

ADDRESS

Slough Town Hall, BATH ROAD, SLOUGH

Parish SLOUGH
District SLOUGH
County BERKSHIRE

Case UID: 165888

Date First Listed:

Formerly Listed As:

RECOMMENDATION

Adviser: Ms V Fiorato

Outcome: Yes, list

Recommended Grade: II

29-JUL-2008

Advice Text: After examining all the papers on this file and other relevant information and having carefully considered the architectural and historic interest of this case, the criteria for listing are fulfilled.

CONTEXT

We have been asked to consider Slough Town Hall for listing. We have received numerous applications in support of listing as there is considerable local concern about the building's future. Slough Borough Council recently decided in February 2008 to dispose of the site with a view to moving the town hall functions to a new building. A new housing development on the site is anticipated and an outline planning application is being prepared. Since that decision was made there has been a local election and a change in the leadership of the council. The new councillors have agreed to postpone any further action until a decision on the listing case has been determined.

In addition to the listing applications (now in excess of 20 which include applications from local and national amenities societies and interested individuals), we have also received a copy of a petition to save the building with just under 800 signatures. We have also received numerous letters in support of listing. There are some high profile advocates, and one of the applicants has written to the Prince of Wales asking for his support for the campaign. The potential disposal of the site and the campaign to save the building has been widely covered in the local and national press.

Slough Borough Council has commissioned consultants to prepare submissions on their behalf. Our South East Regional Team are involved in discussions on the building's future. The Town Hall is a locally listed building.

HISTORY

Slough Town Hall was built to the designs of the architects Charles Holloway James (1893-1953) and Steven Rowland Pierce (1896-1966). The architects were based in Bedford Place, London. The clock tower is by Reg Butler (1913-81), latterly and better known as a sculptor. The Urban District Council had purchased the land on which to build the town hall in 1933. James and Pierce's scheme was selected following a design competition instigated by the council who were eager to complete a new civic building in anticipation of the granting of borough status by Royal Charter in 1938. The competition was managed by the Royal Institute of British Architects and the winner selected from the 205 entries by Professor HS Goodhart-Rendel.

The competition-winning design had included the provision, shown on a block plan, for a detached

assembly hall at right angles to the main block and to its west, as well as an attached 'U' shaped extension which, with the original building, would have formed a square internal court to the south. Contemporary documentation suggests that they were possibilities for the future but were not essential to the composition of the main building. It is not known why these additions remained unbuilt. Possibly it was down to cost, or that the additional accommodation proved unnecessary, or the outbreak of the Second World War, or indeed all of the above. Construction began in 1935 and was completed in 1937. The total cost of the building was just short of £36,000. The opening ceremony, for which a souvenir brochure was printed, took place on the 31st May 1937. Mrs Trevener, wife of Mr A G Trevener, Chairman of Slough UDC, opened the building.

In 1953 a War Memorial Cabinet and Book of Remembrance were moved to the town hall from elsewhere in Slough and were installed in the foyer.

Further accommodation was added to the rear of the building considerably extending the footprint. Slough Borough Council indicates that this took place in the 1970s although other sources suggest the 1980s. There was also some minor remodelling of the interior of the original building, such as the establishment of the Mayor's Suite on the ground floor. The windows in the original town hall were replaced probably in the 1980s. In May 1984 the building was the site of the investiture of Britain's first black mayor (Cllr Lydia Simmons).

Steven Rowland Pierce was a fellow of the RIBA and its Vice-President between 1951 and 1955. He is responsible, with J Woodford, for the Grade II listed statues of Sacrifice, Cure, Prevention and Aspiration which form a memorial to the Second World War (erected in 1952) in the grounds of the British Medical Association House, Tavistock Square, London. Charles Holloway James also has listed buildings to his name such as 3 Fairway Close, Hampstead Garden Suburb (1929, Grade II) which he designed for himself, and Oakwood Station, Enfield, London, designed with Charles Holden (1932-4, Grade II). More significantly the two designed, in partnership, a number of key civic buildings of the period including Hertford Record Office, Library and Register Office (1936-9, Grade II), Norwich City Hall (1938, Grade II*) and Hertfordshire County Hall (1940, Grade II*). Slough Town Hall was thus designed by a leading firm of civic architects and its quality bears this out.

Reginald Cotterell Butler, known as Reg, initially followed an architectural career and was lecturing at the British Architectural Association at the time of this youthful collaboration with Pierce and James. He is known to have designed two domestic properties in Bushey (1935) and Great Munden (1939), Hertfordshire. The clock tower to the town hall is amongst his limited architectural work. Butler later turned to sculpture as well as lecturing at the Slade School of Art. He became a sculptor of some repute with his most famous piece probably, his 1953 work 'Unknown Political Prisoner' (a model for which is in The Tate: it was never realised in its monumental form). The Tate has eighteen Butler pieces in its collection including designs, studies and sculptures, and this gallery also held a major retrospective of his work in 1983.

DESCRIPTION

Slough Town Hall is a civic building built in a Neo-Classical Swedish style with Art Deco influences. It was built on a prominent site within the growing town, to the south of the A4 (which is a principal route) and opposite Salt Hill Park (its main public park). Its construction relies on solid walls of 14 inch bricks supporting concrete and tile floors without the need for steel beams. The exterior is faced in red bricks from the Newbury area of Berkshire in a decorative bond, with dressings in Gloucestershire Nailsworth Stone. The roof is copper and there is a copper covered timber fleche/clock tower at the apex. The building is asymmetric: the main entrance block is towards the

west and is of three storeys with a second floor attic, first floor piano nobile, which contains the principal rooms and council chamber, and a ground floor main entrance hall. It has a shallow pitched roof hidden behind a pediment. This block is flanked by two two-storey blocks: that to the west contains the main staircase; and to the east houses a long central corridor with offices to the north and south. There is a further cross-wing of two storeys at the east end. This has a secondary entrance in its west elevation with a stone surround. These two storey sections also have shallow pitched or hipped copper roofs. The fenestration is important to the composition: although the casements are unfortunately replacements, the scale and position of the window openings are original and add to the horizontality of the design particularly in the block to the east of the main entrance. The main block has decorative horizontal narrow stone bands in contrast to the red brick, a device which is repeated on the corners of the building, and the stone surround to the main double doors is rusticated. There are lead rainwater goods with hoppers dated to 1936 suggesting that the building had been largely completed by this date although it did not open until the following year.

Internally the building retains original features to varying degrees. The main public spaces - the entrance hall, council chamber, committee rooms and staircases - are very much of the 1930s. However, the offices to the east have experienced a greater degree of alteration in order to ensure that they have remained fit for purpose. This has resulted in some opening up to create open plan accommodation as well as the insertion of fire doors and the lowering of some ceilings. Offices were, however, always the plainer relation as they were considered to matter far less than the main public spaces.

The main entrance hall has four jade-coloured scaglioli columns and a two-tone terrazzo marble floor with a geometric pattern and this continues on the stairs. To the south is the Mayor's suite consisting of the Mayor's Parlour, conference room, PA's office and kitchen all of which were furnished in the late 1970s-early 1980s. Originally this was the location of the rates and general office and an interview room. The Council Chamber is on the first floor reached by a very Deco solid curving staircase. This has rectangular portals cut into the solid balustrade and a moulded Deco ceiling above. The Council chamber and the adjoining committee rooms are oak panelled. The Council Chamber has impressive leather-covered double-doors and the committee rooms contain marble fireplaces. The Chairman's room, in contrast, is panelled in Australian walnut. Other original features include etched glass with a Greek Key motif, some bakelite switches and a series of 1930s electric clocks, all linked to the clock tower to ensure consistent time-keeping. There are also, inevitably, the trappings of civic life such as panels displaying the names of the Mayors of the Borough and the aforementioned War Memorial cabinet and Book of Remembrance in the entrance hall.

ASSESSMENT

Town Halls and municipal buildings were built in very large numbers in the C19 and C20 as the role of the state expanded. Many were architecturally ambitious and were designed to project pride in the provision of public services. Their ubiquity is a constant reminder of the role of elected local authorities in the life of the nation and many such buildings can therefore possess considerable community value. The architecture of these buildings was often hierarchical with some areas, such as the key public and civic spaces, given more attention than others. The façade and the ceremonial spaces provided a canvas for decoration and adornment and references to prominent local figures and historical associations of the town and locality are not uncommon. However, adaptation is inevitable given their function, changes in the legislative framework as well as changes of administration over time, and therefore a degree of alteration is to be expected. Many new town halls were built in response to a change in civic status, as a symbolic expression of an

enhanced civic identity. Young municipalities frequently built civic buildings early on, as an assertion of newly-won status and this category of buildings can often have strong meanings for residents. The planning of town halls was also a challenge, given the increasingly complex functions that had to be accommodated within, and therefore understanding how these buildings work can thus be crucial to their appreciation.

Virtually all municipal buildings built before 1840 are already listed. From the middle years of the C19 onwards much greater selectivity is required because of the greater numbers of survivors. This is even more the case for inter-war town halls with architectural interest being the principal determinant in recommending examples for listing. However, civic identity, decoration, setting and planning are also relevant factors.

As already discussed, Slough Town Hall was designed by the architects of the Grade II* Norwich City Hall (described by Pevsner as the foremost English public building between the wars) and Hertfordshire County Hall and as such they can be considered significant designers of civic buildings in the 1930s. All of these designs were won in open competition and they were therefore architects of some repute who were capturing the zeitgeist. Slough as an emerging borough wanted a stately but subtle building, representing value for money while still managing to impress. It is in this manner that the Swedish style Neo-classicism is successful. It is a restrained yet confident style.

Slough has suffered a poor architectural reputation ever since John Betjeman wrote, 'Come friendly bombs and fall on Slough', but the same writer, in conjunction with John Piper in their Murray's 'Buckinghamshire Architectural Guide' (1948) was rather more positive about this particular building: 'The unfinished Civic Centre with Swedish affectations, represents a striving for unity out of chaos.' Little survives from Slough's interwar phase. The 1936 Prudential Buildings are the other Neo-Georgian survival nearby and the town's main claim to note is for having the first trading estate in Britain. The town hall represents the polite face of the town's industrial past and is an important survival from the inter-war period.

It is a somewhat streamlined building with a strong horizontal spirit and Neo-classical references such as the presence of a piano nobile to the main block. Its asymmetry is also important as this creates more interesting massing. The construction method is clever: by using solid walls of 14 inch bricks, it has been possible for the concrete and tile floors to span the gap from the exterior walls to the internal corridors without the need for steels. The design capably separates the public, committee and the back office accommodation. The plan essentially divides the building in two with the public, civic spaces concentrated in the main three storey block and its immediate vicinity (with its adjacent main staircase and offices such as the Chairman's room), and the remaining offices contained in the eastern wing and cross-wing. The fact that it was selected by Calveley Cotton as an exemplar of town hall planning in his 1936 publication is significant, as indeed is the coverage in general that the building received in the contemporary architectural press.

The building is also of material quality. The stone dressings are well executed and there is good detailing externally such as the stars cut into the stone surrounds of the main door and windows, the subtle banding of the hoods to the piano nobile windows, the dated rainwater hoppers, the solid teak panelled main doors, the quality of the copper roof and its striking modern and elegant fleche. As discussed this is probably the only surviving architectural design by the important sculptor Reg Butler.

Internally materials have been carefully chosen and employed. The entrance hall with its scaglioli

columns again represents financial restraint without compromising the decoration, and the main staircase with its curving balustrade with portals and decorative ceiling is absolutely Art Deco in its conception. The principal rooms on the first floor with their simple yet beautiful panelling in oak and walnut, marble fireplaces, original doors and door furniture are 1930s interiors of quality which are relatively intact and exhibit craftsmanship in their understated yet capable execution. The survival of civic plaques and the relocated War Memorial cabinet and Book of Remembrance are important in marking the former officers and servicemen of the town and the building itself is significant as a physical reminder of the gaining of borough status in 1938.

Slough compares well with other listed town halls of the 1930s, and comparison is more appropriate with examples other than Norwich and Hertfordshire which are highly graded. The recently listed Wallington Town Hall in the London Borough of Sutton is one such building. Although a very good design by Robert Atkinson of 1935, it has seen some alteration. Another is the Friern Barnet Municipal Offices in the London Borough of Barnet. This simple Neo-classical building with Swedish influences by Sir John Brown, Henson & Partners of 1939-41, has similarities with Slough in terms of scale, finish (and also has a fleche); it listed at Grade II. The extension to Bethnal Green Town Hall, of 1937-9 by ECP Monson in a restrained Neo-classical style, introduced 1930s streamlined interiors such as sleek panelled committee rooms which are reminiscent of those at Slough. This is a Grade II listed building although with an earlier C20 core. In this context Slough Town Hall fits well: it is an inter-war civic building of quality, designed by architects who are known for their civic buildings in a restrained but capable Neo-classical form with Deco touches. It is also a relatively intact example and unlike some of its contemporaries continues to perform the civic functions for which it was designed.

Town halls are often prominent, yet architecturally understated. Their claims to interest in visual terms can be subtle, yet still considerable: that is the case here. In municipal terms, the claims are more obvious: the building shows Slough's arrival at borough status, and shows the importance of municipal architecture in conferring dignity on a new town. This is one of Slough's key buildings and its subtle architectural quality and high order of intactness are notable. The work of a leading firm specialising in municipal design, Slough Town Hall has clear claims to special interest.

SOURCES

Architecture and Building News, April 9 1937, pp36-42

Architecture Illustrated, June 1937, pp164-167

Architectural Review, May 1937, pp225-6

A Calveley Cotton, Town Halls. The Planning of Modern Buildings series, No. 1 (1936)

M Garlake, 'The Sculpture of Reg Butler' in Art Book - London, Volume 14, No. 4 (2007) pp43-45

N Pevsner & E Williamson, The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire, (1994) p626-7

S Porter, J Smith, J Clarke & P Guillery, London's Town Halls: The architecture of local government from 1840 to the present (1999)

J Read, Biography for Butler, Reginald Cotterell (1913-1981), www.oxforddnb.com

1983 Reg Butler, Tate Gallery Exhibition Catalogue. Tate Gallery Publications Department

Souvenir of The Official Opening of the Town Hall, Slough by Mrs A. G. Trevener (Wife of the Chairman of the Council), Wednesday 31st March, 1937, Souvenir Brochure produced by the Urban District of Slough.

Conclusion: Slough Town Hall is recommended for listing as a good quality and relatively intact example of a traditionally styled inter-war town hall, by established architects.

Reasons For Designation Decision:

Slough Town Hall, a Neo-Classical Swedish style building with Art Deco influences completed in 1937 to the designs of the architects Charles Holloway James and Steven Rowland Pierce, is recommended for designation at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

- * A subtle design in a characteristic fusion of Scandinavian and Neoclassical styles, by a leading specialist firm of architects;
- * Survival of the most important 1930s interiors such as the council chamber, committee rooms and entrance hall;
- * A physical manifestation of the attainment of borough status and a significant civic building.

VISITS

09-MAY-2008 Full inspection

Visited with Louise Campbell

COUNTERSIGNING

First Countersigning Adviser: Ms E Gee

Comments: Agreed. This inter-war town hall by noted municipal designers exhibits the stripped classicism with moderne touches so often employed for major public buildings in this period. It survives well and has architectural panache as well as considerable civic pride all for which it merits listing at Grade II. 9.9.08

Second Countersigning Adviser: Dr R Bowdler

Comments: Agreed also. 10.9.08

HP Director:

Comments:

Proposed List Entry

BATH ROAD

Slough Town Hall

II

Case UID: 165888

Proposed LBS UID: 505060

Town hall; a Neo-Classical Swedish style building with Art Deco influences. Completed in 1937 to the designs of the architects Charles Holloway James (1893-1953) and Steven Rowland Pierce (1896-1966). Clock tower by Reg Butler (1913-81). Substantial 1970s rear extensions and some remodelling of the original block. 1980s replacement of windows. Late C20-early C21 modernisation of office accommodation.

MATERIALS: Solid 14 inch bricks, concrete. Faced in red bricks from the Newbury area of Berkshire in a decorative bond; dressings in Gloucestershire Nailsworth Stone. Copper roof. Windows are 1980s replacements.

PLAN: Asymmetric in plan. Main entrance block off-set to the west, of three storeys and three bays with a second floor attic, first floor piano nobile, which contains the principal committee rooms and council chamber, and a ground floor main entrance hall. Flanked by two two-storey blocks: to the west containing the main staircase; to the east an elongated block with a long central corridor with offices to the north and south. Further east cross-wing of two storeys. Roofs are copper covered shallow pitches or hips.

EXTERIOR: Main entrance block towards the west, of three storeys with a second floor attic, first floor piano nobile, and a ground floor main entrance hall. Shallow pitched copper roof hidden behind a pediment surmounted by a copper covered timber fleche/clock tower at the apex. Decorative horizontal narrow stone bands in contrast to the red brick, a device which is repeated on the corners of the building. Rusticated stone surround to the main double doors. Two storey flanking ranges have shallow pitched or hipped copper roofs. The fenestration is important to the composition: although the casements are unfortunately replacements, the scale and position of the window openings are original and add to the horizontality of the design particularly in the block to the east of the main entrance. Lead rainwater goods with hoppers dated to 1936 suggesting that the building had been largely completed by this date although it did not open until the following year. Further accommodation was added to the rear of the building in the 1970s, which is not of special interest, considerably extending the footprint, and there was some minor remodelling of the interior of the original building, such as the Mayor's Suite on the ground floor, at the same time.

INTERIOR: At ground floor, the main entrance hall in central three storey block is entered via a pair of teak double doors. Teak is also used for interior corridor doors. Entrance hall with four jade-coloured scagliola columns and two-tone terrazzo marble floor with a geometric pattern. This scheme continues on the stairs. Curving marble skirting. Mayor's suite to the south on the ground floor consisting of the Mayor's Parlour, conference room, PA's office and kitchen, all of which were furnished in the late 1970s-early 1980s (originally this was the location of the rates and general office and interview room). Wood and iron War Memorial cabinet affixed to the wall in the entrance hall containing hand-painted and gilded Book of Remembrance to Slough's servicemen who died in the First and Second World Wars. Offices to east of main block (on ground and first floors) have been modernised with some open-plan accommodation, inserted fire doors and false ceilings. Council Chamber on the first floor reached by a Deco solid curving staircase to the west with rectangular portals cut into the solid balustrade and a moulded Deco ceiling above. At first floor is the oak panelled Council chamber (panelled to cill height)

with plaster ceiling. Cork tiling to back wall for aesthetic and acoustic reasons. Impressive pair of leather covered double doors in blue-grey Moroccan leather, projecting silver chrome nail heads and wooden handles. Lamp fittings (also architect designed) are bronze rings carrying six globes. Panels displaying the names of the Mayors of the Borough in the first floor lobby which has a vaulted ceiling. Pair of adjoining committee rooms to the north with folding dividing doors, both with oak panelling. Also pair of Portuguese beige marble fireplaces inlaid with Devonshire and Derbyshire marble. Australian walnut panelled Chairman's room also to north. Clerk to Council's room to south also with marble fireplace. Other original features include etched glass with a Greek Key motif to the upper lights of the corridor doors, some bakelite switches and a series of 1930s electric clocks, all linked, including to the clock tower, to ensure consistent time-keeping. Modernised offices in east wing. Second floor viewing gallery to Council Chamber and caretaker's flat (no longer in use but retaining some original decoration and fittings) with a kitchen, living room, parlour, three bedrooms and a bathroom. A partial basement beneath the secondary staircase at the east end containing generators and strong rooms.

HISTORY: Slough Urban District Council purchased the land on which to build a new town hall in 1933. The scheme by James and Pierce was selected following a design competition instigated by the council who were eager to complete a new civic building in anticipation of the granting of borough status by Royal Charter in 1938. The competition was managed by the Royal Institute of British Architects and the winner selected from the 205 entries by Professor H S Goodhart-Rendel. Construction began in 1935 and was completed in 1937. The total cost of the building was just short of £36,000. The opening ceremony, for which a souvenir brochure was printed, took place on the 31st May 1937. Mrs Trevener, wife of Mr A G Trevener, Chairman of Slough UDC, opened the building. In 1953 a War Memorial Cabinet and Book of Remembrance were moved to the town hall from elsewhere in Slough and were installed in the foyer. In May 1984 the town hall was the site of the investiture of Britain's first black mayor (Cllr Lydia Simmons).

Steven Rowland Pierce was a fellow of the RIBA and its Vice-President between 1951 and 1955. He designed a number of buildings with CH James including Hertford Record Office, Library and Register Office (1936-9, Grade II), Norwich City Hall (1938, Grade II*) and Hertfordshire County Hall (1940, Grade II*). Charles Holloway James also has listed buildings to his name such as 3 Fairway Close, Hampstead Garden Suburb (1929, Grade II) which he designed for himself and Oakwood Station, Enfield, London designed with Charles Holden (1932-4, Grade II).

Reginald Cotterell ('Reg') Butler initially followed an architectural career and was lecturing at the British Architectural Association at the time of this youthful collaboration with Pierce and James. He is known to have designed two domestic properties, in Bushey (1935) and Great Munden (1939), Hertfordshire. The clock tower to the town hall is among his very limited architectural work. Butler later turned to sculpture as well as lecturing at the Slade School of Art. He became a sculptor of some repute with his most famous piece probably his 1953 work 'Unknown Political Prisoner'(a model for which is in The Tate: it was never realised in its monumental form). The Tate has eighteen Butler pieces in its collection including designs, studies and sculptures, and this gallery also held a major retrospective of his work in 1983.

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S Porter, J Smith, J Clarke & P Guillery, London's Town Halls: The architecture of local government

from 1840 to the present (1999)

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Tate Gallery Exhibition Catalogue for Reg Butler (1983)

Souvenir of The Official Opening of the Town Hall, Slough by Mrs AG Trevener (Wife of the Chairman of the Council), Wednesday 31st March, 1937, Souvenir Brochure produced by the Urban District of Slough.

REASON FOR DESIGNATION:

Slough Town Hall, a Neo-Classical Swedish style building with Art Deco influences completed in 1937 to the designs of the architects Charles Holloway James and Steven Rowland Pierce, is designated in Grade II for the following principal reasons:

- * A subtle design in a characteristic fusion of Scandinavian and Neoclassical styles, by a leading specialist firm of architects;
- * Survival of the most important 1930s interiors such as the council chamber, committee rooms and entrance hall;
- * A physical manifestation of the attainment of borough status and a significant civic building.