Emergency Works

Hotel Meridiana 43-44 Argyle Square London

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Perit Marielouise Caruana Galea

A&CE, MSc Conservation (Tech.)¹

(Architect, Civil & Structural Engineer, Restoration Consultant)

¹ Bachelor of Architecture and Civil Engineering (BE&A Hons), University of Malta 1997 Masters of Science in Conservation Technology for Masonry Buildings, University Of Malta. 2004

Historical Background

Built around the 1830's/ 1840's the building forms part of the Georgian terrace the forms the west side of Argyle Square. The building listing relates primarily to the contribution that the front façade makes to the cohesion of the square.

The extensions were built out of necessity to use the building as a hotel and were in fact three hotel rooms at basement, ground and first floor level. Construction was of low quality as the extensions were built by the owners themselves who were not thoroughly knowledgeable in building construction techniques. No architect/structural engineer was involved at the time.

These extensions were similar to the hotels either side at the rear.

Emergency demolition

Old buildings in generally suffer from continual movement, and this is common and accepted if the movement is limited to a certain degree. The extensions in question however exhibited excessive movement in the last three years with cracks continually propagating and increasing in width both on the walls (which was a blockwork wall and rendered finish) and in the ceiling slab (which was a reinforced concrete slab). The ground, which was a thin layer of concrete screed, was also exhibiting hairline cracks. This situation persisted over the years but the undersigned, who took over the running of the hotel in these past 7 years, kept check on these cracks, also installing crack monitors (tell-tales) to understand the way the cracks were behaving.

Over the past two months, in the Christmas period, the situation took a turn to the worst overnight as cracks widened up to such a degree that one could actually look through the cracks in the wall and see the other side. The ground concrete screed in the 0.9m wide corridor which formed the yard, had wide gaps and subsidence was evident. At this stage the undersigned stripped of the carpets of the basement room and the same type of cracks could also be seen in the ground slab of this room. The reinforced concrete slab at all the three levels as well as the whole height of the external walls was also severely cracked in a number of places. The undersigned has thorough knowledge in old buildings and movement could be clearly related to subsidence.

A decision had to be taken swiftly, over the Christmas period/ New Year for the benefit of the safety of our guests as these rooms were used as hotel rooms as well as

the fact that the yard has a secondary fire exit and hence pre-caution **for all** the guests in general had to be taken. A decision was taken by the undersigned to dismantle the rooms as these were considered emergency works both in her capacity of the owner/director of the block as well as in her capacity of a structural engineer. The cause of the subsidence is thought to be due to inadequate and proper drainage as a number of broken drains were unearthed during the emergency works. In order to rectify this underpinning works were carried out under the surrounding walls and a structural concrete raft was cast in the back yard.

It is the author's intention, along with the other director, to apply for a full development permit to rebuild the rooms as they were originally.

Orthene Gradie

Perit Marielouise Caruana Galea A & CE, MSc Conservation (Tech.) 44, St. Margaret Street, Siggiewi SGW 1017 Tel: +356 21 462367 Mob: 9942 8654