Case Name: BENGER HOUSE

Case Number: 465510

Background

English Heritage have been asked to assess Benger House for listing. The listing application was prompted by pre-application discussions with the local authority for re-development of the entire site which included demolition of Benger House.

Asset(s) under Assessment

Facts about the asset(s) can be found in the Annex(es) to this report.

Annex	List Entry Number	Name	Heritage Category	EH Recommendation
1	N/A	BENGER HOUSE	Listing	Do not add to List

Visits

Date	Visit Type
04 July 2011	Full inspection

Context

An application to assess Benger House for listing was received shortly before the North West Regional Office was consulted on a planning application involving partial demolition of the site. As an unlisted building, and not being situated in a Conservation Area, there had necessarily been no pre-application discussions with English Heritage. The case has accordingly been treated as urgent and the owner agreed to waive consultation in order to facilitate a quick response.

Planning approval was granted on 12 Aug 2011.

Assessment

CONSULTATION
Due to the current planning application consultation was not undertaken.

DISCUSSION
Principles of Selection for Listing Buildings (DCMS, March 2010) outlines the general principles applied in determining the special architectural and historic interest of a building. It states that “after 1840, because of the greatly increased number of buildings erected and the much larger numbers that have survived, progressively greater selection is necessary.”

Additionally English Heritage has published a series of Selection Guides (April, 2011) offering further guidance by building type. From the guides on Industrial Structures, and on Commerce and Exchange the following factors are particularly relevant in assessing Benger House for designation: architectural quality, the relationship between architecture and process, the survival of machinery and the level of alteration. Benger House does not retain the machinery associated with its industrial processes and the building is effectively a decorative housing for the processes rather than reflecting those processes in its form. Its architectural quality and the level of alteration are considered below.

Benger House is a late example of a type of factory introduced into this country during the 1920s and often referred to as “day-light factories” exemplified by Bryant & May’s Match Factory, Garston, Liverpool (1919-21) by Mewes & Davis (listed Grade II), and most famously by the by-pass factories designed by Wallis, Gilbert & Partners such as the Hoover Factory, Perivale, London of 1932-5 (listed Grade II*) with its Egyptian motifs. As such they represented an advance in the design of factories not merely from the layout of the factory as a means to improve production efficiency but also in order to create more pleasant workplaces. The twin influences on these inter-war factories were the application of the principles of Scientific Management (seen

most successfully in the factories designed by Albert Kahn for the Ford Motor Company in the United States) and the lessons of the Design Reform movement, most usually associated with the German alliance of art and industry known as the Deutsche Werkbund soon to be seen in the "New Architecture" associated with the Bauhaus. These properties, intended to also enhance the status of industry, were introduced into this country in 1915 with the creation of the Design and Industries Association.

Some of the most notable factories of this type, such as those by Wallis, Gilbert & Partners, were designed in the then fashionable Art Deco style (named after the Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris of 1925) and its break with European tradition through embodying abstract geometric patterns, highly colourful tile work, and often sumptuous interiors in a wide variety of decorative materials. By the time that Benger House was completed Art Deco was being challenged by the more severe and politically engaged International Style of the 1930s. Joan Skinner categorises the form of Benger House as one of the "Geometric-phase factories", that exhibit "a growing preference for manufacturing production to be housed in open-plan, single-storeyed buildings, suitably obscured from public view by a taller 'office block.' (p.223).

Whilst the long, low outline of Benger House, the extent of the glazing, and the general disposition of the massing all conform to this new type of factory the mixture of Art Deco massing and stripped classical detailing creates a diffidence that suggests the architects were not comfortable with the so-called "New architecture" and results in a somewhat stylistically timid and unresolved design when compared to the listed examples of this period. There is little suggestion of the "New architecture" in their previous work so Benger House may be considered exceptional in this regard and shows them to be working in a new direction. The unusual location in the small Cheshire village of Holmes Chapel may have modified any greater flamboyance in the design, as would the late date.

Internally the architectural interest is limited to the entrance and stair with its boldly sculptural treatment and glazed dome above. While the decoration of the first floor corridor and the board room are in keeping with the stair, they are very simply handled.

Although the front elevation is a competent exercise in late Art Deco it has seen the replacement of its windows and the site as a whole has undergone notable alterations and losses.

While Benger House does represent a particular type of factory of the inter-war period, its architectural interest is focused on the façade and the principal circulation spaces. When compared with similar buildings which are listed, such as Westlink House, Hounslow, London, and the Wills Tobacco factory, Newcastle (both Grade II), Benger House does not share the same level of architectural accomplishment. Given the need to be selective when assessing buildings of this date, Benger House, does not exhibit the high level of architectural interest or intactness which justify listing.

CONCLUSION

Benger House is a typical "daylight factory" of the 1930s designed in a restrained form of the Art Deco style. However it does not exhibit either sufficient special interest associated with the style, or retain sufficient interest as an example of this building type to recommend statutory listing though it is clearly of strong local interest.

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION DECISION

Benger House, a "daylight-factory" completed in 1939 to the designs of Andrews and Butterworth in a restrained Art Deco style, is not recommended for statutory designation for the following principal reasons:

* Age and rarity: Benger House was completed in 1939 and is a typical factory of this period and so is not particularly rare for its date.
* Aesthetic merits: Externally the office building is a restrained exercise in the Art Deco style, in an imposing designed setting, and internally retains a largely unaltered sequence of entrance lobby, staircase hall, and board room with some further details to the first floor corridor. However whilst these elements of the building are of note they are not sufficient by themselves to compensate for the alterations and demolitions which have taken place.
* Selectivity: Many better examples of factory buildings of the inter-war period are represented in the lists.
* Intactness: Alteration and demolitions have destroyed the evidence of the manufacturing processes associated with the building.

Countersigning comments:

Agreed: While the frontage of Benger House and its principal circulation spaces have characteristic late Art Deco features, the building overall does not possess the high level of architectural interest or intactness which would merit designation of a factory of this date in the national context.

Annex 1

Factual Details

Name: BENGER HOUSE

Location: Fissons, London Road, Holmes Chapel, Cheshire,

Fissons, London Road, Holmes Chapel, Cheshire,

County	District	District Type	Parish
	Cheshire East	Unitary Authority	Holmes Chapel

History
Benger House was constructed on former agricultural land in 1939 as the new headquarters and manufacturing plant for Benger Foods Ltd., a manufacturer of "ethical pharmaceutical products." At the time these included Auralgicin, a treatment for ear infections, and Benger's Food, a milk supplement. The new headquarters building saw the company re-locate from its Manchester base (Otter Works, Mary Street, Strangeways) to new purpose-built premises in Holmes Chapel designed by the architectural practice of J.H. Andrews and Butterworth.

Benger Foods Ltd. was established as Mottershead & Co. in Manchester in 1790, acquired by Frederick Baden Benger in 1870, changing its name to Benger Foods Ltd. in 1903. The company was taken over by Fissons Ltd. in 1947.

The architects of the new building, J.H. Andrews and Butterworth of Manchester, were unusual for the time in specialising in the design of industrial buildings. The two partners were John Harris Andrews (born 1846) and Thomas Butterworth, L.R.I.B.A. (1856-1939). An album of their works held in Manchester Metropolitan University Library Special Collection reveals the extent to which they specialised in this relatively new, and professionally derided, field of commercial architecture.

At the time of the construction of Benger House, Thomas Butterworth was described as the firm's principal, a position he had held since 1881. His obituaries, and other papers, credit him with a number of industrial buildings in the Greater Manchester area including several bakeries, printing works, a biscuit factory, a corset works, warehouses (including for the Sackville estates on Whitworth Street, Manchester), the Mosley Hotel on Manchester's Piccadilly, together with churches, offices and shops. Additionally (perhaps as a result of Andrews position as resident Surveyor and Manager of the construction of Manchester Town Hall from 1874 until its completion) the practice was responsible for several works for Manchester Corporation including the Bloom Street Electricity station (listed Grade II), and several schools including the Johnson Street School (demolished).

At the time of his death in 1939 at the age of 82 Butterworth was described in his obituary in the "Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects" as working "…on his plans almost to the very end". The obituary cites Benger House as one of his chief buildings. He had earlier been joined in practice by his son, Harold Butterworth, A.R.I.B.A., who took over the practice on his father's death.

Details
The building is composed of two principal elements, a large imposing rectangular office block facing the A50, and a series of axial planned laboratories and production facilities in three wings which lead off from this building at right angles to the north and east. The two storey office and administration block is set well back from the main road and creates a commanding position above terraced front lawns with ornamental retaining walls. This building contains the main architectural interest. To the south of the office building is a flat-roofed single storey gate-lodge controlling access to the rear of the site.

The office building is of two storeys and is built of two contrasting tones of brown brick laid in Flemish bond with imitation stone dressings. The imitation stone has been largely covered with thick granular paint in recent years which obliterates some of the detail. The front elevation is symmetrical and of seventeen bays, defined by giant order pilasters, and punctured by a central projecting tower which contains the main entrance. This entrance is emphasised by a large double-height semi-circular arch, and prominent keystone, which is sub-divided by a decorative iron balcony. The original wooden entrance doors remain but, as throughout the

building, the original metal windows characteristic of 1930s industrial architecture, have been replaced with windows of white powder coated aluminium. To either end of the façade the design is terminated by a smaller projecting tower with the window dressings balancing the central opening of the entrance tower. The façade is topped with a decorative parapet in imitation stone which hides the roof. This is supported on steel trusses and covered in Westmorland slate. Stylistically the office building is a mixture of Art Deco massing and stripped classical detail.

The north and south elevations are of similar design, four bays wide, and contained between additional double-height towers. Single storey wings (with a small central emphasis provided by imitation stone pediments to the inner courtyard space) project eastwards from these elevations and are of a more utilitarian character as befits productions facilities and laboratories such that the pitched roof is revealed, there is a reduction of decorative detail, and large replacement windows dominate the symmetrical design. A later single storey extension has been added to the north, and a cross wing which originally connected the eastern wings to form a courtyard has been demolished.

The interior is principally reached by the front entrance which opens into a lobby of original timber and glass screens, and wall lights, before reaching the central staircase hall. The decorative detail to the timber screens echoes that of the parapet.

The staircase hall is top-lit by a domed decorative glass lantern of twelve sections in blue and pink glass. The decorative motifs to the base of the dome mirror those of the external balcony railings. The dome lights a staircase of speckled pale green cast terrazzo with a strongly moulded newel post and balustrade. The ground floor and tall dados are also terrazzo and tiles in the same colour respectively. Above the entrance lobby is the original board room. The decorative intent of the staircase hall is carried into the first floor corridors which are also top lit, the glazing contained within decorative plaster coving. Some of the original six-panel wooden doors survive.

Elsewhere the interior of the building is either strictly utilitarian in character and/or has undergone considerable alteration leaving the staircase hall, board room, and first floor corridor as the site of any internal architectural interest. The two single-storey blocks which run at right angles to the office building are both large open-plan spaces (one open to expose the steel roof trusses, the other enclosed by a false ceiling) with no evidence of their former function, or machinery. At a later date a new wing containing laboratories was added and which also created an enclosed space, or courtyard. This has recently been demolished. Contemporary with this laboratory was a new single storey rear extension to the office building which acted as a circulation space. This space encloses the only remaining original windows to the office building. To the north of the office building, from its junction with the north-east wing, is a further single storey open-plan post-war extension which is also devoid of any significant details.

Selected Sources

Builder, 20 January, 1939
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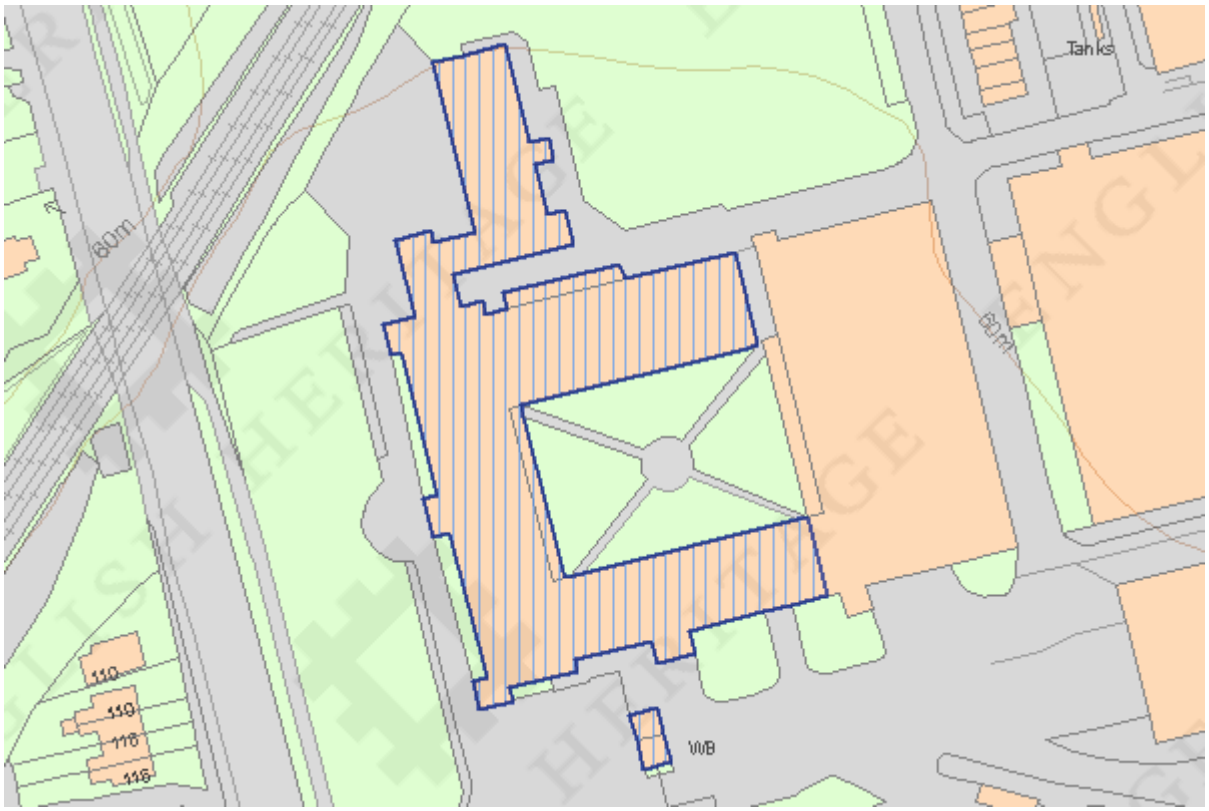
Buildings in Manchester and district designed by the firm of J.H. Andrews and Butterworth, architects and surveyors, 9, St. James's Square, Manchester, Bound portfolio of black and white photographs - some captioned, unknown, Manchester Metropolitan University Library Special Collection
Moss, M.S., Fertilisers to Pharmaceuticals: Fissons - the biography of a company 1720-1986., 1996, Ipswich Record Office
Peter De Figueiredo, Heritage assessment: former Fissons Pharmaceuticals Building, London Road, Holmes Chapel, November 2010

Map

National Grid Reference: SJ7651966616



The above map is for quick reference purposes only and may not be to scale. For a copy of the full scale map, please see the attached PDF - 1402450_1_634504054912426805.pdf