

HOWITT CLOSE HOWITT ROAD, BELSIZE PARK LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN HERITAGE TECHNICAL NOTE

Introduction

- 1.1. In December 2021, Cotswold Archaeology (CA) was commissioned by TPS, on behalf of Daejan Properties Ltd, to provide a Heritage Technical Note in support of a proposed development at Howitt Close, Howitt Road, Belsize Park, London. Currently in Residential use, the building is located within the London Borough of Camden (NGR: 527255, 184811; Fig. 1). The proposed development comprises the addition of a single-storey mansard extension to the roof of the building. The building is not included on Historic England's National Heritage List for England (NHLE) but does lie within Belsize Conservation Area. The building does not feature on Camden's Local List of heritage assets¹.



Fig. 1: Site location

¹ <https://www.camden.gov.uk/documents/20142/8118440/Local+List.pdf/674e9b7b-6fed-d44c-9593-096a22bb271d>

- 1.2. In September 2021, an application was submitted to Camden Council for the extension of the building to incorporate an additional mansard storey atop the existing roof structure. A Heritage Statement, also produced by CA, was submitted as part of the application, and details an assessment of the building's heritage significance and potential impacts of the proposals.
- 1.3. An objection to the proposed development, dated 4 November 2021, was submitted by the Twentieth Century Society that centred on the opinion that the proposed extension would constitute harm to the building as a 'non-designated heritage asset' and the Conservation Area. Specifically, the objection highlights the contribution of the existing flat roof to the Conservation Area and significance of the building:

"We believe the building's flat roof is a key part of its interwar character and appearance, and distinguishes it from neighbouring buildings in a way that contributes to the variety and interest of the sub-area." (20th Century Society, 2021).
- 1.4. The objection also cites the architect of the building as Henry F. Webb & Ash.
- 1.5. A subsequent consultation response from the Design & Conservation Officer for Camden Council, David McKinstry, dated 2 January 2021 [presumed 2022] also identifies the existing flat roof element of the building as a characteristic of inter-war architecture. The Officer also identifies potential harm to the Conservation Area as a result of the proposed development.
- 1.6. The scope of this Note is to provide further research and background on the architecture firm that constructed the building (Henry F. Webb & Ash) and assess the building according to the architect's credentials and other identified works of note.

Henry F. Webb & Ash

- 1.7. The architectural firm of Henry F. Webb & Ash arose through the collaboration of two established architects, Henry F. Webb and Major Arthur Stanley Ash between 1930 and 1936, as cited within a directory at the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). It is within this period that Howitt Close was constructed in 1933. The building was featured in the 1 December 1933 edition of *The Builder* which provided a photograph of the building featuring a flat roof, floor plans and a brief, prosaic description of the building that outlines the functional facilities of each apartment as well as selected

room dimensions. The article confirms that the architects of the building were 'Henry F. Webb and Ash' (The Builder 1933).

RIBA membership

- 1.8. The *Builder* article provides no further context of the architectural merits of the building, however, the article does confirm that Henry F. Webb was a Licentiate member of RIBA. The Licentiate class of members was introduced in 1905 for architects who could show competence, without completing any examinations. This is in contrast to Associate members who were required to 'pass or have passed such Examination or Examinations as may be directed by the Royal Institute' (RIBA 1951). In this context, Licentiate and Associate members represented those in the classes below Fellow. To be considered for election as a Fellow, a Licentiate member must have completed prescribed Examination(s) and been successfully nominated and elected by the Council.
- 1.9. It has been confirmed through staff at the RIBA library that Henry F. Webb never attained membership above that of Licentiate class. Major Arthur Stanley Ash attained the class of Fellow, however, this occurred in 1938, after his partnership with Webb had ceased and lasted until 1942 before recommencing for one year in 1943 (RIBA 1951). There is no evidence that Ash was an Associate prior to this so it is assumed that was also a Licentiate member at the time of the design of Howitt Close.

Other notable works

- 1.10. The RIBA biography of Henry F. Webb records that he designed 'many large blocks of flats, cinemas and public buildings' without specifying the names of any of these. The biography mentions only Elm Park Court which is an apartment complex in Pinner, North London, that was constructed in 1936. Elm Park Court incorporates a pitched roof design and was constructed on a considerably larger scale than Howitt Close. The building is Grade II Listed (NHLE: 1261409) and is described in the List description as an 'exuberant example of the colonial or hacienda style in the mid-1930s deemed appropriate for private flats intended for a middle-class community aping a Hollywood lifestyle'. It is likely that this was his best-known work.
- 1.11. Elsewhere, the only references to identified buildings designed by Henry F. Webb include the former Ambassador Cinema in Hendon (now a modern health centre) that was constructed in 1932. The building was featured in the March 1932 edition of *The*

Builder along with a description, photographs and plan (The Builder 1932). Although located in Hendon, where a number of other modernist buildings are situated, the cinema is not Listed, nor is it included on Barnet's Local Heritage List (Barnet Council 2020) despite the survival of its general form and principal cinema façade.

- 1.12. The RIBA library archive noted an association with a building in Harrow, with no further details available, and a previous Heritage Statement concerning Elm Park Court mentions that he also designed Leytonstone Post Office, constructed in 1910. No further reference of this building, including its location and current status could be found to match these details.
- 1.13. After splitting with Webb, Major Arthur Stanley Ash was later responsible for the design of Charles House office block in Kensington, London in 1950 (The Builder 1950). This was demolished between 2008 and 2012 and has been replaced wholesale by new residential buildings.

Conclusions

- 1.14. The documentary evidence gathered appears to confirm that Henry F. Webb and Ash was an architects firm that focussed principally on regional level projects within the urban extent of London. Whilst there has been one building (Elm Park Court; Grade II) that has been identified as holding heritage significance at a national level, this appears to have been an exception where, for the most part, buildings designed by the firm comprised offices, cinemas and apartment blocks of less renown.
- 1.15. Furthermore, at the time of Howitt Close's design, Henry F. Webb and Ash were operating as Licentiate members of RIBA, at the foundational levels of member hierarchy. Henry F. Webb never progressed beyond this level within the institute and never received further recognition, amongst his peers or the wider community.

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January 2022

References

20th Century Society

*Objection to London Borough of Camden application
2021/3839/P*

Barnet Council 2020

Barnet's Local Heritage List

The Builder 1932	<i>The “Ambassador” Cinema, Hendon Central [11 March 1932 edition]</i>
The Builder 1933	<i>Howitt Close, Belsize Park, NW [1 December 1933 edition]</i>
The Builder 1950	<i>Charles House, Kensington, W [29 September 1950 edition]</i>
Built Heritage Consultancy 2014	<i>Elm Park Court, Pinner, Heritage Statement</i>
RIBA 1951	<i>The Kalendar of The Royal Institute of British Architects</i>