

St. Matthew's Lodge, 50 Oakley Square London NW1 1NB: Heritage Statement

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1789.6.1 St Matthews Lodge heritage appraisal R3.docx

Introduction

- 1 St. Matthew's Lodge is located at the junction of Oakley Square and Crowndale Road, slightly to the west of the junction of Crowndale Road and Camden Street. The existing building on the site is an unremarkable early 1980s apartment building that replaced an 1856 church. The site is located immediately adjacent to the Camden Town Conservation Area, and to a series of Grade II listed buildings including the terrace that forms the western side of Oakley Square.

Purpose

- 2 The purpose of this note is to set out an assessment of the heritage significance of the site of St. Matthew's Lodge, and comment on proposals following considerable discussion with Officers. It should be read with the Design & Access Statement and plans prepared by Echlin as well as the planning statement prepared by DP9.

History

- 3 Oakley Square was developed around 1856 as part of Bedford New Town, an initiative by the Duke of Bedford to create a new suburb on his lands to the north of the Euston Road. It was named after Oakley House near Dedford, one of the Duke's seats. Originally a space enclosed by terraces similar that which survives on the

northern side, the southern side of the square was replaced by the Amptill Square Estate by Eric Lyons & Partners in about 1960, a development described as 'indifferent' by Pevsner.

- 4 The church of St. Matthew was built in 1852–56 on a site presented by the Duke of Bedford, who gave £1,000 to the building fund, £250 of this being contingent upon the steeple being built. In addition he contributed £1,000 a year to the Diocesan Church Building Society out of which the society gave £400 towards the building and lent a further £600. The church was designed by John Johnson and is an elaborate building of Kentish Rag and Bath stone in the Decorated style of Gothic. The nave has a clerestory and the tower with a lofty steeple stands free at the south-east angle of the nave. The total cost was £9,000. The apex of the steeple was damaged during the war. The church was consecrated on 23rd December, 1856, and the vicarage was completed in 1871¹.

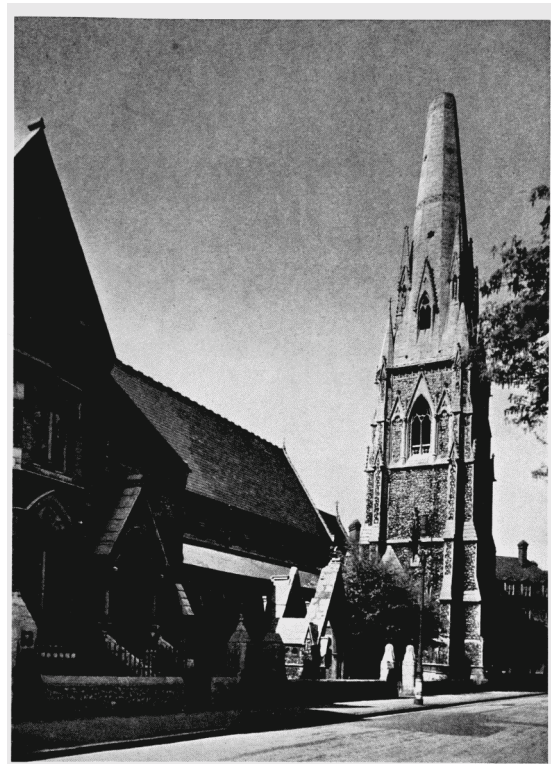
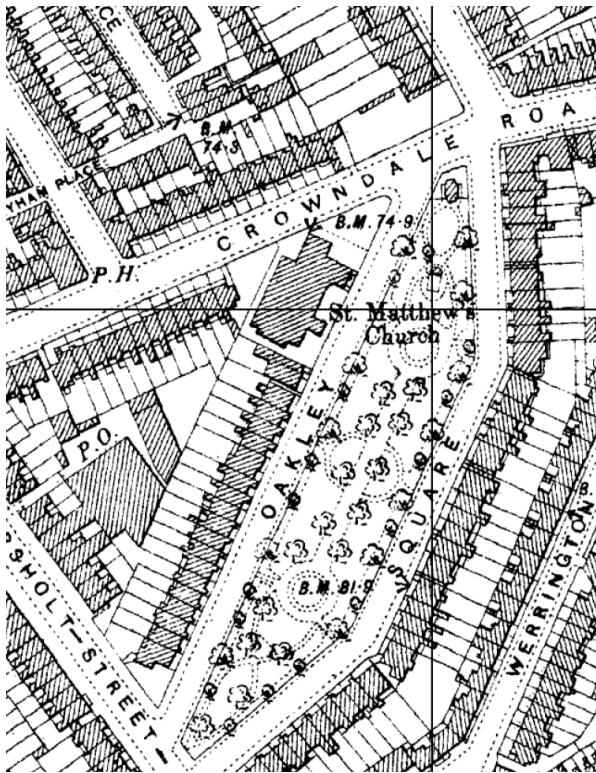


Figure 1 (left): Oakley Square in 1896 Figure2 (right) The church of St. Matthew before demolition

¹ 'The Bedford Estate', in *Survey of London: Volume 24, the Parish of St Pancras Part 4: King's Cross Neighbourhood*, ed. Walter H Godfrey and W McB. Marcham (London, 1952), pp. 128-131



Figure3: The church of St. Matthew when completed (image c 1860)

- 5 The present building on the site was designed by Stefan Zins Associates and granted planning permission on 23 February 1982. It is five storeys in height with a flat roof, with a lift motor room to the rear. The building is longer on Oakley Square than on Crowndale Road (there is a substantial gap between St. Matthew's Lodge and 31 Crowndale Road), and steps down and insets at the points closest to neighbouring properties on those streets. The corner at the junction of the two streets is stepped in plan, and set back from the curved corner of the plot, which retains the former church boundary wall and railings. The elevations are arranged in bays of two windows separated by paired brick pilasters, and articulated by projecting balconies. The fifth floor has a series of cantilevered oriels.

Designations

- 6 The site is located adjacent to the Camden Town Conservation Area to the west and north. The former vicarage of St Matthew's (immediately to the west of the site), Nos 53-57, and 58-70 Oakley Square are listed Grade II, as is Oakley Square Gardens Lodge. On the northern side of Crowndale Road, the Working Men's College at Nos. 46 and 46 is also listed Grade II, along with 31-53 Crowndale Road and the Camden Palace. Oakley Square gardens are included in Camden's Local List.

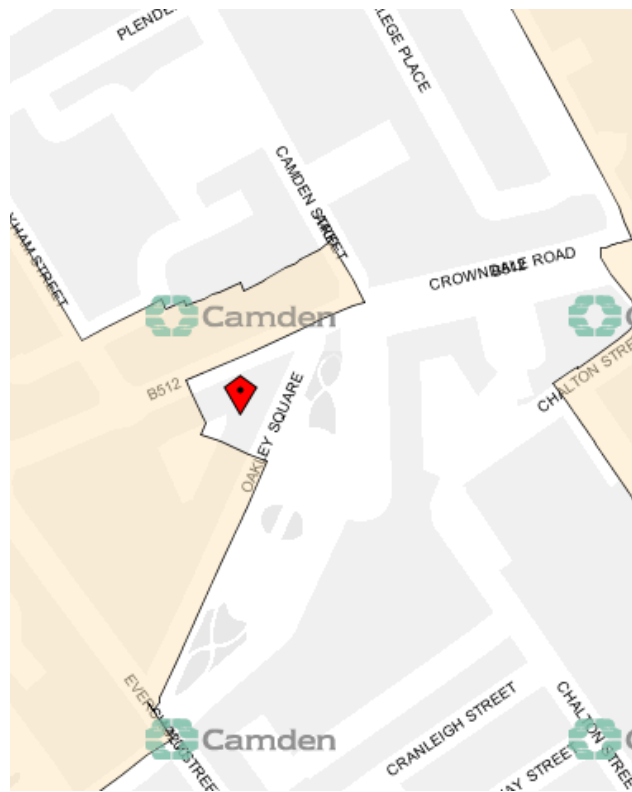


Figure 4: The site in relation to the Camden Town Conservation Area

Assessing heritage significance

Concepts and terminology

- 7 The Camden Town Conservation Area and nearby listed buildings are ‘designated heritage assets’, as defined by the National Planning Policy Framework (the NPPF). Locally listed buildings or features - the Oakley square gardens - are ‘non-designated heritage assets’.
- 8 Heritage ‘significance’ is defined in the NPPF as ‘the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic’. The Historic England ‘Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2’ puts it slightly differently – as ‘the sum of its architectural, historic, artistic or archaeological interest’.
- 9 ‘Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment’ (Historic England, 2008) describes a number of ‘heritage values’ that may be present in a ‘significant place’. These are evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal value.

Heritage significance

- 10 Historical value is described as being illustrative or associative. The listed and unlisted buildings of any discernible historical quality nearby, their relationship to one another and to the conservation area, illustrates the evolution of this part of London. What happened to these older buildings, the historic urban grain and the area generally throughout the 20th century is highly illustrative of how our towns and cities changed in that period. It tells us about the transformation of the older city the expansion of London into new northern suburbs during the 19th century, and about social change and lifestyles in various periods. The area as a whole has historical associations with various important historical architects, developers and other figures.
- 11 It is clear that, despite the changes that have occurred in the area over time, the conservation area and the listed buildings near St. Matthew's Lodge have 'architectural' and 'artistic interest' or 'aesthetic value'. In respect of design, 'Conservation Principles' says that 'design value... embraces composition (form, proportions, massing, silhouette, views and vistas, circulation) and usually materials or planting, decoration or detailing, and craftsmanship'.
- 12 The listed buildings that surround St Matthews Lodge form part of an urban setting that is already typified by the multi-layered mixture of building types, heights and styles that characterises this part of Camden and the Camden Town Conservation Area.
- 13 31-53 Crowndale Road are a terrace of mid-early 19th century Italianate terraced houses similarly found across London. Externally, their special interest lies in their architectural form and detailing. Their setting already comprises a variety of buildings of different heights and architectural style – many of which affect, but do not necessarily detract, from the ability to appreciate the significance of the terrace itself.



Figure 5: 31-53 Crowndale Road

- 14 The significance of the listed former Vicarage on Oakley Square also lies, externally, in its architectural form and high quality detailing – in this case the Gothic Revival style. It was designed by John Johnson as the vicarage for the demolished St Matthew’s Church, which stood on the application site. Since the replacement of the gothic Revival St Matthews Church the building is now unique amongst its immediate neighbours, with the Italianate (also listed) 53-57 Oakley Square looming close to the south west (fig.6).



Figure 6: Former Vicarage, Oakley Square

- 15 Again, this juxtaposition does not, however, detract from the ability to read the architectural form and detailing of the vicarage but highlights the variety of architecture in this part of Camden that gives the Conservation Area its character.
- 16 Camden Council have identified the character of the Camden Town Conservation Area as ‘Sub-Area 2: Residential’ (Conservation Area Appraisal, Oct 2007). The character is described:

“The residential parts of the Conservation Area are largely homogenous in scale and character, having been laid out within a period of three decades spanning the years 1820-1850...A...pocket of residential development, originally made up of slightly grander terraces, falls south-east of the High Street (Harrington Square and Oakley Square). The area contains a large number of good examples of early/mid 19th century speculatively built terraced London houses, generally of uniform appearance, and many statutorily listed for their special interest”.

The existing building and the proposed scheme

- 17 The existing building has a curiously unfinished appearance. Its vertical termination is, to say the least, abrupt. It is not clear whether it was originally intended that the building should have additional storeys, but this is certainly the impression that the building gives. In addition, the existing building makes little of its location – it fails to respond to the prominence of its site at the junction of two straight streets with long visibility, and thus misses the opportunity to help reinforce the sense of place at this important junction in a way that the former church did. In terms of architectural quality, St. Matthew’s Lodge is, at best, inoffensive, and could perhaps be better described as bland. The only aspect of the design that draws the eye – the oriel features – simply appear odd rather than interesting or forming part of a convincing overall design to which they make an intelligible contribution and give the building a top-heavy appearance.
- 18 The Camden Town Conservation Area boundary was clearly drawn to exclude the building from within it. Though five storeys in height, the existing building is lower than the adjacent former vicarage, the terrace beyond on the western side of Oakley Square and the Working Men’s College. It is roughly the same height as the unlisted terrace on the northern side of Crowndale Road and slightly higher than the terrace at 31-53 Crowndale Road.
- 19 The proposed scheme for St. Matthew’s Lodge has been developed following full discussion with Officers over a series of pre-application meetings. It now provides for one additional floor of residential accommodation.
- 20 It has been purposely designed to ensure that the interest is created through a series of raised and set back sections. These have been defined by the existing

architecture and projecting bays. The proposed extension has a vertical emphasis to reduce the effect of a 'box on a roof' and provide a lighter termination to the top of the building. The materiality will be a combination of zinc panels and patinated metal splayed windows. This combination of form and materials will emphasise the appearance of a roof form, with detailing being contemporary, elegant and well considered.

- 21 The views provided by Echlin demonstrate how the setting of the nearby listed buildings remains largely unchanged and that there is no harmful impact on their setting. The proposed extension provides a 'top' to the building, which currently appears top heavy and unfinished and will thus allow the building to sit more comfortably with its more traditional neighbours.
- 22 Where the proposed extension is seen together with the surrounding buildings this impact is no different to other surrounding buildings appearing in views that make up the already multi-layered urban context of both St Matthews Lodge and the setting of the listed buildings. In all cases the significance of the listed buildings remains intact, entirely readable and unharmed.
- 23 In views along Crowndale Road, the existing street tree provides a further natural townscape break between the terrace and St Matthews Lodge.
- 24 The proposed extension provides an opportunity to 'finish' the top of St Matthews Lodge in a way that will enhance both the building and its contribution to its context.
- 25 In addition, the proposals offer the further benefits of improved landscaping – with improved lighting and security – and a new lift that will be compliant to modern DDA requirements.

The proposed scheme: compliance with law, policy and guidance

- 26 The proposed development has the capacity even at this stage to be judged as capable of preserving the special architectural and historic interest of the designated heritage assets (the conservation area and the setting of listed buildings), thus satisfying Sections 66(1) and 72(1) the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
- 27 The proposed scheme is respectful of the setting of the Camden Town Conservation Area, and we believe it would enhance the conservation area. The legal requirement regarding satisfying Section 72(1) of the Act, established by *South Lakeland District Council v Secretary of State for the Environment and another* [1992] 1 ALL ER 573, is met if the proposed development leaves the conservation area

unharmful. The proposed scheme will not only positively enhance a key building outside the conservation area but also views into and out of the conservation area.

- 28 The proposed scheme would clearly not lead to ‘substantial’ harm to any designated heritage asset. The only potential for ‘less than substantial’ harm would be if the proposed scheme caused the loss of something central to the special interest of the designated heritage assets in question. There is nothing about the proposal that would give rise to this level of harm. While the setting of various designated heritage assets will be altered to a modest degree by the proposed scheme, this will not detract from their special interest as listed buildings or as a conservation area. The same can be said of the locally listed Oakley Square gardens.
- 29 All of the surrounding heritage assets already exist in a multi-layered urban context where buildings are appreciated in their own right and also in the context of others of different styles, heights and materials.
- 30 The proposed scheme therefore complies with Paragraph 195 of the NPPF - it certainly does not lead to ‘substantial harm to or total loss of significance of a designated heritage asset’. It also complies with Paragraph 196 for the reasons given in detail earlier – the scheme cannot be considered to harm the conservation area or listed buildings that it affects, but rather alters the site in a fashion that has a relatively small overall effect on heritage significance. Any ‘less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset’ (Paragraph 196) - if any - that might be ascribed to the scheme is outweighed by the public benefit of new housing and the heritage benefit of a scheme that will enhance the setting of listed buildings and the conservation area over the present situation. Further, improvements such as the new compliant lift will ensure the long-term sustainability of the building for the future.
- 31 For these reasons also, we believe that the proposed scheme complies with the London Borough of Camden’s policies for design and for heritage assets, and in particular Policies D1 & D2. The proposals have full regard for the local context and character and preserve and enhance the historic environment and heritage assets. The scheme also seeks to improve the landscaping around the building.

Conclusion

- 32 It is clear that the proposed scheme is positive in its effect. The scheme will change the site and its surroundings, but do so in a way that will enhance both. In effect it will ‘complete’ a building that has an unfinished appearance and will thus sit far more comfortably with its neighbours. It will preserve and enhance heritage assets and townscape, and will deliver heritage benefits and public benefits for Camden and its residents.

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