

# 24-25 Bloomsbury Square London WC1

## Conservation assessment

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## **1.0 Scope**

- 1.1 This assessment has been prepared to assess the conservation significance of numbers 24 and 25 Bloomsbury Square, including the effect of the proposed change of use to self-contained flats.
- 1.2 Anthony Walker, who has prepared this report, has a diploma in Building Conservation and is on the register of Architects Accredited in Building Conservation. It is based on a desktop study of the building, the listing description, the Bloomsbury Conservation Area draft statement, the Bedford Estate archive and a site visit.

## **2.0 Location and description**

- 2.1 The buildings form part of a terrace, numbers 23-27, located on the northern side of Bloomsbury Square to the east of the junction with Bedford Place. The group is listed Grade II, which includes the railings.
- 2.2 They lie within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and are described as being within Sub-Area 6, Bloomsbury Square, Russell Square and Tavistock Square.
- 2.3 The buildings are on four stories plus a basement, with a continuous balcony at first floor level. They are in multicoloured stocks with a third floor cill band and simple coping stone.
- 2.4 The plan form follows a traditional pattern: a large front and back room on the ground and first floors, and the front room divided into two on the second floor. The main staircase stops at this level and a small staircase in the middle of the building, on the party wall, gives access to the third floor which has a main room and smaller room which are aligned with the staircase and landing at back and front. There is a back closet extension with access from the basement-to-first floor staircase in number 25, and basement to second floor in number 24. The basement provides service accommodation with a main front room, and an internal room opposite the foot of the stairs which was originally the wine store, but in both cases this has been converted into a strongroom with the wine racks removed, and a back room with an extension. There is an area across the front of each house, with stairs leading down from the street to vaults under the pavement. At the back of each is an area beyond which is a small raised garden more or less at street level. In the case of 24 this has been largely built over with a single level extension.

## **3.0 Background**

- 3.1 Bloomsbury Square was conceived during the building boom following the Peace of Paris in 1763. A lull from 1767-1771 was followed by an upturn between 1773 and 1777, followed by a decline in 1778 when France entered into the American War of Independence. Loans to builders by the Bedford Estate however allowed the scheme for the Square to be completed by the end of 1783 as part of the spread of development north of New Oxford Street.
- 3.2 Southampton House later, in 1734, to be called Bedford House, was built in about 1657 for Thomas Wriothesley, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Southampton, on the north side of Bloomsbury Square. The 1746 plan shows the main house facing the Square with a small open area on either side of the main house and wings of other development. To the east it links to Southampton Row and to the west to smaller properties leading to Montague House, which was on the site of the present British Museum. At that stage Bedford Place and Montague Street did not exist.

- 3.3 In 1800 the Duke of Bedford obtained two Acts of Parliament to develop his Estate and, in the same year, James Burton who had been working with the adjacent Foundling Estate, started the demolition of Bedford House which, it is reported, no longer appealed to the Duke because development to the north had marred his view of Hampstead and Highgate Hills.
- 3.4 This development enabled Burton to create two new roads leading due north to a new open space named Russell Square, thereby creating a substantial amount of new development value for the Bedford Estate.
- 3.5 Burton designed and developed many of the properties, including the two terraces along the north side of Bloomsbury Square, on either side of Bedford Place, in 1800-1803.
- 3.6 The first leases for both 24 and 25 Bloomsbury Square were granted for 99 years from 1800 to 1899 to a Mr William Toosey who also held the lease for the property on the corner to Bedford Place. There were clearly changes in occupancy and the lease for number 25 was advertised for sale in 1890. Both buildings were re-let for a further period to 1929: number 24 to Alexander Harris and 25 to A J Pelham Jones.

#### **APPENDICES B and D**

- 3.7 In both cases the initial lease plans show a simple rectangle which cannot be taken too literally, but by the renewal at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century both have back closet wings on basement, ground and upper half-landing level.

#### **APPENDIX A**

- 3.8 Subsequently there were a series of leases and evidence of sub-letting by floors, or even half floors, until 1943 when there was a surrender of the lease of 25 to the Duke of Bedford in June.
- 3.9 In 1945 there was a new Agreement for 25 with Baker and others lasting until 1954. Attached to this was a schedule of works including removing all paper from ceilings and making good, general redecoration and the replacement of some rotten timbers.

#### **APPENDIX C**

- 3.9 The lease to Baker and others was renewed to 1969 and it is notable that the plans attached show little change to the building.
- 3.10 It is clear from the historical research that the buildings fell into multiple occupancy with consequent lack of care and the minor alterations that this usually implies.
- 3.11 Examination of the buildings today shows that, although there have been numerous minor alterations, the basic layout has been retained. The buildings have been linked at second floor level.
- 3.12 Although the original layouts of the rooms are relatively clear, particularly on the floors with decorative features which serve to identify them, there are many subdivisions of these primary spaces. The most significant are on the ground floor and first floors. In number 24 where there are subdivisions to the front room on the ground floor and the first floor front rooms of both buildings have been divided although the cornice details remain intact. Other subdivisions include the provision of a corridor and division of the main front room on the second floor of 24, the small back room on the third floor of both

buildings which, in one case, results in a partition abutting a window, and the front rooms of the basement.

**APPENDICES F, I and O**

- 3.13 As a result, although many early details have been retained, numerous interventions have occurred, in particular with regard to the distribution of services which has substantially compromised the appearance of the interior.

**APPENDICES E and K**

- 3.14 There are interesting fireplaces and surrounds, ranging from very ornate to simple, and the original kitchen fire place has been retained.

**APPENDICES Q and R**

- 3.15 There is a good, simple staircase and balustrade to number 25 and a far more ornate example in 24. The original service stairs to the basement have been retained in both buildings but in number 24 they are boxed in.

**APPENDICES J, N,E and M**

- 3.16 At the upper levels the decorative detail either absent or in very simple mouldings. There is also evidence of water damage and there are kitchens and similar interventions on the upper floors. There is some evidence of decorative schemes to the surrounds of the floors in a few rooms.

**APPENDICES S,T and U**

- 3.17 There are miscellaneous cupboards and fittings which may be original or early, and are thus of some interest.

- 3.18 Building significance

- 3.18.1 The buildings are clearly of significance, both as part of a surviving early 19<sup>th</sup> century terrace, and for their role as part of the Burton masterplan and the historical background which preceded it.

- 3.18.2 The buildings have retained much of their original layout and are of interest on that account, although there is nothing of particular significance in that the layout follows that of many houses from this period and location.

- 3.18.3 The detail of the building has been subject to a greater level of change than the general layout and, while many of the original or early mouldings and joinery have survived, much has also been changed or damaged.

**4 Relevant national and local legislation**

- 4.1 National Planning Policy Framework

- 4.1.1 ***The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)*** maintains the protection of the built heritage but emphasises the need for proper evaluation of the significance of the assets. The Core Planning Principles set out in paragraph 17 include, as bullet point 10, the following statement: '*Conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations*'.

- 4.1.2 Paragraph 126 confirms the earlier statement in paragraph 17 that heritage assets should be conserved in accordance with their significance. Significance can of course vary throughout a heritage asset; it is universally recognised that conservation areas can include elements which are at best neutral and sometimes even detrimental to the significance of the asset.

- 4.1.3 Paragraph 129 requires that the Local Planning Authority (LPA) identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset affected by a proposal.

- 4.1.4 Paragraph 131 then requires the LPA to take account of the desirability of: sustaining the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation, recognising the positive contribution heritage assets can make including economic vitality and the desirability of new development making a positive contribution.
- 4.1.5 Paragraph 132 recognises that the impact of proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset should be assessed and in the case of scheduled monuments, grade I and grade II\* listed buildings or parks substantial harm or loss should be exceptional. Paragraph 134 recognises that where harm is less than substantial an assessment should be made of the benefits of the proposals including securing a viable use.
- 4.2 **Conservation Principles**  
Conservation Principles, published in 2008, provides a basis for assessing significance. The principal message in Conservation Principles is that change is a natural and inevitable process. In paragraph 86 it is stated that *'keeping a significant place in use is likely to require continual adaptation and change but provided such interventions respect the values of the place they will tend to benefit public (heritage) and private interests in it.'*
- 4.3 Camden Local Plan
- 4.3.1 **CS14 Promoting high quality places and conserving our heritage**  
The Council will ensure that Camden's places and buildings are attractive, safe and easy to use by:
- a) requiring development of the highest standard of design that respects local context and character;
  - b) preserving and enhancing Camden's rich and diverse heritage assets and their settings, including conservation areas, listed buildings, archaeological remains, scheduled ancient monuments and historic parks and gardens;

## **DP25 Conserving Camden's Heritage**

### **Conservation areas**

In order to maintain the character of Camden's conservation areas, the Council will:

- a) take account of conservation area statements, appraisals and management plans when assessing applications within conservation areas;
- b) only permit development within conservation areas that preserves and enhances the character and appearance of the area;
- c) prevent the total or substantial demolition of an unlisted building that makes a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a conservation area where this harms the character or appearance of the conservation area, unless exceptional circumstances are shown that outweigh the case for retention;
- d) not permit development outside of a conservation area that causes harm to the character and appearance of that conservation area; and
- e) preserve trees and garden spaces which contribute to the character of a conservation area and which provide a setting for Camden's architectural heritage.

### **Listed buildings**

To preserve or enhance the borough's listed buildings, the Council will:

- e) prevent the total or substantial demolition of a listed building unless exceptional circumstances are shown that outweigh the case for retention;
- f) only grant consent for a change of use or alterations and extensions to a listed building where it considers this would not cause harm to the special interest of the building; and

g) not permit development that it considers would cause harm to the setting of a listed building.

#### **Archaeology**

The Council will protect remains of archaeological importance by ensuring acceptable measures are taken to preserve them and their setting, including physical preservation, where appropriate.

#### **Other heritage assets**

The Council will seek to protect other heritage assets including Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest and London Squares.

#### **4.3.2 Camden Planning Guidance 1 Design.**

Section 3 deals with Heritage and the key messages state:

Camden has a rich architectural heritage and we have a responsibility to preserve, and where possible, enhance these areas and buildings.

- We will only permit development within conservation areas that preserves and enhances the character and appearance of the area
- Our conservation area statements, appraisals and management plans contain more information on all the conservation areas
- Most works to alter a listed building are likely to require listed building consent
- Historic buildings can and should address sustainability

#### **4.4 Bloomsbury Conservation Area**

Bloomsbury Square lies in sub area 5 of the Conservation Area. The following extracts are relevant to the current proposals:

*'..... there is general consistency in building heights: four storeys to the north and west sides, and three storeys to the south and along Southampton Place. The buildings are predominantly constructed from yellow brick with stucco decoration, although there are some fronts which are entirely stucco-faced. Window openings are vertically-proportioned, diminishing in size above large first-floor openings, with recessed sliding sashes subdivided with slender glazing bars. The majority of properties have iron boundary railings around basement areas.*

*5.84 The square is a unifying element and, owing to its comparatively small size and relatively narrow peripheral streets, has a strong relationship to the buildings facing it. ....'*

5.85 Looking north, Nos 18-22 (consec) and Nos 23-27 (consec) Bloomsbury Square are two terraces of grade II listed brick townhouses by James Burton, dating from 1800 – 1805, which frame the vista along Bedford Place.

### **5 Proposals**

5.1 It is proposed that the buildings be substantially returned to residential use other than a small area of office use which is to be retained in the basement front room of number 25. The opening in the Party Wall will be closed, thereby reinstating their individual integrity.

5.2 Each building will be arranged as separate self-contained flats, with a maisonette on the basement and ground floor, a flat on the first floor which in the case of 25 makes use of the back closet wing to provide a bathroom accessed by a new doorway beside the back window at first floor level. Another maisonette is created on the second and third floors while in 24 a small two level unit is created out of the back closet wing in 24 which allows the angled fireplace to be retained on the upper of the two levels. This layout generally follows the pattern adopted for 26 and 27 Bloomsbury Square. The subdivision of the main hall at ground level is to provide independent access to the lower

maisonettes and follows a similar pattern to that adopted in 26 and 27. In the case of 24 it has been possible to set the entrance back so that it is under the half level turn in the main staircase while in 25 it has been necessary to form an enclosure under the flight of stairs up to the first floor. In both cases the form of the main staircase will be retained and will be visible.

- 5.3 Joinery. Generally existing doors will be retained and upgraded to achieve the necessary fire resistance with intumescent products. Most of the windows appear to be later additions and generally have horns. These will be repaired or replaced where windows are beyond repair. A number of new windows are proposed where unsympathetic replacements have been installed in the past.
- 5.4 The front of the building will remain unchanged.
- 5.5 The back of the buildings will be altered with the removal of the accretion of small extensions at the back, revealing the original back closet wing with small area and back garden.
- 5.5 Repairs are required to the vaults at the front of the building due to invasive damage by street tree roots. Consideration has been given to the best means of stabilising these areas and it is proposed to use a Gunit concrete inner layer due to the inaccessibility of the brickwork to rebuild the existing.

## 6 **Assessment**

- 6.1 *London terrace houses 1660-1860* published by English Heritage provides both a background to the development of this form of housing but also recognises the need for change and provides guidance as to how this may best be achieved. It is recognised that some accretions may have an adverse effect on the building while others are part of the cumulative history of the building. On page 6 it states as a general rule that alterations should preserve the structure, character and appearance of a building and that in a conservation area the front elevation is particularly sensitive.
- 6.2 In the case of 24 and 25 Bloomsbury Square the front elevations are unchanged and respect the sensitivity identified in paragraph 6.1. At the back of the building there have been a number of accretions particularly at the back of 24 which have blurred the original clear statement of a back closet wing and have thus had an adverse effect. Their removal and the reinstatement of the early simple form is thus a positive benefit from the proposals particularly since the back of this end of the terrace can be seen from Bedford Place.
- 6.3 Internally both buildings have suffered on two main fronts. First the substantial number of subdivisions of the original rooms particularly on the ground and first floors but also including other areas. Secondly the more minor but equally damaging interventions in the form of services which have obscured and frequently damaged existing features including cornices and joinery.
- 6.4 With regard to the first cause of harm the proposals do remove a significant number of these damaging interventions thereby reinstating the original room proportions on the ground floor. The removal of the small enclosure round the original range in the basement of 24 is also beneficial.
- 6.5 Existing cornices will be retained and repaired thus retaining an understanding of the main room layouts even where it is not possible to remove the subdivision partitions, indeed to some degree these interventions, which retain

the main forms of the rooms, reflects the evolution of the buildings as recognised in *London terrace houses*.

- 6.6 As far as the services are concerned all the existing surface services will be removed and any damage caused by their original installation made good. All new services will be concealed and will not adversely affect either the appearance or historic interest of the building.
- 6.7 It is necessary to create a separation in the staircases at ground level. Due to the configuration of the historic rooms slightly different layouts have been achieved in the two buildings. Both retain the original staircases and balustrade and in fact are similar to the arrangements approved for 26 and 27 Bloomsbury Square where similar constraints exist.
- 6.8 The existing back closet wing to 25 has been used to provide a bathroom for the first floor flat. This has necessitated the introduction of a doorway beside the window to the main back room and a small staircase within the closet wing. These represent minimal interventions and retain the historic plan forms with the closet wing performing its original purpose of providing service space. In 24 the closet wing already exists on two levels. The proposals unite these with an internal staircase to provide a small self contained unit. The only existing feature is an angled chimney breast in the corner of the upper floor which will be retained. From the history of the often small scale uses of these buildings and the changes in the layout of the basement closet wings where some records of partitioning are available it is evident that these wings were subject to many alterations and from visual inspection there are no decorative features of merit.
- 6.9 To satisfy building regulations it is necessary to provide a limited number of ventilation and extract points. These have been carefully sited in the back wing of the building using the minimum number of outlets. These do not adversely affect the appearance of the building.

## 7 **Conclusions**

- 7.1 Both the NPPF and the related guidance including *Conservation Principles* (CP) all recognise the need for change and indeed in CP a section is entitled Managing Change to Significant Places. In paragraph 138 on new work and alterations such work will be acceptable if:
- There is sufficient information to understand the impacts
  - The proposals will not harm the values of the place
  - The proposals aspire to a quality of design which will be valued
  - The longterm consequences can from experience be demonstrated to be benign or they do not prejudice alternatives in the future.
- 7.2 Consideration of the proposals shows that they fulfil these criteria. A comprehensive examination of the background to the buildings and their current status has been carried out and their significance is understood. The proposals do not harm the values of the place but rather enhance them by reversing earlier detrimental work. The proposals are of a standard appropriate to the significance of the building and respect the quality of the detailing.
- 7.3 By reinstating the form of some of the principal rooms, together with a sensitive removal of other later subdivisions and services, the significance and quality of the buildings will be significantly restored and enhanced.



- 7.4 In terms of the Conservation Area the front of the buildings which make a significant contribution to Bloomsbury Square as both an architectural and historic record will be retained. The back of the buildings will be enhanced and the detrimental accretions removed thereby enhancing the conservation area.
- 7.5 It is therefore concluded that the proposals fulfil the objectives of the NPPF and the Camden Local Plan CS14 and policy DP25 *Conserving Camden's heritage*.

Anthony Walker  
June 2013

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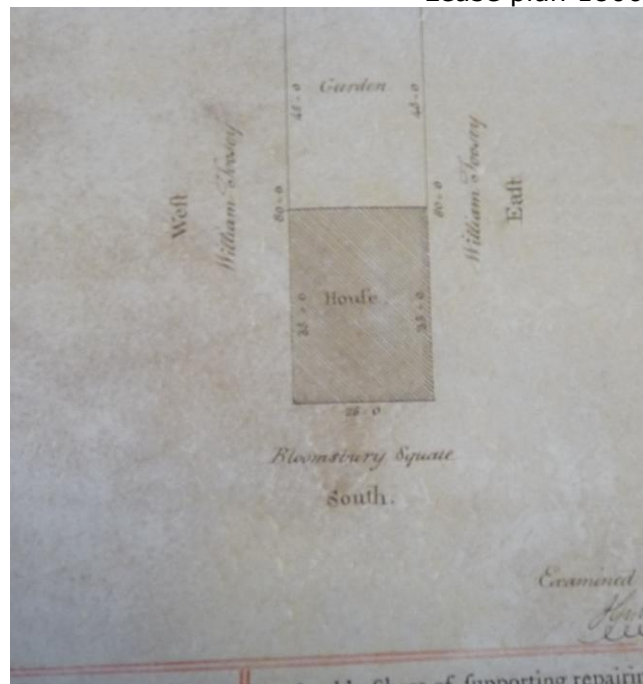
## **Conservation assessment Appendices**

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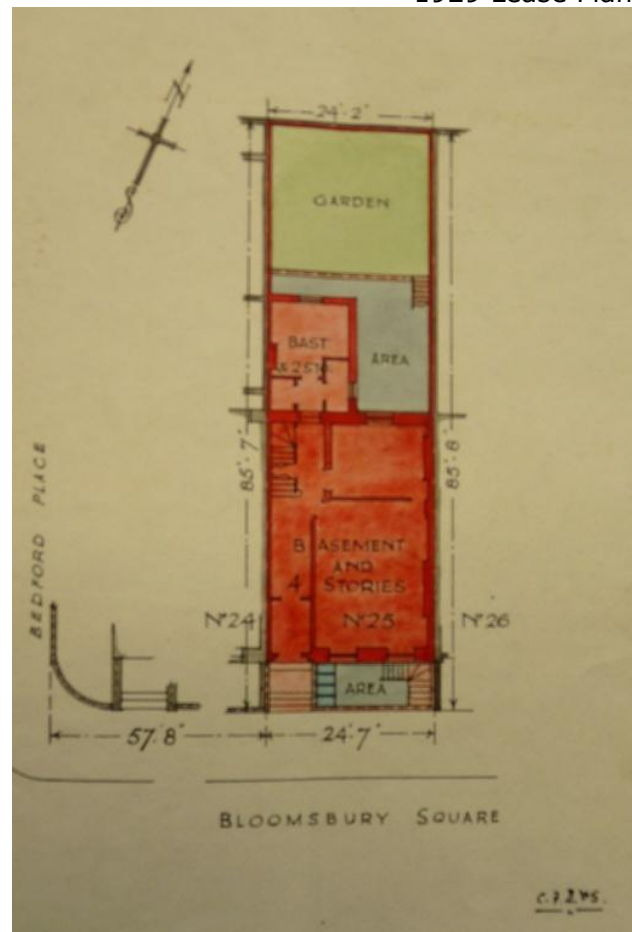


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**APPENDIX A**  
Lease plan 1800

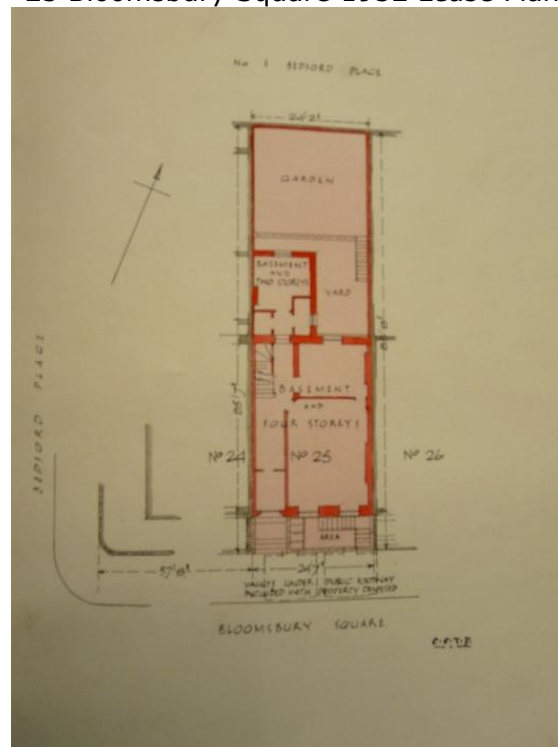


**APPENDIX B**  
1929 Lease Plan



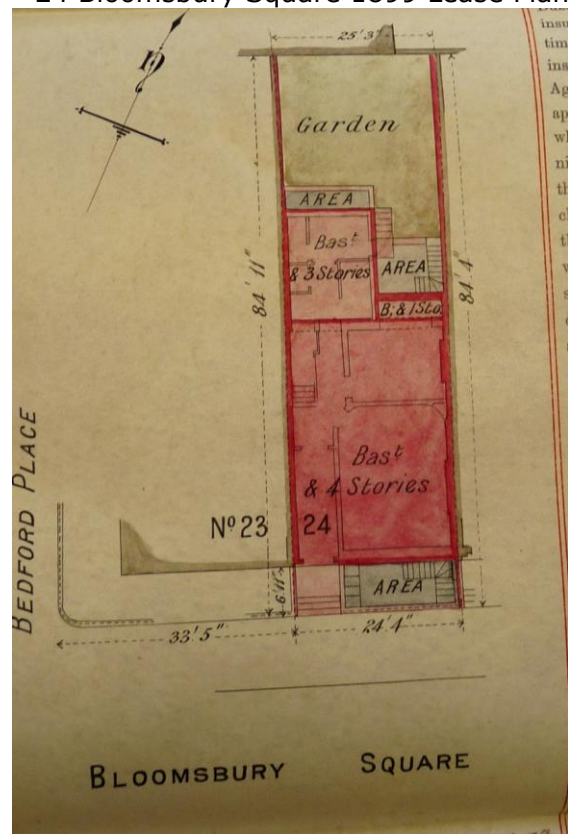
## APPENDIX C

### 25 Bloomsbury Square 1952 Lease Plan



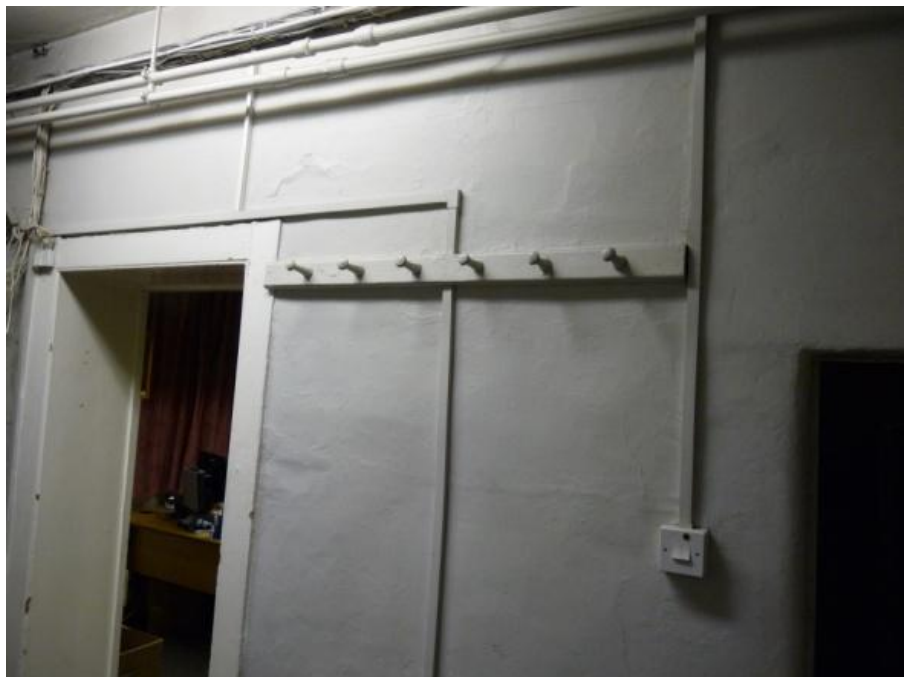
## APPENDIX D

### 24 Bloomsbury Square 1899 Lease Plan



## **APPENDIX E**

Basement 24 Miscellaneous services and a good service staircase



**APPENDIX F**  
Subdivision of ground floor front room 24





## **APPENDIX G**

Subdivision of basement front room 24 to enclose original range fireplace



## **APPENDIX H**

24 Basement strong room door



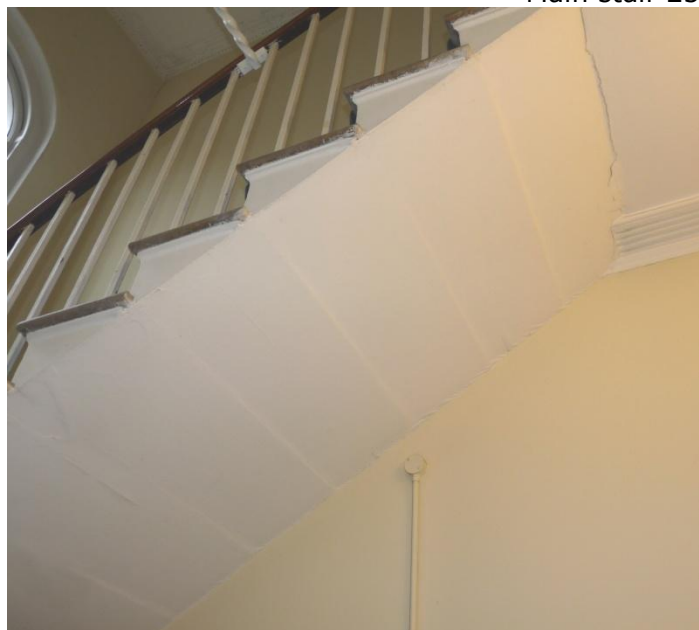
## **APPENDIX I**

Subdivided front ground floor room 24 with evidence of blocked up hatch.



## **APPENDIX J**

Main stair 25





## **APPENDIX K**

Damage to cornice by services 25 first floor



## **APPENDIX L**

Subdivision of main front room first floor 25 with original cornice retained around main area and different cornice detail to partition.



**APPENDIX M**  
Basement 25



**APPENDIX N**  
Main staircase 24



## **APPENDIX O**

Subdivision of first floor front room 24



## **APPENDIX Q**

First floor 24 detail of mantle piece. Example of several good fire places and surrounds



## **APPENDIX R**

Example of simpler fire place 1<sup>st</sup> floor back room 24



## **APPENDIX S**

Example of upper floor lack of decorative detail and some water damage



## **APPENDIX T**

Typical simple decorative detail 2<sup>nd</sup> floor 25



## **APPENDIX U**

Kitchen 3<sup>rd</sup> floor 25

