

## SPECIAL ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORIC INTEREST OF THE FORMER JEWISH MATERNITY HOSPITAL

22-28 UNDERWOOD ROAD

LB TOWER HAMLETS

Erected in three phases, the first phase is represented on Underwood Road by the Arts and Crafts 'cottage' at no. 24 Underwood Road. This two-storey building with semi-basement and a slightly projecting central bay with crow-stepped gable was designed by John Myers of 10 Gray's Inn Square WC. It was built on the site of two houses at nos. 24 & 26 Underwood Street, which were the front part of a former town dairy. The extensive back part was used by Myers for his large two-storey, flat-roofed block. Both buildings were opened in 1911 as The Sick Room Helps' Maternity Home. This included the headquarters of the Sick Room Helps' Society and a nurses' home.

The 'cottage' has brown-glazed-brick basal walls and upper walls of purple-brown brick. Steps up to the segmental-headed entrance doorway, with plain tile dressings, provided suitable access to the headquarters. The large round-arched entrance doorway to the right of the central bay led directly to the block at the back. Both doorways with what appear to be original wooden doors. The area to the front of the central bay still fenced by its very good original railings. And the crow-stepped gable complemented by a brick relieving arch over the central first-floor window. Western bay with two small rectangular windows above its round-arched entrance contributing to the balanced composition.

The second phase is represented by the four-storey, three-bay, flat-roofed block at no. 28 Underwood Road. This was designed by Messrs. Joseph Architects of 2 Pauls Bakehouse Court EC4; built on the site of two houses and their backyards at nos. 36 & 38 Underwood Street, and opened in 1925 as the Childrens' Welfare Centre.

The block's eastern bay is a slightly projecting stair tower with dark-red-brick pilasters rising through three storeys from brown-glazed-brick plinths (either side of the entrance doorway) to a dark-red-brick top storey. Top storey pierced by a circular window opening with four plain tile keys, below which a brick string course arches over a round-headed window opening with a keyed plain tile arch. This is the highest of three window openings set in a yellow-brown-brick panel between the dark-red-brick pilasters; the two lower flat-headed window openings with flat plain tile arches. The block's western section is fronted by original railings, and has a yellow-brown-brick ground storey with a large segmental-headed window opening. And upper walls of dark red brick with pairs of flat-headed window openings with flat plain tile arches.

The third and final phase is mainly represented on Underwood Road by the Neo-Georgian three-storey block with white coved cornice, between no. 24 and no. 28 Underwood Road. This was also designed by Messrs. Joseph, and

built on the site of four houses at nos. 28-34 Underwood Street. Their long back gardens had been taken in the mid-1890s for four single-storey tailors' workshops. These were demolished for Messrs. Joseph's three-storey, flat-roofed block at the back. This linked the 1911 block with the back part of the 1925 block to create a courtyard behind the Arts and Crafts 'cottage' and the Neo-Georgian front block. Both the Neo-Georgian front block and the three-storey block at the back were opened in November 1927 by Lord Reading. They included four new wards, two operating theatres, an observation nursery and more accommodation for the nursing staff and administrators.

The four-storey, seven-bay, flat-roofed block has a yellow-brown-brick ground storey with flat-headed window openings with flat plain tile arches, and a centrally-located circular window with four plain till keys, like the one on the top storey of the 1925 block. Of the two entrance doorways, the eastern is original but the western has been inserted into the westernmost ground-floor window opening. Between the doorways, slightly truncated railings like the 1925 railings. Upper walls of red brick with flat-headed window openings level with those in the two-bay section of the 1925 block. First-floor window openings with flat plain tile arches; and heads of second-floor window openings recessed into the lower part of the white coved cornice. The plain tile dressings match those on the 1925 block, and all make reference to the plain tile dressings in the segmental-headed entrance doorway in John Myers' Arts and Crafts 'cottage'.

During the third and final phase, Messrs. Joseph also designed the stylistically similar two-bay western extension to Myers' 'cottage', but with yellow-brown-brick walls. Its segmental-headed, plain-tile-dressed entrance doorway (with what appears to be its original wooden door) provided direct access to the rear.

All the buildings at 22-28 Underwood Road are associated with Alice Model who started and ran the maternity home from 1911 until her death in 1943. Under the auspices of the Jewish Board of Guardians, she founded the Sick Room Helps' Society in 1895 to help the sick poor and confined women in their own homes in the Jewish East End. Based on a German plan, the SRHS was the first organisation in this country to provide home helps and visiting maternity nurses. The district maternity nurse scheme was started in 1899 and by 1906 the SRHS had a maternity nurses' home at 61 Philpot Street. In 1911, a generous bequest and a donation from Sir Marcus Samuel allowed the society to open its purpose-built maternity home and nurses' home at 24 & 26 Underwood Street - the first and only Jewish lying-in hospital in England. Alice Model was the president and honorary secretary of the SRHS until 1909. After Lady Samuel became president in 1910, Alice Model continued as honorary secretary - raising funds, recruiting volunteers, organising, campaigning and serving on committees.

In about 1914, the Sick Room Helps' Society became the Jewish Maternity, District Nursing and Sick Room Helps' Society. Following completion in 1927,

the maternity home and its branches were incorporated in 1928; and in 1932 hospital status was established. The Jewish Maternity Hospital's annual report for 1936 records that the hospital incorporated: The District Nursing and Sick Room Helps' Society; The Maternity Home and Midwifery Training School; The Ladies' Benevolent Lying-in Institution and The Infant Welfare Centre. The report also included the committee's thanks to the honorary organising secretary Mrs. A. Model MBE "for her ceaseless and unselfish work on behalf of the Hospital".

Alice Model had been appointed MBE in 1935 after forty years of pioneering involvement in maternal and infant welfare. In addition to founding the SRHS in 1895, she established the Jewish Day Nursery in 1897 for the infants of working parents. This was renamed the Alice Model Nursery and now occupies the ground floor of a four-storey building in Beaumont Grove: The Stepney Jewish (B'nai Brith) Club and Settlement, opened by the Queen Mother 28 June 1956. The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* OUP 2004 includes a biography of Alice Isabella Model (1856-1943) by Susan L. Tananbaum.

Despite Alice Model's long involvement with the Jewish Maternity Home, it was known in the Jewish East End as "Mother Levy's" or "Mother Levy's Maternity Home". Arnold Wesker, for instance, was born in Mother Levy's Maternity Home in 1932. Mother Levy was probably the Mrs. S. Levy recorded in the Jewish Year Books from 1899 to 1916 as the SRHS district maternity superintendent. In visiting homes throughout the Jewish East End, supervising the work of the maternity nurses, and from 1911 arranging for some mothers to have their babies at the home in Underwood Street, Mrs. S. Levy was the public face of the SRHS and its new maternity home. The Mrs. L. Levy named as the district nursing superintendent in the Jewish Year Book for 1920 may have also succeeded Mrs. S. Levy in the role of Mother Levy. Further research is needed but Mrs. L. Levy may have been the Mrs. Levy who was the administrator for the Ladies' Benevolent Institution from 1905 to about 1917. This metropolitan charity helped "Jewish lying-in married women at their own homes" and in 1918 was probably the "Ladies' Benevolent Lying-in Institution" which amalgamated with the Jewish Maternity District Nursing and Sick Room Helps' Society (JMH 1936 annual report).

In 1940, the Jewish Maternity Hospital was renamed the Bearsted Memorial Hospital, in memory of the first Viscount Bearsted (1853-1927): formerly Sir Marcus Samuel, founder of the Shell Trading and Transport Company and benefactor of the Jewish Maternity Home. During the Second World War, the Bearsted Memorial Hospital moved to The Green, Hampton Court, but maintained an out-patients' department at 36-38 Underwood Road (the former infant welfare centre opened in 1925). The vacant 1911 and 1927 buildings were adapted in 1941 for use as an ARP stretcher party depot with offices, kitchen, dining room and dormitories.

After the War, the Bearsted Memorial Hospital moved to new premises in Lordship Road, Stoke Newington. Stepney Borough Council purchased its old buildings in Underwood Road and re-opened them in November 1947 as the Mary Hughes Welfare Centre and Nursery. The centre at nos. 22-28 Underwood Road included an ante-natal clinic, infant welfare centres, nurseries, nursery nurses hostel and an LCC school treatment centre. It was named "to perpetuate the memory of the late Councillor Mary Hughes as a mark of appreciation of her great work and untiring efforts on behalf of the people of the area". The Mary Hughes Welfare Centre and Nursery was closed in 1996 and nos. 22-28 Underwood Road were subsequently occupied by Bethnal Green Area Social Services. Now vacant, the buildings face an uncertain future as they are neither locally listed nor in a conservation area.

Unless granted immediate protection, the East End will almost certainly lose its last surviving Jewish hospital: The London Jewish Hospital (1919, 1921, 1927 and 1928) and nurses' home (1939) having been demolished for the London Independent Hospital, opened in Beaumont Square in 1986. Fortunately, the East End's other former maternity hospital, the East End Maternity Hospital in Commercial Road, presently survives as the Steel's Lane Health Centre. But this was not a purpose-built hospital, whereas the identifiable phases in the unique assemblage of purpose-built buildings in Underwood Road provide an exemplar of early-C20 charitable hospital development. The buildings also represent the achievements of a pioneering organisation in the related fields of home helps, maternal welfare and infant welfare.

The special historic interest of England's first and only Jewish lying-in hospital is enhanced by the use of nos. 22-26 Underwood Road as an ARP stretcher party depot during the Second World War. As such, the former Jewish Maternity Hospital is one of the very few surviving representatives of ARP work during the East End Blitz.

Although the LBTH nursery in Beaumont Grove bears her name, Alice Model's real memorial is the former Jewish Maternity Hospital in Underwood Road. Given the tragic loss of the London Jewish Hospital and nurses' home, it would be appropriate for English Heritage to recognise the special architectural and historic interest of Alice Model's hospital as the sole representative of maternal and infant welfare provision in the Jewish East End.

The former hospital is briefly described by Cherry, O'Brien and Pevsner in *London 5: East* YUP 2005 p. 423.

The house at 61 Philpot Street, used by the SRHS maternity nurses' home from about 1906 to 1911, is a c.1839 tall three-storey terraced house. Street Directories record that the house was occupied by the Sick Room Help Society and that Mrs. Sara Levy was the superintendent: she was probably the Mrs. S. Levy recorded in the Jewish Year Books as the SRHS district

maternity superintendent. No. 61 Philpot Street is now occupied by the City and East London Bereavement Service.

The Bearsted Memorial Hospital in Lordship Road was opened in 1947 and closed in about 1980. Following demolition, the site was shared between two Jewish charities and a Jewish Housing Association, and is now occupied by the Bearsted Centre, the Somers Children and Family Centre and housing at Schonfeld Square.

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