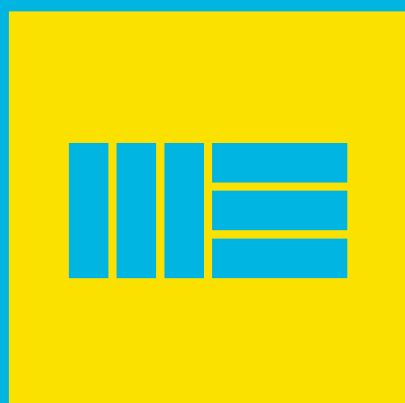


**231 WATFORD ROAD,
HA1 3TU:**

**LONDON BOROUGH
OF BRENT**

HERITAGE STATEMENT

AUGUST 2021






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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to assess the former John Lyon pub at 231 Watford Road, and to determine whether there are any heritage considerations here which deserve consideration.
- 1.2 The building dates from the mid-1950s and was built by the now-defunct Watney's brewery. It is a late example of a roadhouse, a pub situated on an arterial road which sought passing traffic from motorists. 
- 1.3 The building is neither listed nor in a conservation area. 
- 1.4 This report has been prepared by Dr Roger Bowdler, former Director of Listing at Historic England and a partner at Montagu Evans. 

2.0 DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY

- 2.1 The site comprises a roadside pub, set behind a car park, on the Watford Road (or A404) in North Wembley, between Sudbury Hill and Northwick Park.
- 2.2 The two-storey building, rectangular in plan, is Neo-Georgian in style, and is two storeys in height with single-storey ground floor extensions on each side. To the north is a single-storey extension with a shallow pitched roof leading up to a square louvre, containing more bar space. To the rear is a more recent extension. The walls are painted render, and the pitched roofs of each building are hung in slate. The fenestration comprises mainly 9/9 pane sash windows. Bands of diapered lozenge-pattern decoration ornament the frontage over the recesses pairs of windows on either side: this is the only ornamentation to the building.
- 2.3 According to the CAMRA *What?Pub* website,¹ the pub was formerly the known as the John Lyon. It opened in 1957 for the Watney's brewery and was later acquired by the Greene King in 2007, when it ceased to be a pub and became the Mumbai Express restaurant.
- 2.4 John Lyon (1514-92) was a renowned local figure, best remembered as the founder of Harrow School. He also established a charity which gives grants to young Londoners; Lyon also established a trust for the upkeep of the Harrow and Edgware Roads. A brass plaque beside the entrance honours his memory.
- 2.5 The site was not yet built up in 1935, the date at which the 25 inch Ordnance Survey map published in 1937 was surveyed. Pebworth Road to the north had been laid out and built up; Amery Road directly behind the pub is laid out but was yet to be developed. Sudbury Court Drive had yet to be laid out too. Aerial photographs on the Historic England 'Britain from Above' website show the still-rural area prior to development in the 1920s.²







25 inch Ordnance Survey map 1937, surveyed 1935, showing undeveloped site of the future 231 Watford Road, to the west of the island site above The Crescent

- 2.6 The building of the John Lyon represented the completion of development of this part of North Wembley. The Borough of Wembley's population peaked in 1951, showing how suburban development continued after the war. Other pubs to be built at this time included the Torch, opened in 1956 at 1 Bridge Road, Wembley Park and built in a more contemporary style.

¹ <https://whatpub.com/pubs/MDX/11863/mumbai-junction-sudbury>

² <https://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/en/image/EPW001646> image of 1920 showing Watford Road to north.





- 2.7 The John Lyon represents a late example of the road house, the roadside pub with dining facilities which was aimed at customers arriving by car. 
- 2.8 Watney's was a substantial London brewery based in Mortlake and at the Stag Brewery, Victoria. Properly known as Watney Combe and Reid from 1898, its origins were in the 1830s, with Watney's being linked to the Stag Brewery from 1843. Watney's 20th century claim to fame was the pioneering of pasteurised keg beer, introduced as Watney's Red Barrel in 1931.
- 2.9 The firm became Watney Mann in 1958 when it acquired Mann, Crossman and Paulin: this promoted Watney's to being one of the largest of English brewers. In 1959 it had to fight off a hostile take-over bid from Sears Holdings which sought to acquire Watney's 3,670 pubs and modernise them by improving the customer offer (particularly in terms of food). This bid was kept at bay but did usher in a new phase of modernisation of the brewery's premises and a more boldly promoted brand identity featuring the firm's red barrel motif.³ This re-branding was led by the influential firm known as the Design Research Unit. Watney's peak period was the late 1960s. 
- 2.10 The firm (which by then had around 7000 pubs) was absorbed into Grand Metropolitan in 1972 for around £400M. It was subsequently merged with Truman, Hanbury, Buxton and Co in 1974, and Watney's Red ceased production in 1979. Some of the firm's papers are held at the City of Westminster Archives.⁴
- 2.11 The brewery's in-house architect between 1919 and 1940 was Alfred W. Blomfield: characteristic designs included the Neo-Georgian Bedford PH at 77 Bedford Hill, Balham of 1931 (listed Grade II). The firm employed 40 staff in its architect's department in 1934.⁵ It has not been possible who succeeded him in this role, and who designed the John Lyon. 
- 2.12 There are few references to the site in the council's planning archive: an application was made in October 1987 for 'single storey side and rear extensions to form new toilets, conservatory and enlarged kitchen and erection of entrance canopy and 4 flagpoles on frontage' lodged by Garnett Associates of Solihull which was granted on 22 December 1987. 
- 2.13 There are references in the Building Control records to internal alterations being proposed in 1999 and 2003, and the extension of the dining area in 2012.

³ <http://letslookagain.com/2014/11/watneys-red-barrel/>

⁴ See also Hurford Janes, *The Red Barrell: A History of Watney Mann* (John Murray, 1963).

⁵ Lynn Jenkins, *The Brewing Industry*: <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/brewing-industry/bhs-brewing-ind-shier/> p.7

3.0 SIGNIFICANCE




- 3.1 The site lies outside of any conservation area. The nearest is the Sudbury Court Conservation Area immediately to the east. The Harrow Park Conservation Area, located some distance away to the north-west, and outside the borough boundary in LB Harrow. 
- 3.2 Locally listed pubs of the mid-20th century in the borough are few, and include the Green Man, Slough Lane (1937 by A.E. Sewell), an impressive eclectic late Arts and Crafts design with a separate off-sales building. The Brent local list is recent (2020) and has been carefully compiled. The site under consideration is not included, and falls considerably beneath the interest level of the Green Man. 
- 3.3 Road houses were a common form of inter-war pub building. They reflect the growth in motor traffic, the rise in disposable income in the relatively prosperous Greater London area in the mid-20th century, and the provision by the big breweries of new forms of pub.
- 3.4 Watney's was a huge concern, with over 3,600 tied pubs in the late 1950s. Judging by photographs from 1961 extracted from its in-house magazine *The Red Barrel*, the firm soon moved onto a standardised approach to pub design in the late 1950s which was very domestic in character, and more modern than the neo-Georgian opted for at the John Lyon.⁶
- 3.5 Inter-war pubs have recently been the subject of an extensive 2015 Historic England research project.⁷ Post-war pubs were the subject of a thematic listing review in 2018 but have not been the subject of comparable research. Historic England summarise the post-war pub thus:
The post-war years saw the English pub become for the first time, a fully accepted social amenity. Pubs were constructed in their thousands in areas such as new housing estates and cities damaged by wartime bombing. Until building restrictions were lifted in 1954, most of these pubs were temporary or built so as to be capable of future expansion. However, the period from 1954 until around the mid-1980s saw a huge quantity of pubs built in England, many of them located at the heart of neighbourhoods, next to shops, community halls and churches.⁸
- 3.6 Architecturally, the building is unremarkable. It was a conservative design, slightly reminiscent of an officers' mess at an RAF station, and very plain overall. This reflects the general tendency of pub design from the mid-50s to the mid-60s:
In the 1950s and 1960s, the principles of public house design remained largely the same as in the inter-war period, although further refined and advanced...A conscious effort was made to ensure post-war public houses harmonised with their environment, so their exteriors were often comparatively plain and/or of a form imitating nearby buildings; only occasionally were they bold architectural statements, this being especially the case in town and city centres. Almost all were given large car parks (reflecting the rising popularity of the motor car), but gardens became less common and were less elaborate than in the inter-war years.⁹ 
- 3.7 Historically, the building is of but slight interest. It dates from a later phase of the area's build-up, and is not very evocative of this period of expansion. Pubs remain extremely common building types, despite the closure or conversion of many, and as stated by Historic England, post-war pubs were built in very high numbers. 
- 3.8 In terms of alteration, this building has been considerably extended. There is no period signage remaining externally. Internally, it has been comprehensively knocked through, and all bar fixtures have been replaced. This was a common occurrence for large brewery pubs which often underwent corporate re-presentation. It has thus been heavily altered and is without interest.

⁶ <https://boakandbailey.com/2017/04/modern-pubs-of-1961-watneys-whitbread/>

⁷ <https://research.historicengland.org.uk/Report.aspx?i=15315>: Emily Cole, *The Urban and Suburban Public House in Inter-war England, 1918-1939* (3 vols, 2015).

⁸ <https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/five-quirky-post-war-pubs-listed/> 2018 press release with list descriptions attached.

⁹ Historic England, list description for the Queen Bess public house, Scunthorpe (NHLE No 1454513).

- 3.9 In terms of setting and group value, the building is of slight interest and does not form a notable group with other contemporaneous structures. The garage building to the north is of a similar period but is low in visual interest.
- 3.10 Working through the Historic England list of heritage interests which might contribute to a building acquiring locally listed status is a useful exercise.¹⁰ These are rehearsed below.
- 3.11 Archaeological interest: the site is outside of any Archaeological Priority Area, as determined by Historic England,¹¹ nor is it included as a Site of Archaeological Importance on the council's inter-active map of policy constraints. There are therefore no indication that this former agricultural site has any particular claims to archaeological interest.
- 3.12 Architectural and artistic interest: the building is an unremarkable design, and internally heavily altered. There are no sustainable claims to either of these interests.
- 3.13 Historic interest: the building is not eloquent of past lives, being a common building type and a late example thereof. Its conversion from pub to restaurant has reduced its community value. 
- 3.14 Setting: as discussed above, the building's location on a roundabout, flanked by disparate buildings, denies the building any claims to lying within a setting which endows it with interest. 
- 3.15 It is therefore a reasonable conclusion to reach that the former John Lyon is below the standards of a local listing, and should not be regarded as a non-design  heritage asset.

¹⁰ Historic England, *Local Heritage Listing: Identifying and Conserving Local Heritage* (Historic England Advice Note 7, second edition, 2021).

¹¹ <https://historicengland.org.uk/content/docs/planning/apa-brent-pdf/> : 'Archaeological Priority Areas in Brent'.

4.0 CONCLUSION

4.1 As discussed above, the former John Lyon public house at 231 Watford Road is a building without sustainable claims to being assigned heritage significance.



4.2 The building is clearly not of special interest, and therefore not of listable quality at a national level.

4.3 The building has not been identified as warranting inclusion on Brent's local list, and is of much lesser interest than the other locally listed mid-20th century pub, the Green Man on Slough Lane. There are no reasons why this withholding of local value should be amended.



4.4 It is likewise difficult to see any grounds upon which it could be assigned Non-Designated Heritage Asset status. This is a post-war building which was built by a major pub chain, and which has undergone extensive alteration (above all internally). Such buildings are not rare, and the lack of architectural interest is hard to deny.

4.5 It is therefore our finding that this building is one of low heritage significance.



APPENDIX 1.0 **SITE**

PHOTOGRAPHS AUGUST 2021



Fig 1: 231 Watford Road from NE



Fig 2: 231 Watford Road from E.



Fig 3: 231 Watford Road from SE. The modern rear extension is on the left



Fig 4: 231 Watford Road from N, showing adjacent property



Fig 5: 231 Watford Road from S



Fig 6: 231 Watford Road from SE, looking across junction with Sudbury Court Drive



Fig 7: interior, looking to N. No original internal features survive.



Fig. 8: interior, showing bar counter. All fixtures in this area (as in others) have been replaced.

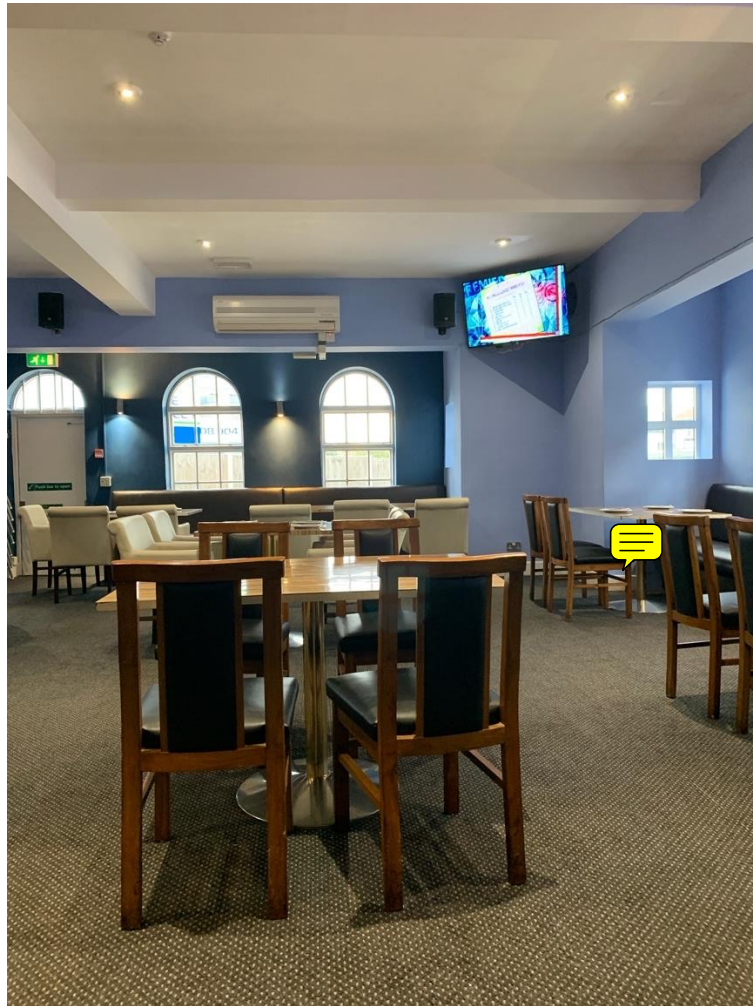
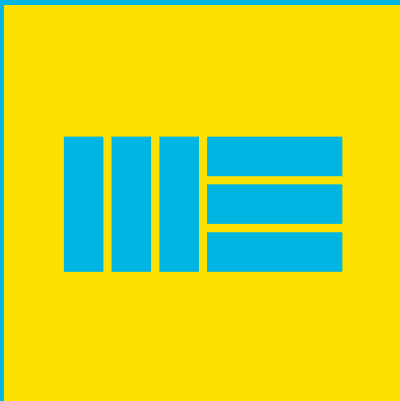


Fig 9: interior of northern extension.



MONTAGU EVANS
70 ST MARY AXE
LONDON
EC3A 8BE



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