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Condition Report Veined Carrara Marble Chimney-piece
GFF 88 Seymour Street, London W2 2JJ

Dear Claire,

We are just following up on our discussions on the condition of the GFF chimney-piece within 88 Seymour Street and have drawn up a report on the chimney-piece's condition using the images taken in April of this year. The chimney-piece also appears to be a contemporary feature of the Grade II listed building. Like many chimney-pieces made in London in the last four years of the 18th century and first fourteen years of the 19th century, the chimney-piece is composed of a number of thin sections of Italian, veined, white marble. The reason behind the use of thin elements relates to the lack of marble available during this period following Napoleon's troops entering Carrara in August 1796 and access to Italian marbles ceasing. In keeping with the smaller room dimensions the chimney-piece has been executed from cheaper more veined marble than that used in the 1FF room. The historic material is heavily veined and such veining bears comparison to the clearly much later shelf (Cornice) replacement that has been introduced.



The chimney-piece in the GFF room of 88 Seymour Street, an early 19th century English marble chimney-piece composed from thin sections of veined Italian Statuary probably dating to 1815-1820. The current black granite/marble slab is raised and a recent introduction as also the late Victorian style stove grate.

The condition of much of the chimney-piece is reasonable, both jambs, their plinth blocks, moulded panels, the frieze and turned Paterae are un-broken although elements of both outgrounds have broken. The surface of the marble is discoloured from atmospheric conditions (coal smoke) combined with having been previously painted, so much of the surface appears *flat*. Traces of paint are still present in many of the less accessible areas, including the underside of the Cornice (shelf) and junction of the upper frieze mouldings to the flanking blockings as also within the crevices of the right-hand Paterae shown below. There is however, in keeping with its age, substantial wear to the plinths and considerable mechanical damage to the inner edges of the elements that surround the fireplace opening particularly to the left-hand side.



Detail showing areas of residual paint within the deeper crevices of the frieze moulding, junction with the blocking. The chimney-piece appears to be out of alignment as exemplified by the large plaster joint to the underside of the Cornice junction with the blockings and frieze where the white plaster joint has been *bodge* painted a light grey. Note the deep dirt impregnation to the centre of the paterae.

Areas of mechanical damage, such as this are generally the result of wear and tear from its use as a means of heating and lighting 1820-1960, the damage often caused by mechanical impact by fire tools or coal buckets/scuttles. The damage is severe on the inner edge of the left-hand jamb as shown below.



The inner edge of the left hand -jamb showing severe mechanical damage to the inner edges of the marble pillasters, probably as a result of impacts by metal objects such as fire tools and coal scuttles. Note the break to the internal returns, some of which appears to be the result of movement.

The chimney-piece appears to have moved, perhaps as a result of recent modifications such as the introduction of a new in-congruous raised black slab and the introduction of a reproduction Victorian style stove grate. Alternatively, the movement may be the result of the age of the property and faults within the supporting brick arch within the flooring. Evidence for this can be seen in the below detail of the right-hand jamb where the outground has fractured and the elliptical moulding to the front has become disconnected from the outground.



Detail of the right-hand jamb showing the elliptical moulding which is beginning to separate from the out-ground which has in itself broken. Similar separation and fractures are present within the left-hand jamb. Such separation can have been the result of unsympathetic installation work or movement within the building.



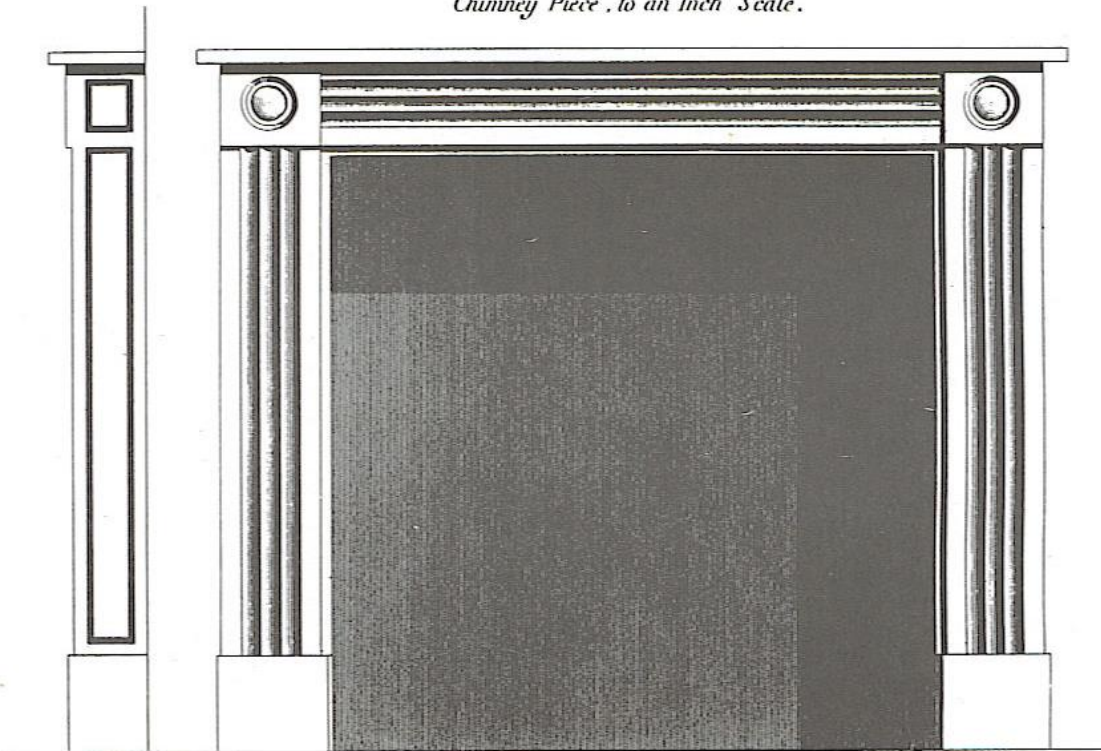
The base of the left-hand jamb showing that the plinth block has '*dropped*' and the adjacent elliptical moulding that forms part of the outground has broken as a result. This is often an indicator that the supporting brick arch within the flooring has moved or sagged. Further breaks occur further up the elliptical moulding and also in the outground return. Note the height of the recently introduced Black marble/granite raised slab. This greatly detracts from the presence of the historical feature and should be removed. Should the original historic slab be present beneath the later flooring and in good condition, this should be removed and restored, or a new marble slab installed in a veined white marble that accords with the historic chimney-piece as best possible.



View of the top of the Cornice or shelf of the chimney-piece. This is a recent introduction, formed from a modern, white marble, which does not accord with the veined marble seen in the historic original. It is our recommendation that this is removed and replaced with a veined moulding without the profile to the outer edge, following a related design published by the early 19th century architect W.F. Pocock, with his 1811, *Modern Finishings for Rooms*

Dressing Room.

Chimney Piece, to an Inch Scale.



Design for a Dressing Room chimney-piece as published within W.F. Pocock's 1811 *Modern Finishings for Rooms*. The form of the chimney-piece is related to that seen in the GFF and 1FF of 88 Seymour Street. Note the un-moulded shelf or Cornice.

Like that in the 1FF room, the chimney-piece appears to have remained in situ since the building was first constructed and as such should be secured in place via being set back within the historic plaster face, combined with wrought iron cramps securing the plinth block and jambs/jambs and blockings, to the brickwork. Such installation processes generally make removal broadly quite simple, particularly where there has been movement within the supporting brick arch. However, there is always a possibility that the chimney-piece has been removed and re-fitted by 'builders' and therefore inappropriate materials (i.e., Sand and cement mortar) may have been used in re-installation which being stronger than the marble can make removal much more complex and occasionally impossible without massive destruction to the historic elements. Similarly, given the condition of the frieze and soffit, the flanking jamb returns may have deteriorated from the heat of the fire and may also break during removal. In essence, as with most 18th and early 19th century chimney-pieces, considerable care will be required when it is removed.

Recommendations.

Given the reasonable condition of the chimney-piece, it is our recommendation that the chimney-piece is removed, repaired and re-installed. Given the existing evidence of separation, we envisage that the jambs, frieze and plinth blocks should be possible to remove, with ease, but will separate into component parts during the removal process and there may have been heat damage to the internal returns and soffit. Restoration work should allow for the replacement of the later Cornice with one in veined marble, unmoulded to the edge, but extending the same distance as that present, which should accord with the historic marble as best possible. The restoration work should further allow for the removal of all soot/debris from the rear faces of all the historic marble elements and any supporting sections of stone. All of the broken and fractured elements will require re-joining and re-enforcing and the joints coloured to match the veining present as best possible. Test trials for the removal of the existing paint on the surface should be applied as also for the application of poultices, for the extraction of Coal soot and smoke staining. Further allow for the full re-assembly of elements to form component parts and the replacement of the historic supporting stones (Frieze liner and blocking stones for jamb elements and plinth block elements) within the chimney-piece and cramping elements (using copper wire) and the application of a coat of Micro crystalline wax to all surfaces on completion.

We would recommend that if the original historic marble slab remains within the original flooring and can be removed and restored this should be affected, or if not a matching veined marble slab sourced and re-installed with the chimney-piece. This should extend the full width of the chimney-piece at flooring level, projecting perhaps as much as 50% of its extent. Note site visit indicates the slab projection to be broadly 52", 1321mm. The later, modern black marble slab and stove grate will need to be lifted and removed during removal of the chimney-piece, so the contractor should allow for all disconnection as required (gas/electric). The existing brick arch should be inspected for structural integrity in order that once re-installed, any structural re-enforcement that may be required has been completed so that there is adequate support for the years ahead.

Please feel free to contact us if you require clarification of any of the above or further detail.

Yours sincerely

John P S Davis
For and on behalf of Melliush & Davis Associates Ltd