



# romney's house

architect's design statement

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### **analysis of existing house and surrounding area**

Romney's House and No 4 Holly Bush Hill, are in the heart of Hampstead village. Together they form part of a dense urban block comprising of Romney's House, 1-4 Holly Bush Hill, 21, 23 and 24 Holly Mount, and The Holly Bush Public House. The houses have grown organically over time and form an asymmetrical, haphazard and cohesive picturesque massing, which is accentuated by the use of various building materials including red brick, render and weatherboarding (both painted white and stained black).

Romney's house was initially built by and subsequently named after the Artist George Romney on a site previously occupied by stables and coach house. Gauging from various descriptions of the house and the original building cost, it must have been a fine house with large pleasant rooms, verandahs and a large gallery for Romney's collection of sculptures. The house afforded extensive views to the east over London, hence its original name 'Prospect House'. Romney only lived in the house for two years before moving to the Lake District, however his association with the house, even though now unrecognisable from his time, was the prime reason for its Grade I listing.

The house was subsequently bought by the Trustees of the Assembly Rooms who demolished the eastern part of Romney's house (which probably contained the dining, sitting and bedroom) in order to build the Hampstead Assembly Rooms. Part of what was probably Romney's previous Salon ('Romney's room') was used as a cards room. The Assembly Rooms were made redundant after the opening of the Hampstead Town Hall and the house was subsequently used by the Hampstead Constitutional Club.



views from holly bush hill 1



views from holly mount 1



In 1929 the house was bought by the Architect Clough William Ellis (CWE) who rationalised the haphazard planning of the house and installed a new staircase in the external courtyard, between the house and pub. CWE also added dormers in the attic and cut back the roof above of the Assembly Room to create an attic writing room and terrace. His detailing, including new architraves and cornices, made reference to the work of Sir John Soane.

CWE, better known for the construction of the Welsh Village of Portmeirion, was an architect with a theatrical temperament and style. He was eccentric and bombastic, and his budget constraints forced him to be inventive. He would acquire architectural features from old buildings and re-use them on current projects. At Portmeirion, the parapet from Henry III's Chapel at Bodfean Hall was reused as a 'tasteful barrier' on a service road behind a bank of cottages (below left). At Romney's house doors and architraves were salvaged from other buildings and reused, and the pine floors in the Assembly Room were painted in black and white squares to resemble marble (below right).

In the 1950's the house was divided in two. The western half, with its new front door, brick facing, sash windows and new staircase was used as a family house, while the Assembly room, and rooms below it, were occupied as offices.

In the 1990's, in an attempt to convert the house back into a single family home, it was further sub-divided with the introduction of an awkward mezzanine and the extension of the 1950's staircase to the attic level. Doors and awkward staircases were also introduced to link Romney's house with the cottage at 4 Holly Bush Hill.

The house now has little resemblance to Romney's original house. It is a labyrinth of badly designed spaces which has none of the grandeur and little of the delight of either Romney's or CWE's house. Romney's original finishes, detailing, cornices and architraves have been removed or altered considerably, and much of CWE's more delicate 'Soanian' detailing was replaced in the 1950s and 1990's with heavier and unsympathetic mock - Victorian architraves and skirtings.



CWE pictured here in characteristic tie and breeches -

### the proposal - design and massing

Our clients' brief is to reinstate the house as a single family dwelling and to achieve a balance of living spaces and bedrooms, private and public spaces, to maximize direct sunlight (the house faces north), to reinstate the views over London and to bring back the grandeur and delight of Romney's house.

The proposal includes the following:

- The removal of the 1990's mezzanine floor and the 1950's staircase, and the reinstatement of 'Romney's room' (below)
- The insertion of two bedrooms and a library in the former Assembly Rooms.
- The extension of the existing staircase up to the attic level, and the creation a new belvedere to reinstate 'Romney's view' (left).
- The removal of internal partitions built in the 1990s, in order to rationalize the planning at ground floor level.
- Relocating the garage to create an improved garden which better relates to the house.

In order to reinstate Romney's room, it is necessary to remove both the mezzanine and associated bedrooms, as well the 1950's/90's staircase which is currently used to access the attic floor. The removal of the mezzanine floor represents a loss of 45sqm of floor space and three bedrooms. In order to reinstate 'Romney's room' it is necessary to accommodate the bedrooms elsewhere.



sketch of proposed belvedere



model - proposed ground floor



model-proposed first floor



'romney's room' as used by cwe





We therefore propose to accommodate two bedrooms in the former Assembly Rooms, which is to all intents and purposes a redundant room in the house.

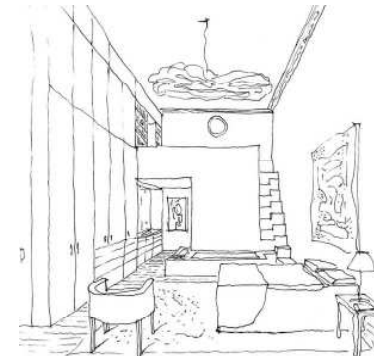
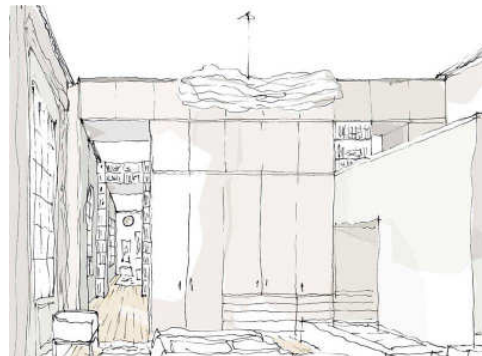
The Assembly Room is in essence a large meeting room of which many examples can be found up and down the country and there is existing planning precedence for the conversion for these old assembly halls and church halls for domestic use.

We propose dividing the room with elegant full height bookcases which will form a new library space connecting the two new bedrooms. These bookcases, along with the bathroom pods and studies above, will read as large pieces of furniture inserted into the room, a solution which is reversible and which allows the original space to remain legible.

In the upper hall, we propose installing 4.5 metre high glazed double doors opening into the new library space. The height and design of these new glazed doors to the Library and to the stair hall, will match the original sash windows which will be reinstated.

The removal of the mezzanine, the creation of an enfilade along the north elevation, the installation of the very tall (4.5m) glazed doors and the re-instatement of the original sash windows will assist in restoring the architectural delight and grandeur that the house must have had when Romney lived here. The rooms will be flooded with light and the new glazed doors will accentuate the high ceilings, catch and reflect light and allow long vistas from one room into another. The spaces will be beguiling and a joy to live in.

The proposed removal of the 1950's/1990's staircase makes it necessary to find an alternative access to the attic. We propose extending the existing staircase, which currently connects the ground and first floors only. The new staircase will culminate in a belvedere at Attic level from where one will experience the dramatic views over London, thus reinstating 'Romney's view'.



Londoners moved to Hampstead for the fresh air and views, and the houses often incorporated belvederes, which afforded views over the city and added to the picturesque

massing which typifies Hampstead (see below). The proposed belvedere (left) continues this tradition, and provides a much needed culmination point to the south elevation. The urban block is given an apex, a tower, which completes the elevation and gives it a coherency which it currently lacks.

The belvedere tower will be clad in black stained weatherboarding to match the existing, and will include bronze framed handmade glass fitted into a playful grid of stained black timber mullions. By using traditional materials in a contemporary way the proposed belvedere will not mimic the existing building but will be sympathetic to it. The thin bronze frames, together with the bronze cladding to the lantern, will catch the winter light sparkling against the grey London skies and will echo the black and gold gates of Fenton House opposite. Further, the large south facing windows of the belvedere will allow light to filter down to the first and ground floor through the lightwell of the new staircase.

The ground floor which was divided into many rooms in the 1950s and in the 1990s, currently includes a small living room, two studies, two dining rooms, two entrance halls and a kitchen. The proposal includes the removal of many of the internal partitions in order to reinstate the two rooms below the Assembly rooms, one as a living room and the other as a family room, and to create one large kitchen/dining room. Glazed double doors positioned enfilade will create long vistas through the house.



justification

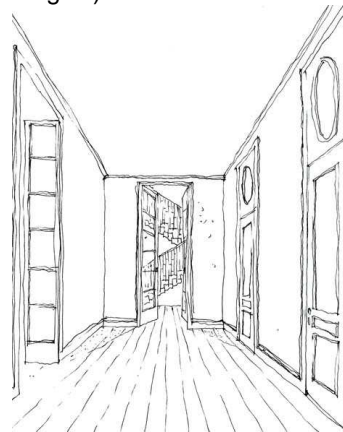
Paul+O Architects worked closely with the clients' historic buildings consultant Donald Insall Associates, who have an in depth understanding of Romney's House and its history, while developing the proposals.

Paul+O's work is contemporary and contextual. Our approach is site-specific, drawing upon the broader cultural context of each project. We believe that it is inappropriate to simply mimic the past. Our work, and this proposal in particular, is generated by its context. The proposed external materials are all sympathetic to the existing building and the design concept is carried through to the detailing, in order to ensure that the resulting architecture has integrity and substance.

We contend that all the proposed works will enhance the architectural and special historic interest of Romney's House. The house has suffered from previous refurbishment work which was executed in a piecemeal and haphazard fashion. The result is a house which doesn't work as a family house and has no architectural integrity or delight.

The proposed removal of both the mezzanine and the 1950's staircase, the sub-division of the former Assembly Room and the proposed new staircase extension (left), ensures a better balance of rooms. Dining, entertaining and relaxing will be accommodated on the ground floor, sleeping and studying on the first floor, and viewing and contemplation on the third.

Importantly, 'Romney's room' will be reinstated, and the spirit and grandeur of Romney's house will be restored. A clear distinction will be made between the service rooms on the ground floor (2.8m ceiling height), and the grand piano nobile on the first floor (6m ceiling heights).



proposed upper hall

London and its architecture is typified by constant change. It is a mercantile city driven by economics and pragmatism. There was, for the most part of its history, a desire to move

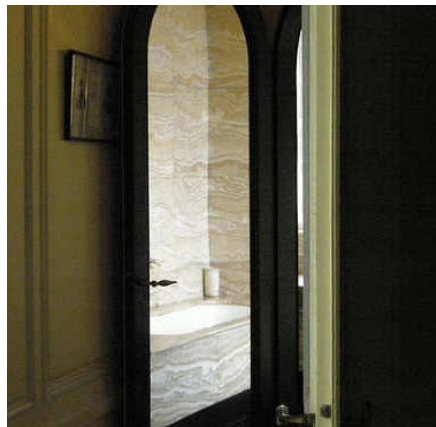
forward and to construct buildings which were both economically and stylistically suited to the time in which they were built.

Consequently there are many historical examples of houses where the interior has been altered and updated to reflect the modes of the day and the aspirations of its owners. It is therefore not uncommon in England to find houses, especially in more affluent areas, where there is a layering of styles and where the architecture of the interior, and often the garden elevation, is different from the street elevation.

Leeds Castle is a good example of a building where the interior of a building has been thoughtfully and significantly remodelled and updated and its exterior restored and enhanced. The interiors of Leeds castle, designed by the French designer Stephane Boudin under the patronage of Lady Baillie were, for their time, modern and luxurious.

Careful detailing and exquisite materials including ebony floors in the ballroom and marble bathrooms, resulted in a series of beautiful rooms which enhance and compliment the 12<sup>th</sup> century castle. Today as many people visit the castle for the interiors and for Lady Baillie's gardens, as for the medieval castle in its picturesque setting.

At the same time as carrying out the work at Leeds, Stephane Boudin was engaged to completely 'redo' the interiors of 5 Belgrave Square and Oliver Hill was engaged to refurbish Gayfere and North House in Westminster. The resultant 1920's interiors are a wonderful examples of the style of the day, commissioned by clients who were confident of and comfortable with the style of their times.



Wotton House is another example of inspired and confident patronage. The house, designed with an almost identical plan to Buckingham House, was completely gutted by a



fire in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Grenvilles took this opportunity to engage John Soane to remodel the house in the style of the day. Soane replanned the rooms, adding corridors, a double height tribune entrance and new staircases (below). The house was subsequently saved from demolition in the 1950s by Eliane Brunner, who and with the assistance of Donald Insall, restored the significant Soanian interiors.

There are thousands of examples in England, of which these are but a few, which demonstrate how refurbishments can enrich our architectural heritage. It is also essential to note that all examples cited are successful because they are the manifestation of a confident and uncompromised vision, and the coupling of a clear and concise design with superior craftsmanship.

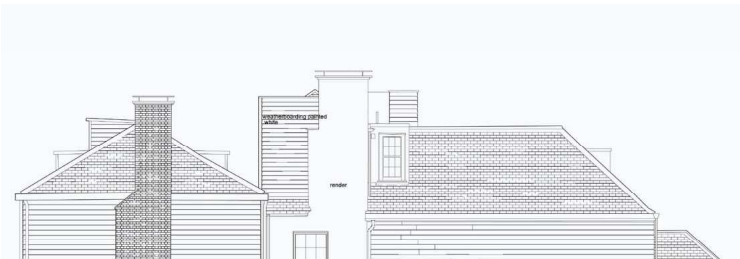
The proposed works at Romney house (left) will enrich the existing house and the city. They have been carefully considered and will reflect the time in which they are built as well as the tastes and aspirations of our client.

It is of course also common sense, as is acknowledged by PPG15, that 'the best way of securing the upkeep of historic buildings' is to ensure that they are lived in, and the best way to do this is to ensure that they are both fit for purposed and desirable. Our client bought Romney's House with the understanding that the house, with its ill considered 1990s additions, was not suitable for a single family home, but they saw its potential. They both have the commitment, the foresight and the resources to enable them to make changes which will not only transform the house into a comfortable family home but also make it a showpiece, and add another layer to the house and the city. PPG15 states that it is the cumulative changes reflecting the history of use and ownership which are in themselves of special interest of some buildings.



### summary

We contend that the proposal will enhance and improve the Conservation Area. The internal layout of Romney's House will be greatly improved, and externally the alterations will enhance the external massing of the building.



The 1950's alterations on the north elevation (left) will be removed and the playful and picturesque will be reinstated with the extension of the chimneys to their original height and the reinstatement and alteration of the windows. The south elevation (below left) will see the greatest improvement, with the building of the belvedere which will give coherency and vitality to the picturesque massing of the urban block.

The assembly room, a large and underused room, will be divided by beautiful and intricate bookcases to form two beautiful bedrooms. New internal glazed doors will ensure the house is flooded with light. 'Romney's room' and 'Romney's view' will be reinstated.

In balance all the alterations present a significant improvement to a house.

**impact on the residential amenity  
overlooking**

a) New and altered windows on Western Elevation ( W-114, W-209, W-305 and W-414) will not significantly increase the overlooking because:

-WC window (W-114) will be move sideways by approx. 2m, and will not increase any overlooking.

-Shower room window (W-209) will be relocated to ensure that residents at 3 Holly Bush Hill are not looking directly into the shower, and the window in the attic will be reduced in size.

-The new Window (W-305) will be added in the new laundry room. The height of this window will mean that this window will look out onto the roofs.



b) New and altered windows on Southern Elevation. (W-416, W-306, W-307, W-415)

- The new windows on the southern elevation, including the new staircase windows, bathroom windows and two new circular windows in the former Assembly Room will not significantly increase overlooking. All these windows look over the back of the Holly Bush Pub and 21 Holly Mount.

**views**

No important views will be lost. The staircase extension will not be higher than the roof of the existing house. Importantly the new belvedere will provide access to Romney's view from a 'public' areas of the house. Currently CWE's writing room and roof terrace is accessed via the main bathroom and bedroom.

**light pollution**

Increased lighting will be limited. Although there are new windows on the south elevation at the staircase hall, artificial lighting will be kept to a minimum, using subtle wall washes and table lamps to ensure that the belvedere, when occupied, will omit a soft glow which will enhance rather than distract from the elevation.

**sunlight and daylight levels**

The new staircase tower will not have significant impact on the daylight or sunlight levels of any of the surrounding building. The new staircase is built in an existing courtyard space on the south elevation of the house and does not rise above the roofline of the existing house. The new staircase looks onto the back of the Holly bush pub. The nearest windows facing onto Romney house are about five meters away and currently look onto a blank wall as they sit below the level of the start of the new staircase hall.

**the quality of the accommodation for the future occupants**

The quality of the accommodation for future occupants will be greatly improved. The current labyrinthine arrangement of small living rooms on the ground floor and awkward mezzanine at first floor level means that the house does not function adequately as a single family home. The proposal addresses the imbalance of private and public rooms. There are unnecessary level changes between the rooms on the ground floor and the mezzanine level bedrooms have

inadequate natural daylight or ventilation. Much of the garden space is taken up with garaging and car parking and the house does not relate well to the garden.

#### **disabled access**

Disabled access to the house and movement within the house will be significantly improved. The existing ground floor is currently on three different levels with the Kitchen and dining are one step up from the hall. The proposal includes making all the accommodation on the ground floor on the same level and the proposed stair, with regular risers, will make access to the first floor easier for the ambulant disabled.

#### **sustainability**

It is difficult to fulfil requirements for both sustainability and conservation with Grade 1 listed buildings, but we are aware of the sustainability targets for housing and where possible will make changes where possible to achieve improved u-values. All new windows will be double-glazed using a thin double glazing unit and all existing windows will be overhauled and draught proofed. The belvedere will be designed with operable windows and a skylight to ensure good cross ventilation in the and avoid use of air-conditioning. The heating system will utilize a more sophisticated time clock incorporating summer to winter settings for different heating zones. The repositioning of the boiler to the centre of the house ( in the extended cellar) will reduce pipe lengths and consequently heat loss and new more efficient radiators will be installed.

#### **traffic and parking**

The proposed works will have no effect on traffic or parking.

#### **impact on adjoining trees**

No mature trees, street trees or trees with a preservation order will be affected by the works.

