

Heritage Statement

Project Summary

This application is to request listed building consent planning permission for a blue heritage plaque to Jazz pioneer, Sidney Bechet, to be placed at 27 Conway Street, Camden, London, W1T 6BW. The project is supported by the United States Embassy, the London Jazz Society, Camden Council arts and tourism department, and three London schools.

Organisation Behind the Plaque

Nubian Jak Community Trust Ltd (NJCT) is a not-for-profit organization endorsed by the Runnymede Trust as a 'Real Histories' provider. The Trust has previously applied for and been successful in obtaining listed building consent for previous commemorative plaques. I.e. the Mary Prince bronze plaque on Senate House, University of London, Russell Square, Camden (grade 2 building), and further afield, for example the first commemorative plaque in Whitehall (installed on the Foreign Office – a Grade 2* listed building). The aims and objectives of the Trust is to recognise some of the most important personalities who have made a significant contribution to Britain's diverse history. The New Orleans Jazz master, Sidney Bechet is one such person whose contribution helped to introduced Jazz music to Britain for the first time after WW1.

History

The Sidney Bechet Commemorative Plaque Tribute has been in research and development since October September March 2013. The chair of NJCT along with a number of volunteers and facilitators recently completed an 8 month Heritage Lottery Funded project, which looked at the history of the Southern Syncopated Orchestra, the groundbreaking Jazz ensemble that brought the music of Jazz to Britain and Europe in 1919. The project featured a number of components including recording the oral histories some of the descendants, a London wide touring libraries exhibition, 2 eBooks and a website. As Sidney Bechet was a founder member and arguably the most important member of the Southern Syncopated Orchestra, it was felt that a blue plaque in his honour would be befitting. To that end, contact was made with the property owners of 27 Conway Street seeking if permission would be granted for the plaque. After several weeks of communicating permission was granted in October 2013, but it was explained that listed building consent would have to be applied for due to the grading of 27 Conway Street.

Heritage

Clarinetist and saxophonist Sidney Bechet (1897-1959) was a pioneer in taking jazz out of New Orleans into the wider world. He is described by The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz as one of the three or four best jazz musicians of the post-war [World War I] period, and is regarded today as one of the consummate artists produced by this music. A legend even in his

youth, he was the first celebrated jazz soloist. He was the first major figure in jazz to make his home in Britain, arriving in June 1919 as a member of the Southern Syncopated Orchestra and staying on as a member of a small jazz band which became known as The Jazz Kings and played long residencies at The Embassy Club in Old Bond Street, the Hammersmith Palais de Danse, and Rector's Club in Tottenham Court Road. Whilst working at the latter club in 1922 he was residing at 27 Southampton Street [now Conway Street], Fitzroy Square, which is attested by a document issued by the Aliens Office on 8 September 1922 and now in National Archives file HO45/24778. Bechet left an autobiography, *Treat It Gentle*, published in 1960 shortly after his death, and has been the subject of several biographies in both French and English of which Sidney Bechet, *The Wizard of Jazz*, by John Chilton (1987), is a definitive account

Project Co-ordinator

The project co-ordinator for the Sidney Bechet memorial plaque is NJCT chairperson, Jak Beula. He is a former member of staff with English Heritage and has been involved with over 30 separate commemorations around the United Kingdom to date.

Material for Memorial Plaque

The blue plaque to be installed on 27 Conway Street is made of cast Aluminum. It is 18inch in diameter and painted blue with white text. It will be affixed to the white Portland stone exterior of 27 Conway Street by two 7cm metal screws at the back of the plaque. The screws are 6mm in diameter.

This installation process involves making 2 tiny holes 7mm wide and 7 ½ cm deep and placing the screws at the back of the plaque inside these holes, using a concrete glue to keep the plaque permanently in place.

There is a small iron fence which surrounds the paving outside 27 Conway Street which will allow viewers to enjoy the memorial plaque without going anywhere near it. The appearance of the plaque will both compliment and enhance the features and character of the surrounding area.

Plaque Site and Access

The memorial plaque will be positioned on the white Portland stone panel between the two windows on the ground floor. It will be placed approximately 7 feet high, looking at it from ground/street level, 17ft from the basement, and 6ft away from the street paving. 27 Conway Street is surrounded by iron fencing approximately 4 ½ foot high and typical of all most all of the properties both sides of the Stree/.

Street History

Conway Street also known as Southampton Street (not be confused with Southampton Street leading from Covent Garden to the Strand), was also formerly known as Hampstead Street. The street has always been divided into two parts separated by a square. i.e. 1-15 Conway Street is separated by the chronological numbers of 20 - 30 Fitzroy Square on the same side, thereafter Conway Street

continues as 17 – 33. On the other side of the street 2-10 is broken up by a park in the middle of the square, then continued as 12 – 34.

The area itself is known as Fitzrovia, and specifically Fitzroy Square, having the family name of Charles FitzRoy, 2nd Duke of Grafton, into whose ownership the land passed through marriage. His descendant Charles FitzRoy, 1st Baron of Southampton developed the area during the late 18th and early 19th century.

The houses in and around Fitzroy Square are faced with stone, and have a greater proportion of architectural excellence and embellishment than most others in the metropolis. The northern and western sides were subsequently constructed in 1827-1829 and 1832-1835 respectively, and are stucco-fronted. Stucco or render is a material made of an aggregate, a binder, and water.

The south side on Southampton Street suffered bomb damage during World War II and was rebuilt with traditional facades to remain in keeping with the rest of the square. The Street was renamed Conway street in the late 1930s.

Researched by historian Howard Rye in Contemporary Postal Directories:

- Adams Arms, 4 Southampton Street (now 4 Conway Street Fitzroy Square)
- The original address of the Adams Arms was 11 Hampstead Street until at least 1884, then given as 4 Southampton Street by 1891. The address changes again between 1938 and 1944 to 4 Conway Street (see attached PO directories).

Information from pubshistory.com/London Pubs/St Pancreas/AdamsArms

“A listing of historical London Public Houses, Taverns, Inns, Beer Houses and Hotels in Sty Pancras Parish, City of London. The St Pancras Parish includes a large number of areas that include Kentish Town, Euston Roads, Regents Park, etc, London Pubs, information from census, Trade Directories and History to add Victuallers, Publicans, Pub Staff, Lodgers and Visitors.”

Reason for the plaque

There are a number of other blue plaques to famous residents who lived around Fitzroy Square. For instance the writers George Bernard Shaw and Virginia Woolf lived at 29 Fitzroy Square, while Robert Gascoyne Cecil, the 3rd Marquess of Salisbury and English Prime Minister lived at number 21. Both plaques are on the same side of the road as the proposed heritage plaque to Sidney Bechet.

Benefits

There a number of plaques in Fitzrovia dedicated to poets, writers, statesmen, explorers, and pioneers in the fields of medicine and architecture. Sidney Bechet was considered one of the Fitzrovia elite and entertained many considered to among the higher echelons of high society when he resided at 27 Southampton Street. He will be only third Jazz musician in the UK to honoured with a blue plaque, and the first in Fitzroy square. It would be great for the borough of Camden to have a memorial to one of the most significant musical icons of the 20th century, Sidney Bechet.

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