

LUARD CONSERVATION Ltd.

CARVINGS DECORATIVE WOOD LIME PLASTER

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Luard Conservation Response to 'Comments on Luard Report' by LBC.

The Elms, Fitzroy Park
Listing: Grade II
Architect: Basevi

In the light of the research that has been carried out in the recent past (as described elsewhere as part of this submission) I feel that it would be sensible to look at the building realistically. By this I mean that the quality of the detailing and manufacture of the timber items should be taken into consideration. In my opinion hardly any of the woodwork with which we are dealing with is of any other than standard quality for the status of the house or period; the only detailing of any real interest are the overdoors in the 'Library'¹, the external window shades to the south and west elevations (at least one of which is a replacement, being of slightly different design), and the rising shutters from the 1st floor. Other than the previously mentioned items there is little that stands out as being exceptional, especially when coupled with the designation 'original'.

I would suggest that I go through the woodwork stored on site with the purpose of identifying those elements that originate in that section of the building for which permission to demolish was granted in 2003. The Council has previously advised that these elements may be disposed of.

The paragraph identification numbers refer to those used in LBC's 'Comments on Luard Report' where no paragraph number is used I have tried to retain any/all my comments on a particular paragraph to one paragraph here.

1.0 I cannot comment on 'Note 1: and Note 2:' not having seen the documents. Had my report on the joinery been carried out prior to the removal of the timber elements from the house it would have been substantially different.

2.0 Luard Joinery Catalogue Final. N/A

2.1 N/A

2.2 N/A

2.3 Returning the woodwork to the condition that it was in the day before any dismantling took place would not be realistic or advisable. It would be better, where possible, to correct the results of, no doubt well meant, previous additions, removals, and demolitions. For example many of the doors are obviously inappropriate replacements. Where the complete

¹ 365-The ELMS(LBC 2011)\365-CAMDEN PHOTO CD No.1 2011\365-ENGLISH HERITAGE PHOTOS \365 English Heritage photos of original building 009 copy

door sets exist it will be possible to assemble them using paint breaks and other identifying marks². The work of re-installation will be rather more difficult if there are small variations in dimensions from the original openings as this may require alteration old material.

2.4 While these elements (and others) are marked there seemed to be more than one method of room identification which rather confused matters. While it may be desirable to identify items with rooms this would have no effect on their suitability for re-use.

3.0 I was not given to understand that any condition reports predating the removal of the timber elements existed.

3.1 I was provided with some photographs taken during demolition, some internal photographs (O'Shea Window Photos) showing the windows prior to removal and '365 - Camden Photo CD No 1. 2011 f', no other documentation was asked for as I was undertaking a strict evaluation of the viability of the timber for re-integration, the main evidence was the timbers items themselves.

The use of the phrases "about seven years ago" and "at least five years ago" give a suggested time bracket for the removal of the timber elements as I was given these two dates by two different people. A different 'main contractor' was running the site when the removal took place.

The condition of the exterior woodwork is evidenced by the photographs on '365 - Camden Photo CD No 1. 2011 f', file 365-MAIN HOUSE 15-12-2001 copy f'. When one looks at the photographs on this CD it becomes readily apparent that the visible timberwork is in uniformly bad condition. My use of the word 'likely' would seem, on reflection, to have been overly generous.

Paragraphs 6 & 7 – The use of the building for government purposes is described as 'anecdotal' and damage from enemy action as 'unsubstantiated' in the relevant footnote. The onset of degradation as a result of the closing off of ventilation, and lack of maintenance resulting in water ingress in houses during WWI and more so during WWII is generally well known. With regard to the conversion in 1948 it may or may not have dealt with dry rot, I have not seen any plans of the conversion. Most building work of that period was subject to the restrictions on labour and materials in force at the time, which enhanced the chance of low quality materials and corner cutting.

Paragraph 8 – Jenny Reid is quite clear and concise about the condition as she perceives it. LBC's additional quote refers to the procedural pathway and uncertainty as to what might be proposed as alterations, as at that stage "no detailed listed building aspects...had been submitted". The intention now is that an application for consent will be made. I would be very interested in seeing the photographs and condition report that date from the 1997 visit if such items exist.

Paragraphs 9, 10, 11, 12 – N/A

Paragraphs 13, 15, 16 – N/A

² This is a very basic tenet of conservation/restoration and any conservation joiner will be able to do it as long as the window and door openings are the same dimensions as original.

Paragraph 16 – LBC quite rightly agree that timber elements from the section of the building legally demolished can be disposed of. These items should not be taken into account for the percentages referred to in LBC – 2.3.

Paragraph 14 – not having a floor plan or any description of the interior of the building it is difficult to identify the original position of the boards. However looking at the English Heritage photographs provided on ‘365 - Camden Photo CD No 1. 2011 f’ it appears that the oak floor comes from the room in ‘EH photos of original building 008 copy’, I would speculate that this room is to the left of the front door (when looked at from the outside), at either ground floor or first floor level. The three oak window sills are curved and are therefore from the Library French window.

As LBC say fungal growth and attack can be controlled by humidity and temperature control, as well as treatment, and that sort of treatment is eminently suitable in situations where the woodwork and interiors are otherwise in good condition. However in this situation many of the timber elements are in such bad condition that it is not practical to treat all these elements in this way. Theoretically it would be possible to consolidate rotten sections and piece in missing areas while retaining about 80% of what survives but I am not sure that this would result in a satisfactory conclusion in many of the pieces we are dealing with. The requirement that all dimensions and profiles should be recorded is in my conclusion.

3.2 Structural timbers. No recording was undertaken when these items were removed so it would be almost impossible to ascertain, without speculation and/or lucky guesswork, their original position in the house. The structural timbers are included in the catalogue. on the ‘floor’ page under the column heading ‘joist/beam’ and will be those dated ‘19th C’. Those that still exist in the house and that I refer to are those visible when the report was written, some photographs and location details would have been useful but these elements were not within my remit as they are still in situ.

3.3 Floor boards. The types of floor board are detailed in the paragraphs two to five of this section though it would have been helpful to list them after paragraph one. The wide boards are detailed on the relevant page in the catalogue (floor) under column headings ‘Board’ ‘Original’ or ‘19th C’, their dimensions are recorded.

There are really only the three types of floorboard (softwood, oak, and wide boards) with the addition of some modern softwood.

Skirtings: the skirtings are entered on the ‘other’ page in the catalogue and largely comprise of smallish sections. The understairs cupboard must be a later alteration as there is a moulded panel on the underside of the stairs inside the cupboard, this would not have been done originally, but admittedly could be an alteration carried out at the end of the original build.

3.4 Doors: The catalogue lists all the doors individually and was supplied as a fully functional excel document.

3.5 The location of the elements; I can make a calculated guess on but this was not part of the remit.

The arched window from the stairs was not restrained when it was taken out between 5 and 7 years ago. I have little doubt that given the variable storage conditions since that the arch is no longer the same curve as it was originally and that the sash windows will no longer fit without serious alteration from the original, in addition to the extensive rot in the sash boxes and sill.

3.6 General: In twenty five years of working as a conservator on building sites I have yet to come across a competent general builder who implements recording of humidity levels and timber moisture content without prompting from the architect or myself.

3.7 Conclusions: I did not say that there are any inappropriate details, my text is “there may be timber details that are inappropriate to its present use”, this is not the same meaning. My words are designed to cover mid 20th century division of rooms with glazed partitions as well as badly designed shop bought decorative detailing and architraves.

Conclusions

LBC does have some relevant points to raise but they appear to be mainly without the scope of my remit as they deal with timber that is not still on site, or that is still installed in its original position.

The catalogue is part of the report and should be read in conjunction with, and cross referenced to, the text.

I would say it would be essential, in this instance, for LBC to visit the site with the report for them to be able to understand some of the reasoning behind my comments.

LBCs comments generally concern the application of criteria that should be applied to woodwork BEFORE it is removed, but I was not able to do that in this instance.

To move forward

The elements from the permissibly demolished section should be separated from the rest and removed from the catalogue.

The assessment for suitability for inclusion could take the form of a two stage process.

Firstly those elements that originate in the retained house should be assessed for their suitability for retention on a stylistic basis – dormer windows, metal windows, 20th century windows of incorrect or low quality workmanship and design, internal doors in external doorways post demolition.

When those elements agreed to be inappropriate for inclusion in the retained house have been separated and removed from the catalogue the remaining elements should be assessed for their completeness and structural integrity and suitability for retention.

I would recommend that meetings should take place with LBC representatives to establish guidelines for the process of evaluating the surviving features. By this I mean that when all the surviving elements of, for instance, a window have been identified they should be assessed for re-assembly and re-installation in the building and a decision made as to their

suitability for inclusion. This may have to be done on an individual basis, or by applying criteria agreed between the client and LBC.

The doors are somewhat easier to deal with. Some doors are obviously of the wrong design and standard for a house of this status. For instance the door above and to the right of the arched window in photograph 365 – 1-9-2003.4 is an internal part glazed door of late 20th century design set in what was an external wall. While this wall is now an internal wall, and was so when the door was installed the style of this door is inappropriate for the house now. While this door was probably installed prior to the listing of 1974 it is unlikely that it would have been allowed post listing. I would submit that this door should not be re-installed.

Neither the dormer windows set in the roof above the arched window nor the dormer windows in the roof above the Library French doors should be re-installed. Both dormer windows were of low quality design as well as low quality manufacture.

David Luard
Luard Conservation Limited

05/02/2013