

Camberwell Green Fascias

The Camberwell Green Conservation Area includes Camberwell Green and, with some gaps and additions, the surrounding buildings fronting Camberwell Road, Camberwell New Road, Coldharbour Lane, Denmark Hill, and Camberwell Church Street. There is a full account of the conservation area at www.southwark.gov.uk/download/4993/camberwell_green. Readers of the *CQ* do not need to be reminded of the wealth of, mainly Victorian, buildings that have survived here.

Good buildings are better if the parts that you see most of, at street level, are not marred by ugly shop fronts. Fascias and advertising material on shop fronts fall under the planning regime. Part I of Schedule 3 of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) gives the classes of advertisement where planning consent is deemed to have been granted without application. Classes 4B and 5 are relevant to fascias and other advertising on shop fronts. The main points are that in a conservation area an application for planning permission is necessary if the proposed size is greater than 1.55 sq.m or if the sign is to be illuminated.

In acting under the legislation Southwark Council can be expected to try to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area, whose special architectural or historic interest led to its original designation as a conservation area.

Shops in the past were different from their present-day successors in two ways relevant to the question of fascias. They had very high front windows; and they did not have metal security shutters. Thus there is always a problem to be solved in creating a fascia now that fits and looks pleasant. *Cruson*, at 26 Church Street (Fig.1) has an elegant solution.



Figure 1.

A permanent awning hides the “missing” height of the window and allows a fascia above which sits within its original frame. On the whole however the solution is to make the fascia higher.

My impression is that, in decisions granting permission, Southwark Planning allows fascias up to 1m high; excludes interior illumination; favours painted wood as the fascia material; and requires surviving pilasters not to be obscured. *Fone World* at 3 Church Street and *Peacocks* at 56-60 Denmark Hill are good examples (Figs.2 and 3).



Figure 2.



Figure 3.

Both look much better than those they replaced. Perhaps the biggest improvement has been at 20-23 Camberwell Green, where English Heritage was involved in the replacement of three pretty terrible fascias with the admirable set we see now (Fig.4). A nice element of the new scheme is that the pilasters are allowed a separate identity, their painting isn't “shared” between the adjoining premises.



Figure 4.

Size is an obvious issue but not an entirely straightforward one. The very large *Tuckers* fascia at 18 Church Street (Fig.5) is dire, but across the street at no.15 the also very large *Wuli Wuli* seems quite acceptable (Fig.6)



Figure 5.



Figure 6.

Colour is also important. I would say that uninterrupted areas of bright monochrome always detract from the appearance of a building; so, for example, the current *Greggs* fascia at 18-20 Denmark Hill looks much better than the one it replaced, in which the whole area was uniformly blue. The yellow favoured by some pawnbrokers is particularly strident.

So far, so positive. On the other hand I have been pretty selective, and haven't penetrated at all to the periphery of the conservation area, to Coldharbour Lane, Camberwell New Road, the upper part of Denmark Hill, or the eastern part of Church Street. I suspect that there are many premises over the whole conservation area that, according to the regulations, ought to have applied for planning permission but haven't. Certainly there are very many fascias that by no means preserve or enhance the appearance of the area.

Even when planning permission is applied for and granted it may not be the end of the story. Planning permission was granted for what is now *Chicken Coop* at 5 Church Street. The fascia applied for was perfectly pleasant and in line with what I imagine were the Planning Department's recommendations. But what was installed was quite different, a brightly coloured internally illuminated box, which protrudes, and overlaps the pilasters (Figs.7 and 8)



Figure 7.



Figure 8.

The banks and pubs, to whose architects of long ago we owe some of the best single buildings, do well. Similarly, in general one cannot complain about the national chains, except that the betting shops and pawnbrokers seem to push the planners very hard. Finally, the Planning Department deserves our thanks. Steadily, if slowly, as regards fascias it is improving our local environment. The planning website, <http://planningonline.southwark.gov.uk/AcolNetCGI.exe>, where one can see details of all applications, both decided and undecided, is excellent.

