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VIA ON-LINE PORTAL - E-MAIL application

London Borough of Camden
Heritage and Planning Officer

LBC: Covering Letter – HERITAGE STATEMENT

30 March 2020

Dear Sir or Madam

Blue plaque: Noor Inayat Khan (1914-1944)

The proposal: I am writing to advise you that English Heritage's Blue Plaques Panel has approved the recommendation that if consents are agreed, a blue plaque be erected to: Noor Inayat Khan, a courageous SOE (Special Operations Executive) Agent with a blue plaque at **4 Taviton Street, Bloomsbury, WC1H 0BT, in the London Borough of Camden**. This is a listed Grade II building in the Bloomsbury Conservation Area, Sub Area 2.

BUILDING STATEMENT

The current building history:

Number 4 Taviton Street is part of a terrace numbered 1-12 (consecutive) built by Thomas Cubitt on the Bedford Estate in about 1824. Built of stock brick, 4 storeys and basement; the ground and basement levels façade white stucco lightly channelled; vertically proportioned windows, three bays wide, the first floor with continuous cast-iron balconies; a wide running cornice between 2nd and 3rd storeys, plus a parapet cornice. Originally built for domestic use, by the 1940s when Noor stayed here with her family, in common with much of the street, this address was (together with 3, 17, 18 & 19 Taviton Street) run as a boarding or 'apartment house'. In the early 1970s number 3 and 4 Taviton Street were adapted by the present occupant, University College London (UCL), for teaching and administrative purposes. However, the frontage is largely unchanged since Noor's residence. UCL have agreed that the current lightning cable that runs down the full height of the façade will be partially rerouted to accommodate the fixing of the plaque. The whole terrace is listed grade II and lies within the London Borough of Camden's Bloomsbury Conservation Area, Sub Area 2.

Summary biography of Noor Inayat Khan

Our research has confirmed that Noor Inayat Khan, was the first woman radio operator to be sent into occupied France in June 1943. Even for the most brilliant and devious, this was extremely dangerous work: the average survival time in the field for a radio operator was estimated by the Special Operations Executive (SOE),

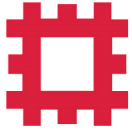
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to be six weeks. A betrayal rather than any failing on her part led to her capture in October 1943. She did not reveal her full identity or give information under German interrogation; a prisoner for nearly twelve months, she was executed in September 1944.

Noor Inayat Khan was born on 1 January 1914, to Hazrat Inayat Khan of Gujarat, a musician, a noted Sufi teacher and a great-great-grandson of Tipu Sultan; her mother Amina Baker Begum, was an American of British descent. From a baby up until she was six, the family lived in London, to then move in 1920 to France, and from 1922 in Suresnes, near Paris, where she lived and went on to study child psychology at the Sorbonne.

At the outbreak of the Second World War Noor escaped from France with her mother and two siblings to England. Noor enlisted in the WAAF as Nora Inayat Khan on 19 November 1940; in 1941 she applied for a commission in Intelligence and in May 1942 was posted for duties as a wireless operator and sent to No. 3 Signals School in Compton Bassett in Wiltshire, where she was the first in the WAAF to receive this extra training. Her fluency in both English and French brought her to the attention of the SOE, and was called to interview on 10 November 1942. In the ensuing months Noor received paramilitary training at a number of secret locations across Britain, and she was formally inducted into the SOE in February 1943. Given her written instructions 9 June 1943, Noor's cover was as a nurse, her name on papers Jeanne Marie Renier and as an agent in the field - 'Madeleine'.

On 16 June 1943 Noor was flown to France by Lysander aircraft, her task to be a wireless operator, to send and receive messages for 'Cinema's' circuit, a sub-circuit of Prosper, the largest Resistance organisation run by Francis Suttill in Paris. Soon after her arrival, the Prosper network collapsed as the Gestapo made multiple arrests. Noor however chose to stay in order to keep communications open with her French comrades; having managed to get her radio set from Le Mans to her Paris safe house, she was now the only transmitting agent in Paris. Noor evaded the Germans for three-and-a-half months while continuing to transmit messages via radio to London. Under extreme pressure, 'she did the work of six radio operators', the report in her SOE file commended 'the conduct of this young woman who, regardless of personal danger, remained at her post – often alone – and always under threat of arrest.

Captured on 14 October – Noor was taken with her transmitter to the Gestapo's Paris headquarters at Avenue Foch. Noor sent the agreed signal to alert SOE of her capture but in a series of failures this was repeatedly ignored. She escaped at least twice only to be recaptured and sent to Germany 'for safe custody'. At Pforzheim Prison, she gave her name as 'Nora Baker', close but not quite the truth, 'Nora' was a name used by her family and friends, and 'Baker' was her mother's maiden name. For nearly a year she was kept mainly in isolation, often restrained in chains, but despite beatings Noor refused to cooperate. On 11 September 1944 she was sent with three other female agents on the 250-mile journey to the Dachau concentration camp.



Evidence given at the War Crimes trial and by surviving prisoners revealed that Noor was singled out for a night of torture and then, like her comrades, was shot in the head. They were cremated on the morning of 13 September 1944. Noor had revealed nothing to her captors, and her last word was said to have been 'Liberté'.

Historical reputation:

Noor Inayat Khan, GC, MBE, WAAF, FANY, was awarded the Croix de Guerre with Gold Star on 16 January 1946, and on 5 April 1949, the George Cross (GC). As her citation in the posthumously awarded GC concludes, 'Assistant Section Officer Inayat Khan displayed the most conspicuous courage, both moral and physical, over a period of more than twelve months'. Noor is one of three female SOE agents awarded the GC – the others being Violette Szabo (1921-45) and Odette Sansom (1912-95). Noor is commemorated in England in the FANY memorial in St Paul's Church, Knightsbridge (1948), in the plaque to WAAF Section Officers at Runnymede (1953) and with a portrait bust in Gordon Square (2012); featured in a memorial stamp (2014). In Suresnes, France she is remembered in a plaque to her childhood home and a square named Cours Madeleine, while a plaque in the Remembrance Hall of Dachau Museum records her death and cremation at the camp. A digital exhibition at Runnymede Air Forces Memorial (CWGC) is in planning for 2020.

Publications on Noor's life include, *Spy Princess, The Life of Noor Inayat Khan*, by Shrabani Basu, 2008; Noor's friend and biographer, Jean Overton Fuller published *Noor-un-nisa Inayat Khan: Madeleine*, 1988; publications on the SOE and the Second World War, include Sarah Helm's *A Life in Secrets: The Story of Vera Atkins and the Lost Agents of SOE*, 2006; and Noor is included in *Women Spies* by Jack Johnson, 2016. For further information the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography entry is an attached document.

Connection of 4 Taviton Street to Noor Inayat Khan:

Our research has identified that **4 Taviton Street** is the main surviving address related to Noor's adult life. She was resident in London for six years of her early childhood in 1914-20 and again when Noor and her family fled France in 1940. Between periods of military training, Noor stayed in the capital between 1941-43, either at friends homes or with her family, and within her peripatetic life, the most consistent home was with her mother Amina. Amina took rooms in 1942 at 4 Taviton Street, a lodging house, and Noor would join her when on leave. As a lodger however, it is only the landlady, Mary Lewis, who appeared in rate books and directories. Nevertheless Jean Fuller, who lived three doors down at 1 Taviton Street, and with whom Noor would also sometimes stay, records that Noor's mother lived there from mid-1942. Surviving electoral registers confirm that Amina and Vilayat (Noor's brother), remained at 4 Taviton Street, among thirty residents, until 1947. Correspondence places Noor at the house in 1943, for example on 28 and 31 March when she wrote to her brother Vilayat (who had joined the RAF), to tell him she was



at the War Office and then on leave in London and, to continue to write to her at 'Mother's address'.

As an SOE agent she left for France in June 1943. Noor's time staying in Taviton Street was not long in blue plaque terms, the evidence being for short periods over one year, it is however, the place she stayed when she became an agent; it was this address that Noor scratched on the bottom of her feeding bowl while in Pforzheim Prison – *'Nora Baker, Radio Office Service RAF, 4 Taviton Street, London'*, and it was where Noor's family received the news that she was missing. 4 Taviton Street is very close to the site of her childhood home, 29 Gordon Square (demolished and rebuilt), where she was recently honoured with a memorial in the Square's garden.

The proposed inscription on the blue plaque is:

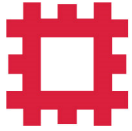
**NOOR
INAYAT KHAN GC
1914-1944
SOE Agent
codename
'Madeleine'
stayed here**

Note: 'GC' should appear on the inscription in small caps.

The plaque inscription has been approved by the Blue Plaques Panel; the descriptor of SOE Agent has been agreed as the best term to describe Noor Inayat Khan's role. The Special Operations Executive (SOE) organisation has received increasing recognition by the public and academics, the interest in the work of the SOE in the Second World War now has a wide enough understanding of the term to use on the plaque rather than 'Secret Agent' which is associated with MI6, or the more ambiguous 'Special Agent', which is associated with the FBI. Although Noor had other code names, 'Madeleine' was the official field name given to her on her mission papers (9 June 1943).

Our proposal for the positioning of the inset mounted blue plaque is for it to be sited centrally between the two ground floor windows, placed vertically in height to centre on the main sash window transom bars, this position is to visually place it in context and in line with, the plaque to commemorate the Methodist preacher Hugh Price Hughes at 8 Taviton Street (installed in 1989). UCL have agreed to partially re-route the current lightning cable on the building façade to allow the plaque to be positioned here.

For the detailed views of the proposed location of the plaque please see the attached positioning documents of the surveyor orthophotos - scaled 1:50; and the perspective oblique views; these take the role of architect drawings. The size of the plaque is the



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standard 19.5-inch diameter, inset into the brickwork by a depth of 50mm. The materials and methodology for the installation of the plaque are considered under the design and access statement with accompanying method documents.

Consents: Recent consultation with the freeholders, University of London (UoL) and leaseholders (UCL), of number 4 Taviton Street, has resulted in positive support and their final approval for the design and positioning of the blue plaque as shown attached.

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, and when Government guidelines on restricted public movement in the time of Coronavirus circumstances are lifted, we would install the plaque this autumn 2020.

Yours faithfully

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