



HERITAGE STATEMENT

55a Baker Street, Reading, RG1 7XX

Prepared for: Keen Partnership

The purpose of this report is to accompany a planning or Listed Building application. A heritage statement sets out the details of the history and development of the asset using photographic, map, archival and fabric evidence. It includes an assessment of the evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal value of the heritage asset and the impact of the proposed works upon that significance. In addition to desk based research a site visit was carried out as part of this assessment and a non intrusive survey took place.

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

Heritage Asset and its Setting:

Project Address: 55a Baker Street, Reading, RG1 7XX

Local Authority: Reading Borough Council

Conservation Area: Russell Street/Castle Hill

Archaeological Notification Area: None

Building Use: Residential/Commercial (office)

Listing Status: Grade II List entry no. 1154492

Designated Heritage Asset:

Scheduled Monument?	N
Listed Building?	Y
Registered Park and Garden	N
Historic Battlefield	N
Conservation Area	Y
World Heritage Site	N

Non Designated Heritage Asset	N
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Project Overview:

Change of Use of the existing property from office to residential. Refurbishment of ground and first floor. No proposed extension.



Photo 1 – View of front/side elevation (northwest), 55 and 55A

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Photo 2 – View towards dwelling from Baker Street (northwest elevation)



Photo 3-5 – View of rear extension, side elevation (west)

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Photo 6 and 7 – View of rear extension, rear/side elevation (south/southeast)



Photo 8 and 9 – View of rear extension, side elevation (east)



Photo 10 and 11 – View of rear extension, ground floor interior, facing east

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Photo 12 – View of rear extension, ground floor interior, facing south



Photo 13 and 14 – View of rear extension, first floor interior, facing east



Photo 15 and 16 – View of windows on first floor, facing east

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Photo 17 – View of kitchen on first floor



Photo 18 – View of damage in ceiling on first floor



Photo 19 – View of gate leading to stairs to first floor

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Photo 20 – View of stairs leading to first floor

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Drawings and Documents provided by Client:

List of documents provided:

-  9453 PL-01 Location Plan
-  9453 PL-02.01 Existing Plans
-  9453 PL-03.01 Proposed Site Plan
-  9453 PL-03.02 Proposed Plans

Schedule of Intervention:

In order to achieve the works, the following alterations/ interventions will be required:

- No proposed extension.
- Replacement of the modern ground floor doors and windows
- Refurbishment and redecoration of the traditional first floor windows. New secondary glazing.
- Redecoration of the existing fascia boards and soffits.
- Demolition of the existing external staircase and rebuilding like for like with new balustrade.
- New first floor external door.
- New insulated ground floor.
- Removal of existing timber partitions and internal decoration on the first floor. Removal of existing sanitaryware and kitchen units.
- New timber stud partitions within ground and first floor.
- New electrics, plumbing, sanitaryware and kitchens throughout. New floor finishes, plaster, skirting and architraves. Redecoration throughout.

Setting Overview/ Context:

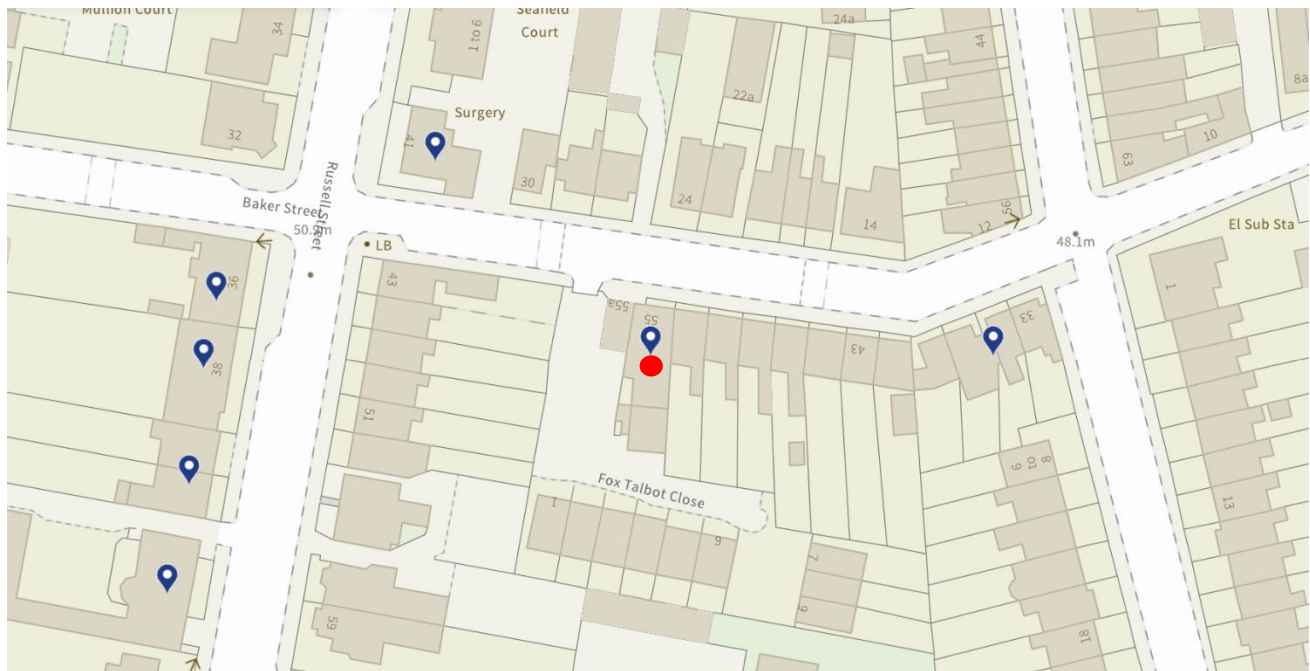
The site is situated within the Russell Street/ Castle Hill Conservation Area, a residential area close to Reading town centre. The area is described in the Conservation Area Appraisal as having a 'diverse and representative collection of urban, domestic English architectural styles dating from the Georgian period through the Victorian and Edwardian periods with modest amounts of later 20th century infill.' It is part of the character area labelled as 'Russell Street and streets east.'

The building in question is situated behind and physically connected to the three storey brick 55 Baker Street, a Grade II Listed Building. Although now a separate address the building in question was once part of the front building which is now Grade II Listed and built at the same time. The property first shows as a separate address in the 1958 mapping and commercial in nature, pre Listing however was not noted as being excluded at the point of Listing so is presumed for the purposes of this application to be Grade II Listed by association due to its age, physical and visual links. The property was later part of the printing works for the site which was largely demolished in 2009. It should be noted that the Conservation Area Appraisal excludes it as being Listed.

Access to the site is via a gated service yard which now doubles as an access drive and parking for new build two storey dwellings behind. View to the site from the street scene are incredibly limited due to its set back nature and high boundary treatment.

The building in question is two storey, stepping down in scale from the house in front. Its materiality is a painted brick to one side and a red brick to the other matching that of No.55 in age and colour. The gable end is rendered. The first floor windows are traditional timber sliding sashes but the ground floor windows are modern timber casements of a poor quality and mixed glazing. The roof is a pitched slate roof, again matching the house to the front. There is a low quality external staircase, heavily altered and encased in painted brickwork. The garden area is to the eastern side accessed from an external gate. Its last known use was an office.

Setting: Urban Area



Map taken from Historic England Listing Database. Property shown with a red dot.

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Site Planning History:

[PL/10/0734](#)

Discharge of conditions for planning permission 09/01560/LBC

Received: 19/3/2010 Decision: 25/8/2010 Decision: Conditions discharged

[PL/09/1115](#)

Demolition of number 57 Baker Street and workshops/garages to the rear of numbers 41-55 Baker Street, including alterations to boundary walls.

Received: 08/9/2009 Decision: 17/12/2009 Decision: Approve

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Impacted Heritage Assets:

The building sits within the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area.

The building is presumed Listed as part of no.55 however this is a matter of debate/ confirmation.

Official list entry

Heritage Category: Listed Building

Grade: II List Entry Number: 1154492 Date first listed: 14-Dec-1978

List Entry Name: 55, BAKER STREET

Statutory Address 1: 55, BAKER STREET

Location

Statutory Address: 55, BAKER STREET

District: Reading (Unitary Authority) Parish: Non Civil Parish

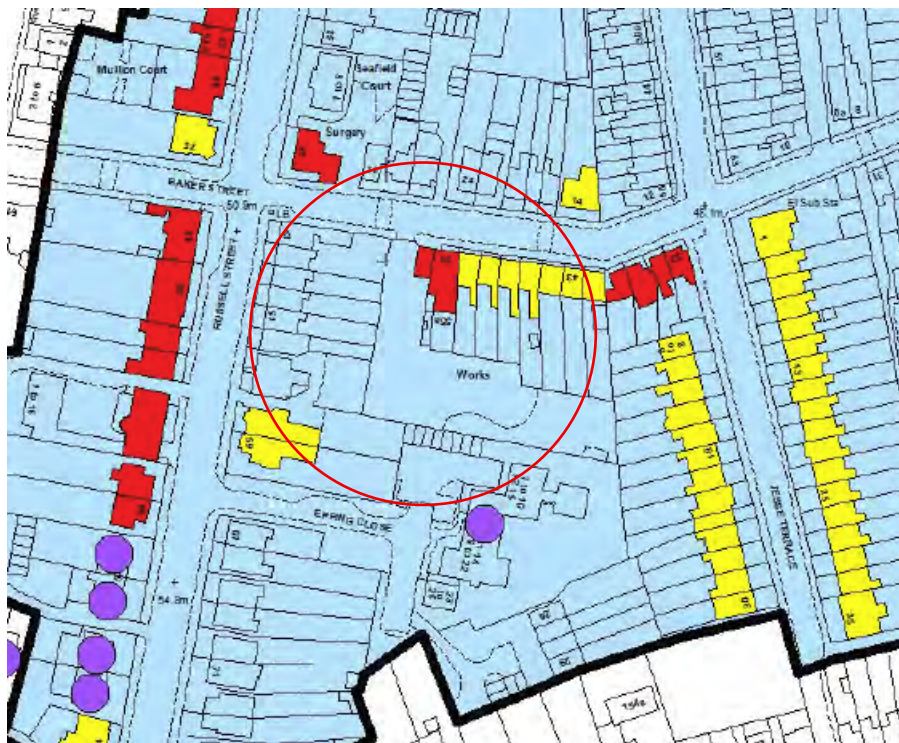
National Grid Reference: SU 70823 73155

Details

BAKER STREET 1. 5128 No 55 SU 7073 12/14 II GV 2. Circa 1840 and altered. 3 storeys, Stucco, band over ground floor, small cornice and parapet with shallow central pediment. Slate roof. Glazing bar sash windows, 1st floor with marginal glazing; 2 windows including flat segmental bay window on 1st floor which has casements. Moulded architrave 1st floor left with cornice, ground floor windows with raised surrounds, architraves and cornices. Small arched door and a panel with 2 arched openings with radiating and wreathed fanlights on ground floor. A tablet on the wall says that this house was "Fox Talbot's Reading Establishment 1844-45". A pioneer photographer and associate of Fox Talbot's, Nicholas Henneman, lived here.

Listing NGR: SU7082373155

The building is not within the context of another Listed Building (red). The building is close to Buildings of Townscape Merit (yellow).



Extract from Conservation Area Appraisal

Assessment of Significance:

Heritage has cultural, social, economic and environmental values. The attributes that combine to define the significance of a historic building can relate to its physical properties or to its context. – BS 7913:2013.

In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance – NPPF

Archeological: *As defined in the Glossary to the National Planning Policy Framework, there will be archaeological interest in a heritage asset if it holds, or potentially holds, evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation at some point.*

According to the CAA there has been limited evidence of archaeological significance in the area. There is however no below ground works proposed as part of this work so this has not been reviewed in further detail as part of this reporting.

Historic: *An interest in past lives and events (including pre-historic). Heritage assets can illustrate or be associated with them. Heritage assets with historic interest not only provide a material record of our nation's history, but can also provide meaning for communities derived from their collective experience of a place and can symbolise wider values such as faith and cultural identity.*

In 1838 the site appears to be undeveloped on the mapping and was registered as being garden land on the census. It is understood that the buildings appeared shortly after this mapping in around 1840. A tablet on the wall says that this house was "Fox Talbot's Reading Establishment 1844-45", a photographic studio, one of the first in the world, instrumental in the mass production of paper photographs and part of a significant moment in the history of photography. William Henry Fox Talbot (1800 – 1877), was the pioneer of the photographic negative. A pioneer photographer and associate of Fox Talbot's, Nicholas Henneman, also lived there. This studio along with the house was likely its original build purpose.

The Reading Board of Health Maps show in 1854 illustrate the different sections of the building under the same address.

By 1879 the stuccoed late Georgian terrace at 37-55 Baker St appears to have changed purpose on the OS mapping and no.55 is labelled 'St Marys Home' presumably in association with the nearby Church. It retains that description up to and including the 1912 OS Map. It is one building with No.55a and extends further south and to the east as an L shape. There are now garden areas to the side.

The 1939 Census records the front house to no longer be a high status dwelling and instead contains a much larger number of lower status occupants, primarily in the confectionary industry. There is now no reference to St Marys Home.

By 1958 and again in 1961 the seeming commercial purpose of the rear part of the site is apparent and the L shape return of the building has been adapted and extended. The garden areas are no longer being recorded so presumably it is all service yard. The front house and the part of the site to which this application relates appears functionally separate.

No. 55a on the OS Mapping is shown as a printing works in 1971 and utilizes the site currently containing new build housing.

At present the building is not connected to the front house and has no functional purpose however is last recorded as being offices presumably for the printing works..

Architectural or Artistic: *These are interests in the design and general aesthetics of a place. They can arise from conscious design or fortuitously from the way the heritage asset has evolved. More specifically, architectural interest is an interest in the art or science of the design, construction, craftsmanship and decoration of buildings and structures of all types. Artistic interest is an interest in other human creative skill, like sculpture.*

Compared to the architecturally residential in appearance No. 55, the building in question is of a much lower architectural status and is clearly a secondary lower status element despite matching in apparent materiality and build era of the front. It retains its traditional form despite having been substantially altered in the past. It is likely that the portion of the building was associated with the photographic studios purpose. We believe that this photo includes the building in question on the LHS as the terrace row can be seen in the background.

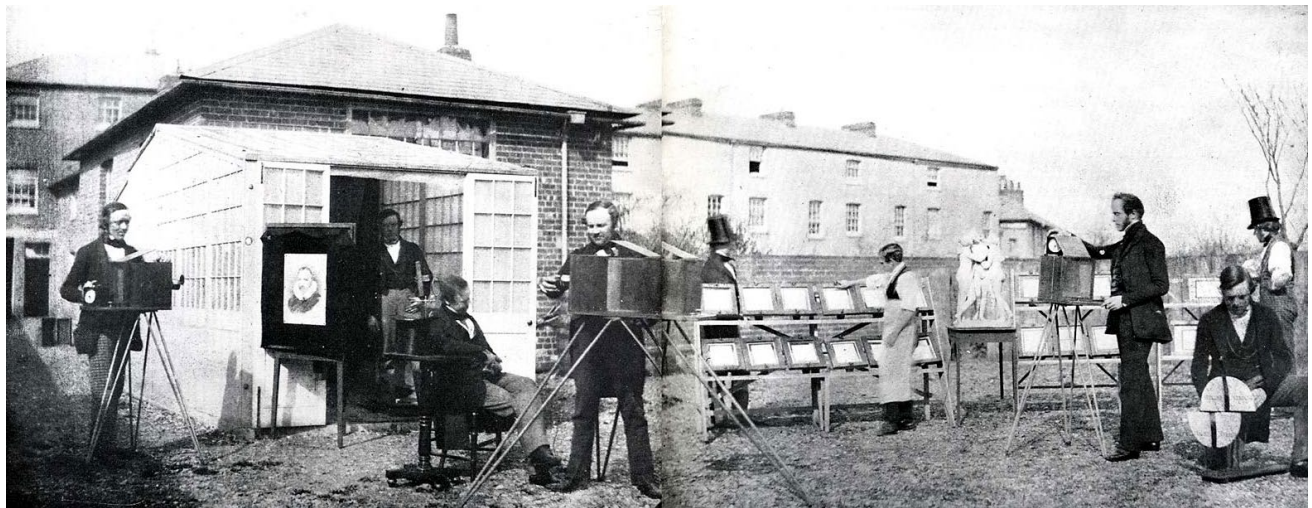


Photo Reproduced from the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television collection – 1844

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Historic Mapping – For reference dating only, not for reproduction

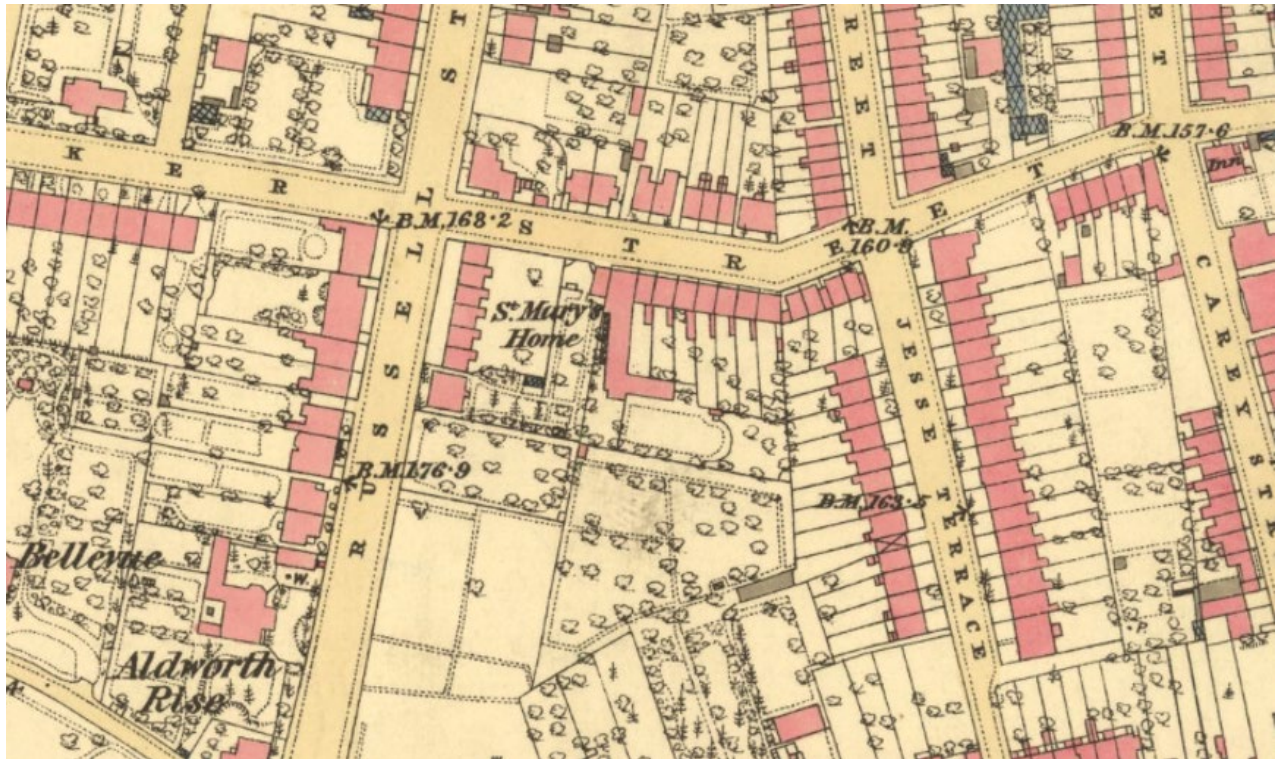


Extract from Plan of the Parish of Saint Mary, Reading 1838



Extract from Board of Health Map 1853

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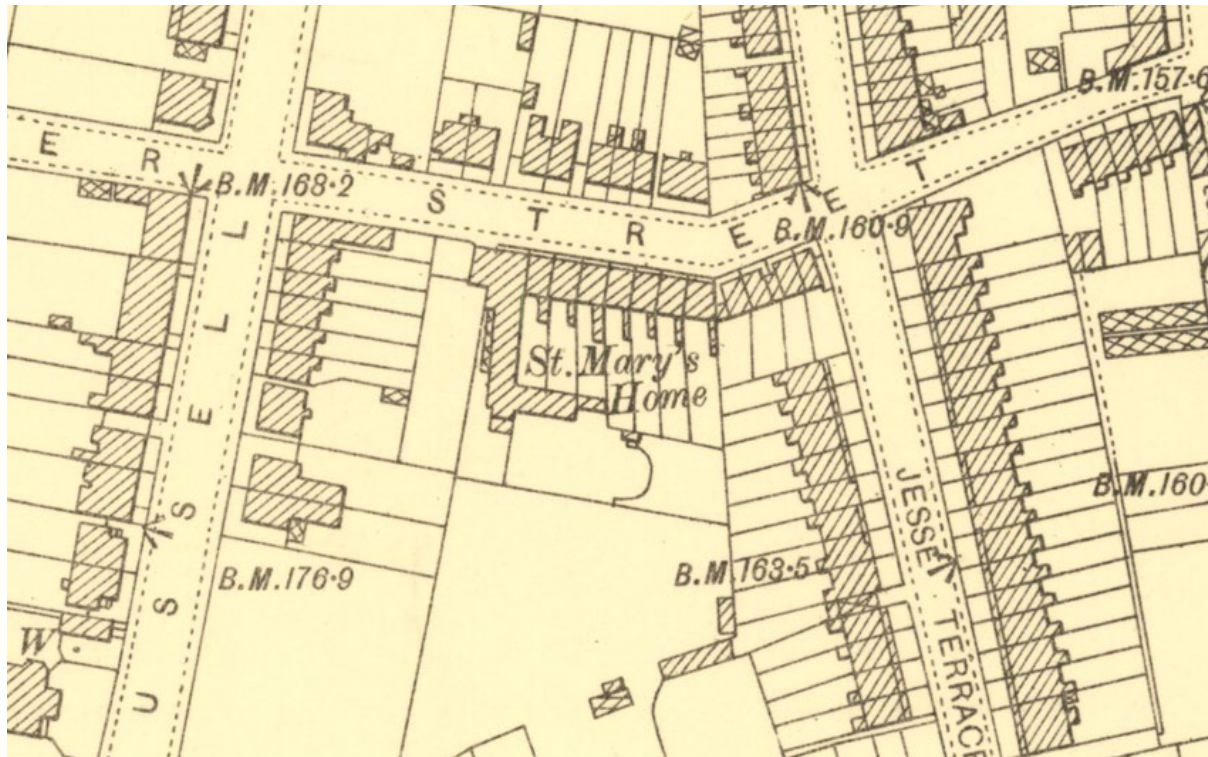


Extract from Berkshire XXXVII.3 1879

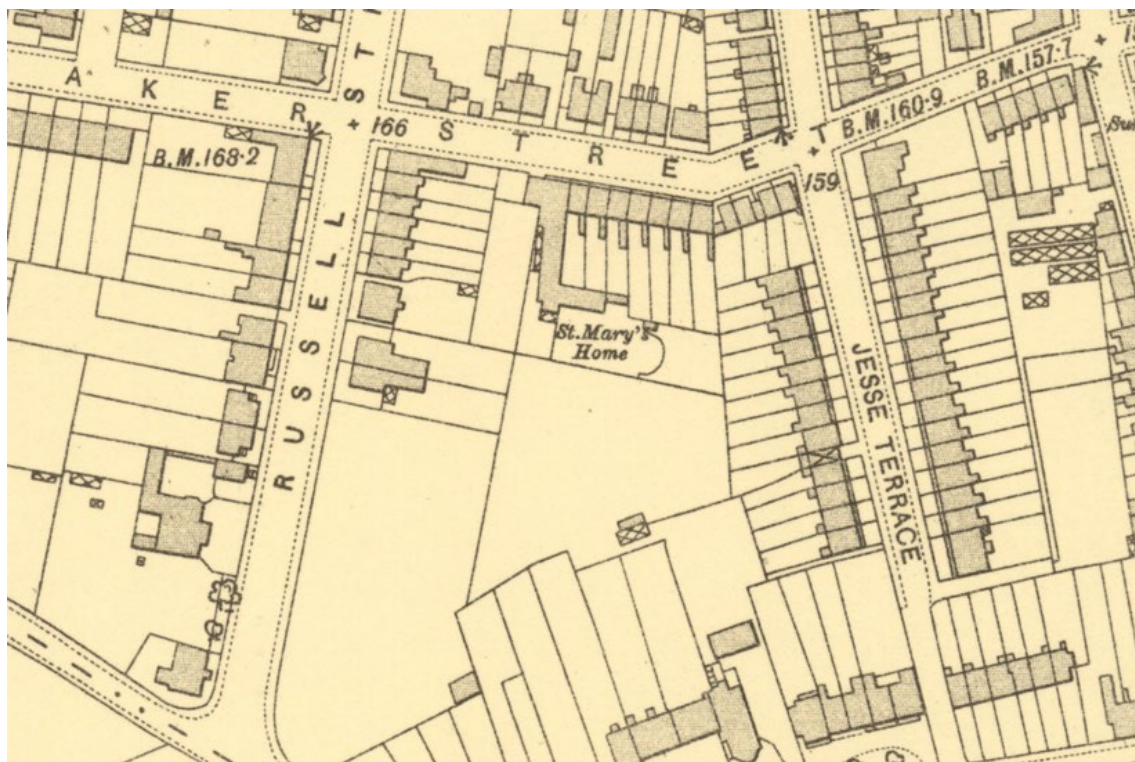


Extract from Reading Berkshire XXXVII.3 1879

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Extract from Berkshire XXXVIII.3 1900



Extract from Berkshire XXXVII.3 1912

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Extract from Berkshire XXXVII.3 1931



Extract from SU7073SE 1958

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Extract from SU7073SE 1971

Development Impact on the Historical Asset:

An assessment of how the proposed works will affect the significance of the heritage asset and the justification for that impact.

Proposals should and do:

- 1 - Avoid, minimise and mitigate negative impact, in a way that meets the objectives of the NPPF.*
- 2 - Look for opportunities to better reveal or enhance significance.*

Building Elevations and Setting:

There is no change to the front 55 Baker Street house. Any changes and alterations to No.55a are not visible from the streetscene nor from the wider Conservation Area.

Overall the building form which is believed to be part of the former photographic studio (see previous pictures) is being retained and brought back into functional use giving it a viable chance of retention in the future, having survived several attempts at demolition. This is an important part of the setting of the property on the street frontage, retaining its unusual plan form.

The removal and replacement of the poor quality external staircase is of overall aesthetic benefit to the Listed Building and its setting. The retention of a staircase in this location however, visible on the OS mapping ensures it continues to tell the tale of the site.

The retention and repair of the first floor windows is of heritage benefit retaining its simple and traditional characteristics. The lack of proposed extension retains its simple and traditional form.

The replacement of the poor quality modern ground floor doors and windows with a higher quality unit would be of visual benefit to both the building and wider setting.

Internally:

The ground floor contains no architectural detailing to lose and is non functional. By installing new fixtures and fittings there is no loss of architectural detailing.

On the first floor the interior is much altered and of a low standard and in disrepair. Although parts of the fabric are clearly historic in nature, its low quality and poor state of repair mean that its overall loss and replacement as part of a wider refurbishment to retain functionality will not result in significance overall harm to the building.

Scale and Massing:

There is no change to the existing massing or scale as part of the proposals and the simple form and relationship to the host building is maintained.

Archeaology:

There are no proposed extensions so this has not been reviewed as part of this reporting. There is no known impact upon below ground archaeology.

Use:

The building is currently uninhabitable and non functioning. It was originally part of the front house and as such was originally residential plus a studio in nature. Although now under separate ownership the proposals revert the property back to residential use which is of heritage benefit.

Relevant Policy:

The Government has set out its planning policies framework for the historic environment in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) outlining the framework within which local authorities should consider the importance of conserving, or enhancing aspects of the historic environment within the planning process. This was published in March 2012 and replaced in 2018, 2019, 2021, 2023 and 2024.

Conservation as defined by the NPPF is an active process of maintenance and managing change. It requires a flexible and thoughtful approach to get the best out of assets as diverse as listed buildings in every day use and as yet undiscovered, undesigned buried remains of archaeological interest.

In the case of buildings, generally the risks of neglect and decay of heritage assets are best addressed through ensuring that they remain in active use that is consistent with their conservation. Ensuring such heritage assets remain used and valued is likely to require sympathetic changes to be made from time to time. In the case of archaeological sites, many have no active use, and so for those kinds of sites, periodic changes may not be necessary, though on-going management remains important.

Where changes are proposed, the National Planning Policy Framework sets out a clear framework for both plan-making and decision-making in respect of applications for planning permission and Listed Building consent to ensure that heritage assets are conserved, and where appropriate enhanced, in a manner that is consistent with their significance and thereby achieving sustainable development. The National Planning Policy Framework defines a heritage asset as, 'a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. Heritage assets are either designated heritage assets or non-designated heritage assets.

In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary. 'Significance' in terms of heritage-related planning policy is defined in the Glossary of the National Planning Policy Framework as the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting.

All heritage assets have a setting, irrespective of the form in which they survive and whether they are designated or not. The setting of a heritage asset and the asset's curtilage may not have the same extent.

The extent and importance of setting is often expressed by reference to the visual relationship between the asset and the proposed development and associated visual/physical considerations. Although views of or from an asset will play an important part in the assessment of impacts on setting, the way in which we experience an asset in its setting is also influenced by other environmental factors such as noise, dust, smell and vibration from other land uses in the vicinity, and by our understanding of the historic relationship between places. For example, buildings that are in close proximity but are not visible from each other may have a historic or aesthetic connection that amplifies the experience of the significance of each.

The contribution that setting makes to the significance of the heritage asset does not depend on there being public rights of way or an ability to otherwise access or experience that setting. The contribution may vary over time.

When assessing any application which may affect the setting of a heritage asset, local planning authorities may need to consider the implications of cumulative change. They may also need to consider the fact that developments which materially detract from the asset's significance may also damage its economic viability now, or in the future, thereby threatening its ongoing conservation.

Where a site on which development is proposed includes, or has the potential to include, heritage assets with archaeological interest, local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation.

In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of: (a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation; (b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and (c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

Historic England 'Conservation Principles' deem new work or alteration to be normally acceptable where the proposals do not materially harm the value of the place. They consider the setting of the heritage asset to contribute greatly to its significance. They accept that a heritage setting changes over time.

The local authority may have location specific guidance also which includes policies which seek to ensure the protection of the historic environment and that development is of a high quality and seeks to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Heritage Asset. In assessing the impact of these proposals local guidance has also been considered.

Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 196) requires that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing the optimum viable use of that asset. Where a heritage asset is capable of having a use, then securing its optimum viable use should be taken into account in assessing the public benefits of a proposed development. Public benefits should flow from the proposed development. They should be of a nature or scale to be of benefit to the public at large and not just be a private benefit. However, benefits do not always have to be visible or accessible to the public in order to be genuine public benefits, for example, works to a listed private dwelling which secure its future as a designated heritage asset could be a public benefit. Examples of heritage benefits may include: sustaining or enhancing the significance of a heritage asset and the contribution of its setting, reducing or removing risks to a heritage asset, securing the optimum viable use of a heritage asset in support of its long term conservation.

Changes to the setting of historic buildings / Conservation Areas are to be sympathetic in terms of siting, proportion, scale, form, height, materials and detailing. All design work and procedures should follow guidance outlined in BS 7913:2013 Guide to the Conservation of Historic Buildings.

Conclusion:

The status of this building in regards to Listing is for debate. It was clearly originally part of The house/ studio and then St Marys Home which is now registered as Grade II Listed 55 Baker Street, albeit significantly altered from the original form. The property appears to have been split in ownership from no.55 between 1939 and 1958. At the point of Listing No.55 was a separate property however there is a clear physical and visual link remaining at the time and past historic photos illustrate the site usage and its historic importance. The building in question was not excluded from the Listing description, nor was it mentioned. However it is reasonable to assume that although this building is of a much lower significance architecturally and status wise to the front house, both architecturally and physically it is Listed by association and therefore has been reviewed as such for this report.

The proposals bring back into functional use a redundant but historically important building that has been put at risk many times in the past. The proposals retain the relationship to the front building, and leaves the traditional and simple form and architectural features unchanged.

We believe that the proposals are supportable and in line with both local and national historic building planning policy.

Assessor Details:

Surveyor: Michelle Purnell BA(hons) BArch RIBA MSc Building Conservation IHBC

A site visit was undertaken as part of the site investigation in order to understand important relationships in the area surrounding the site. Date of Site Visit:03/09/25

Information Source Checklist:

The following information sources have been used when conducting desk based research:

Historic England List of Protected Historic Sites x
National Planning Policy Framework x
Planning Practice Guidance: Conserving and enhancing the historic environment x
Relevant Local Plans x
Conservation Area Character Appraisal x
Local Authority Landscape Character Assessment n/a
The Local List of Buildings and Monuments x
Local Records Office Other (please state):