Barton Engineers

Heritage Statement

Internal Structural and Fabric Repairs, 28 Russell Square

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Introduction

This application for Listed Building Consent concerns the approval of proposed repairs to be carried out to the internal staircases and supporting walls at 28 Russell Square. The internal structural walls have suffered severe movements as have the supported floors, and the repairs are required to ensure the structural safety of the building in the long term.

The property is Grade Two Listed.

Statement of Significance

Introduction

The staircases and internal walls that are in need of structural repair are within the upper three storeys of a large terrace house, currently owned by Birkbeck, University of London, and that for much of the Twentieth Century was owned and occupied by the University of London. The upper storeys of the building have been much altered since they were originally constructed, and especially during the period of University of London occupation. It is thought that inappropriate alterations within the basement storey were the original cause of the damage, and it is proposed to re-grout stone to stone junctions within staircases, and also to install a new steel support beam beneath the rear timber staircase. Repairs will also be carried out to wall cracks.

Historical Background

The development of Bloomsbury started in 1661 with the laying out of a residential square, later known as Bloomsbury Square, by the Earl of Southampton, to the south of his house, that had begun before the Restoration. To the west of this square the Duke of Montague erected his own house in 1675-9, known as Montague House, and later the site of the British Museum, and by 1720 Great Russell Street had developed, running east/west between the two sites, with the grounds to the north of these two great houses remaining undeveloped open country until the late 18th Century.

The Southampton Estate passed by marriage to the Russell family, the Dukes of Bedford, and then in 1775-80 Bedford Square was developed, along with Gower Street further north. Then, in 1800, Southampton House was demolished and the fifth Duke of Bedford's builder, James Burton, then laid out Russell Square and Bedford Place. Other developments followed, as laid out by Thomas Cubitt, with the area as far north as Euston Road being filled out by terraces and further squares throughout the period from 1800 to 1850.

The area retained much of the original character until the 1930s when, as Pevsner describes it;…

> *…when University College became a menace to old Bloomsbury. The scale of the buildings grew; they overpowered and occasionally entirely destroyed the squares. Around the new intellectual centres a welter of university institutions, student's clubs and small hotels took possession of what were once private houses. After 1950 yet more were destroyed. Still more was threatened, but the decision to build the new British Library at St Pancras reprieved the area south of Great Russell Street, which benefitted from rehabilitation in the 1980s.*

The landscape of Russell Square itself was laid out by Repton with a series of horseshoe paths and a central garden building, and was at the time the largest square in London. The streets of Montague Street and Bedford Place were the first to be developed in 1802-11 by James Burton. The terraces surrounding all sides of the square then followed, although only those to the north end of the west side, including 28 Russell Square, remain in their original state.

The property at 28 Russell Square was constructed by James Burton in 1814.

Description

The property comprises a mid terrace five storey house, including a lower ground floor storey. The front facade of the building is generally of London Stock Brick construction with gauged brick flat arches over the windows. A cornice of render or stone extends across the full width of the facade at third floor window cill level, and the upper and lower ground storeys are rendered. A semicircular arch forms a fanlight over the main entrance door and ornate columns and a lintel are set over the entrance door. A continuous stone balcony structure cantilevers from beneath the first floor windows, and extends across most of the width of the house. Iron railings guard the lower ground lightwell.

The interior of the property is much altered, although the upper ground and first floor storeys probably retain the original room layout, and the original stone staircase is still in place between upper ground and second floors. A smaller rear staircase gives access from lower ground to third floor

Image 1, View of Front Facade.

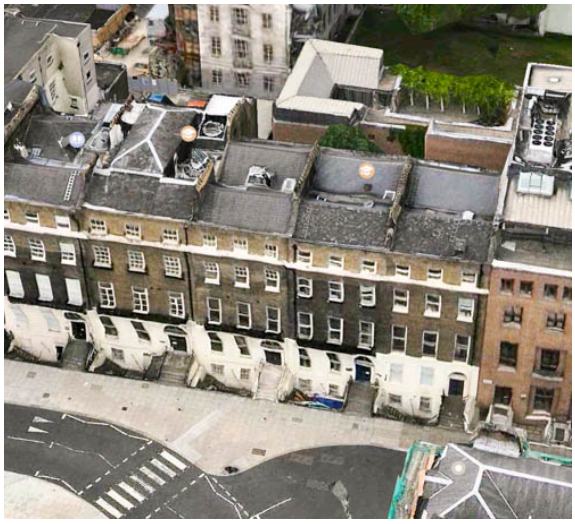

Image 2, View of Terrace.

Image 3, View of Main Staircase

Image 4, View of Rear Staircase

Significance

The building is Grade Two Listed, and the listing notes state;

> *Terrace of 5 houses. c1814. By James Burton. Multi-coloured stock brick with rusticated stucco ground floors. Round-arched doorways; Nos 25 and 26 with pilaster-jambs, Nos 27-29 with fluted Doric half columns; fanlights and double panelled doors. Gauged brick flat arches to recessed sash windows, some with original glazing bars and No. 28 with 1st floor casements.*
>
> *Continuous cast-iron balconies to 1st floor windows except No.25 with window guards. Stucco cornice at 3rd floor sill level. Parapets above attic storey.*
>
> *INTERIORS: not inspected.*
>
> *SUBSIDIARY FEATURES: attached cast-iron railings with urn finials to areas, No.27 with lamp-holder.*

The listing notes refer only to the front facades of the terrace and, specifically, to the semicircular arched doorways, gauged brick window lintels, recessed sash windows, the continuous stone and ironwork balconies, and the rusticated stucco render to the ground floor storeys.

It is clear from the listing description that the heritage significance of the property is largely due to the facade, its relationship to the terrace, and its position at the north west corner of Russell Square.

The interior of the property has been much altered since its original construction, although the original stone cantilever staircase is still in place from upper ground to

second floor level. However, this stair has suffered significant deformations and requires repairs.

The rear small staircase is also of stone construction between lower ground and second floor, with a timber structure between second and third floors.

It seems clear from an assessment of the building, and the Listing Statement, that the heritage significance of the property at 28 Russell Square can be defined by the following;

1. The building forms part of the terrace of five houses, with similar and symmetrically arranged features.
2. These buildings are the last remaining original houses within Russell Square, constructed as one of the earliest phases of development within the Bloomsbury area, and are without alteration to their front facades.
3. The front facade, as part of the group of houses forming the terrace, is of considerable significance, as are the features that define that facade. Specifically, the window arrangement and detailing, the stone balcony, and the render and the detailing of that render.
4. Specific subsidiary features mentioned within the listing statement have considerable significance; the cast iron railings with urn finials.
5. The main stone staircase and its balustrading. Also the rear stone staircase and the timber upper section.
6. The room layout at upper ground and first floor, and the relationship of these rooms to the staircase is likely to be that of the original with some significance, although with that significance reduced by the intrusive insertion of doors through party walls on both the north and south side of the house.
7. The roof profiles, together with the chimney stack masonry and chimney pots, are likely to be original, and to have some significance, although this area has been damaged by inappropriate use of steel framed rooflights, asphalt gutter lining, and cement render to the chimney stacks and the insertion of a fourth storey over part of the plan. It is probable that the roof slates have been replaced more than once during the life of the building, although the current slates appear in good condition and in sympathy with the original form and fabric.
8. The chimney pots themselves are decorative in character, and are likely to be original, and therefore considered to have considerable significance.

The upper storeys of the building have been much altered since the original construction. It is likely that these alterations took place at the ending of the original ninety nine year lease period (in 1910-1913). Further alterations were likely to have been carried out later in the Twentieth Century during occupation by the University of London. These include the removal of all basement walls, causing a number of structural problems. It is therefore considered likely that none of the internal room layouts or fabric within the internal floors and walls of the upper storeys where repair works are proposed is original and therefore none of these elements have any significance.

Damage and Approach to Repairs

Damage and Causes

The damage to the internal structure of the upper floors comprises settlements within the first, second and third floors, and severe deformation of internal walls, also within the first, second and third floor storeys. The causes of this damage can be summarised as inappropriate removal of internal structural walls, allowing the upper floors and walls to settle downwards.

Image 5, View Internal Staircase Damage

Image 6, View of Small Staircase Damage

Approach to Repairs

The proposed repairs are set out in detail on the Barton Engineers drawings that accompany this Listed Building Consent application.

The approach used to repair the main curved stone staircase has been to replace the existing repair mortar between the existing stone joints with a natural hydraulic lime mortar putty that is rammed into the joints. It is intended that this new mortar will be installed throughout all of the staircase joints and provide a sustainable long term solution that deals with the effectives of the wall distortions caused by the inappropriate removal fo the lower ground walls within the house, and also possible issues created by the use of other repair mortars used previously. The top step of the upper flight requires a more localised repair, possibly using resin bonded steel dowel bars through the stone and keying into the upper landing structure which is of timber framing. The precise form of these repairs will be the subject of detailed investigation once access and support scaffolding has been installed. However, it is intended that any repairs will not adversely affect the appearance of the upper tread, which is badly separated from the main flight at present.

The approach used to the repair of the rear small staircases is identical to the main staircase. The upper flight is of timber framing and has suffered considerable distortion and some previous efforts at repair by installing a boxed out downstand and timber support. However, this boxing out repair has been ineffective structurally and is also considered to be detrimental to the significance of the staircase. The proposal is to remove this timber framed boxing, and to install a new slender steel beam with a cranked profile to match the staircase profile. The intentions are that this new steel beam will be an honest and reversible intervention to repair the staircase structure, which is currently suffering from serious and ongoing structural problems caused by the one off movement within the supporting walls of the upper storeys.

The walls surrounding both staircases have also suffered considerable distortions, and have probably suffered from inappropriate repairs. Evidence has been encountered of serial crack filling and redecorating, as well as the installation of new facing or lining, rather that repairs to the wall structures. The intention is for repairs to be made to the base brickwork structures to prevent further cracking, rather than make superficial repairs.

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

References

Pevsner, 1998, London 4: North - Buildings of England

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