

Case Name: The Black Cap, Camden

Case Number: 1447154

Background

Historic England has been asked to assess the former Black Cap for a Certificate of Immunity from Listing.

Asset(s) under Assessment

Facts about the asset(s) can be found in the Annex(es) to this report.

Annex	List Entry Number	Name	Heritage Category	HE Recommendation
1	1448361	The Black Cap	Listing	Do not add to List

Visits

Date	Visit Type
08 June 2017	Full inspection
26 July 2017	Partial inspection

Context

PLANNING HISTORY

On 3 March 2015, planning permission was refused for a change of use of the first, second and third floors from bar/restaurant and ancillary accommodation to residential (Class C3) use.

In April 2015, The Black Cap closed for business shortly after it was designated an asset of community value (ACV). Following a request for review, lodged on 2 June 2015, the decision that the whole of the Black Cap was designated an ACV was upheld on 7 July 2015.

It has not reopened for business (August 2017), but the upper floors are occupied by guardians, appointed to prevent squatters who have targeted the building.

Assessment

CONSULTATION

We consulted the owner and applicant through their agent Iceni Projects. We also consulted the original listing applicant, Camden Borough Council as the local authority, and the Greater London Historic Environment Record.

AGENT'S RESPONSE: on behalf of the owner Iceni Projects reiterated points made in the original application. Three main points were made:

1. While a public house stood on the site from the C18 or early C19, the pub was heavily rebuilt in 1889, including insertion of the current facade, and was subsequently extended and altered significantly by 1916 and again by 1952.
2. As one of many drag/cabaret bars, the design and execution of historic additions and all subsequent alterations are principally on the basis of economy, and lack any design intent beyond typical pub features, which exist in abundance across London and the UK.
3. They broadly agreed with our report and clarified an error in our report regarding the name of the upper floor bar. While Rex Jamieson was the given name of the performer, the bar was named after his drag persona: Mrs Shufflewick.

HE RESPONSE: we have corrected the error and set out the evolution of the building more clearly. Other points are addressed in the following discussion.

The listing applicant confirmed they would not comment further. No other responses were received.

DISCUSSION

The Black Cap was built as a public house in 1889 on the site of an earlier inn of the same name. Since 1965 it has had strong LGBTQ associations, as a major London venue. It closed for business in 2015.

It is assessed against the Principles of Selection for Listing Buildings (DCMS, March 2010) which notes that after 1840 greater selectivity is applied to reflect the greater numbers of structures, built and surviving. Regarding historic interest, a building must illustrate important aspects of the nation's social, economic, cultural, or military history and/or have close historical associations with nationally important people. There should normally be some quality of interest in the physical fabric of the building itself to justify the statutory protection afforded by listing.

The Selection Guide, Commerce and Exchange Buildings (April 2011), notes that after the 1830 Beer Act the number of pubs increased, with the high point of pub building falling in the decades either side of 1900, which coincides with rebuilding of the Black Cap in 1889. Not all pubs were lavishly decked out but most had some fittings which when brought together created the iconic gin palace, such as mahogany bar counters, shelving, mirrors, partitions, frosted glass windows, signage, decorative tiling, embossed ceilings, occasionally with public rooms upstairs.

The Black Cap has an architecturally powerful facade, in the eclectic revivalist manner of the period, but made more distinctive by the reference to Mother Black Cap which is incorporated in the architectural fabric rather than in the signage alone. The quality of construction and materials: red brick with rubbed brick and stone or stone composite dressings, is typical rather than exceptional. The fenestration pattern survives, although covered on the ground floor, for security. The original metal window frames and their fixtures and fittings survive, but the leaded glazing and decorative glass on the upper floors, apparent in early photographs, have been replaced with plate glass. An early C20 photograph shows an impressive hanging pub sign and lantern, which contributed to the external exuberance, and have since been removed.

It has been suggested that the previous building is embedded in the rear gabled wing, because of the flush casement and exposed purlins, but the structure appears consistent with the later C19 and with the footprint of the larger 1880s building.

The interior has been subject to greater alteration than the exterior, most of it of mid to later C20 date, and there are no grand interior spaces, ornate ceilings, or fixtures and fittings commensurate with the exterior. The ground floor bar area is a single space, extended to the rear of the site as a stage. The bar front may relate to the later C19 pub, but the bar back is a late C20 composition. Similarly the staircase incorporates some earlier fabric but is essentially a mid to later C20 reconfiguration that cuts across the main window. A second bar has been created on the first floor, which is now also a single space where deep moulded cornices and encased beams suggest the removal of former partition walls. Conversely, the second floor room which from the treatment of the elevation suggests a significant internal space, is now subdivided, has only ever had a modest cornice and has a simple fire surround. The only fire surround of note serves a small domestic fireplace on the upper floor. Bar fittings are predominantly pine and there are no partitions or built-in furniture that distinguish the original hierarchy of the bar area.

Until recently the Black Cap was a major LGBTQ meeting place, as a bar, and for artists on the national and London circuit, along with venues such as the Royal Vauxhall Tavern (RVT). The main performance space was added in the 1950s and lacks architectural distinction. Although the upper bar took the name 'Shufflewick Bar' after the death of the performer Rex Jamieson in 1983, unlike the RVT, the Black Cap does not have the very strong resonance and longevity as a LGBTQ beacon and performance space, that is embedded in the historic fabric in a way that could contribute to special interest.

Given the degree of alteration to the C19 interior and lack of fixtures and fittings of distinction that clearly illustrate its recent history as a LGBTQ venue, its cultural identity alone does not give it the high level of interest to merit statutory listing. However it has an imposing presence on the streetscape, has a little altered facade, and an acknowledged cultural importance, which contribute to its local significance.

CONCLUSION

After examining all the records and other relevant information and having carefully considered the architectural and historic interest of this case, the criteria for listing are not met and a Certificate of Immunity should therefore be issued.

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION DECISION

The Black Cap, a public house, predominantly of 1889 on the site of an earlier pub, and in the later C20 a LGBTQ venue, is not recommended for listing, and a COI should be issued, for the following principal reasons:

Architectural interest:

- * the exuberance of the facade is not carried through to the interior;
- * the interior has been altered in the C20, obscuring the original plan by the introduction of later fixtures and fittings.

Historic and cultural interest:

- * whilst acknowledging its significance as a LGBTQ venue since the mid-1960s, this is not strongly manifest in the historic fabric.

Countersigning comments:

Agreed. While the exterior is of some quality this is not reflected in the interior, which is also altered and high quality interior survival is important in the selection of pubs for listing. In terms of historic interest the LGBTQ use of the pub is not manifest in the fabric to a degree that would elevate it to being worthy of listing in a national context, but its local interest, both architecturally and historically, are noted.

V Fiorato, 27 July 2017

Annex 1

Factual Details

Name: The Black Cap

Location: 171 Camden High Street, London, NW1 7JY

County	District	District Type	Parish
Greater London Authority	Camden	London Borough	Non Civil Parish

History

An inn known as the Mother Black Cap stood on the site now occupied by Camden Underground Station before becoming the site of the parish workhouse from 1778 to 1809. In the later C18 or early C19 a pub of the same name was established on the current site, 171 Camden High Street (historically numbered as 91 Camden High Street). In 1889 the building was essentially rebuilt in its current form, occupying a larger footprint than the previous pub, replacing part of a row cottages or outbuildings at the rear, and given its prominent facade, which is captured in a photograph from the early C20. By 1916 it had acquired a narrow rear extension, replacing the remaining cottages. Map evidence records that by 1952 it had been extended at the rear once more to provide a larger ground floor bar, and later, a performance space. Judging from the internal fixtures and fittings the first floor bar was installed in the mid-to later C20.

During the 1950s the bar had a significant Irish following and was known for its live music. In the early 1960s the pub was re-branded as the New Black Cap, and since late 1965 has had strong LGBTQ associations, becoming a well-known cabaret and drag venue, before homosexuality was legitimised in 1967.

Regular performers on the London circuit included Phil Starr and HIH Regina Fong and the drag act, Mrs Shufflewick, the upper bar being named the Shufflewick Bar in 1983 after the death of the performer, Rex Jamieson.

The pub continued as a leading London LGBTQ venue until its closure in 2015.

Details

Public House, 1889 on the site of a late C18 or early C19 pub.

MATERIALS: a red brick facade with stock brick flanks, with terracotta, stone and cast stone dressings, tile hanging at the rear and asbestos tile roofs; pine fixtures and fittings.

PLAN: laid out on three storeys and attics, with a beer cellar beneath the front range, and a single-storey rear extension. The ground floor is taken up by a single bar behind a full-width entrance lobby from which stairs rise to the first floor bar. Stairs at the rear rise to accommodation, and recently kitchens, on the upper floors. The first floor bar is also reached by a side entrance.

EXTERIOR: the ground floor frontage is set between pilasters with foliate bosses and capitals with a crowned figure head resembling a medieval king. The entrance, to the left, has pilasters with similar capitals and paired, part-glazed, panelled doors; the single window has wide margin lights and a central band of smaller lights, with shaped glazing bars in the outer lights and in the central light above. The fascia and stallriser are later C20. The first and second floors are set within a tall, rubbed brick arch, between flush panels with dragooned capitals, treated as pilasters, and surmounted by a dramatic stepped gable with deep moulded cornices. The first floor has a canted bay window with a moulded transom and metal-framed casements or fixed lights with plain glazing, beneath a balustrade with vase balusters, some of which are missing. The second floor has a flush, six-light mullion and transom window, with square section mouldings, and similar lights, beneath a tympanum of terracotta panels in the form of rosettes. The brick arch has a lion's head keystone supporting a tall moulded bracket which in turn supports a bust of Mother Black Cap, set on a semicircular plinth which projects from the cornice, and is set forward from the gabled pediment at the apex of the roof.

To the left is a tall external chimney stack. The rear wing is slightly lower, with the rear wall gable wall clad in banded tiled hanging and has a flush timber casement window. The external passage to the left (south) of the building is clad in cream glazed tiles, with a coloured foliate frieze and moulded cornice and has a coloured terrazzo floor and threshold to the street. Windows on the side elevation are a mix of single, and two over two pane horned sashes.

INTERIOR: the main entrance leads through paired part-glazed doors to the stair lobby. The stairs have been reconfigured in the mid-C20 and cut across the window. Oak newels and a moulded oak rail are reused in a new frame, with later, predominantly turned balusters. Double doors with moulded panels with small inset upper lights, and a late C19 or early C20 brass handle open onto the ground floor bar. The bar extends along the north wall of the original late C19 building. The bar front has matchboard panelling with moulded fillets and a predominantly marble top, with a small section in timber to the west. The bar back is a composite construction of probably reused robust bulbous pilasters and a crudely made later C20 cornice, with pedimented bays at either end, and later C20 mirrors. The outer walls of the bar have later shelves, for drinks, above a plain matchboard panelled dado. The western extension is fitted out as a stage. The ground floor ceilings are plain, without moulded cornices or ornament.

The first floor bar area, latterly known as the Shufflewick Bar, has a deep moulded and coved cornice and boxed in beams which suggest that the former upper floor rooms have been opened up. Principal, front windows on this floor and above retain their original window plates, catches and latches but have lost leaded glazing that is inferred from the early C20 photograph. There is a blocked chimneybreast. The bar is set towards the rear of the space and again appears to be in two parts. It has a fielded panelled oak front and a softwood bar back with simplified fluted pilasters. A small stage has been created in the late C20 at the back of the bar area.

Stairs, probably late C19, from the first to second floor have turned newels and balusters. The principal room at the front of the building has been subdivided, the cornice continuing across all three rooms, and has a simple timber mantelpiece. Side and rear windows have deep moulded architraves, some with panelled vertical shutter boxes. The attic floor front room has an ornate, mid- to later C19, round-arched cast iron fireplace surround. The roof structure of a machine-cut side-purlin roof is exposed in the rear room which has a simple, probably early C20, fireplace surround.

Selected Sources

Map

National Grid Reference: TQ2889483786



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The above map is for quick reference purposes only and may not be to scale. For a copy of the full scale map, please see the attached PDF - 1448361_1.pdf