

HERITAGE STATEMENT

HAMPSTEAD OLD FIRE STATION TOWER ROOF RESTORATION PROJECT



1. Hampstead old fire station c.1900

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SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Hampstead Old Fire Station [HOFS] dates from 1873 and was built by the Metropolitan Board of Works.
- 1.2 During the early 20th century it ceased to be used as a fire station and was vacated. The look-out tower was subsequently dismantled at some point between 1927 and 1965.
- 1.3 It is a Grade II listed building and makes an important contribution to the heart of the Hampstead Conservation Area.
- 1.4 Current proposals to reinstate the cupola on the clock tower would have clear heritage benefits for the building itself and for its wider historic setting. There is sufficient documentary material available to inform the design of a replacement structure, even though the original drawings do not survive. Structural stability is being borne in mind throughout the project and is the subject of separate documentation.
- 1.5 Reinstating the tower would not be contrary to any planning policies, is not being undertaken for commercial gain, and there are no disbenefits to weigh up. Indeed, there are very clear heritage benefits to be gained through this restoration of a lost feature.
- 1.6 It is thus suggested that the proposal to reinstate the HOFS tower roof meets the necessary tests and should be granted consent.

HISTORY



2. *The HOFS from the junction of Heath Street and Hampstead High Street, 2020.*

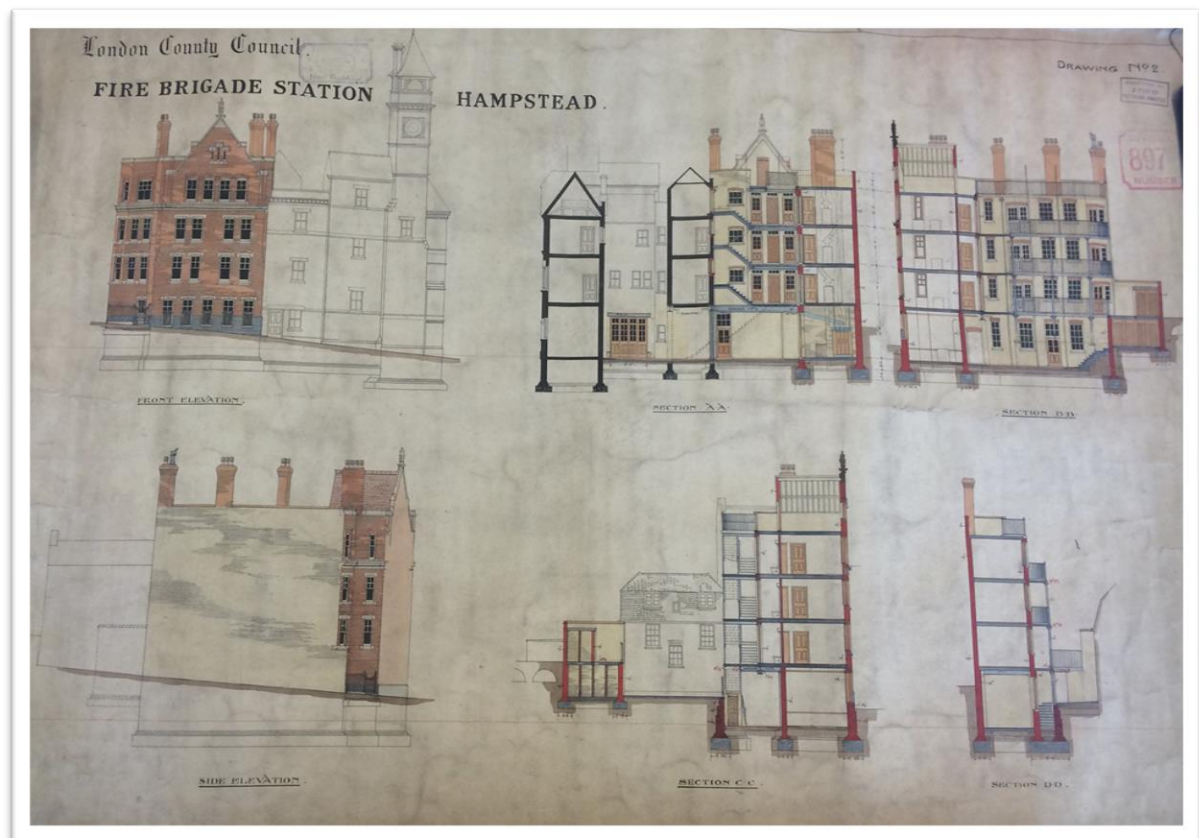
- 2.1 The building is dated 1873 on its Portland stone frieze at second floor level, with the initials MBW: this stands for the Metropolitan Board of Works. The HOFS was built to provide a fire station for the fast-expanding area, and to take advantage of the elevated location which afforded views over the southern and western slopes of Hampstead.
- 2.2 The **Metropolitan Board of Works** [MBW] was an early London-wide body, charged with the construction of public buildings and infrastructure for the capital. Founded in 1855 by the passing of the Metropolis Management Act, its chief responsibilities covered sewage, parks

and open spaces, roads and bridges. In 1865 these were extended to include the Metropolitan Fire Brigade.

- 2.3 The London Fire Engine Establishment was founded in 1833. Growing anxiety at the danger to London of uncontrolled fires led to a parliamentary investigation, resulting in the transfer of fire-fighting responsibilities to the MBW in 1865. No fewer than 26 new fire stations were built from 1867-71, showing the resources devoted to this topic. Fourteen followed in the years up to 1880. The HOFs were designed in 1872: other contemporary fire stations of 1872 were Mile End Road, Lower Wandsworth Road and Whitecross Street.
- 2.4 The chief architect to the MBW was George John Vulliamy (1817-86), nephew of the better-known architect Lewis Vulliamy (1791-1871). The younger Vulliamy travelled extensively abroad between 1841 and 1843, in France, Italy, Greece, Asia Minor and Egypt, and was very familiar with a wide range of historical styles of architecture. His best-known work for the MBW is probably the setting of Cleopatra's Needle, erected on the new Victoria Embankment in 1878. Vulliamy produced the illustrations for Henry Gally Knight's *Ecclesiastical Architecture of Italy* (1842-4), and his knowledge of Italian (particularly Venetian) gothic architecture is sensed in the elevational treatment of the HOFs. However, his role at the MBW was a senior one, and it is unlikely he had a direct hand in the design of the HOFs beyond approving of the final design. Mitton, writing in *The Fascination of Hampstead* (1908, p.25) specifically refers to 'an imposing fire-station, built by Vulliamy in 1874'. The date is wrong by a year, and perhaps the ascription is as well.
- 2.5 The architect with actual oversight of fire stations from 1871 to 1879 was **Alfred Mott**, who took over this role from Edward Cresy junior (1824-1870). Mott changed the chosen style used for fire stations away from a more pointed arch style to one called 'Secular Gothick' (Weinreb, 503), and worked closely with Robert Pearsall (1852-1929), who was eventually to lead the Fire Brigade Branch of the MBW's architecture service from 1879 to 1899. Alfred Mott is the best candidate for the architect of the building.
- 2.6 The new building occupied a prominent corner site, where Hampstead's High Street turned north up the hill, and forked, with Holly Hill running to the north-west. This prominence was a later Victorian development however, and the fire station's construction was part of this remodelling of the centre of the village into its present configuration.
- 2.7 It stood on the site of a former police station, at the corner of the High Street and Heath Street, on the form with Hollybush Hill. Just to the south was 'a warren of alleyways, tenements and cottages that lay between Church Row and the High Street. After several years argument it was decided to demolish these slums, extend Heath Street to meet Fitzjohn's Avenue, and widen the northern part of the High Street... These improvements were completed in 1888 at a cost of £120,000, shared between the Hampstead Vestry and the Metropolitan Board of Works' (*Conservation Area Statement*, p10). The MBW thus not only built the fire station but it also contributed more widely to the creation of Hampstead's centre. The location of the fire station became even more prominent with the cutting-through of Heath Street to Fitzjohn's Avenue (laid out in 1875) in 1887.

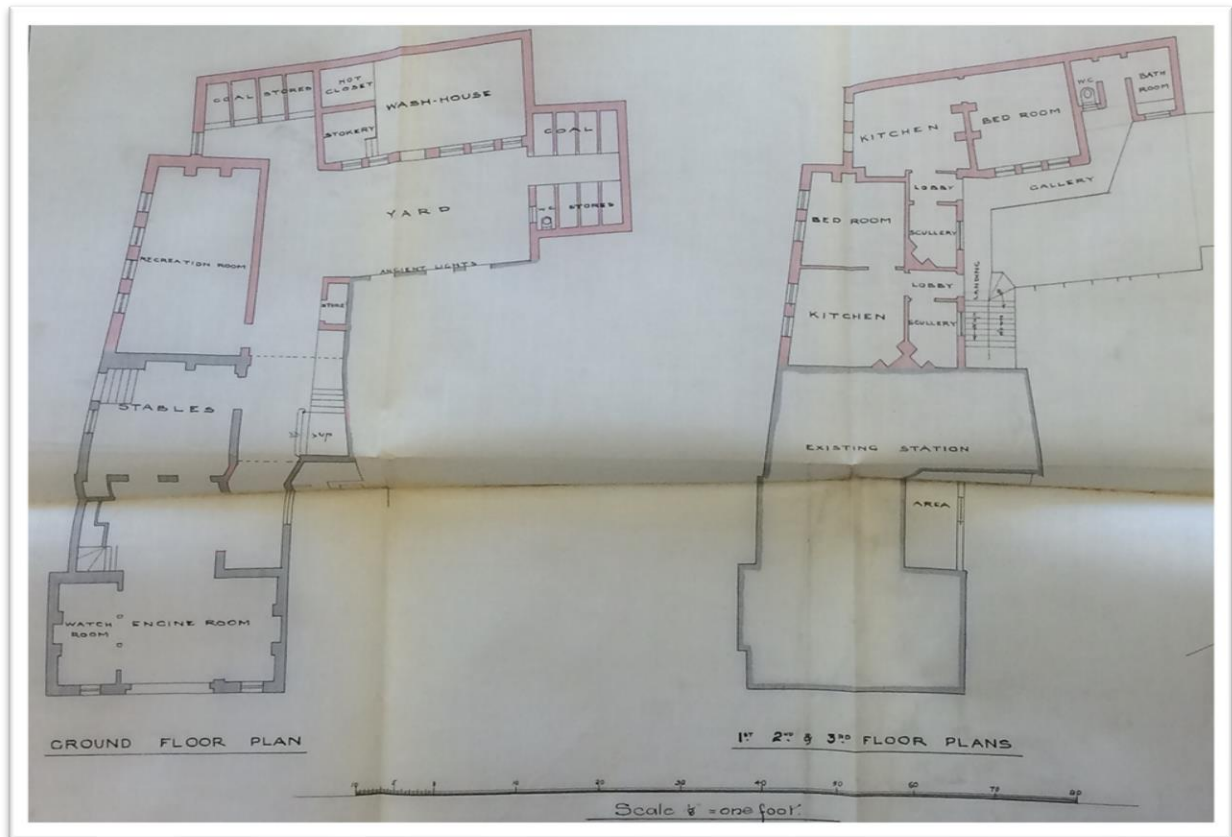


3. 25-inch Ordnance Survey map (surveyed 1866, published 1870): the site of the HOHS, indicated by an arrow, was occupied by a police station at this date.



4. Metropolitan Board of Works: designs for extension to HOFS, 1896 (London Metropolitan Archives). The original drawings for the building have been lost, so these are the closest drawings to this which survive.

- 2.8 An extension was built to the rear, running along Holly Hill, in 1896. A full set of drawings survives for this phase, but not for the earlier one.
- 2.9 The HOFS consisted of an engine room fronting onto Heath Street; behind this on the ground floor was a stable and yard, with a recreation room to the rear. On the first and second floors, the front of the building contained the engineer's quarters, with more accommodation to the rear. The third floor of the rear of the building contained further accommodation, with a gallery looking out onto the yard.
- 2.10 The List description observes that 'the watch tower was also a water tower, one of the first buildings for London's new horse-drawn fire brigade to have one.'
- 2.11 The HOFS was closed in 1915, when a new station was opened in Lancaster Grove in Belsize Park (Wade, 61). The replacement of horse-drawn fire engines with motorised ones changed the requirements of the buildings, rendering the first generation of such buildings obsolete.
- 2.12 The building was subsequently sold into private hands, and the firemen's quarters adapted for residential use. The ground floor was converted into retail space: judging by evidence from dated postcards, this took place some time after 1919. The first occupants were Hamptons, the estate agents which opened for business on 26th March 1923.



5. floor plans for the HOFs from the 1896 extension drawings (London Metropolitan Archives).

MESSRS.
HAMPTON & SONS,
 ESTATE AGENTS AND AUCTIONEERS,
 Beg to announce that their
NEW BRANCH OFFICE
 at
THE CLOCK TOWER,
49, Heath Street, Hampstead, N.W.3.
 (Telephone: Hampstead 2727),
 Will be opened on
MONDAY, MARCH 26th, 1923.
 This Office occupies the site of the Old
 Fire Station, and is immediately opposite
 the Hampstead Tube Station.
 The Branch will be conducted in conjunction
 with and under the same Direction as the
 Head Office, and Clients are reminded
 that Messrs.

HAMPTON & SONS
 Hold Weekly Auction Sales of HOUSES
 AND ESTATES of every description at the
ST. JAMES' ESTATE ROOMS,
20, ST. JAMES' SQUARE, S.W.1.,
 The Head Office of the Business.

6. a newspaper advert published in The Hendon And Finchley Times on 23rd March 1923

- 2.13 Just when the cupola was taken down is not known. Still present in 1927, it had been removed by 1969, the date of a photograph in the London Metropolitan Archives. No bombs are recorded as having fallen close by.



7. The building from the south in 1927: the fire station had closed in 1915 and by the time of this photograph the ground floor was now occupied by Hampton's the estate agents.

DESCRIPTION

- 3.1 The building is a picturesque, complex design on four floors, on a sloping corner site fronting onto Heath Street, with an extended return elevation along Holly Hill. The List Description gives a sense of the intricacy of the composition:

“Red brick with stone and terracotta dressings. Tiled gabled roof with stone bracketed eaves cornice. Venetian Gothic style. EXTERIOR: 3 storeys with irregular 3-5 storeys return to Holly Hill. Irregular fenestration. 3-stage rectangular clock tower rising from 1st floor on left hand return. Heath Street facade with C20 stone faced shop frontage. 1st floor, 5-light arcaded window of attached columns carrying pointed arches; centre light blind with patterned terracotta plaque; stone sill string. Arch heads break into enriched stone and terracotta band at 2nd floor level inscribed "MBW AD 1873". Half-hipped gable with 2-light 2nd floor window in pointed arch recess with enriched tympanum and apron. Clock tower with dentil cornice at roof level and above narrow opening on each facade. Clock face on each facade with continuous projecting modillion cornice above. Return with gabled end bay having cornice at 3rd floor level; mostly paired sashes.”

- 3.2 The full specification for the building (running to 49 pages) survives among the Metropolitan Board of Works bound papers in the London Metropolitan Archives. The bricks were to come from Suffolk; roofs were to be covered with Broseley plain tiles to all roofs. Outdoor masonry was to be of Portland stone, with York stone to all floors. All timber was to be best quality ‘Memel, Dantzic or Riga fur’ (that is, softwood from the Baltic). External woodwork was to be painted bronze green, and windows ‘invisible green’ (A dark green used for painting iron fences): the ‘standards and frame of the clock tower roof to be stained dark oak colour, and to be sized and twice varnished.’
- 3.3 The principal area of external alteration to the building has been the ground floor. Originally this had a single depressed arched opening, set between small windows, with elaborate mouldings. It was replaced with a conventional classical shop-front in the 1920s.
- 3.4 The clock tower, square in section, is at the south-east corner of the building. It is of two stages, with an illuminated clock face within a square setting, in the upper stage. The cupola stood above the surviving eaves cornice, and consisted of a pyramidal tiled roof carried on squat timber corner posts: arched braces supported the roof structure. Behind, on the west side of the cupola, stood a tall chimney stack which rose almost to the full height of the roof. The cupola was tile-covered, with a metal lightning conductor at the pinnacle. As shown in some views, a flagpole sometimes extended out of the eastern face of the structure.



8. Front elevation (2020).



9. Detail of 1905 photograph, showing the tower roof with its finial and flagpole. Precautions are in place to prevent tiles falling to the ground

SIGNIFICANCE

- 4.1 The significance of this Grade II-listed building can be broken down under a number of headings. These include:
- 4.2 **Architectural:** as a picturesquely designed, well-constructed example of a High Victorian fire station, demonstrating the adaptation of Venetian Gothic for public buildings, and responding to operational requirements with the construction of a picturesque look-out tower;
- 4.3 **Historical:** as an early surviving example of a London fire station, demonstrating the emergence of specific building types responding to the needs of the growing metropolis; and for showing the role of the MBW, providing services for the capital as opposed to local parish;
- 4.4 **Communal interest:** as a prominent landmark, showing the emergence of fire-fighting provision for the fast-growing Hampstead area; and for embodying the redevelopment of this area at the heart of the Village in later Victorian times;
- 4.5 **Group value:** for its visual relationship with other buildings such as the Underground Station and the late 1880s developments nearby.
- 4.6 The building is Grade II listed, and has been listed since the May 1974 revision of the list for the London Borough of Camden. The list entry (No 1378826 on the National Heritage List for England) was last revised in 1999 (attached as an appendix). This does not give any specific reasons for designation, but it is implicit that architectural and historic interest are the key grounds. The loss of the 'steeple' as the tower roof is described, is noted in the entry.
- 4.7 The presence of a Heath and Hampstead Society cast-iron plaque which sets out the building's history demonstrates that the communal interest of the building has long been recognised.
- 4.8 The HOFS is a handsome building which derives at least some of its architectural significance from the picturesque way in which its tower looms above the Hampstead rooftops to provide a look-out for fire-watching. The truncation of the tower through the loss of its canopy undermines some of this significance. Its reinstatement would return the building's silhouette to its full measure of interest. This would constitute a clear heritage benefit.



10. close-up of the Heath and Hampstead Society plaque erected on the HOFS.

PROPOSALS

- 5.1 The current proposals consist of the reinstatement of the look-out tower which formerly stood on top of the brick tower. The present owner has already restored the clock mechanism and illumination, and returned this to use.
- 5.2 The original drawings for the building do not survive, although the outline of the cupola is shown on the drawings for the 1896 enlargement. Numerous photographs exist of the structure from several angles, so it is possible to reconstruct the cupola with some accuracy.



11. Detail of south elevation of existing tower on the HOFs from the 1895 MBW drawings for the rear extension (London Metropolitan Archives).

- 5.3 The original cupola was a stout structure, strongly built and of heavy timber construction, with a square tiled roof.
- 5.4 Matters of structural stability and the appropriate health and safety considerations are beyond the scope of this heritage statement. It is worth stating here that the building is overall in sound condition and was designed to receive a tower roof canopy.

RELEVANT POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 The proposals will need to be assessed under a number of different legislative considerations within the planning system.
- 6.2 Because of the non-contentious nature of the proposals, and for reasons of brevity, these considerations are not individually rehearsed here in full. Officers will be familiar with the individual considerations and only an outline is offered here, to demonstrate an awareness of the relevant framework.
- 6.3 At a **national level**, the applicable legislative framework includes the following:
- * The Town and Country Planning Act 1990;
 - * The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004;
- And in particular
- * **The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.**
- 6.4 The applicable statutory provisions in the 1990 Act are:
- * Section 16 (2) which covers listed building consent;
 - * Section 66 (1) regarding the determination of applications;
 - * Section 72 (1) regarding conservation area considerations.
- 6.5 Section 16 (2) requires that the local planning authority or the Secretary of State 'shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.' This is repeated under Section 66 (1).
- 6.6 Section 72 (1) requires that 'in the exercise of all planning functions, special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the area.' Character is determined by physical characteristics but also by more general considerations such as use or activity.
- 6.7 The proposals indubitably preserve and enhance the character and appearance of both listed building and conservation area and are therefore acceptable in terms of national legislation.
- 6.8 At the level of **local development plans**, the application needs to accord with
- * The London Plan (2021)
 - * the Camden Local Plan (2017).
- 6.9 In terms of the current **London Plan**, the relevant considerations are found under Policy D4 ('Delivering Good Design'). These require that developments make a positive contribution to the public realm, streetscape and wider cityscape, and to take references from the form,

mass and orientation of the existing built environment. Policy HC1, 'Heritage conservation and growth', advises that development affecting heritage assets and their setting should conserve their significance, by being sympathetic to their form, scale, materials and architectural detail.

6.10 The **Camden Local Plan** goes into slightly more detail. Policy D1 (Design) requires that development

- a. respects local context and character;
- b. preserves or enhances the historic environment and heritage assets in accordance with Policy D2 – Heritage;
- c. is sustainable in design and construction, incorporating best practice in resource management and climate change mitigation and adaptation;
- d. is of sustainable and durable construction and adaptable to different activities and land uses;
- e. comprises details and materials that are of high quality and complement the local character;
- f. integrates well with the surrounding streets and open spaces, improving movement through the site and wider area with direct accessible and easily recognisable routes and contributes positively to the street frontage;
- g. is inclusive and accessible for all;
- j. responds to natural features and preserves gardens and other open space;
- k. incorporates high quality landscape design (including public art, where appropriate) and maximises opportunities for greening, for example through planting of trees and other soft landscaping;
- l. incorporates outdoor amenity space;
- m. preserves strategic and local views;
- o. carefully integrates building services equipment. The council will resist development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions."

6.11 The Camden Plan's Policy D2 (Heritage) covers the impact of development on conservation areas and on listed buildings. With regard to the former, the Policy states that the council will

- e. require that development within conservation areas preserves or, where possible, enhances the character or appearance of the area;
- f. resist the total or substantial demolition of an unlisted building that makes a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a conservation area;
- g. resist development outside of a conservation area that causes harm to the character or appearance of the conservation area; and
- h. preserve trees and garden spaces which contribute to the character and appearance of a conservation area or which provide a setting for Camden's architectural heritage."

6.12 With regard to listed buildings, the Policy states that the council will:

- i. resist the total or substantial demolition of a listed building;
- j. resist proposals for a change of use or alterations and extensions to a listed building where this would cause harm to the special architectural and historic interest of the building; and
- k. Resist development that would cause harm to the significance of a listed building through an effect on its setting."

6.13 In each case, the proposals are in harmony with the precepts of the policies set out in the local plan. The proposals uphold and enhance the significance of both the conservation and of the listed building. No harm is to be identified in the proposals.

6.14 The other material considerations are the **National Planning Policy Framework** (NPPF), as revised in 2023, and the **Conservation Area Statement** (2002). Paragraph 194 requires an applicant to describe the significance of any asset affected by a proposal in a proportionate way. Paragraph 195 requires local authorities to 'identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal'. Paragraph 199 states that 'When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation'.

6.15 Most relevantly, Paragraph 205 states that local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within conservation area and within the setting of heritage assets to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to or better reveal the significance of an asset should be treated favourably.

6.16 What is proposed in this application clearly better reveals the significance of the listed HOFS by reinstating a lost feature and it is therefore clear that the proposals are wholly consistent with the requirements of the NPPF.

6.17 The 2002 **Conservation Area Statement** contains some relevant sections. In particular, the paragraph on 'Quality Erosion' (p. 57) regrets the 'steady erosion of many of the attributes of the character and appearance of the area' including 'alteration and addition to roofs' and 'loss of original features'. The section 'Elevational Alterations and Loss of Detail' (p.58)

discusses the impact of lost features and how embellishments of properties 'need to be retained and restored'. Policy H17 states that original features 'should be retained and kept in good repair, and only replaced when there is no alternative, or to enhance the appearance of the building through the restoration of missing features.' Moreover, 'Where details have been removed in the past, replacement with suitable copies will be encouraged'. Policy H33 covers roof extensions, but states that 'The retention or reinstatement of any architecturally interesting features and characteristic decorative elements such as parapets, cornices and chimneystacks and pots will be encouraged.'

- 6.18 Moreover, the Conservation Area Statement makes specific mention (p.17) of the HOFS and its missing tower canopy: 'At the central junction of the High Street and Heath Street is the Gothic former Fire Station (1873) by GJ Vulliamy, with red brick and stone dressings. Its bold clock tower, which has unfortunately lost its pointed roof, is a prominent landmark.' The absence of the upper feature is thus identified as a negative element.
- 6.19 It is therefore apparent that the proposals are very much in keeping with the spirit and the letter of the Conservation Area Statement, as well as with local and city-wide plans and with national legislation and guidance.

HERITAGE IMPACT

- 7.1 The HOFS is a picturesque building in a prominent location, set in a sensitive area. The building contributes considerably to the amenity of the local scene.
- 7.2 Even without the cupola, the building is attractive and of special interest. The loss of the cupola is however regrettable: the look-out function of the clock-tower is no longer evident, and the abrupt termination of the tower is out of keeping with the picturesque composition of the building. This has been identified in the Conservation Area Statement of 2002.
- 7.3 The reinstatement of the missing cupola is wholly beneficial in terms of impact. It would reverse the negative impacts of its removal, and further reinforce the significance of the Grade II building.
- 7.4 The reconstruction of the cupola would be based on careful study of the original structure, and would thus avoid conjecture.
- 7.5 No harm would be done to the historic fabric of the clock tower; the mid-20th century capping of the tower is not an event of any interest.
- 7.6 In conclusion, therefore, the proposal to reinstate the missing cupola should be welcomed as it is a wholly positive contribution to the significance both of the listed building and conservation area.

CONSULTANT

- 8.1 This document has been prepared by Roger Bowdler. He has a PhD in art history (Cambridge), a diploma in historic building conservation (Architectural Association) and is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. He joined English Heritage in 1989 as a historian in the London Division, and ended as Director of Listing at Historic England, leaving in 2018. He joined Montagu Evans as a partner in the heritage team in 2019; this report is written in a private capacity, however, and *pro bono*.
- 8.2 Roger has lived in Hampstead since the late 1980s. He has been a member of the Heath and Hampstead Society for thirty years, and was much involved in the campaign to save New End Hospital from demolition. He worked on the revision of the Camden list in the 1990s and has published on a range of heritage issues.

REFERENCES

London Borough of Camden, *Conservation Area Statement: Hampstead* (2002)

G.E. Mitton, *The Fascination of London. Hampstead and Marylebone* (1908)

John B. Nadal, *London's Fire Stations* (2006)

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Roger Smith, 'Vulliamy Family' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004), available at <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ezproxy2.londonlibrary.co.uk/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-50605?rskey=UrVG7j&result=1>, accessed 14 February 2020.

Christopher Wade ed., *The Streets of Hampstead* (rev. ed. 1984)

Ben Weinreb et al., *The London Encyclopaedia* (3rd ed. 2008)

London Metropolitan Archives:

Hampstead Fire Station (drawings detailing building extension)
Reference Code: LCC/VA/DD/R/270

Hampstead Fire Station (schedule of works)
Reference Code: MBW/2818 (1870 - 1879)

APPENDIX

NATIONAL HERITAGE LIST FOR ENGLAND ENTRY ON HAMPSTEAD OLD FIRE STATION



Grade: II

List Entry Number: 1378826

Date first listed: 14-May-1974

Date of most recent amendment: 11-Jan-1999

Statutory Address: NATIONWIDE ANGLIA BUILDING SOCIETY,
49, Heath Street, London NW3 6UD

TQ2685NW HEATH STREET 798-1/26/797 (West side) 14/05/74 No.49 Nationwide Anglia Building Society (Formerly Listed as: HEATH STREET No.49 National Westminster Bank)

Fire station, later bank, now building society with accommodation over. c1873. By GJ Vulliamy as head of the Metropolitan Board of Works' Architects' Department. Red brick with stone and terracotta dressings. Tiled gabled roof with stone bracketed eaves cornice. Venetian Gothic style. EXTERIOR: 3 storeys with irregular 3-5 storeys return to Holly Hill. Irregular fenestration. 3-stage rectangular clock tower rising from 1st floor on left hand return. Heath Street facade with C20 stone faced shop frontage. 1st floor, 5-light arcaded window of attached columns carrying pointed arches; centre light blind with patterned terracotta plaque; stone sill string. Arch heads break into enriched stone and terracotta band at 2nd floor level inscribed "MBW AD 1873". Half-hipped gable with 2-light 2nd floor window in pointed arch recess with enriched tympanum and apron. Clock tower with dentil cornice at roof level and above narrow opening on each facade. Clock face on each facade with continuous projecting modillion cornice above. Return with gabled end bay having cornice at 3rd floor level; mostly paired sashes. INTERIOR: not inspected. HISTORICAL NOTE: the watch tower was also a water tower, one of the first buildings for London's new horse-drawn fire brigade to have one. Originally also with steeple. The fire station closed 1915 when a new one opened in Lancaster Grove.

The entry is available at <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1378826>



Hampstead Old Fire Station, from the south-east (c.1910)