

92nd Amendment, dated 18.04.06
The following building shall be added:

CURTAIN ROAD

Shoreditch
Nos. 134-146

494342

II

Showroom-warehouse, now workshops, offices and bar / restaurant. 134-144 built 1881-2 to the design of C Creese Harrison for the wholesale furniture manufacturers C & R Light; 146 rebuilt in 1887, also for Light. The contractor was Lawrence & 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 colonettes 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 134-136 with an arched pediment, a wider entrance in the end of 134, this under rusticated voisoirs 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 the 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 the cast-iron columns with splayed flanges and concrete floors, has enabled a variety of uses to continue without affecting the building. There 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 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 firedoors 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, warehouses 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 134-134 by 1880. Between 1881 and 1882 they rebuilt 134-144 as a single block, redeveloping 146 in 1877 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 from hall, office, library, dining-room, drawing-room and bedroom, in the styles and treatments now in vogue' (Cabinet Maker, September 1874, 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 as G & 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 188 Old Street, then 54 Great Eastern Street and, in the 1930s, 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 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 facade 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. Cabinet Maker, 7 July 1877; September 1892, 83; September 1894, 78; October 1901, 93; May 1902, 298; 10 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.