



**Burton Stone Community Centre (Evelyn Crescent, Clifton,
York. YO30 6DR): A heritage appraisal**

Before becoming a community centre in the 1980s, this 1930s building was as a gymnasium / hall for what was originally called Water Lane High School for Girls (but later called Burton Stone Lane Secondary Modern County School). This building was opened on 6 October 1942, with the rest of the school completed in 1945. This is the only surviving aspect of the school.

Architectural significance

It was designed by local York architects, F.T. Penty & J.E.N. Thompson, who, along with the wider school buildings on this site, were also responsible for the Grade II listed redbrick Queen's building at St Peter's School (1927) and Tang Hall Primary School, both of which are recognised by Pevnsner in his *The Buildings of England* series.

Penty & Thompson were also involved in the construction of The Regal cinema on Piccadilly in 1937 (demolished in 1989). Although this cinema was designed by the chain's in-house architect, William R. Glen, given the *streamlined moderne* style of this building, a late type of Art Deco, and that Penty & Thompson were involved with it at the same time that they were designing Water Lane High School for Girls, the stylistics of the cinema and work with Glen would appear to have directly influenced the choice of style and materials of the gymnasium hall.

The building has architectural and aesthetic interest due to its sleek curved walls, elegant fenestration, flat roof with semi-circular 'deck', and chimney – all part of its *streamlined moderne* style. The city has very few other examples of this style, especially since the loss of The Regal cinema on Piccadilly. The only notable surviving example of this style in the city is the Grade II* Odeon cinema on Blossom Street.

Communal significance

While the rest of the original Water Lane School complex was demolished in the 1980s, this former gymnasium / hall holds important communal significance as a school (and youth centre) serving the Burton Stone, Kingsway North, and Water Lane estates for nearly half a century. Since the school's demolition, this building has served the community further as a popular and well-used community centre.

Historical significance

Built in response to the Education Act of 1936, Water Lane High School for Girls was the first purpose built Local Education Authority secondary school in York and, furthermore, the city's first public-ownership-provided Youth Centre – two milestones in the provision of formal and informal education in the city. Previously local interest groups, such as churches or private organisations, had provided sites for the young. This Council provision for the

'Youth Movement', as it was then called, dates from when the gymnasium hall first opened in 1942, and throughout the Second World War had a regular membership of in excess of a hundred local teenagers.

Due to its gymnasium purpose, the building is a rare surviving example of the craze for sport, health and wellbeing, especially for youths and women in particular, during the later 1930s. In a formal initiative, a response was made by the government following Great Britain's poor performance at the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games. Facilities were provided, including in schools, as part of Neville Chamberlain's National Fitness Campaign that started in 1937. Indeed, as a result of government advice on the need for secondary schools to provide gymnasium equipment and sports faculties (Government Education Circulars, 1938 (No.1445, and No.1450)), York Council's Education Committee identified the gymnasium hall at Water Lane High School for Girls as an example of its compliancy with these national directives (City of York Council Education Committee; RE Gymnastic Apparatus Etc. Sub-Committee Meeting, 13th May 1938).

In a wider national context, there was a 'craze' for swimming, sunbathing, team sports, camping and hiking; this health-drive zeitgeist was perhaps best captured in George Formby's hit film, 'Keep Fit' (1937). In architectural form, the Keep-Fit craze helped bring about the creation of new building forms: lidos, tennis and squash courts and clubhouses, and school gymnasium buildings. The Art Deco and *streamlined moderne* styles were often chosen for such buildings. Such use of modern materials and form was associated with health, leisure and luxury.

The Women's League of Health and Beauty (founded in 1930) was immensely popular with young women by the late 1930s. Under its motto 'Movement is Life', Prunella Stack expanded this organisation both nationally (with 166,000 members by 1937) and internationally, and relied on communal space provided by school gymnasiums and youth centres, amongst others, such as the one built here in Evelyn Crescent.

With almost no identifiable 1930s school gymnasium buildings on the National Heritage List for England, despite the keep-fit craze of that decade, the former gymnasium hall on Evelyn Crescent is of clear historic significance locally, as well as a possible national significance.

4 July 2018

Dr Duncan Marks
Heritage Planning Officer,
York Civic trust