

Heritage Advice Note

Vernon House, St. Mark's Square, London

Introduction

1. This Heritage Advice Note has been written and prepared by Heritage Collective on behalf of SAV Group. It relates to a grade II listed building known as Vernon House, built circa 1860. Vernon House was listed grade II on 14 May 1974. The site in question comprises numbers 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the terrace on St. Mark's Square, and it should be noted that numbers 9, 10 and 11 St. Mark's Square were also part of Vernon House until 1996 at which point they were returned to use as single dwellings. The listed building is officially described as follows (the listing description has not been updated since 9, 10, 11 St. Mark's Square were returned to use as single dwellings):

"Terrace, formerly of 8 houses, now converted to one building. c1860, altered. Stucco with rusticated ground floor and quoins. 4 storeys and basements; projecting end bays, left hand with extra attic storey. Symmetrical facade of 13 windows and 3-window left hand return. Prostyle Doric porticoes with dentil entablatures continuing across and around the buildings; doorways of former Nos 5 (on left return), 6 and 10 with pilaster-jambs carrying cornice heads, sidelights, fanlights and half glazed doors. Other doorways converted to windows. Tripartite ground floor sashes, most with cast-iron window guards; projecting left hand bay with canted bay window and cast-iron window guard. 2nd floor sashes architraved with console bracketed segmental pediments and continuous cast-iron balconies; projecting left hand bay with canted bay window and balcony. 2nd floor, architraved sashes with console bracketed cornices; 3rd floor, architraved sashes with keystones. Projecting left hand bay with tripartite sashes to 3rd, 4th and attic storeys; 2nd floor with console bracketed cornice. Simplified dentil entablature with console bracketed cornice and blocking course. INTERIOR: not inspected."

2. The purpose of this advice note is to demonstrate the heritage benefit of removal of modern fabric and reinstatement of appropriate period details to the main stair of the building.
3. The main stair is the only surviving example from the four original terrace houses.
4. The stair has two flights of cantilevered stone treads (coated in multiple layers of paint), with decorative iron balustrading to these flights. Above these flights the stair has been altered significantly, with a dividing 'spine' partition obscuring the volume of the stairwell. Initial investigation behind the plasterboard of the spine partition indicates there is no surviving historic fabric, with no balusters remaining in situ, and the stairs themselves of a relatively new (circa 1970s) construction.
5. It is proposed to remove the accumulated layers of paint from the stone treads of the principal floors, and seal as appropriate.
6. Further, a considerable heritage benefit to the building can be achieved by the removal of the spine partition and reinstatement of architectural details representative of the period and status of the house. Research has been undertaken to determine the specific nature of the stair as originally constructed, but unfortunately limited sources have been found. It is assumed that as the stair treads change from stone to timber beyond the principal floors, this hierarchical ordering would be the same with the balusters, changing from decorative cast iron to a simpler wooden baluster.
7. On the last stone tread there is a gap in the existing balustrading, with one decorative iron baluster missing. This will be replaced by a bespoke cast baluster to match the existing. This solution is the ideal response in this context.
8. Research to determine accurate original details has been done, but unfortunately returned no definitive results. However, given the age, status and surviving features of the building an informed judgement on the design and detailing of the original stair can be made. The use of simple square-section wooden balusters, with a hardwood timber handrail to match as closely as possible that of the principal floors would be an ideal reinstatement. The outer stringer will also need to be adjusted to create an open stringer, and treated with a basic form of timber

relief decoration (appropriate to the hierarchy of the stair) attached to the outer side of the stringer.

9. The proposed removal of the central spine partition from the property's main stair, and reinstatement of appropriate period details will return a sense of legibility to the plan form of this part of the building, and would constitute a heritage benefit. This benefit is enhanced by the fact this is the only remaining stair from the original four terrace buildings.
10. As part of the proposal for the rear infill extension the sill height of an existing window will be lowered to create a door opening. The internal timber panel below the sill and a small amount of external brickwork will be removed. The removal of this fabric constitutes a minor loss, of negligible harm to the building. The heritage benefit derived from the reinstatement of the original form and detailing of the stairs, and the improved legibility this brings to an important area of the building outweighs the minor loss of fabric associated with the rear infill extension.