

IMOGEN GRUNDON CONSULTANCY

**ON BEHALF OF
JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES**

**30 BELSIZE GROVE
LONDON**

HISTORIC BUILDING INVESTIGATION

MAY 2008

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Introduction

30 Belsize Grove is one of seven houses in a grade II listed terrace built between 1825-6. The stuccoed terrace is symmetrical with a central pediment on the principal elevation and the visual impact is important to the property. It lies within the Belsize Conservation area (including front walls and gate piers) in the Belsize Conservation Area. This assessment has been commissioned by Casson Condor Partnership to inform a series of proposals for alterations to the fabric which require Listed Building Consent.

The structural development of this building is not complex, so the following report identifies the historic fabric of interest in the building and how it would be affected by the proposed alterations.

Description

Exterior (Figure 1)

Externally, this house has not changed materially on the principal elevation. It is of two stories with basement and attic. The façade is of stucco over brick and is situated just to the right of the pedimented house that forms the centre of the 7-house terrace. The fenestration survives intact. Two 3x2-light sash windows light the front room on the ground floor, with the front door adjacent. At first floor level, these are balanced by and three 3x6-light sash windows on the first floor. Currently at basement level, beneath the sight line from the street, there is a small sash window with a 4x 3-light window, the top row of which is fixed, limiting the amount by which it could open to the height of one light. Adjacent to this is the small door that would have provided access for staff to the service area. This door is very narrow with a glazed 3x3-light upper half. This is an original feature. The stairs down to the basement are a modern replacement of an earlier similar arrangement, the scars of which can be seen in the wall beneath the current stair.

There have been alterations to the rear of the house, which is plain brick in Flemish bond and no stucco, except for the basement which is covered in white render. The

balcony at ground floor level is an original feature, but the stone stairway that leads from it to the garden has been moved in the past from the north end to the south end. This can be seen by the difference in the railings pattern and by the added brick skin beneath the stairs from which to cantilever the steps. Had the stairway been original, the stairs would have been set into the rear wall of the building during construction. Evidence for the original position of the stairway has been obscured, if not obliterated, by the addition of the present kitchen extension. It is possible that the stair is the original that was moved, but there is no evidence to suggest that is the case other than the quality of it and the fact that stone was used as in the floor of the balcony rather than an iron structure.

The rear fenestration is largely original, except for the insertion at some point of a steel lintel above the ground floor French window. The greatest alterations have taken place at basement level where only one original window survives. Where the original doorway from the service entrance stood, there is now a modern door which may have been inserted later. The brickwork is confused by the addition of the brick skin to support the moved stairway.

The door from the study is clearly modern, as is the narrow full-length window. The small sash window is, however, original. The staircase and balcony give the best clues. The staircase seems to have descended originally on the right hand side and was moved to make way for the extension, presumably because the extension was for the kitchen from which it leads. The evidence for the turning of the staircase can be seen in the fact that a brick skin has been added to the rear wall of the house to hold the cantilevered stone stairs, rather than being built into the original brickwork as is the case with the stone balcony. There is also a clear break in quality and design between the original balcony ironwork and the later staircase ironwork.

The brackets supporting the stone balcony are original, though the right hand one of the three was removed to build the kitchen extension. This would have balanced with the width of the window above.

Interior

Basement (Figures 2, 3, 4 & 5)

The basement is reached from the small front hall, down the bare wooden stair to a small lobby from which the doors open to the other rooms. The first door on the left is a walk-in pantry with pierced holes in the door for ventilation. Another such

cupboard is on the right hand side of the stair. These two cupboards are original features, as are all the divisions of the rooms at this level. The original kitchen has been much altered, not least by the removal of the kitchen to the floor above.

The window and door opening onto the outside stairwell and the front garden are both original features. The architrave of the door does not appear original, though the door itself may be. The window has largely original features, though it appears that the shutters were originally closed by a bar across. Now they have a shuttering lock more typical of the 1860s.

There is nothing left of the original kitchen range, though a cupboard to the left of it might be original.

The kitchen leads into what is now a utility room. Only the small square window onto the garden survives of the original features. There may well have been a door to the garden where the present one leads to the modern extension, but any evidence of it is invisible or simply gone.

The room now occupied by the office has no original features. The original flooring material at this level has been lost throughout.

Ground floor

The front door opens into a small porch area with an arch separating it from the narrow hall. The panelled-off service stair, to the right on entry, descends to the basement though it has lost its original door.

The hall passage leads to the dining room with a French window opening onto a balcony overlooking the garden and giving access by the stair mentioned above.

The dining room has retained most of its features, such as cornice mouldings and fireplace. The front room, which is set perpendicular to the dining room has been turned into a kitchen, but otherwise has kept its fireplace. The dumb waiter appears no longer to function above basement level. The two large sash windows are original and intact.

First floor (Figures 6 & 7)

There are two bedrooms on the first floor. The principal bedroom at the front of the house has a small dressing room with decorative coloured glass on its internal wall to give borrowed light to the otherwise unlit stair. This feature is repeated on the floor above for the same reason. The smaller rear bedroom has a curious entrance arrangement doorway, with a double architrave and storage shelf above. This may have been a double door at one point, a feature used to give added privacy to the occupants.

The bathroom door is surmounted by decorative coloured glass, an original period feature to give borrowed light from the bathroom window to the stairwell.

A large, built-in linen cupboard on the first-floor landing appears to be an original feature.

Second floor (Figure 8)

This storey is accommodated within the mansard roof, but is more spacious than the term attic would suggest. There has already been alteration of the room spaces at this level.

There are currently three bedrooms, the two principal of which were linked by a broad double-leaf door. Half of this has been sealed shut and a modern plasterboard partition added to create a short passage into the front bedroom. The front room has its own dressing room giving borrowed light onto the stairwell. All of this suggests that it is unlikely that this was ever service accommodation, but more likely the nursery. There is a blocked door between the two rear bedrooms, but it is not possible to judge if this was an original feature.

The walls at this level are all of plaster and lath. The top landing is lit by a rooflight, but it is a modern one.

Proposed alterations

The proposed alterations, some of which require listed building consent, do affect in some ways the historic fabric of the building.

Exterior

Front basement

It is proposed to replace the original door leading into the service access with a

window, to match the existing window adjacent to it. There has already been some alteration to the architrave of this door and the alteration would not alter the external appearance of the building as this is below ground level and is not visible. There is no suggestion of replacing the existing window, only of replacing the door with a window to match it. The shutters on the existing window would remain, and the architrave of the door, which does not seem original, would not be a great loss.

Interior

Basement

There is no doubt that this is the area of greatest proposed internal alteration. The alteration will erase the service area of the building. But this is no longer a service area and its historic use is now obsolete. The house needs to be habitable and the low level of the ceiling and the half-basement construction make it a dark and cramped space that cannot be used for its original purpose nor yet for any modern living. There is a record of the service area as it has survived, but it no longer suits its purpose. The dropping of the floor level in itself will result in no serious damage to the historic fabric of the house, the original flooring having been lost long since. It will not alter the balance of the building on the exterior as it will not be visible. It is only the positions of the walls and doors that will be lost by the proposed alterations, and if recorded this will be no serious loss. The space has to become usable or it will always be left empty and may suffer somewhat by neglect.

The suggestion that this alteration will have an effect on the hearth and fire surrounds is not applicable as these do not survive. Skirting boards and architraves can be kept and re-used if necessary.

It would, however, be a pity to lose the original service stair and there appears little reason why this should be necessary.

First floor

The first floor alterations involve switching the positions of the second bedroom and bathroom to create an en suite arrangement for the principal bedroom. This would involve the removal of the decorative glass above the current bathroom door, which would alter the feel of the building, particularly the stairwell. If this proves necessary the panel should be moved to the new door position. The piercing of the wall between master bedroom and secondary bedroom would not greatly alter the feel of the principal bedroom and the damage done to the historic fabric of the building will not be excessive. No house can survive without alteration as lifestyles change and the fabric changes with it.

The blocking of the door from the current rear bedroom to the landing could be minimised as proposed, but as the door has already been moved once, it is hardly a serious alteration.

Second floor

There have already been alterations carried out at this level. The replacement of the modern partition is not important, but it would be a shame to lose the double door feature and an attempt to keep it should be made.



Figure 1: The rear of the property



Figure 2: The basement front room, formerly the kitchen



Figures 3 and 4: The instructions and winding handle for the dumb waiter



Figure 5: The basement lobby and service stair

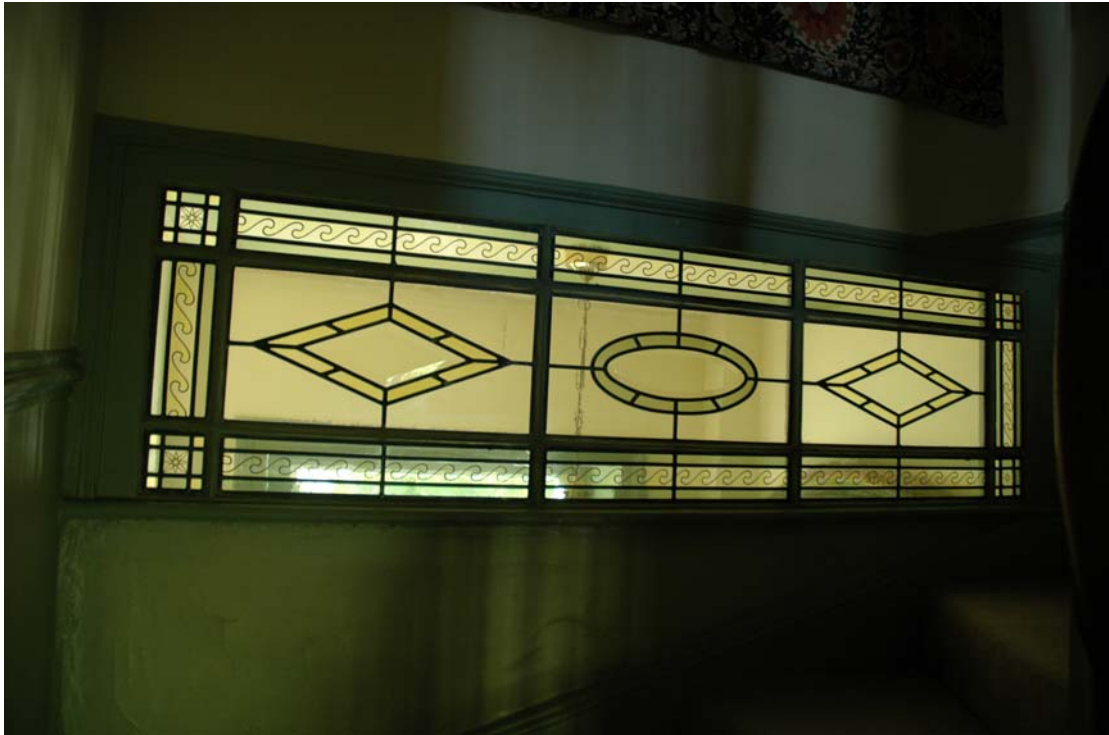


Figure 6: The decorative coloured glass window giving borrowed light to stair



Figure 7: The decorative coloured glass above the current bathroom door on the first floor

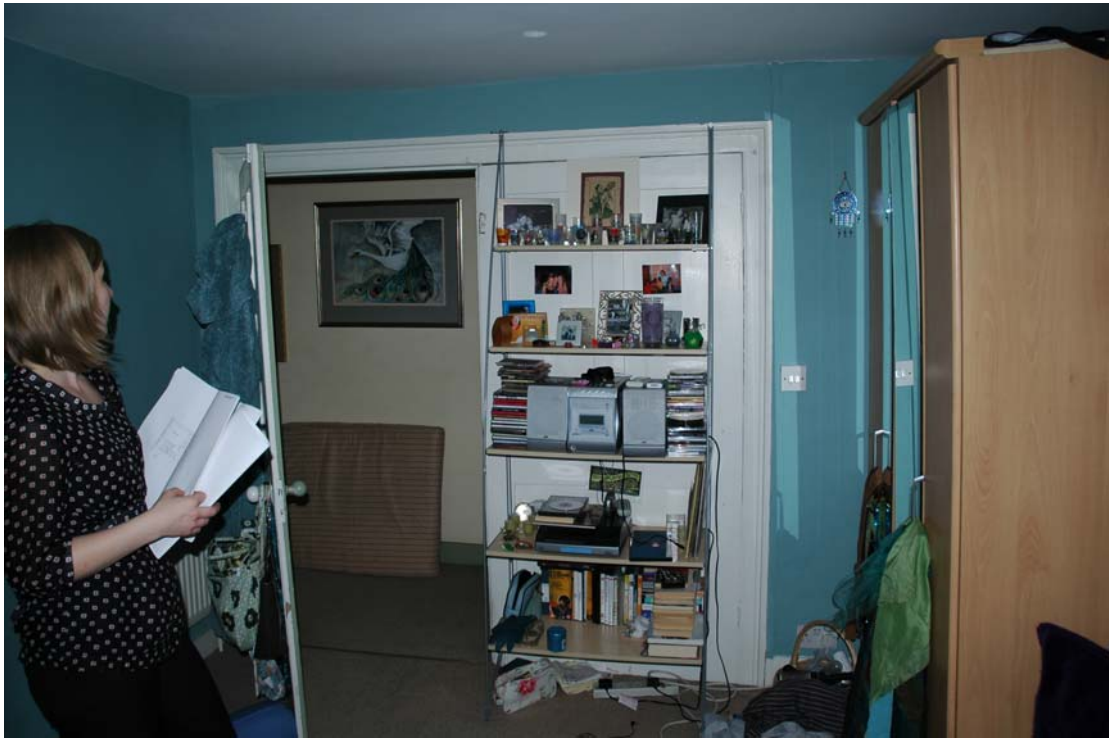


Figure 8: The double door on the second floor