**ISLINGTON ARTS FACTORY: TEXT OF LISTING APPLICATION FOR VERGER’S COTTAGE AND ENTRANCE, SENT TO HISTORIC ENGLAND 23.4.15**

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**Threat**

The entire site of the Islington Arts Factory (which occupies several buildings) and the adjacent garage (whose lease is due to expire) is being redeveloped by the owners, the City of London Corporation. The planning application, P2015/0330/FUL, was registered on 18 March 2015. The building that is being submitted for statutory listing is the verger's cottage together with the adjoining Islington Arts Factory entrance, designed by E.G. Trobridge in 1908; it is these that are singled out for demolition in the current planning application. They form the ceremonial entrance to the Camden Road New Jerusalem Church (Swedenborgian); the cottage is sometimes referred to as 'the gatehouse'. The church and the Sunday school building, both by Edward C. Gosling, 1873, are to be converted into housing. The intention of the scheme is to rehouse the Islington Arts Factory (the existing tenants of the church, Sunday school, verger's cottage and the exceptional entrance way) on the redeveloped garage site, together with new housing.

The cottage and the entrance building, with their extensive mosaic interiors by Rust and Co. and extraordinarily original organic forms, are threatened by complete demolition. They are of far greater rarity, originality and historic interest than the Victorian church and Sunday school buildings to which they are attached. Trobrige is an exceptional figure in architectural history and many of his eccentric cottages and suburban houses in Kingsbury and elsewhere in Brent (which holds his archives) are statutorily listed. The verger’s cottage and entranceway appear to have been overlooked by historians, and his work in Islington has not been connected with the enthusiastic protection and conservation of his buildings in Brent. The building is the first that Trobridge seems to have completed (age 24), and the only one of his surviving works connected to a religious complex -- the very religion that was the inspiration for the spiritual adapations of Arts and Crafts and cottage architecture for which he is known and celebrated.

The threat to this building is very real, even though it ought to be protected as part of the Hillmarton Conservation Area. The stakeholders are the owner, City of London Corporation; Islington Arts Factory, a charity reliant on City of London Corporation, as landlord, for their premises, and for the possibility of a badly needed new building; and also Islington Council, which substantially funds the work of Islington Arts Factory and strongly wants it to continue. The development as a whole offers some welcome possibilities for improvement of the site, including the restoration of the top of the spire of the church, which is an important local landmark, and potentially it offers a sustainable future for the Victorian buildings. However, the demolition of Trobridge's 1908 additions should be resisted and prevented, as they are at the heart of the historic interest of the site. This is why I am putting them forward for listing and for urgent attention and survey. I am an independent researcher who lives nearby, and am a member of the Islington Society’s planning committee. The Islington Society supports this bid for spot listing of an exceptionally unusual building.

**Historic interest**

The verger’s cottage and the new entrance were added to the Camden Road New Church in 1908. The church housed one of perhaps eight Swedenborgian congregations in London in this period. Purpose-built accommodation for followers of Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) must be rare. He set up no churches in his own lifetime.

There is quite substantial documentation of the history of the church and the congregation, which had its origins in Cross Street, Hatton Garden, where a chapel was dedicated in 1797 (see Johnson, P., ‘Cross Street and Camden Road New Churches. A Summary History’, n.d., copy supplied by the Swedenborg Society). The timeline Philip Johnson provides gives many insights into the social history of the church and the active involvement of its members in the life of the area around them. The congregation continued at Camden Road until 1954, when, on the expiry of its lease, it merged with the Argyle Square Society of the New Church and moved ultimately to a site at New Barnet, where it continues to this day. The Camden Road building was used as a boys’ club (a plaque in the church records a visit by the Duke of Edinburgh) and subsequently as an arts centre. It has been in public and community use since it was built, in one form or another.

The simple fact of the ‘rarity’ of a religious faith has some claim for historic interest. The Camden Road New Church seems to have been the inheritor of a particularly significant congregation within the church’s wider history, and a focal point for Swedenborgians: many of its members did not live locally. What is perhaps more interesting is that nonconformist churches did not always develop their own expression very fully, and borrowed from a range of available styles and traditions of architecture. The 1908 additions to the Camden Road New Church confidently make an architectural effect that is evocative of a freethinking, modern approach, in keeping with the involvement of church members in the life around them. The architecture is an evocative testament to the social history of a faith that still has living followers, and of the wider history of evangelism and nonconformity in a part of London that became very much poorer in the course of the 19th century.

**ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST**

**1. The architect**

E.G. Trobridge (1884-1942) was, throughout his life, a devout follower of the thinking of Emmanuel Swedenborg. He was also the designer of exceptional domestic architecture that gave physical form to his spiritual aspirations, and an architect-developer, who worked closely with builders.

His work shows a singular devotion to the associations of the cottage form and, latterly, of castles and baronial halls. It is fanciful, and some way outside the mainstream of the architecture of his time, but it can also be seen as a late development of Arts and Crafts thinking. It was also technically adventurous – he was an advocate for building with green elm in the immediate housing crisis of the aftermath of World War 1. Many of his buildings in the Kingsbury area and elsewhere are listed, otherwise protected and studied, and since his archives have been acquired by Brent Museum there have been successful developments in increasing public awareness of his buildings and his ideas. An exhibition about his work was held at Brent Museum in 2010: ‘Ernest Trobridge: Visionary of the Suburbs’. The leaflet included a map showing the location of Trobridge houses in Kingsbury, and a programme of public events addressed Trobridge’s work and its context.

Earlier research, by Graham Paul Smith at Oxford Polytechnic in 1982, for an exhibition that travelled from Oxford to Edinburgh, could draw on memories of Trobridge’s family members as well as on archival material. The publication covers as much as could then be found of Trobridge’s buildings and thinking, in Brent and outside it. A photocopy of this will be sent by post to accompany this application, as it is the most serious account of Trobridge as an architect that we have. Some of the lost buildings (e.g. Ozonia. Canvey Island, 1938, built as a holiday destination for working-class people) are astonishing.

**2. The commission**

We are fortunate in possessing a full contemporary account of the work that Trobridge undertook. 'In the remodelling of the buildings, the following points were the objects aimed at: (1) A caretaker's cottage with ample, convenient and healthy accommodation; (2) A wide passage leading to the Church; (3) A wide and safe staircase to the lecture hall [now upper dance studio]; (4) A ladies' cloak-room; (5) A gentlemen's cloak-room; (6) A new entrance to the church gallery; (7) An enlargement to the lecture hall; (8) An enlargement to the library [now ground floor dance studio]; (9) An increase in the height of the cellars, and the installation of a new furnace.' Source: 'A Short History of the Camden Road Society of the New Jerusalem Church, with Programme of Bazaar held on Thursday, Friday, Saturday Dec. 10th, 11th, 12th, 1908', photocopy provided by Islington Arts Factory; a copy of it will be sent by post to accompany this application.

The same document continues:

‘The average height of the new buildings is the same as before, but the premises occupy more than twice the floor accommodation in the rooms and passages, as compared with those they replace, and the handsome staircase is one foot four inches wider than the old staircase.

The treads of the stair consist of Pentelikon marble. This marble is of the same kind as was used in the famous Parthenon of Athens. The risers and dado of the staircase, the dadoes in the Church passage and the cloak-rooms, as well as the floors, are mosaic tiles, this particular work having been executed by Rust’s Vitreous Mosaic Company. The plaster is polished marble plaster.

The designing and carrying out of this work on so limited a space has been a task of considerable difficulty, and it has been very ably and ingeniously carried out by the architect, Mr. Ernest J. Trobridge, son of the well-known New Church writer, Mr. George Trobridge. The contractors were Messrs. J.E. Wallis & Co. of Maidstone.’

The alterations required were built at a cost of £1200. It is worth noting the use of one of the best mosaic firms of the period (Rust and Co.) and the thoughtful judgment Trobridge made about materials: the ‘polished marble plaster’ survives in a very good state and enhances the unusual organically shaped supports for the arch in the entrance way to the church, and the sculpted chimney form in the first floor living room.

The commission was one of only two Trobridge undertook for a religious building; in 1909 he completed Esher New Church (now demolished; it is illustrated in the 1982 publication by G.P. Smith). The complex of the verger’s cottage and entrance to the church is thus the only building by Trobridge for a specific religious function that survives – and one that connects directly with the Swedenborgian beliefs that guided his life’s work.

**3. Survey**

**EXTERIOR**

The symbolic dimensions of the cottage form are clearly present in Trobridge's first surviving work as an architect. The centrally placed chimney, the rainwater pipe (intended to be noticed: it bears the title VERGERS COTTAGE 1908 on the central hood) and the M-shaped, double gable make up the surprising emphasis of the facade. A large proportion of Trobridge’s original joinery survives under the blue and yellow paint, and the gable is carefully shaped, with carved detail; it is quite likely made of oak. The cottage is in red brick, and the brickwork is of a high standard. Curved bricks make a slight recess for the side windows on the upper floors. These curve outwards, which means the central windows are daintily canted. (The same feature is found in Trobridge houses such as that in Elm Park Road, Pinner, 1921.) The top area of the facade is coated with a resilient rough cast/pebble dash that is still firmly bonded and has not been painted. The three storeys of the cottage are symmetrical, either side of the pipework, though the windows are varied on each floor. Although some of the leaded glass panes have gone, restoration and conservation of the windows would be entirely possible. There are areas of stained glass, too, with a leaf and floral motif. This highly unorthodox facade, now mostly hidden by a plane tree, does everything to draw the eye to the protective roof, the central chimney and the rainwater pipes, which are celebrated as a quirky decorative element. The side wall of the roof, facing the garage, is in the shape of a red brick Dutch gable, and appears to be built on top of a reused boundary wall in stock brick -- this is where the church buildings would have butted up against the Athenaeum, since demolished, which occupied the garage site.

The roof is tiled. From what I can see the main ridge runs parallel to the front facade, and the two gables are at right angles to it. The chimney is at the centre: this was a feature that Trobridge returned to again and again in his suburban houses in Kingsbury and elsewhere.

**INTERIOR**

**Entrance way to church, stairs and gallery**

The new entrance to the church utilised part of Gosling's original building to make an impressive and brightly modern processional way. The floor is finished in hardwearing mosaic tiles, still in excellent condition, and the walls are decorated in an arcade motif, in shades of green mosaic (Rust's vitreous glass) to dado height. There is only one obvious small section of loss, about 90cm, that I could see, on the right of the entrance. The floor mosaic spells out LIBRARY by the door leading to the left of the entrance. The impressive staircase leads off to the right of the entrance, about two thirds of the way in. At this point the words THE NEW CHURCH run right across your progress to the church, and the height of the passage is reduced. There is a flat arch, supported on two organically sculpted corbels finished in the white 'polished marble plaster'. These are extraordinary forms to find in an interior of this date. Above them is a rectangular window which must have been where the stained-glass panel referred to in the 1908 account of the work was located. (It carried the letters THE NEW CHURCH, in red, and a sun emerging from clouds.) The passage narrows slightly and veers slightly to the left. A toilet door leading off the entrance way seems to be original (similar doors are found at the top of the stairs). The carved mahogany doors into the church do not survive. To the left there is an opening to modern offices and a single-storey extension. The effect of the mosaic work as a whole is, however, very consistent. We don't have contemporary photos of the entrance way, which is decorated at ceiling level with a modest plaster coving with a leaf motif, but the white paint is effective.

The stairs, rising in two flights, are truly impressive. The green arcading motif continues (except at the return), and mosaic risers meet the marble treads in a curve, in a way I have not seen before. The ironwork is unusual, integrated well with the mosaic design, and the handrail appears to be original. The whole staircase is very expensive work and feels impressively solid in its construction. Above it light falls into the stairway from a window set into the angled roof . I have not looked at this window closely but it is a successful feature that floods the stairs with light. At the top of the stairs there is more mosaic work and lettering on the floor that spells out GALLERY. A door here, not original, leads through a further passage, entirely mosaic on the floor and to dado height (with the same green arcade motif), as far as it was possible to see. It is currently used as a storeroom. This passage provided entrance direct to the church gallery and could be used by latecomers without disturbing the service. The double doors into the upper dance studio (originally the lecture hall) are original, and there is at least one other original door. These doors, though simple, incorporate striking curved shapes; they indicate that Trobridge's intriguing way with woodwork was already in place.

The firm of Rust and Co. who did the mosaic work, were among the best of their time. Their work is now being studied and documented. See <http://www.wandsworthhistory.org.uk/historian/jesse_rust_illus.pdf>

**Basement**

A new 'furnace' is mentioned as a part of the commission. An impressively wide fireplace is to be found in the basement -- is this what was meant? It seems to be in stone, but is painted, with a mantel shelf and mirror above. The hearth and the chimney were important symbolic forms for Trobridge. The basement fireplace is at the dead centre of the cottage, at an unusual 45-degree angle to the room. The basement was originally used as the ladies' and gentlemen's cloakroom; it is now just the ladies’. There are areas of loss to the mosaic work at dado level around the fireplace (the walls are painted in imitation of it), but there are extensive areas around the toilet cubicles where it survives; and the floor mosaics are intact.

**Ground floor**

Two rooms, not examined.

**First floor**

Two rooms, currently used as offices. The first was used by the caretaker as a kitchen, and has an intact copper and built in coal stove beneath it. It must be an unusual domestic survival of this once common form. The windows have sculpted wood surrounds; the woodwork seems to survive even where some of the windows are blocked up. There is an original narrow fireplace with art nouveau-ish tiles, of a familiar type for the date, i.e. bought in, not commissioned specially like the large hearth in the basement. The living room runs off the kitchen. In it there is an extraordinary organic sculpted form, larger than the corbels in the entrance, and finished in white plaster. It is perhaps part of the chimney flue? It is a very striking and unusual form to be found in any building for this date, and if it is a kind of symbolic enhancement of the chimney, that would make sense in terms of Trobridge's interests. It simply has to be seen.

S**econd floor**

Two rooms, currently used as studios; it was not possible to examine them closely. These attic rooms were originally used as bedrooms. All the rooms in the cottage are small in scale. In the listing description for Trobridge’s 142 Slough Lane, it is stated that ‘he arranged his rooms to mike maximum use of available space and to keep heights low’. The strong preference, as well as the practical advantages of low rooms for domestic architecture, is something that can be seen in the verger’s cottage. The rooms are strikingly small, but they are designed to feel cosy, as cottages are meant to be.

**Alterations and changes**

Interior: The furnishings and decoration of the library (now lower dance studio) have entirely gone – but that part of the building is not being submitted for listing. The carved mahogany doors into the church and the stained glass panel above it (which included in red glass THE NEW CHURCH and a design of a sun rising through clouds) have also gone. There are areas of loss to the mosaic dadoes in the basement and the entrance but there is also a great deal still to find out about this building: it is quite possible that important features may be covered up. The exterior of the cottage and entrance has been altered by the addition of a modern porch that shelters Islington Art Factory's noticeboard, but not in a way that affects the structure of the building or is irremediable. The windows, as already described, lack some panels of leaded lights (at ground floor level they are all blocked up), but enough survives to enable a complete reconstruction, and a large proportion of the original window joinery survives.

Overall, a huge amount survives intact, despite the rough use the building has had as church, boys' club and community arts organisation.

**4. Evaluation of architectural significance**

A listed thatched cottage in Kingsbury, built in 1921 using Trobridge’s green elm construction, is actually illustrated and discussed in English Heritage’s selection guide *Designating Heritage Assets. Domestic 4: The Modern House and Housing*, April 2011, on page 3. This is still Historic England’s current advice. The demolition of the very first building by the same architect would surely be wrong!

The main reason for listing the combined cottage and entrance way, however, is its exceptional rarity. Trobridge completed very few buildings before the 1920s. Crucial evidence of his originality and his thinking is already present in the verger's cottage: with the hearth and the chimney at the centre, and the strong associations of the cottage form enhanced, even in a building that is three storeys high. As already pointed out, this is the only one of Trobridge's buildings to have a specific connection with the Swedenborgian church; and he was an architect whose life’s work was guided by his immersion in Swedenborg’s thinking. The integration of the cottage with the ceremonial entrance ways to the church, both at ground level and up the wide flight of stairs to the gallery, must be an unusual combination of the domestic and the religious. The richness of the mosaic work by Rust and Co. (a firm whose contribution to many buildings now listed is well known) together with Trobridge’s unexpected and perhaps unprecedented organic forms, which have not before been described, makes the whole ensemble highly evocative. It has been quite a well kept secret of the users of Islington Arts Factory, but Philip Temple (long involved with architectural history and conservation with English Heritage and the Survey of London) chose to illustrate Trobridge’s staircase in his book on Islington Chapels (Temple, P., *Islington Chapels. An Architectural Guide to the Nonconformist and Roman Catholic Places of Worship in the London Borough of Islington*, Royal Commission of the Historical Monuments of England, 1992, pp. 94-96.)

Trobridge’s 1908 alterations and additions to one of the last extant Swedenborgian churches in London develop a highly original approach, and a large proportion of the interior survives as originally built. This is a rare moment when nonconformist beliefs of some strangeness found the ideal architect: one who was committed to them spiritually, while proving every bit as unorthodox at the level of practice in his adaptations of Arts and Crafts ideas, craftsmanship, motifs and materials. Trobridge’s additions are of special significance as an overlooked first work by an architect who is celebrated and still not entirely understood.

**NOTE**

On PastScape, The Verger’s Cottage has a separate monument record: no. 1196871, and the following description: ‘Verger's Cottage. Built to replace the caretaker's flat adjoining the former Camden Road New Church in 1908-9. The building was designed by Ernest Trobridge and is a carefully detailed piece of Vernacular Revival. The house id faced in rubbed orange brick with a roughcast double gable.’

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

**Smith, Graham Paul**, *Ernest Trobridge 1884-1942: Architect Extraordinary*, published by Department of Architecture, Oxford Polytechnic, 1982. (The Swedenborg Society can supply a copy.)

**Temple, Philip,** *Islington Chapels. An architectural guide to Noconformist and Roman Catholic places of worship in the London Borough of Islington,* Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, 1992

**Rita Ensing, ‘**Jesse Rust and His Son, Vitreous Mosaic Manufacturers of Battersea’, [www.wandsworthhistory.org.uk/historian/jesse\_rust\_full.doc](http://www.wandsworthhistory.org.uk/historian/jesse_rust_full.doc)

Brent Museum holds the Trobridge archives and arranged an exhibition in 2012; maps and guides to Trobridge’s buildings in Kingsbury are easily found on the Brent Council website.