

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Origin, Scope and Structure of the Report

This report has been commissioned from AOC Archaeology Group by Hornglade Projects Limited, on behalf of their client Merton College.

- 1.1.2 Outline Planning Applications have been made to the London Borough of Merton for planning consent for the residential redevelopment of the Merton College site at Central Road, Merton.
- 1.1.3 The proposed development will effect two distinct buildings. Both buildings do not lie within a Conservation Area, nor are they on the statutory list of *Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest*, although, the eastern building, originally a primary school, is presently Locally Listed by the London Borough of Merton.
- 1.1.4 The Unitary Development Plan policies, in accordance with the government guidance provided by PPG 15 stress the importance of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of the local area, and place strict constraints on the demolition of buildings considered to make a positive contribution to that character or appearance.
- 1.1.5 The purpose of this report is to provide an assessment of the original school, which is Locally Listed, and the second school building of contemporary construction, which is unlisted. This includes their architectural and historic interest and the contribution they makes to the special character and appearance of the local area within which they are situated, in order that an informed decision can be made with respect to the planning application.
- 1.1.6 The report will provide, in section 2.0, a background and history of the area around Merton College, and the development of the variously named schools present on the site since the 1930's, in order to place the college in its historic context.
- 1.1.8 English Heritage guidance relating to development, and its interpretation in the relevant Unitary Development Plan policies will be set out in section 3.0 of the

report. This section will also include an appraisal of the special architectural or historic interest which goes to make up the special character and appearance of the area, against which the contribution made by the college buildings can be assessed.

1.1.9 Section 4.0 will provide a brief description of the buildings as they currently survive; noting alterations that have been made to the fabric and appearance of the buildings, and a brief statement of their current condition.

1.1.10 Based on its background history, and the site investigation, the special architectural or historic interest of the building will be identified in section 5.0 of the report. The significance of the buildings in their local, regional and national context will also be assessed in this section, as will the contribution that they make to the special character and appearance of the area as previously identified in the report.

1.2 Site Location and Description

1.2.1 The site is located to the southeast of Central Road, Morden, in the London Borough of Merton. The site is centred upon National Grid Reference (NGR) TQ 25950 67730. The location is currently occupied by Merton College and Petit Enfant Day Nursery and by disused Playing Fields (Fig.1).

1.2.2 The site is bounded to the north by terraced residential houses facing onto Bristol Road, to the east by terraced houses along Canterbury Road, to the south/southeast by more housing along Combermere Road and to the south/southwest by Farm Road and houses along Willows Avenue (Fig.2).

1.2.3 The natural topography of the area within which the site lies is of land sloping upwards towards the south from approximately 34.3m Ordnance Datum (OD) to the south of the site along Farm Road to 23.5m along Central Road to the north.

1.2.4 The site is currently occupied by the five main buildings and associated ancillary buildings of Merton College and the Petit Enfant Day Nursery, which are located within the northern area. Disused Playing Fields and Tennis Courts occupy the open ground comprising the southern portion of the site. Main access to the site is from Central Road, with additional access from Canterbury Road (Fig.2).

1.3 Sources and Limitations of the Documentary Evidence

- 1.3.1 The holdings of the London Metropolitan Archive, Merton Borough Council offices, Merton Local Studies Archives, National Monuments Record, the Royal British Institute of Architects, and the Surrey History Centre were researched in the preparation of this report.
- 1.3.2 Unfortunately, Merton College, and the school in its former guises, are poorly represented in the documentary record. The main location of archived material that relates to the institution resides at the Surrey History Centre, comprising written papers relating to the development of the school.
- 1.3.5 Greater detail relating to the development of the school is provided by a full range of Ordnance Survey maps, dating from 1935 to the present (Figs.3-7).
- 1.3.6 Only a single early photograph was found of the original college buildings, providing evidence of its appearance soon after its construction (Fig.8). This was revealed in a search of the Merton Local Studies archives.

2.0 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 The aim of this section of the report is to provide a historical context within which to place the construction of the college. It is not intended to provide a thorough history of the Morden area, nor to discuss in detail the running of the college during the period of its use.
- 2.1.2 The purpose of providing this brief historic background is that it will aid the assessment of the relative significance of the college in local, regional and national terms.

2.2 A Brief History of Morden

- 2.2.1 In February 2002 AOC Archaeology undertook a commission to write an Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment of the Merton College site. Details relating to the history of the area prior to the 20th century have been extracted from this document.
- 2.2.2 The name Morden, is often translated as to mean ‘hill in a swampy place’. The settlement itself is first referred to in the Domesday Book of 1086, with the Morden noted as having a single mill and being under the ownership of Westminster Abbey.
- 2.2.3 Cartographic sources from as early as 1768, demonstrate that Morden remains on the rural fringes of London until the early 20th century, with limited settlement activity focused along the route of Central Road. The area of the site is indicated as being comprised of fields up to the early 1930s.

2.3 Brief History of Merton College

- 2.3.1 The two original buildings which comprise Merton College (Buildings 1 & 2 on Fig.2) were opened in 1930, under the designation of School No.1, Willows Girls School (Senior, Junior mixed and Infants). The school was built for London County Council as part of a much larger scheme, in operation between 1928-36, to construct multiple ‘overspill’ estates to house people from decaying inner London areas. The locale of Morden was declared as a suitable location for one of the new estates, with

construction beginning on 825 acres of land being purchased between 1926-29. The estate was named after Lady Susan Mary St. Helier, a Councillor and Alderman of the London County Council (Parker & Siemaszko, 1998).

- 2.3.2 The layout of St. Helier Estate was based around six main highways to provide access to all parts of the estate, with the smaller network of roads being named after monastic centres of England and Wales (Fig.9). The plan also provided provision for 120 acres of open space, comprising approximately 16% of the total area of the estate (Parker & Siemaszko, 1998).
- 2.3.3 The estate was designed to not only support a physical infrastructure, but a community as well, with plans from the outset to incorporate a hospital, libraries, shops, transport (including bus, train and underground connections), entertainment and schools. Ten schools were planned, each allotted a number 1-10, but only nine were built (Parker & Siemaszko, 1998).
- 2.3.4 Great investments went into the construction of the Willows Girls School, with a total cost of £44,438 being spent. The two most expensive elements were the cost of the building works (£39,900) and the purchase of furniture and equipment (£2,160) (Parker & Siemaszko, 1998). The Ordnance Survey map of 1935 also reveals the investment in land that was allocated to the school (Fig.3), with both school buildings and ancillary buildings occupying sizeable grounds in the northern portion of the site. Equivalent in size again was the sports ground, with pavilion, in the southern portion.
- 2.3.5 By 1955 the Ordnance Survey map shows the presence of a third school building, in the northeast corner of the site, which had not been present on maps three years earlier (Fig.4). The maps also indicate that between 1963 and 1966 (Fig.5) Building 1 received large scale extensions to both the northeast and southwest sides of the building, and by 1968 (Fig.6) an additional square building was constructed between Building 1 and the more recent school building of 1955 (Building 3). The school continued to grow into the early 1970s with the presence of a sports block (Building 4) directly to the south of the two original school buildings, and two further smaller structures (Buildings 5 & 6) to the west of Building 1 (Fig.7).

2.3.6 The 1980s and 90s saw the role of the school change from being that of a secondary school, into that of a college, catering for the education of older students. To function fully in this new role, the third school building of 1955 was demolished and replaced by a new college building to the north of Building 2 (Building 7), and the Petit Enfants Day Nursery (Building 8) (Fig.2).

3.0 PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

3.1 English Heritage Guidance

3.1.1 English Heritage, the government's statutory advisor on archaeology and the historic environment, have produced a number of guidance documents relating to development within the historic environment.

3.1.2 Of particular relevance in this instance, section 4.4 of the document Conservation Area Practice (English Heritage, 1995), provides a series of questions which should be asked when assessing whether or not listed and unlisted buildings make a positive contribution to the special architectural or historic interest to an area. These are:

- is the building the work of a particular architect of regional or local note?
- has it qualities of age, style, materials or any other characteristics which reflect those of at least a substantial number of the buildings in the conservation area?
- does it relate by age, materials or in any other historically significant way to adjacent listed buildings, and contribute positively to their setting?
- does it, individually or as part of a group, serve as a reminder of the gradual development of the settlement in which it stands, or of an earlier phase of growth?
- does it have a significant historic association with established features such as the road layout, burgage plots, a town park or a landscape feature?
- does the building have landmark quality, or contribute to the quality of recognisable spaces, including exteriors or open spaces within a complex of public buildings?
- does it reflect the traditional functional character of, or former uses within the area?
- has it significant historic associations with local people or past events?
- does its use contribute to the character or appearance of the conservation area?
- if a structure associated with a designed landscape within the conservation area, such as walls, terracing or a minor garden building, is it of identifiable importance to the historic design

3.2 London Borough of Merton Unitary Development Plan (adopted April 1996)

- 3.2.1 The policies currently used to provide a framework for development control within this district are contained in the London Borough of Merton Unitary Development Plan (adopted April 1996).
- 3.2.2 Four policies contained within this plan are considered most pertinent to the current study:

POLICY EB.11 - LOCAL LIST OF BUILDINGS OF ARCHITECTURAL OR HISTORICAL INTEREST

The Council will develop, maintain and make available a local list of buildings of special architectural or historical interest.

POLICY EB.12 - LOCAL LIST - REHABILITATION AND MAINTENANCE

The Council will encourage the rehabilitation, maintenance and repair of buildings included on the local list and will resist their demolition. The Council may permit changes of use to such buildings where:

- i) They are currently vacant or substantially under-utilised and are not capable of continuing in their existing use;**
- ii) The change will allow the character of the building to be retained;**
- iii) The proposed use would not detract from the environmental quality of the surrounding area.**

POLICY EB.13 – LOCAL LIST – UPGRADING

The Council will consider making representations to the Department of National Heritage to seek the transfer of a building from the Local List to the Statutory List when the danger of its demolition is apparent.

Justification

3.33 The Local List contains some of the buildings which are of architectural or historical interest within the Borough. These buildings contribute to the character and historical legacy of the area, which it is desirable to retain. The number of statutorily Listed Buildings in the Borough is small and it is hoped that some of the buildings on the Local List may, in future, be transferred to the Statutory List. In the interests of preserving buildings of interest and character, the Council seeks to encourage their continual beneficial use and their restoration. This will also apply to other buildings, including those in Conservation Areas which are neither statutory listed or included in the Council's Local List. The Local List will be reviewed and updated from time to time. Owners/occupiers of buildings included on the local list will be notified of the reasons for their inclusion. Copies of the Local List of Buildings of Architectural or Historic interest can be obtained from the Council's Environmental Services Department.

The wording of the above policies is reflected in the equivalent policies contained within the emerging replacement UDP, namely BE15, BE16 and BE17 of the Second Deposit Draft Merton UDP of October 2000.

POLICY EB.14 – ARTICLE 4(2) DIRECTIONS

The Council will use Article 4(2) Directions, where appropriate, subject to the Secretary of State for the Environment's confirmation where required, to protect the special character of buildings included on the Local List, and to protect the appearance of Conservation Areas.

Justification

3.34 The Council will consider the use of Article 4(2) Directions to restrict unsympathetic alterations to buildings in Conservation Areas and Buildings on the Local List. Copies of the Local List can be obtained from the Council's Environment Services Department.

4.0 BUILDING DESCRIPTION

4.1 Plan Form, Materials and Architectural Detail of Building 1

- 4.1.1 At the time of survey, the college building was still in use with classes taking place. The building was found to be in excellent condition, with no sign of dilapidation or degradation of building materials.
- 4.1.2 The original school building has multiple classrooms flanking each side of central corridor traversing the full length of the building. Two staircases on the northwest side of the building provide access to the first floor, where the rooms are laid out in a similar fashion (Fig.10).
- 4.1.3 Two phases of extensions have been incorporated into the original school building, first in the mid 1960s and then in the 1980s or 1990s. The early one and two storey extensions have lengthened the building to both the northeast and southwest, providing greater teaching space and an assembly hall. The main entrance to the modern building is incorporated into the southwest extension. The later single storey extension projects from the central northwest elevation and contains three further classrooms (Fig.10).
- 4.1.4 The original entrance(s) are assumed to have been to the northeast and the southwest elevations, but now have been masked by the addition of the two extensions to these elevations.
- 4.1.5 The external walls of the building are of dark red brick, with light red brick dressings and tiled roof (Plate 1).

- 4.1.6 The southeast elevation incorporates five bays and two storeys. The central bay is framed on either side by rusticated brick pilasters, and crowned by a triangular pediment at eaves level. The elevation as a whole incorporates rusticated brick quoins, in association with a rusticated stringcourse (Plate 2). All windows are of a square-headed type with both louver and casement openings (Plate 3).
- 4.1.7 The northwest elevation incorporates two storey projecting wings and central bay, but retains the style as used on the southeast elevation. The only exception being the presence of two round-headed windows illuminating the stairwells (Plate 4).
- 4.1.8 The northeast and southwest elevations of the original building have been obscured by later extensions.
- 4.1.9 The internal design is simple and utilizes arches to break up the long corridor spaces (Plate 23). The majority of the original features remain including doors, internal and external windows (and their mechanisms), radiators and cubicle doors (Plate 5-7). Most of the rooms are still in use for their original teaching purpose.
- 4.1.10 Internal alterations have occurred where changing demands of education have meant the reallocation of space, resulting in the sub-division of certain rooms and expansion of two rooms into one on the first floor. Other alteration are associated with these changes such as the blocking of internal windows to prevent disruption to classes, and the blocking of existing doors and insertions of new doors to comply with fire regulations and access new spaces created (Plate 5 & 8).
- 4.1.11 All internal alterations have been undertaken with the intent to maintain the straightforward character of the building.

4.1.12 The building has been comprehensively extended on the northeast, northwest and southwest sides. The northwest and southwest extensions are all a single storey in height (Plate 9 & 10). The northeast extension comprises both one and two storey buildings (Plate 11). These extensions have been designed specifically to keep within the style of the original school, utilizing similar materials, colours, window shapes, and guttering design. The overall effect is one that compliments the original building, although altering the scale of the original school still maintains a sense of balance to the structure as a whole.

4.1.13 The detrimental effects of the extensions are limited, with only the removal of two toilet blocks, known to be part of the original design (Fig.8) and similar to those attached to Building 2 (Plate 12), that were levelled to permit the construction of the northwest extension. With their ancillary use and small size, their disappearance has only negligible effects on the operation and composition of the original school.

4.1.14 Building 1 is also noted as having a contemporary auxiliary building, in the form a bikeshed/shelter area that is walled on three sides and left open on the fourth (Plate 13). The Bikeshed/shelter utilizes the same materials and design as the parent structure.

4.2 Plan Form, Materials and Architectural Detail of Building 2 (Locally Listed)

4.2.1 At time of survey, the building was in a similar use and condition as Building 1 (see 4.1.1). The only difference being that the basement of Building 2 is prone to flooding, resulting in an unpleasant smell.

4.2.2 The original school building has multiple classrooms flanking each side of central corridor traversing the full length of the building. Two staircases at the northern and southern ends of the building provide access to the first floor, where the rooms are laid out in a similar fashion. Three square toilet blocks are attached to the main building by covered walkways, one to the south and two to the east side (Fig.11).

- 4.2.3 The school has no apparent extensions to the main structure. The building is linked to another more recent school building by a covered walkway to the north (Fig. 11).
- 4.2.4 Ordnance Survey maps indicate that an addition fourth toilet block was demolished to facilitate the construction of the more recent school building, and the covered walkway.
- 4.2.4 The external walls of the building are of dark red brick, with light red brick dressings and tiled roof (Plate 14).
- 4.2.5 The western elevation of the building is the most elaborate and incorporates seven bays and two storeys in a strong classical style. The central bay is projected and crowned by an open-bed triangular pediment at eaves level, and has rusticated brick quoins. Central to the second storey of the projecting bay is a round-headed window with stylised brick relieving arch (Plate 15 & 16). The elevation as a whole incorporates rusticated brick pilasters (set at regular intervals) and quoins, as well as decorative brick relieving arches set to the ground floor windows. (Plate 16). The flat roofed bays to each end are slightly recessed from the front of the elevation, and are of a slightly simpler style (Plate 17). All windows are of a square-headed type with both louver and casement openings (Plate 18).
- 4.2.6 The eastern elevation mirrors the style as present on the western elevation, but in a simpler form. The only features of note on the eastern elevation are the triangular pediments above two of the central ground floor windows (Plate 19).
- 4.2.7 Building 2 has two forms of contemporary auxiliary building. The first are three square toilet blocks, which have had their exterior entrances blocked, and a bikeshed/shelter area that is walled on three sides and left open on the fourth (Plate 20 & 21). Both type of auxiliary buildings utilize the same materials and design as the parent structure.

4.2.8 The internal design and level of alterations are equivalent to those in Building 1 (see 4.1.9-11 & Plates 22-26).

4.2.9 In comparison the two buildings are very similar in both style and character, with both structures receiving the same amount of maintenance and degree of alteration. It is notable though, that the design of Building 2 has received greater decorative elements. The greatest differences occur in the extent to which Building 1 has been extended, whereas Building 2 still exists in its original form.

4.3 Associated Buildings

4.3.1 The Merton College campus also includes six other buildings, one is a square two storey block built between 1966-68 (Building 3), one is a large sports building built in the 1970s (Building 4), built at approximately the same time as two temporary classroom huts (Buildings 5 & 6), and additional two storey block built in the past 20 years (Building 7) (Plates 27-31 & Fig.2). The college is also associated with the recently built single storey Petit Enfants Nursery (Building 8) (Plate 32 & Fig.2).

5.0 ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

5.1 Special Architectural or Historic Interest of the Buildings

- 5.1.1 The original schools are well-built using good quality brick and tile, and in a style intended to co-ordinate with the residential properties of the St. Helier Estate which the school was intended to serve. The use of scale in the design would allow the school to be recognized immediately from the uniform rows of housing (Plate 33), yet the classical style and subtle architectural features could only be appreciated from within the boundaries of the school.
- 5.1.2 The buildings are considered to have minimal historic interest. They appear to be poorly documented, having only received passing accounts within histories relating to the St. Helier Estate. Official records do, however exist documenting the construction and operation of the school.
- 5.1.3 The buildings were constructed at a time when a great number of schools were being built as part of London County Council's 'Overspill' scheme. Eight other schools are known to have been constructed as part of the St. Helier Estate development, all of which appear to still be use as schools or community centres. The condition and appearance of these other structures has not been fully assessed at the current time. Photographs do exist of two of these eight structures, Malmesbury Middle School and Canterbury School (now The Canterbury Centre), which demonstrates both institutions sharing similar architectural features with Merton College (Figs 12 & 13). The buildings at Merton College are likely to be two of a larger number of buildings, of a similar type and size, within the southern Borough of Merton.

5.2 Local significance

- 5.2.1 A school will always hold a place of significance in any community, as all those who are native to the area will have spent many of their most formative years within its walls.

5.2.2 The buildings are constructed using similar materials to those of properties in the local vicinity, and has maintained their character and setting within the area. The scale and style of the buildings will always provide an association with education and institutionalism.

5.2.3 The original buildings, and their internal layout and features, survive with very little alteration. Where extension work has been undertaken to Building 1 it has deliberately been designed to mirror the style of the original building, resulting in a uniform appearance. Both structures have strong and attractive characters, in an area where other uninspired architectural characters follow the uniform pattern of residential development. Because of this the two original school buildings form a representation of the original and community, and their purpose, that was established here in the 1930s.

5.3 Regional Significance

5.3.1 A large quantity of school building took place during the period between the First and Second World Wars in London, meaning that most of the newly formed communities would have had their own school designed along similar lines.

5.3.2 Being so poorly documented, having no unusually significant architectural interest, and no notable historic associations, this school is not considered to have regional significance.

5.4 National significance

5.4.1 The building is not included on the *List of buildings of special architectural or historic interest* which would have indicated national significance. For the same reasons as cited in 5.3.2 above, the building is not considered to have national significance.

6.0 DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

At the current time no firm decision has been taken on which proposal will be accepted.

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