

Bermondsey Street Conservation Area The Character and Appearance of the Area

Bermondsey Street (south)

- 3.2.8. Between Leathermarket Street and Lamb Walk the buildings provide a very consistent street frontage in a group centred on listed buildings at nos. 124-132 (dated 1828). Originally houses, they have a three-storey cornice line and simple shop fronts linked by a common fascia line. The windows of the upper floors create a simple unifying rhythm. Other buildings in the block have been extended to a mansard storey set slightly back but retain the dominant line of the cornice. New residential development at 134 to 140 continues the line of the shop fronts as a stuccoed ground floor elevation.



Figure 21 124-132 Bermondsey Street: early 19th century houses converted to shops and now listed. The picture shows the importance of the original cornice line and the impact of modest roof extensions on neighbouring buildings.

- 3.2.9. South of Lamb Walk, the yard to a large modern warehouse interrupts the continuity of the western street façade. It is re-established by the frontage of early 20th century concrete buildings at 156-170, but the character of the buildings at street level is harsh, with lower ground floor windows on the level of the pavement necessarily protected by mesh screens, and upper floor windows well above head height. The original surface was badly stained, but the northern half of the buildings have been painted brightly, which lifts its heavy appearance and brings a little more vitality to the street scene.



Figure 22 Looking south to St. Mary Magdalene, showing concrete buildings at 156-170 Bermondsey Street, with repaired and painted façades.

- 3.2.10. The scale of these buildings is emphasised by the narrowness of the street at this point, and their proximity to a range of 19th century warehouse buildings on the opposite side. The latter include a renovated pair at 139-153 with distinctive central loading bays rising above three main storeys to serve an attic storey behind the roof parapet, and the early 19th century

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four storey former cloth factory at No. 173 on the corner of Newham's Row. The street here has a canyon-like quality that derives from a tight height to width ratio of 2:1, and it retains a strongly industrial character. Buildings on the western side are much altered by plastering and window modifications but remain in warehouse use with doorways and high windowsills dominating at street level.



Figure 23 *Industrial character of southern Bermondsey Street; but under pressure for redevelopment (see 0 below). The corner building at No. 173 is prominent in the centre of the picture.*

3.2.11. The focus of the southern end of Bermondsey Street is the Church of St. Mary Magdalene because of its location on the outside of the bend in Bermondsey Street. As important is the prominence of its belfry above the rooflines of adjacent warehouses, such that it is often sunlit when shadows are cast in the narrow street. The church itself is unusual in its painted stucco and Gothick detail, after remodelling by George Porter in 1830; its Grade II* listing describes it as “playful”, and Pevsner as “gimcrack but charming, wholly unscholarly”. Its architectural importance is for Charles Stanton’s interiors (1675-9) modelled on Wren’s St. Martin’s, Ludgate, and the building is by any description a surprising contrast to the character of the warehouses around it with their simple, regular brick designs. It is also part of the wider context of connected buildings, including the rectory and 191 Bermondsey Street and the churchyard enclosure with railings and stuccoed masonry, which includes the early 19th century watch-house on the corner of Abbey Street.



Figure 24 *(left) St. Mary Magdalene: an eccentric façade is in contrast to the style and scale of Bermondsey Street’s warehouses and belies an important 17th century interior.*

Figure 25 *(right) Bermondsey Street from Abbey Street, with the corner block on Long Lane and the watch-house at the corner of the churchyard.*

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- 3.2.12. The buildings in the vicinity of the church, between Newham's Row and Long Lane, are of very varied architectural character. They include a two storey corner building (formerly a pub) at 177, three and four-storey commercial buildings and a cheerful Arts and Crafts style building at 187-189 built in 1908 for the charitable Time and Talents Association as a hostel for young working girls and women. The three-storey building group on the western side between 253-5 Long Lane and 210 Bermondsey Street marks the street corner and is particularly important because of its visibility from the New Caledonian Market in Bermondsey Square and from St. Mary Magdalene's churchyard. Elevationally, the buildings appear as simple 19th century houses, those in Bermondsey Street with added shopfronts, but no. 210 in particular is probably much older, with evidence of 17th century structure internally, and a double M-profile roof. No. 212 has a raised mansard roof, and these varied rooflines are important to retain especially where they are so visible.



Figure 26 (left) New development at 194 to 204 Bermondsey Street dominates its historic neighbours at 210-214, despite a stepped front elevation.

Figure 27 (right) Some industrial buildings in yards behind Bermondsey Street are large scale (Newham's Row).

- 3.2.13. Southern Bermondsey Street is experiencing significant pressure for renovation and redevelopment. This is most noticeable at the edge of the Conservation Area in sites and yards behind the main building frontages, e.g. in Newham's Row and behind 156 to 170 Bermondsey Street. Some existing industrial buildings in these locations are large (see Figure 27), but it is important that these are not taken as precedence for over-development for other uses. Many parts of the main street frontage are only three storeys, and in this context, examples such as the new block at 194-204 Bermondsey Street whose flank elevation dominates the buildings around it.

Long Lane

- 3.2.14. In Long Lane, the Conservation Area includes buildings on the north side only. The most prominent is at No. 239, built around 1900 as a fur processing works. At 5½ storeys and 42 metres in length its highly fenestrated and ordered façade dominates the street, counterbalanced by the open space of the playground opposite (site of the 18th/19th century Quaker Burial Ground, but outside the Conservation Area). The mature trees lining the southern side of the street are important to the setting of the buildings and enhance their appearance overall. The

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"Simon The Tanner" pub at 231 Long Lane is the last building in the Conservation Area, separated by a gap site from 239.



Figure 28 Long Lane: No. 239, the imposing façade of this former fur processing works is very influential on the urban quality of the street.

Views and Townscape

- 3.2.15. Because the Conservation Area is based primarily on streets, views tend to be well-contained vistas rather than broad prospects. Nevertheless, there are some key visual links to high buildings and landmarks outside the Conservation Area. Views from Bermondsey Street above the viaduct to tall blocks in the city are a reminder of the wider context of the Conservation Area and its distinctive village scale within the inner city.
- 3.2.16. Bermondsey Street averages only 10 metres or so in width compared to heights of 3, 4 and 5 storeys. This very strong vertical proportion creates a very distinctive townscape characterised by tight enclosure and glimpsed vistas into adjoining streets and yards, and it is reinforced by continuity of building frontages. The consequent contrast between the busy and very public qualities of Bermondsey Street and the relatively quiet privacy of areas behind the main frontages is a key characteristic of the Conservation Area. This pattern of development allows high urban densities, but it is essential that the scale and quality of these secondary spaces is not lost through excessive development. Most of Bermondsey Street is contained in this way, with the belfry of St. Mary Magdalene Church closing the view to the south. The arched rampart of the London Bridge Station viaduct provides a powerful northern boundary with just a glimpse through to Tooley Street at the end of a long brick tunnel under the railway.
- 3.2.17. The centre of Bermondsey Street is characterised by street junctions on both sides between Tyers Gate and Lamb Walk. These provide the townscape with a higher degree of linkage into adjacent areas than at other points in the street, and they afford valuable glimpses to the green edges of Leathermarket Gardens and Tanner Street recreation ground. Buildings on the street corners create a strong development form and these locations provide important reference points in the street pattern;

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corner buildings to Tyers Gate, at 2 and 86 Bermondsey Street, and at 99 and 109 Bermondsey Street are particularly visible.

- 3.2.18. The low steeple of St. Mary Magdalene Church is one of the most important landmarks in the Conservation Area, situated in a key position on the only bend in Bermondsey Street and visible between building frontages along most of the length of the street. Past the Church, the narrow street opens out again as far as the corner with Long Lane, and the churchyard provides a green counterbalance to the simple, strong building line on the western side. Looking back into Bermondsey Street, the church again has importance, positioned at the focus of views on the outside curve of the street. It is also important as a landmark in a number of viewpoints from Tower Bridge Road and the south-east across the churchyard and Bermondsey Square. It is important that the relatively low scale of development in the vicinity of the church, discussed at 0 above, is observed to preserve the setting and views of the church.



Figure 29 Views to St. Mary Magdalene are of great importance in the Conservation Area: any higher development in the vicinity of the church would compromise the skyline view of the steeple.

Key spaces

- 3.2.19. Bermondsey Street is a vibrant public space in its own right and the strong mix of street activity that its buildings generate, particularly in the central section, is a key part of its character. At the junction of Tanner Street and Leathermarket Street, vehicular and pedestrian movement across and along the street creates an important node of activity and the tight urban scale slows traffic speed to acceptable levels. Shops, cafés and galleries attract customers and provide a stimulating backdrop to the scene.
- 3.2.20. The street pattern creates some secondary spaces, such as that in Morocco Street, headed by the Morocco Stores on the angle with Leathermarket Street. Although functionally no more than a street junction, its configuration gives it the character of an intimate and contained space off Bermondsey Street.
- 3.2.21. At the centre of Bermondsey Street there is now a significant small space where corner buildings to Tanner Street have been lost and converted to a landscaped sitting area. In the narrow street it provides a significant contrast of spatial quality, and gives an open outlook to shops on the western side. It is contained by the gable ends of 1 Tanner Street and 109 Bermondsey Street. A large horse-chestnut tree approximately on the original building line provides visual focus and ensures that the linear character of the street is partially maintained. The space is at the middle

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of the Conservation Area and is an amenity that could be developed as more of a focus for people living and working in the area.



Figure 30 Junction of Bermondsey Street and Tanner Street: a small pocket of green that provides a useful sitting area for people living and working nearby.

Landscape elements

- 3.2.22. In the dense urban character of the area, St. Mary Magdalene Church Yard is an extremely important recreation space as well as a feature of historic importance. It occupies the corner of a very busy traffic junction but it is enclosed by railings and planting, which give it some detachment from its surroundings. It is well used, with the character of a municipal park rather than a quiet churchyard. Its aspect southwards is fairly open, with views beyond the railings to the busy space of Bermondsey Square. It does not have a strong relationship to surrounding developments, so that the mature trees and architectural elements within it (e.g. the Bourne-Bevington fountain) are important to give it containment, proportion and focus.

Negative features

- 3.2.23. A works yard south of Lamb Walk creates a serious gap in the street frontage. Its dark brick yard wall is visually intrusive and a wide vehicle access exposes a large concrete yard and a modern warehouse behind.



Figure 31 Intrusive warehouse development, Bermondsey Street: the yard breaks the continuity of the street frontage, the boundary walls remove vitality and interactiveness from the scene, and the building itself is not part of the street.

- 3.2.24. In other locations gaps have occurred within the street scene and are steadily being redeveloped. The gap between 147 and 163 Bermondsey Street is an example, which now gives access to a redevelopment area behind the street. A remaining example is a car park north of 139 Bermondsey Street.

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- 3.2.25. There is a group of poor quality single-storey buildings between 247 and 253 Long Lane. The site links to a gap between 204 and 210 Bermondsey Street. The frontage of the site onto Long Lane includes 19th century houses at 241-245 which, although in poor condition, retain original features internally.



Figure 32 Long Lane: the corner buildings are important in the townscape (see 0 above) but there are gaps between them and three houses at nos. 241-245.

- 3.2.26. In St. Mary Magdalene Church Yard, neglected maintenance areas and close boarded fencing behind the rectory detract from the quality of the setting.

3.3. Sub area 2 – Grange Walk

Bermondsey Square

- 3.3.1. The characteristics of Bermondsey Square are its openness and the fragmented nature of its street surfaces. Of the original urban form, only the south west corner of the square remains, at nos. 2-5. These four early 19th century houses indicate how the corner of the square was neatly turned, carrying through the simple detail and proportion of the brick façade. The group retains iron railings to the front areas, which are important in illustrating the street character of the original square before it was lost by the construction of Tower Bridge Road and later 20th century damage and redevelopment. The small oval garden at roughly the centre of the original square is a token of its former urban character, and the enclosing railings and neatly clipped privet hedge are part of this earlier setting.



Figure 33 South side of Bermondsey Square: the houses are all that remain of the original square, and the warehouse was added to finish the block neatly when Tower Bridge Road was broken through.

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- 3.3.2. An uncluttered three-storey skyline is provided by the continuous and intact plastered entablature of nos. 2-5. Houses on the western side of the square have been rebuilt to a similar height but with an additional mansard storey above the roof parapet. This disrupts rather than continues the scale of the listed buildings and the newer buildings lack their quality of detail. The later 19th century warehouse building at No. 1 forms a strong corner on Tower Bridge Road that relates visually to the corner building at 116 Tower Bridge Road on the corner of Grange Walk.

Grange Walk

- 3.3.3. Grange Walk is a narrow, historic street, whose character is created primarily by the buildings on its south side. Elements of the listed building group at nos. 5 to 11 date back to original abbey structures; this was the site of the mediaeval gateway. The whole group dates from the mid-17th century. The building forms reflect these origins, with varied elevational proportions and window patterns, gables facing the street and rendered painted façades. The buildings stand well forward in the street, narrowing it to only eight metres or so, and creating a pinch point that separates Grange Walk from the noise and traffic of Tower Bridge Road.



Figure 34 17th century houses on the site of the abbey gateway: their gabled forms are on contrast to the more formal elevations of later development.

- 3.3.4. The remainder of the street within the Conservation Area is characterised by neat and regular 19th century brick terraces, with key buildings marking street corners at the ends. The former Bermondsey United Charity School for Girls stands on the corner of Griggs Place, framing the western end of the terrace. At the eastern end Grange Walk Mews, also a former school, has a similar role. In between, the terrace at nos. 16 to 30 is well preserved with few inappropriate changes and almost all of its original simple brick detailing. The continuous lines of the second-storey roof parapet and, at ground level, of boundary fences and walls to short front gardens create an uninterrupted containment of the street space.

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Figure 35 (left) Grange Walk Mews, converted from a former school, and

Figure 36 (right) the former Bermondsey United Charity School for Girls

- 3.3.5. The angle in the street at the crossroads with Fendall Street gives particular importance to the final terrace of houses in the Conservation Area at nos. 34-40, which close views along the walk eastwards. They too are well preserved in character and detail and the semicircular heads to ground floor window and door openings are their distinctive features. Some moulding has been lost to the parapet at the western end of the terrace, but again its uninterrupted continuity and consistency make an essential contribution to street character.

Townscape and views

- 3.3.6. The view from Grange Walk into the remaining original corner of Bermondsey Square links these two distinct townscape areas visually. The narrowing of the western end of Grange Walk reflects its historic origins as the Abbey gateway, and preserves the contrast between the quiet residential character of Grange Walk and the noisy traffic dominated environment of Tower Bridge Road.
- 3.3.7. In Bermondsey Square, the buildings provide a visual and historic reference point, but the confusion of parking areas, fences, hoardings and market storage undermine the identity of the space. The remaining oval garden in the former centre of the square is also an important historic reference, but it appears isolated from its original context by the changes in the street scene that have occurred around it. In particular, Bermondsey Square lacks clear differentiation from Tower Bridge Road and the traffic intrusion associated with it.
- 3.3.8. The openness of the space in the present day nevertheless allows views from Tower Bridge Road to the landmark of St. Mary Magdalene's Church. The eastern side of the square is formed by the southern end of Bermondsey Street, and this affords an excellent vista northwards along the street to the front of the church, positioned as the street bends to close the view. 255 Long Lane is prominent on the corner of Bermondsey Street, marking the north-west corner of the square. Southwards, there are views out of the Conservation Area to the Tower Bridge Road primary shopping area, establishing a link between it and the market.

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Figure 37 (left) Bermondsey Square looking south-west: the space is dominated by Tower Bridge Road, and

Figure 38 (right) looking north-west: although the result of demolition, there are now good visual links back to St. Mary Magdalene church.

Key spaces

- 3.3.9. Historically, Bermondsey Square is one of the most important spaces in the Conservation Area. It is now used for the New Caledonian Antiques Market on certain days, when it takes on a special character. When not in market use, the open areas of car parking, stall storage and hoardings are visually very detrimental. It also has a role as a landmark location on the major route north to the City across Tower Bridge. In this respect the poor qualities of the streetscape are a serious failing.
- 3.3.10. On the north side of Bermondsey Square, the corner of Long Lane and mature trees in St. Mary Magdalene's churchyard provide a backdrop to the space. Abbey Road, however, is a significant barrier between the churchyard and the square because of traffic, and there is no other interplay between the two spaces (see 0)

Negative elements

- 3.3.11. The setting and streetscape of Bermondsey Square have been badly degraded by the range of issues discussed above. The townscape problems of Bermondsey Square relate to its lack of containment, the poor quality of its surfaces and street features and the intrusion of elements related to the market and to traffic and highway engineering on Tower Bridge Road. A scheme of improvement might include new building to remedy the spatial issues, but it is also essential to accommodate the market, which provides such distinctive vitality and was originally established by Royal patronage. The loss of buildings has created the benefit of visual connections to Bermondsey Street and St. Mary Magdalene, which it would be desirable to retain.
- 3.3.12. In Grange Walk the car park at the corner of Fendall Street is in a prominent location that detracts from the setting of the terrace of houses at nos. 34-40.

3.4. Sub area 3 – Weston Street/Snowsfields

- 3.4.1. The western part of the Conservation Area is detached from Bermondsey Street by Leathermarket Gardens and the Tyers Estate. While the street pattern was broadly established by the 18th century, there was subsequently much redevelopment of small warehouses and housing and the key buildings in the area date from the later 19th century. Many of the secondary streets were redeveloped for housing. These are not generally