

Barton Engineers

Historical and Conservation Statement

32 Torrington Square
London WC1E 7JL



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Contents

Historical and Conservation Statement	3
Appendix 1 - List of Documents	5

Historical and Conservation Statement

The property, 32 Torrington Square, is within the Bloomsbury area, much of the original development of which took place in the Georgian period. The developer Thomas Cubitt was responsible for many of the houses in Bloomsbury from 1820 onwards, and even after his death his executors completed Gordon Square immediately to the north of Torrington Square in 1860. However, other builders were also active during the same period, and Torrington Square was completed by James Sim between 1821 and 1825, while in partnership with James Sim Junior and Robert Sim. The same partnership went on to complete Woburn Square in 1829.

The architectural historian and author, John Summerson, suggests that the works of the Sim “lack that extra finish and character which the Cubitts achieved” (Summerson 2003, P220). Summerson goes on to describe Sim as a “competent builder working in elevations approved by the estate”, which suggests that Sim was building and developing to designs specified by the landowner on a plot by plot basis, rather than planning his own developments in the manner of Cubitt.

Number 32 Torrington Square would originally have formed part of the terrace of houses on the East side of Torrington Square, which would have been four sided with a central garden and would have remained so until during most of the 19th Century. However, according to Pevsner (Cherry & Pevsner 1999, P321) early in the 20th Century the area of Bloomsbury “fell into a gentle decline, and the name became the term for the set of intellectuals and artists who lived cheaply here in those short years around the First World War”.

Pevsner goes on to describe the development of university buildings and their effect on the Georgian townscape as “a menace to the old Bloomsbury from the 1930s onwards”. In 1931, the architect Charles Holden produced a plan for the whole block between Montague Place in the South and Byng Place in the North, which included the rebuilding of the whole of Torrington Square. The scheme commenced with Senate House (completed in 1937), but was then interrupted by the Second World War, during which much of the West and North sides of the Torrington Square were damaged by bombs. During and immediately after the War the university buildings on the West side of the Square were completed; the Union was built between 1947 to 1955, and Birkbeck College completed in 1955, with a later extension in 1966.

It was during the wartime bombing of 1940-41 that Number 32 Torrington Square become the northernmost part of the terrace, following the destruction of the houses leading up to Byng Place.

The facades of the building are largely unaltered from the original 1825 design. It is likely that the windows have been replaced although with a fenestration pattern and joinery to match the original. The stone balconies and rendered areas and features are all as the original design, although again extensive repairs are likely to have taken place. The North flank wall has been extensively repaired and protected by a cement render and buttresses, as part of post bombing repairs.

Much of the interior of 32 Torrington Square is likely to have the original layout, although there have been some alterations to the partition layouts in the lower floors and in the rear extension. There are a number of recesses on the inside of the front facade containing cupboards and timber panelling, much of which is likely to be original joinery.

The listing entry makes clear that the building forms part of a group; specifically “Numbers 27 to 32 Torrington Square and attached railings”. Clearly it is the terrace grouping of buildings as set piece which gives the building its heritage significance, and any interventions must respect the appearance of Number 32 as part of the terrace, and should not detract from the overall form and appearance of the terrace as a whole.

The proposed structural repairs are vital for the short term stability of the building, and its long term performance. Currently the facade is temporarily shored by scaffolding to prevent further delamination of the existing brickwork and collapse. The materials and techniques proposed are sympathetic to the original construction method, and their technical performance is identical to that of the original structure. All works that are required to make this intervention are reversible.

It is hoped that it will be agreed that the proposed repairs will preserve the character of the listed building, and will not adversely affect the significance of the building or significance of the front facade in the context of the significance of the Group of houses.

This Historical and Conservation Statement has been prepared and written by Bob Barton (BSc Hons CEng FIStructE FICE FConsE GradDipIBldgCons AA), Director of Barton Engineers Ltd.

This report has been independently checked and approved by Matthieu Roure MEng MSc DIC CEng MIStructE, Project Director of Barton Engineers Ltd.

References:

Cherry. B and Pevsner. N, 1999, The Buildings of England: London 4: North, Penguin

Summerson. J, 2003, Georgian London, Yale University
Press

List Entry Numbers 27-32 Torrington Square and
attached railings (Entry Number 1379012), 28th March
1969, Historic England

Appendix 1 - List of Documents

Documents submitted as part of the Listed Building Consent Application:

- Barton Engineers' drawings 15/080/1.2 - T1, 15/080/2.1 - T1 and 15/080/2.2 - T1
These drawings include a detailed schedule and specification of the proposed works, and photographs of the existing building fabric.
- Barton Engineers' Specification for Structural Works in Relation to Remodelling and Alteration of Existing Structure.
- Barton Engineers' Structural Survey Report issued 30 July 2015.