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The Former Post  
Office, 22 Station  
Road, Hinckley,  
Leicestershire  
Assessment  
of Architectural  
and Historic Interest

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**The Former Post Office, 22 Station Road, Hinckley, Leicestershire  
Assessment of Architectural and Historic Significance**

by

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for

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# **The Former Post Office, 22 Station Road, Hinckley, Leicestershire**

## **Assessment of Architectural and Historic Significance**

### **1.0 Introduction**

An historic building assessment was undertaken of the former main post office, Station Road, Hinckley, Leicestershire. The former post office is an early 20<sup>th</sup>-century building occupying a corner plot at the junction of Station Road and Lancaster Road, close to the town centre. Although the building is not listed, it falls within the Hinckley Town Centre Conservation Area, the boundary of the CA being drawn immediately south of the building, and it is currently being assessed for listing by English Heritage. This report, which has been commissioned by Atisreal on behalf of Royal Mail is an independent assessment of the building's listability.

### **2.0 Location**

The former post office is situated at No. 22 Station Road (west side) at its junction with Lancaster Road (north side), Hinckley, Leicestershire at NGR SP 4262 9372.

### **3.0 Objective**

To assess the architectural and historic significance of the building in respect of its eligibility for statutory listing

### **4.0 Method**

The assessment was undertaken by means of an internal and external inspection during which written notes were compiled in respect of dates, architectural style, external and internal character, building materials, fixtures and fittings, the degree of survival, and the extent and value of later alterations. In addition, the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland was visited with a view to obtaining documentary evidence concerning the date of construction.

Assessment of listability is based on Government policy as set out in the Department for Communities and Local Government Circular 01/2007 *Revisions to Principles of Selection for Listing Buildings*. The part of this document entitled "Principles of Selection for Listing Buildings" replaces Section 6, paragraphs 6.1-6.40 of Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 *Planning and the Historic Environment*. In addition, selection guides for different types of building are published on the English Heritage website. The relevant guide in respect of Hinckley Post Office is the *Utilities and Communications Buildings Selection Guide*. These documents have been referred to in considering the listability of the building.

### **5.0 Historical Notes**

The contract and specifications for the new post office at Hinckley are dated 14 August 1901 (*National Archives*, WORK/13/88). The building was designed by Thomas Oldrieve (1854-1922) of the Office of Works, architect of provincial post offices for England and Wales, and the builders were Scurr, Jowett & co. of Barrow-on-Soar ([www.hinckley.netfirms.com](http://www.hinckley.netfirms.com)). The *Hinckley Times* for 25 June 1902 records that the building itself had been erected by this date, but that work was still going on in the interior (*Ibid.*). By 27 September 1902, however, the same newspaper indicates that the building was complete and functioning (*Ibid.*).

Reference to the Ordnance Survey 25 ins to one mile map published in 1903 and based on a revision of 1901, shows the building as a rectangle with a rear (west) wing at the north end. The 1924 edition (revised 1923) shows both the rear wing to the north, as well as the south end of the building to have been extended towards the rear (west). Corroboration for a two-phase construction sequence comes from a photograph of c. 1902, which shows a shorter Lancaster Road front. A second photograph, evidently only slightly later shows the building to have attained its current extent.

## **6.0 Description**

### Exterior

The former post office is a rather austere neo-baroque building constructed of red brick laid in Flemish bond, with ashlar dressings, high pitched slate roof with stone coped verges, and brick ridge stacks. Although principally aligned along Station Road, as originally designed, it was orientated towards the corner formed by the junction with Lancaster Road, where the main entrance was situated. It is a two-storey building with attic windows over the entrance block breaking through the brick parapet; horizontal articulations comprise window sill bands, eaves fascia, parapet band and coped parapet.

Originally, the vertical articulation was more symmetrical than at present, the building being focused on a three-bay entrance block wrapped around the corner with two three-bay sections to the north along Station Road, the external articulation to a great extent reflecting the internal arrangement. Within the entrance block a segmental-arched entrance (now blocked and converted into a window) with raised key was flanked first by a pair of small rectangular loops, and then a pair of large segmental-arched three-light windows also with raised keys, the arrangement being consolidated by ashlar sill bands (reconstituted stone within the former doorway), head bands and hood mould string on consoles. Above, the bay is articulated by pilasters rising in line with consoles, and the centre, above the doorway, breaks forward slightly to contain the upper windows, a cross window at first-floor level, like the two flanking bays, terminating in a dormer with semi-circular pediment containing festoons etc. This crowning feature is flanked by a pair of lower segmental-arched dormers over the two side bays. This entrance block was altered soon afterwards by the addition of another bay in a similar style to the west along the Lancaster Road front, skilfully integrated with the original fabric.

To the north, the Station Road elevation continues with three window bays: the outer cross windows flanking a single light transomed window. Next, set back slightly from the main block, is a lower two-storey, three-bay section lacking a parapet, and with a roof of shallower pitch than the main block. Structurally, this seems to be an addition to the main building, although the map evidence would suggest that it is closely contemporary, and probably an original part of the plan. This section has been greatly altered during the mid- to late 20<sup>th</sup> century to the extent that the entire ground-storey elevation has been replaced. This section, which contains what was latterly the main entrance, is not of interest. Above, is a row of windows (2:3:2 lights) with ovolo-moulded mullions and transoms.

### Interior

Generally, the segmental-arched windows retain moulded architraves and sills, and the lesser windows moulded sills. The corner doorway gave access to the

main counter area, which is now greatly altered, not least by the insertion of a large, full height walk-in safe. Early features that do survive are two plastered beams with ovolo-moulded arrises carried on moulded console brackets, and moulded plaster cornices. The extension to the west appears to have been an extension of this main reception area. To the north, now opened out by a large breach in its south wall, is a former office, possibly the postmaster's office, the surviving moulded plaster cornice denoting its relatively high status. An opening devoid of any diagnostic features leads into another room, its lower status being indicated by its comparative plainness. The northernmost portion of the building is entirely late 20<sup>th</sup>-century in character and completely lacking in features of architectural or historic interest. It seems likely that this room originally contained the sorting office. Nothing further of interest survives on the upper stories.

## 7.0 Assessment

Fundamental to the listing selection process is the concept of 'special' interest, which a building must display to be eligible for statutory listing. Special interest is defined as follows:

**Architectural Interest.** To be of special architectural interest a building must be of importance in its architectural design, decoration or craftsmanship; special interest may also apply to nationally important examples of particular building types and techniques (e.g. buildings displaying technological innovation or virtuosity) and significant plan forms;

**Historic Interest.** To be of special historic interest a building must illustrate important aspects of the nation's social, economic, cultural, or military history and/or have close historical associations with nationally important people. There should normally be some quality of interest in the physical fabric of the building itself to justify the statutory protection afforded by listing." (DCLG 2007)

Generally, the older and rarer a building is the more likely it is to be listable. Thus:

- before 1700, all buildings that contain a significant proportion of their original fabric are listed;
- from 1700 to 1840, most buildings are listed;
- after 1840, because of the greatly increased number of buildings erected and the much larger numbers that have survived, progressively greater selection is necessary;
- buildings of less than 30 years old are normally listed only if they are of outstanding quality and under threat. (DCLG 2007)

Hinckley post office falls into the category of buildings after 1840, amongst which "progressively greater selection is necessary". There is, then, no underlying assumption of listability, on the grounds of age, and to demonstrate the building's eligibility for listing its special interest must be more pointedly articulated.

Firstly, there is no doubt that the building is of architectural and historic interest. It is a high quality structure designed with aesthetics in mind as much as functionality; it is well built in good quality materials and the craftsmanship is of a superior standard. The post office occupies a prominent site, its corner orientation acting as a powerful eyecatcher and an apt introduction to the conservation area. It also has an interest in being a specific building type whose original plan can still be discerned in its essentials.

Set against this is the relatively plain character of the building, the alterations to the north end of the Station Road elevation, and the fact that the interior, despite the survival of a few significant elements, has to a great extent been stripped of its fixtures and fittings and the original layout greatly altered. In these circumstances it is not considered that the former post office meets the criteria for statutory listing, and it is felt that it is of local interest only.

It may be argued that in this case group value ought to be taken into account in assessing the listability of the former post office, given that it is situated diagonally opposite to the grade II listed Former Library (No. 3) and No.5 Station Road, a building of 1888 on the east side of Station Road. The appraisal of group value is based on "the extent to which the exterior contributes to the architectural or historic interest of any group of buildings of which it forms part." (DCLG 2007, 3). Group value is taken into account "particularly where buildings comprise an important architectural or historic unity or a fine example of planning (e.g. squares, terraces or model villages) or where there is a historical functional relationship between a group of buildings." (DCLG 2007, 4). In this instance the main argument would be that the two buildings are relatively close in date, and that both make an important contribution to the late Victorian character of Station Road. However, while there may be an historical relationship, architectural unity is lacking, and there is no functional or planned relationship. It is not considered here that the group value, as defined by the DCLG, is particularly strong, and it is concluded that it is insufficient to influence a decision on the listability of the former post office.

## **8.0 Conclusion**

While it is not considered that the former post office is of listable quality, there is no doubt that it does make a significant contribution to the historical character of the Station Road streetscape. Many historic buildings that do not meet the criteria for statutory listing receive recognition through local listing, a non-statutory designation made by some local authorities to give a degree of protection to locally important buildings. While the former post office might be considered significant enough to be locally listed, no local list of buildings of architectural or historic interest exists for Hinckley at the moment, nor are there plans to create one in the immediate future. Therefore, it is not possible at present to measure the former post office against any local listing criteria, given that no such criteria have yet been formulated.

On the other hand might be argued that its significance has already been recognised through its inclusion just inside the boundary of the Hinckley Town Centre Conservation Area. This seems appropriate, because the value of the building lies more in its contribution to the general historical character of the area, rather than in its individual qualities. While it may not be listable it still receives the consideration and protection afforded by the conservation area status. It is considered that this is adequate protection for a building of this nature.

## **9.0 References**

Department for Communities and Local Government 2007, *Circular 01/2007: Revisions to Principles of Selection for Listing Buildings*

Department of the Environment 1990, *Planning Policy Guidance 15: Planning and the Historic Environment*

English Heritage 2007, *Utilities and Communications Buildings Selection Guide*