

SUPPORT A PETITION TO SAVE A CENTRAL LONDON WORKHOUSE

There is a campaign in Fitzrovia to save a 230 year old Georgian former workhouse which is the last of its kind in central London.

Background

The building at 44 Cleveland Street in Fitzrovia (near London's Telecom Tower) is the best preserved Georgian workhouse in central London. Originally built on fields in 1775, it has been used for the care of elderly and sick Londoners ever since. It had been the Outpatients' Department of the Middlesex Hospital for many years when it was closed in 2006.

The building stands pretty much unchanged since Georgian times, and it is a rare living testimony to those bleak institutions as a whole, rich in architectural as well as historical interest.

Since the closure and destruction of the Middlesex Hospital (to the south-west) complete demolition and redevelopment of this former workhouse has also been proposed: the building in the new plans is yet another very large development of expensive flats quite out of character with the surroundings. A planning application has already been submitted and the decision in favour or against is imminent, and so potentially is its demolition.

Time is really upon us all to save this Georgian building. For too long it has been overlooked and judged only on the basis of its functionality. Its aesthetic is austere and rigorous and yet it sits extremely well between the elegant neighbouring period properties, and its ties with social and medical history are extraordinary, making it a London landmark.

Recent research also links the workhouse as the likely inspiration for Charles Dickens *Oliver Twist*, as it has been discovered that the famous author lived only a few doors away. Dr Joseph Rogers, a friend of Dickens, worked at the workhouse for many years, and his work was responsible for key reforms of the time.

Virtually every other Georgian property in the country has already been listed, on the basis that – no matter what the aesthetic represented – the age of the building and the fact that Georgian properties are in percentage terms rare are sufficient elements to grant preservation. Justice needs to be done!

This particular example is typical of the late eighteenth century but is now very rare. We very much hope that you will support this effort.

Please forward this petition as widely as possible to your contacts, mailing lists, ezines/bulletins, discussion groups/forums, and social sites.

Petition is here:

<http://www.gopetition.com/petition/39594.html>

There is space to contribute a comment.

Comments received so far

No 1092, "As an archivist at the City of Westminster Archives Centre, I know the importance of workhouses in the history of London. I believe that it is important for these buildings from the old St Paul's Covent Garden, latterly Strand Union, Workhouse to be preserved as a memorial."

No 1232, “My gt gt gt grandmother, Elizabeth Hawley, died at the Strand Workhouse in 1852 aged 43 years and I consider it to be a very important part of London's social history and as such deserves to be saved.”

No 1375, “My great grandmother and other ancestors saw their last days out here . . . this could be a fantastic attraction that Americans and other visitors to London would travel miles to see and pay something towards (in its originality) . . . ”

What you could write

If wondering what to write: please indicate that the whole assemblage of buildings must be saved – full restoration would reveal the original beautiful symmetry of the H-block and the evolution of the institution's expansion. These are actually very handsome buildings just in need of some TLC! Examples of uses of other uses of historical campus type sites welcome.

You could also include a comment that Camden Council's policies are disgraceful when it comes to preserving heritage.

Thank You!

Historical personalities connected with the site

Dr Joseph Rogers – the most active and successful reformer of workhouse medicine of the 19th century – was the workhouse medical officer there in the mid-19th century. Charles Dickens was an active supporter, as was Louisa Twining, the famous medical journal *The Lancet*, and (behind the scenes) Florence Nightingale.”

More information here:

<http://savinggeorgianbuildings.blogspot.com/2010/11/save-georgian-workhouse-from-wrecking.html>

General information about workhouses here:

www.clevelandstreetworkhouse.org