

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

29 November 2024

Sent via PLANNING PORTAL

**LBC APPLICATION – for installation of one ceramic blue plaque to:
Rhoda Garrett (1841-1882) and Agnes Garrett (1845-1935)**

SITE ADDRESS – 2 Gower Street, WC1E 6DP

Listed Grade II, in Bloomsbury Conservation Area, (sub area 5. Bedford Square/Gower Street)

APPLICANT – Cathy Power, London Blue Plaques Manager, English Heritage
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COVER LETTER AND HERITAGE STATEMENT

Dear Sir or Madam

Single blue plaque to two figures; Rhoda Garrett (1841-1882) and Agnes Garrett (1845-1935) at 2 Gower Street, WC1E 6DP

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 single blue plaque be erected to commemorate Rhoda Garrett and Agnes Garrett at **2 Gower Street, WC1E 6DP**; the property Grade II (listed entry 1322171) and lies within Bloomsbury Conservation Area, sub area 5. There is an existing blue plaque to Dame Millicent Garrett Fawcett at the address, this new proposal is for the placing of a second plaque on the front elevation.

The proposed inscription on the proposed blue plaque is:

**RHODA
GARRETT
1841–1882
AGNES GARRETT
1845–1935
Interior decorators
and suffragists
lived, worked and
died here**

6th Floor, 100 Wood Street, London EC2V 7AN
Telephone: **020 7973 3000** Website: english-heritage.org.uk

Plaque dimensions

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.

Proposed position of the new blue plaque: front elevation of 2 Gower Street

Historical research by English Heritage identified that there is only one surviving London address where a plaque to Rhoda Garrett and Agnes Garrett can be located, namely 2 Gower Street. The positioning of the plaque has carefully taken into consideration that the building has an existing blue plaque to Dame Millicent Garrett Fawcett, installed in 1954 by the London County Council (LCC); reading 'Dame/ Millicent Garrett/ Fawcett/ 1847-1929/ pioneer of/ women's suffrage/ lived and/ died here'. For every plaque proposed we look carefully at the impact that the plaques make on the architecture of the building, the number of plaques nearby and their siting on buildings in order to minimise any negative disruption. Where, as in this case, there is an existing plaque (and other plaques nearby), it is important that the second plaque serves a clear purpose in raising awareness of the new proposed figures' historical associations to the building and that it can be placed sensitively within the architectural façade. The height location of the existing Garrett Fawcett plaque influences the positioning of the proposed new plaque. Examples of two plaques on one building usually place the plaques in a horizontal or vertical line, at 2 Gower Street we would propose the location of the new plaque in a horizontal line – therefore to be at ground floor level; centred horizontally on the rendered pier between the two windows; vertical height to visually align with the existing plaque. This also aligns the plaque with neighbouring plaques on the same side of the terrace. The painted render of the ground floor is lined with shallow channel lines, we usually try to straddle the plaque symmetrically across decorative panels, however, the channel lines are so faint they have a secondary role to the placement, the important alignment is on the vertical height of the existing plaque. 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.

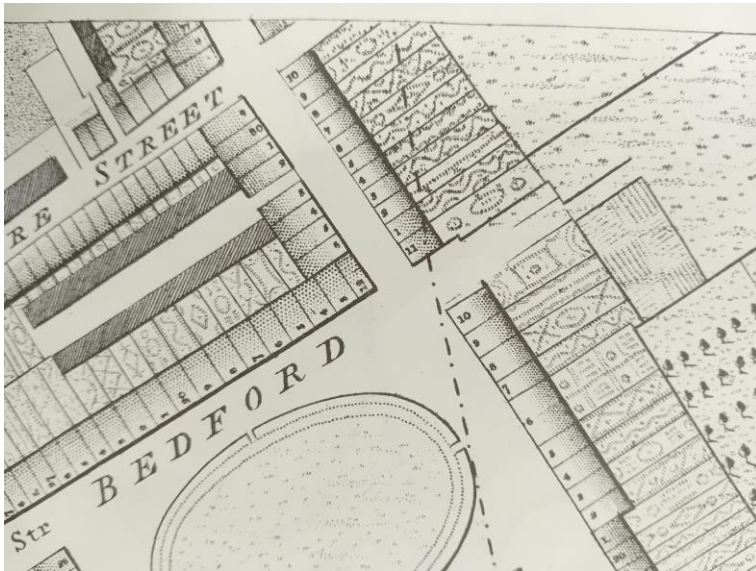
BUILDING STATEMENT

Building description

Number 2 Gower Street lies within a Grade II listed terrace of 10 houses (2-20 evens, east side). The terrace built in about 1780 on land owned by the 5th Duke of Bedford (1765-1802). Built of brick it is distinct from the other three-bay, mansard-roofed, houses in the terrace, being plain painted render fronted and taller than the rest, with four storeys and basement. A square-headed paneled double entrance doorway set to the right with rectangular overdoor window; the ground floor sash windows set in shallow curve arch recesses; first floor of three French windows with console-bracketed cornices, a continuous cast-iron balcony; 2nd and 3rd floor with plain recessed sash windows; a plain running band at third and parapet level.

Gower Street, a long wide street, runs northwards from Bedford Square to join Euston Road, named after Lady Gertrude Leveson-Gower (d.1794), second wife of Lord John Russell, 4th Duke of

Bedford (1710-1771), his grandson Francis Russell, 5th Duke of Bedford began the transformation of the family Bloomsbury estates. Gower Street conceived as terraces of residences for wealthy middle-class owners and followed the completion of the grand houses nearby in Bedford Square (completed by 1783). The first house on the east side of Gower Street was designed and numbered (11 on the Horwood map of 1792-99) to be part of the Bedford Square plan, the building of the following Gower Street terraced houses were built moving northwards, the design controlled by the Bedford Estate and constructed mainly by speculative developers. The terrace houses of 2-20 are shown as completed on the Horwood 1792-99 map, with long individual rear gardens; (numbered 1-10 consecutively).



Detail of Horwood map 1792-99

The long street as it developed was named in three parts, to include Upper Gower Street, Gower Street North; in the 1860s the street renumbered in one continuous sequence, evens on the east side (2-142), odds on the west (1-161), and the whole road called Gower Street.

Due to the proximity of the British Museum, medical and academic institutions – the residents were principally professional and intellectual middle-classes, and the institutions continued to expand and build upon Gower Street, replacing blocks of the original houses. The new railway stations at Euston (1837), Kings Cross (1852) and St Pancras (1868), partly led in the twentieth-century to a downward slide of status to the area and in the 20th century, many of the single residential houses were converted for institution, offices and hotels use. The long rear gardens of number 2-20 terrace houses were conjoined into communal landscaped gardens in the late 19th-century, to which the residents had individual access from the rear of their home, with a through access gate on Malet Street.

Parts of Gower Street suffered devastating bomb damage in World War II, however number 2 and its immediate neighbours survived unscathed. Pevsner in 1998 describes the street as ‘..even, soothing, dignified, and a sense of overall planning, although certainly without much imagination’. (London North, Bridget Cherry and Nikolaus Pevsner, pg 325). In the 21st century it is a busy main traffic route, the terrace a good survival in original frontage form, number 2, currently in the University of London ownership.

Biographical summary Rhoda Garrett and Agnes Garrett



Left – Rhoda Garrett

Right – Agnes Garrett

Unknown date

Image source online open comms

Rhoda Garrett and Agnes Garrett respective grandfathers were brothers; after Rhoda's mother died in 1853 and particularly after her father's remarriage seven years later, she became especially close to her cousins Agnes Garrett, Millicent (later Garrett Fawcett) and Elizabeth (later Garrett Anderson). They were a remarkable family of strong-minded women determined to carve independent careers for themselves and who were leading suffragists.

In the late 1860s and early 1870s Rhoda and Agnes, with Millicent, became active campaigners for the National Society for Women's Suffrage. Rhoda was a frequent and effective speaker on behalf of women's rights, becoming sufficiently famous in this role that photographic portraits of her were available at one shilling each. In terms of wider issues of women's rights, Rhoda and Agnes argued that women should be able to work professionally and be allowed proper training in their chosen fields, and Rhoda and Agnes wanted to find a worthwhile career – but little was open to women at this time. Rhoda had briefly taken a role as a governess, in 1870 she was working for The London and County Banking Company in Gravesend and in the 1871 census she gave her occupation as 'editor of newspapers and private secretary'. Agnes Garrett worked in her father's substantial malting business, she and Rhoda however, decided that their interests lay in interior design and sought to gain an apprenticeship to train as house-decorators.

Probably helped by family connections, Rhoda and Agnes were taken on as pupils at Cottier & Co., Art Furniture Makers, Glass and Tile Painters, in Langham Place, Marylebone. In about 1873, they moved to the office of John McKean Brydon at 39 Great Marlborough Street, Soho where they learnt both the theoretical and practical aspects of the business. The following year Rhoda and Agnes first started their house decoration firm from a flat they shared (now demolished) in Regents Park, to move in 1875 to much larger premises, **2 Gower Street, Bloomsbury**.

The two cousins developed the business R. & A. Garrett, House Decorators; 2 Gower Street acted as personal residence and an important showroom for their 'Queen Anne' style. The Garretts published their ideas in *Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting, Woodwork and*

Furniture (1876). The book was extremely successful and six editions appeared over the next three years, selling some 7,500 copies.

Through a network of family and social contacts the two young women worked at Gower Street on commissions to design and supply furniture as individual pieces or for complete room settings, a few of the original pieces of furniture created for the solicitor James Beale and his wife Margaret are now at the Beales' country house, Standen, West Sussex, (National Trust). The Garretts worked on institutional commissions, probably playing some part in the interior decoration of Newnham Hall (the precursor of Newnham College), Cambridge, in 1875, and the Somerville Club, London, founded in 1879 as a meeting place for women interested in political and social questions. One of their first public exhibitions was of a cottage room exhibited in the Trocadero at the French Exhibition of 1878 which gained general admiration for its original and simple style, and they continued to promote their room settings at exhibitions, alongside a good number of reports and interviews, often with illustrations.

Rhoda Garrett caught typhoid at the end of October 1882. Ten days later she developed bronchitis and died on 22nd November 1882. After Rhoda's death Agnes carried on the firm alone and continued to trade as R & A Garrett. Two years later Agnes' sister Millicent Garrett Fawcett was widowed and she with her young daughter Philippa, came to live with Agnes at 2 Gower Street.

During the 1880s, Agnes promoted her interior furnishings at exhibition; at the 1885 Exhibition of Women's Industries in Bristol, she showed a 'model boudoir'; and a complete room-set at the Edinburgh Exhibition, 1888. Agnes (and Rhoda) had always preferred to work on designs for complete furnished rooms or houses, to provide a 'harmonious whole' - but the company nevertheless continued to sell furnishing items separately.

In 1890, R. & A. Garrett won the tender to decorate the 42-bed premises of the New Hospital for Women on the Euston Road, set up by Agnes' sister, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (1836-1917), the first woman to qualify as a doctor in Britain, (also a plaque holder – at 20 Upper Berkeley Street). It was not unusual for family connections to pave the way for commissions. Agnes closed the business in 1905 but the 'Missus Garrett' firm continued to be a well-known company, as in 1925 an article titled, 'Agnes Garrett: Pioneer of Women House Decorators' was published in the *Woman's Leader*. Agnes died on 19 March 1935 at 2 Gower Street, London, and the house sold by the Fawcett family in around 1938/9.

Connection of Rhoda Garrett and Agnes Garrett to 2 Gower Street

Rhoda and Agnes Garrett lived there from 1875 until their respective deaths, over half a century apart – Rhoda in 1882 and Agnes in 1935.

It was their home and workplace, where they ran their pioneering interior furnishing business – R. & A. Garrett, House Decorators. The cousins' own domestic spaces acted as an important showroom for their style and furnishings for in-person clients. The interiors, created by Rhoda and Agnes, are pictured in *House Decoration* and various magazine articles. The two reception rooms on the first floor were decorated, it is presumed by the Garretts, with elaborate hand-painted ceilings, one of which remains *in situ*, restored in 1974–5; the other ceiling, in poor condition, is held in Senate House library. The rooms first described by their friend, the composer Hubert Parry, in May 1876 when he noted the 'quiet and soothing colour of the walls' not 'gaudy & covered with gilt'. Later a journalist from the *Women's Penny Paper* interviewed the women's suffrage campaigner Millicent

Fawcett in 1890 in the rooms, she was impressed by the décor of 2 Gower Street. “Artistic and tasteful as the room was, comfort was evidently a primary consideration,” she wrote. “The drapery, which was so pleasant to the eye, served to keep off possible draughts; the seats were low and easy, the floor was warm and soft with bright-colored rugs, and above all one felt able to move about without the risk of upsetting some valuable ornament.”

Conclusion

The R. & A. Garrett firm was in business there from 1874-1905, for the 20 years after Rhoda’s death at Gower Street, Agnes managed it alone. Both Rhoda and Agnes Garrett were an early example of female pioneers in business, and activists on behalf of women’s rights. They referred to themselves as ‘architectural decorators’ and were, according to present research claims, the first decorating firm in Britain to be run fully by women and actively train women apprentices - while Morris & Co., for example, employed female designers and makers, but it was principally run by men. The Garretts were clearly professional role models and closely bound to their commitment of reforming the lives of women, they opened the way for others to follow. Their connection to women’s suffrage gives important context to the existing plaque to Dame Millicent Garrett Fawcett.

The suggestion from a member of the public for Rhoda and Agnes Garrett came about as part of an English Heritage campaign for more plaques to women. Gower Street and the surrounding area has a remarkable social and cultural history, reflected in the number of blue plaques nearby; Gower Street has four on the block that runs from 2-20, to include The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood at number 7; Lady Ottoline Morrell at 10; James Robinson at 14; and number 2 itself to Dame Millicent Garrett Fawcett. The eight plaques in nearby Bedford Square are all to men. While the English Heritage plaques in Gower Street are working towards balance for gender representation - it should be noted that we considered if Philippa Fawcett (1868-1948), Millicent’s daughter, who lived there from age sixteen, could be a likely future candidate. Philippa Fawcett, mathematician and civil servant, has not yet a high profile, however if new research widens her reputation and she is suggested for a plaque, there is an address in Hampstead where a plaque could be potentially located. Two plaques per building are the maximum number we recommend.

Consents

Recent consultation with the freeholder, University of London, has resulted in positive support and final approval for the design and positioning of the blue plaque as shown in attached documents and described in the Design & Access Statement. The Historic England Conservation Architect has confirmed that the building is structurally sound to support an inset plaque, and has approved the positioning, and methodology of fixing the plaque. If planning consent is approved, we would hope to install the plaque in 2025.

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
London Blue Plaques Manager