



HISTORIC  
BUILDINGS  
CONSULTANTS

~ Voel House 18 ~

South Grove  
Highgate, N6

London Borough of Camden

Report  
by  
Historic Buildings Consultants

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## INTRODUCTION

No 18 South Grove is listed Grade II\* and is a three-storeyed house of late seventeenth century origin reconstructed in 1713 and extended and altered at different dates in the nineteenth century. The intention is to insert a wheelchair lift between the different floors for the owner's son. Considerable thought has been given to the best position for this, so as to cause the least disturbance to the historic fabric, and so as not to detract from the special interest in the building. The site chosen occupies an existing nineteenth century enclosure to the cellar stairs on the ground floor (the alignment of the stairs can be reversed into their original position). The first and second floor bedrooms upstairs that would be affected are plain and contain no original fabric. Much of the first floor was re-planned in the late nineteenth century. The walls there are modern stud or plasterboard partitions, and there are nineteenth or twentieth century narrow boarded floors. It is argued therefore that the proposals would not have a serious impact on the special interest of the building. Apart from the entrance hall and staircase few original features survive and none of the main rooms, nor the bedrooms, have eighteenth century panelling, cornices, chimneypieces or floor boards; most of the joinery etc being nineteenth and twentieth century.

## SHORT HISTORY

The house is covered by the *Survey of London* Vol. XVII (1936) which deals with the early history but not the 'modern' (i.e. nineteenth century) extensions and alterations to the fabric. The house was situated in the manor of Cantlowes, and the Court Rolls show that in 1713 the lease was conveyed to Joseph Saunders and this gives the date of the early eighteenth century remodelling of a seventeenth century house. The front elevation is largely of 1713. The upper back wall shows seventeenth century brickwork. The Saunders family occupied the house until 1759 (Joseph Saunders died in 1723 and the house was subsequently the house of his daughter Mary who married Robert Waddilove.) In 1759 it was acquired by Thomas Bromwich and belonged to his family for four generations until sold in 1857 to the Bloxham sisters. In the twentieth century it belonged to the Owens, and was acquired by the present owner in 1962.

The most interesting occupant was Thomas Bromwich, of Ludgate Hill, the leading English purveyor of wallpaper in the reign of George III, who did much to popularise this French fashion and supplied wallpaper to some of the leading architects of the day, including the Wyatts, and he enjoyed a high reputation. His trade card survives. Though no traces of his decoration survive now at Voel House, the occupation of the house by this late-Georgian wallpaper merchant and decorator may part explain why so little early timber panelling survives today in the building (unlike other properties of similar date in Highgate and Hampstead). It obviously all gave way to more fashionable wallpaper in the 1760s and 1770s. The only surviving panelling is two sections of very simple and altered work in what is now the dining room and cellar stairs, but was the kitchen.

When first built the house was only one room deep, but was extended at the back in two phases in the nineteenth century. The major addition was the single storeyed drawing room and study. This is dated 1842 on an inscribed brick, with the initials W.T.B. The interior was 'modernised' at the same time with Victorian joinery. The two-storeyed western extension was added as servants' accommodation at the end of the nineteenth century with a scullery etc on the ground floor. The cellar stairs in the old house were also re-aligned at that time to give decent access from the kitchen rather than from under the hall stairs.

There was a fire in the 1930s and the damage was reinstated simply afterwards. The present owner has carried out various works in the house and the turned banisters of the lower flights of the stairs were installed by him, on the model of the originals surviving on the top flights. The glazed screen between the hall and dining room (original kitchen) was also inserted in the 1960s. The present modern kitchen was formed out of the old sculleries of the late nineteenth century wing to the design of Brian Perry, RIBA in 1970.

## PROPOSALS

It is intended to install a lift serving the ground, first and second floors. It is argued that the site chosen for this will have the least impact on the historic interest of the building. The lift will be hydraulic so will not require any overhead plant and can therefore be fitted inside the existing structure. It will be a small passenger lift which can be fitted in to the right of the front hall and staircase, within the existing ground floor enclosure there. The open well staircase is the best surviving feature in the house. The carriage and newels, and the balusters of the upper section, are of oak and date from the late seventeenth century. There is an eighteenth century panelled dado from ground to first floor and on the first floor landing. At second floor (attic) level the landing is enclosed by an original planked partition which is a rare feature.

The other rooms in the house, though attractively proportioned, retain no original features. There are no eighteenth century chimneypieces. Much of the joinery dates from *circa* 1842, including the double doors between the old dining room and drawing room. There are simple nineteenth and twentieth century plaster cornices in the principal ground floor rooms. The only old floor, with wide boards, is in the entrance hall. The bedrooms have narrow pine boarded floors of the late nineteenth or twentieth century date and are plain rooms with stud partition walls (some plasterboarded).

The lift can be fitted into the existing cellar staircase enclosure on the ground floor. The existing outer partition would be retained. The cellar stairs can be reorientated to descend in the opposite direction, as was the original arrangement (see surviving top step). The present stairs are themselves utilitarian late nineteenth century deal joinery, so their reversal will not affect any historic fabric. The panelling on the inside wall is the original simple early eighteenth century partition and would be retained behind the lift, and so not physically affected by the work. On the plus side, the 1960s glazing would be removed from the hall partition and the panelling and appropriate door reinstated there.

As already pointed out, on the first and second floor levels the lift would be in the corners of the bedrooms and only relatively modern partition walls would need to be adjusted to accommodate it. Without opening up, it is not clear whether any old floor joists survive and would be affected. The lift area affected would be very small, so it is no considered that the degree of disturbance would be seriously detrimental. But this is something which could be investigated further. In general, it is considered that a lift can be inserted in the proposed position with little historic building disturbance.



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