

L O V E

CHARTERED ARCHITECTS

A R C H I T E C T U R E

PROJECT MANAGERS

Director: B Q LOVE RIBA FRSA



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49 Doughty St, WC1N 2LX

Proposed New Front Area Stair

Heritage Statement

49 Doughty St is a four storey terraced house built in the early 19C. Its use is as the Charles Dickens Museum. It is listed Grade II, and sits in a street of houses used for generally office and residential purposes.

The proposed development is demolition of the existing stone and concrete stair and metal gate which give access to the front 'area', and construction of a new steel stair and gate which will conform more closely with current building regulations.

Architectural and Historical Interest

The town houses along Doughty St are of significance as they are almost complete Georgian streets. (Source: Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy)

Number 49 is part of a terrace of 24 houses, and with Nos 47-62 was built c1807-9. The terrace was completed by 1820. The houses were built by J Wigg, G Slaton and J Wilson of multi-coloured stock brick most with evidence of tuck pointing. They have a plain stucco first-floor sill band and slate mansard roofs with dormers except Nos 53-55 and 62.

Nos 39-47, 49-52 and 56-61 each have three storeys, attics and dormers. They have three windows each; round-arched doorways with panelled or recessed pilaster-jambs, cornice-heads, most with patterned fanlights and panelled doors. Nos 44-47, 49, 51 and 52 have doorways with stuccoed surrounds. The windows have gauged brick flat arches to recessed, mostly 2-pane sashes. Nos 49, 52, 56, 57 and 60 have cast-iron balconies to first-floor windows. Stucco cornices and blocking courses. Most houses with original lead rainwater heads and pipes.

SUBSIDIARY FEATURES: attached cast-iron railings with urn finials to areas. (Source: English Heritage Listing Text)

Condition of Existing Stair & Railings

The existing stair consists of a sandstone structure assumed to be the original stair, with mid 20th C concrete treads overlaid, to which are attached a mid 20th C balustrade. See attached photographs.

The original stone is badly weathered and delaminating, potentially imperiling the structural integrity of the whole. The concrete treads are spalling, and the fixings of the balustrade have suffered water and frost penetration.

The treads and risers which vary, but are approximately 230mm going and 210mm rise.

The existing railing appears to be original. The top rail passes above the opening gate and connects to the transverse railing between numbers 48 and 49. In order to use the gate it is necessary to pass below this rail which is 1075mm above pavement level.

It is brace back to the front wall of the house by an arched brace which appears to be a 19th or early 20th C modification of the original brace.

Change of Use/Circumstances

From the opening of the museum in 1929 until the refurbishment in 2012 the basement rooms of the house were used as storage and research areas. Since 2013 when the museum reopened they are used as teaching and conservation areas. The stair has become the means of escape route from these areas. It is proposed that it will also be used as the main means of access for school parties

Principles of and Justification for Demolition within a Conservation Area

The existing stair is inadequate for its current and proposed use because:

- The treads and balustrade are no longer stable, and are deteriorating
- The underlying stone structure of the upper stairs is unstable and will most probably not survive the removal of the treads
- The steepness of the stair is too great for an escape stair under current building regulations
- The gate and railings is not sufficiently high to permit passage by a standing adult and escape to a safe place of refuge.

Proposed Works

The proposal is for demolitions to permit:

- The removal carting away of the treads and balustrade of the existing stair
- The dismantling of the sections of the original stone stair and their storage (on site if possible)
- The removal of the section of the upper railing rail directly above the gate

the construction of:

- A new steel or aluminium stair and balustrade conforming more closely to current building regulations, but of design which permits retention of the existing railing brace
- Insertion of a new hooped section to the railing in a style similar to the adjacent house and others in the terrace
- Installation of a new gate similar in style and materials to the existing but with a top rail to line through with the rail of the railing and finials to match.

Impact of the proposal on the special interest of the structure, its setting and the setting of adjacent listed buildings

The existing stair is below street level, and not visible in a general view of the house or terrace. Its special interest is as a part of a much larger entity (the house) and in its original materials and means of construction.

As it is ancillary to the main house its replacement will have minimal impact. The key features of material and means of construction will be retained for posterity in storage.

The proposed new stair and gate are in materials and a style found in the adjacent house and elsewhere in the terrace, and as such will not have a significant impact on the streetcape and setting.

Photographs of Existing Stair



Existing Stair



Soffit of showing presumed original stone structure



20th C concrete treads showing spalling and handrail fixings



Detail of soffit showing delamination of stone