

Heritage Statement
for proposed redevelopment of

**5-7 Lower Holyhead Road, Coventry
Spon Street Conservation Area**

September 2008



SR Davis Architects Heritage Statement Proposed Redevelopment of 5-7 Lower Holyhead Road, Coventry

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Aerial view of proposed redevelopment site, with Spon Street to the top of the image

1.0 Introduction

SR Davis Architects (SRDA) have been commissioned by Oakmoor Estates to design a new student accommodation / study bedroom scheme, with associated facilities and submit a Planning Application and Conservation Application for the redevelopment of 5-7 Lower Holyhead Road, Coventry.

The purpose of this Heritage Statement document is to support these Planning Applications and should be read in conjunction with other supporting material; in particular, reference should be made to the SRDA Design & Access Statement for analysis of the surrounding area.

This Heritage Statement includes background information of the history of the site, leading to an analysis of the character and appearance of the buildings and their historical significance, concluding with justification for their removal and replacement.

2.0 Spon Street Conservation Area

Lower Holyhead Road is located to the north-west of Coventry city centre, within the ring road, accessed from junctions 7 and 8. Lower Holyhead Road itself is a cul de sac, rising up from Spon Street towards the ring road. The site lies within the Spon Street Conservation Area. The Spon Street Conservation Area was declared on 8 August 1969 and later enlarged to cover the site at 5-7 Lower Holyhead Road in 2004.

The Coventry City Council Report dated 15th January 2004 covering this 'extension', referred to in section 8.52 of the Coventry Development Plan 2001 (Built Environment section, page 13) reads as follows:

'Spon Street Conservation Area to be extended to include parts of Hill Street and Lower Holyhead Road, which possess a similar quality and character to the existing Area, and backland in Watch Close, in order that development can be controlled in such a way as to safeguard the setting of the Conservation Area.'

3.0 Historical Background of Spon Street Conservation Area

Source: *extracts and summaries from Coventry City Council "Spon Street Townscape Scheme" 1993, and "Coventry City Centre Trail" 1993 (reprinted 2000)*
<http://www.coventry-walks.org.uk/conservation-areas/spon-street>

By the 14th century, the street pattern in Coventry had been established with one of its' strongest features being the west to east axial road running for nearly 1½ miles from Spon to Gosford Green.

Spon End and Spon Street formed the western section of this route. The first documentary evidence of Spon Street is in the late 12th century. Spon or Bablake Gate was built in 1391 with stone from Cheylesmore Park, and survived until 1771. It was one of twelve gates on the town's defensive wall. In 1410-11 Spon Street stretched from Smithford Bridge, out as far as the old leper hospital, near the junction of the present Allesley Old Road and Hearsall Lane. By then the area outside the city wall was developing as the suburb of 'Spon', one of four or more such medieval suburbs 'outside' of the towns gates.

In the 12th and 13th centuries many dyers and tanners plied their trades in Spon Street, because their noxious work required them to be away from the centre of the town and close to a source of running water. By the 19th century the balance had shifted away from the cloth and leather trades to watchmaking. At the 1851 census, the Spon district was given over, almost exclusively, to one or other branch of the watchmaker's craft. There were as many as 137 households in Spon Street alone involved in this trade.

In 1812, Spon Street was one of six city streets to be 'turnpiked' - improved as a toll road. 'Lower' Holyhead Road itself was constructed by Thomas Telford in 1827-30, and helped relieve Spon Street from its longstanding role as a major route out of the city. The road was part of the great route designed by the famous engineer connecting from London to Holyhead. (This one unbroken route running out to Allesley and beyond, only being cut off from rest of Holyhead Road when the inner ring road was constructed in the 1960s-'70s). During the 19th century the open land both to the north and south of Spon Street was gradually built up. By the beginning of the present century most of the houses were in use, particularly towards the city centre.

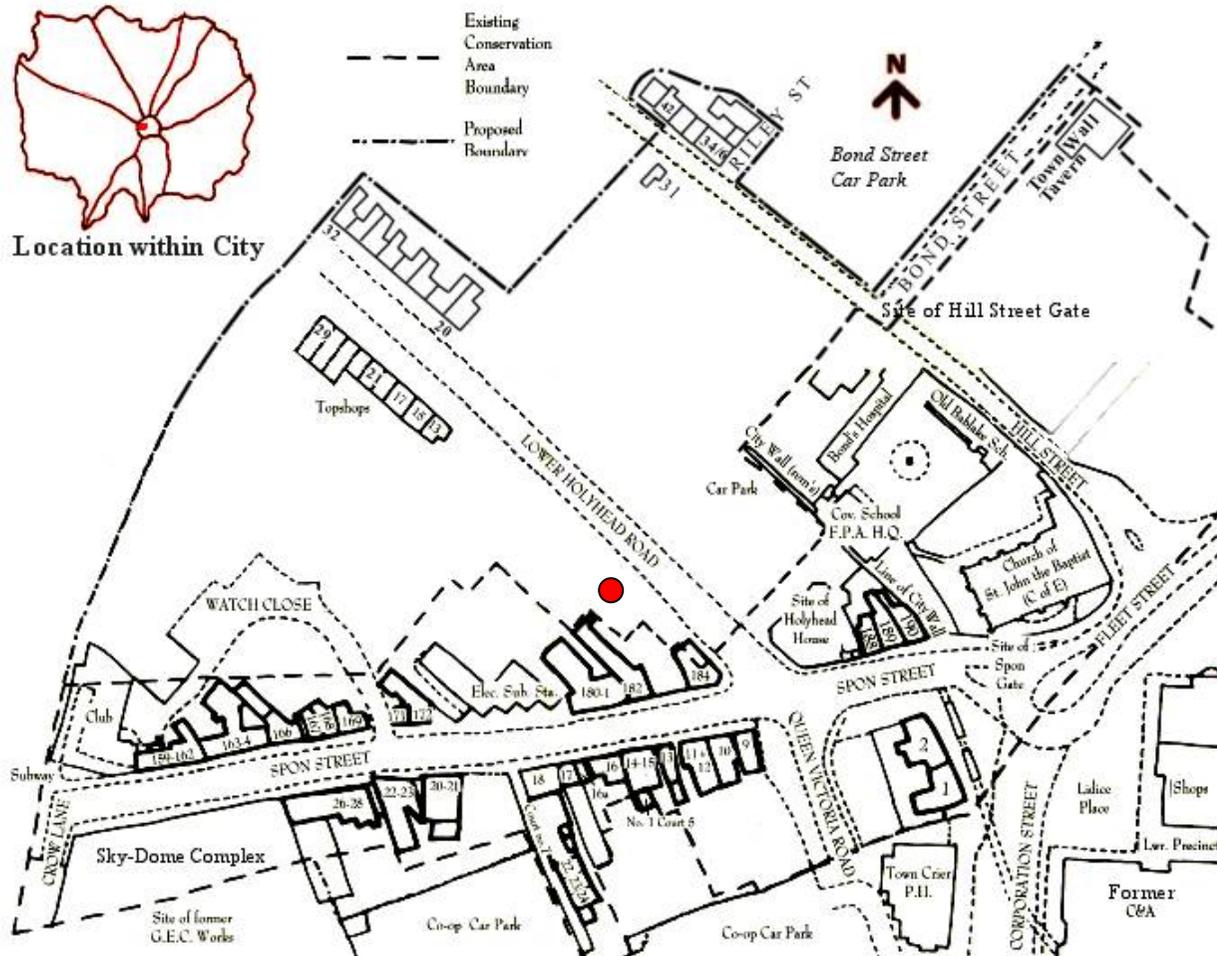
The locality escaped major destruction during the bombing raids of 1940 and 1941, but after the war, in the 1950s and '60s, major changes took place with the redevelopment of the Spon End district and the construction of the inner ring road, including 'severing' through the once busy and continuous Holyhead Road - forming the truncated 'cul de sac' we see today. Most of the surviving medieval houses along the western and central sections of the street were demolished and replaced by modern flats.

However, by the mid 1960s, there was growing concern about the disappearance of historic timber-framed houses in the city centre through wartime damage and overall redevelopment. It was decided to preserve the best of the remaining buildings, in that part of the street lying between St. John's Church and the ring road and to reconstruct there timber-framed buildings which had been, or would be, dismantled from other sites around the city.

As a result of the reconstruction scheme launched in 1967, with some twelve buildings having been restored in situ, and ten re-erected from other sites, Spon Street now contains one of the most important groupings of medieval timber-framed buildings in the country. Today, the street provides both a 'living museum' of Coventry's vernacular architectural heritage and an attractive environment for specialised shopping eating and drinking.



4.0 Buildings of Note in Proximity to 5-7 Lower Holyhead Road



Lower Holyhead Road contains a number of buildings that vary in height from single to three / four storey.

As highlighted by the map opposite (source CCC "Spon Street Townscape Scheme" 1993) 'period' buildings of note include the following:

13-29 (odds) Lower Holyhead Road 'Top Shops' (weavers' houses)
(1819 and pre-1837)



This row of 'top shops' has been reduced by half from the original eighteen. They are characteristic of 19th-century industrial buildings in Coventry, but few examples remain. The 3-storey 'top shop' provided living accommodation on the ground and first floors and the workshop above, originally reached through a trap-door from the conventional two-storey houses below.

After a long period of economic decline, Coventry's revival began in the mid 18th century with the introduction of watchmaking and silk ribbon weaving. These industries were small in scale with workshops built as an upper storey of a dwelling. The typically large windows allowed for maximum daylight. The 'top shops' here date from 1819 and the row was completed by 1837. The 'missing' half of the row was demolished to make way for the construction of the Inner Ring Road, in late 1964 or early 1965. They are all Grade II listed.

9 Lower Holyhead Road (pre-1887)



9 Lower Holyhead Road (pre-1887) has been provisionally agreed for the Local List because of its former likely association with the Errington / Williamson's Watch Factory (1890-1934) and because of its significant contribution to the remaining historic character of this section of Lower Holyhead Road.

18-32 (evens) Lower Holyhead Road (pre-1887)



Other, unlisted older buildings make a contribution to the character of the area, such as the terraced houses at 18-32 (evens) Lower Holyhead Road (pre-1887) and the adjacent Arts Co-operative building, formerly the Quaker Meeting House (1896).

(Text source CCC "Spon Street Townscape Scheme" 1993)

5.0 Site History

As previously discussed, the area was 'outside' the Coventry town wall. 'Holyhead Road' itself was laid out between 1827-1830 and thereafter the land being gradually built up on either side. Please refer to Section 3.0 for further background information.

246 FURTHER REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONERS [City, &c. of Coventry.]

Thus leaving an average surplus of about 50*l.* a-year, which is from time to time invested.

The affairs of the school are managed by 10 trustees, appointed from time to time by entries in the charity-book, and by one of them the accounts are kept for the year. On the day on which the annual sermon is preached the acting trustee gives a dinner to the clergyman and his co-trustees.

Meetings are held for the business of the charity generally about six times in the year, when the boys are examined. On the account audited 20th April 1833, up to the Lady-day preceding, there was a balance in hand of 139*l.*, out of which 100*l.* Three per cent. Consols was afterwards purchased, and now forms part of the stock already mentioned.

FAIRFAX'S SCHOOL, SPON-STREET.

Fairfax's School. This school originated in a donation of 100*l.* by *Samuel Fairfax*, in the year 1751, which was subsequently increased by collections made after charity sermons. In the year 1761, the first addition to the permanent funds of the charity was received, and from that time the following sums have been added by successive donors:

		£.	s.	d.
1761.	Mrs. Dorothy Haycock	-	-	40
1761.	Rev. Mr. Fairfax	-	-	100
1766.	Mr. Thomas Skinner, gentleman	-	-	50
1766.	Mr. Samuel Garratt	-	-	200
1778.	Mrs. Hannah Crynes	-	-	200
1780.	Mr. Thomas Cleve	-	-	50
1786.	Mr. Samuel and Mrs. Sarah Spicer	-	-	150
1789.	Mrs. Christiana Goode	-	-	50
1790.	Mr. William Edwards	-	-	300
1793.	Edward Atkins, esquire, (in the Three per Cents.)	-	-	500
1794.	Mr. William Jackson	-	-	51
1807.	Their Royal Highnesses the Prince of Wales and Duke of Sussex	-	-	36 15
1818.	Mr. William Bunney	-	-	50
1819.	James Vernon, esquire	-	-	50
1828.	Mrs. Haycock	-	-	19 19
-	Sir Skears Rew, knight	-	-	100

These monies have been invested as follows:

A sum of 403*l.* on mortgage of premises, situate in Cow-lane, the property of William Newsome, at four per cent.

A sum of 400*l.* on loan at four per cent., at present in the hands of Messrs. Troughton and Lee, the solicitors of the trustees, for investment.

A sum of 1,700*l.* 9 s. 6 d. stock in the Three per cent. Consols, in the names of Joseph Jordan, John Howe, Thomas Banbury, the younger, and Adie Cramp. A portion of this stock belongs to the lecturer of St. John's. See Crynes's Charity, p. 291.

£ 100. stock in the Reduced Three-and-a-Half per Cents., in the names of Joseph Jordan, Thomas Rotheram, Thomas Banbury and Adie Cramp.

A sum of 489*l.* 8 s. was laid out in the year 1814 in the purchase of a house and a garden on the north side of Spon-street, for a residence for the master and the accommodation of the school. At the same time a new school-room was erected in the yard at the back of the house, at an expense of about 370*l.*

The proportion of the purchase-money paid for the garden was 45*l.*, which, as it is not productive and does not join the master's house, the trustees have not thought it necessary to keep. In consequence of its having a frontage on the new road to Birmingham, the trustees have been enabled to obtain 100*l.* for it. At this sum they have accordingly contracted to sell.

An annual sermon is preached at St. Michael's church for the benefit of this charity, the average receipts at which amount to about 100 guineas.

The income from these several sources may be stated at about 200*l.* per annum.

The school at present contains 40 boys, the number having been increased, as the funds would allow, from 24. The vacancies in the school are filled up by the trustees from the children of the industrious poor of Coventry. They are

Report of the Charities Commissioners on Coventry Charities 1833

The First Notation of the site included in the Report of the Charities Commissioners 1833, page 246, shows the property purchased by Fairfax school in 1814. Further through the Report, it is noted that the land fronting the 'new road to Birmingham' was not deemed to be 'productive' and the garden area sold on. This 'backland' was clearly regarded as surplus to requirements and thus sold off

The school itself started with 24 and rose to 40 boys by 1833. Refer to extract of Report, courtesy of the Coventry City Archives.

Before the 1870 Education Act and its successors ushered in the era of compulsory education, Coventry's schools comprised:

- The boys' grammar schools of King Henry VIII and Bablake
- Five endowed charity schools providing elementary education: including Fairfax, Baker, Billing & Crow's, Bayley's, Blue Coat (for girls), and Southern & Craner's (for girls - from 1850 part of Vicar Lane, later King St., British School)
- Other unendowed schools of various denominations.

Whereas the two grammar schools continued, merging in 1977 to form Coventry School, Bablake had absorbed Fairfax' School in 1887.

(Source: Coventry City Council Archives "Education Records Guide", issued October 2001)

The Board of Health map dated 1851 is the first recorded plan of the buildings. Please refer to extract on following page. Ordnance Survey maps dated 1888, 1905 and 1925 have also been reviewed – all show the buildings in place. Indeed the post war Ordnance Survey of 1951 shows the current buildings.

Report of the Charities Commissioners dated 1833
Courtesy of the Coventry City Archives



Board of Health
Map dated 1851
Courtesy of the
Coventry City
Archives

Note: circle
highlights site

6.0 Analysis of Character and Appearance of 5-7 Lower Holyhead Road

Despite the interesting historical nature of the site; little of historical interest remains at 5-7 Lower Holyhead Road.



Existing buildings at 5-7 Lower Holyhead Road.

The site is a collection of 'linked' knocked-through spaces and relatively undistinguished buildings, mostly single-storey, with a small two storey 'cottage' structure towards the middle of the site. Built form covers most of the area (up to site boundary lines) and the individual buildings have been altered and amalgamated to form one 'larger' industrial / warehouse type building. The majority of the building facing Lower Holyhead Road is set approximately 7.0metres back from the building line, with this 'open space' having a concrete surface and used for parking.

The predominant material is facing brick, with original pitched slate roof remaining and a more recent felt flat roof. This flat roof structure ties a number of individual building elements together. Towards the rear of the site, buildings have pitched roof, supported on timber / metal trusses. Roof covering vary including slate, corrugated metal and felt.

Internally, the buildings are utilitarian with little of interest remaining - really the fire places are the only surviving feature of any note. Please refer to photographs on following page.

It is clear that the buildings have been much altered and subsequently neglected. The buildings last use was for retail / storage purposes, however we understand the building has lain empty, derelict and at the 'mercy to the elements' since 2003.

As can be seen from the photographs the fabric of the building is in decline and in need of replacement. Note, that since these photographs were taken (over two years ago), part of the building has further collapsed and safe access to the whole building can no longer be achieved.

Please refer to Table on subsequent page for a summary review of character of the building.



Selection of internal photographs of building taken 5th May 2006
Courtesy of Mark Singlehurst CCC
Conservation Officer.

As can be seen, the fire places are the only surviving feature of any interest.

Note, since these photographs were taken (two years ago), part of the building has further collapsed and safe access to the whole building can no longer be achieved.

5-7 Lower Holyhead Road Character Analysis Summary

Character element:	Summary Description:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Predominately linked single storey, with small element of two-storey to middle of site. - Flat roof links number of individual building structures so building is viewed as a single entity. - Building footprint covers majority of site (to boundary line), although majority of structure is set-back approximately 7.0metres from building / boundary line facing Lower Holyhead Road.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Materials and detail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Walls: predominately facing brickwork with restrained and simple detailing. Brickwork facing road subsequently painted further eroding identity of individual constituent structures across the site - Roof: mix of materials including slate, tiles, corrugated metal and felt - Windows: timber, although all boarded-up - Doors: timber, although many boarded-up - Boundary: building footprint built upto boundary line, with the exception of Lower Holyhead Road, were it is set-back approximately 7.0 metres back from boundary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Settlement and pattern 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The area was 'outside' the Coventry town wall. - C12th and C13th surrounding area used for dying and tanning. - C19th area centre for weaving and clock making trade. - Lower Holyhead Road not laid out until 1827-1830.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development history 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'Holyhead Road' itself was laid out 1827-1830, with land being gradually built up and developed either side. - First notation included in 1833 referring to Fairfax School and land being utilised rooms. - First map recorded buildings dated 1851.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streetscape and street furniture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low streetscape quality. - Relatively wide footpath (approx. 5.0m) to Lower Holyhead Road. - Existing street furniture includes modern painted bollards that detract from character of area.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green spaces and landscape features 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - None; building footprint covers vast majority of site with built-form.

7.0 Conclusion - Proposed Demolition and Archaeology

As the site is within Coventry City Centre, this falls within the 'Area of Archaeological Potential'. However, following consultation with the Councils Planning Archaeologist, the City have confirmed that an archaeological desk-based assessment would not contribute a great deal of new information at this stage and that it will not be required as part of the planning application. However, the City have confirmed, that if permission for the scheme is granted, the City would look to condition the recording of the historic buildings prior to demolition and condition an archaeological evaluation of the site, with trial trenches after demolition, followed by appropriate mitigation if remains are found.

As has been previously discussed within this report, the building, while playing a part of the wider Spon Street Conservation Area, contributes little to the character, quality and appearance of the area. The buildings have been changed and altered over the years and little of historical interest remains at 5-7 Lower Holyhead Road. Indeed it could be argued, that due to their current neglected state, the buildings in fact detract from the character of the area and give a negative 'impression' of other positive regeneration efforts being carried out in the surrounding area.

In terms of the existing buildings, little of historical interest remains at 5-7 Lower Holyhead Road. Therefore the buildings, in their current state – being much altered and swamped with later extensions of no merit – contribute little to the Conservation Area. In summary:

- The ground frontage has largely been knocked out to integrate the buildings together
- The contemporary extensions are of an industrial nature
- Little of interest remains internally, bar the fireplaces previously discussed.

Therefore it is concluded that the buildings should be demolished and replaced with a scheme of high standard of design, to preserve and enhance the character of the conservation area - as the 'next chapter' of the sites' history.

8.0 Credits / Bibliography

Coventry City Council "Spon Street Townscape Scheme" 1993 brochure, and "Coventry City Centre Trail" 1993 (reprinted 2000) brochure.

Coventry City Council, Cabinet Report Conservation Area Extensions, dated January 2004

Coventry City Council, "Spon End and Nauls Mill Area of Local Distinctiveness", dated August 2003

Coventry City Council Archives "Education Records Guide", issued October 2001

Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 "Planning and the Historic Environment", September 1994

<http://www.coventry-walks.org.uk/conservation-areas/spon-street>

<http://www.coventrywatchmuseum.co.uk>

Discussions with Mark Singlehurst and George Demidowicz of Coventry City Planning Services.