

59 Birkenhead Street Camden London WC1 Heritage Statement

14 April 2014



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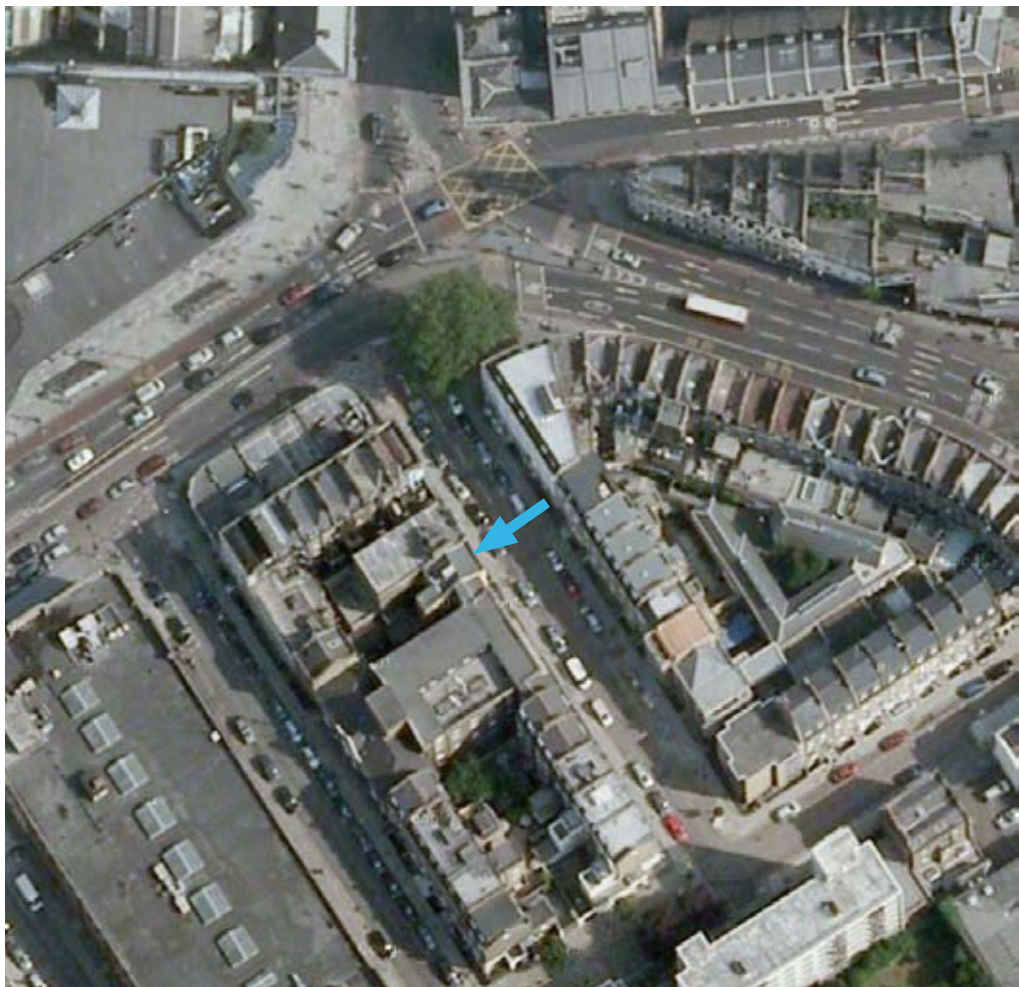
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1.0 Introduction

The Built Heritage Consultancy have been commissioned to carry out a heritage assessment of 59 Birkenhead Street following severe flood damage, in order to inform proposals for suitable repair and replacement of affected fabric. This Heritage Statement summarises our research and sets out the history and significance of this Grade II listed house, as well as considering the appropriateness of the proposed works in the context of the building's special historic and architectural interest, and applicable national and local authority policies.

This report has been written by Paul Clarke, James Weeks and Anthony Hoyte based on archival research and site visits (in September and October 2013).

NB. Since the site visits for this report, there has been targetted removal of damaged fabric and modern insertions to enable detailed planning of repair works.



Aerial photograph of Birkenhead Street; King's Cross Station is to the north (top left). [Google]

2.0 Understanding the Asset

2.1 The development of King's Cross

Despite evidence of Roman activity from remains found in the vicinity of York Way, there is no indication that the area around the site was occupied by a settlement before medieval times. In later centuries a small hamlet grew up around the crossing of the River Fleet, known as Battle Bridge. This settlement was largely isolated, surrounded by open fields until the mid 18th century when the New Road was constructed as a early by-pass which allowed for the rapid movement of troops around the city. This later became known as the Euston Road, and provided the stimulus for urban development to begin along its length.

As London expanded, a number of fields to the south of the New Road were dug for brickearth and so remained undeveloped, although our site appears to be slightly different. In 1800 it is recorded that the land here was owned by William Brock and used for gardens and meadows until the early 1820s, when it was purchased by Thomas Dunstan, William Robinson and William Flanders. In 1824 these three applied for an Act of Parliament to develop the land, and in 1825 construction of standardised late Georgian 'Third Class' housing, comprising three storeys and a basement, began south of Euston Road. This speculative development included Derby (now St Chad's) Street, Chesterfield (now Crestfield) Street and Liverpool (now Birkenhead) Street. It was one of the last developments in the area, which by that time had become quite built up.

As part of the development of the area the Fleet River, which was quickly assuming the character of an open sewer, was culverted in 1825. Meanwhile an attempt was made to give the area some cachet by the erection in 1830-35 of a 60-foot high memorial to George IV at the main junction, in honour of which the neighbourhood was renamed King's Cross. Despite these improvements, and the dignified touches of the Birkenhead Street houses with their decorative iron railings and fanlights, the local area was never one of the more respectable parts of the new suburbs. An assessment of its character in 1842 described it as healthy, but by 1848 it was noted as an overcrowded and squalid district: a verdict which was to remain accurate – in the context of changing mores – for the next 160 years.

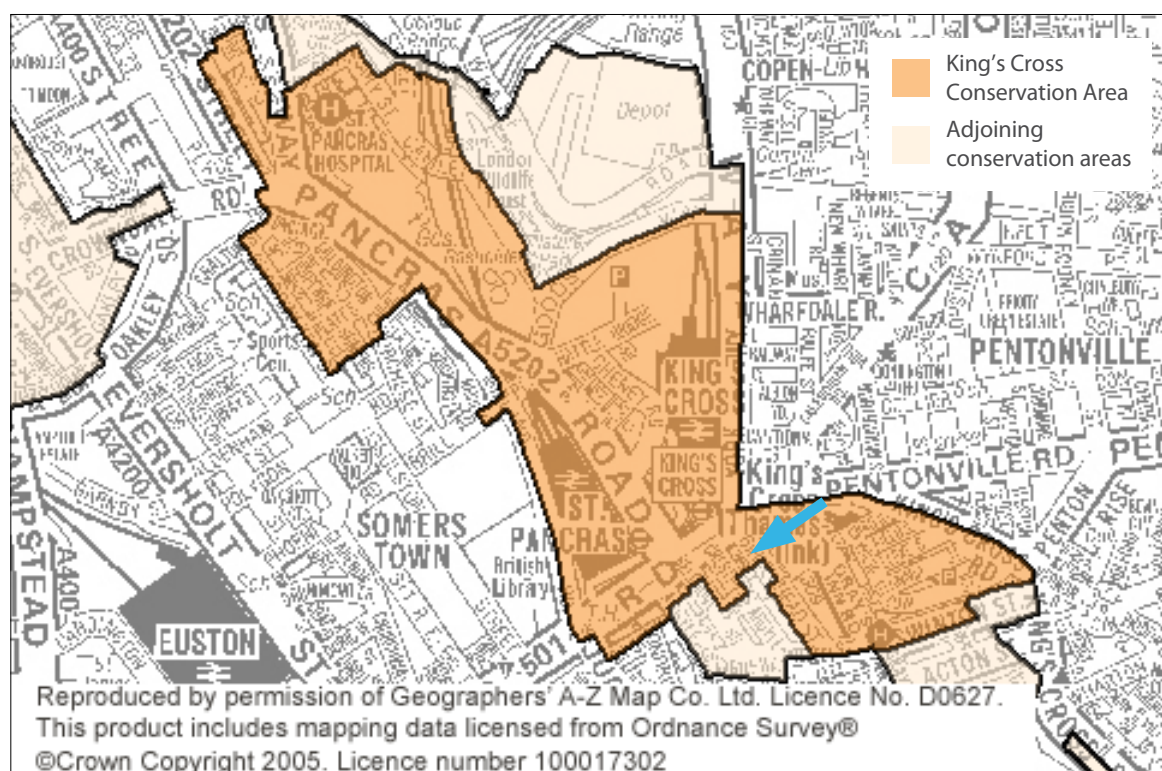
By 1850 the George IV memorial had been swept away, and King's Cross Station was under construction on the northern side of Euston Road – that being the most central location that was thought appropriate. With the opening of this grand terminus in 1852 came worsening air pollution, severe traffic congestion, and the seedy aspects of city life which thrived on a large and transient daily population. The relatively young suburb's decline became complete with many of the houses being converted into lodging houses and cheap hotels, many of which become synonymous with prostitution and drug use.

2.2 King's Cross Conservation Area

The conservation area was designated in 1986 by the Greater London Council and enlarged on two occasions. The first extension in 1991 took in the area south of Euston Road between Judd Street, Argyle Street, Swinton Street and King's Cross Road. The second in 1994 extended the conservation area to the northwest to include the area surrounding Pancras Gardens.

The centre of the conservation area is dominated by King's Cross and St Pancras Stations, which are major landmarks as well as prime gateways into and out of Central London from the north and midlands. However, despite this, a variety of other elements help to make up the character of the conservation area, of which the streets to the south of Euston Road are more characteristic of the urban grain and land uses beyond the conservation area boundary which are largely unrelated to the stations. These streets were originally late Georgian houses of stock brick, some with stucco ground floors and dressings, with sash windows and railed front basement areas. Subsequent changes have included the extension of many houses, the rendering of façades, and redevelopment with office and flat blocks.

59 Birkenhead Street lies within King's Cross Conservation Area and there is a view from the street outside to the main elevation of King's Cross Station. The Conservation Area Statement also identifies that only nos. 58a, 59 and 61 on the west side and 1-7 on the east side are within the conservation area; the south section of Birkenhead Street lies within Bloomsbury Conservation Area.



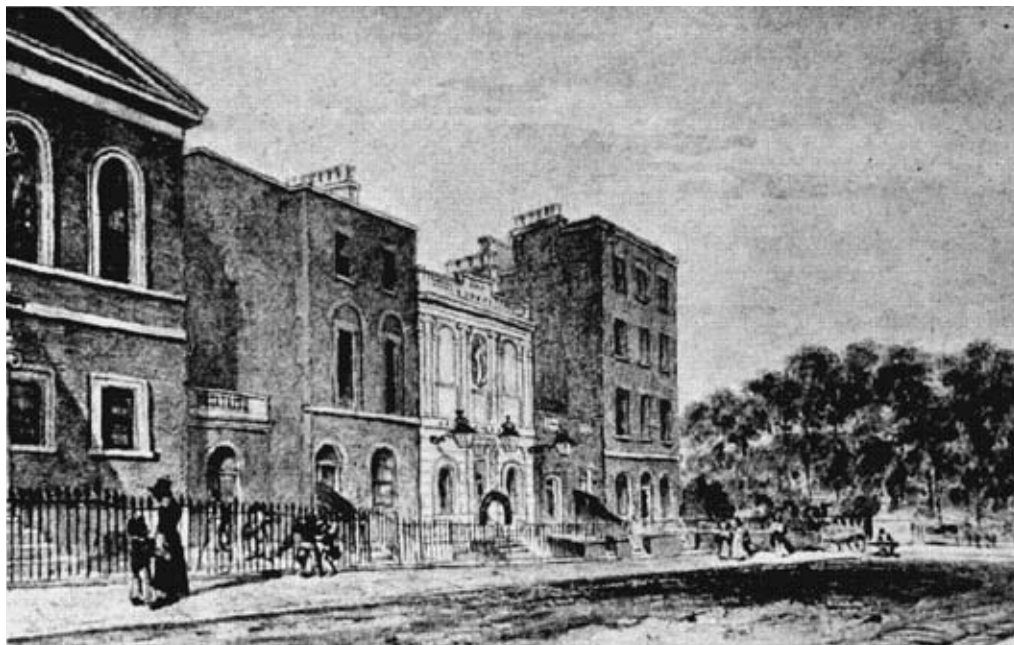
King's Cross Conservation Area

2.3 Birkenhead Street

The dwellings in Birkenhead Street were built in 1827 as part of a development on land owned by Messrs. Dunston, Robinson and Flanders, which started in 1825. This speculation included dwellings along Argyle Street and Manchester Street (now merged into Argyle Street), Belgrove Street, Crestfield Street and St Chad's Street. By 1849, sixty houses had been constructed in total, some of which were constructed by W. Forrester Bray who appears to have acquired capital from the landowners. From the architectural style and design of the properties it seems likely that Bray not only built Birkenhead Street but much of Crestfield, Belgrove and Argyle Streets too.

The original houses are constructed from yellow stock bricks in the typical late Georgian fashion, as set out by the Building Act of 1774. This standardised the layouts and sizes of rooms into four classes: Birkenhead Street was built up with the Third Class of house, defined as smaller houses worth £150-300 and occupying 350-500 square feet of ground. Nos. 1 to 7 on the east side and nos. 54 to 59 opposite are all that remain of the original development today. The ground floor windows have arched heads while the first and second floors have square heads. The first floor windows are also slightly recessed within a larger arched feature. The properties on the eastern side of the street are directly accessed from street level while the houses on the western side are accessed via a short flight of steps from the street. Both sides have basements which are accessed via a short flight of steps from street level (which have been removed from no. 59).

The retention of many original external architectural features such as windows, doors, fanlights, railings and balconies significantly contributes to the streetscape setting. The majority of the original properties have stucco render applied to the ground floor, which may first have been added soon after the street was built in response to the prevailing fashion of the early Victorian period, although the finishes visible today are likely to be modern. Most of



An 1830s watercolour showing no. 59 Birkenhead Street between the Methodist Chapel to the south (left) and the Royal Theatre to the north. Note that stucco render had yet to be applied to the ground floor.

the original houses now have mansard roofs, most of which appear to have been added from the 1970s to the 2000s, as indicated by photos at the London Metropolitan Archives. However all the remaining original houses still by and large retain their historic character, which derives mainly from their stock brick façades, regular proportions and sash windows.

Abutting 59 Birkenhead Street to the north is the former Royal Theatre and on the south side is a Methodist Chapel. The classically styled theatre was constructed in 1830 as part of the Panharmonium Project and used by Signor Gesualdo Lanza for his pupils until 1832, when it reopened as a public theatre. In 1838 the building was known as the New Lyceum and subsequently as the Regent, the Argyll and the Cabinet. The building has been altered externally over the years. The abutting Methodist Chapel – King's Cross Methodist Mission – fronts both Crestfield and Birkenhead Streets and was opened by the Wesleyan Methodists as Battle Bridge Church. It was renamed as King's Cross Church in 1836. Constructed from yellow stock brick, later alterations to the original façade have reduced its significance in the streetscape of Birkenhead Street.

By the late 19th century many of the houses in Birkenhead Street had become cheap hotels, often frequented by prostitutes, an aspect of city life fueled by the large and transient daily population brought to the area by King's Cross Station to the north. The trams of the London Street Tramways Co. arrived in 1885. The Great Northern, Piccadilly & Brompton Railway (GNP&BR) – the Piccadilly line – opened in 1906, and the City & South London Railway (C&SLR) – part of the Northern line – in 1907. By 1922, the street block bounded by Crestfield (Chesterfield) Street and Belgrove (Belgrave) Street to the west had been cleared for the development of a coach station. Originally Birkenhead Street was named Liverpool Street, but the name was changed in 1938 as were many of the surrounding street names. The reason for this is not known but it may have been an attempt to 're-brand' the area.



A photograph of 1978 looking northwards up Birkenhead Street with no. 59 in the distance; note the plain Georgian façades and modern mansards.



View northwards along Birkenhead Street terminating in King's Cross Station.



View northwards showing the eastern side of Birkenhead Street.



View southwards along Birkenhead Street terminating in the postwar Birkenhead Street Estate.

During the Second World War the street suffered from the effects of aerial bombardment, resulting in the loss of historic houses at its southern end. These bomb-damaged properties were eventually replaced with blocks of flats in the 1950s, creating the Birkenhead Street Estate.



1945 bomb damage map: the areas of darker colour indicate greater damage.

Map regression



Ordnance Survey of 1871, showing 59 Birkenhead Street (then Liverpool Street) between the King's Cross Theatre to the north and the Methodist Chapel to the south. King's Cross Station, which had opened in 1852, is to the north.



Ordnance Survey of 1893, showing the King's Cross Station forecourt developed southwards. The horse-drawn trams of the London Street Tramways Co. had arrived in 1885.



Ordnance Survey of 1922, showing the street block bounded by Chesterfield (now Crestfield) Street and Belgrave (now Belgrove) Street cleared for development. The Great Northern, Piccadilly & Brompton Railway (GNP&BR) – the Piccadilly line – had arrived in 1906, and the City & South London Railway (C&SLR) – part of the Northern line – in 1907.



Ordnance Survey of the 1930s, showing the King's Cross Coach Station to the west.



Ordnance Survey of 1959, showing the Birkenhead Street Estate to the south east.



59 Birkenhead Street viewed from the east. King's Cross Station is at top right. [Bing Maps]

2.4 History of 59 Birkenhead Street

59 Birkenhead Street was constructed in 1827 by W. Forrester Bray, as part of a larger unified development of terrace houses. However while the other houses on the street adjoin each other, No. 59 stands apart from the rest, between the Methodist Chapel established in 1825 and the former theatre of 1830.

This section describes the building and sets out the known changes that have occurred since it was built. The date of a number of alterations are not precisely known, but approximate dates have been inferred from stylistic evidence and the context of other known changes

The relevant historic plans are reproduced in Appendices at the end of this report.

2.4.1 Exterior

Street front

The street façade of the house consists of three main storeys over a basement, matching other properties along the street. It was probably originally faced entirely in stock brick, as no. 58 is today, but at some point in the 19th century the ground floor and basement were rendered, and architraves were added to the ground floor window and door. The basement would have been accessed via a stone stair in the front area, but this has been removed and replaced with a modern steel staircase. The original iron railings remain, including an integrated gate leading to the external basement stair.

At basement level the wide metal window is a mid 20th century insertion, as are the door and doorframe beneath the front steps. At ground floor, the front door is reached up several external steps, bounded by railings: it is a modern replacement set within a modern frame, but the wider pilastered surround and fanlight are original, matching others along the street. The softwood casement window to the ground floor is 20th century in date.



A photograph of 1959 showing no. 59 painted white.

On the first floor the tall sash windows set within arched brick recesses are modern elements, which have a plausibly historic appearance although they do not match the original pattern exactly. Similar but not identical modern replacement sash windows are also fitted to the second floor. At the top of the façade a thin stone coping crowns the plain brick parapet.

There are terracotta air vents at first- and second-floor levels.



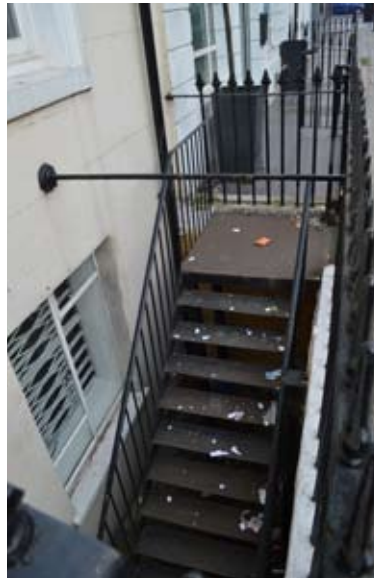
No. 59 Birkenhead Street today; the ground-floor render and architraves are probably Victorian additions, while the windows are all 20th century.



Nos. 57 & 58 Birkenhead Street with their later mansard roofs. No. 58's plain brick ground floor is probably the original design, whereas no. 57's stucco surrounds to the doorcase and arched windows are likely to be Victorian additions.



No. 59's basement area with modern door.



Modern staircase and window.



Detail of front doorcase, showing original and modern fabric.

Rear

The back of the house is much more varied and utilitarian in appearance. The main elevation is rendered and mainly painted white, although the second floor is left unpainted. It contains one main window on each storey, but these differ in size and shape. The basement window is a 20th century metal casement, with a further small metal window insert on its north side. The ground floor window is a Georgian sash – the only original window in the building – with a window insert on its south side lighting the WC, together with modern extract vents for the kitchen and WC. The first floor has a much wider late 20th century tripartite sash window, possibly inserted into a widened opening. The second floor window above returns to Georgian proportions but is a modern reproduction sash. Above is a modern dormer set into the rear roof slope, possibly replacing a lost earlier feature.

To the south of the main part of the rear elevation is a projection containing the staircase, which is lit by modern reproduction sash windows at half-landing height between the ground and first floors, and first and second floors. The rear elevation of this projection is rendered with ashlar scoring, while the north flank is plain stock brick, painted white in the lower parts. Where this flank wall reaches into the basement area there is a modern door set within an original doorway, and a small modern window lighting the under-stair WC.

Behind the rear stair projection is a single storey link constructed of brick and timber with concrete floors, and featuring a flush-panelled door of early-mid 20th century date. This connects back to a flat roofed shed-type building of two rooms, constructed in the mid 20th century though possibly on the site of an earlier building. It features a metal window opening onto the rear area, and another opening south towards the Methodist Chapel.

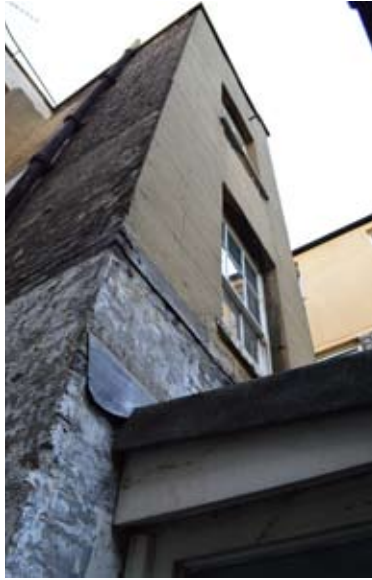
Within the rear basement area is a low stone-capped plinth which appears to be mid 20th century in date, judging from the brick walls. This abuts the retaining wall which is of older brick but appears to have been underpinned in brick and concrete in places, perhaps when the asphalt tanking was carried out. The top of this wall is capped with 19th century stones bearing evidence of an original metal railing that has since been lost. A plain modern railing stands in its place, fixed to the walls at either end.



Basement and ground floor of the rear façade, showing modern railings.



First and second floors of the rear façade.



Upper floors of the rear staircase projection.



The rear basement area.



The modern flat-roofed building in the rear yard.

2.4.2 Interior

The original layout of the house is still very legible, with most of the walls remaining in place although many have been altered. The plan form was typical of its date, featuring a long corridor on the ground floor running from front to back, giving access to a rear staircase. On the basement, first and second floors the plan was simpler, with a large front room and a smaller rear room. The third floor would probably originally have been a single space, as it is now. The ground floor rear room and second floor front room have been subdivided in the last few decades. In addition it seems that the first floor front room was enlarged backwards at an early date, reducing the size of the rear room and causing some disruption to the original cornices, which was repaired inexactly.

The house's strange position on its own between two institutional buildings that were erected at the same time may indicate that it was built to serve one or other of them. Certainly during the second half of the 20th century the building was used by the Methodist Church, most recently with the upper levels used as accommodation for the minister and the basement level occupied by a community charity run in conjunction with the Church congregation. A doorway in the party wall on the second floor was probably inserted around 1969 and gave access to the adjoining church which was extended upwards at that time. When this was stopped up in order to create an entirely separate dwelling, a recess was left in the wall as a reminder of the previous use and the long-time relationship between the house and the neighbouring church.

Basement

This storey has been tanked with asphalt in recent decades, and, at the time of the site visits, most walls were dry-lined with plasterboard. The dry-lining has since been removed. The original ceilings have been lined in plasterboard, but in the south east part the whole ceiling has collapsed due to flooding; meanwhile the corridor ceiling had already been replaced. The windows to front and back have been replaced with 20th century metal casements, while two small metal windows have also been inserted into the rear and staircase walls. The doors and inner doorframes are modern. The staircase has been modified with new boards while the original railing and newel appear to have been completely replaced with plain modern timber studding and boarding. Investigation has revealed that the lower part of the staircase has rotted, probably in consequence of the tanking. Without any opening-up to make certain, it is not clear what age the stud wall to the corridor is, but it may contain much original fabric.



The stairs to the basement from the ground floor.



The front basement room.



The front basement room showing the dry-lining cut away to show the original walls. (The dry-lining has since been removed.)



The front basement room showing the modern utilities cupboards on the south wall.

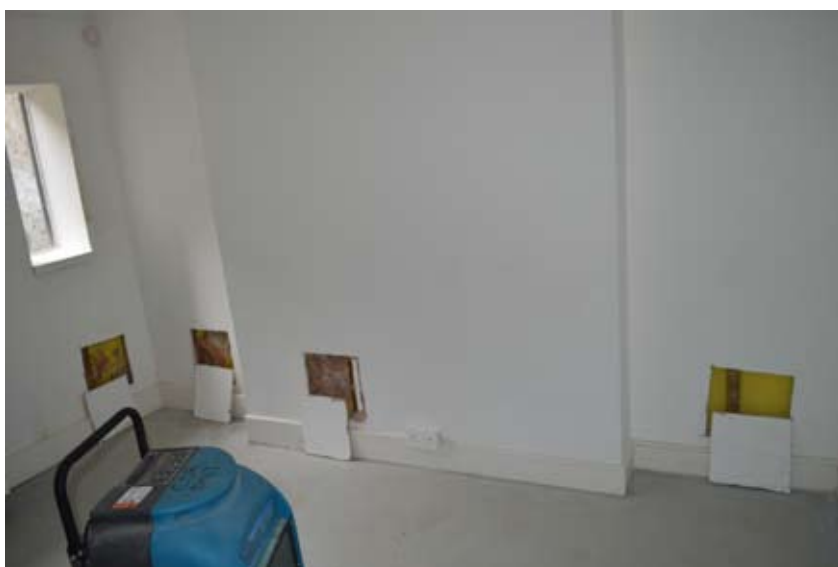


The rear basement room showing the damaged ceiling, metal window and modern door.

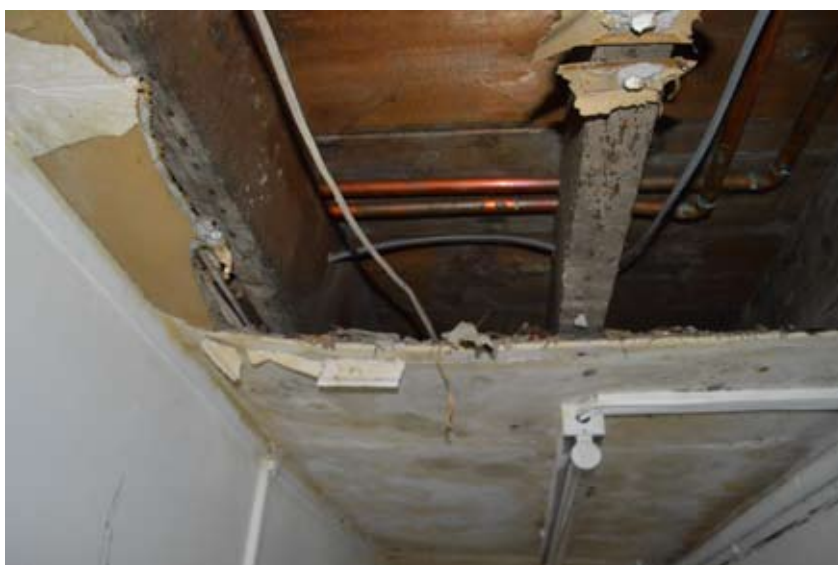
At the front of the basement, the lobby beneath the front steps has been rendered, as has the coal-hole beyond. This has had the unfortunate effect of trapping moisture within the brick walls, and where some render has been removed this water is sweating out of the brick.

Ground floor

The basic layout is original, but all the doors and inner doorframes are modern, and the north wall of both main rooms was, at the time of the site visits, dry-lined with modern plasterboard. The dry-lining has since been removed. The partition walls and small metal window within the rear room are modern, as are the inner lobby door and partition at the entrance. The modern suspended ceiling and modern WC built in to the south-west corner of the kitchen, present at the time of the site visits, have since been removed, as have the fitted kitchen units. The cornices which remain visible appear to be original, while some highly fragmentary traces of 19th century wall finishes remain. Many historic stretches of skirting remain, but have been liberally pieced in with modern stretches following a similar pattern. The front window is a 20th century softwood casement, while the shutterbox surround may be a later 19th century



The rear basement room with the dry lining cut away to show the original wall behind. (The dry-lining has since been removed.)



The basement corridor ceiling, now damaged, is modern plasterboard.

insertion; it has been altered more recently on the south side to accommodate a large soil pipe and boxing running down the inside of the front wall. The opening between front and rear rooms appears historic, as is the rear window and the timber panel below. To the rear, the stair treads appear historic but the newels and railings have been replaced by modern timber studding and boarding.

The recent flooding has caused damage to the lath and plaster ceilings in the entrance hall and front room: some of the ceilings have fallen or had to be cut away, while nearby areas of the ceilings and also the walls appear in need of repair and/or replacement. The water has



View from the front door showing the modern inner partition, original bracketed cornice and pilastered arch.



The main staircase from the entrance hall, showing the modern partition.



The curved corner of the rear room seen from the corridor, showing the cornice above, modern pipework in the middle, and the modern door frame to the WC below.



The front room showing the later shutters and modern window, as well as flood damage to the south wall (right).



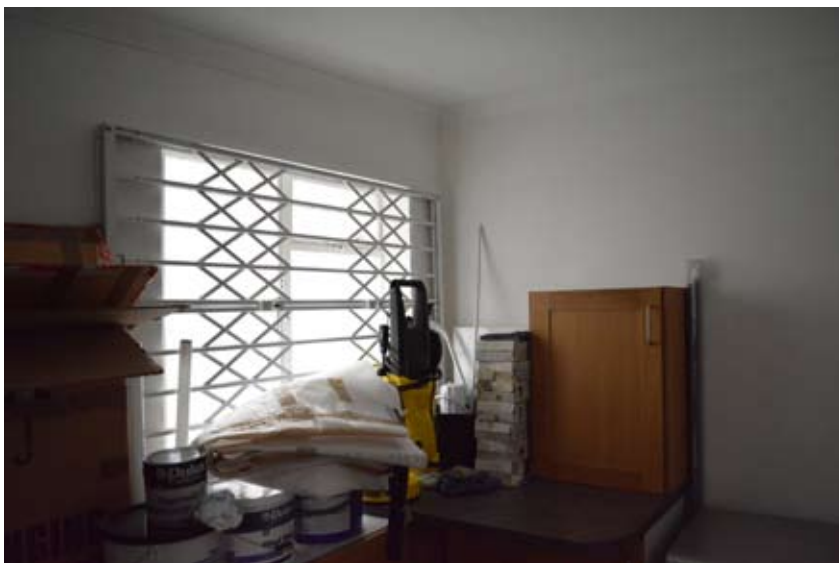
The north wall of the front room, with dry lining cut away to show the original wall behind.



The rear room showing the modern kitchen, which has since been removed, with the sole original window to the left.



The suspended ceiling and dry lined north wall in the rear room. Both have since been removed.



The southern room in the rear extension, showing the 20th century metal window and plain nature of the space.

also caused some swelling and splitting of door frames, which as noted above are mostly composites featuring historic architraves and modern inset frames, which will also require repair or replacement in places.

To the rear of the staircase, an opening leads into a utilitarian connecting space with doors that suggest perhaps a 1920s-1950s date. Beyond is a mid-20th century flat roofed building with metal windows.

First floor

All the doors, inner doorframes and windows on this floor are modern replacements. The large front room with a roll-moulded cornice shows signs that the wall separating the front and rear rooms is not original: for instance parts of the original ceiling are set above the stud partition. Following the recent collapse of the ceiling, it is therefore clear that originally the first floor had a different configuration of walls, or was even a larger single space. The present stud walls appear to have been added later, but the date of this change is not known. Along the front wall, asymmetrically set between the two windows, is a 20th century soil pipe with timber boxing that disrupts the harmony of the room. At the time of the site visits, modern plasterboard dry-lining was present on the north wall, obscuring the chimneybreast. This has since been removed. Much of the original lath and plaster ceiling had been replaced in modern times with plasterboard, but the recent flooding has caused additional losses in the south east corner, while nearby areas also appear in need of replacement. The plasterwork of the walls in this area has also been affected by the flooding, and parts may need to be replaced. Many historic stretches of skirting remain, but have been liberally pieced in with modern stretches following a similar pattern.

The rear room has a modern service riser in the south west corner. The rear staircase is largely historic: although many railings appear to have been lost and overlaid with modern boarding, the newels remain.



The front room showing the damaged ceiling; this has worsened since this photograph was taken. See detail photograph on p. 22.



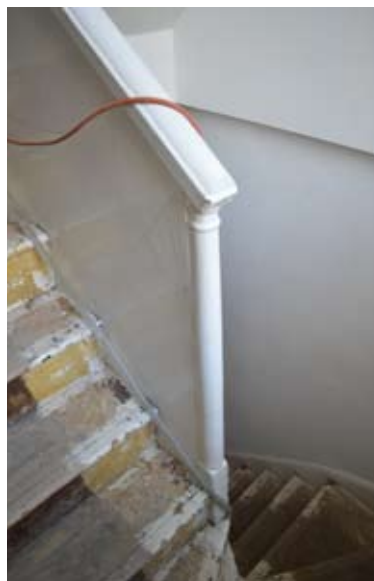
The damaged ceiling in the front room in detail.



The dry-lining in the north wall cut away to show the original wall behind. (The dry-lining has since been removed.)



The rear room showing the damaged coving and modern service riser.



Detail of the staircase showing the original newel with a later rail and boarding.

Second floor

This floor has been altered significantly in modern times, and all the windows, doors and inner doorframes are modern replacements. At the front, the single large room has been subdivided to give a bedroom to the north and a bathroom to the south, connected by an entrance lobby. The bedroom has been given an artex ceiling, and has a large soil stack boxed into the south east corner on the front façade. The partition wall between the bedroom and bathroom has affected the historic cornice, which has also been completely removed within the bathroom itself. The partitions also destroy the sense of volume of the original. Meanwhile in the rear room the original cornice has been removed and replaced with modern plain coving.

Within the corridor the blocked doorway in the party wall has a step but no surround, and appears incongruous. The attic staircase railings have been boarded over but may remain



The second floor front bedroom, showing the modern partition wall and soil stack in the south east corner, and the artex ceiling.



The lobby between the bedroom and bathroom, showing the disruption caused to the original room volume and to the cornice by the partitions and trunking.



The rear room, with modern sash window and coving.



The corridor and staircase, with the modern partition blocking light from the staircase beyond.

beneath, while the party wall to the west was, at the time of the site visits, dry-lined. The dry-lining has since been removed. The modern installation of stud partition and door at the stair head has ruined the sense of space that originally existed, as well as taking away the daylighting of this landing from the staircase window. The original balustrade remains behind the partition and could be reopened to view. A hidden water tank has been installed over the main staircase, which has unfortunately reduced the volume of the space, although the large west window has been left intact.

Third floor

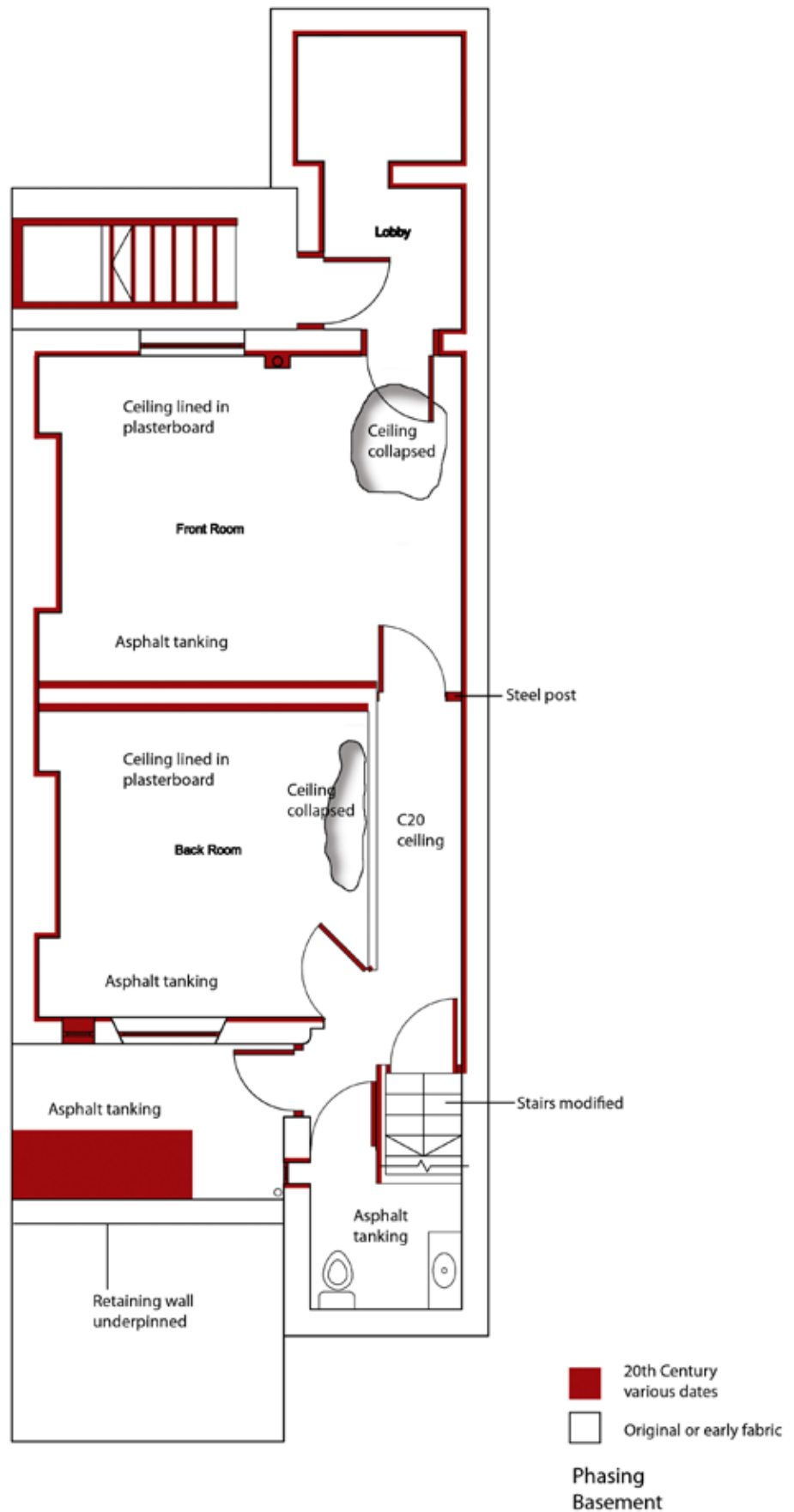
The doorway is very plain but may be historic. The room has been dry-lined with plasterboard, obscuring the roof structure. The dormer window facing west is a modern insertion but may stand in place of an original opening. The underside of the roof is visible through openings in the walls: the rafters do not form a truss with the joists but run to the side of them, and the roof may thus be 20th century in date. Above the rafters is modern felt sheeting topped by boards and modern slates, so that any historic battens have long since been removed.

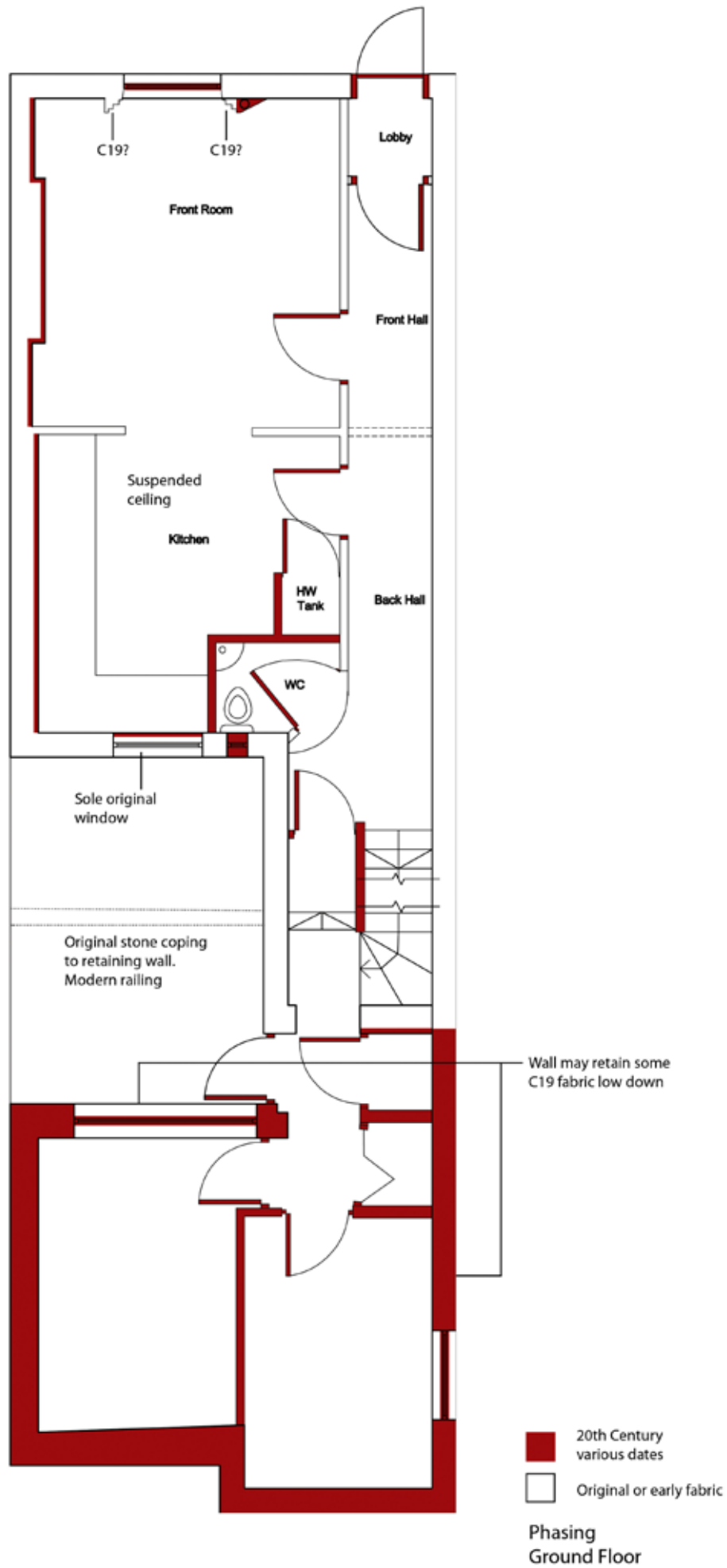


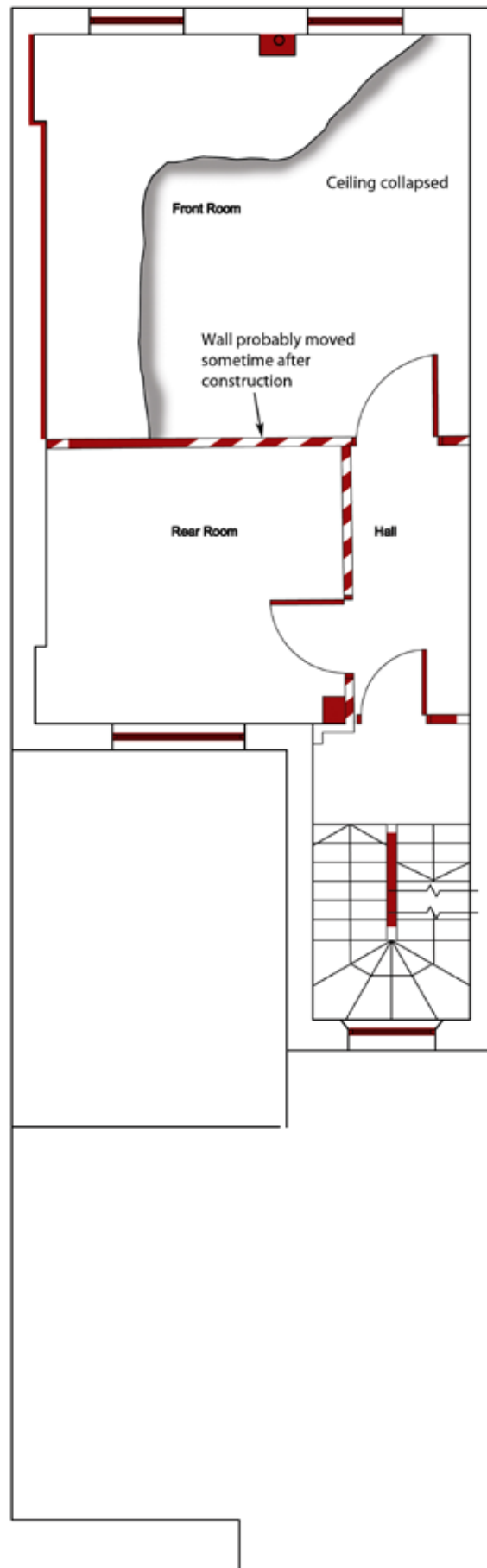
The third floor, with the modern dormer to the right and the doorway beyond.

2.4.3 59 Birkenhead Street today

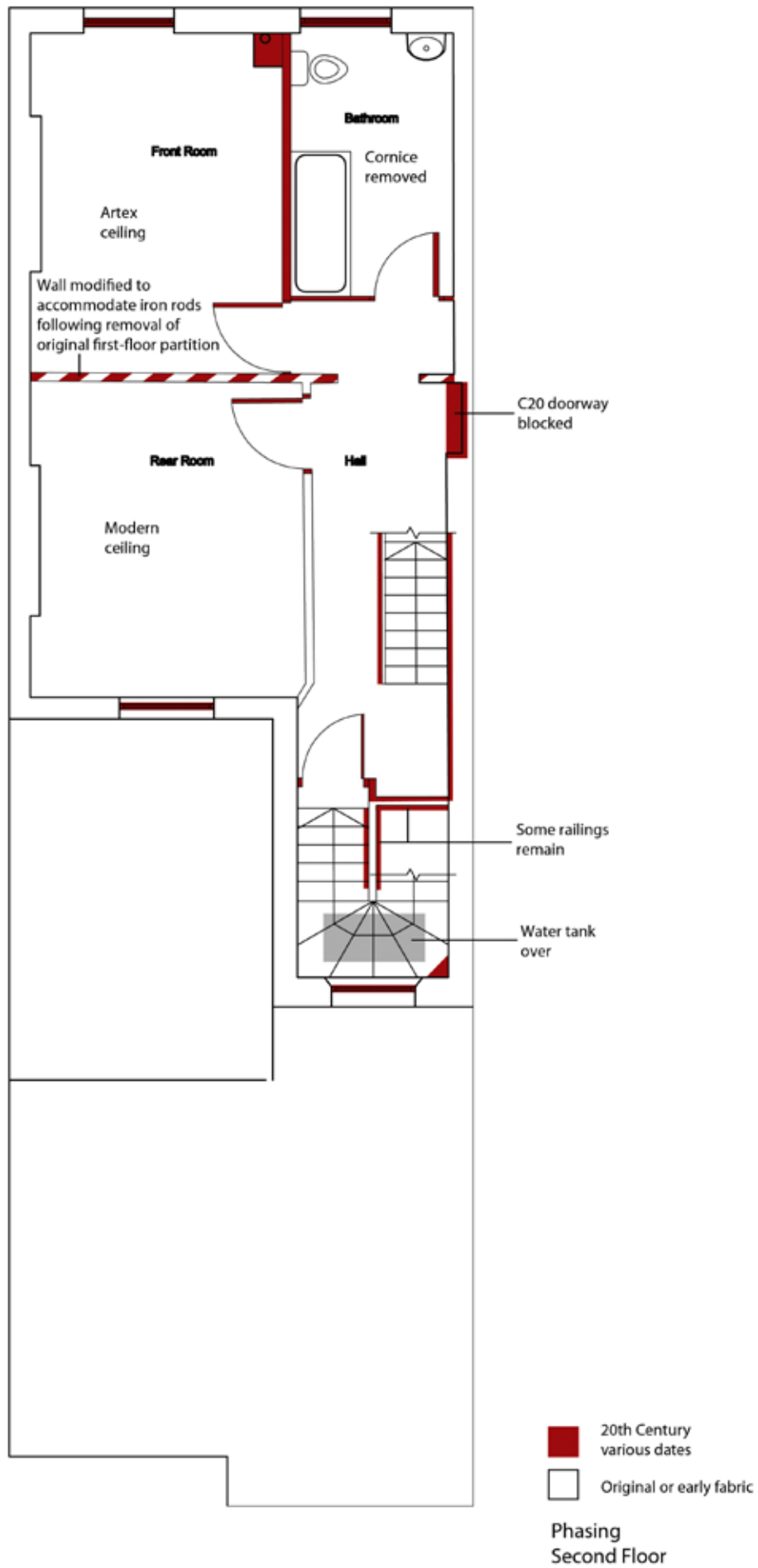
The following phasing drawings illustrate the changes that have occurred to the house over time.

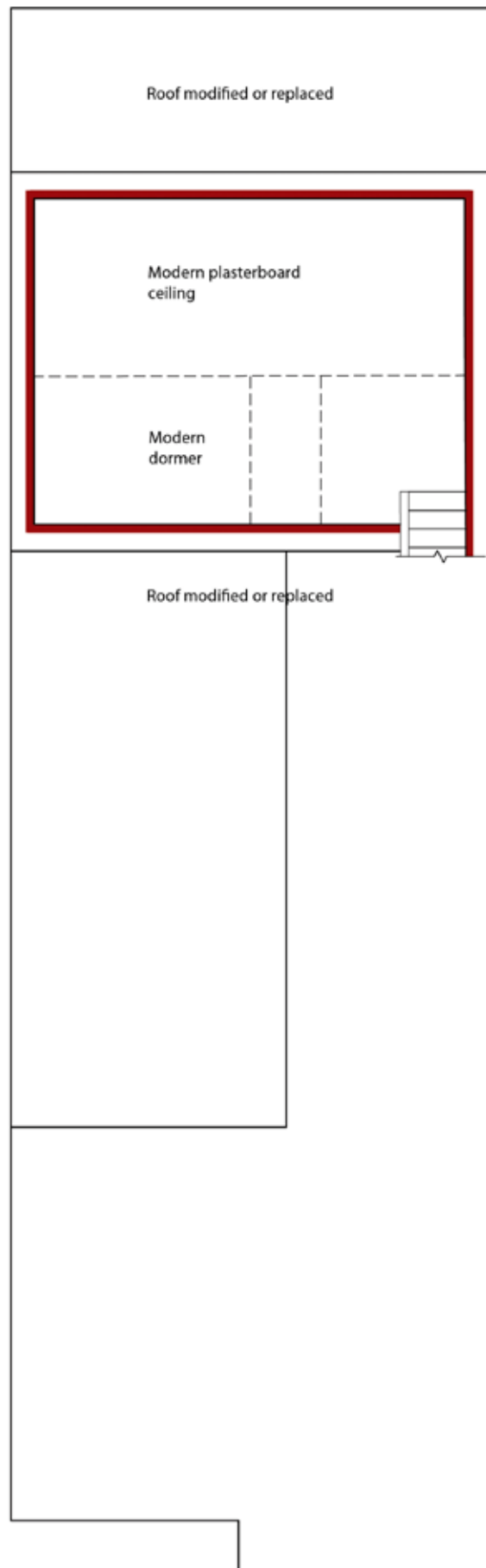






Phasing
First Floor





- 20th Century various dates
- Original or early fabric

Phasing
Third Floor

3.0 Assessment of Significance

59 Birkenhead Street is listed at Grade II as one of the original houses erected on Birkenhead Street in the 1820s. While the listing recognises the national architectural and historic interest of the building, the official list description does not set out what features are important, or to what degree; nor does it describe which elements play a neutral role, or detract from the building's significance. Understanding these aspects of the building's special interest is essential in enabling informed decisions to be taken when proposing repairs and alterations, so that its architectural and historic interest can be conserved as appropriate. The purpose of this section is to provide a detailed assessment of significance, so that the effects of any proposed changes upon the listed building can be fully evaluated, and changes can be directed at those areas most able to accommodate them. This assessment draws upon the historical understanding set out in chapter 2.0 above, and follows established conservation practice in using the following terms:

Highly Significant – original elements which make up the principal historical and architectural interest of the building.

Significant – original elements which contribute noticeably to the building's overall architectural or historic interest; or non-original features of historic or design interest.

Some Significance – original elements of rather minor importance, or non-original features which contribute to maintaining the building's character (e.g. appropriately designed replacement windows).

Neutral or Detracting – features which do not contribute positively to the historic and architectural interest of the building, and in some cases may even detract from an appreciation of its significance. This can include original fabric where it is of minimal special interest, and is located in an area that has undergone notable change.

These terms are used in a purely relative sense within the context of the house, and should not be taken as descriptions of the absolute significance of elements compared to those in other listed buildings.

The description of significance given below is illustrated on the coloured plans in section 3.4.

3.1 Exteriors

Highly Significant

The front façade from ground floor to second floor is Highly Significant as it retains much of its late Georgian character. The replacement of the windows and rendering of the ground floor has reduced its aesthetic value but the original design can still be appreciated.

The rear kitchen window is Highly Significant as it appears to be the one surviving original window in the house.

Significant

The basement street elevation is rated Significant as it includes the original front wall of the house, which was intended to be the primary architectural expression of the building. This gives it significance despite the rather degrading alterations including later render facing and the insertion of an unsympathetic metal window.

Some Significance

The rear facade is of Some Significance due to its role as an original external wall, although the later render finish over much of its area, and its utilitarian character, prevent it from having any great aesthetic value.

The basement wall underneath the front entrance steps is also of Some Significance, due to its subsidiary role within the front façade and later render finish.

The first and second floor windows in the front façade are modern sashes that don't exactly replicate the moulding profiles of the lost originals. However they plausibly suggest a Georgian character from the street, and are therefore of Some Significance for their role in the elevation.

Neutral or Detracting

The stone-capped pedestal structure in the rear basement area is Neutral.

The rear single-storey shed building is Neutral at best. It is utilitarian and does not directly affect our appreciation of the main house, but its metal windows and felt roof are unsympathetic and Detract.

The replacement windows which do not appear to closely replicate the originals are Neutral at best. The ground floor front window and all metal windows Detract.

3.2 Interiors

Highly Significant

The ground floor front room and entrance corridor are Highly Significant, as although they have been altered they are the most important surviving interiors in the building. They retain their cornices and volumes, and still give a plausible impression of their original state. The original interior walls which define these spaces are also Highly Significant. The recent flooding has caused damage to parts of the lath and plaster ceilings and left additional areas of ceilings and walls in need of repair and/or replacement – if done like-for-like the original appearance of these surfaces could be restored, enhancing the design value of the listed building. The water has also caused some swelling and splitting of the doorframes which feature historic architraves and modern inset frames – repair of these could be coupled with a restoration of their original appearance and thus enhance significance.

Significant

The first floor party walls and the original parts of the partition wall at the top of the stairs are Significant as remainders of the original layout.

The first floor front room was designed as the principal reception room, but has an altered plan form since the west wall is not original, and the prominent soil stack disrupts the sense

of space on the east wall. Nevertheless, there is potential to enhance the room by reversing these negative aspects and regularising the disrupted cornice. Like-for-like repair of damaged areas of plaster and the restoration of the damaged door frames, skirtings and cornices to their historic appearance could enhance the design value and hence the significance of the listed building.

The original second floor stud walls are Significant for defining the layout of this floor as originally designed.

Some Significance

The stairs are of Some Significance as, although they are plain, they appear to be largely original. Many of the railings and some handrails are missing, but others survive largely intact beneath later additions. (The modern boarding and stud walls in places Detract.) The staircase has experienced considerable repair in some places; the basement flight in particular has suffered from rot.

The main basement spaces are of Some Significance for appearing to demonstrate the original plan form of the building, although they do not contain any elements of importance.

The rear ground floor room is of Some Significance, as although it retains important original features it has been detrimentally altered by the insertion of a WC and store cupboard in its south west corner, as well as a suspended ceiling.

The first floor rear room and corridor are of Some Significance as historic spaces, although they contain little of importance. The first floor main partition walls appear to be later alterations and are of Some Significance; some areas have modern fabric while other parts appear more historic.

The second floor front bedroom and lobby are of Some Significance. Although these are subdivided spaces they still show the original cornice of the front room and thus allow its historic form to be understood. (The partition walls in these spaces Detract, however.)

The second floor rear room and corridor are of Some Significance, as they show the original plan form of the house in this area.

Neutral or Detracting

The rear corridor and under-stair WC in the basement are Neutral spaces.

The third floor room and walls are Neutral. If the roof proves to be a 20th century structure it too would be Neutral.

The modern doors are Neutral at best. Often they are set into modern frames which sit within larger original surrounds, in which case they Detract. Where they are set within later partitions they also Detract.

The modern wall and ceiling linings within many of the rooms obscure their original volumes and often interacts poorly with surviving original mouldings, and therefore Detract.

The later boarding and stud partitions around the stairs Detract.

The suspended ceiling within the rear ground floor room Detracts.

The WC and cupboard created in the south west portion of the rear ground floor room Detract.

The second floor front bathroom Detracts, as it disrupts the original room volume and has caused the localised removal of the historic cornice.

3.3 Overall Statement of Significance

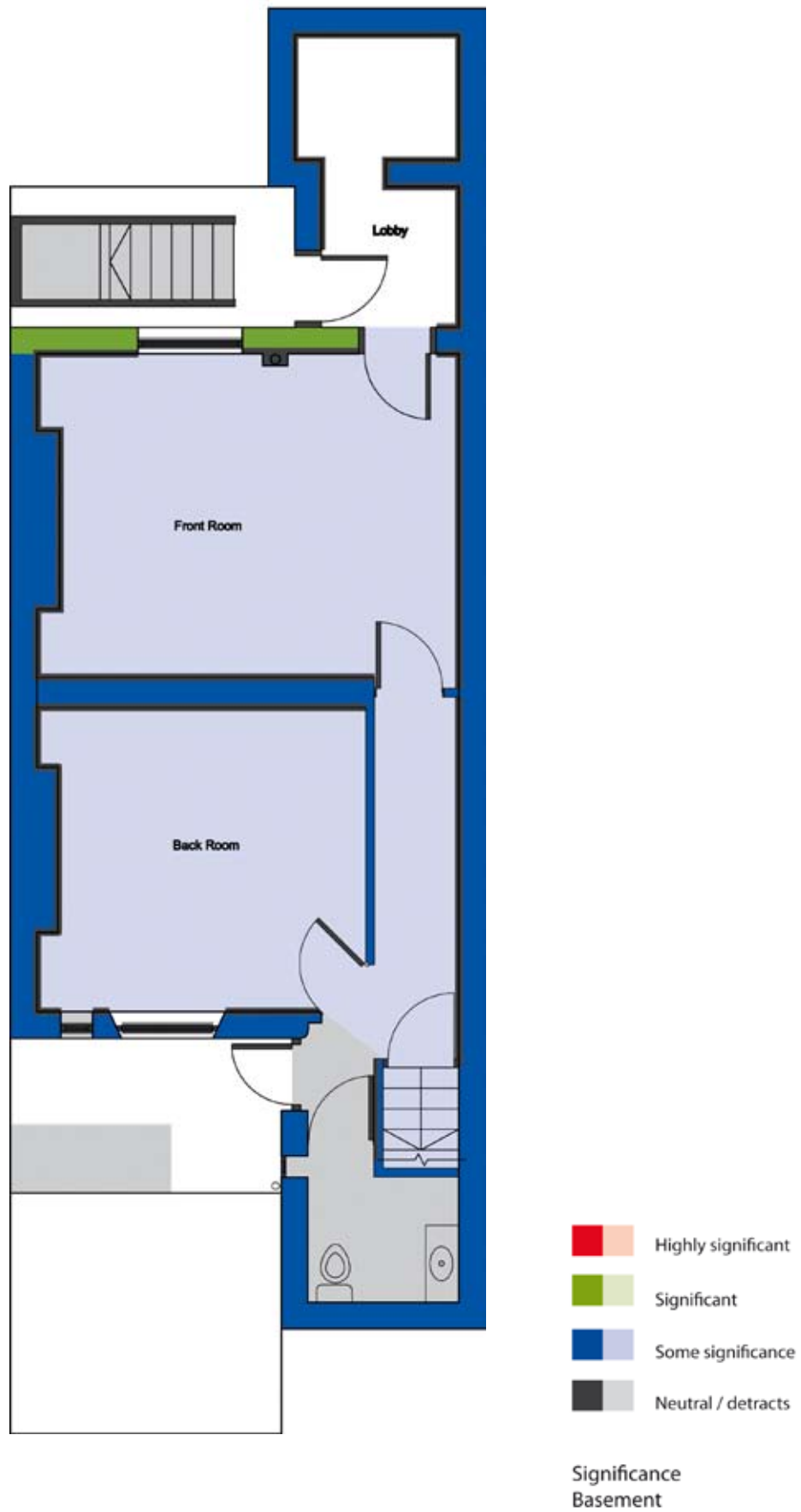
The special interest of 59 Birkenhead Street derives first and foremost from its character as a late Georgian Third Class house that was built as part of a classic speculation. It has group value with its neighbours on both sides of the street, and with houses on other streets nearby, and so contributes to the character and appearance of this part of the King's Cross Conservation Area. The main façade retains its Georgian character on the first and second floors, as well as in the pilastered doorcase and fanlight, despite the piecemeal replacement of windows, the rendering of the ground floor and basement, and the loss of the original external basement stair. The rear façade and roof are of relatively low special interest due to their utilitarian nature and history of alteration.

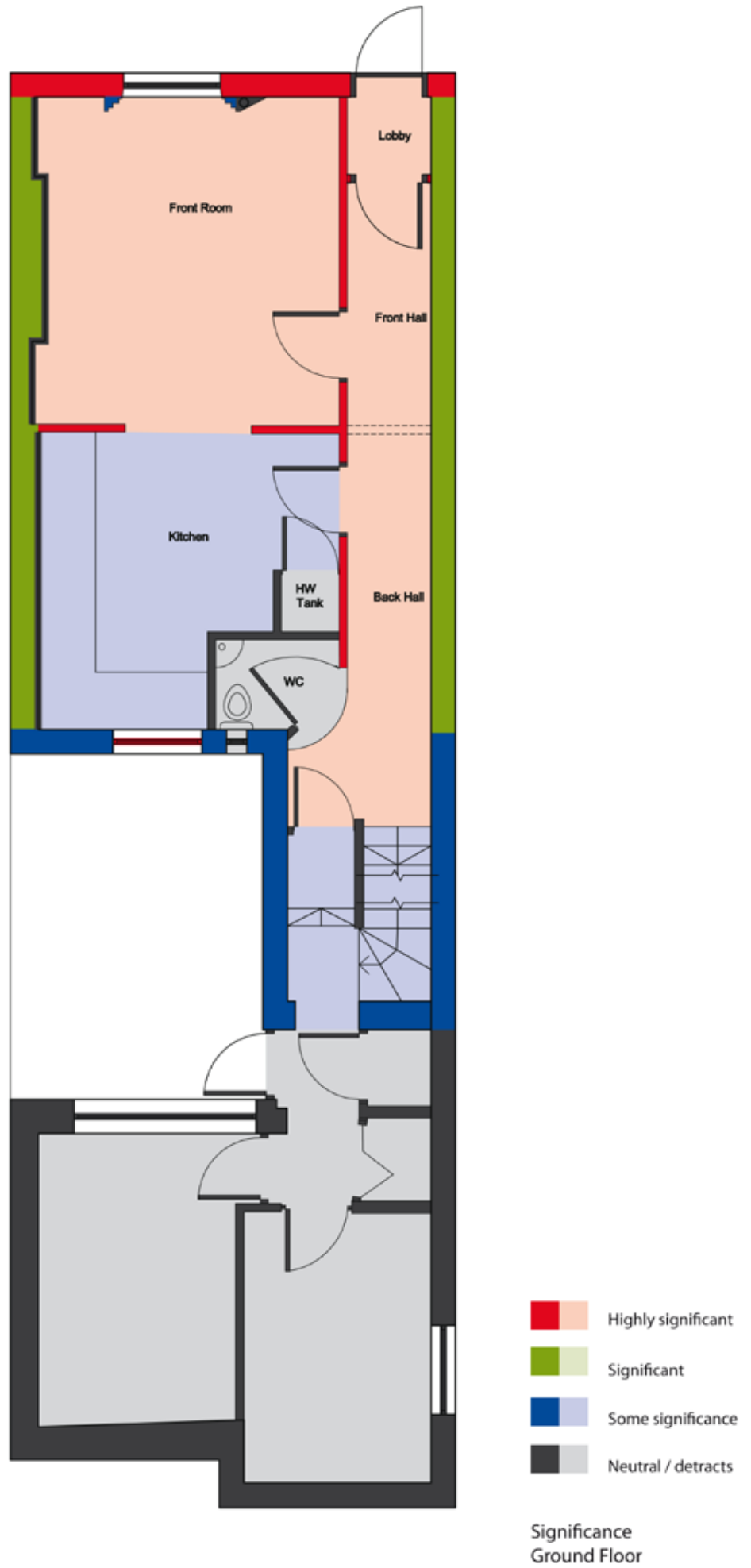
Of the original interiors, little now remains save for around half the original cornices, the basic structure of most of the staircase together with some railings and newels, and a number of door surrounds which have been modified with new doorframes set within. The retention of the main internal walls (except on the altered first floor) is a key feature of the building, as these allow the original plan form to be understood despite later partitions and alterations.

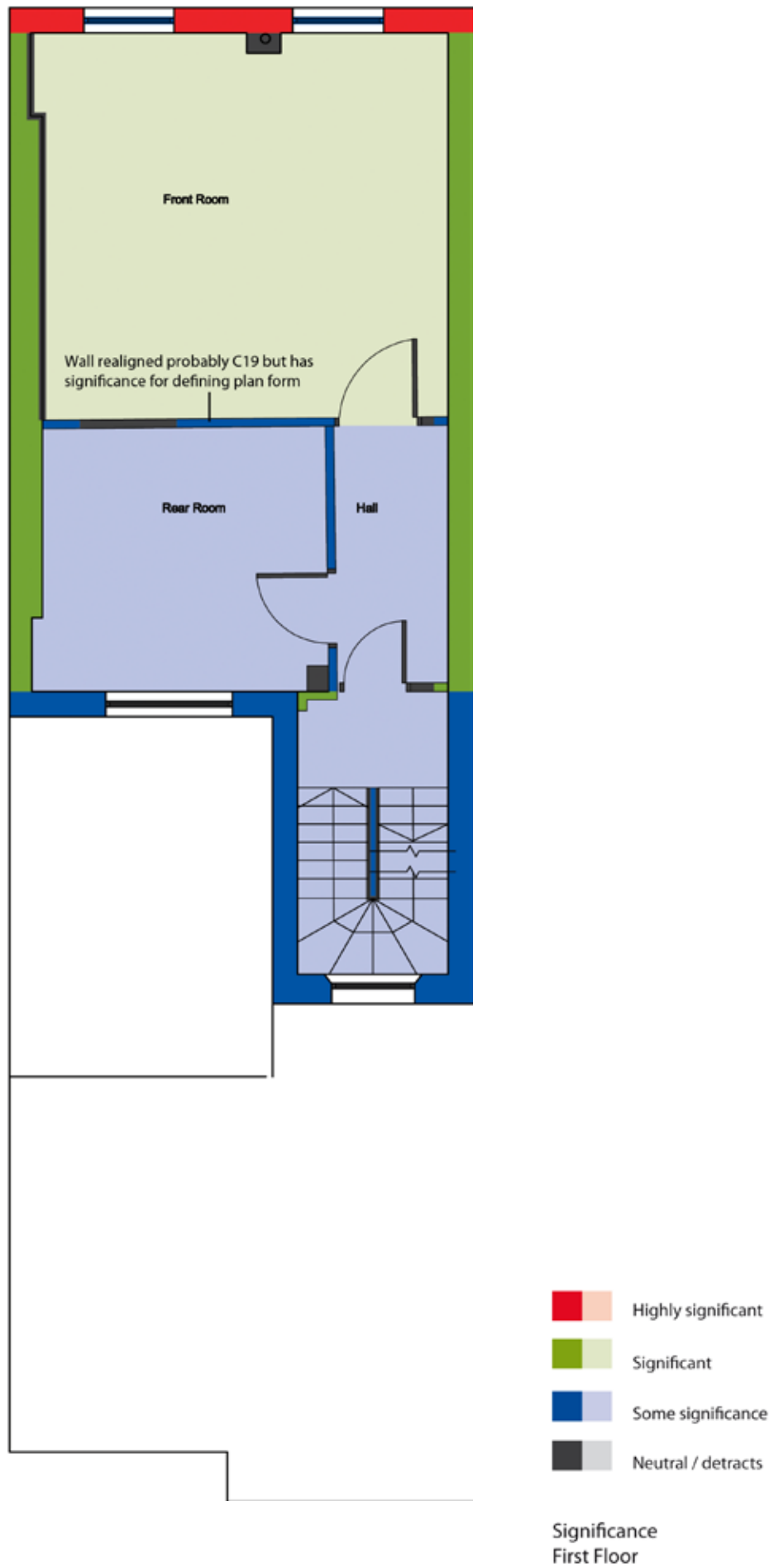
The elements which detract from the special interest of the building include: the unsympathetic character of the modern works, including the soil stack set within the front rooms; the dry lining or rendering of historic walls; the loss of chimneypieces; the plain doors and modern inset surrounds; the later partition walls; the metal and other inappropriately designed windows; the steel external basement stair; and the creation of new openings in historic fabric both internally and externally.

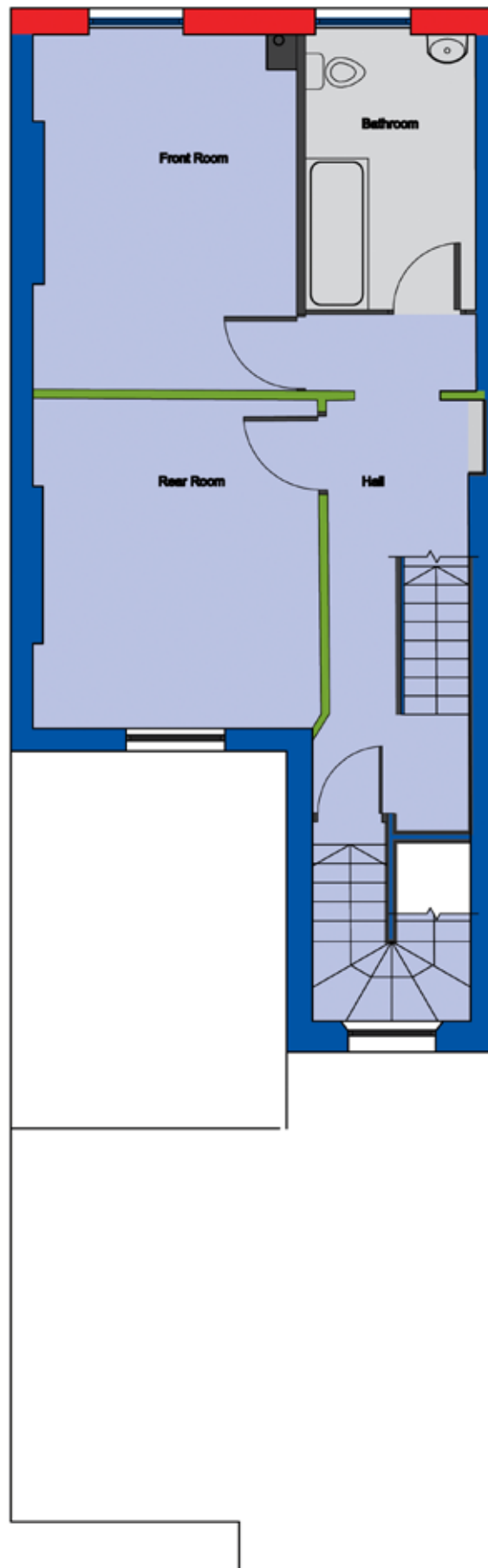
In addition, the recent flooding has caused considerable damage including the loss of large areas of ceiling and the saturation of brickwork and surface plaster. The building is still drying out and the full effects of the water damage are yet to be determined. However it does appear that significant areas of plaster have been damaged, and in some areas the loss of bond with the wall is apparent (though this may have existed beforehand and merely been exacerbated by recent events). The repair of this damage will necessarily involve the removal of some areas of historic fabric, but the overall results of a suitable approach to these works would be to repair and enhance the significance of the listed building.

3.4 Significance Plans



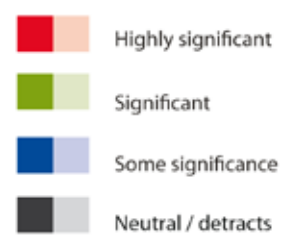
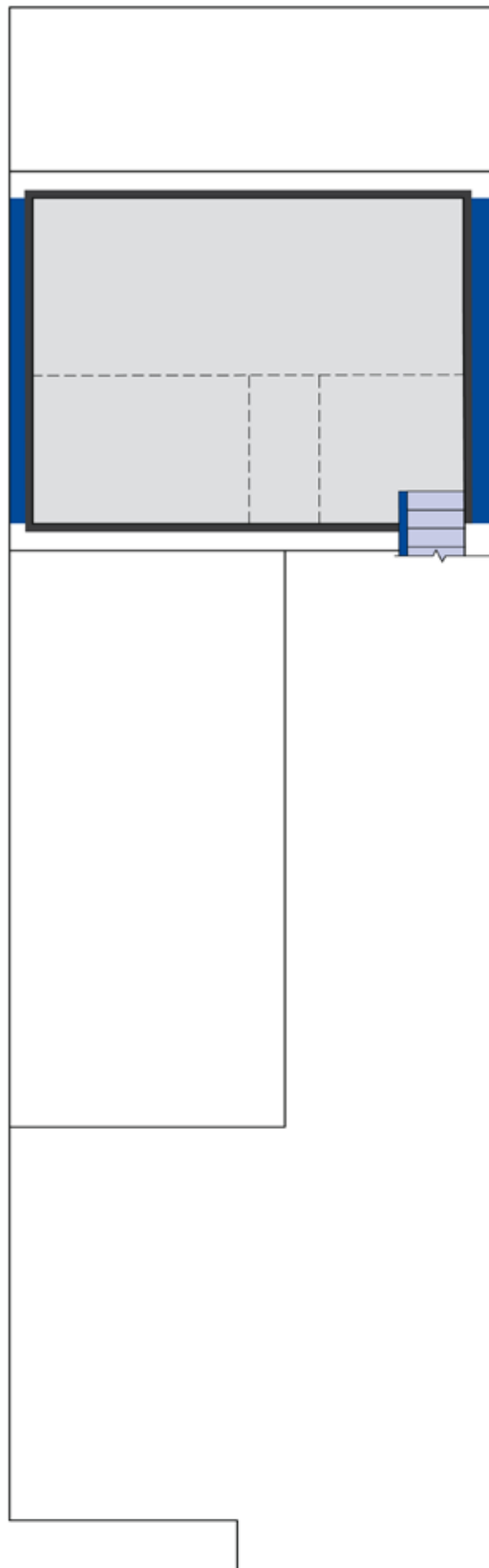






- Highly significant
- Significant
- Some significance
- Neutral / detracts

Significance
Second Floor



Significance
Third Floor

4.0 Policies

4.1 National Heritage Policies

National heritage policy is contained within section 12 of the *National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)* (March 2012). The relevant sections are as follows:

131. *In determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of:*
- *the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;*
 - *the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and*
 - *the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.*
134. *Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.*

4.2 Regional Heritage Policies

The Greater London Authority's *London Plan* (July 2011) contains heritage guidance in Policy 7.8, the relevant parts of which are as follows:

- C. *Development should identify, value, conserve, restore, re-use and incorporate heritage assets, where appropriate.*
- D. *Development affecting heritage assets and their settings should conserve their significance, by being sympathetic to their form, scale, materials and architectural detail.*

4.3 Local Authority Heritage Policy

Planning policies relating to heritage are contained within Camden Council's *Core Strategy* (2010), and *Development Policies* (2010). In addition, the current *King's Cross Conservation Area Statement* (2003) is a Supplementary Planning Document which contains management proposals for conserving the Conservation Area.

4.3.1 Camden Council Core Strategy (2010)

The relevant policy is 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;*

4.3.2 Camden Council Development Policies (2010)

The relevant policy is DP25 Conserving Camden's 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.*

4.3.3 King's Cross Conservation Area Statement

Section 7 of the conservation area statement gives guidelines in order to manage change.

7.7.1 Some of the works below may require prior listed building consent from the Council. For example, matching repairs in the same manner do not require consent but other works, such as re-pointing in a different manner, do require consent. It is recommended to check whether consent is needed with the Council before works commence.

7.7.2 In all cases, existing/original architectural features and detailing characteristic of the Conservation Area should be retained and kept in good repair, and only be replaced when there is no alternative, or to enhance the appearance of the building through the restoration of missing features. Where retained significantly, original detailing including decorative iron balconies, stucco banding and cornicing, door and window surrounds, timber shop front façades, timber-framed sliding sash windows and doors add to the visual interest of properties as well as the street. Where removed in the past, replacement with suitable copies, based on evidence of previous appearance, will be encouraged. Original, traditional materials should be retained wherever possible and repaired if necessary.

7.7.3 Materials should be appropriate to the locality and sympathetic to the existing buildings. The choice of materials in new work will be an important part and will be considered by the Council as part of the planning process.

7.7.4 Generally routine or regular maintenance such as unblocking of gutters and rainwater pipes, the repair of damaged pointing and stucco, and the painting and repair of wood and metal work will prolong the life of a building and prevent unnecessary decay and damage. Where replacement is the only possible option, materials should be chosen to closely match the original. Generally the use of the original (or as similar as possible) natural materials will be required, and the use of materials such as concrete roof tiles, artificial slate and uPVC windows would not be acceptable.

7.7.5 Carefully detailed brick facades are most important to the existing character. Original brickwork should not be painted, rendered or clad unless this was the original treatment. Such new work, whilst seldom necessary, can have an unfortunate and undesirable effect on the appearance of the building and Conservation Area and may lead to long term structural and decorative damage, and may be extremely difficult (if not impossible) to

reverse once completed. Re-pointing of brickwork should only be undertaken in exceptional circumstances owing to the risk of damage to the bricks and hence the appearance of the building. Re-pointing if done badly can also drastically alter the appearance of a building (especially when "fine gauge" brickwork is present), and may be difficult to reverse. A guide to the pointing of brickwork is available free from English Heritage.

7.7.7 The removal of external plumbing from the rear of buildings is not necessarily an improvement. Especially on listed buildings, the insertion of services into interiors can be very harmful to original structure and decorative finishes. Traditionally, external rainwater or sanitary pipework is in cast iron. Replacement in modern materials such as uPVC is considered harmful to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and will be resisted.

5.0 Assessment of Proposals

5.1 Outline of the proposals

The proposed works are set out in the accompanying Schedule. Essentially, they are concerned with the repair of fabric damaged by water leaks. The works would entail the replacement of irreparably-damaged doors and joinery, the selective replacement of damaged or split floorboards, and the repair/replacement of sections of damaged plaster, including some decorative plasterwork.

The guiding principle of the proposed works is that, wherever possible, fabric would be replaced on a like-for-like basis, apart from in some instances where existing fabric is modern and of inappropriate character (such as flush-faced doors) and where the new fabric would be of appropriate period design.

In some cases, where large sections of ceiling plaster have already collapsed, it is proposed to remove and replace what remains, essentially because, although still in place, the ceilings have become de-bonded and there is the strong likelihood of further collapse. In such cases, the removal of extant plaster would allow for full inspection (and repair as necessary) of the ceiling joists. Ceilings would be replaced with lath and plaster, using a lime-based plaster reinforced with horsehair. It is also proposed to replace some badly-damaged cornices considered to be at risk of further collapse. Moulds of the existing cornices would be taken to ensure that the replacement cornices exactly match. The new cornices would be constructed of lath and plaster, using a lime mix reinforced with horsehair.

Similarly, in some cases, wall plaster would be removed where plaster has become saturated or has blown to allow underlying masonry to dry out (and be repaired as necessary), or to allow for the full inspection (and replacement where necessary) of timber studwork. Lath and plaster, using a lime-based plaster reinforced with horsehair to match the existing, would be reinstated. The basement staircase, the lower part of which has rotted, would be removed to allow repairs to be undertaken to the adjacent wall; it would be reinstated using as much of its fabric as practicable.

A small section of (replacement) timber flooring in the basement would be replaced with concrete. The basement floor (which already largely comprises concrete slab with asphalt tanking) and walls would be waterproofed with an approved drained system.

Minor structural repairs would be undertaken to the front elevation (including the replacement of the lintol over the front door), and the party wall to the north (including the replacement in concrete of a timber beam supporting the ground floor).

Services, including gas and electrical meters and installations would be repaired or replaced as necessary, and the existing central heating system would be extended into the basement. Exposed surface-mounted pipework already removed to allow assessment of and repair to walls would be replaced, concealed within walls and ceilings where possible. On the ground floor, new kitchen units would be provided.

5.2 Assessment

No. 59 Birkenhead Street has experienced considerable flood damage, and comprehensive repair (including the selective replacement of fabric) is therefore essential if the building is to be returned to use and further damage is to be avoided.

Where possible, fabric would be repaired using appropriate materials. For example, in the case of several damaged door frames, defective timber would be carefully cut out and new timber spliced in to match the existing profile. However, as detailed on the accompanying Schedule, much of the fabric damaged by water leaks is beyond repair. Its replacement is therefore essential to restore the house to a usable state, and to ensure that its significance is not further diminished. As noted above, the guiding principle of the proposed works is that fabric should be replaced on a like-for-like basis, apart from in some instances where existing fabric is modern and of inappropriate character.

Throughout the house, damaged or split floorboards would be replaced. Whilst the loss of historic boards would result in the loss of some evidential value, their replacements would be reclaimed boards sized to match the existing. Where these remain visible, the historic character of the house would thus be maintained. Replacement floor coverings would be provided in finishes to be agreed.

In total, it is proposed to replace eight doors irreparably damaged by flooding. All of these are modern doors that detract or are of neutral significance. They would be replaced with panelled doors of an appropriate historic character, thereby enhancing the building's aesthetic value.

Many of the skirtings and architraves to be replaced are modern, and their replacement (to match the existing, or in an approved design) would thus have a neutral or beneficial impact on significance. In other instances, the replacement of period skirtings and architraves is proposed; whilst this would result in the loss of some evidential value, the new skirtings and architraves would match the existing and would thus sustain the historic character of the house and conserve its design interest.

The degree of decay to the basement staircase necessitates its partial reconstruction. The staircase has already been modified and has undergone extensive repair, and, as a consequence, any loss of evidential value would be negligible.

As noted above, some sections of ceiling plaster and decorative plasterwork have already collapsed. Much of what remains has become de-bonded and it is considered that there is a strong likelihood of further collapse. In such instances, the replacement of whole ceilings is considered essential in order to prevent future problems. The removal of extant plaster would allow for full inspection (and repair as necessary) of the ceiling joists, and ensure that the new ceilings are properly supported. Whilst the removal of this historic fabric would result in the loss of some evidential value, the ceilings would be replaced with lath and plaster (using a lime-based plaster reinforced with horsehair), and thereby sustain the historic character of the house. New cornices would be modelled on the existing historic cornices, and would thus conserve the design interest of the affected rooms.

Similarly, the replacement of historic wall plaster where it has become saturated or has blown is considered essential to allow underlying masonry to dry out (and be repaired as necessary), or to allow for the full inspection (and replacement where necessary) of damaged timber studwork. The reinstatement of lath and plaster, and the use of a lime-based plaster reinforced with horsehair, would sustain the historic character of the house.

The proposed structural repairs are considered essential to maintain the building's structural integrity. Whilst the replacement of historic lintols would result in the loss of some evidential value, the works would not be visible, and the historic aesthetic character of the house would be maintained.

The replacement of gas and electrical meters and installations, the extension of the existing central heating system into the basement, and the provision of new kitchen units and built-in appliances would have no impact on the building's significance. The hiding, where possible, of pipework within walls and ceilings would offer a modest enhancement of the building's aesthetic interest.

6.0 Conclusion

The proposed works are concerned with the repair of fabric damaged by water leaks, and are considered essential if No. 59 Birkenhead Street is to be returned to use and further damage is to be avoided.

It is clear that, in the language of the *National Planning Policy Framework*, the proposed works constitute 'less than substantial harm' to the significance of the listed building. Whilst there would be some loss of evidential value through the localised removal of historic fabric, this harm would be more than outweighed by the replacement of fabric on a like-for-like basis, thereby ensuring that the historic character of the house is maintained. Indeed, there would be a modest enhancement of the building's aesthetic interest through the replacement of some elements that detract or are of neutral significance with features of an appropriate historic character. Overall, therefore, as required by Camden Council's Policy DP25, the proposals would not cause harm to the special interest of the listed building. The proposed works meet the requirements of all relevant heritage policies and guidance, which thus enables Listed Building Consent to be safely granted.

7.0 Sources

The sources below have been used in the preparation of this report.

London Borough of Camden, *Local Development Framework Core Strategy*, 2010

London Borough of Camden, *Local Development Framework Development Policies*, 2010

Department for Communities & Local Government, *National Planning Policy Framework*, March 2012

Greater London Authority, *The London Plan*, July 2011

Ordnance Survey maps

London Borough of Camden planning files on 59 Birkenhead Street (internet only)

London Metropolitan Archive documents relating to Birkenhead Street

London Borough of Camden Local Studies and Reference Library collection relating to Birkenhead Street

Survey of London: volume 24, 1952, pp. 102-113 (Battle Bridge Estate)

University College London Bloomsbury Project [online], www.ucl.ac.uk/bloomsbury-project/streets/liverpool_street.htm

Muthesius, S. (1982) *The English Terraced House*. Great Britain: Yale University Press.

Appendix:

Listed Building Description

Name: NUMBER 59 AND ATTACHED RAILINGS
List Entry Number: 1244502
Location: NUMBER 59 AND ATTACHED RAILINGS, 59, BIRKENHEAD STREET
County: Greater London Authority
District: Camden
District Type: London Borough
Parish:
Grade: II
Date first listed: 14-May-1974

Details

CAMDEN
TQ3082NW BIRKENHEAD STREET
798-1/90/95 (West side)
14/05/74 No.59 and attached railings
GV II

Terraced house. c1827-32. Built by W Forrester Bray. Painted brick and stucco ground floor and 1st floor sill band. 3 storeys and basement. 2 windows. Architraved, round-arched ground floor openings. Doorway with fluted Doric quarter columns carrying cornice-head; patterned fanlight and C20 panelled door. Casement ground floor window. Upper storeys with gauged brick flat arches to recessed sashes; 1st floor in shallow arched recesses. Parapet. INTERIOR: not inspected. SUBSIDIARY FEATURES: attached cast-iron railings with urn finials to areas.

Listing NGR: TQ 30331 82917

