

Bermondsey Street Conservation Area

The Character and Appearance of the Area

within the Conservation Area, although they are closely related and together form a local neighbourhood centred on shops in Weston Street and Snowsfields.

Weston Street

- 3.4.2. North of Leathermarket Gardens, Weston Street presents a continuous building line of varied three to five storey buildings directly on the street. The larger buildings are warehouses typical of the whole Conservation Area (see 0), and nos. 70-72, dated approximately 1885, are particularly important when viewed from west of the area (Guy Street) in defining the height and solidity of the street frontage.
- 3.4.3. The junction with Snowsfields occurs between strong corner buildings and breaks the line of the street frontage minimally. The Rose pub on the southern corner, and the cupola of the shops and flats on the opposite side are local landmarks. The shops maintain the appearance of a four-storey elevation of similar height to the adjacent converted warehouse, but extend to a mansard and a further attic storey above the eaves line. The mix of uses that these few buildings represent – shops, pub, housing, and offices – is a strong characteristic of Weston Street.



Figure 39 (left) The varied forms of small warehouse buildings in Weston Street, and

Figure 40 (right) Corner buildings: Snowsfields / Weston Street, marked by the cupola above shops and flats.

- 3.4.4. South of Leathermarket Gardens, the Leather Hide and Wool Exchange, built in 1874-8 by George Elkington on the corner of Leathermarket Street, is a significant landmark. Its elaborate red brick and Portland stone detailing and corner turret take full advantage of its siting. It follows in height the main block of the Leather Market itself, built in 1833 with a more restrained classical elevation based on a pattern of full-height 3-storey pilasters. Again, this building group defines the critical line, scale and solidity of the street frontage, and the incidental feature of a large red pillar-box on the pavement adds to the period character. The Leather Market complex includes a further warehouse on the eastern side, which encloses a large court. The whole complex, now used as offices, is listed Grade II and described in the listing as “an excellent 19th century industrial grouping”.

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Figure 41 *The Leathermarket, Weston Street: a very orderly façade providing strong definition of the east side of the street.*

Snowsfields

- 3.4.5. The most distinctive building on the street is the elaborate red brick tenement development of the Guinness Trust Buildings. The main block on Snowsfields and Kirby Grove is palatial in style, its two four-storey wings linked by an arcade of five brick arches that give access to its central court. The whole development is surrounded by heavy iron railings to protect a half basement floor. A smaller block in similar style adjoins the Rose pub. Together the buildings form a significant section of the street: with their railings, street trees, and the block of shops and flats opposite, they contribute to a strong urban character.



Figure 42 *Guinness Trust Buildings, Snowsfields: showing the importance of the ensemble of railings, street furniture and trees in the character of the street.*

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- 3.4.6. Opposite, Arthur's Mission marks the corner into Melior Place. Between the two Guinness Trust blocks, Ship and Mermaid Row is a narrow lane that survives from the earlier street layout. It turns a right angle to meet Weston Street but is closed to vehicles at this point. It provides service access to adjacent buildings, and retains original cobbled surfacing, stone kerbs and brick boundary walls.

Melior Street

- 3.4.7. Melior Street forms the northern boundary of the Conservation Area. Its primary significance is as an approach to the Horseshoe Inn, which closes the view from Weston Street. The pub is also the visual focus viewed from Snowsfields via Melior Place to the south. The building is contemporary with the Guinness Trust housing and is elaborately decorated and detailed, drawing the eye from its more mediocre immediate surroundings.
- 3.4.8. In this pivotal location, the pub creates a small and sheltered public space that customers use. Much of the quality of the spaces around the pub derives from their informal and intimate scale, and the pub is visually the most important feature in views along Melior Street, Melior Place and Vinegar Yard. The individual variety of other small buildings such as the Catholic Church and the Glasshouse Theatre Studio, contribute further to the interest.



Figure 43 *Melior Place: The Glasshouse Studio and The Horseshoe Inn contribute to a lively, local space.*

Leathermarket Street

- 3.4.9. The area north of Leathermarket Street suffered war damage and many gaps were created in the urban fabric. A little of the 19th century character of the street is retained by the north side of the Bermondsey Leather Exchange, the Leather Exchange pub which is part of it, and the remaining old tannery building opposite (No. 22). A primary feature of the tannery building is an elaborate brick and stone arch, which once led into its yards: the remains of a destroyed wing of the building form the eastern side.

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Figure 44 22, Leathermarket Street: former tannery in need of renovation, providing a counterbalance in the street scene to the impressive buildings of the Leathermarket Exchange, opposite.

Townscape and views



Figure 45 The Horseshoe Inn viewed down Melior Place: a key vista to a local landmark.

- 3.4.10. In this small area there is a surprising variety of different building types and street characters. Some of the most dominant elements actually lie outside the Conservation Area in the Guy's Hospital complex on the other side of Weston Street, where concrete towers of nearly 30 storeys loom above the three to four storey townscape of the area itself. The view southward along Weston Street focuses on the 22 storey block of Burwash House, which also dominates views westwards along Leathermarket Street.
- 3.4.11. Views into the area from the west are important. Approaching from Long Lane, Weston Street is broad and the Conservation Area boundary to housing estates is very open. The façade of the Leather Market is consequently prominent both along the street and from the housing areas. Warehouses in the northern part of Weston Street have a similar relationship to their surroundings.
- 3.4.12. Looking eastwards along Leathermarket Street, the slightly angled façade of converted warehouses at 1-7 close the view as the street curves to join Bermondsey Street. In front of them the street has a quiet urban quality created by their relationship to Leathermarket Gardens which they overlook and by the predominance of residential uses.

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Landscape elements



Figure 46 *Leathermarket Gardens: a beautifully maintained oasis in a bustling urban area – the enclosure of buildings surrounding the park is important for its containment, without restricting its spaciousness.*

- 3.4.13. Leathermarket Gardens was created following clearance of war damage and 19th century tanneries. It now provides outlook for buildings in Tyers Gate and the eastern part of Leathermarket Street, with views across the space. Its western end is more separated from its surroundings, behind the Old Tannery frontage on Leathermarket Street and the Guinness Trust buildings on the north side. The Gardens are well connected into the community that they serve, with gates into Weston Street, Kirby Grove and the Tyers Estate. The mature trees along the edges open to surrounding streets provides the visual enclosure of the street space that former buildings would have: this is particular important in Leathermarket Street and Weston Street.

Negative elements

- 3.4.14. The area suffers from a number of gaps in development that are detrimental to its overall quality. On Weston Street the former three-storey building on the corner of Melior Street (No. 50) has been reduced to a single storey and there is a vacant site between it and No. 56 currently secured by a galvanised palisade fence.
- 3.4.15. At Melior Place, the car park behind 8–20 Snowfields breaks the definition of Vinegar Yard beside The Horseshoe Inn. Other parking areas immediately adjacent to the Conservation area and related to the warehouse at 9-17 Vinegar Lane are also detrimental to the setting.
- 3.4.16. At 26 Leathermarket Street a former gap in the street frontage west of No. 22 has been filled by a modern 2-storey pavilion-like community building. This building form does not follow the scale or line of buildings either side, and while it is not entirely detrimental, it makes no positive contribution to the quality of the Conservation Area.

Sub area 4 – Tower Bridge Road

Tower Bridge Road

- 3.4.17. The character of Tower Bridge Road is different in many ways from other parts of the Conservation Area in that it has a "metropolitan" scale that reflects its importance as a route in the wider London context. It is no coincidence that it is a relatively new street, built in the 1890s to extend the approach to Tower Bridge, and does not have the fine grain of narrow

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development frontages that are typical elsewhere in the Conservation Area. A boulevard character was intentionally planned, in which the trees that line the street are very significant.



Figure 47 Avenue trees in Tower Bridge Road help to create the “metropolitan” character intended by the street’s designers in the 1890s.

- 3.4.18. Within the Conservation Area, the character of Tower Bridge Road is created by strong street frontages of five or more storeys on the western side, a reasonably generous street width (18 metres), and avenue trees to reinforce linearity and height. The eastern side of the street is occupied by early 20th century commercial buildings in a range of simple styles varying from 3 to 5 storeys: the street trees are particularly important in enlivening this street frontage. The railway viaduct passes over the street on a brightly painted iron bridge, providing a powerful closure of the street scene northwards. Here the street space widens to take in Roper Lane, a fragment of the 18th century layout.

Roper Lane

- 3.4.19. The western side of Roper Lane is occupied by the former Sarsons’ Vinegar Factory site. It presents a very industrial face to the street with much altered 2-3 storey 19th century buildings at the north end and a 1930s block of three-storey height to the south. The most northerly building retains unusual large 3-bay sash windows at first floor level, one of which has a bayed centre section. Within the site are a number of listed industrial buildings dating back to the establishment of the works in the 1820s: they incorporate specialist details associated with brewing and malting operations which are important to preserve.
- 3.4.20. While the buildings present a plain appearance at street level, they are important in establishing a building height appropriate to the containment of Roper Street. The engineering character of the structures relates not only to the factory site, but also to the railway viaduct and bridge and gives these elements particular value as an industrial group.

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Figure 48 *The Railway Bridge is a key element of spatial enclosure, related to the industrial architecture of the former Sarsons Vinegar works.*

Tanner Street

- 3.4.21. The Conservation area extends through Tanner Street between Bermondsey Street and Tower Bridge Road and for a short distance further east. Tanner Street was historically an important east-west route and developed much as the rest of the Conservation area with warehouses and tanneries in the 19th century. Now only a small area of that character remains east of Tower Bridge Road. There are examples of small warehouses typical of the Conservation area generally at nos. 45-47 and nos. 54-58. The remainder was cleared in the construction of Tower Bridge Road and following wartime damage: Tanner Street recreation ground now occupies the western end of the street, separating the sub area from Bermondsey Street. A mixture of uses and building types, such as the Raven at the Tower pub on the corner, adds to the working character of the area.
- 3.4.22. A number of gap sites existed in Tanner Street until filled by some good recent buildings. Particularly successful is the corner site at nos. 35-45, occupied by a light and airy new building by Weston Williamson. It observes key design parameters of the established scale and character of the area, composed in strong vertical modules, defined by simple horizontal lines at roof level, and with interest and movement at street level. Its Tower Bridge Road elevation turns quietly to meet the 1930s face of the Sarsons Vinegar works, which is undergoing radical refurbishment. Opposite at no. 42, a more restrained six-storey building in terracotta coloured panels and glass marks the street corner decisively, again using simple, rectilinear forms.



Figure 49,50, 51 *New corner buildings on Tower Bridge Road.*

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Townscape and views

- 3.4.23. Views are contained within the linear form of the street and the railway bridge at the north is a dominant focus. At the bridge, the trees are particularly important in maintaining the visual line of Tower Bridge Road where Roper Lane sets back to the frontage of the former Sarsons' vinegar works. The enclosure of these structures creates a shaded street space, grouped with a listed red telephone box, York Stone paving and the granite sett surfaces below the railway arches. Glimpsed views through the arches to St. John's Churchyard north of the viaduct give additional visual interest.



Figure 52 Tower Bridge Road: visual closure and glimpsed views below the Railway Bridge.

Landscape elements

- 3.4.24. Tanner Street recreation ground has aspect over Tanner Street, but are otherwise enclosed by buildings. There is pedestrian access into Bermondsey Street at the western end but views into the gardens are blocked by walls and planting. Buildings on the north side of Tanner Street are critical to establishing the scale and enclosure of the gardens although they fall outside the Conservation Area. They are an important amenity for people living and working in the Bermondsey Street area and add to the vitality of the centre of the Conservation Area.

Negative elements

- 3.4.25. Significant recent redevelopment has taken place in the sub-area, particularly in relation to the Sarsons factory and new buildings on Tanner Street. Some gaps remain, particularly east of Tower Bridge Road, where the Conservation Area includes a security fenced car park next to nos. 1-4 Pope Street and a gap site between nos. 45 and 49,

4. AUDIT

4.1. Listed buildings

4.1.1. The list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest for Southwark was updated in September 1998. Detailed list descriptions are available from the Council. They are grouped in five main areas:

- Bermondsey Street, in five groups: east side 55-63, west side 86-78, west side 124-132, east side no. 173, and 2 Morocco Street / 2-4 Leathermarket Street;
- Grange Walk and Bermondsey Square (no. 67 is Grade II* listed);
- Bermondsey Leather Market;
- The Sarsons Vinegar Works in Roper Lane off Tower Bridge Road;
- St. Mary Magdalene Church and churchyard.

4.1.2. This last group includes the Grade II* classification of St. Mary Magdalene Church itself. In the churchyard are five listed tombs, the drinking fountain and an obelisk, the gates and gate piers opposite Purbrook Street, and the octagonal watch-house on the corner of Bermondsey Street and Long Lane.

4.1.3. An early red telephone box (K2 model) is listed on the green at Roper Walk. In the south-east of Tanner Street recreation ground is a listed drinking fountain, adapted from a turret on the tower of St. Olave's church, Tooley Street, to commemorate the opening of the recreation ground in 1929.

Key Unlisted Buildings and Building Groups

4.1.4. The main defining elements of the Conservation Area are groups of buildings that combine into frontages that define streets, spaces and views. Often this group value of buildings is as important as the individual characteristics of listed buildings, and the scale, containment and background character that they provide is essential to the character of the Conservation Area. The following descriptions include listed buildings in key groups.

4.2. Sub Area 1 - Bermondsey Street north

- *2-16 Crucifix Lane*: a 3-storey 19th century residential group, with shop fronts; No. 2 is The Horns pub. The group forms a strong street frontage opposite the railway arches into London Bridge Station.
- *35-71 Bermondsey Street*: including some listed buildings, a mixed group of 3-5 storey former warehouse and commercial premises, now all retail. They provide strong definition of street form.
- *46-62 Bermondsey Street*: 3-4 storey warehouse buildings providing strong definition of street form. No. 60 is a recent building by Weston Williamson, given a Civic Trust Commendation, 2002.
- *64-78 Bermondsey Street*: listed three storey Georgian buildings, with shop fronts: strong architectural character and definition of street form.

- *Tyers Gate: 2-6* (north side) are fine four storey commercial buildings with loading bays and a swing-gantry to the upper floors, and classical rusticated ground floors. On the south side are a 2-storey cottage, and three and four storey warehouse buildings. Together, the buildings form a narrow street approach into Leathermarket Gardens. No. 2 forms a strong corner onto Bermondsey Street.