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VIA ON-LINE - E-MAIL application

London Borough of Camden
Heritage and Planning Officer

LBC: Covering Letter – Heritage Statement

11 January 2018

Dear Sir or Madam

Blue plaque: John Thelwall (1764-1834)

I am writing to advise you that English Heritage's Blue Plaques Panel has approved the recommendation that a blue plaque be erected to: **John Thelwall, at 40 Bedford Place, Bloomsbury, WC1B 5JT** in the London Borough of Camden.

Building Statement

The current building: Bedford Place was built by James Burton in 1800-1806 as part of the fifth Duke of Bedford's redevelopment of the site of his London residence. Number 40 Bedford Place, is listed Grade II, and is within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. It forms the end house in a terrace of twenty houses built of stock bricks, with a rusticated stucco ground floor. It consists of four storeys, with a basement, and balcony at first-floor level. Number 40 was internally refurbished to link with number 39 in the early 20th century, the façade was maintained, and currently, it is in use as a hotel.

The background history: In 1806 Thelwall moved to the newly-built 40 Bedford Place, Bloomsbury, where he opened his Seminary for the Cultivation of the Science and Practice of Elocution, and the Cure of Impediments of Speech. Number 40 is ideally suited to the commemoration of John Thelwall for it was home for seven years (until 1813), to his pioneering institution, taking pupils for elocution. It was here that he was living when he published his *Vestibule of Eloquence* (1808), which summarised his plan of education, and his celebrated *Letter to Henry Cline* (1810), which contained a number of case studies. 40 Bedford Place is the only viable surviving address for Thelwall, rare to find for 18th-century London radicals, and rare among streets in Bloomsbury, Bedford Place has yet to be commemorated with a blue plaque and the proximity of the statue to Charles James Fox, who led the parliamentary campaign for reform in Thelwall's era, is particularly apt.

John Thelwall - Historical Reputation: John Thelwall has a threefold claim to be recognised as one of the most original and outstanding public figures of the late Georgian era. Firstly, he was one of the most popular and effective orators of the day, whose style was famously likened by William Hazlitt to a 'volcano vomiting out lava'. Unusually for the times, Thelwall achieved an envious political celebrity outside the realm of Westminster and in the arena of radical debate and protest. Despite the efforts of government agents and agents provocateurs, Thelwall continued to champion free speech, parliamentary reform and universal suffrage, whilst

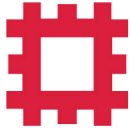
Step into Thelwall's story



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condemning the violence of the French Revolution. Secondly, he was a highly influential writer and journalist, who constituted a direct link between the radical movement and the Romantic poets, Wordsworth and Coleridge. Thirdly, he made a pioneering contribution to the practice of elocution and speech therapy, not least by combining a medical understanding of the physical origins of speech impediments with a therapeutic approach to their alleviation or cure: Thelwall linked this speech therapy work with his political interests, calling it the 'enfranchisement of fettered organs'. Praised by Coleridge as 'intrepid, eloquent, and honest; perhaps the only acting democrat that is honest', Thelwall was rediscovered by the historian E. P. Thompson in the 1960s and has an authoritative biography, with a dedicated society to promote interest in him. Commemorating the home of his first elocutionary institution in London would certainly help promote popular, as well as academic interest in this polymathic figure. The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography entry is an attached document that gives a full summary of Thelwall's life and achievements.

The proposed inscription on the blue plaque is:

**JOHN
THELWALL
1764-1834
Political Orator,
Writer and Elocutionist
lived and worked here
1806-1813**

Our proposal for the installation of the blue plaque on the front façade is for it to be located between the ground floor windows, set within the stucco course lines, horizontally in line with the upper sash ground floor window panes, (see positioning images). The size of the plaque is the standard 19.5-inch diameter.

We have obtained full freeholder consents, and the Historic England Conservation Architect has confirmed that he is happy with the proposed location and that the façade is of good construction to allow installation of the inset ceramic plaque, (please see attached documentation).

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. I hope that – all being well with our planning application - the unveiling would be a significant occasion in 2018.

Yours faithfully

Cathy Power
Blue Plaques Manager

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