

Case Name: Cecil Rhodes Memorial Plaque, 6 King Edwards Street, Oxford

Case Number: 1432715

Background

Historic England has been asked to assess for listing a commemorative plaque dedicated to Cecil Rhodes.

Asset(s) under Assessment

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

Annex	List Entry Number	Name	Heritage Category	HE Recommendation
1	1432747	Cecil Rhodes Memorial Plaque	Listing	Add to List

Visits

Date	Visit Type
11 February 2016	External only

Context

The plaque is mounted on an unlisted building which stands within the Oxford Central Conservation Area. The owners of the plaque (Oriel College) had been considering whether it should be removed from the building. The decision has now been taken, however, that the plaque should remain.

Assessment

CONSULTATION

The applicant, Oriel College, the local authority, the Historic Environment Record (HER) and the Victorian Society were consulted on the facts of the case.

The local authority provided a response which considered the basis on which the plaque might have claims to special historic interest, and noted that Rhodes' contribution is recognised in other ways within Oxford. They concluded that it remains undecided as to whether the plaque merits listing.

Oriel College provided some minor additional points of historic fact, which have been added to the relevant sections of the report. The College also confirmed its decision that the plaque is to remain in place, and noted that aside from the plaque's historic importance, it also represents an interesting example of the work of the artist, Onslow Whiting.

The applicant provided a minor additional point of fact. A direct descendent of Sir Alfred Mosely, who erected the plaque, also contacted us with some additional information regarding Mosely. Where relevant this has been added to the report.

The Victorian Society expressed the view that the plaque should be listed, in recognition of Rhodes' importance as a national figure, as well as for its artistic interest. The Society noted the need to separate an assessment of significance, from a moral judgement of Rhodes' character and views.

DISCUSSION

This listing application seeks the listing of the memorial plaque dedicated to Cecil Rhodes, rather than the building to which it is fixed (a building typical of its late-C19 date, without special interest). In line with the provisions made by the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013, it is possible to list the plaque while expressly excluding the building from the listing. For the plaque to be listed however, it would have to meet, in isolation, the criteria set out in the Principles of Selection for Listing Buildings (March 2010) - those of special architectural or historic interest. Advice specifically relating to the assessment of commemorative structures is found in our Listing Selection Guide: Commemorative Structures (April 2011). Factors for consideration include date, artistic merit and the significance of the persons or events commemorated.

From lavish commemorative monuments to the decorative embellishment of town halls and pubs, Victorian sculpture expressed the ideals of a society which embraced history, ornament, and its own success. The celebration through sculptural portraits of important figures in fields such as politics, the Arts, and philanthropy, was particularly popular, with works being both free-standing monuments, as well as being mounted onto or within buildings. The sculptural legacy of the period is rich in quantity and quality, and the Rhodes plaque under assessment here, though not strictly Victorian, is very much within that same tradition. Artistically, it is a successful piece: the work of a skilled artist, which well captures Rhodes' likeness; his shoulders and the folds of his lapel break free of the architectural frame in which they sit, bringing a subtle informality to the portrait.

Historically, the plaque has several layers of interest. Firstly, it commemorates a figure of national importance. Though his legacy is a controversial one, Rhodes' life and work nevertheless impacted significantly on the story of British Imperialism in the late C19; his commemoration in this plaque reminds us how our understanding of the past changes with the perspective of time. Beyond this however, the fact that the location of the plaque marks Rhodes' residence at the time he completed his degree at Oxford, and that it was funded by a personal friend, gives it a level of interest beyond that of other types of memorial. The erection of plaques to commemorate the connection of a place with a particular person or event is a well-established practice; however these plaques tend to be erected by committees or by consensus. The Rhodes plaque was erected shortly after his death and is the tribute of a friend and fellow philanthropist to mark a site which had a meaning important to the subject. In this way it is an unusual piece, being a particularly personal commemoration.

The listing of buildings or sculpture associated with any particular individual is not a moral judgement of their life or work. The significance of an individual is judged in relation to their impact, for good or ill, on the cultural, economic or political history of this country, and this forms just one facet of the consideration of a building or structure for listing. The Cecil Rhodes plaque is both a testament to the importance of Rhodes as a historical figure, but also as a friend to Alfred Mosely, and a man for whom his time at Oxford was particularly important. It is also a work of high artistic merit, and for all these reasons it is recommended that the Cecil Rhodes plaque be listed at Grade II.

In recommending the extent of designation we have considered whether powers of exclusion under s.1 (5A) of the 1990 Act are appropriate, and consider that they are. This is made clear in the proposed List entry.

CONCLUSION

After examining all the records and other relevant information, and having carefully considered the architectural and historic interest of this case, the criteria for listing are fulfilled.

REASON FOR DESIGNATION DECISION

The Cecil Rhodes memorial plaque, 1906 is recommended for listing at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

- * Historic interest: Rhodes is a figure of international significance, whose life and work impacted fundamentally on the story of British Imperialism in southern Africa in the late C19;
- * Artistic interest: the work of a skilled artist, the plaque is a handsome object, capturing Rhodes' likeness with a subtle informality;
- * Rarity: erected shortly after Rhodes' death this is an unusual example of a personal tribute of a friend and fellow philanthropist, marking a site which had a meaning important to the subject.

Annex 1**List Entry****List Entry Summary**

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

Name: Cecil Rhodes Memorial Plaque

List Entry Number: 1432747

Location

6 King Edward Street, Oxford, OX1 4JL

The listed building is shown coloured blue on the attached map. Pursuant to s.1 (5A) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 ('the Act'), structures attached to or within the curtilage of the listed building (save those coloured blue on the map) are not to be treated as part of the listed building for the purposes of the Act.

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County	District	District Type	Parish
Oxfordshire	Oxford	District Authority	Non Civil Parish

National Park: Not applicable to this List entry.

Grade: II

Date first listed:

Date of most recent amendment:

Legacy System Information

This section only relates to older records, created before the introduction of the National Heritage List for England in 2011.

Legacy System: Not applicable to this List entry.

Legacy Number: Not applicable to this List entry.

Asset Groupings

This List entry does not comprise part of an Asset Grouping. Asset Groupings are not part of the official record but are added later for information.

List Entry Description**Summary of Building**

Memorial plaque, dedicated to Cecil Rhodes, 1906, by Onslow Whiting.

Reasons for Designation

The Cecil Rhodes memorial plaque, 1906 is listed at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

- * Historic interest: Rhodes is a figure of international significance, whose life and work impacted fundamentally on the story of British Imperialism in southern Africa in the late C19;
- * Artistic interest: the work of a skilled artist, the plaque is a handsome object, capturing Rhodes' likeness with a subtle informality;
- * Rarity: erected shortly after Rhodes' death this is an unusual example of a personal tribute of a friend and fellow philanthropist, marking a site which had a meaning important to the subject.

History

Cecil John Rhodes (1853-1902) was an imperialist, colonial politician and mining entrepreneur. He has always been the subject of intense controversy, even during his lifetime; he was "revered by his intimates, who regarded him as a towering colossus, and reviled by those who saw him as an unprincipled and unscrupulous adventurer" (Oxford Dictionary of National Biography). Born in Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire, he was sent at the age of seventeen to the British Colony of Natal to assist his brother in growing cotton. His efforts soon transferred to diamond mining, large reserves of the gems having recently been discovered in the region. The vast wealth which Rhodes amassed during his lifetime was founded on this enterprise, and he was both a great supporter of, and contributor to, a new phase of aggressive imperial expansion in southern Africa in the later C19.

Rhodes' connection with Oxford began in 1873; at the age of twenty he had accumulated enough wealth to return to England and fulfil his ambition of an Oxford education. Gaining a place at Oriel College, he was an intermittent undergraduate, attending for short periods in between developing his business interests in Africa, finally completing his pass degree in 1881. In 1899 he was also awarded an honorary degree by the university. Rhodes' regard for Oxford, and the education it offered, was expressed in his will. He left a sizable endowment to Oriel and provided for 160 scholarships to Oxford for young men from Canada, Australia, South Africa, Rhodesia, New Zealand, Newfoundland, Bermuda, Jamaica, Germany, and the United States. The scholarship programme continues to run, with beneficiaries known as Rhodes Scholars.

The plaque on King Edward Street was erected in 1906, four years after Rhodes' death, by his friend, business associate, and medical and educational philanthropist, Alfred Mosely. Located on a building owned by Oriel College, it marks the location of Rhodes' residence during Michaelmas term in 1881. The plaque is the work of Onslow Whiting (1872-1937), a Letchworth-based sculptor and silversmith who taught at the Central School of Arts and Crafts, London. Whiting is responsible for several listed memorials commemorating those who fell in the Boer War, including one erected by Alfred Mosely, and Letchworth's First World War memorial on Station Place.

Details

The plaque is fixed to the street frontage of No. 6 King Edward Street, part of a late-C19 terrace*.

The plaque is approximately 2m high, situated between a pair of first-floor sash windows. Of cast bronze manufacture, it comprises a relief bust of Rhodes within a shallow arched niche surmounted by the Oriel crest of three lions rampant. Below the bust is a square-framed inscription reading: IN THIS HOUSE THE RIGHT / HON. CECIL JOHN RHODES / KEPT ACADEMICAL RESIDENCE / IN THE YEAR 1881 / THIS MEMORIAL IS ERECT- / ED BY ALFRED MOSELY / IN RECOGNITION OF THE / GREAT SERVICES RENDERED / BY CECIL RHODES TO / HIS COUNTRY, beneath which is a laurel wreath cast in relief.

*Pursuant to s.1 (5A) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 ('the Act') it is declared that No 6 King Edward Street is not of special architectural or historic interest.

Selected Sources

Books and journals

Lee, S (Editor), Dictionary of National Biography, Second Supplement, Vol.III, (1912), pp. 181-191

Websites

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, entry for Cecil John Rhodes, accessed 13 Jan 2015 from <http://www.oxforddnb.com>

Map

National Grid Reference: SP5154806165



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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 - 1432747_1.pdf