



Historic London foundry that made Big Ben's bells could be saved from hotel development

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The digital heritage preservation company Factum Foundation and conservation group Re-Form Heritage plan to buy the site and hold it in perpetuity as a working foundry.



Palace of Westminster and Big Ben

Photo: Cornel Putan

A non-profit organisation known as the London Bell Foundry has made an offer to acquire the Whitechapel bell foundry in east London which could see the historic site reopen as a working enterprise.

The Art Newspaper learned that the centuries-old site in east London could be up for sale after the UK government approved a controversial plan to turn it into a boutique hotel development early last year. The Whitechapel bell foundry was bought by the US investment group Raycliff Capital, which pledged to transform the foundry into a 103-room hotel, café and studios for creative businesses.

The landmark building is currently available to rent with the high-end estate agents Pilcher. “We are letting the building as a whole; the back section, which is the old



foundry and the front section, which is a set of two period buildings,” said a Pilcher spokesman. Commercial galleries are encouraged to apply, he confirmed. Asked if the building is for sale, the spokesman said: “Not officially, but like everything, there is a price.”



Workers at the Whitechapel Bell Foundry, which had been casting bells for more than 400 years

Now there is an alternative. The digital heritage preservation company Factum Foundation teamed up with the conservation group Re-Form Heritage to use the site for its industrial purpose. Both organisations want to acquire the organisation and buildings through the newly formed London Bell Foundry, and form a charitable trust to then hold it in perpetuity as a working foundry.

A spokesperson for the London Bell Foundry says: “In 2020 the owners entered into a legal obligation not to occupy or permit occupation of the foundry (listed building) until they had entered into a lease for the occupation of the foundry. This lease is for a minimum of ten years. As you are aware the foundry remains shuttered up and unoccupied.”

He adds: “In October 2022 the owners appointed agents to market the foundry for rent or sale. As a result of this in November, The London Bell Foundry Limited put forward a proposal, via its agents, to lease the building for ten years with an option to purchase the freehold in year ten or earlier. The proposal is to re-establish a working foundry in the listed building and it would comply with the owners’ legal obligation. The proposed lease terms are on a commercial basis.” Pilcher had not responded to a request for comment at the time of writing.