered modifications to the operation for varicose veins, and ambitious interventions in wrist, elbow and knee joints: his 1877 wiring of a patella (kneecap) attracted particular attention. Lister operated on Queen Victoria in 1871 for an abscess in her armpit, using his antiseptic method.

Lister served as president of the Royal Society (1895-1902); awarded a barony (1897), thus becoming the first medical practitioner to enter the House of Lords. In 1902 he was one of the original twelve members of the reconstituted Order of Merit; he was also awarded the Royal Society's Copley Medal that year. In 1903 the name of the Jenner Institute for Preventive Medicine was changed to bear the name of Lister, to his reported embarrassment. With his sister-in-law, Lucy Syme, Lister retired to Walmer, Kent in 1908 and died there on 10 February 1912. After a funeral service in Westminster Abbey he was interred in Hampstead cemetery, next to his wife Agnes Lister, (died 1893).

### **Historical Reputation**

Lister's work vastly improved the success rate in surgery in his own time, boosting public confidence in hospitals, and helped to lay the ground for the new science of bacteriology. His work made operations possible within the thoracic, abdominal and cranial cavities: thus, to quote his most recent biographer, he 'opened up new frontiers in medicine ... and ... saved hundreds of thousands of lives'. His antiseptic method using carbolic acid – which could be a skin irritant – has long since been replaced by aseptic methods, in which scrupulous cleanliness ensures that no infection is present, but the essential theory – that germs must not be allowed to enter a wound – remains the same. Lister's reputation has remained high and there has been a steady stream of biographies – the first, by his nephew Rickman Godlee, and the most recent in 1977. A 1948 biographer complained that Lister's work was 'little thought of' in Britain given that he had 'driven back death itself', and when compared to



the attention given in France to Pasteur. This has been addressed more so in Scotland, where Lister is commemorated by George Henry Paulin in Kelvingrove Park, Glasgow, as well as existing plaques in Edinburgh and Glasgow. The bacteria *listeria* is named after him, as is, more palatably, Listerine mouthwash; carbolic soap was one of a number of products marketed on the back of his work.

### **Historical association of Joseph Lister to 52 Maple Street**

Maple Street is the only surviving London address at which Joseph Lister can be commemorated with an English Heritage blue plaque.

Joseph Lister lived here as a student while he studied for his first degree at University College; Maple Street (formerly 28 London Street), was his first independent address – to which he appears to have moved in late March or early April of 1844. Here he lived with a fellow Quaker, Edward Palmer, 8 years his senior. Unfortunately most of Lister's correspondence from this period has been lost, but there are two letters at the Wellcome Library (Western MS 6182), both of which clearly come from the pen of a young man irked at feeling obliged to write home when he has little to report. On 2 April 1844 he told to his mother: 'I suppose I had better just write to say that I am quite well, and to ask if you are the same. I have attended the lectures hitherto, and like them much and notwithstanding Papa's fears, have found quite enough to employ my time after 3 o'clock. I am getting pretty much settled in here and anticipate a pleasant residence here.' In a second letter dated 11 April, he regretted that his father had called when he was out, explaining that he and Edward Palmer had been on a long walk up to Hampstead via Primrose Hill, and reported a trip to the Ethnological Society 'which I enjoyed very much'.

Lister was studying for a broad-based BA degree while living at this address, his medical studies came later; however, it was this breadth of grounding, urged on him by his father, that has been credited with encouraging his dedication to ongoing research and to the experimental method. His father also paid for Lister's studies: entries in his account book include the hefty initial matriculation and lecture fee in April 1844 (£16), as well as expenditure on shoes, slippers and books, which included John Lindley's *A Natural System of Botany* (1830-36), purchased in May 1845, and an expensive unnamed book on anatomy (£10 6s), acquired in September 1846. Lister was also paid an allowance: usually £1-2s a week in 1844 and rising over time, with additional sums paid for annual holidays.

In December 1846 Lister witnessed an operation at University College Hospital on a patient rendered unconscious under ether, conducted by Robert Liston – the first operation to use anaesthetic in Great Britain. This confirmed his intention, already indicated by a childhood fondness for dissection, to study medicine. Lister's most recent biography postulates that, as an operative assistant, it was probably Palmer – having divined great promise in his house-mate – who provided Lister's entrée to witness Liston's ground-breaking use of anaesthesia. Appropriately, 52 Maple Street lies within direct sight of University College hospital. Lister is recorded at this address in the UCL student register for 1844; since these records do not give another address until 1847, it is likely that London Street was Lister's



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term-time abode until sometime that year, when both Lister and Palmer likely moved to 5 Bedford Place, which has followed the fate of all Lister's following London addresses and no longer survives.

A plaque on the London house where Joseph Lister first gained confidence and inspiration to study medicine would seem very appropriate especially after the loss of his original early LCC bronze plaque, and would be a very welcome replacement and popular addition to the cultural history of the area.

### Consents

Recent consultation with the freeholder has resulted in positive support and final approval for the design and positioning of the blue plaque as shown attached. The Historic England Conservation Architect has been consulted to review that the building is structurally sound to support an inset plaque, and approve the positioning, and methodology of fixing the plaque. If planning consent approved, we would hope to install the plaque in autumn 2024.

I should be grateful if you would let me know whether you have any observations on our proposal. If you would like to discuss the matter further, or require any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

Cathy Power  
Blue Plaques Manager

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