



11. Ber Street

Significance

Concentration of historic buildings

Presence of features from historical period(s)

Townscape / Landscape quality:

Quality of details:

Concentration of negative features:

Score

LOW

LOW (1)

SIGNIFICANT (2)

SIGNIFICANT (2)

LOW (1)

SOME (2)

8

Character Area Overview

Summary

A fragmented area as a result of slum clearances and Second World War bomb damage. Remnants of its earlier character and buildings survive along the long and wide Ber Street, behind which, towards Rouen Road, lies a predominantly mid C20 local authority housing area. The Finkelgate area, at the southern end of Ber Street leads out across the City Wall boundary into the residential Bracondale area, whilst the northern end of Rouen Road contains a number of large office buildings.

Topography & Landscape Framework

The area stands on the Ber Street escarpment which forms a wooded ridge on Richmond Hill, a prominent natural feature

in the Wensum Valley. Higher ground also lies to the south and west. The Wilderness is a well treed open space that allows views of the City Walls and the Black Tower (a).

Town Morphology, History & Archaeology

Ber Street, an ancient Roman Road, has been a major route out of the City since the C12, but even by Thomas Cleer's map of 1696, development in the area was limited to the street itself. It was used as a cattle drove and was the location of many butchers and slaughterhouses; it was known locally as 'Blood and Guts Street'.

The area between Ber Street and King Street was densely built up by the 1840s

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Extract from 1880 OS map

with many yards and courts leading off the street. It also became home to the Italian community, with ice cream parlours and pubs. However, slum clearances between the 1930s and 1960s, together with Second World War bomb damage means that few houses from before the War remain.

The huge amount of redevelopment required in the area after the Second World War, provided the opportunity in 1962 to create Rouen Road (so named because Norwich is twinned with Rouen). This avoided having to widen King Street, and low-rise council housing was then built in 1967-8 at the

southern end of Rouen Road, including Normandie Tower, a tower block, in 1965 (b). At the northern end of Rouen Road a cluster of office blocks were built including Prospect House in 1970, home to Eastern Daily Press.

Landmarks & Views

Due to the scale of the council housing and offices, the Character Area lacks any significant views or vistas, although elevated views of the river can occasionally be glimpsed from east-west cul-de-sacs due to their location on higher ground on the Ber Street escarpment. Views across, and of, the



aa. 140 - 146 Ber Street
bb. 131 - 137 Ber Street

Wilderness and Richmond Hill are gained from both Rouen Road and Ber Street, whilst views to Thorpe Hamlet can be gained from Ber Street/ Thorn Lane. St John de Sepulchre's Church forms the focus of views south down Ber Street (c).

The larger C20 buildings are landmarks, albeit negative, because of their bulk and massing which is out of scale with the remaining historic development in the area.

Key Building Groups

The area is dominated by the low-rise council houses which mainly date from 1967-8 (d). However, a few C17 and C18 houses survive in Ber Street, particularly on the west side. The most cohesive groups are Nos. 156-60 (evens) on the east side and 121-125 (odds) on the west side (e). Nos. 121-125 are C18 with later alterations and the group includes the Jolly Butchers public house (f); No. 156 (g) is the earliest of the eastern group, dating from the early C17 with C19 and C20 alterations, and No. 158 (h) (Ber House) is a late C18 pair of houses of seven bays.

A few C19 shops are also found in Ber Street. Queen's Road and Bracondale contain a small number of C19 houses including Nos. 177-197 Queen's Road, a mid C19 terrace, and a couple of early-mid C19 villas on Bracondale (i).

St John de Sepulchre's Church is an

important building at a prominent position on the junction of Ber Street and Finkelgate (j). It is enveloped by the Anderson Place development of sheltered housing and is now used by the Russian Orthodox Church.

Current Uses

The area is predominantly residential with office development in the north of Rouen Road. Other commercial uses are concentrated along Ber Street. The southern end of the character area contains older residential building stock centred around St John de Sepulchre's Church.

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Key Characteristics

Townscape Elements

Ber Street's function as a cattle drove is reflected in its width, a key feature of the street. The fragments of C17, C18 and C19 properties that survive along its length are a reminder of the street's original tight building line which has been lost with C20 redevelopment.

The large swathes of council housing are set well back from the main streets, mostly in cul-de-sacs off Rouen Road. The houses are often surrounded by empty green spaces and parking areas or garage blocks and provide very little enclosure to the street. The repetitive and alien design together with the lack of detailing of much of this housing forms a stark contrast with the remaining traditional properties.

Rouen Road also lacks enclosure, with most of its length having few buildings directly fronting onto it; a typical feature of housing developments from the 1960s and 1970s. A large section of its west side is taken up by an open car park and Normandie Tower, a highly unusual feature in Norwich.

The character at the southern end of Ber Street is very different and the imposing tower of St John de Sepulchre signals this change. The genteel C19 development at the Bracondale end of the character area, together with the backdrop of the Wilderness and its mature trees, lends an

almost suburban character to this part of the Ber Street area.

A good stretch of the City Wall and one of the best preserved towers, the Black Tower, forms the boundary to the character area. Its setting amongst the Wilderness is very attractive (k).

Building Types

The most prevalent building type is the council housing blocks which rise up to 5 storeys, although at 16 storeys, Normandie Tower is a high rise C20 tower block, a building type not found elsewhere in the Norwich City Centre Conservation Area.

Two to three storey C17 and C18 houses are grouped together in rows along Ber Street, Queens' Road and Finkelgate. These are now predominantly in commercial use at ground floor with residential above.

2 storey C19 terraces are found in the south of the character area along Queen's Road (l). A handful of 2-3 storey C19 villas are also found in the south of the character area around the Wilderness.

Building Details

The C17 and C18 houses are timber-framed structures with pantiled roofs and many show the change in architectural style and materials that occurred during these centuries. The C19 buildings are typically

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of red brick with either pantiled or Welsh slate roofs, although a couple of the Bracondale properties are of white brick. Most traditional properties retain their sash windows with other typical detailing of their periods such as flat gauged brick arches, fanlights and carriage entries. Some good shopfronts also survive along Ber Street.

Concrete and grey/buff wire cut bricks are the prevalent building materials of the council flats and houses. They have either flat concrete roofs or shallow pitched concrete interlocking tiled roofs.

Management & Enhancement

1. Reinstatement of strong building line along Ber Street (B2.4)
2. Views to and from the Ber Street ridge must be preserved and enhanced (A2, C1.2, C2)
3. Development on Rouen Road and the east side of Ber Street must respect the important topography of the area (A2, D1, D2.2, D3, D6, D7, E1.2)
4. Enhancement of Ber Street gate area (B4)

