

Bentley House

200 Euston Road, London NW1 2DA

Historic building appraisal and justification of proposals



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Consultancy for the
Historic Built Environment

KMHHeritage

Contents

1.0	Summary	3
2.0	Introduction	4
	Purpose	4
	Organisation	4
	Author	4
3.0	The building	6
	Location	6
	History	6
	The building	7
	The architect	8
	The Bloomsbury Conservation Area	9
	The significance of 200 Euston Road and its context	10
	Potential effects on heritage assets	12
	Conclusion	12
4.0	The proposed development	14
	The scheme	14
	The Euston Road frontage	14
	The elevation to Stephenson Way	17
	The evolution of the proposed scheme	20
5.0	The policy context	21
	National policy: Planning Policy Statement 5	21
	Camden Council's Unitary Development Plan	26
	Guidance on urban design and the historic built environment	27
6.0	The effect of the proposed scheme	31
	The design and how it responds to the Bloomsbury conservation area	31
	The rear elevation	33
	Social and economic benefits	35
	Sustainability and accessibility	35
	Effect on other heritage assets	36
7.0	Compliance with policy and guidance	38
	National policy	38
	Camden's UDP	40
	Guidance	41

Appendix A: Location	43
Appendix B: Historic maps	45
Appendix C: Photographs.....	49

1.0 Summary

Bentley House was built in 1937 as the London outpost of the Cambridge University Press. It was designed by William Curtis Green (1875–1960). The building provides accommodation for storing books with some ancillary accommodation. As it is seen from the Euston Road, it consists of a projecting five-bay Portland stone façade of three storeys, two red-brick towers at either end of the building and a fourth floor brick screen between the towers, set back from the principal façade.

The principal contribution that the building makes to the character and appearance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area is in its frontage to Euston Road. The rear elevation of the building to Stephenson Way is clearly not as significant as the front, and makes no more than a neutral contribution to the overall character of the building. The building behind its elevations is unremarkable and largely utilitarian in its appearance and layout.

The proposed development involves the replacement of existing accommodation behind the portion of the building facing Euston Road, to the depth of the rooms that presently sit behind that façade. This will include the full retention of the towers in the round. Additional floors will be placed on the building, taking advantage of the stepped nature of the existing frontage to Euston Road, and the greater height of the neighbouring properties.

The architectural expression of the additional floors draws upon the aesthetic principles of Curtis Green's design, and the proposal is based on the idea of extending his building in a manner that is consistent with its style and proportions.

The proposal will allow Bentley House to continue to contribute to the character and appearance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. The new elevation to Stephenson Way will replace a largely blank façade with an active frontage. The use of the site will create economic benefit, and bring life and vitality to a location in need of ground level activity. In doing all of this, the development preserves significance, and thus complies with national and local policy and guidance for the historic built environment

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 This report has been prepared by KMHeritage on the instruction of the Wellcome Trust in order to support an application for conservation area consent and planning permission. It relates to Bentley House, 200 Euston Road, London NW1 2DA.

Purpose

- 2.2 The purpose of the report is to assess the proposed development against national and local policies relating to the historic built environment.
- 2.3 This report should be read in conjunction with the Design and Access Statement and drawings prepared by TP Bennett Architects, the Planning Statement by dp9 and other supporting material

Organisation

- 2.4 This introduction is followed in the next section by a brief description of the building, its significance and that of its context, and an outline in Section 4 of the proposed scheme. Section 5 sets out the national and local policy and guidance relating to the historic built environment that is relevant to this matter. Section 6 describes the benefits of the scheme, and Section 7 assesses the proposed development against that policy and guidance. Appendices contain a location map and photographs.

Author

- 2.5 The author of this report is Kevin Murphy B.Arch MUBC RIBA IHBC. He was an Inspector of Historic Buildings in the London Region of English Heritage and dealt with a range of major projects involving listed buildings and conservation areas in London. Prior to this, he had been a conservation officer with the London Borough of Southwark, and was Head of Conservation and Design at Hackney Council between 1997 and 1999. He trained and

worked as an architect, and has a specialist qualification in urban and building conservation. Kevin Murphy was included for a number of years on the Heritage Lottery Fund's Directory of Expert Advisers.

3.0 The building

Location

- 3.1 Bentley House is located on the northern side of Euston Road, between North Gower Street and Euston Square. A minor street, Stephenson Way, runs from east from North Gower Street to the rear of the building before turning north to meet Euston Street.
- 3.2 Immediately to the east of Bentley House are the Grade II and II* listed buildings at 194-196 Euston Road, 30 Euston Square and 6 Melton Street. Beyond is Euston Square and Euston Station.
- 3.3 Directly opposite on the southern side of Euston Road is the headquarters building of the Wellcome Trust at 215 Euston Road, which occupies the eastern end of the block bounded by Euston Road, Gower Street, Gower Place and Gordon Street. South of this block is the campus of University College London, and the large new building of University College Hospital dominates the northern end of Gower Street. To the east of 215 Euston Road is the original Wellcome building at 183 Euston Road, dating from the 1920s. On the opposite side of Gordon Street is the Grade II Friends Meeting House

History

- 3.4 Development in the West End spread north of Oxford Street in the 1720s, and in the early 1750s, the 2nd Duke of Grafton obtained approval for a by-pass road through the fields to the north. This “New Road from Paddington to Islington” was a private toll road, and the enabling Act’s proscribed building within 50 feet of the carriageway.
- 3.5 Development occurred in the vicinity of 200 Euston Road from 1810, and the estates to either side were built up in the housing boom of 1815-30. Tolls were removed in the late 1820s, but Euston Road continued to function primarily as a northern by-pass of the West End to the City

until the development of the railway stations from the late 1830s onwards. Redevelopment began in the early 20th century, presumably as the initial leases ran down, starting prior to World War I with the London, Edinburgh and Glasgow Assurance building of 1907 (at the corner of Melton Street), and Unity House for the railwaymen's union in 1910. It continued between the world wars with the Friends House (1927), No. 194 on the north side of Euston Road and the original Wellcome building at 183 on the south (both 1932).

- 3.6 The 1950s saw redevelopment of war-damaged sites such as No. 222 (later remodelled) and the site of what is now University College Hospital, the next major development period was in the 1980s. New buildings appeared in the early 1980s at the corner of Hampstead Road, at Nos. 195-203, and on the site of Unity House. At the end of that decade the Wellcome Trust remodelled their 1930s' building and moved the library into the refurbished Bentley House.
- 3.7 The area has changed considerably in recent years. The new Gibbs Building, designed by Hopkins Architects, was opened in 2004 for the Wellcome Trust, the new University College Hospital was largely completed shortly afterwards, and most recently a refurbishment of the 1930s Wellcome building in 2007 which re-housed the library that had been held in Bentley House.

The building

- 3.8 Bentley House (named for an 18th-century scholar and Royal Librarian) was built in 1937 as the London office and depot for Cambridge University Press. It was designed by William Curtis Green (1875–1960).
- 3.9 The building as it is seen from the Euston Road consists of a projecting central five-bay Portland stone façade of three storeys, two largely red-brick towers at either end of the building and a plain brick fourth floor screen between the towers, set back from the principal façade. A large plant enclosure is located towards the western end of the

building, and projects to the height of approximately a building storey. There is one central entrance on the Euston Road. The reveals to the ground floor window openings in the central five bay section have large recessed horizontal joints. Above, each bay is delineated by shallow pilasters over first floor. The windows on the second floor are slightly wider and margined.

- 3.10 The building consists of accommodation to store books arranged around a large central lightwell. There is some ancillary accommodation located towards the front of the building. The eastern wing of the building is slightly higher than the western wing. The building steps back at the rear on Stephenson Way at fourth floor level, as it does on the Euston Road.

The architect

- 3.11 William Curtis Green was articled to John Belcher and trained at the Royal Academy Schools under R. Phené Spiers. He joined the staff of 'The Builder' for a brief period in 1897, and he travelled widely at home and abroad to develop his skills. Curtis Green commenced practice in 1898 and was soon busy with domestic and other buildings. Among his first important buildings were two fine generating stations for electric tramway companies, at Bristol (1899) and Chiswick (1904), and the Painswick Institute (1907). He was elected fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in 1909. When Edwin Lutyens first went to New Delhi, he asked Green to take charge of his office while he was away. In 1910 he was taken into partnership by Dunn and Watson who had a large city practice: soon he was left in sole charge. From 1919 to 1927 he practised on his own and then he established a partnership with his son, Christopher, and his son-in-law Antony Lloyd. They continued the practice after his death at the firm of Green, Lloyd, and Adams.
- 3.12 In London, Curtis Green made a lasting mark in Piccadilly. His first large building, Wolseley House (1922–3), originally a motor showroom and later a bank, was

followed by the Westminster Bank (1926–7) on the other side of Piccadilly, and later Stratton House (1929), next to Devonshire House. 6 King Street, adjacent to Piccadilly, and the London Life Association building in King William Street belong to the same group of buildings of similar character. During the last years of his career, when he was associated with his son-in-law and son, his work exhibited a quiet maturity and eliminated the orders. The new building for Scotland Yard on the Embankment (1935–40) and the exterior of the Equity and Law Life Assurance Society, in Lincoln's Inn Fields (1936–7), have serene Portland stone elevations, with fine fenestration and a sense of scale that is urbane and satisfying.

- 3.13 The Dorchester Hotel in Park Lane is perhaps Green's best-known building, undertaken following Sir Owen Williams and three other architects who had worked on the scheme and built it to ground level. His scope was limited by the existing foundations and predetermined outline, but the hotel was opened on the advertised date in 1930, thirteen months later, owing largely to Green's careful supervision of every aspect of the project, including the architectural design, intricate plan requirements, complex construction, décor, and furnishing. The Queen's Hotel at Leeds, in collaboration with his partners and W. H. Hamlyn, likewise shows his skill in hotel planning. Green designed many domestic buildings, most of which were small in scale. His churches are quiet and pleasing examples of ecclesiastic architecture.

The Bloomsbury Conservation Area

- 3.14 200 Euston Road is an unlisted building on the edge of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. The boundary of the conservation area is formed by the party wall of Bentley House with 210 Euston Road, and it then crosses Euston Road and runs through the centre of 215 Euston Road. The boundary runs along the centre of Stephenson Way to include the neighbouring listed buildings and Euston Square.