

22 Bedford Square WC1B 3HH

Conservation Assessment for The Bedford Estate

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1.0 Scope

- 1.1 This assessment has been prepared at the request of the Bedford Estate to consider the impact of the installation of new heating and cooling systems encased in joinery units or plaster board ducting in each room.
- 1.2 This report has been prepared by Anthony Walker who has a post graduate diploma in Building Conservation, has been a visiting professor at Kingston University and on the register of architects Accredited in Building Conservation. It is based on a desk top study of the building, the listing description, the Bloomsbury Conservation Area draft statement and Andrew Bryne's architectural study of Bloomsbury Square.

2.0 Location

- 2.1 The site is located on the north side of Bedford Square.
- 2.2 It lies within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and is described in the current statement as being within Sub-Area 6 Bloomsbury Square, Russell Square and Tavistock Square. Bedford Square is described as:
- 6.57 Bedford Square is one of the most significant and complete examples of a Georgian (1775) Square remaining in London. Its national importance is highlighted by the grade I listing of all the properties fronting the square. It is also notable that many original streetscape elements remain (also listed) and that the gardens are on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in Greater London (Grade II*).*
- 6.58 The square was part of a planned development of the Bedford Estate that included a series of interlinked streets and spaces and is a major landmark both along Gower Street and within the Bloomsbury area. Despite the impact of traffic along Gower Street the Square remains a relatively intimate space with the degree of enclosure enhanced by the large mature trees and landscaping within the oval gardens. This central, private space is defined by iron railings with gates under wrought iron arches. Although initially a residential square it is now entirely occupied by offices*
- 6.59 The terraces are three storeys with a basement and attic level. The front elevations are particularly notable as they were designed as a whole to give a sense of architectural unity and harmony to the square. The elevations are constructed of yellow stock brick with tuck pointing and have a central stucco pedimented element and a rusticated base. The doorways have intermittent voussiors of Coade stone (a type of artificial stone) and faces on the keystones*

3.0 Background and description

- 3.1 Bedford Square was conceived during the building boom which 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.

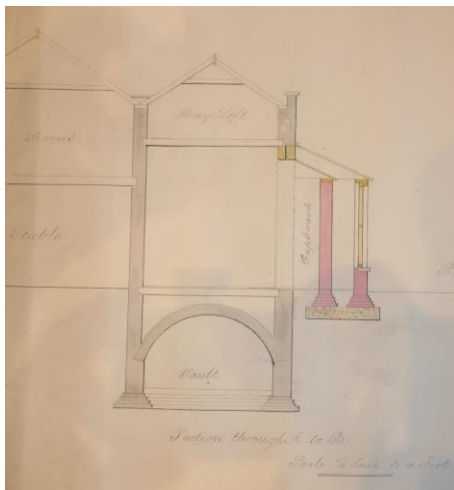
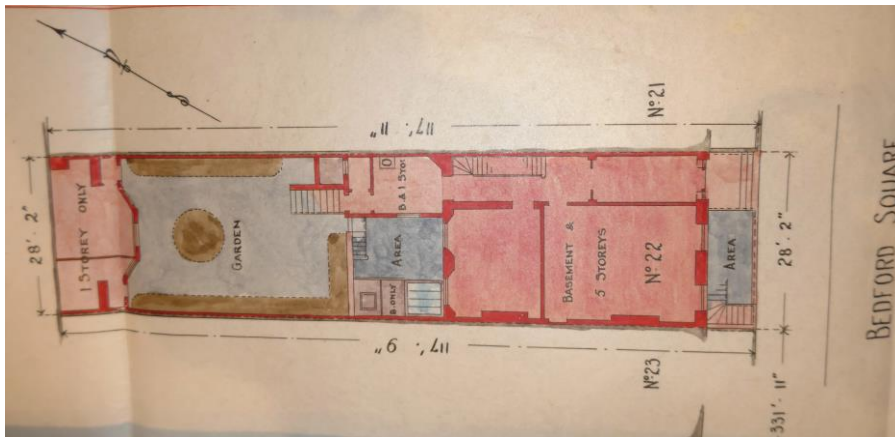
- 3.3 The building facades had to keep to a regular format with an emphasis on the central properties of the ranges on each side. This uniformity has been broadly maintained although careful inspection reveals a wealth of detailed variations.
- 3.4 The coherence of appearance, combined with some very good interiors, has justified the listing of all the buildings as Grade I.
- 3.5 A lease to numbers 21,22 and 23 was granted for 99 years to William Scott, a brickmaker, on the 20th August 1782. The plot sizes were 28feet wide by 138 feet deep except for where an additional section which was created at the end of 21 to terminate Gower Mews.
- 3.6 Number 22 is on four main floors with a basement below. The main frontage faces the Square and is three bays wide with individual balconies to each window at first floor level along the frontage to the Square.
- 3.7 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.



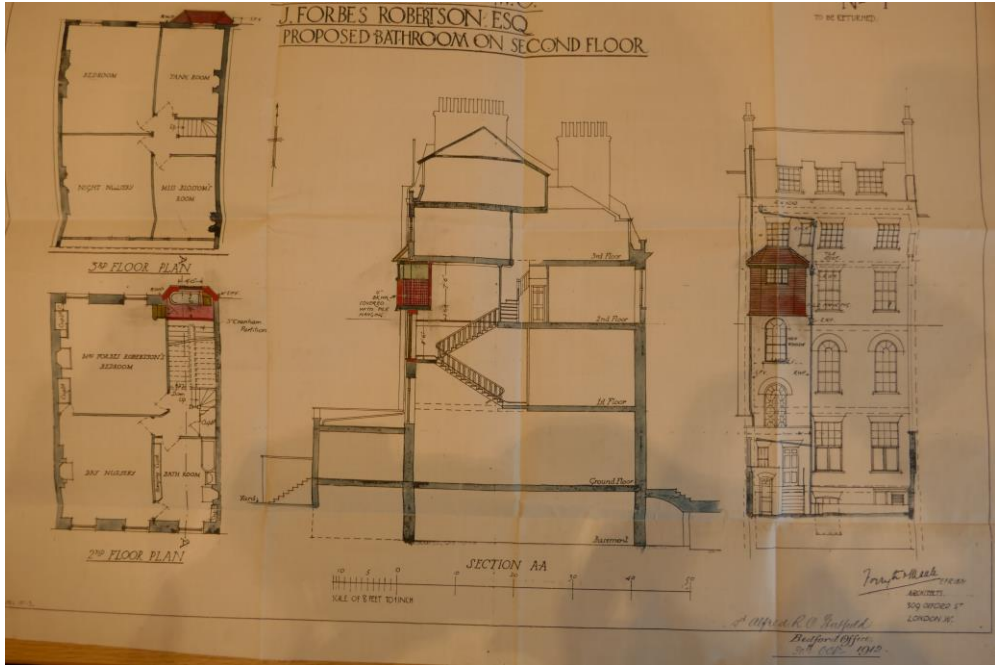
- 3.8 At the back the building there is an open space running across the back of 23 and 22 and facing a new building on the northern side. There is a raised line in the paving along the back denoting what is understood to have been the original small open space behind the two buildings. On the western side there is new development at the back of the adjoining buildings in the Square.



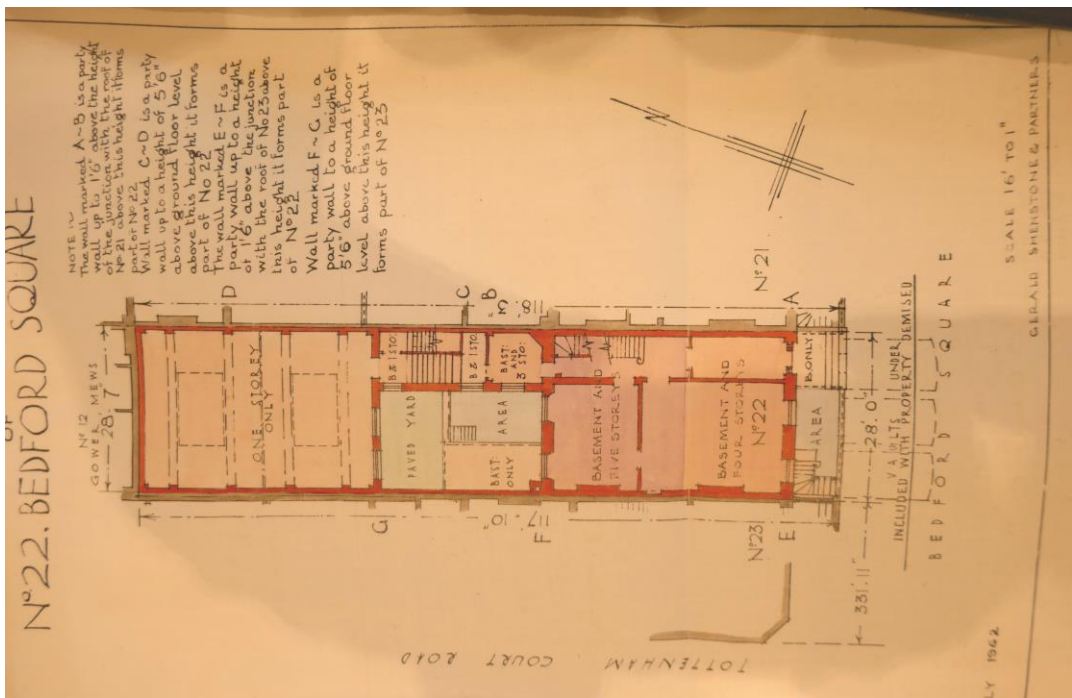
3.9 The lease at the beginning of the 20th century shows a well maintained garden with a garden room across the end of the garden backing onto the stables accessed from Gower Mews. A vault is shown under the garden room.



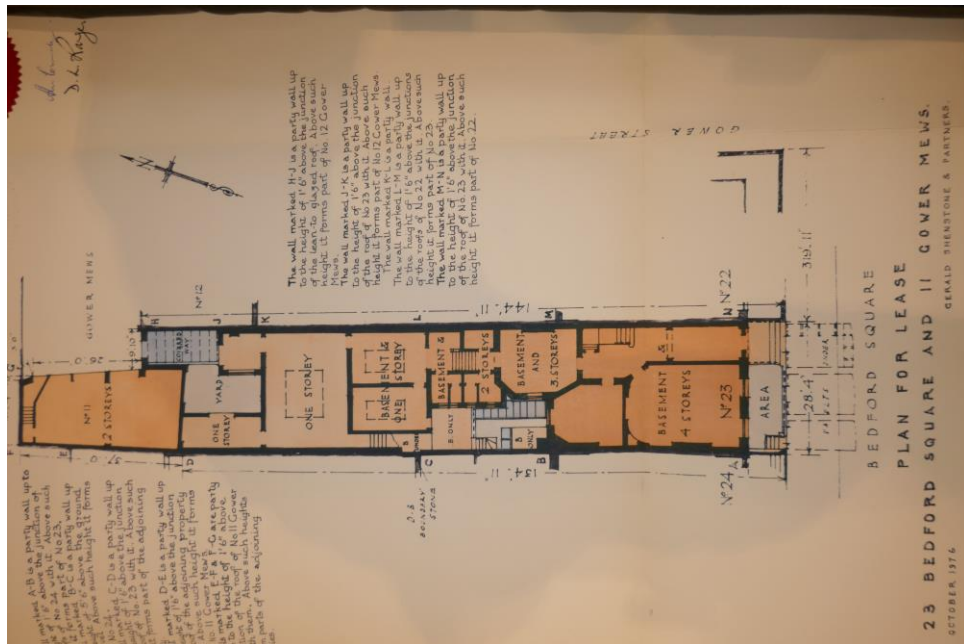
- 3.10 The 1912 section shows the small bathroom projecting beyond the end of the main staircase. It also shows the small single storey closet wing at the back of the house on the ground floor only which also is clear from the above lease plan. Above ground level there is no closet wing.



- 3.11 The 1962 lease plan shows the layout of 22 with the main building facing the Square on the right, a large single storey block to the left and a link across the top of the plan surrounding the central courtyard. This plan explains the layout of the space behind 22 and 23 identified above.



- 3.12 Number 21 although at one stage part of the group of three buildings 21,22 and 23 with lateral links across east west have been separated but as can be seen from the 1976 the extension at the back links up to Gower Mews.



- 3.13 In the 1980's the back of 22 and the areas behind 22 and 23 were developed

4.0 Significance

- 4.1 The building in common with all of Bedford Square is listed grade I. The listing description states that:

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. The 2 centre houses, Nos 18 & 19, are stuccoed. 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 blind boxes: Nos 16-19, No.20 to 1st floor only, Nos 21 and 25. 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. Plasterwork friezes and

ceilings. Some curved doors. No.17: plaster ceiling. Nos 18 & 19: rusticated ground floor; 5 Ionic pilasters rise through the 1st and 2nd storeys to support a frieze with roundels above each pilaster, and pediment with delicate swag and roundel enrichment on the tympanum. At 2nd floor level a continuous enriched band running behind the pilasters. INTERIORS with curved staircases; No.18 with original cellar including a storage cupboard. Attached to and facing the rear of No.19, a finely proportioned contemporary 2 storey and basement stuccoed building. 3 windows. Round-arched ground floor openings; windows set in architraved Coade stone surrounds with guilloche impost bands and female head keystones. 1st floor palm leaf string course. A rare survival of this kind of building attached to the rear wall of the coach-houses. No.21: screens and a plaster ceiling. Attached to and facing the rear, a well detailed contemporary 2 storey brick building. 3 windows. Arcaded ground floor with stucco impost bands. Entrance with radial patterned fanlight. Gauged brick flat arches to all sashes. Brick mutule cornice which continues around the pediment containing a blind oeil-de-boeuf. A rare urban survival of an ancillary building of the period. No.23: panelled doors and a plaster ceiling. No.24: rear elevation with canted bay to lower 3 floors. Plaster ceilings and panels. No.25: rear elevation with full height bow and full height half-canted closet. Wood carving and plaster ceilings, one originally with painted panels. No.26: plasterwork and closet room behind the stairs. No.27: original basement door with interesting metalwork. Some houses with original lead rainwater heads and pipes. SUBSIDIARY FEATURES: attached cast-iron railings to areas with urn or torch-flambe finials. No.17 with a wrought-iron lamp bracket and snuffer. Most houses with good wrought-iron foot scrapers. 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 development.

- 4.2 The layout of the main building retains the original form with two main rooms on the western side of the house facing north and south. Beside these to the east are the main staircase at the back and a small front room located over the entrance hall which takes up a similar space on the ground floor.
- 4.3 Behind the main building facing Bedford Square there is an L shaped courtyard with a narrow modern link down the eastern side linking the original building at the front of the site with a modern block running east/west across the back of the site and across that of 23 Bedford Square.
- 4.4 Behind the modern block there is a central leg containing a second staircase linking to Gower Mews and separated from those buildings by small open wells on either side.
- 4.5 Internally the layout of the rooms in the original building, the main staircase and the decorative items particularly on the ground and first floors are of particular significance. The rooms in the more recent wings linking the front building with the modern extensions at the back while of interest are of less significance than the original main building.



4.6 For the Conservation Area the significance of the main building is as noted in 4.1 in relation to Bedford Square.

Anthony Walker
2019 March