

Proposed alterations to coal vaults under pavement at 6 Queen Square WC1N 3AT

Architectural Background:



The building consists of a c.1713 terraced town house fronting Queen Square on the west side.

The building was purchased by the Art Workers Guild in 1913 to create the meeting rooms and hall that still serve the purposes of the Guild. The Guild has an office, library and meeting room on the first floor; the main hall, gallery and meeting room on the ground floor, and a caretaker's flat, and storage in the basement.

The building is Listed Grade II\*, the full description reading as follows:

CAMDEN TQ3081NW QUEEN SQUARE 798-1/100/1360 (West side) 24/10/51 No.6 and attached railings GV II\* Terraced house with purpose-built meeting hall, in use as the headquarters of the Art-Workers' Guild. c1713, refronted later C18. c1914 alterations and additions by FW Troup for the Art-

Workers' Guild. Darkened multi-coloured stock brick with evidence of tuck pointing. Slated mansard roof with dormer. EXTERIOR: 4 storeys, attic and basement. 3 windows. Wooden doorcase with sunk panels to pilasters carrying entablature with dentil cornice, rectangular patterned fanlight and panelled door; threshold with the monogram of the Art-Workers' Guild executed in white marble. Gauged red brick flat arches to recessed sashes. Plain stucco band at 1st floor level; stone cornice at 3rd floor level. Stone capped parapet. Original lead rainwater head and pipe. Rear elevation original with elongated windows. INTERIOR: retains its original plan form throughout with fielded panelling, 6-panel doors, moulded cornices and dado rails, fireplaces and good stairs with twisted balusters and column newels. Entrance hall with 2 arch-headed niches and cornice of thick mouldings. Rear projecting wing, probably originally withdrawing rooms, has elegant decorative woodwork. 1st floor front room with Regency plasterwork. Top storey flat by FW Troup, with fireplace and kitchen cabinets; Troup also designed the meeting hall to the rear. Meeting hall: single storey with red brick entrance; above the doorway, a segmental-arched stone aedicule, containing a decorative lead plaque with the gilded initials AWG set within gilded oak leaf sprays above the date 1914. INTERIOR: panelled walls with a low picture rail below a broad frieze. Above the frieze, oval architraved niches containing busts of the Guild masters by Frampton, Bayes and WS Frith. The hall is lit by a large hipped roof light, with dormers, supported on deep ceiling beams around which the deep dentil cornice extends. Bolection-moulded oak chimney-piece. SUBSIDIARY FEATURES: attached cast-iron railings with torch flambe finials to area.

## Use and Need:

The building is in mixed use: the Art Workers Guild occupies basement, ground and first floors, using the rooms for its member as well as hiring out the hall and two meeting rooms to other bodies for meetings, lectures as well as some catered receptions and other events. The second floor is rented out as office space, currently for an architectural practice, and the third and fourth floors have self-contained two bedroom flats. The Art Workers Guild has an archive of documents and art from the 130 years it has been running but precious little space and nothing suitable for long term archive and storage. The thought therefore is to make the coal vaults dry and practical for the much needed storage space it could provide.

Here is a statement from the Art Workers' Guild Archivist:

*The Art Workers Guild was founded in 1884, and has throughout its history had a distinguished membership of craftsmen and women, architects and artists. Its archives comprise minutes of meetings and discussions and membership records. These are consulted extensively by historians and others undertaking research into the history of the arts and crafts in Britain from the date of the Guild's foundation to the present.*

*The accommodation for these papers is at present highly unsatisfactory. These are largely crammed into cupboards where, due to the shortage of space, it is often difficult to extract or even to find, and then correctly to replace, papers that are needed. Environmental conditions are also far from ideal. There is in addition no satisfactory space where researchers can work, owing to the intensive use that is made of the rooms in 6, Queen Square. At the same time, the Guild is expanding its work into new areas of education and public understanding, and the spaces where these papers are now stored are needed for current activities*

*Satisfactory space in which to store and consult the Guild's archive is therefore urgently needed, and the proposed works will provide what is required.*

Nicholas Cooper, Hon. Archivist

## Proposals:



There are three separate coal vaults at the front with their own access doors, one is inaccessible as there is a fire escape stair that blocks the entrance so no one has been able to access that for years, one is accessible by an external door and one is accessed from the basement lobby under the front steps. It is barely possible to stand up in most of the space as the headroom ranges from 1.7m to 1.9m. The proposal is therefore to excavate to lower the floor level by 600mm with a new reinforced concrete slab and then form modest openings between the three vaults, then tank the space with drainage, heating, ventilation and lighting so they



can be used for archive and storage. It would be proposed to add small vision panels within the external doors to provide some natural light but still detailed in a traditional way. The current timber doors are not considered of any historic value, being replacements of long rotten previous doors. A large portion of the central vault will remain unaltered to preserve the stone steps into it, the brick lined vault and existing floor.

In addition, the proposals include handrails to the front steps either side of the front door. The building is used by dozens of arts societies and groups and by up to 100 people daily, many are elderly and although there are only 3 steps between pavement level and the entrance hall, many users would benefit from something to hold onto. The proposal is to install handrails that screw to the brickwork either side of the door-case, and clamp in a reversible way to the existing wrought iron railings, so that they are reversible and also in keeping with the existing architecture. They also integrate with and relate to the recently installed lanterns either side of the front steps and are therefore conceived as part of this intervention.

### **Heritage Impact:**

The coal vaults currently retain their original character of brick vaulted roofs and earth floors, and their dry lining will hide this brickwork, and the openings between the 3 cells will make them into interconnected spaces where once they were discrete. However, the original layout will be discernible, and the vaults are unremarkable, like many hundreds in the local area, so no special interest will be harmed or any notable character lost. The alterations will not be visible from the street and have little or no impact on the external character of the building. The retention of part of the central vault unconverted will preserve the original character sufficiently to mitigate the concealment of the existing brick vaults elsewhere. The proposals are therefore neutral in their harm, and taken in context with the entire listed building are not harmful to the special qualities for which this building is listed and of note.

The proposed handrails are reversible and architecturally designed to be in keeping with the historic building so are a positive aesthetic intervention and non-detrimental to the character of the listed building and surrounding area.

### **Access:**

The proposed handrails will significantly improve safety to users in entry and exit of the building, especially in wet weather.

### **Summary:**

The proposals would provide much needed storage and not detrimentally alter the unique character of the listed building overall.