

Case Name: Royal Vauxhall Tavern, 372 Kennington Lane, London SE11 5HY

Case Number: 1424488

Background

We have been asked to assess The Royal Vauxhall Tavern for listing.

Asset(s) under Assessment

Facts about the asset(s) can be found in the Annex(es) to this report.

Annex	Name	Heritage Category
1	Royal Vauxhall Tavern	Listing

Visits

Date	Visit Type
16 February 2015	Full inspection

Annex 1

The factual details are being assessed as the basis for a proposed addition to The National Heritage List for England.

Factual Details

Name: Royal Vauxhall Tavern

Location

Royal Vauxhall Tavern, 372 Kennington Lane, London, London, SE11 5HY

County	District	District Type	Parish
Greater London Authority	Lambeth	London Borough	Non Civil Parish

History

The Royal Vauxhall Tavern was built between 1860 and 1862 by the architect James Edmeston, the first building in a scheme to redevelop the site of Vauxhall Gardens which had closed in 1859. In 1889 the Royal Vauxhall Tavern was bought by the publicans Poole and Venner who in 1896 employed the architect RA Lewcock to refurbish the interior; his scheme included the installation of a long curving bar that followed the line of the internal structural columns, and for many years provided a stage and performance space for drag artists. In the 1970s the local streets, which had been laid out by Edmeston on the footprint of Vauxhall Gardens, were demolished, leaving the RVT standing alone, while the ground behind was landscaped to form New Spring Gardens.

The Royal Vauxhall Tavern, or RVT as it is known, is a key LGBTQ venue and symbol of the gay community, with a national and international reputation. From the later C19 the pub was recognised as an important drag venue, building on the reputation for Bohemian and alternative entertainment which had been characteristic of the area, and particularly of Vauxhall Gardens since its inception in the 1660s. Many well-known drag artists have started their career or performed at the RVT.

Given the need for discretion at the time, it is difficult to give a precise date, but during the course of the C20 the RVT came to be recognised as a major LGBTQ venue. Certainly by the 1960s it was overtly so, providing a meeting place and entertainment platform, and a flagship for the gay community, and it was a site of resistance to homophobia during the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1980s. The website <http://www.rvt.community/> provides a detailed history of the building and its cultural significance.

Thriving in this role, in the 1980s the pub was refurbished internally. Previously laid out with three smaller bar areas, internal partitions and the iconic curved bar were removed to provide a single open space served by a smaller bar against the southern wall and a larger stage, built against the rear wall of the building. Seating was built-in against the outer curved wall and in place of the horseshoe bar, island tables were created round each of the internal columns.

After Vauxhall Gardens closed, items, including 'about sixty-one iron columns', were sold at auction. It has been suggested that the six structural piers that support the first floor stair well and a further six used externally on the building may have been acquired from the Gardens. Illustrations of Vauxhall Gardens, including the frontispiece of the 1778 edition of the *Vocal* magazine, an engraving from the *Lady's* magazine of 1799 and a drawing by the artist and social commentator George Scharf of 1827 show buildings with columnar arcades but, never intended as precise architectural drawings, none appear to provide clear certainty that these correspond with the RVT columns and piers.

Details

Public house, 1860-62 by James Edmeston, remodelled internally in 1896 by RA Lewcock for the publicans Poole and Venner and again in the 1980s.

MATERIALS: stock brick with stucco dressings. Pitched, presumably slate, roofs are hidden behind the parapet and rear extensions.

PLAN: the building comprises pitched roofed wings in three storeys behind a curved street frontage. The pub has a single bar space, originally laid out as three separate bars, each entered from the street. To the right, a separate entrance gives access to the upper floors, which were formerly laid out as accommodation and probably a first floor function room on the street frontage.

EXTERIOR: the street frontage is in six bays, the upper floors articulated by giant order pilasters supporting pediments in the outer bays and in the inner bays a round-arched arcade above the second floor. The outer bays have rusticated pilasters framing a full-height recessed panel, within which is a pedimented first floor window with scrolled brackets, while the upper floor window has a shallow stilted arch with stucco rendered capitals and keystone. The inner bays have round-arched windows, on the first floor with moulded impost bands within each bay, and on the upper floor with a narrow cill band and moulded brackets. Most windows are horned sashes.

On the ground floor three entrances, of which the central doorway is now blocked, are flanked by engaged, fluted, timber columns on square bases, of which four retain their Corinthian capitals. Between the entrances are moulded panels; above all are overlights, of which the least altered are glazed with a central lozenge panel. The entrance to the right (south) to the upper floors has a later C20 architrave. The plinth below the ground floor windows is faced in ox blood coloured tiles with darker flush panels, but has been painted in 2015. The fascia is later C20.

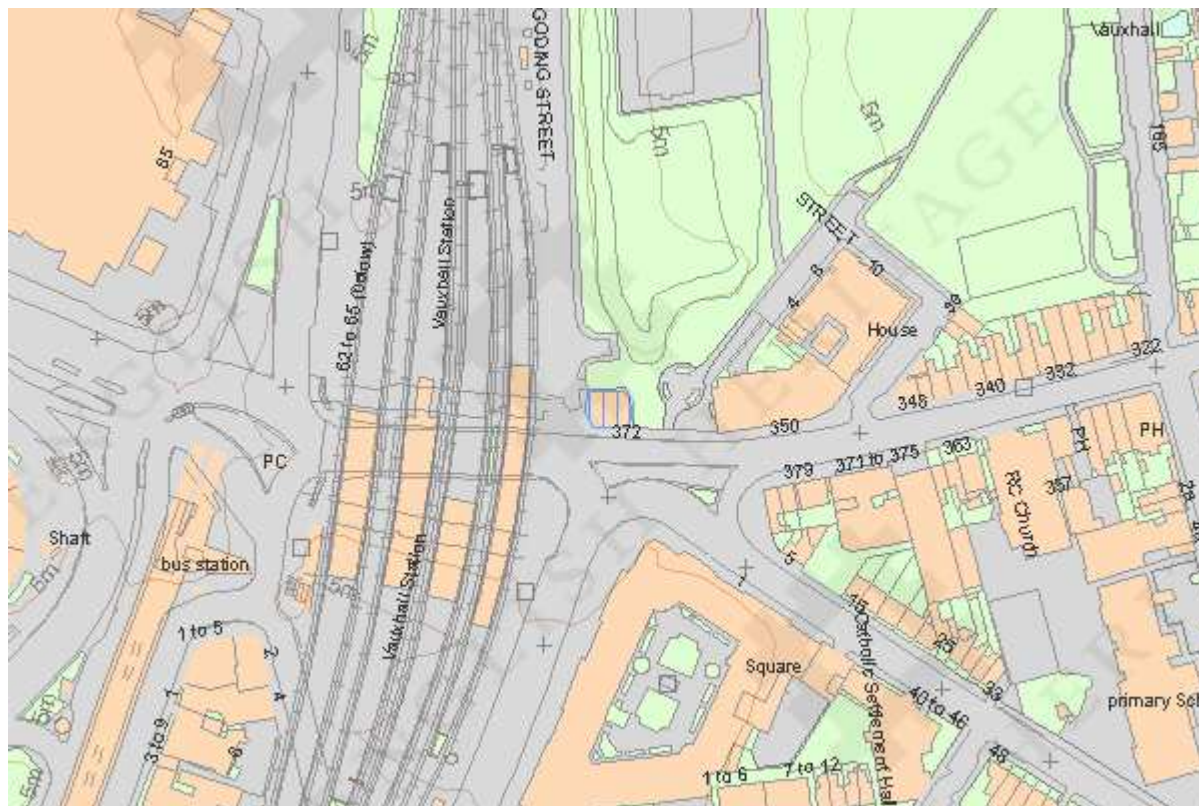
INTERIOR: arranged in an arc and supporting the curved stairwell above are six cast iron cylindrical columns with Composite capitals. The bases are enclosed by C20 cladding. Entrance doors have moulded architraves. Otherwise the bar area is a single space, remodelled and fitted out in the 1980s.

An impressive closed string stair built against a curved inner wall, with turned newels and moulded balusters, rises from first to second floors. The principal room on the first floor, perhaps formerly a function room, has been subdivided and within it most of the internal joinery has been replaced. Elsewhere upper floors have moulded door and window architraves and doors of four panels. A number of upper floor rooms have round-arched cast iron fireplaces and grates with integral trivets or pot stands.

Selected Sources

Websites

The Future of the Royal Vauxhall Tavern, accessed 7 May 2015 from <http://www.rvt.community/>

Map**National Grid Reference:** TQ3050078049

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The above map is for quick reference purposes only and may not be to scale. For a copy of the full scale map, please see the attached PDF – 1426984_1.pdf.