

## The New New Synagogue A Building "At Risk" no longer



The New Synagogue (Egerton Road, Stamford Hill, London)  
(Photo: Nic Stevenson © English Heritage 2005)

**London, June 2005:** Stamford Hill's New Synagogue, universally known as "Egerton Road", has been awarded £62,000 for restoration and conversion into the headquarters of the Bobover Hasidim in London. The grant is made under the English Heritage & Heritage Lottery Fund Joint Places of Worship Repair Grants Scheme.

Egerton Road has been virtually redundant for well over a decade, since the site was sold in stages by the United Synagogue to the Bobovers from 1987. In fact, the fine building deteriorated so rapidly that the sky could be seen through the roof and there were pigeon droppings all over the floor. In 1996 the Grade II Listed synagogue was added to the English Heritage Listed Buildings at Risk Register.

It is therefore welcome news that Egerton Road is being granted a new lease of life serving another section of London's Jewish community. Indeed, evolution and adaptation has been part of the history of the New Synagogue.

For the Stamford Hill New is of greater historical significance than its comparatively recent vintage implies. The interior of the current building is, in many ways, a replica of the previous New Synagogue, designed by John Davies in 1838 in Great St Helen's Bishopsgate in the City - and it contains some original fittings from that building.

A founder member of the United Synagogue in 1870, the New was a famous landmark in its day. It was the only synagogue featured amongst the engravings in Melville and Shepherd's *London Interiors* of 1841 which achieved wide circulation. In 1855 the *Illustrated Times* described it as "the finest synagogue not only in England, but in all Europe" - despite the existence not only of Bevis Marks, but of the Great Synagogue, the Hambro and the Western at that time.

None of this figured in the calculations of the United Synagogue when, faced with the familiar story of the instability of London Jewry - leaving the city for the suburbs - they decided, just before the First World War, to close down the New Synagogue. The site was sold to Marcus Samuel, later Lord Bearsted, who demolished the synagogue in 1912 to make way for the company headquarters of Shell Petroleum.

However, salient features of Davies' New Synagogue live on inside the replacement building in Stamford Hill - although the exterior is completely different. The style is Italian Renaissance, fashionable in Davies' day. The *Aron Kodesh* [Ark] is housed in a semi-circular apse with a coffered ceiling. The columns flanking the Ark and that carry the gallery, follow the classical architectural Orders, Corinthian above superimposed on Doric below, all with gilded capitals. The clerestory windows were retained but, instead of a flat ceiling, the rebuilt version has a shallow barrel vault and the galleries are tiered and open, the heavy brasswork lattices obscuring the women from view having been dispensed with (a high *Mehitzah* is now to be reinstated). The concave mahogany Ark with its sliding doors was brought "in its entirety" from Bishopsgate. This *Aron Kodesh*, inspired by that of James Spiller's Great Synagogue in Duke's Place, was greatly admired and in turn influenced those of a number of other synagogues including Birmingham's Singer's Hill (1856) and Sandys Row (1870). The *Bimah* too was brought to Stamford Hill, although much altered, but the massive candlesticks at each of its corners are the original 1830s brasswork. (Sadly, one of these was stolen during the 1990s).

Imagination and hard work have finally achieved the transformation of the Stamford Hill New Synagogue into the Bobover Synagogue, the largest Hasidic synagogue in Britain. Sympathetic alteration and adaptation will both preserve its fabric and ensure that a new generation of Jews will use and appreciate this historic building.