

18 Bedford Square WC1B 3HH

Heritage assessment of proposed building alterations for The Bedford Estate

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1.0 Scope

- 1.1 This heritage assessment has been prepared to accompany planning and listed building applications to reconstruct the back wings at
- 1.2 This report has been prepared by Anthony Walker who is on the register of architects Accredited in Building Conservation. It is based on a desk-top study of the building, the listing description, the Bloomsbury Conservation Area draft statement and Andrew Bryne's architectural study of Bloomsbury Square.

2.0 Location

- 2.1 The site is located on the north side of Bedford Square.
- 2.2 It lies within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and is described in the current draft statement as being within Sub-Area 6 Bloomsbury Square, Russell Square and Tavistock Square. Bedford Square is described as:

6.57 Bedford Square is one of the most significant and complete examples of a Georgian (1775) Square remaining in London. Its national importance is highlighted by the grade I listing of all the properties fronting the square. It is also notable that many original streetscape elements remain (also listed) and that the gardens are on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in Greater London (Grade II).*

6.58 The square was part of a planned development of the Bedford Estate that included a series of interlinked streets and spaces and is a major landmark both along Gower Street and within the Bloomsbury area. Despite the impact of traffic along Gower Street the Square remains a relatively intimate space with the degree of enclosure enhanced by the large mature trees and landscaping within the oval gardens. This central, private space is defined by iron railings with gates under wrought iron arches. Although initially a residential square it is now entirely occupied by offices.

6.59 The terraces are three storeys with a basement and attic level. The front elevations are particularly notable as they were designed as a whole to give a sense of architectural unity and harmony to the square. The elevations are constructed of yellow stock brick with tuck pointing and have a central stucco pedimented element and a rusticated base. The doorways have intermittent voussiors of Coade stone (a type of artificial stone) and faces on the keystones

3.0 Background and description

- 3.1 Bedford Square was conceived during the building boom which followed the Peace of Paris in 1763. A lull from 1767-1771 was followed by a rise between 1773 and 1777 and then a further downturn in 1778 when France entered into the American War of Independence. Loans to builders from the Bedford Estate however allowed the scheme for the Square to be completed by the end of 1783 as part of the spreading development north of New Oxford Street.
- 3.2 The Estate had considerable control over the form of the development and the Square is unique in having four complete sides of 'palace-fronted' terraced houses surrounding a central garden, which in this case is oval in shape.
- 3.3 The building facades had to maintain a regular format with an emphasis on the central properties of which 18 is one. This uniformity has been broadly maintained although careful inspection reveals a wealth of variations in detail.

- 3.4 The integrated appearance, combined with some very good interiors, has justified the listing of all the buildings as Grade I.
- 3.5 In 1782 a lease to number 18 was granted for 99 years to Robert Grews. The plot was 30 feet wide by 138 feet deep and was a mirror image of 19 which was leased in the same year but to William Scott who was also responsible for development at 20 and 21.
- 3.6 Number 18 has a standard layout on four main floors with a basement below. The main frontage faces the Square and is three bays wide with individual balconies to each window at first floor level along the frontage to the Square.
- 3.7 The main façade is clearly visible from the Square and constitutes an important element in the composition of the terrace on the northern side of the Square.



- 3.8 At the back the building there is a small lightwell abutting a closet wing at the western end and overlooked by a two storey building behind which is another small courtyard with a further two storey building on the northern side.
- 3.9 The two storey wings at the back are modern with standard casement windows, concrete lintols, cills and flat asphalt roofs. The closet wing rises to the full height of the building and shows clear signs of alterations including the presence of concrete window cills



Small light well at the back of the main house



Roof top view of existing back wing. Note concrete cill to back closet wing in foreground

- 3.10 Internal. The room layout of the house has been substantially retained including a particularly significant staircase rising from the ground floor to the second floor with a simple dogleg staircase up to the third floor. The basement is served by a typical stone stair with simple hand rail. The main stair does not have access to the back closet wing which appears always to have relied on access from the main back room. It has been modified, first with the introduction of a lift and secondly with alterations to the access to the main back room with, for example, an additional doorway on the second floor and the introduction of a corridor on the third floor with a lavatory and window at the end.
- 3.11 The decorative schemes are generally intact although there has been some movement which has led to damage and will need suitable repair.



Staircases.
Main staircase above.
Basement staircase to left
Staircase second to third floors below





Rooflight to main staircase



First floor principle front room



Ground floor front room

3.12 The modern back extensions have no significant decorative features.

4.0 Significance

4.1 The building, in common with all of Bedford Square, is listed grade I. The listing description states that:

CAMDEN TQ2981NE BEDFORD SQUARE 798-1/99/77 (North side) 24/10/51 Nos.12-27 (Consecutive) and attached railings (Formerly Listed as: BEDFORD SQUARE Nos.1-54 (Consecutive)) GVI Symmetrical terrace of 16 houses forming the north side of a square. 1776-1781. Mostly built by W Scott and R Grews; probably designed by either Thomas Leverton or Robert Palmer; for the Bedford Estate. Yellow stock brick with evidence on most of the houses of tuck pointing. Plain stucco band at 1st floor level. The 2 centre houses, Nos 18 & 19, are stuccoed. Slate mansard roofs with dormers and tall slab chimney-stacks. EXTERIOR: 3 storeys, attics and basements. 3 windows each. Recessed round-arched entrances with Coade stone vermiculated intermittent voussoirs and bands; mask keystones. Enriched impost bands and cornice-heads to doors. Side lights to panelled doors, some 2-leaf. Fanlights, mostly radial patterned. Gauged brick flat arches to recessed sashes, most with glazing bars. No.23: panelled doors and a plaster ceiling. HISTORICAL NOTE: the houses in Bedford Square form a most important and complete example of C18 town planning. Built as a speculation, it is not clear who designed all the houses.

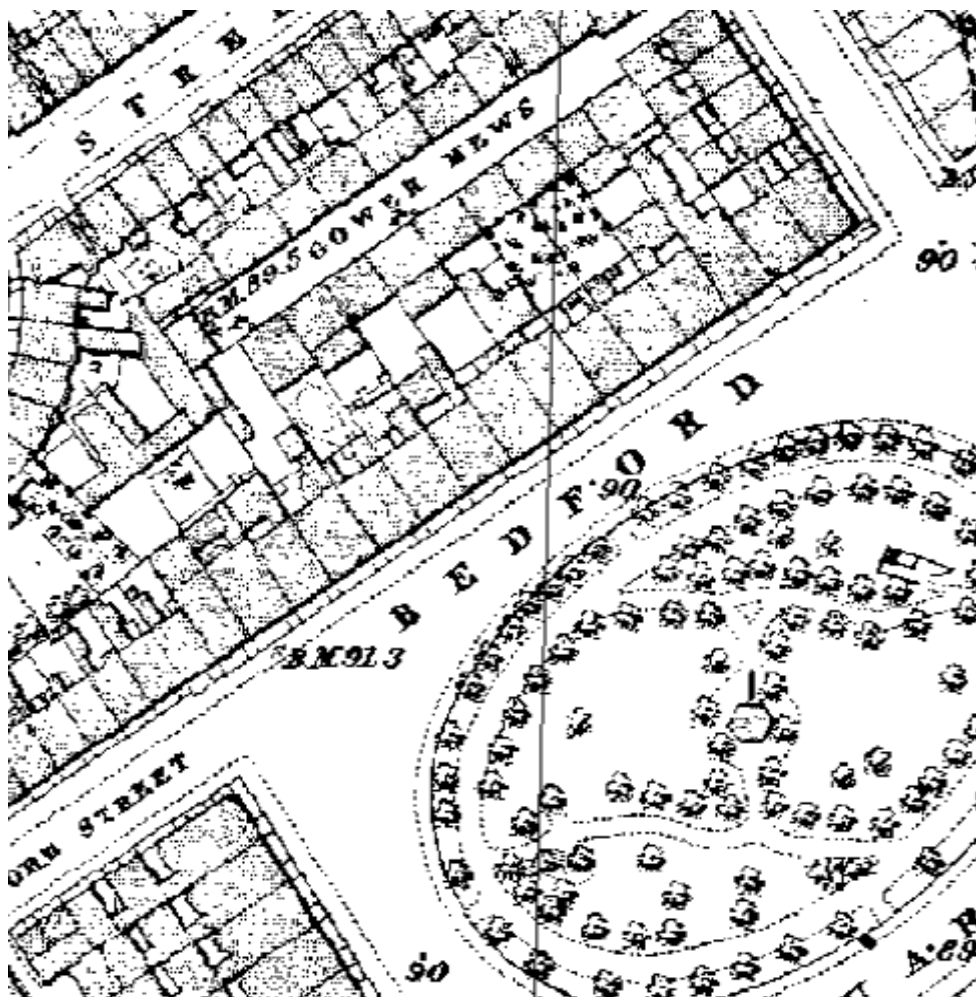
The building is clearly of significance as the central pavilion in the northern terrace as part of the development around Bedford Square.

4.2 Internally the layout of the rooms, the main staircase and the decorative items, particularly those on the ground and first floors, is of significance. To some extent this has been harmed by the interventions in the back rooms, particularly on the second and third floors.

4.4 This building constitutes a significant element in this section of the Conservation Area by contributing to the character and appearance of Bedford Square.

5.0 Proposals

- 5.1 The proposals are set out in more detail in the Design and Access Statement. For the purposes of this heritage assessment, in simple terms they comprise the demolition and reconstruction of the modern two-storey infills to the original courtyard, and a series of minor modifications to the back closet wing.
- 5.2 The modifications to the back closet wing at the upper levels reinstate the original relationship between the wing and the back room and, at the third floor, allow the original form of the back room at that level to be reinstated.
- 5.3 The new extension at the back retains the existing wall facing the main body of the building which echoes the arrangement shown on the 1875 OS map where there is a back extension with a lightwell between it and the main house and then a further open space between it and the buildings in Gower Mews. Unlike many of the adjoining properties the area behind the main house appears to have been substantially developed from the second half of the nineteenth century. Judging from the flue at the eastern end of the small lightwell it seems likely that there was a substantial room, possibly a kitchen, in this back wing.



- 5.4 The new extension has a simple form with a flat roof covered in lead sheet with rolls. This traditional detail will enhance the appearance of the wing viewed from above. The northern face looking out over the back courtyard is a discreet contemporary glazed façade which is not overlooked.
- 5.5 Minor repairs are anticipated which will be carried out on a like for like basis.

6.0 Assessment

- 6.1 There are no changes to the front of the building which, as described above, is of particular significance. There are no alterations to the back elevation of the main body of the building, other than the removal of the intrusive small window to the lavatory at the end of the corridor on the third floor. The exterior of the main house is therefore not adversely affected by the proposals.
- 6.2 The new back wing retains the façade facing the main house and designed with its new façade discreetly hidden from both 18 and the adjoining properties and thus causes no harm to the designated heritage assets or to their setting. The roof to the extension is in traditional materials and will enhance the appearance viewed from above and thus enhances the setting of the designated heritage assets and the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- 6.3 Internally the rearrangement of the closet wing and the removal of inappropriate interventions such as the corridor on the third floor will be a positive improvement in the appearance and understanding of the designated heritage asset.
- 6.4 The proposals comply with Camden Local Plan and Conservation area Policies and National Legislation in the form of the NPPF in protecting the designated heritage asset and preserving and enhancing the Conservation Area.

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