

Statement of Significance for 1061 Richmond Street, “Robinson Memorial United Church”

Description of Property

1061 Richmond Street, “Robinson Memorial United Church”, is an ecclesiastical structure listed as on Plan 217 , Lots 5 & 6. It is located at the southwest corner of Richmond Street and Sherwood Avenue in north London.

Statement of Cultural Value or Interest

Robinson Memorial United Church is important for three primary reasons: its architectural value, historical and associate value, and contextual value.

The competition to design Robinson Memorial United Church was won by the prominent London architect William G. Murray (1876-1954) who executed plans for a number of other churches in London and southwestern Ontario in the Romanesque Revival style including New St. James Presbyterian Church in London and St. James Anglican Church in Watford. Initially a Methodist Church, it was dedicated for service on March 17, 1912 replacing a small wooden hall that had served worshipers as a mission church established by First Methodist Church, later Metropolitan United Church, since 1891. The new church was named in honour of George R. Robinson who was responsible for the construction of the original mission hall. Murray also designed the Reynolds Hall addition of 1951-52 in a style and using materials sympathetic to the earlier Romanesque Revival building.

Robinson Memorial United Church is an important landmark in London North helping to define and support the character of its immediate neighbourhood both physically and visually. It was long regarded as the neighbourhood church until in recent years church attendance declined significantly and it closed late in 2010.

Description of Heritage Attributes

Robinson Memorial United Church is one of several mid-sized and large churches built in London between 1890 and 1914 in the then popular Romanesque Revival style, which broadcasts an impression of solidity and monumentality and reflects the strength and vigour of the Christian faith of the era. The church, with its sanctuary in the front section of the building and a rotunda-shaped Sunday School at the rear, follows the Akron Plan, a design blueprint popular with Methodist churches of the 19th and early 20th centuries. In terms of its execution and design elements, the church arguably represents architect William G. Murray’s best work. Murray successfully met the challenge of designing an apparently large building on a compact, 68-foot-by-124-foot corner lot.

The building contains many of the features that define the Romanesque Revival style and appear to be well executed and in fine condition. A major feature of the building is its outstanding stained glass executed by several London stained glass manufacturers and designers notably Hobbs Glass, Edwards Glass and Christopher Wallis.

The heritage attributes worthy of preservation include:

- Red brick construction with contrasting cut stone window heads and sills and randomly placed stone highlights
- A tall, three-stage, crenelated corner tower featuring stone capped buttresses and tall narrow windows, the upper two of which on all sides of the tower accentuated by single brick arches
- Balanced by a shorter, two-stage, crenelated tower on the opposite corner
- A one story narthex which links the two corner towers
- The narthex contains the two main entrance doors with stained glass transoms above and balanced on either side by single elongated round headed stained glass windows
- The prominent gable end above and in back of the narthex encases a large stained glass round window accentuated by a single brick arch above and supported with tablet-like windows below
- The side elevations are dominated by large gables which project slightly forward from the wall surface and are supported by stone capped stepped buttresses at the corners
- The side elevation gables also encase large, round headed stained glass windows and are likewise accentuated by single brick arches above
- Windows, some containing both patterned stained glass and plain coloured glass and others clear glass, break the wall space of the remaining portions of the side elevations and two towers
- A rounded band of clerestory windows atop and towards the rear of the roof light the interior of the former Sunday School from above; some of the windows are now filled in
- A small, gable ended minister’s study extends from the Sherwood Avenue side elevation

- The building is anchored on a foundation of rock faced cut stone blocks which on the front elevation includes the corner stone with the inscription “George Robinson/Memorial/Methodist Church/1911”
- The Reynolds Hall of 1951-52, added to the rear elevation of the Sunday School section of the original 1911-12 building and also designed by Murray, mimics it in its use of red brick and cut stone highlights which cap the corner buttresses and encase the name of the hall above the slightly projecting entrances on the Richmond Street and Sherwood Avenue elevations
- Red brick arches, squared on the Richmond Street elevation and rounded on the Sherwood Avenue elevation, accentuate the doors of both Reynolds Hall entrances
- The third floor windows of the Sherwood Avenue elevation feature leaded, coloured glass windows