

Heritage Statement

Curtain House, Shoreditch, London EC2



AHP Architectural
History
Practice

**Curtain House, 134-146 Curtain Road, Shoreditch,
London EC2**

Heritage Statement

Prepared for

District and Urban Group PLC

by

The Architectural History Practice Limited

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From the early nineteenth century the character of South Shoreditch developed as a centre for the manufacture, sale and supply of furniture to the local, national and international trade. One of the larger wholesale furniture makers was C. & R. Light, a family business which had been operating in the area since the mid-eighteenth century. In 1877 the business was inherited by Charles and Richard Light; they rebuilt 134-144 Curtain Road as a single block, from designs by the architects R. Creese Harrison & Son. This was followed five years later by the redevelopment in matching style of the adjoining site at no. 146.

The company vacated the Curtain Road premises in the early twentieth century, and the building passed into multiple occupation. The building is now used as workshops and offices, with a bar on the ground floor. This is not untypical of how the area has developed since the retreat of the furniture and associated trades. Those historic activities have left a legacy of nineteenth and early twentieth century factories, warehouses and showrooms, chronicled in detailed studies carried out by English Heritage. It is this legacy which gives South Shoreditch its distinctive architectural and townscape character.

In the words of the list entry, Curtain House ‘has special interest as one of the most architectural of the area’s furniture trade buildings, indicative of its late-Victorian manufacturing prowess, with its impressive façade and well surviving robust interior; it also has special historic interest as one of the best surviving and well known of the showroom-warehouses within the well understood and highly significant context of South Shoreditch’.

Current proposals to alter and extend Curtain House have been carefully considered, taking account of pre-application advice from Hackney Council, and informed from the outset by an assessment of the significance of the heritage asset and its setting. They have been devised in such a way as to avoid harm to that significance. The proposed landmark roof addition will be a beacon in the conservation area, adding to the sense of place and to the architectural richness of the area while taking away nothing of value.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Heritage Statement has been prepared by the Architectural History Practice (AHP) at the request of Brian Waters RIBA MRTPI of The Boisot Waters Cohen Partnership (BWCP), acting on behalf of District and Urban Group PLC. It has been prepared in order to inform and accompany proposals to carry out alterations and additions at Curtain House, Curtain Road, London EC2, a grade II listed building lying within the South Shoreditch Conservation Area.

The statement meets the requirements of the London Borough of Hackney for Heritage Statements (Listed Buildings Appraisal and Conservation Area Appraisal), as set out in the council's planning application validation checklist of March 2012. It also meets the requirement of *The National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF), paragraph 128, that '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'.

Current proposals have been prepared by Brian Waters RIBA MRTPI and Georgina Holden DipArch MA of BWCP, with Witold Zablocki BSc CEng MICE of Soarbond Consulting Engineers. They follow on from and supersede a previous scheme prepared by Douglas & King Architects, presented to Hackney Council in 2009, and the subject of a pre-application advice report from the council dated August 2009. The current scheme takes account of the council's criticism of that earlier scheme, and has been framed with reference to the policies contained within the South Shoreditch Supplementary Planning Guide (2006) and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The statement has been written by Andrew Derrick BA Hons, AA Dipl Cons, IHBC, a director of AHP.

2.0 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

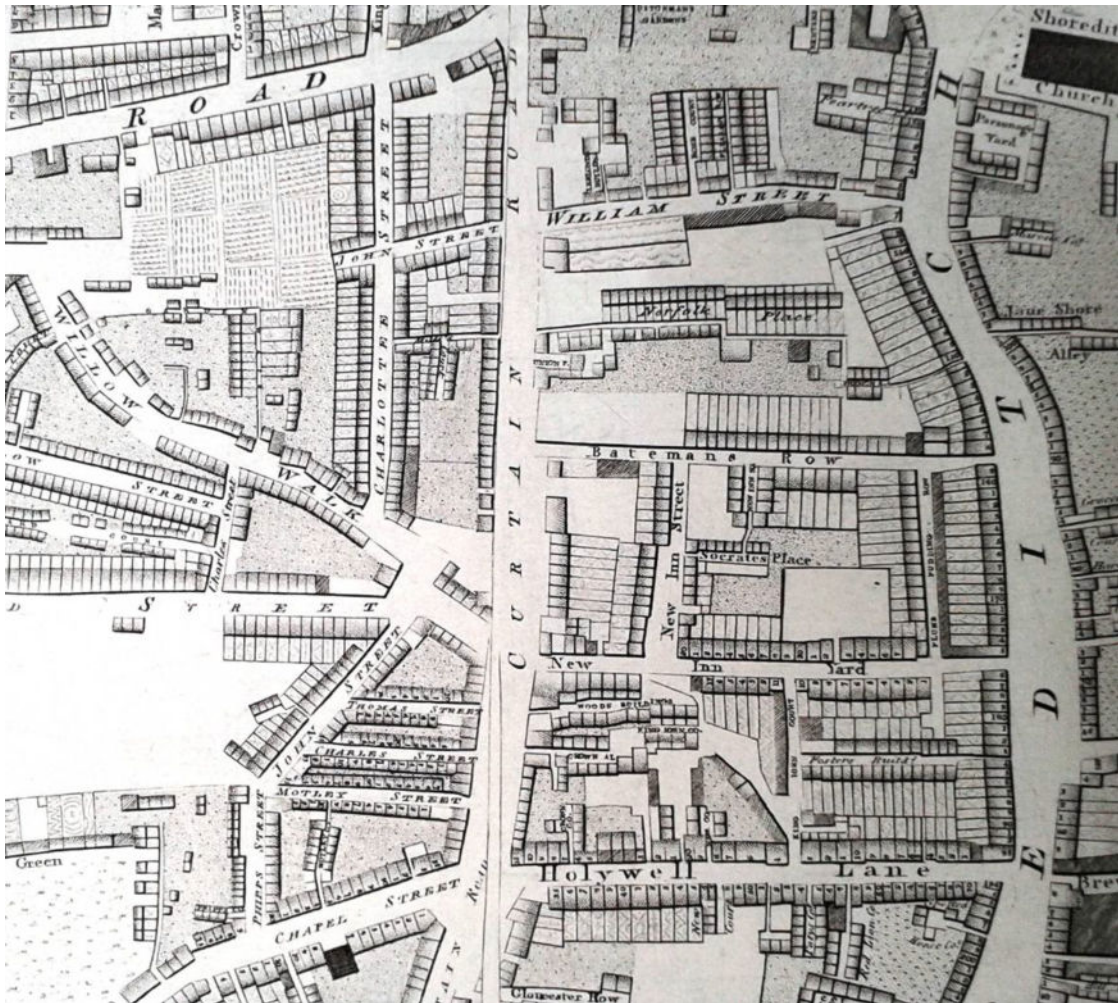


Figure 1: Detail from Horwood's map, 1799

Curtain Road is an eighteenth century thoroughfare that takes its name from the walled enclosure of the medieval Holywell Priory, which lay to the south. The Curtain Theatre, one of two theatres built in Shoreditch in the 1570s, is thought to have been located on the site of the present Hewett Street, which gives off the lower part of Curtain Road south of the present Great Eastern Street.¹ Richard Horwood's map (figure 1) shows the state of development at the end of the eighteenth century; the present Rivington Street is shown as William Street, and Rivington Place as Rose Court. The corner site of Curtain Street shows development around an open court.

□

¹ See *Shakespeare's Theatre? Archaeology at New Inn Broadway, Hackney*, Museum of London Archaeology Service, 2008

From the early nineteenth century the character of South Shoreditch changed, the area developing as a centre for the manufacture, sale and supply of furniture to the local, national and international trade. The railway arrived in 1840, with the opening of the terminus of the Eastern Counties Railway on Shoreditch High Street in 1840 (later converted to the Bishopsgate Goods Station). This was followed by the North London Line in the 1860s, its viaduct cutting through the area.

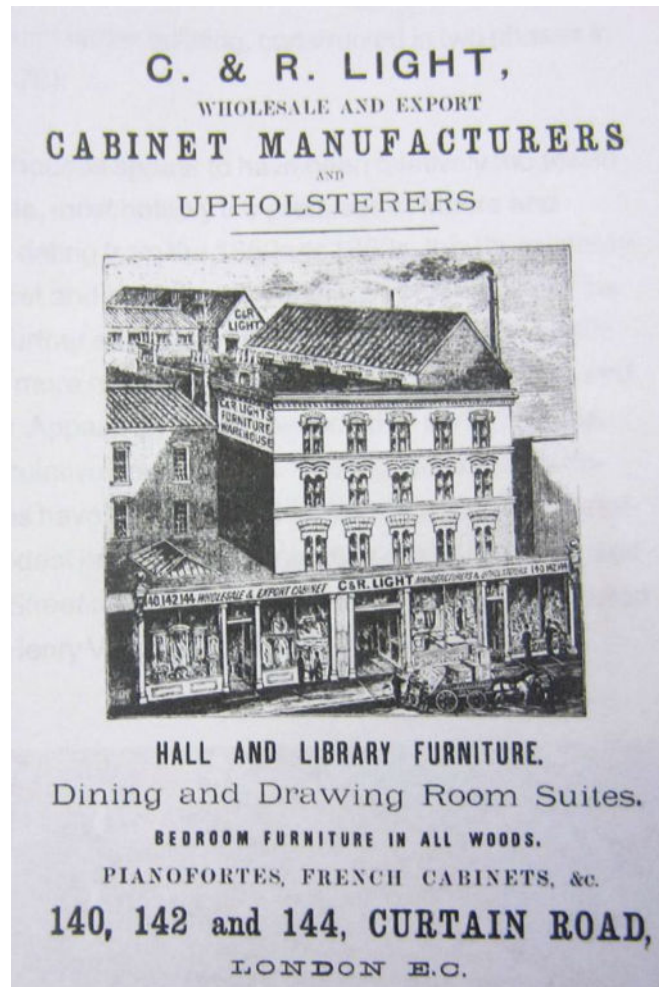


Figure 2: Advertisement for C. & R. Light
(*The Cabinet and Upholstery Advertiser*, 7 July 1877)

One of the larger wholesale furniture makers was C. & R. Light, a family business that had been operating in Shoreditch since the mid-eighteenth century. Charles Light had premises at 144 (then 134) Curtain Road in 1855, acquiring neighbouring premises (140-144) by 1874. In 1877 the business was inherited by his sons Charles and Richard; the appearance of the premises at this time is shown at figure 2.

The first edition Ordnance Survey map (figure 3) shows the narrow plot widths occupied by these premises, reflecting the incremental development of the business. The present Rivington Street is shown as William Street; to the north is Shoreditch Town Hall (1863-8) and to the east the new railway line cuts through the area.

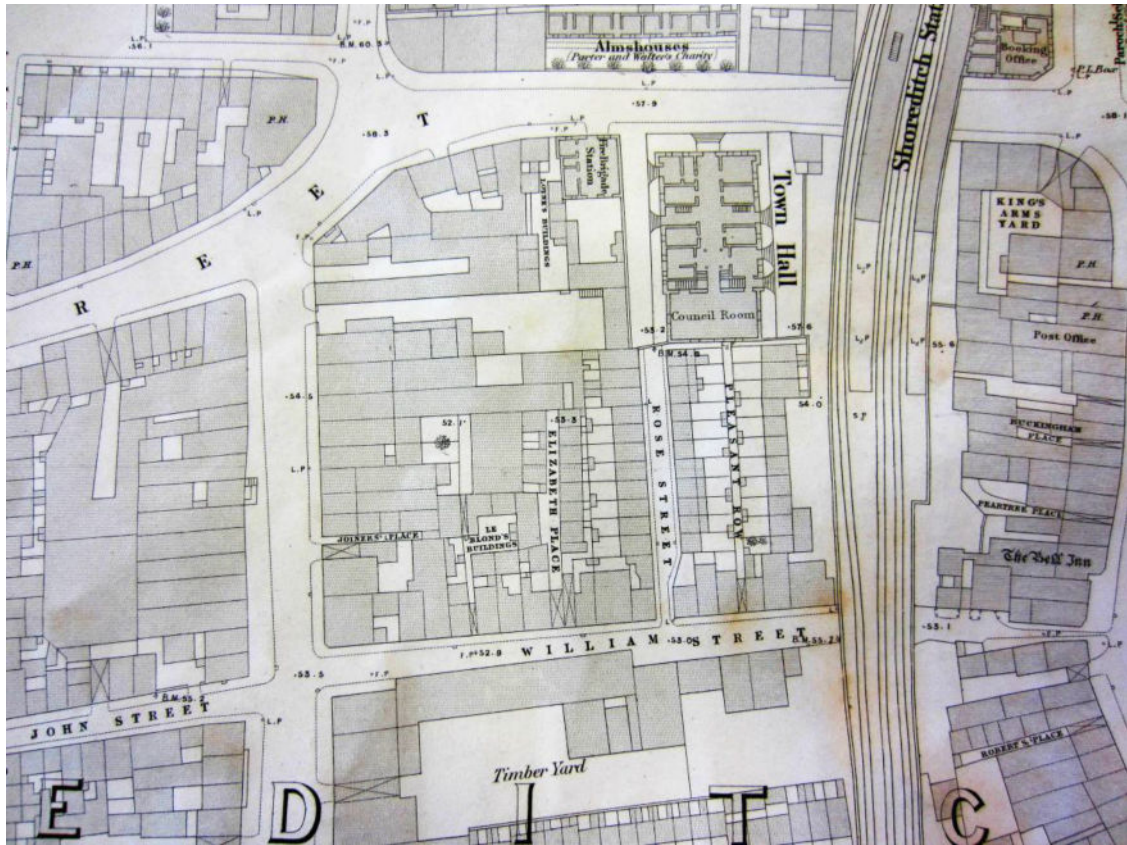


Figure 3: Detail from first edition Ordnance Survey map, 1872-3, Sheet VII 46

In 1881-2 the Light brothers rebuilt 134-144 Curtain Road as a single block, from designs by the architects R. Creese Harrison & Son of Cannon Row (contractor Lawrance & Son of City Road). This was followed five years later by the redevelopment in matching style of the adjoining site at no. 146. The huge warehouse that resulted was described at the time as ‘an enormous place, which is crammed from one end to the other with furniture’ and filled with ‘an almost endless variety of goods for hall, office, library, dining-room, drawing-room and bedroom, in the styles and treatments now in vogue’ (*Cabinet Maker*, September 1894, 78). The 1913 OS map (figure 4) shows the considerable footprint of the new building, amalgamating historic plot widths, and the development of Rivington Place to the rear (William Street having become Rivington Street by this time).

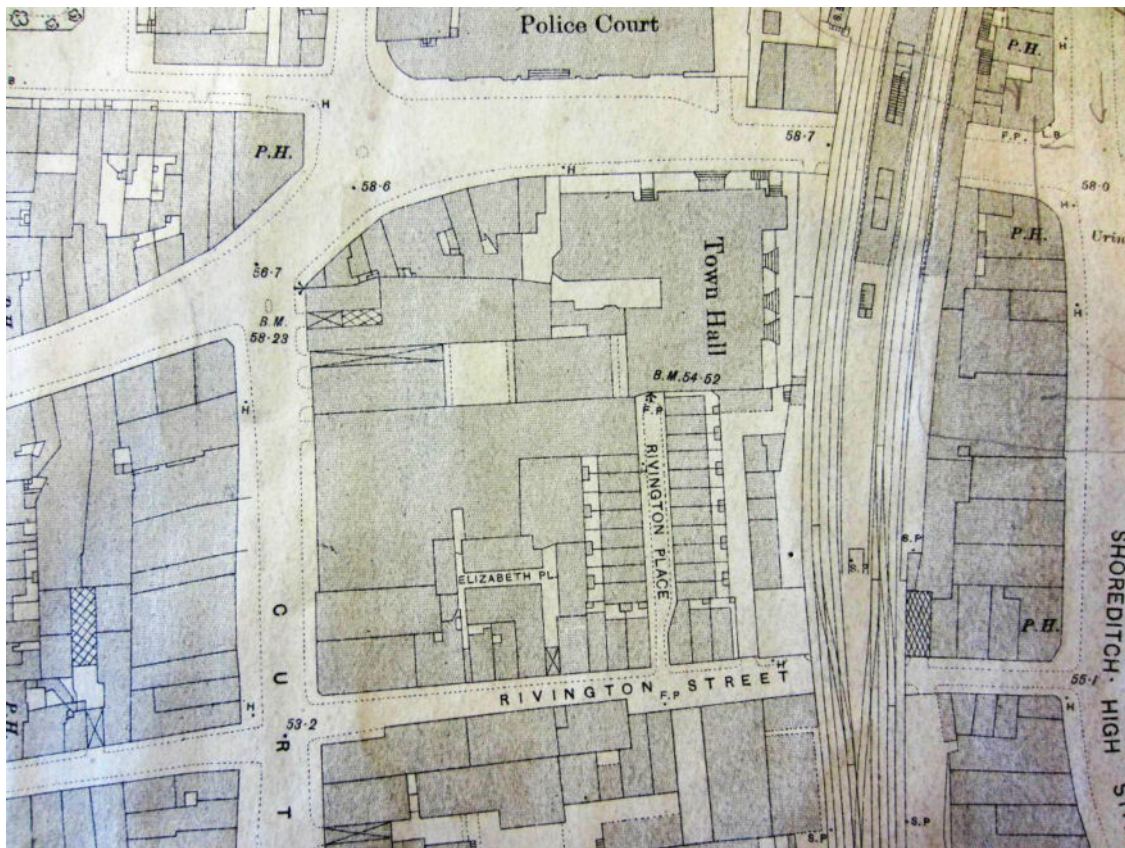


Figure 4: Detail from 1913 Ordnance Survey map, Sheet VII 46

The continued growth of the company necessitated further premises at 82 Great Eastern Street (1892) and in Rivington Street (1897). Continued expansion eventually forced it to look beyond the area, and a new works was built in Bedfordshire. The illustration at figure 5 shows the dominance of the furniture related trades in 1918. By this time the Curtain Road premises had been vacated by C. & R. Light and had passed into multiple occupation by the rag trade, printers and upholsterers. Faded lettering on the building points to this later use. The building is now used as workshops and offices, with a bar on the ground floor. This is not untypical of how the area has developed since the retreat of the furniture and associated trades. However, those historic activities which have left a legacy of nineteenth and early twentieth century factories, warehouses and showrooms, concentrated within a relatively small area, giving South Shoreditch its distinctive architectural and townscape character.

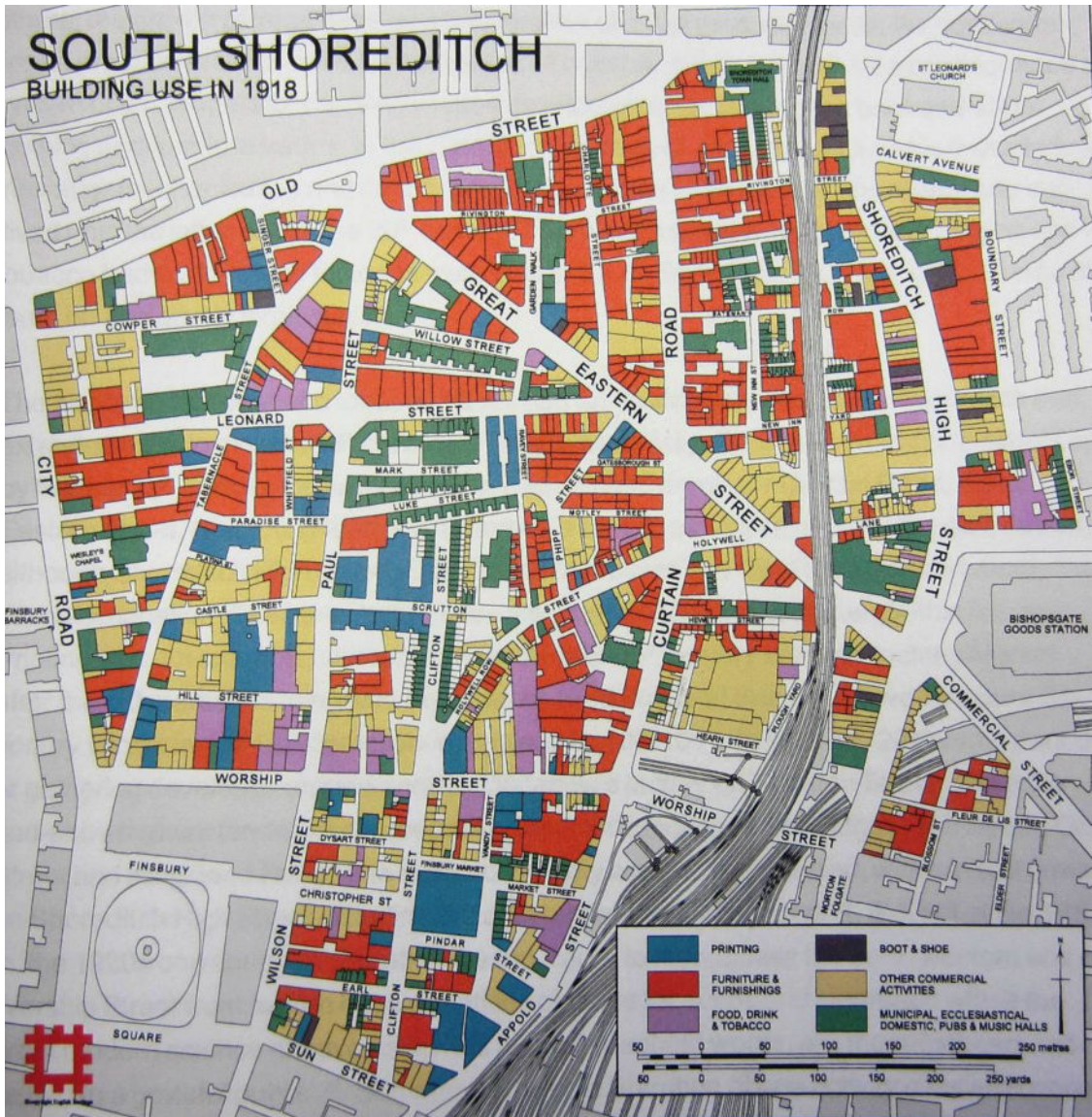


Figure 5: South Shoreditch furniture-related trades in 1918 (English Heritage, 2006, p.20)

3.0 ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION



Figure 6: Elevation to Curtain Road

3.1 *Elevation to Curtain Road*

The front elevation of Curtain House faces onto Curtain Road, and consists of two builds, both of five storeys. The earlier, main range (nos. 134-144) dates from 1881-2 and is of six bays of unequal width. The bays are separated by giant rusticated stock brick piers rising up to a plastered modillion cornice. Between the piers, the wall surface is almost entirely glazed, with metal framed windows separated by cast iron colonnettes serving as mullions. On the first and second floors the windows have cast iron lintels, while the upper floors have shallow segmental brick arches. Thin brick panels beneath the windows have decorative terracotta bands, different on each floor. There is a carriage arch with rusticated voussoirs in the southern bay (now blocked) and an entrance under a segmental pediment in the fourth bay (from the south). The ground floor bays are demarcated by brick piers and have shop fronts over moulded stone plinths. There were originally light wells for the basements (figure 7).

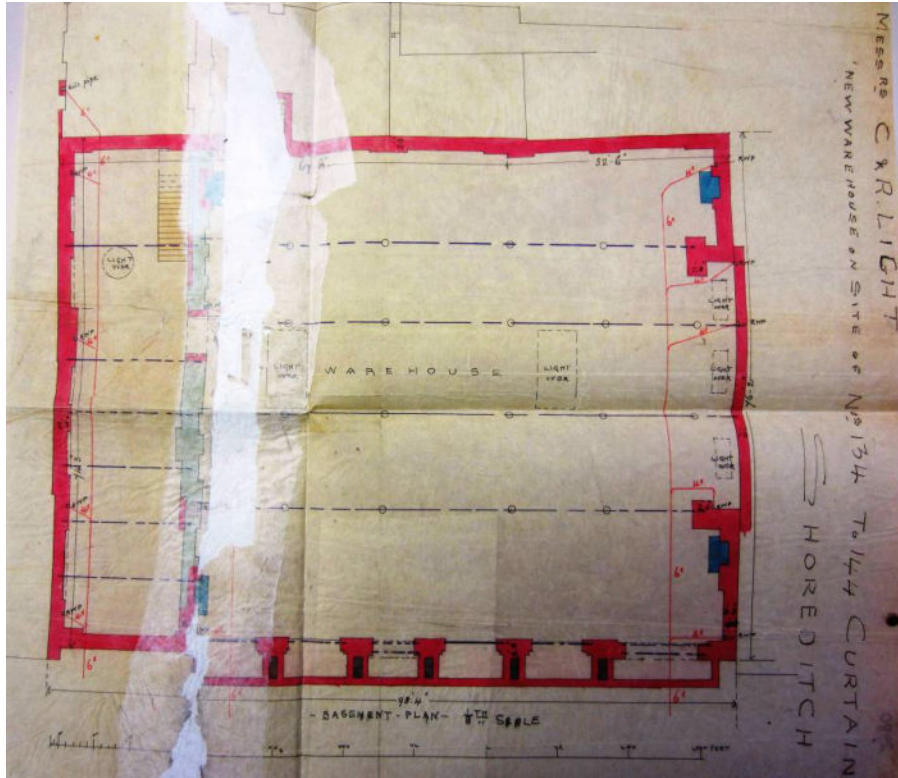


Figure 7: Basement plan for nos. 134-144 Curtain Road, c1881 (Hackney Archives, drainage plans 2980)

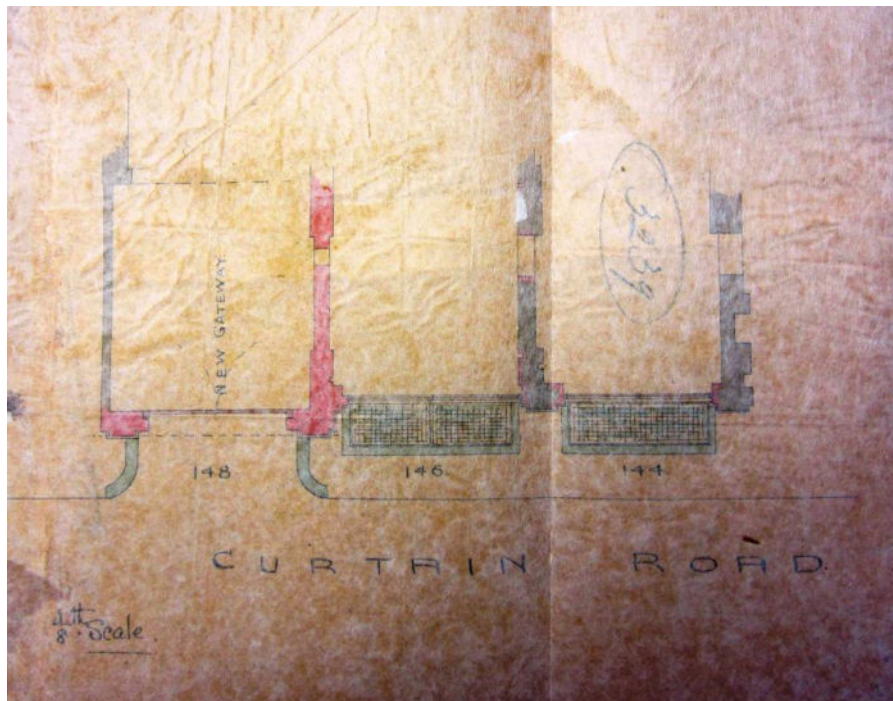


Figure 8: 'New building at 146 Curtain Road and new entrance at 148 Curtain Road', 1887 (Hackney Archives, drainage plans 3239)

The seventh and eighth bays were added in 1887 (figure 8) and continue the architectural treatment of rusticated brick piers, modillion cornice, and window and lintel detailing. The carriage arch on the ground floor was probably originally rusticated, like that in the southern bay of the earlier build; it is shown as such in a drawing for the adjacent development, also designed by R. Creese Harrison & Son and built by Messrs Lawrance & Son (figure 9).² In the seventh bay there is no shop front but an entrance (which is of interwar rather than late nineteenth century character) with a blind brick panel to left (figure 10). Behind and above this brick panel a lightwell extends to the full height of the building, its existence disguised by blind windows (figure 11).



Figure 9: Elevation, nos. 148-50 Curtain Road, 1905
(Hackney Archives, drainage plans 5012)

□

² The numbering on these 1905 drawings is confusing, with no. 146 appearing as no. 148



Figure 10: Later entrance in bay 7



Figure 11: Bay 7 (light well)

3.2 *Side and rear elevations*



Figure 12: Rear elevation, from Elizabeth Place

As befits the nature of the building, the side and rear elevations are much more utilitarian in character (figure 12). They are faced in solid stock brick, with cambered brick arches to the window openings (some replaced with concrete lintels). Some traces of painted twentieth century advertising are still visible. Three storey workshops are arranged around a narrow yard to the rear of nos. 134-144 (partly visible to the right in figure 12), connected to a two-storey range with a timber roof structure and rooflights. No 146 extends into an early twentieth century range with a pair of ridge lights, and then a longer lower range with a parallel pair of ridge lights.

3.3 Interior



Figures 13 and 14: Fourth floor interiors

The interior retains much of its original fabric, often obscured by more recent partitions and suspended ceilings. The original construction was designed to be fireproof, and consists of concrete floors with wooden boarded finishes supported on rows of cast iron columns. There are two staircases, one at the rear of no. 134, of stone and with a central lift, and another in no. 146, also stone, adjacent to the blocked lightwell. There are pairs of sliding iron fire doors on every floor. The interiors are lit primarily from the large windows on the Curtain Road frontage. The building retains its original timber roof structure, open to the fourth storey (figures 13 and 14), hipped at the ends, with three ranges of queen post trusses running parallel with the street at nos 132-144 and a similar roof running at right angles to the street over no. 146. The roof contains original openings for rooflights, but the rooflights themselves are modern in date. The hipped roof within the two storey range at the back also retains its original timber roof structure.

4.0 SIGNIFICANCE

The assessment of the significance of buildings is based on detailed knowledge of the building type, a comparison with what exists elsewhere, and the extent to which it may be distinctive or have special meaning for different groups of people. In this case assessment is made easier by the very detailed studies of the area which have been carried out by English Heritage.

Significance is essentially a hierarchical concept, using descending levels of value. These follow guidelines established by James Semple Kerr, which have been adopted by the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage and others. The levels of significance are:

- *Exceptional* - important at national to international levels
- *Considerable* - important at regional level or sometimes higher
- *Some* - usually of local value only but possibly of regional significance for group or other value
- *Little* - of limited heritage or other value
- *Neutral* - features which neither enhance nor detract from the value of the site
- *Negative/intrusive* - features which detract from the value of the site

The NPPF (Annex 2: Glossary) suggests that for planning purposes, the significance of historic buildings should be assessed under the headings of *archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic*, and points out that significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence but also from its setting.

4.1 *Archaeological significance*

The medieval settlement of Shoreditch was centred to the south, around the site of the Augustinian Holywell Priory. Proximity to the City of London meant that a lot of the less favoured, dirty trades, such as tanning, were established here. The 1730s rebuilding of St Leonard's parish church in the High Street hastened development of Shoreditch as a Georgian suburb. Much of the present street layout, including that of Curtain Road, belongs to this period, but the building fabric of the area is overwhelmingly nineteenth and twentieth century in date.

In 2001, archaeological evaluation of an adjoining site (152-154 Curtain Road) by the Museum of London Archaeology Service recorded post-medieval activity only.³ The deep footings and basement associated with the construction of 134-146 Curtain Road (see figures 7 and 9) suggest that any medieval or later below-ground archaeological deposits would have been destroyed at that time. The site is therefore considered to be of *little* below-ground archaeological significance.

□

³ EH National Monuments Record 1357379

4.2 Architectural significance

Curtain House is one of the largest and, in the words of the list entry ‘most architectural’ of the furniture-warehouses built for the furniture trade in Shoreditch during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Its façade displays many of the characteristics of this building type – a vertical emphasis and bay rhythm provided by brick piers, and large areas of glazing lighting the warehouse and showroom areas. The building uses the latest methods of fireproof construction, including cast iron columns, concrete floors and iron fire doors. As well as its ‘impressive façade’, the list entry refers to the ‘well surviving robust interior’; much of this is overlaid or concealed by modern partitions and suspended ceilings, which detract from the spaces but are essentially non-destructive and reversible in nature.

The architects, R. Creese Harrison & Son, are not a major nineteenth century practice either locally or nationally. English Heritage’s 2004 report on South Shoreditch states (p.49) that they are associated with just one building in the area, although they did in fact also design the adjoining buildings (figure 9).

Curtain House is located in the Central Shoreditch Character Zone, identified in the council’s Conservation Area Appraisal as ‘the heart of the South Shoreditch Conservation Area. It contain the largest number and some of the most significant groups of buildings belonging to the nineteenth and twentieth century furniture and printing trades [...] The dense concentration of historic brick showrooms-warehouses-workshops...make a particularly important contribution to the character of the zone’ (Conservation Area Appraisal, 5.2.1). The view north up the wide thoroughfare of Curtain Road towards Old Street is one of the most significant views in the conservation area, for its characteristic streetscape (CAA 4.6.3). Curtain House is a powerful presence in this view (figure 15), but is not amongst those listed buildings identified as of particular note for their contribution to the character of the Central Shoreditch Character Zone (CAA 5.2.4).

For its inherent design qualities and for its position in and contribution to the local townscape, Curtain House is considered to be of *considerable* architectural significance. However, the list entry makes it clear that not all parts of the building are of equal significance, and in order to inform the development of proposals, the following hierarchy has been adopted:

Exceptional/considerable significance: The original design of the front elevation to Curtain Road and original internal structural elements (floors, columns, staircases, fire doors, roof trusses); the two storey range to the rear (including roof structure);

Some/little significance: The original flank and rear elevations (NB these are however of high visibility in townscape terms);

Neutral/negative significance: The low range to rear of no. 146; the light well in bay 7; all later twentieth century interventions (partitions, suspended ceilings, replacement rooflights, office and ground floor fitting out); the three-storey workshops to the rear of nos. 134-144 (in separate ownership and not included in the listing).

4.3 *Artistic significance*

There are no known artistic associations; Curtain House is considered to be of *little* artistic significance.

4.4 *Historical significance*

The list entry states that Curtain House has ‘special historic interest as one of the best surviving and well known of the showroom-warehouses within the well understood and highly significant context of South Shoreditch, the industrial quarter that from the mid-C19 to mid-C20 manufactured, sold and supplied furniture of all types and quality to retailers in the West End, provincial cities and throughout the British Empire’.

For these reasons, Curtain House is considered to be of *considerable* historical significance.

5.0 CURRENT PROPOSALS

Proposed alterations and extensions to Curtain House and a schedule of works are set out in the drawings prepared by BWCP, the Design and Access Statement and other parts of the planning submission. Briefly, they involve additions to the rear and the roof of the building, and associated internal alterations, mainly associated with the provision of access to the new accommodation.



Figure 15-16: Curtain Street, looking north



6.0 RELEVANT POLICY

6.1 *The National Planning Policy Framework*

The NPPF (paragraph 126) enjoins local authorities to ‘recognise that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and conserve them in a manner appropriate to their significance. In developing this strategy, local planning authorities should take into account:

- the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that conservation of the historic environment can bring;
- the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness; and
- opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place’.

Paragraphs 132-4 state: ‘When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of a grade II listed building, park or garden should be exceptional. Substantial harm to or loss of designated heritage assets of the highest significance, notably scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, battlefields, grade I and II* listed buildings, grade I and II* registered parks and gardens, and World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional. [...] Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use’.

6.2 *Local policy*

The most detailed relevant local policy is that contained in the *South Shoreditch Supplementary Planning Document (SSSPD)*, 2006. This was prepared after the major study of the area carried out by English Heritage in conjunction with Hackney Council, and placed the heritage value of South Shoreditch at its heart.

The SSSPD divides South Shoreditch into distinct districts; Curtain House lies within the Shoreditch Triangle, described at 5.11.5 as the ‘heart’ of Shoreditch, its street pattern and range of cultural uses and many historic buildings creating ‘a distinct inner-city bohemian experience’.

The Shoreditch Triangle is described at 5.5.2 as the focus of the area. However, key landmark buildings such as Shoreditch Town Hall and Shoreditch church are few in number and are on the periphery of the site. Key views of orientation include those to north and south along Curtain Road.

At 5.8.1 the SSSPD describes the unique character of South Shoreditch. Amongst the critical heritage issues identified in the English Heritage survey were:

- The absence of historic ‘landmark’ buildings in the study area
- ‘The special interest of historic industrial buildings (listed and not) does not consist in their facades generally, which can be simple, even utilitarian. Rather their interest derives from the consistency of form and expression between interiors and exteriors...’
- ‘The older properties do not have a consistent palette of materials or detailing. This adds variety but poses a challenge to new development seeking to respond to a context’.

The most relevant policies set out in the SSSPD are:

- **SSSPD 3.4: Development.** Development proposals within the SPD area should (*inter alia*) be ‘of the highest architectural quality, and by their design and relationship to setting create or contribute to a sense of place (including contemporary design where appropriate)’. They should relate appropriately to the surrounding townscape and any buildings of note; have regard to the scale and character of adjacent streets; have regard to local views, prevailing heights and cornice lines; preserve the historic street layout and be acceptable in land use terms.
- **SSSPD 3.7: Alterations and extensions to buildings of intrinsic merit.** The council will normally only grant permission for schemes that reinstate lost or missing features of historic or architectural interest on such buildings; will discourage schemes which involve the loss of such features or the introduction of glazing to upper floors that is not consistent with the character of the building. Extensions are acceptable provided they are of the highest possible quality and have regard for the architectural form, scale, massing, height and materials of the principal building, and any surrounding buildings of merit.
- **SSSPD 3.8: Roof extensions and structures on roofs.** In general, the council will discourage a roof extension if it is considered to harm the architectural integrity, proportions or uniformity of a building or significant group of buildings; harm a significant or sensitive view; reduce the visual interest generated by a varied skyline, or where the building has features that were designed to be silhouetted against the sky; or result in the loss of historic roof forms. Extensions and additions may be considered acceptable where the scale of the proposed addition is appropriate to the scale of the existing property, or is unobtrusive; the

proposed addition is of a high standard or contemporary design where appropriate; and steps have been taken to prevent the build-up of visual clutter apparent from the street at high level.

- **SSSPD 12.2: Design guidance in the Shoreditch Triangle.** This contains no specific recommendations for Curtain House or its immediate environs, but states that ‘sites with potential for prominent new development should be of high architectural quality and follow principles of good urban design, well integrated with surrounding urban form and pedestrian movements’.

7.0 ASSESSMENT

Curtain House is considered to be of little below-ground archaeological significance, and the current proposals do not propose any ground disturbance. An assessment of impact on archaeological significance is not therefore required as part of this appraisal. Equally, the building is considered to be of little artistic significance, and so this assessment does not dwell on that aspect either. The listed building is however of considerable architectural and historic significance, and the impact of the proposed scheme needs to be considered in the light of these high rankings of significance.

The scheme can be divided into three distinct elements: rear additions, internal alterations and rooftop addition. The impact of each of these on the significance of Curtain House and its setting is discussed in turn.

7.1 *Rear additions*

The additions proposed at the rear of the property affect parts of the building identified in the list entry as of 'lesser interest'. The design of the proposed additions is in brick to complement the original construction, with window openings of similar proportion to the original openings. The flat roofs will be hidden by parapets, and a build up of visible rooftop clutter will be avoided. The additions are unobtrusive and have regard to the architectural form, scale, massing, height and materials of Curtain House; they will not harm the architectural integrity, proportions or uniformity of the listed building. They will not harm a significant or sensitive view, reduce the impact of a varied skyline, or result in the loss of historic roof forms. It is therefore considered that subject to the satisfactory resolution of detail, the proposed rear additions would not harm the significance of the heritage asset and comply with relevant local and national policies.

7.2 *Internal alterations*

Proposed internal alterations involve the provision of a stairwell and lift within the disused lightwell in bay 7. This is an area identified as of neutral/negative significance, and no loss of historic fabric or character is involved.

The fourth floor, an area of considerable significance, will remain in commercial use. Proposals involve the creation of mezzanines, non-destructive and reversible interventions which will (unlike some of the partitioning in the floors below, which are stated in the list entry not to detract from the character of the building) exploit these fine spaces to advantage. Again, no loss of historic fabric is proposed, and the proposed internal alterations comply with relevant local and national policies.

7.3 *Rooftop addition*

This might be deemed the most contentious element of the proposals. However, it is considered that such an addition would not result in harm to the significance of the heritage asset, and might result in an enhancement of its setting.

As the English Heritage report quoted above states, referring to the architecture of South Shoreditch, ‘the special interest of historic industrial buildings (listed and not) does not consist in their facades generally, which can be simple, even utilitarian. Rather their interest derives from the consistency of form and expression between interiors and exteriors...’. The addition will be placed over the existing roof, and will be structurally supported independently of the roof. No loss of historic roof forms is proposed, or of significant historic fabric generally. Whatever the arguments in townscape terms, the proposed addition would not have a serious impact on the special interest of the historic building as identified by English Heritage; the consistency of form and expression between interiors and exteriors will be preserved, and wherever possible opportunities taken better to reveal it.

It is not so much in the impact on historic fabric that the proposed addition might be deemed to be contentious, than in its likely external visual impact. Curtain House is already one of the larger historic buildings in the conservation area, and an earlier proposal to build a rooftop addition was rejected by the council at pre-application stage as detracting from the listed building and being out of scale with the conservation area. That proposal involved the addition of two rooftop storeys rather than the single storey now proposed. Furthermore, the proposed design is much more reticent (albeit innovative in many respects and of high architectural quality) than some of the more outré schemes previously placed before the council.

Even setting aside those two important considerations, the argument that Curtain House is already taller than its immediate neighbours and therefore not suitable for extension can be turned on its head. It is precisely *because* it is the largest building in the immediate locality that such an addition would be appropriate. The building is in the heart of Shoreditch, an area identified in the SSSPD as lacking in key landmark buildings. A rooftop addition in this key location would allow Curtain House to become just such a landmark; its glowing glass roof addition almost literally a beacon or lighthouse, drawing people to the heart of the conservation area. As the long, horizontal glass rooftop addition at Tate Modern has shown, such successful marriages of old and new can add to the richness and diversity of historic places, even in locations of the highest sensitivity.

Curtain House is of a robustness of construction and design that could accommodate an addition of this nature, both physically and visually. The proposed roof addition is modest in size relative to the scale of building. It would be set well back from the cornice line, and although visible in the longer views (a

positive rather than a negative attribute), it would not be obtrusive. The addition is of a high standard of contemporary design, complementing but not seeking to imitate the historic building. The existing building does not possess a varied skyline whose visual interest would be compromised, or features designed to be silhouetted against the sky that would be lost; on the contrary, the addition would add visual interest to the skyline. Steps have been taken to prevent the build up of visual clutter apparent from street level. The addition would not harm the architectural integrity, proportions or uniformity of Curtain House, and would add interest to rather than harm the most significant views along Curtain Road. In all these respects the scheme complies with SSSPD policy 3.8.

8.0 CONCLUSION

The proposal has been carefully considered, taking account of pre-application advice from Hackney Council, and informed from the outset by an understanding of the significance of the heritage asset and its setting.

The proposed rear additions affect parts of the building identified as of lesser interest than the rest of the building. They are unobtrusive in character and their design complements the original form and construction of Curtain House. Subject to the satisfactory resolution of detail, the proposed rear additions would not harm the significance of the heritage asset. This part of the scheme therefore complies with NPPF and council policy (in particular SSSPD 3.4, 3.7 and 3.8).

The proposed internal alterations are relatively minor in nature and do not involve the loss of any significant historic fabric. The proposed mezzanines are non-destructive and reversible interventions which will exploit the fine and robust spaces of the fourth floor to advantage. Subject to satisfactory resolution of detail, the proposed internal alterations would not result in any harm to the significance of the heritage asset, and therefore comply with NPPF and council policy.

The proposed roof addition would not harm the significance of the heritage asset. It will be placed over the existing roof, and will be structurally supported independently of the roof; no loss of historic fabric is proposed. The building is in the heart of Shoreditch, an area identified as lacking in key landmark buildings. A rooftop addition in this location would allow Curtain House to become just such a landmark. The proposed addition is modest in size relative to the scale of the listed building, and would be set well back. Although visible in the longer views (a positive rather than a negative attribute), it would not be obtrusive. The addition is of a high standard of contemporary design, and would add visual interest to the skyline. In all these respects the scheme complies with NPPF paragraphs 132-4 and council policy SSSPD 3.8.

* * * * *

Sources

- English Heritage, *An Industrial Suburb: The Commercial Buildings of South Shoreditch, 1850-1980*, Architectural Investigation Reports and Papers, B/018/2004
- Hackney Council, *South Shoreditch Supplementary Planning Document*, 2006
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Appendix 1: List entry and map

List entry Number: 1391632

Location: 134-146, CURTAIN ROAD

Grade: II

Date first listed: 28-Apr-2006

UID: 494342

134-146 CURTAIN ROAD Shoreditch

II

Showroom-warehouse, now workshops, offices and bar/restaurant. 134-144 built 1881-2 to designs of C. Creese Harrison for the wholesale furniture manufacturers C & R Light; 146 rebuilt in 1887, also for Light. The contractor was Lawrance & Son.

MATERIALS: Yellow stock brick with painted stone and concrete dressings. Metal-framed windows with cast-iron colonnette mullions. Internally, cast iron columns, timber roof structure and concrete floors.

EXTERIOR: To Curtain Road, 8 bays of varying width divided by giant rusticated brick pilasters beneath a modillion cornice. The glazing between the piers varies between 1 and 3 lights, with metal-framed windows and slender iron colonnettes to the larger openings. The windows have moulded stone lintels to the 1st and 2nd floors and segmental brick heads to the upper levels. Brick panels beneath the windows are detailed with decorative terracotta bands that differ on each floor. The ground floor has brick piers and shop windows with stone plinths. These originally had openings for the basements which have subsequently been filled in. There is an entrance in the centre of 134-146 with an arched pediment, a wider entrance in the end of 134, this under rusticated voussoirs with a later door, and a loading entrance into 146 with later rendering. The clock was installed in the early-C21.

The rear of the main block has slightly cambered brick arches over the windows, a few to the rear of 134 replaced with concrete lintels; traces of C20 painted advertising. To rear of 134-144, 3-storey workshops ranged around a narrow yard, which are not included in the listing; and a connected two-storey range with timber roof structure and roof lights that is. 146 extends into an early-C20 range with a pair of ridge lights, and then a longer lower range with a parallel pair of ridge lights, these ranges of lesser interest.

INTERIOR: The interior of the building maintains much of its original character, and the robust construction of cast-iron columns with splayed flanges and concrete floors, has enabled a variety of uses to continue without affecting the building. There are a number of late-C20 stud partitions, but these do not detract. The upper floors retain their original timber roof structure with several

bays of queen post trusses running front to rear, and with modern roof lights in original openings; the narrow bay that is 146 has similar trusses running the opposite direction. The original large windows with part opening hoppers survive. There are two staircases, one stone and with a central lift, in the rear of 134, and another stone stair within 146, this adjacent to the now blocked lightwell behind the façade of 146, a curious arrangement that survives but is now blocked for access. There are pairs of sliding iron fire-doors on every floor. The interior of the bar/restaurant at 134-144 was modernised in the early-C21, but the original structure remains apparent.

HISTORY For almost a century, from the mid-C19 to the mid-C20, South Shoreditch was the hub of the international furniture trade. The area manufactured, sold and supplied furniture of all types and quality to retailers in the West End, provincial cities and throughout the British Empire. As a result, South Shoreditch has a consistent and unique combination of factories, warehouse and showrooms, a concentration of interrelated building types which creates a distinctive historic character.

C & R Light was one of the larger wholesale furniture makers in London in the late-C19 and early-C20. The Light family were present in Shoreditch from the mid-C18, working as successive generations of cabinet makers. Charles Light, father of the Charles & Richard (the founders of the firm), was present at 144 Curtain Road (then numbered 135) by the 1850s. In 1863 the rear workshops were destroyed by fire but the front showrooms and warehouse escaped damage due to the presence of iron fire doors between the different sections. By 1874 he occupied 140-144, applying to rebuild 140 as a five-storey warehouse that same year (as well as rear warehouses known as Le Blonds Buildings). In 1877 the sons inherited the premises and continued to expand, taking over 134-138 by 1880. Between 1881 and 1882 they rebuilt 134-144 as a single block, redeveloping 146 in 1887 in the same style. The result was 'an enormous place, which is crammed from one end to the other with furniture' filled with 'an almost endless variety of goods for hall, office, library, dining-room, drawing-room and bedroom, in the styles and treatments now in vogue' (Cabinet Maker, September 1894, 78).

Furniture ensembles were grouped together in separate 'rooms' which ran along the front of the building and there was a separate bent wood department. A fitting up shop enabled orders to be finished and despatched as quickly as possible. Some indication of the sheer range of furniture supplied by Light's is given by the catalogue of 1880, which was 435 pages in length and listed over 1,908 items. This colossal document was printed by the local firm, Waterlow and Sons Ltd.

In 1892 the firm became a limited company, by which time they occupied several of the North London Railway arches nearby and had a separate timber department on Rivington Street. Five years later C. & R. Light set up a bedroom furniture factory in 82 Great Eastern Street and took on additional manufacturing premises in Rivington Street as their production of machine-made

furniture increased. The showrooms on Curtain Road were redecorated in 1900 and special attention given to expanding the 'modern antique furniture' department. Inevitably the company had to look beyond Shoreditch for further space to expand, opting to build a new works in Bedfordshire. But the scale of expenditure created financial difficulties and in 1911 the firm was voluntarily wound up and by the time of its reconstitution in 1918 as C. & R. Light (1918) Ltd the family's connection with the business had ceased. Around this time the Curtain Road premises were vacated and the firm moved first to 288 Old Street, then 54 Great Eastern Street and, in the 1930s, 43 Charlotte Road. 134-146 Curtain Road passed into multiple occupancy, largely used by clothing trade firms but also printers and upholsterers. The faded lettering on the side and to the rear of the building are reminders of this subsequent use. In the late-C20 part of the building was used as a music hall.

SUMMARY OF IMPORTANCE This 1877 (*sic*) showroom-warehouse for the leading furniture firm C. & R. Light has special interest as one of the most architectural of the area's furniture trade buildings, indicative of its late-Victorian manufacturing prowess with its impressive façade and well surviving robust interior; it also has special historic interest as one of the best surviving and well known of the showroom-warehouses within the well understood and highly significant context of South Shoreditch, the industrial quarter that from the mid-C19 to mid-C20 manufactured, sold and supplied furniture of all types and quality to retailers in the West End, provincial cities and throughout the British Empire.

SOURCES: Smith, Joanna 'An Industrial Suburb': The Commercial Buildings of South Shoreditch 1850-1980 (Unpublished English Heritage Architectural Investigation, 2004) *The Builder*, 9 July 1881, 64. *Cabinet Maker*, 7 July 1877, 2; September 1892, 83; September 1894, 78; October 1901, 93; May 1902, 298; 10 June, 1911, 302; 17 June 1911; 331. John Light, 'C & R Light Ltd, Cabinet Makers of Shoreditch', *East London Record*, 10, 1987, 2-7. *The Times*, 28 May 1863.

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