

From: James Hughes
Sent: 12 Jul 2019 14:48:18 +0000
To: Planning
Cc: Peach, Natasha
Subject: DC/19/112087: Lee, St Mildred

Dear Ms McBirney

RE: Lee, St Mildred (Unlisted, *Henry Elliott, 1878-9*); extension

Thank you for consulting the Victorian Society on this application. Having considered the proposals we write to register our **objection** to what is proposed and to recommend that the application is refused consent.

The fact that St Mildred's is not listed should not blind us to the many virtues of it as a building of historic and architectural interest. It was constructed in 1878-9 to the designs of one *H. Elliott*. This is a somewhat elusive attribution: Elliott is not an architect we have knowingly encountered, and we can find – from a cursory inspection – no other known works by him. However, 'The History of Lee and its Neighbourhood', published in 1882, provides a detailed account of the establishment and funding of the building, the impetus for which came largely from the Earl of Northbrook. In addition to naming Elliott as the architect (and providing his address: 99, Strand, where he was based until at least 1884), it names the builders as G. Coles and Sons of Croydon.

While we know nothing of Elliott's career, St Mildred's provides as clear a demonstration as one could wish that he was not merely a competent architect, but a fluent and confident exponent of the Gothic Revival style. Indeed, his configuration and manipulation of form, massing and geometry lends this cruciform church a satisfying coherence and in-the-round quality that is notable. The narthex structure at the west end is rather unusual, and the numerous and consistent traceried windows are impressive. The Kentish ragstone and red clay tiles further differentiate the building from its surroundings, and help distinguish this building as a thoroughly Kentish church. Most pleasing, however (and also very Kentish), is the resolution of forms at the east end of the church: the sanctuary apse, apsidal south-eastern chapel and the nestling cylindrical bellcote, as a group of forms, are exceedingly attractive. As a result – and even before one considers the significance of the east end in historic or liturgical terms – as a pure piece of architecture, the east end is by far the most attractive, interesting, exciting and important aspect of the building. (The interior is unaffected by these proposals, but it is worth noting that it, too, is very attractive and well detailed. It is to be regretted that most of the original fittings appear to have been lost: were they to remain in situ, the building would almost certainly merit statutory designation).

That being the case, what is envisaged in respect of the proposed extension would severely erode the special architectural interest of the building and the positive contribution it makes to the surrounding streetscape. The extension would wrap round the whole of the east end of the church – the south-eastern chapel, apse and the eastern wall of the north transept swallowed up in the process – even protruding greedily of the north wall of the transept. The whole architectural effect and geometry of the east end would, as a result, be enormously compromised and subjugated, and that is simply on the basis of its general form, scale and location. Materially the proposed new building would be an alien and jarring addition to both the church and the streetscene. As a work of architecture it is without refinement or quality. At a more detailed level, the way in which the new structure would interact with

the historic building is defined by awkward junctures and unfortunate consequences: the meeting of the new roof and the south transept window, for instance; or the inevitable but significant intrusion of the new roof on the stained glass windows in the south east chapel, which were designed by the renowned stained glass artist *Wilhelmina Geddes*.

There is a sense in which commenting on the failure of the details of the design is pointless: while the design could be improved, our view remains that there is no less appropriate location for an extension to this building; however it is designed, an extension of the size and in the location of that proposed could only cause serious harm to the special interest of the building.

The principle of demolishing and replacing the present hall is, of course, entirely acceptable, and it's removal would free up a large amount of space that could be more intelligently and sensitively developed to meet the needs of the church and its congregation. We advise that any new building should not sit any further north than the south wall of the southeastern chapel. If well-designed, a new hall could conceivably be taller than that now envisaged, if the additional accommodation it would provide is required (although given that the church is, as I understand it, entirely de-pewed and furnished with moveable seating, the need for so great an extent of additional accommodation would be unclear). Either way, the open space around the east end of the church should be left free of new buildings and could be sympathetically landscaped to provide a beautiful setting for the new hall, the church and the wider streetscape.

In light of the above, and the harm that this proposal would needlessly cause to the significance of this non-designated heritage asset, we object to the application and recommend that it is refused consent. A genuinely sympathetic and acceptable solution surely exists: this is not it.

Yours sincerely

James

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