

Paul Dennis Metalworks

Specialists in design, manufacture and restoration
of fine ironwork

A SHORT INVESTIGATION INTO AND REPORT ON THE HISTORIC METALWORK WINDOW GRILLS AT No 42 BEDFORD SQUARE, BLOOMSBURY, LONDON



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Introduction

The late Georgian period in central London saw an increased awareness of security relating property, particularly newly laid out town houses. Additional protection was achieved through a number of new features.

The main front entrance door was reinforced by using solid lower / flush panels, this prevented the door readily being “kicked in”. Internal wooden window shutters had more sophisticated catches to prevent their being opened from the outside.

The basement lightwell areas at the front of the houses were often vulnerable because they were not readily observed. Grills to windows had long been a standard form of protection on the continent and became popular in London from the 1760s onwards. Metalwork grills permitted the window to be defended against would be intruders but allowed daylight in and observation of the basement area.

By the late Georgian period basement windows were usually glazed. Earlier the service areas would have had more rudimentary arrangements such as barred wooden internal shutters.

The metalwork railings to the frontage along with lightwell / basement areas of the townhouses acted as a form of moat and palisade defence. The railings preventing ready access to the basement and the basement’s depth preventing easy access to the windows on ground and upper floors. As a consequence, these upper windows could be free of external grills, but typically featured internal wooden shutters for privacy and insulation.

Metalwork was also used internally creating defensive secondary areas. An example of which is Sir John Soane’s house in Lincolns Inn Fields, here his bedroom was secured at night by a locked metal grill door.

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Survey

A survey was carried out relating to the historic metalwork grills in Bedford Square, Bloomsbury, London.

Of the existing 51 townhouses in the Bedford Square 76% have grills to their basement windows, which reflects the continued importance of strong protective security. These 39 properties with basement grills were examined and of those grills, 18 are historic and contemporary with the construction of the building they protect. This equates to just over 35% of the original grills surviving.

The historic grills were examined to identify common themes or variations in their construction. Broadly four variants were spotted.

Type 1, a horizontal punched flat bar with diamond/square set spigot ends set approximately 5 ft from the base. Simple pyramidal finals, square bars with base square plate form the grill.

Type 2, a surrounding square bar frame, which is set into the window reveals by diamond/square bar spigots.

Type 3 the frame is attached to a flat bracket which is in turn nail spigot fixed to an additional piece secured to the reveal.

Type 4 horizontal forged bar to vertical lozenge section into the reveal.

42 Bedford Square

The existing reveals to the basement / lightwell area windows for No 42 Bedford Square have recently been repaired.

It was possible to examine only one reveal in detail.

An examination of the right hand reveal to the lower right front basement window was undertaken. The reveal was cleaned of its render and the brickwork exposed.

A clear diagonal set hole was revealed with modern foam fill. The foam fill was removed, and the hole examined. Samples were taken from the wall of the hole and the hole measured for its size and position. The hole size was approximately 19/20 mm on all sides, i.e., a size appropriate to receive a 3/4" bar. The hole is

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diagonal otherwise known as diamond set. The hole had a depth of 75mm or three inches. The hole is 1600mm from the base of the windowsill, approximately 5 feet.

A cotton bud rub sample was taken on the back interior brick of the hole, and clear metal rust/oxidized flecks were collected on the sample. Indicating that it had previously held an iron bar.

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Conclusion

The size, height, and the position of the hole to the reveal examined at 42 Bedford Square are very likely to reflect a past diamond/square set metal spigot for holding a metal horizontal bar and are consistent with other examples within the square relating to the historic security grills.

The fact that the spigot is diamond set arranged for the grill suggests that a type 1 metal grille was installed at 42 Bedford Square.

Furthermore, the logic is that both windows would have had security grills, since having only one grille would not have achieved the desired objective.

The uniformity of Bedford Square would be best served by the installation of window grilles.

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Photographs



Type 1 diamond/square bar spigot into reveal

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Type 2 bracket fixing to reveal

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Type 3 surround square bar fixed by square bar spigot into reveal

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Type 4 horizontal bar forged to vertical lozenge into reveal.

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Right hand front basement window right reveals showing square diamond set
hole 5 foot above the sill base.

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Close view of hole to reveal

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Cotton sample showing metal oxidized flecks from interior brick surround

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