

Guilford Place Drinking Fountain, Camden

Design, Access and Heritage Statement

July 2024

1. Introduction

This Design, Access and Heritage Statement accompanies a Listed Building Consent application for general maintenance and like-for-like repair works to the Grade II listed drinking fountain in Guilford Place, Camden. It sets out the history and significance of the fountain before outlining the package of works to the fountain and assessing the impact of the works upon the significance of the fountain as a designated heritage asset and upon the character and appearance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area within which the fountain sits.

The official list entry is also included below for information.

This document should be read in conjunction with the Condition Survey and Report of Proposed Works (London Stone Conservation, 2024) and Photographic record of condition and works (Heritage of London Trust, 2024) submitted as part of this application.

2. Site location and context

The Guilford Place Drinking Fountain is located within Guilford Place in the London Borough of Camden. It is orientated northwards facing onto Guilford Street which runs east-west immediately in front of the fountain. Immediately to the rear (south) of the fountain is a subterranean former public lavatory which is now in use as a wine bar. To the south of the wine bar and fountain runs Lamb's Conduit Street. The built context around the Guilford Place Fountain is a mix of historic Bloomsbury townhouses (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), alongside larger twentieth and twenty-first century institutional buildings mostly associated with healthcare and research, including Great Ormond Street Hospital. To the north of the site lies Coram's Fields, a large open space mostly given over to playing fields and sports pitches.

3. History of the fountain

The area of Bloomsbury remained as agricultural land between the cities of London and Westminster up to the seventeenth century. Sporadic development in the area included some large manors. Lamb's Conduit (named after William Lambe) was erected in 1564 to provide drinking water to local residents. Its use declined after the completion of the New River in 1613 and it was demolished in 1746 as urban development progressed northward.

Bloomsbury was developed between the 1660s (after the Great Plague of 1665 and Great Fire of 1666) and the 1840s. The southern and south-eastern areas, including Red Lion Street/Lamb's Conduit Street) were developed very early on, with the roads laid out and mostly developed by 1700.

Between 1742 and 1752, the Foundling Hospital was constructed at the north end of Lamb's Conduit Street. When built, it was situated on the northernmost fringe of the expanding city, surrounded by

undeveloped fields. Bloomsbury continued to develop throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, maintaining a formal pattern of gridded streets, squares and crescents.

The Guilford Place fountain was erected in around 1870 to the memory of Mrs Francis Whiting by her daughters, who lived in nearby Mecklenburgh Square. Some sources claim that it is in fact dedicated to Mr (not Mrs) Francis Whiting. The fountain was designed by Henry Darbishire (1825-1899), an accomplished architect who completed many works for charitable causes and organisations including the Peabody Trust. It comprised a Carrara marble statue of the Woman of Samaria, crouched and holding a jug, sitting atop a large Aberdeenshire granite plinth. The fountain originally had a floral motif push button tap (see Fig 01).

Historic maps and photographs reveal that a set of male and female public lavatories were installed immediately south of the fountain in the 1920s or 1930s (contrary to many sources, including the structure's National Heritage List description, which state that they are late-nineteenth century lavatories).

The Foundling Hospital moved to a different site in 1926 and the hospital buildings on Guilford Place were demolished. In 1936, the cleared site was reopened as a public park named Coram's Fields after the Hospital's founder, Thomas Coram (1668-1751).

Bloomsbury was severely bombed during the Second World War. The fountain survived but many buildings in the local area were destroyed (see Fig 02).

The fountain was refurbished on several occasions during the twentieth century. This included replacement of the statue's nose in Portland cement mortar and replacement of the floral motif tap with a cup-style drinking fountain sometime before 1977 (see Fig 03 below). The adjacent public lavatories are believed to have been closed in the 1980s.

During the late 1990s or early 2000s, the heavily stained statue was cleaned and another fountain system was installed, comprising a stainless steel push button and separate stainless steel spout. A stainless steel access panel was installed in the rear of the statue providing access to the internal plumbing, which also appears to have been renewed at this time. In contrast to these interventions, the bottom step of the fountain suffered significant damage around this time, with several chunks knocked off of the bullnose edge and one of the rear treads infilled with cementitious render.

The long-vacant public lavatories were converted to a wine bar in around 2016. Today, the water supply for the fountain is located within the bar, with a spur running off of the bar's mains water supply. The fountain has not been functional for at least 10 years and upon inspection it was found that both the internal and external plumbing were irreparably damaged through many years of disuse.

No Listed Building Consent or planning applications appear to have been submitted for any of the previous works undertaken to the fountain.

Photos of the fountain's existing condition in June and November 2023 can be found in the Photographic record of condition and works (2024) submitted with this application.



Fig 01 – Photograph of the drinking fountain in 1912, prior to the construction of the public lavatories immediately to the south. (Credit: London Picture Archive)



Fig 02 – Photograph of the Guilford Place Drinking Fountain during the Blitz, c.1940-41



Fig 03 – Photograph of the Guilford Place Drinking Fountain in 1971. Note that the original floral tap had been replaced with a cup-type fountain. Note also the relative lack of damage to the granite base at this time, and the ‘withered’ appearance of the marble jug’s handle.



Fig 04 – Photograph of the Guilford Place Drinking Fountain, c.1990s

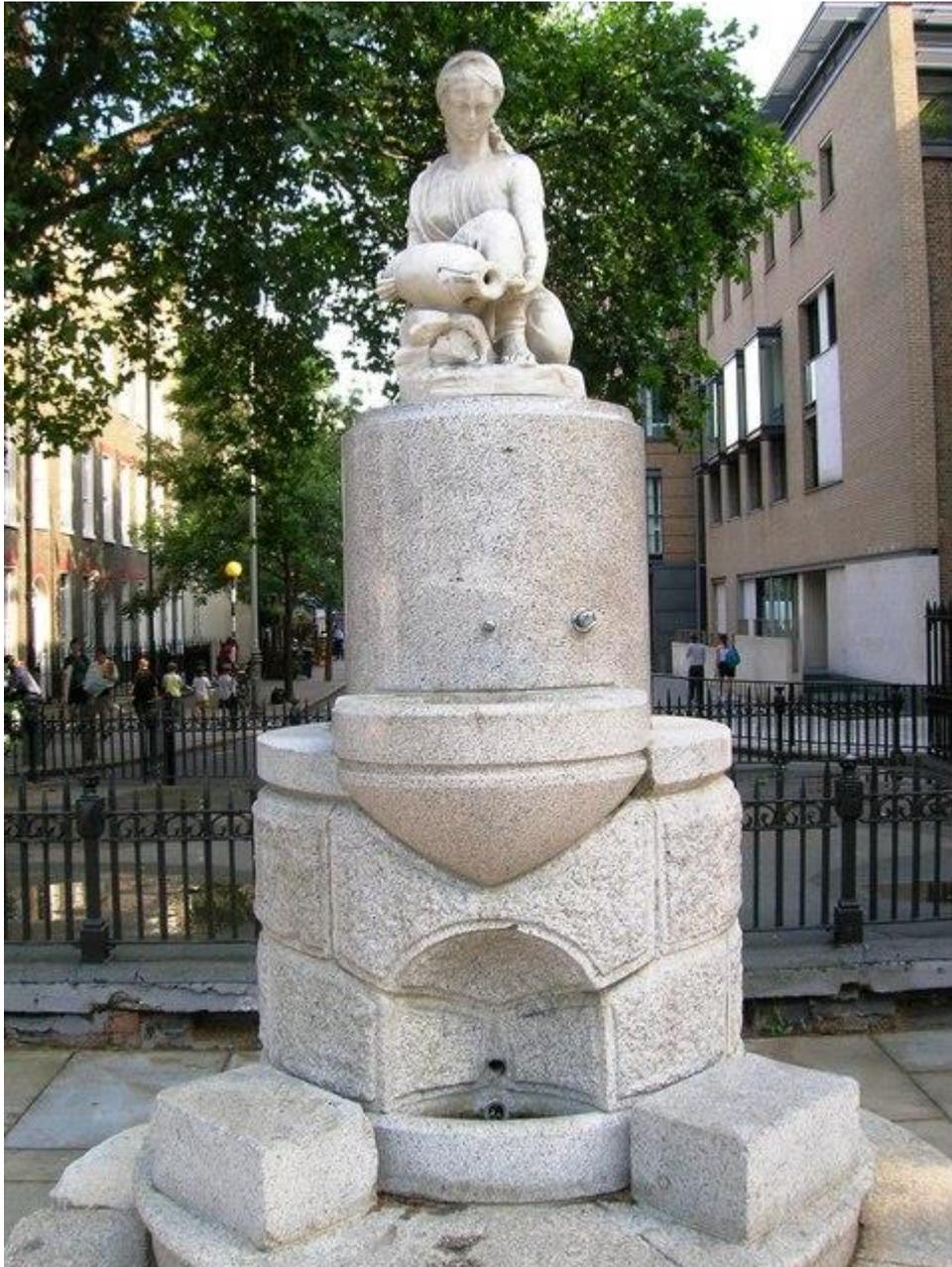


Fig 05 – Photograph of the Guilford Place Drinking Fountain, 2006. Note the damage to the granite base, the cleaner appearance of the marble statue and the new push button tap and spout.

4. Significance of the fountain

The Guilford Place Drinking Fountain is Grade II listed and lies within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area, designated by LB Camden in 1968 and extended on several subsequent occasions. The fountain's significance is derived from multiple sources.

Historic interest

A well-preserved example of a nineteenth-century public drinking fountainThe Guilford Place Drinking Fountain is of significance as a surviving nineteenth-century drinking fountain which was philanthropically commissioned and located in a prominent location by local residents.

Epidemics of water-borne diseases such as typhoid and cholera, and the rapid expansion of urban populations, led to the introduction of public drinking fountains across the country from the 1850s onwards. Drinking fountains provided a vital public amenity for those who could not afford piped water in their homes, with many older pumps and conduits being the source of contaminated water. The first public drinking fountain in London was erected at St Sepulchre Without Newgate church in the City of London in 1859.

By 1870, when the Guilford Place Drinking Fountain was constructed, many had been installed across the capital and clean drinking water was available to a greater proportion of the population than in 1859, but drinking fountains remained a gratefully-received and well-used public amenity.

Comparatively very few nineteenth-century drinking fountains survive across London and an even smaller collection remain functioning. The lack of functionality of the Guilford Place Drinking Fountain detracts from its significance to some degree as it no longer functions as originally intended.

Architectural and artistic interest

Part of the architectural oeuvre of Henry Darbishire

Henry Darbishire (1825-1899) was a prolific architect who is particularly well-known for his work for charitable causes and patrons, including the celebrated philanthropist, Angela Burdett-Coutts and the early housing association, the Peabody Trust. His best-known works include the Burdett Coutts Drinking Fountain in Victoria Park (1862) and the Columbia Market buildings (1869, demolished 1958). NB The market's ornate iron gates, railings and lanterns survive and were restored by HOLT in 2022. Darbishire's involvement here is of interest due to his reputation as a successful Victorian architect but also his frequent work for philanthropic and charitable causes, which is relevant in the context of the nearby Foundling Hospital (superceded to some degree by Great Ormond Street Hospital).

The design of the Guilford Place fountain by Darbishire may also be indicative of the Whiting's social connections and financial standing, as fundamentally a rather small commission for one of the country's leading architects at the height of his career.

An example of high quality Victorian craftsmanship

The Woman of Samaria (or Samaritan Woman) has been the source of artistic inspiration for many artists, especially associated with water features or fountains. It is a theme derived from the Biblical passage in which Jesus asks a Samaritan woman for a drink of water from Jacob's well, breaking the social stigma of interactions between Jews and Samaritans. The use of this story for the Guilford Place fountain's statue suggests that their Christian faith was important to the Whiting family. There are several other well-known depictions of the Woman of Samaria, including at Hoddesdon (Hertfordshire), Chester Cathedral and the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, USA.

The fountain showcases the impressive ability of Victorian stonemasons in the design and quality of the marble statue and the granite plinth upon which it sits.

Setting of the Guilford Place Drinking Fountain

The setting of the fountain also contributes to its significance. The fountain forms part of the formal urban plan that characterises Bloomsbury more generally, with axial streets, squares and crescents forming a neighbourhood of international importance for its spatial planning. The fountain lies on axis with Red Lion Street/Lamb's Conduit Street (home to some of London's oldest surviving townhouses, c.1690s) and the former site of the Foundling Hospital (built 1752, largely demolished 1936). Although the site of the Foundling Hospital has now been largely given over to playing fields, Great Ormond Street Hospital now lies immediately to the west of Guilford Place, maintaining the legacy of child welfare in the area.

5. Character and appearance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area

The Bloomsbury Conservation Area was designated in 1968 and has been extended on multiple occasions since. The Guilford Place Drinking Fountain lies in sub-area 12 of the conservation area which is dominated by Coram's Fields, on the former site of the Foundling Hospital. This is one of the largest open spaces in Central London and a key open space within the conservation area. Immediately south of Guilford Place lies sub-area 11 (Queen Square/Red Lion Square) which encompasses the earliest development within the conservation area, including Red Lion Street-Lamb's Conduit Street, which was laid out in around 1690.

The conservation area is of international importance as an early and highly influential form of urban planning, with its rapid development over 200 years resulting in a formal grid layout of streets, squares, circuses and crescents, with a strong degree of architectural unity stemming from the dominance of Classical architecture from the late-seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century. There is a range of building and site uses including domestic, commercial, institutional and civic, which reinforces its inner-city character.

The Guilford Place Drinking Fountain makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area by reinforcing the formal urban plan and high-quality streetscapes within the conservation area. It acts as a focal point of views along Guilford Street and from Coram's Fields south along Red Lion Street. Its central placement within Guilford Place emphasises the axial layout of Red Lion Street, Guilford Place and Coram's Fields (formerly the Foundling Hospital). Its donation by an established local family in 1870 helps to illustrate aspects of the conservation area's social history.

6. Description of works

By 2024, the Grade II listed drinking fountain had become heavily stained from traffic contamination and had suffered minor damage to the marble statue and granite plinth. The fountain was structurally sound and its fabric was generally in good condition, although unsympathetic repairs had been carried out to the marble statue and granite steps in cementitious mortar. The push button tap had ceased to function and the modern access panel in the rear of the fountain had been broken, leaving the modern internal pipework potential vulnerable to vandalism.

The current application is for a package of general maintenance works and like-for-like repairs using matching materials, intended to reverse harmful recent changes in the fountain's appearance, sensitively remove dirt to arrest further pollution-related decay, and restore its functionality as a drinking fountain.

A survey of the fountain's condition was carried out by CHAS-accredited stonemasons from London Stone Conservation and a package of minor repairs and maintenance works were specified. The works specified are outlined in the accompanying document: Guilford Place Drinking Fountain Condition Survey and Schedule of Works (London Stone Conservation, 2024).

Works were carried out to the fountain during June-July 2024, closely following the Condition Survey. The work comprised:

- DOFF clean of the entire structure to remove all organic staining.
- Limited, targeted poulticing to areas of engrained carbon staining (ammonium carbonate at 10% solution).
- Removal of the cement repairs to the marble statue's nose and handle, and to the granite steps.
- Like-for-like repairs to the granite steps using Aberdeenshire Kemnay granite.
- Like-for-like repair to the statue's nose and jug handle using Carrara statuary marble.
- Maintenance of the internal and external plumbing, involving the partial replacement of irreparable modern internal pipework and replacement of irreparable modern stainless steel push button and spout.
- Repairs to the modern rear access panel involving: temporary removal of the panel; hammering out the damaged concave section; replacement of the hinge with a flush hinge to facilitate addition of a metal plate (or plaque) over the top; addition of a 3-lever lock; and reinstallation of the hatch within its original aperture, avoiding any loss of original fabric.
- Raking out of cementitious mortar pointing and re-pointing in lime mortar.

These completed works are illustrated in the accompanying document (Guilford Place Drinking Fountain maintenance works, photographic record, 2024).

In addition to these completed works, permission is sought for the following proposal:

- Installation of an etched stainless steel plaque affixed to the modern rear access panel. The plaque will provide summary historical information regarding the fountain and acknowledge the parties involved in the 2024 works. Please see drawing GPDF04 and Fig 21 of the Photographic record (GPDF03) for more information.

7. Response to site context

The proposals are for minor, general maintenance and repair works using like-for-like materials to enhance the fountain's appearance and reverse inappropriate modern interventions. The fountain will not be moved and its prominence as a feature of Guilford Place will be enhanced with the renewal of its functionality and its enhanced appearance. The sensitive redevelopment of the adjacent public lavatory as a bar, the redevelopment of adjacent plots with high-quality new buildings, and enhancements to the public realm in recent years all give a sense of the area being improved. The works to the fountain will help to further uplift one's experience of the public realm in the area and help to create a more sustainable city.

8. Access considerations

The fountain lies within the public realm and was erected as a public amenity. The fountain itself is accessed via two granite steps. There are no plans to change access to the fountain – it will remain a public drinking fountain. It would be very difficult to achieve equal access to the fountain's tap due to its physical constraints, and no interventions are currently planned to change equal access arrangements for the fountain.

9. Heritage impact of the works

The works that have been carried out to the Guilford Place Drinking Fountain have significantly improved the fountain's condition and have better revealed its significance as a designated heritage asset.

The cleaning works have revealed the statue's vibrant appearance and removed all staining from the granite body of the fountain. All cleaning processes were light touch methods recommended for historic stone conservation, and will help to arrest pollution-related decay of the marble statue in particular. The fountain's historic fabric suffered no damage or loss as a result of the cleaning works.

Like-for-like repairs were made to the marble statue, including the replacement of the jug's right handle which had become severely eroded to the point of almost complete loss, and the tip of the statue's nose, where a cementitious mortar repair was replaced with a stone indent. Both repairs were executed in Carrara marble to match the statue's original material.

The fountain's existing plumbing was modern (c.1990s or early 2000s) and made no contribution to the fountain's significance. The repairs to the internal plumbing have removed the risk of damage to the fountain that may have occurred due to the broken, leaking nature of the existing pipework. The push button was replaced like-for-like while the spout was replaced with a longer spout to direct water into the bowl, avoiding the risk of water and algal staining down the front of the fountain's granite body.

Limited stone indents were made to areas of greatest damage to the lowest granite step. This damage is believed to have occurred during the late 1990s or early 2000s. Lime mortar or cement repairs are not possible for step edging and the recent cement repairs on the top of the step had also failed. A negligible amount of historic fabric was removed to enable the granite indents to be installed to the stone steps, while the inappropriate failed cement repairs to the rear steps were removed. The replication of the steps' historic appearance including the bullnose profile, carved all in like-for-like materials (Aberdeenshire Kemnay granite), has reversed a harmful recent change to the fountain's appearance.

The addition of a commemorative plaque to the rear access panel will cause no harm to the significance of the fountain and result in no loss of original fabric as it will be affixed to the modern metal access panel. The plaque will provide members of the public with useful context regarding the history of the fountain, thereby better revealing its significance.

The character and appearance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area has been enhanced through the works to clean the Guilford Place Drinking Fountain and reverse harmful recent changes to its appearance.

Overall, the completed and proposed works represent a heritage benefit in replacing failed and inappropriate modern repairs, better revealing the significance of a degraded heritage asset, and

have increased public awareness of and engagement with the fountain. The proposed addition of a plaque on the rear of the fountain will further enhance public awareness of this designated heritage asset. Returning the fountain to working order will also deliver a public benefit in providing free drinking water to all, enhancing the sustainability of the public realm within Camden by reducing plastic waste and improving climate resilience. The works are fully compliant with local and national policies relating to conservation of the historic built environment.

10. Official list entry

Heritage Category: **Listed Building**

Grade: **II**

List Entry Number: **1246147**

Date first listed: **11-Feb-1998**

List Entry Name: **DRINKING FOUNTAIN**

Statutory Address 1: **DRINKING FOUNTAIN, GUILFORD PLACE**

Location

Statutory Address: **DRINKING FOUNTAIN, GUILFORD PLACE**

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 30563 82182**

Details

CAMDEN

TQ3082SE GUILFORD PLACE 798-1/96/717 (South side) 11/02/98 Drinking Fountain

GV II

Drinking fountain situated on a traffic island. 1870. Designed by architect Henry Darbishire for the Misses Whiting to commemorate their mother. Granite base with stone figure. Raised circular plinth with 2 block steps to circular base of rough-hewn granite blocks with round-arched niche for animal trough at base, supporting projecting semicircular basin and smooth granite drum surmounted by a sculptured figure of the Woman of Samaria, in loose robes and scarf, kneeling on left knee to fill a water jar. The drinking fountain forms a civic group with the cast-iron railings to the Ladies' & Gentlemen's public conveniences (gv), situated behind it.

Listing NGR: TQ3056382182

Legacy

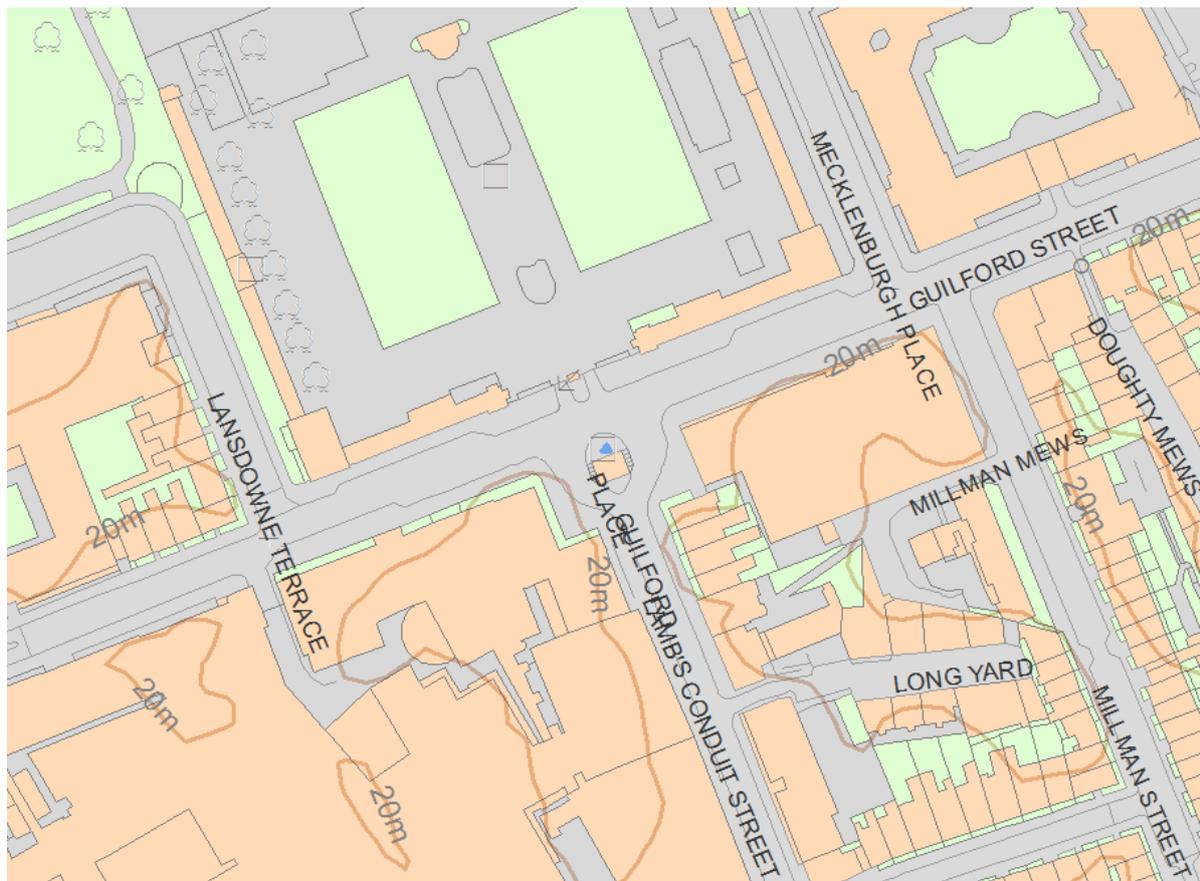
The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System number: **477918**

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.



End of official list entry.