

MARTIN O'ROURKE

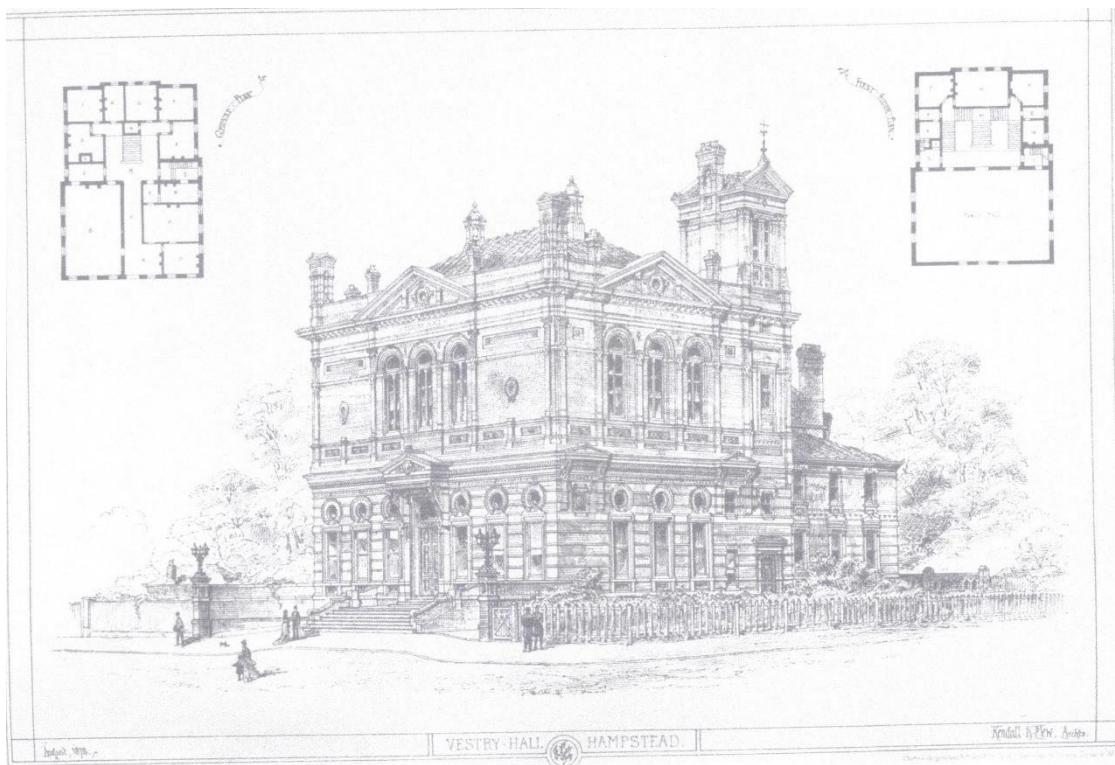
CONSERVATION - REGENERATION

[martin.orourke.consult@gmail.com](mailto:martin.orourke.consult@gmail.com)

tel: 0044(0)7895063839

61 Beacon Rise  
Newmarket Road  
Cambridge  
CB5 8AX

## Hampstead Town Hall N.W.3 London Borough of Camden



Building News November 15 1878

*A Heritage Appraisal of the Building and the Possible Impact  
of the Proposed Works*

*August 2019 - (Rev1)*

# 1 Purpose of this Appraisal

1.01 This appraisal seeks to describe the history of Hampstead Town Hall and to ascertain the nature of its significance as a heritage asset.

1.02 The proposed works of alteration and adaption planned for Wac Arts will be discussed and assessed in the context of local and national policies for managing change in the historic environment.

## 2 Heritage Designations

2.01 Hampstead Town Hall is listed Grade II as being of special architectural or historic interest. It was first included on the list on 1 August 1994. The list description reads;

*Hampstead Town Hall and attached walls and piers.*

*II*

*Town hall, now council offices. 1877-8. By H.E Kendall and Frederick Mew. Red brick, rusticated at ground floor level, with stone dressings. Italianate style. EXTERIOR: symmetrical design. Central stone-cased entrance with panelled pilasters supporting mask console brackets to pediment with carved, foliated cartouche and acroterion; double part-glazed panelled doors, with 2 rectangular overlights and a further overlight, approached by wide steps with low stone balustrades having elaborately enriched cast-iron lampstandards with ladder bars and Windsor lanterns. To each side of the entrance, 3 stone architraved sashes with scrolled pediments incorporating architraved oculi. Dentil cornice at 1<sup>st</sup> floor level below a blind balustrade with panels of carved enrichment. 3 tall round-arched central windows flanked by brick pilasters linked by impost bands; pilasters marking bays and angles continue in fluted stone to support entablature with "Town Hall" inscribed on the frieze and modillion cornice crowned by a pediment with oculus above central bay and parapet above outer bays. Return without entrances but in similar style and having friezes inscribed "Erected AD 1877". INTERIOR: with many original cornices, fire places, clocks and radiators. Top-lit entrance hall with patterned tile floor and imperial stair with elaborate cast-iron balusters and newels having brass lamp-holders. At 1<sup>st</sup> landing, a round-arched mirror surround with clock in pediment. In right hand stair well, a marble 1<sup>st</sup> World War Memorial with columns supporting an entablature surmounted by a coat of arms. Good marble fireplace in porter's booth. In rear corridor a Boer War memorial formed of brass panels. First floor assembly hall with stage has heavy*

*cornice with console brackets dropping down over frieze. Secondary stair with cast-iron balustrade. Included as a fine example of a London vestry hall.*

2.02 Hampstead Town Hall is situated within the designated Belsize Park Conservation Area.



Hampstead Town Hall 1878

## 3 Early History

### 3.01 THE PARISH VESTRY

Until legislative reform in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, local government was the responsibility of the parish vestries, ecclesiastical bodies with roots going back to the medieval period. Apart from their religious parish duties, the vestry gradually accrued civil responsibilities, and were run by an appointed committee of rate

payers. The vestry was responsible for collecting local tax, poor relief, appointing a constable for law enforcement, repairing roads and supervising burials.

### 3.02 REFORM

Vestry committees were often inefficient and sought to reduce rates rather than address local issues through expenditure. The Local Government Act (1894) introduced the concept of rural and urban district councils to be run by elected councillors rather than appointed self-interested rate paying property owners. The London Government Act (1899) created 28 elected metropolitan borough councils, replacing 41 parish vestries and district board of works, within the boundaries of the London County Council which had been created in 1889 as the first London county-wide elected local government.

### 3.03 HAMPSTEAD VESTRY

Until 1878, Hampstead Vestry met in the board room of the guardians of the workhouse at New End. In 1876, the Vestry resolved to build a Vestry Hall to accommodate the increasing public responsibilities produced by a rising population. An architectural competition was held attracting seven entries. However, the Vestry also resolved that the new Vestry Hall must not exceed £10,000 in building costs and this reduced the qualifying entries to two.

3.04 The successful architects were Kendall & Mew. Henry Edward Kendall (1805-1885) had been in partnership with his eponymous father who had died in 1875. Both father and son were founder members of the Institute of British Architects (1834). A royal charter was granted in 1837 creating today's Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA).

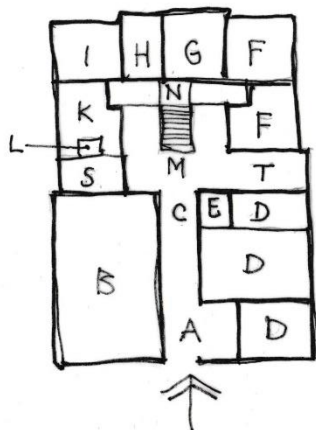
3.05 After the death of Kendall Senior, H.E Kendall Junior went into partnership with his nephew, Frederick Mew (1832-1898). Kendall and Mew's architectural practice was mostly based on schools, asylums and other public sector buildings, so that designing a Vestry Hall for Hampstead would have suited their experience. Also, Henry Kendall's position as District Surveyor to Hampstead Vestry may have helped, despite critical local comment and whispers of nepotism at the time of the competition. There was also some objection to the "bright red brick façade"

3.06 The Vestry Hall was not completed until 1878. H.E.Kendall died in 1885, leaving Frederick Mew to continue the practice. But Frederick, the lowly son of an

Isle of Wight innkeeper, was not considered enough of a gentleman and soon sank into obscurity.

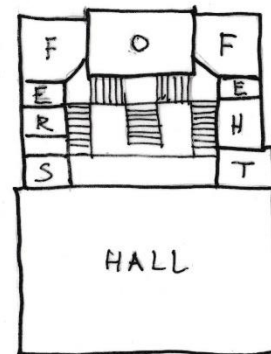
## HAMPSTEAD TOWN HALL ~ ORIGINAL USE PLAN (1878)

GROUND FLOOR



- A ENTRANCE HALL
- B VESTRY HALL
- C CORRIDOR
- D SURVEYOR'S OFFICE
- E LAVATORIES
- F VESTRY CLERK'S OFFICE
- G SUPERINTENDENT REGISTRAR
- H WAITING ROOM
- I MEDICAL OFFICER
- K BURIAL BOARD

FIRST FLOOR



- L LIFT
- M PRINCIPAL STAIRCASE
- N STRONG ROOM
- O COMMITTEE ROOM
- P WAITING ROOM
- Q CLOAK ROOM
- R RETIRING ROOM
- S SERVICE
- T TOWER + SIDE STAIR

### 3.07 HAMPSTEAD VESTRY HALL

Kendall & Mew's design is a square-planned Italianate block faced in Bracknell red brick with Portland stone dressings. The roof is covered in interlocking Broomhall Co. patent clay tiles. The building has pediments to the three main elevations to Haverstock Hill and Belsize Avenue. There is a grand sweep of stone steps to the main entrance from Haverstock Hill and a tower which originally contained the secondary stair and water cisterns on the Belsize Lane return elevation.

3.08 The diagram plan (above 3.07) and list of original uses demonstrates the variety of functions the Vestry had to perform from the outset, under the inspiration of the motto proudly set into the Vestry Hall façade; “Non sibi sed toti” (Not for self but for all).

3.09 The floors under the public halls were constructed of “Dennett’s Arching”, a fire resisting construction of inverted T iron beams spanned between with shallow jack arches formed from gypsum and broken brick. This was a strong construction which could sustain extreme heat. Dennett’s Arching, patented in 1863 by builder engineer Charles Colton Dennett (1819-1875) of Nottingham, was an early example of effective fire-resistant construction.

3.10 The halls provided by the new building was also be used for community and educational uses. Examinations for the Cambridge Local Examination for Woman were held here, an important route for improving the educational opportunities for women through external examinations governed by Cambridge University.

3.11 The central entrance hall has the Vestry Hall on the left with the Parish Surveyor’s offices to the right. There was a kitchen in the basement served by a lift to bring refreshments to functions in the Vestry Hall. Beyond is the grand imperial-style top-lit staircase with various Vestry official’s accommodation clustered around.

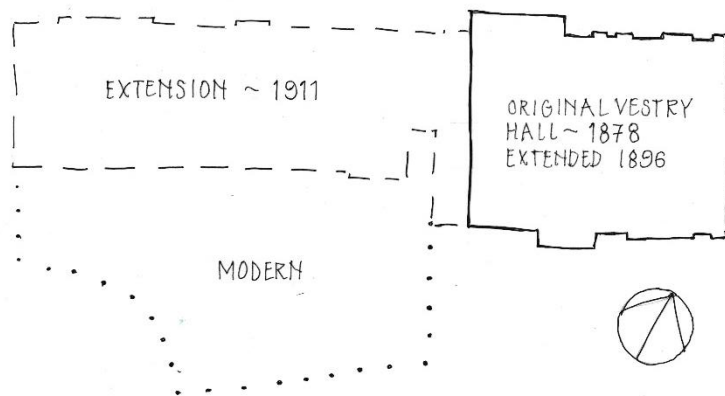
3.12 At the top of the imperial staircase is the public hall occupying the front section of this floor. To the rear, is a committee room and a suite of offices for the Vestry clerks.

## 4 The London County Council

4.01 In 1889, the London County Council was created, the first London-wide elected body to govern the capital. Under the 1899 London Government Act, Hampstead became a Metropolitan Borough with a mayor, 7 aldermen and 42 elected councillors. The Vestry Hall became Hampstead Town Hall. Already extended in 1896, in 1911 the Vestry Hall received a major extension fronting Belsize Lane designed by John Murray to provide for the new Metropolitan Borough’s increasing responsibilities.



## BUILDING EVOLUTION ~ HAMPSTEAD VESTRY HALL



Hampstead Town Hall Extension. John Murray 1911

## 5 The Greater London Council

5.01 In 1965, the GLC was created, taking in the old LCC Metropolitan Boroughs plus large areas of outer London to form 32 London Boroughs. The London Borough

of Camden was formed by amalgamating the Metropolitan Boroughs of Hampstead, Holborn and St Pancras. Like many of the new London Boroughs, this created a problem of local authorities with multiple town halls, which while often surplus to requirements, were often also Listed Buildings. New uses were required to bring fresh life to these important community heritage buildings.

## 6 Wac Arts

6.01 Since 2000, Wac Arts has successfully run Hampstead Town Hall as a community arts and performance venue, offering opportunities for young people and the wider local community. A new dance and performance extension on the site of wartime air raid shelters was built in 2000 to the designs of architects Burrell Foley Fischer.

## 7 Heritage Significance

7.01 Hampstead Town Hall has an important heritage significance as a high quality and well-planned example of a vestry hall. Vestry halls, where they survive form an important early link in the historic development of London local government. The listing description states;

*Included as a fine example of a London vestry hall.*

The heritage significance extends to the interior of the building where the original plan form is largely intact being composed of formal hall, committee room, vestry hall and supplementary offices grouped around a highly decorated imperial-style staircase. The 1911 extension in an Edwardian Baroque Revival style illustrates the development of architectural fashion as well as the increasing complexity of local government during this period.

7.02 Hampstead Town Hall is also a major historic civic landmark in the Belsize Park Conservation Area, making an important contribution to the character and appearance of the area.



## 8 Policy Context

**8.01 Government policy** for managing change in the historic environment is given in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Section 16 “Conserving and enhancing the historic environment”:

*189 In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage asset affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets’ importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. As a Minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary.....*

*196 Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum use.*

NPPF Planning Guidance indicates the need to identify public interest in terms of heritage benefits associated with a proposal;

*Public benefit should flow from the proposed development. They should be of a nature or scale to be of benefit to the public at large and not just for private benefit.....*

*Public benefit may include heritage benefits such as:*

- *Sustaining or enhancing the significance of a heritage asset and the contribution of its setting.*
- *Reducing or removing risks to a heritage asset*
- *Securing the optimum viable use of a heritage asset in support of its long-term conservation*

**8.02 Historic England** have published policy guidance on decision-taking in the historic environment, advising on how significance should be judged;

*Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment*

*Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning 2.*

*8 Understanding the **nature of that significance** is important to understanding the need for and best means of conservation.*

*9 Understanding the **extent of that significance** is also important because this can, among other things, lead to a better understanding of how adaptable the asset may be.....*

*10 Understanding the **level of that significance** is important as it provides the essential guide to how policies should be applied.*

8.03 This guidance indicates that a careful and informed judgement is required to ascertain the nature, level and extent of the significance in relation to the proposals. Change can be harmful to heritage assets or may have little or no impact on their significance.

**8.04 The London Borough of Camden** have a Camden Local Plan (2017) Policy DC-Heritage, which aims to protect and promote heritage assets and the historic environment.

The Local Plan Policy C3 -Cultural & Leisure facilities seeks to protect and promote cultural and leisure facilities in the Borough.

## 9 The Proposals

9.01 The proposals by Wac Arts aim at improving the facilities within and outside the building to assist and extend their successful programme of arts-based activities.

### 9.02 EXTERNAL

The front entrance from Haverstock Hill with its stone steps and piers would be retained. The retaining wall on the right-hand side would be raised in height to accommodate the new flat level café terrace, occupying the space outside the northern facade of the Town Hall. Access to this café terrace would be via the existing windows on the north western façade, which would be converted to glazed casement doors. To the left of the entrance steps and terrace, a platform lift would be provided for disabled access.

COMMENTARY - Improved café accommodation would greatly assist the work of Wac Arts and the terrace would be well landscaped in a currently underused area. The landscaping improvements would be an enhancement of the setting of the historic Town Hall. Appropriately detailed new glazed doors in place of the existing windows would not detract from the appearance of this strongly modelled building.

### 9.03 GROUND FLOOR INTERIOR

The entrance hall would be altered by the removal of a non-original wall on the right-hand side directly within the front entrance. The original timber and glass double lobby doors would be retained.

The wall between the entrance hall and the current reception and meeting rooms on this side of the hall would be opened up and several dividing walls within this area would be removed to form new café.

The existing modern double doors into the Vestry Hall would be removed and a single door relocated closer to the main entrance to match the original door location.

COMMENTARY - The removal of the small non-original section of hall wall near the entrance is to be welcomed as is the re-location of the Vestry Hall entrance door to its original location. The existing chimney piece will be relocated back to its original position in the vestibule from where it was removed during works in 1999-2000.

The opening up of the rooms on the right-hand side of the entrance hall is a significant intervention. These rooms were originally the Parish Surveyor's offices and were fairly plainly finished. The mezzanine and cast-iron spiral staircase were manufactured by W. MacFarlane of Glasgow and probably date from the alterations to the building of 1896. It is intended for the spiral staircase to be reused within the building.

9.04 In comparison with the main ceremonial areas of the Town Hall (the imperial staircase and the three public halls), these offices spaces are of secondary heritage significance. The proposed opening up for café use amounts to less than

substantial harm and the important elements of the original plan form are still discernible

However, when this harm is weighed against the public benefit of assisting the cultural use of the building and offering a sustaining use for this area and the building as a whole, the principle of this proposal is acceptable in heritage terms.

## 10 Conclusion

10.01 At the formation of the GLC in 1965, many new London Boroughs were faced with the problem of having three town halls within their borough, which once served the smaller, individual L.C.C metropolitan boroughs. Frequently of historic interest, these civic buildings have often proved difficult to successfully reuse.

10.02 In this case, Wac Arts have reused Hampstead Town Hall in a culturally successful manner and in a form sensitive to the buildings historic interest. The essentially public access and use which is characteristic of a Town Hall is here recreated as art and performance replacing politics, but perhaps in this case making the building more accessible and useful to a more diverse groups than the original purpose.

10.03 From the heritage public interest aspect, it is therefore important to nurture the successful arts and performance uses in this listed building as providing a sustainable future for the Town Hall. The public interest is also served by promoting the arts and performance use for the wider cultural benefit in a building of heritage significance.