



21 May 2015

**PRESS RELEASE: CHANGE OF POSITION FROM HISTORIC ENGLAND ON THE STRAND BUILDINGS; MICHAEL PALIN ADDS HIS VOICE TO THE CAMPAIGN.**

SAVE welcomes Historic England's reviewed stance on the Strand: they now conclude that King's College's proposals to demolish four buildings and retain only the façade of a fifth causes substantial harm to the conservation area. This renders null and void their original letter that supported the scheme and would have been key to the decision that was made by Westminster Council when it approved the demolition and development scheme in April.

The revised position follows almost a month of public outcry reflected in the numerous articles, letters and leaders in *The Times*, the *Evening Standard* and other media. SAVE's petition addressed to the Principal of King's College and the head of its estates committee, gathered 9,000 signatures in 3 weeks and is still growing. Latest supporters of the campaign include Michael Palin who said in a statement to SAVE this week: "I'm against the destruction of these properties and the proposed replacement."

Historic England wrote today in a letter to *The Times*, that is supported by an online statement:

"As we originally said, the loss of the buildings would damage a historically important part of London, which is clearly cherished by all those who have spoken up. We stand by this view, but have further tested the harm against Planning Practice Guidance and our review has found that the degree of harm would be substantial. This group of buildings is integral to the character and appearance of the wider conservation area.

"It is for Westminster City Council or, should the case be called in, for the Secretary of State, to weigh up the public benefit of the proposals. But we would like to acknowledge the high level of public interest in this case, and look forward to the best outcome for the Strand and the conservation area."

This change of position from Historic England redoubles the case for public inquiry. SAVE is appealing once again to the Secretary of State Greg Clark MP to call the case in.

Historic England had originally weighed up the public benefits of the scheme themselves, but now make it clear that that is the role of the planning authority or the Secretary of State.

In the light of this changed position SAVE calls on King's College London to revise its position.

We thank all our supporters who have written to Greg Clark MP requesting a call in and urge those who have not yet done so, to write to him.

Letters should be emailed to [greg.clark@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:greg.clark@communities.gsi.gov.uk) and copied to [npcu@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:npcu@communities.gsi.gov.uk), or posted to the Department of Communities and Local Government, Eland House, Bressenden Place, London, SW1E 5DU

SAVE's grounds for requesting a public inquiry can be found in our previous press release:

<http://www.savebritainsheritage.org/news/campaign.php?id=340>



**Watercolour sketch of 152-158 the Strand by Ptolemy Dean**

## **Background**

152 - 158 Strand are buildings of great charm on one of London's most historic and central thoroughfares: the procession route from St Paul's Cathedral to Buckingham Palace. The existing buildings also provide the setting for the Grade I listed Somerset House and St Mary Le Strand.

They were originally part of a late-seventeenth/early-eighteenth century terrace, and are sited on their original narrow medieval burgage plots. The building frontages have been partially or fully re-fronted during the mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, but the majority of interior and rear walls relate to the eighteenth century.

The Strand has been the principal route between the economic centre of the City of London and the royal and political centre of Westminster for centuries. As these centres grew in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Strand became a commercial strip and significant landmark buildings and churches were established. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Strand was renowned as an area for restaurants, public houses, music halls and theatres. As a result, the Strand has developed a variety of building and architectural styles, with its grand landmark buildings on the one hand, and an assortment of commercial building on narrow medieval plots on the other.

The buildings at 152-158 Strand are tangible memories of the commercial businesses and occupiers of the buildings that were on the Strand for over 200 years. A variety of businesses occupied the buildings, including tailors, locksmiths, watch-makers, button-makers, umbrella-makers, architects, booksellers, tobacconists, photographers, shoe-sellers, confectioners, lamp manufacturers, estate agents and dentists. This variety and number are typical of these kinds of buildings on the Strand.

Although there was a high turnover of owners and leases of the buildings, some notable businesses occupied the buildings for decades – including Firman & Sons (military button-makers founded in 1656, one of the top 25 oldest companies in the world), Thresher & Glenny (founded in 1755 and one of the world's oldest surviving tailors), George & Walter Yonge (watchmakers, notable as being watchmakers for the King and the Lord High Admiral 1820-28), and Lyons café (a successful teashop chain, particularly in the 1930s).

The buildings at 152-158 not only typify the physical and historical character of the Strand Conservation Area, but also have significance for their association with the Grade I listed Somerset House and St Mary-le-Strand. The row of buildings, which is mirrored on the southwest side of Somerset House by a similar row, provides an authentic sense of how Somerset House and St Mary le Strand church fitted into an eighteenth century streetscape. Historical paintings and photographs of these features include the buildings at 152-158 Strand, illustrating the importance of these buildings to the eighteenth and nineteenth century context of the Strand.



**John Tallis, the Strand, *London Street Views* (1838-40), Part 28, p. 96**

The entire group of threatened buildings are in the Strand Conservation Area, while one of them is listed Grade II. The ones condemned for demolition are singled out in the Conservation Area Audit as Unlisted Buildings of Merit, which contribute to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. This should, according to local planning policy, safeguard them from this kind of proposal.

King's College received planning permission to demolish 154-158 and façade 152-153 the Strand at a Westminster planning committee meeting on the 21<sup>st</sup> April. SAVE submitted strong objections to the planning application, along with the Victorian Society, The Ancient Monument Society, LAMAS, the Courtauld Institute and the Somerset House Trust, as well as many individuals, but these objections were ignored.

For more information and images, please contact the SAVE Office on 0207 253 3500 or [office@savebritainsheritage.org](mailto:office@savebritainsheritage.org), or Clem Cecil on 07968 003 595

**Notes to editors:**

**SAVE Britain's Heritage** has been campaigning for historic buildings since its formation in 1975 by a group of architects, journalists and planners. It is a strong, independent voice in conservation, free to respond rapidly to emergencies and to speak out loud for the historic built environment.

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