

# 13 Bedford Square

## Heritage Assessment

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### 1 Scope of Assessment

- 1.1 This Heritage Assessment has been prepared to accompany a request for approval of proposals for listed building and planning approval for alterations to number 13 Bedford Square.
- 1.2 It has been prepared by Anthony Walker who is a chartered architect with a postgraduate diploma in Building Conservation from the Architectural Association. He has been a Visiting Professor at Kingston University, and lectures on the Mst Courses at Cambridge and Leicester Universities.
- 1.3 It is based on a desk-top study of the building, examination of the Bedford Estate archive held at Woburn, the listing description, the Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal, Andrew Bryne's architectural study of Bloomsbury Square and the Camden response to a preapplication submission.

### 2.0 Location

- 2.1 The site is located on the north side of Bedford Square close to the corner with Gower Street.
- 2.2 It lies within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and is described in the current Appraisal as being within Sub-Area 5 Bedford Square/Gower Street:

#### *Bedford Square*

*5.62 Dating from 1775, Bedford Square is one of the most significant and complete examples of a Georgian square in London. Its national importance is acknowledged by the grade I listed status of all the townhouses fronting the square. Furthermore, a sizeable number of original streetscape elements remain (many of which are grade II listed) The private gardens in the centre of the square are included in the English Heritage Register of*

*Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in Greater London at grade II\*.*

*5.63 The square is the centre piece of the Bedford Estate's planned development which includes a series of interlinked streets and spaces and is a major focal point both along Gower Street and within the wider Bloomsbury area. Despite the impact of traffic along Gower Street the square remains relatively intimate and secluded space. The landscaped oval gardens at its heart green the space, and the iron boundary railings and group of mature trees heighten the sense of enclosure. The gardens are entered through gates under ornate wrought iron arches. Originally of a purely residential nature, the square now contains several office and institutional uses. However, a small number of properties are now being returned to single family dwellings.*

*5.64 The terraces comprise three principal storeys with a basement and attic level. The frontages are of particular note because they were designed as a whole in a neoclassical to give a sense of architectural unity and harmony to the square. The front facades are constructed from yellow stock brick with tuck pointing. Each of the four terraces has a central, stuccoed pediment as a centrepiece, with rusticated bases. The doorways have distinctive intermittent voussiors of Coade stone (a type of artificial stone) and each key stones is decorated with a human face. It should be noted that five townhouses in Bayley Street extend the northern side of the square to the west, all of which are listed grade II.*

### 3.0 Background and description

- 3.1 Bedford Square was conceived during the building boom followed the Peace of Paris in 1763. A lull from 1767-1771 was followed by an

upturn between 1773 and 1777 which turned into a further down turn in 1778 when France entered into the American War of Independence. However loans to builders from the Bedford Estate allowed the scheme for the Square to be completed by the end of 1783 as part of the spread of 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' terrace houses surrounding a central garden, in this case oval in shape.

3.3 The building facades had to keep to a regular format. This uniformity has been broadly maintained although careful inspection reveals a wealth of detailed variations. The coherence of appearance, combined with some very good interiors, has justified the listing of all the buildings as Grade I. Byrne reports that the plan was identical to its neighbour number 12 but six inches shorter thus making it the smallest house in the Square.

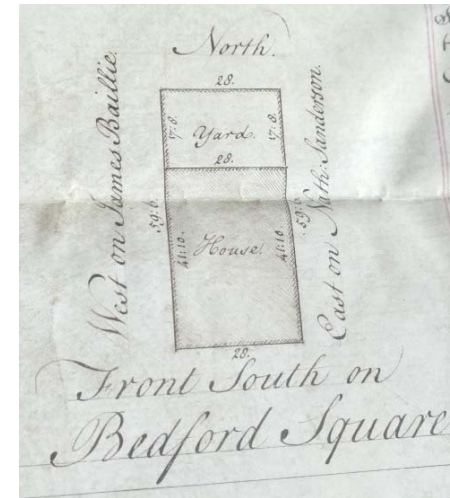
3.4 Number 13 is of importance not least as the 99 year lease granted in 1781 was to Leverton 'Surveyor to the Parish of St Giles in the City' and who, according to Andrew Byrne, was responsible for the interior together with a number of others around the Square. According to Byrne the staircase which was originally of stone was ripped out and replaced with a wooden version in the Victorian period.

3.5 Leverton died in 1824 and his widow continued to live in the property for a further 9 years.

3.6 Fredrick Beeston took a lease from 1874 to 1895. The Estate archives at Woburn contain an extended correspondence between Beeston and the Estate Steward. In January 1874 Beeston wrote regarding alterations including remodelling the entire staircase which he repeats in December the same year saying that he would find it *'very difficult to make the house as he would wish it to be without altering the staircase throughout'*

3.7 In the meantime in November 1874 Beeston wrote to JJR Davison at the Estate returning the specification of works to be carried out to the building. He says that the building is curiously planned which would take considerable cost to remedy and thus appears to have accepted the staircase which he had objected to in January. He goes on to say that building would be very much improved by the following five items which he intends to carry out as follows:

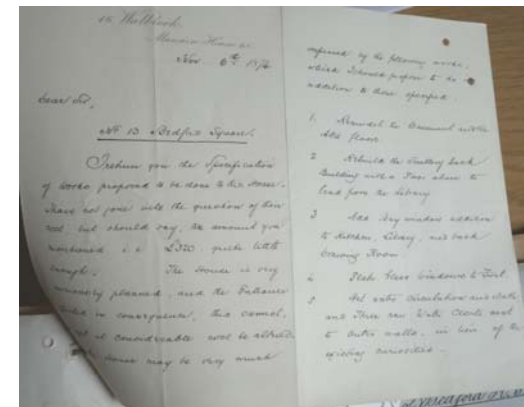
- 1 Re-model the basement and attic floors.
- 2 Rebuild the scullery back building with the floor above to lead from the library. This appears to indicate that there was a back closet wing at basement level only which he intended to make two storeys.
- 3 Add bay windows to the kitchen, library and back drawing room. These appear to be the canted bays which now exist on the basement (kitchen), ground floor (library) and first floor (back drawing room). It must be presumed that the original building had a flat back face as shown on the 1775 lease plan.



4 Plate glass windows to front

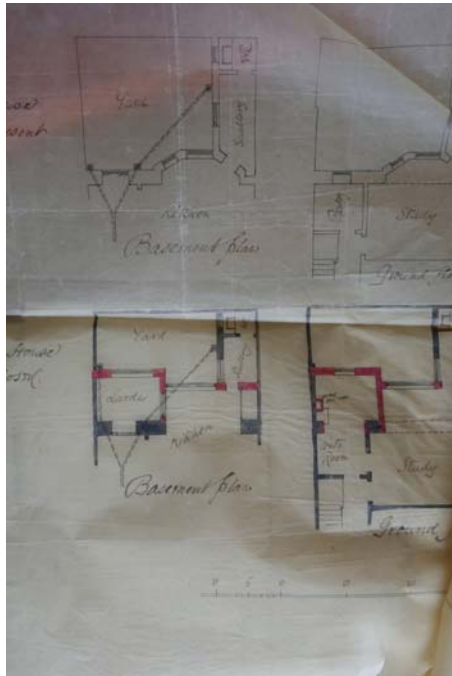
5 Hot water circulation and bath three new water closets next to outer walls in lieu of existing curiosities.

In February 1875 he withdrew this request.



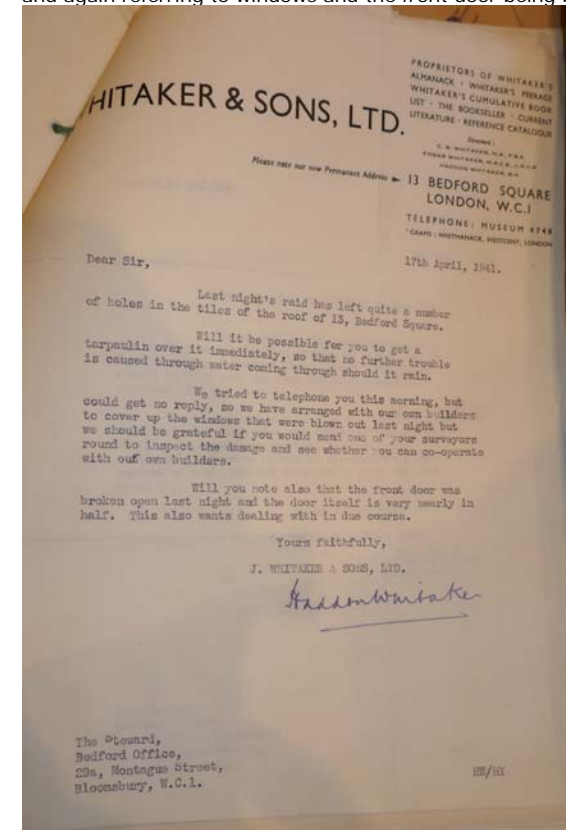
3.8 In March 1875 Beeston confirms that he has insured the extra risk for number 13 and in July he is pressing for the Lease so that he can let the house to Mr Harcourt. Apart from the additional plumbing it appears that all the other four requests have been accommodated. Byrne also confirms that the canted bay appears to be a later addition and certainly the rather cramped arrangement confirms that this was not an original feature. Byrne suggests that the bays may be a change by Leverton but the correspondence between the Estate and Leverton's successor Beeston shows that this could not have been the case.

- 3.9 Halsey Ricardo acquired Mr Harcot's interest and then took a lease from 1895 to 1910 which was renewed to 1940. Halsey Ricardo proposed to extend the building at the back and sent a letter to the Estate dated 20 March 1888, enclosing drawings for proposed extensions at the back of number 13, into the courtyard. It appears that this was not accepted by the Estate which then ten years later apparently started on extensions as the back of numbers 1,3,5 and 7 Gower Street which provoked Ricardo to a complain that these would seriously encroach on the open space at back of number 13.



- 3.10 The first time that the staircase is shown on the lease plans is in 1951 in the lease between the Duke of Bedford and J Whitaker and Sons. The Lease was renewed in 1953 and a licence granted for additional lavatories in 1955. A further extension was granted with a new Lease 1971 to 1985. Attached is a licence to sublet an underlease to to Yale University Press Ltd for Basement and Ground Floor with works to provide an enclosure to the staircase down to the basement.
- 3.11 During the Second World War the building was hit by enemy bombs at least twice. First in 14/15 October 1940 when it appears substantial damage was caused with extensive repairs being claimed under the provisions for war damage including plasterwork repairs more or less through out the building, replacement of windows which had been blown out and similar matters. Further damage was caused on the night of 16/17 April 1941 when it was recorded that there were a substantial number of holes in the roof, Whitaker and Sons were

then the tenants and wrote on the 17<sup>th</sup> asking for help in repairing the damage and again referring to windows and the front door being blown out.



- 3.12 The main façade is clearly visible from the Square and is an important element in the composition of the terrace on the northern side of the Square. A significant difference is the profusion of cast iron balconies to both the front and the back of the building. Byrne notes these were typical of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century and thus probably added by Leverton during his residency.
- 4.0 National and Local Guidance relevant to the Heritage Interest of the building.**
- 4.1 The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 provides the basis for legislation regarding Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas.
- 4.2 The application of the 1990 Act is guided by the National Planning Policy Framework which has been reviewed and adopted during 2018.
- 4.3 Heritage matters are set out in section 16 of the Framework Conserving and Enhancing the historic environment.

192. In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness

193. When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation ..... This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

196. Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

- 4.4 Local Policy is set out in the Camden Local Plan and is reflected in the Conservation Area Appraisal adopted in 2011. This is subdivided into a number of areas of which sub area 5 covers 13 Bedford Square. The relevant section is set out in 2.2 above.

## 5.0 Significance

- 5.1 Number 13 in common with all of Bedford Square is listed grade I The listing description extract 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)) GV I 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. 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. The following have cast-iron balconies to 1st floor windows: Nos 12-15, 18-21, 23-25. No.12 has a good early C19 cast-iron balcony with round-arched trellis and tented canopy. Cornice and parapets, Nos 12 & 27 having balustraded parapets. INTERIORS not inspected but noted to contain original stone stairs with cast and wrought-iron balusters of various scroll designs, decoration and features; special features as mentioned: No.12: 5 window return to Gower Street, some blind, plus single storey extension. The doorway is stucco, not Coade stone. No.13: Leverton's own house, occupied in 1782 but he did not settle here until 1795. Stucco doorway, not Coade stone. Rear elevation with canted bay to lower 3 floors and cast-iron balconies. INTERIOR: stair replaced by a timber version late C19. 2 fine plaster ceilings. No.14: rear elevation with full height canted bay.*

.....*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. Leverton was a country house architect and may have been involved with only the grander houses; he lived at No.13. Palmer was the Bedford Estate surveyor and may be responsible for the vagaries of the square. The majority of the plots leased by the estate were taken by Robert Grews, a carpenter, and William Scott, a brickmaker. No.22 was the residence of Sir J Forbes Robertson, actor (plaque). (Byrne A: Bedford Square, An architectural study: London: -1990).*

The building is clearly of significance as part of the complete range of terraces around Bedford Square and as an example of this type of town planning.

- 5.2 Internally the layout of the rooms follow a traditional layout other than the main staircase which rises from the ground floor at the back of the hall. This generates a plan with the two principle rooms on each floor extending the full depth of the building with smaller rooms at either end of the main staircase which rises in the central portion of the western side of the building.
- 5.3 These smaller rooms are relatively cramped and as a result have been largely used as service rooms either in fact or as part of proposals such as those by Halsey Ricardo
- 5.4 For the Conservation Area the significance of the building is as noted in 2.2 in relation to Bedford Square.

## 6 Proposals

- 6.1 The proposals are shown on the accompanying plans and the DAS prepared by the architects.
- 6.2 In principle the basic plan form of the building is retained with some modifications to enhance the use of the building and the provision of modern facilities.
- 6.3 It is proposed the remove the later enclosure around the main staircase at ground level. The doorway does not sit comfortably with the panelling at the side and the removal of the enclosure which is a late 20<sup>th</sup> century addition from around the late 1970's will improve the lighting of the hall and the appearance of the entrance. A new balustrade is provided down to the ground floor to match the existing pattern and a simple metal handrail and balusters is extended down to the basement.
- 6.4 It is proposed to use the small room behind the staircase for a combination of lavatory accommodation which is its current use.
- 6.5 Item 2 of Beestons letter of 6<sup>th</sup> November 1874 makes it clear that the back closet wing at that time was only a single storey and he intended to rebuild it with a ground floor storey to link into the library at the same level. In doing so the layout of the windows was changed and it thus appears that none of the existing closet wing was retained. Beeston also built the canted bay at the back at the same time.
- 6.6 The front of the building apart from the changes to the dormer windows sought by Halsey Ricardo have not had any significant alterations since the building was first created. At the back of the building there have

been several minor alterations as set out above. These are largely unseen due to the recessed location of the back of number 13 which is inset behind number 14 to the west and the properties to the north and east in Gower Street.

## **7 Impact on the significance of the building**

- 7.1 The building is part of a symmetrical terrace of Grade I listed buildings with Group Value on the north side of Bedford Square. The listing description includes an HISTORICAL NOTE laying emphasis on the buildings as a complete and important example of C18 Town Planning.
- 7.2 The Conservation Area Appraisal in 5.64 states that the frontages are of particular note because *they were designed as a whole in a neoclassical style to give a sense of architectural unity and harmony.*
- 7.3 The proposals therefore, as noted in 6.6 above, do not compromise the significance of the listed buildings nor of the Conservation Area.
- 7.4 The removal of the 20<sup>th</sup> enclosure to the staircase at ground floor level enhances the appearance of the entrance hall and the natural light to the staircase.
- 7.5 The services installation will be renewed in accordance with the service engineers proposals which accompany this application. Fan units will be located on the roof between the two inner slopes. This arrangement has been used for 12 Bedford Square and the units are effectively screened from sight.
- 7.5 It is considered that the proposals provide significant benefits which will enhance the designated heritage asset and help secure its optimum viable use.

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