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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE & HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

In respect of

16 Wilton Street, Belgravia, London

On behalf of

Mrs F. Lanza

AHC REF: ND/9679

May 2022

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1.0 INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report, which has been prepared and written by Dr. Nicholas Doggett, FSA, MICfA, IHBC, Managing Director of Asset Heritage Consulting Ltd., on behalf of Mrs F. Lanza, the owner of 16 Wilton Street, is two-fold.
- 1.2 The first is to provide an assessment of the house's significance as a Grade II listed building situated in the Belgravia Conservation Area, and the second is to examine the application proposals to carry out some minor external and internal alterations to the house and to provide them with a cogent and sustainable justification in heritage terms.
- 1.3 The value of this two-stage approach (of assessing significance first and allowing this to inform an applicant's proposals) is that it complies with the requirements of paragraph 194 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 1.4 This rightly places the onus on those planning changes to historic assets to begin this process with a clear description of the significance of the assets affected, albeit that the requirement in the NPPF is only such that *'The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance'*.
- 1.5 Indeed, the need to understand and evaluate 'significance' before moving on to assess the impact of potential change on that 'significance' has for some time been regarded as good conservation practice in the design and application process (see, for instance, English Heritage's 'Conservation Principles', 2008) and, following the introduction of the short-lived PPS5 in 2010 and then the first version of the NPPF in 2012, is now effectively a standard requirement for most applications affecting designated heritage assets.
- 1.6 Importantly, this approach also demonstrates to the Council (or to any other decision maker) that the heritage significance of the building as it currently exists has been fully analysed and understood as part of the formulation of the proposed alteration scheme.

- 1.7 It is also important to note here that, following a pre-application dialogue with Council officers, including their advice letter dated 30 March 2022, the alteration scheme has been pared back significantly, notably through the omission of the initially proposed rear extension, which the letter stated was unlikely to be acceptable on the grounds that the officers considered that it had a potentially '*harmful impact on the listed building*'.
- 1.8 Certainly, it will be clear from this report that there is no material reason in heritage terms why the application proposals the subject of this report should not receive listed building consent.

2.0 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 As referred to in Simon Bradley's and Nikolaus Pevsner's *London 6: Westminster* (2003) account of Belgravia (pp.727-58) and Westminster City Council's 2013 draft Character Appraisal for the Belgravia Conservation Area (this was first designated as such in 1968 and extended in 1977, 1981 1987 and 1990), Belgravia was built almost entirely on the Five Fields, part of the land acquired by Sir Thomas Grosvenor in 1677 on his marriage to the heiress Mary Davies.
- 2.2 '*The first scheme to open up the heartland dates from c.1812. The royal removal to Buckingham Palace in the 1820s cannot therefore have been the spur, as is often claimed. The Grosvenors must rather have been weighing up the capabilities of a smart new district between Chelsea and the West End*' (Bradley & Pevsner, pp.729-30).
- 2.3 '*The great episodes of Belgravia belong to the next phase, signalled by the arrival in 1824 of Thomas Cubbitt, the ambitious builder and contractor whose firm had already developed estates in North London and in Bloomsbury*' (Bradley & Pevsner, p.730). For an authoritative summary account of Cubbitt's career (1788-1855) see Howard Colvin's *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects, 1600-1840* (4th edn, 2008, pp.289-91). Cubbitt was joined in this venture by other large-scale builders, notably Seth Smith (1791-1860).
- 2.4 Wilton Street lies in South Belgravia, outside Cubbitt's principal area of involvement, and was laid out in c.1813 (not the late 18th century as erroneously referred to on p. of the Council's Character Appraisal), although it was not until '*after the mid-1820s (that) organization into one composition begins to appear*' (Bradley & Pevsner, p.755).
- 2.5 The Historic England list entry (attached at **Appendix 1**) – No.16 was first added to the statutory list in December 1987 at Grade II as part of a 'group listing' of the terrace (Nos.16-23) on the south side of the street - simply refers to an early 19th century date for the terrace, with no mention of an architect or builder/developer.
- 2.6 Bradley and Pevsner's attribution of the terrace to Seth Smith is though sound and based on documentary evidence; furthermore, not only does the terrace bear close

similarity to other known examples of Smith's work in Belgravia (e.g., in Belgrave Square, Eaton Square and Eccleston Road) but stylistically a date in the second half of the 1820s is absolutely consistent with its character, architectural form and appearance.

- 2.7 The prevailing architectural style of the terrace, which is built of yellow London stock brick, and has four storeys over a basement/lower ground floor (the area of which is protected by contemporary spearhead railings) is in a plain late Georgian idiom. Nos. 19 & 21 have an additional storey above the continuous moulded and stuccoed cornice.
- 2.8 Embellishment is however provided through the use of 'rusticated' stucco on the ground floor of the whole terrace and the provision of '*Grecian pedimental attic blocks*' to the end houses (Nos. 16 & 23), a feature noted both by Bradley and Pevsner and in the Historic England list entry. Interestingly, Grecian is one of several architectural styles employed by Smith in his work in Belgravia and elsewhere.
- 2.9 Turning now to a description of No. 16 itself, externally it retains its original character and appearance of its street façade and return elevation (to Wilton Mews) essentially unaltered (**plate 1**). Its rear elevation has however been significantly altered through the addition of a two-storey flat-roof extension (at lower ground- and ground-floor levels).
- 2.10 This extension appears to date to the late 19th or early 20th century, presenting a rusticated wall to Wilton Mews with a later tall parapet to the roof garden/amenity space on its flat roof. Both this parapet and the protective decorated iron railings to the rear elevation of the extension's roof garden date to the late 20th century as do the canted bay projections under a single modern lead-seamed lean-to roof on the extension's rear elevation, facing the existing yard area (**plates 2-10**). Indeed, as the attached drawings at **Appendix 2** show, this phase of work dates only to the early 1980s.
- 2.11 As noted above, this yard is concealed from public view by a wall on Wilton Mews, which meets the higher boundary wall between the yard and the grounds/car park of

the Grade II* listed St. Peter's Church, Eaton Square, the vestry of which backs directly onto this boundary wall (**plates 11-15**).

2.12 The properties of the remainder of the terrace adjoining No.16 have also been extended on their rear elevations, several (including Nos.17 & 18) with late 20th-century conservatory-like extensions atop earlier flat-roofed extensions, that to No.18 projecting beyond the rest of the building line (**plate 16**). This plate shows there are further extensions of varying storey height to the remainder of the terrace beyond No.18.

2.13 Turning now to the interior of No.16, as would be expected in a London townhouse of this sort, the principal rooms are on the ground and first floors, with the most significant architectural feature being the main staircase. This staircase is, unsurprisingly, at its highest status on the flight from the ground floor to first floor, with decorated iron balusters, giving way to simpler but still elegant timber balusters on the flight from the first to second floors (**plates 17-22**).

2.14 The principal rooms of the house are on the first floor, the main room facing Wilton Street with a decorative plaster cornice and ornamental fireplace. An enriched archway leads from this room towards a smaller room to the rear, the French window of which gives access to the roof garden/amenity area described at paragraph 2.10 above (**plates 23-26**).

2.15 Turning now to the parts of the house the subject of the pre-application proposals internally, the proposal is simply to turn the existing kitchen (in the rear extension) into a drawing room and the existing dining room at the front of the house into a kitchen diner (**plates 27-31**). The effects of this proposal are discussed in Sections 3.0 and 4.0 below.

2.16 The remainder of the internal proposals relates entirely to the lower ground floor of the house, which was originally the service area of the house (including the kitchen) but has been significantly changed from its original character, form and appearance through conversion of its service areas into bedrooms and bathrooms and associated upgrading of the whole space (including the kitchen) in the later 20th century (**plates**

32-41). Indeed, as the attached drawings at **Appendix 2** show, much of this work dates only to the early 1980s.

2.17 The only element of the lower ground floor to remain essentially unaltered by the existing changes is the staircase leading up to the ground floor. This is constructed of stone with a simple cast-iron handrail and stick balusters (**plates 42-46**).

3.0 ASSESSMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE AND CAPACITY FOR CHANGE

- 3.1 From the historical background, description and analysis of the building provided in Section 2.0 of this report, it will be clear that No.16 Wilton Street is a building of 'special' architectural and historic significance fully deserving of its inclusion at Grade II on the statutory list.
- 3.2 It is no part of this report to call that listing into question.
- 3.3 It is though quite clear that No.16 does not fall into that very small category of listed buildings which cannot be altered or extended in any way without a diminution of their 'special' qualities.
- 3.4 By no means however are all parts of the house of equal significance in heritage terms, and the purpose of this section of the report is therefore to assess the relative significance of the various elements of the building and their 'capacity for change' in heritage terms.
- 3.5 Externally the highest level of significance clearly attaches to the Wilton Street façade, which in common with the rest of the terrace is very much the 'show' elevation; indeed, as noted in Section 2.0 above, both Nos.16 and 23 are further embellished by the use of '*Grecian pedimental attic blocks*'.
- 3.6 As also discussed in Section 2.0 above, the rear elevation of No.16 and the terrace as a whole has, as is usual with terraced London townhouses of this date and type, always been less architecturally distinguished than the front elevation.
- 3.7 Furthermore, it has been significantly altered through the addition of the two-storey flat-roofed extension (at lower ground and ground floor level) in the late 19th century, which has itself been altered through the addition of the canted bay windows under a single lead-seamed lean-to roof in the early 1980s (see **Appendix 2**).

- 3.8 It is also worth noting here that the canted bay projections are concealed from any form of public view by the old, tall London stock brick wall, which forms the boundary between No.16 and the grounds of St. Peter's Church, Eaton Square.
- 3.9 All that said, there can be no denying that the rear elevation of No.16 is as much a part of the listed building as any other, while it also forms part of the setting of St. Peter's Church.
- 3.10 This means that any proposal for significant alteration to the back of No.16 which might challenge the primacy of its original rear elevation (i.e., the wall behind the two-storey extension) and might possibly affect the setting of the church would almost certainly be unacceptable in heritage terms.
- 3.11 There is however ample scope for replacing the existing 1980s projecting bay windows extension, which is in any case hidden from public view.
- 3.12 Likewise, given the extent of late 20th-century change made to the lower ground floor of the house, there should be no obstacle to also carrying out a scheme of appropriate alteration to this part of the house's interior.
- 3.13 The ways in which the pre-application proposals, which have been formulated with a firm understanding of the building's heritage significance in place, serve to 'preserve' the character and setting of the listed building as it currently exists in line with Section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 are considered in the next section of this report.

4.0 THE APPLICATION PROPOSALS AND THE HERITAGE ISSUES

- 4.1 The purpose of this section of the report is to consider the application proposals and to provide them with a robust and sustainable justification in heritage terms. The proposals are effectively limited to a replacement of the existing canted bay window projections (dating only to the early 1980s) attached to the two-storey extension at the rear of the house with new bay windows, and some minor modifications to the lower ground floor, which was also largely reconfigured in the 1980s.
- 4.2 It is also proposed to change the uses of two rooms on the ground floor of the building, while in the area on Wilton Street it is proposed to provide a slight lean-to vestibule extension to the existing internal porch located under the steps leading to the front door (**plates 47-49**).
- 4.3 Beginning with the proposed works to the rear of the property, these are extremely limited in scope, involving the removal of the two rather fussy-looking 1980s canted bay window projections and lead roof above, replacing these with new fully glazed bay windows designed in a contemporary idiom sitting within the footprint of the existing projections.
- 4.4 As part of this proposal, the ground level of the existing yard area (the existing stone paving and steps up to it were introduced as part of the work carried out in the 1980s – see the 1981 drawings at **Appendix 2**) will be reduced (**plates 50-51**).
- 4.5 As is the case with the existing projecting bay windows and lead roof above, the new bay windows will effectively be concealed from public view by the old, high brick wall forming the boundary between No.16 and the grounds and car park of St. Peter's Church, Eaton Square.
- 4.6 Internally, the proposed reconfiguration of the lower ground floor, the layout of which chiefly dates to the work carried out in the 1980s, involves no significant change to plan-form or any loss of historic fixtures and fittings. The fireplaces in both the lower ground floor living room and the existing dining room on the ground floor (proposed to become a kitchen diner) are clearly reproduction 'period' fireplaces (presumably also

installed in the 1980s); in any case, both fireplaces remain *in situ* in the application scheme and are entirely unaffected by the proposals.

- 4.7 Finally, the proposal to provide a slight lean-to vestibule extension to the existing internal porch located under the steps leading to the front door is closely based on the existing arrangement at No.17 (see **plates 47-49**), while the proposal to lower the concrete floor of the vault behind the door to the internal porch will not disturb any historic fabric.
- 4.8 In short, it is my view that the application proposals for No.16 are entirely commendable in heritage terms, and work with rather than against the established character of the listed building.
- 4.9 As such, I can see no material reason in heritage terms why the application proposals should not receive listed building consent.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 For all the reasons set out in the body of this report, it is clear the application proposals are entirely compatible with No.16's status as a Grade II listed building situated in the Belgravia Conservation Area.
- 5.2 As such, the proposals comply with the relevant guidance contained in the NPPF, local planning policy and, most importantly of all, meet the statutory requirements set by Sections 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.



Plate 1. Wilton Street and Wilton Mews elevations of Nos.16-23; No.16 in foreground



Plate 2. The rear elevation of No.16 seen from the grounds of St. Peter's Church, Eaton Square



Plate 3. The rear elevation of No.16 seen from the grounds of St. Peter's Church, Eaton Square



Plate 4. Looking down over the boundary wall separating the grounds of St. Peter's Church, Eaton Square from No.16 to the late 20th-century additions to the rear elevation of No.16



Plate 5. Looking down over the boundary wall separating the grounds of St. Peter's Church, Eaton Square from No.16 to the late 20th-century additions to the rear elevation of No.16



Plate 6. Looking down over the boundary wall separating the grounds of St. Peter's Church, Eaton Square from No.16 to the late 20th-century additions to the rear elevation of No.16



Plate 7. The flank (Wilton Mews) elevation to the rear extension to No.16 and the boundary wall to its rear yard area



Plate 8. The flank (Wilton Mews) elevation to the rear extension to No.16 and the boundary wall to its rear yard area



Plate 9. The flank (Wilton Mews) elevation to the rear extension to No.16 and the boundary wall to its rear yard area



Plate 10. The flank (Wilton Mews) elevation to the rear extension to No.16 and the boundary wall to its rear yard area



Plate 11. The main entrance to St. Peter's Church, Eaton Square is from Belgrave Street



Plate 12. The grounds/car park of St. Peter's Church, Eaton Square



Plate 13. The vestry of St. Peter's Church, Eaton Square backs directly onto the boundary wall separating the grounds of the church from No.16



Plate 14. The vestry of St. Peter's Church, Eaton Square backs directly onto the boundary wall separating the grounds of the church from No.16



Plate 15. Looking from the grounds of St. Peter's Church, Eaton Square towards the rear elevation of No.16



Plate 16. Late 20th-century conservatory-like extensions sit on top of earlier flat-roofed extensions to the rear elevations of Nos.17 & 18



Plate 17. The main staircase, seen from the entrance hall

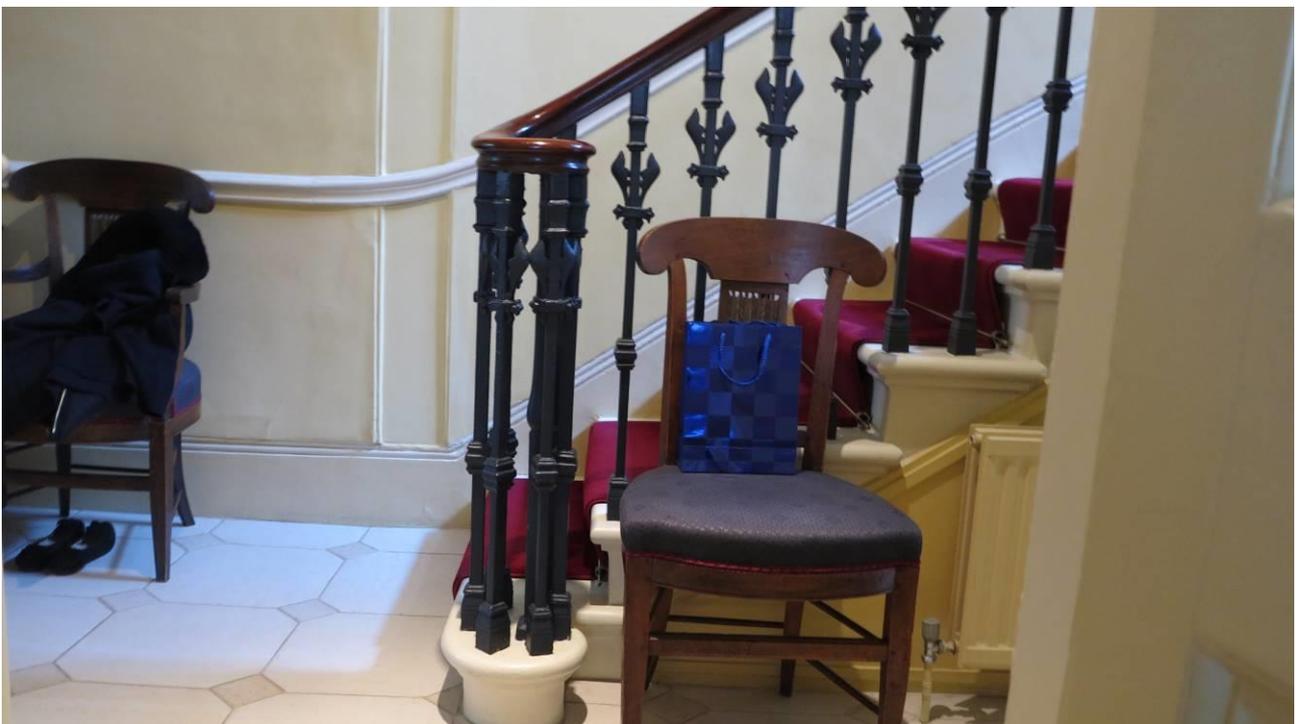


Plate 18. The main staircase, detail of bottom 'newel' and balusters



Plate 19. The main staircase, detail of balusters

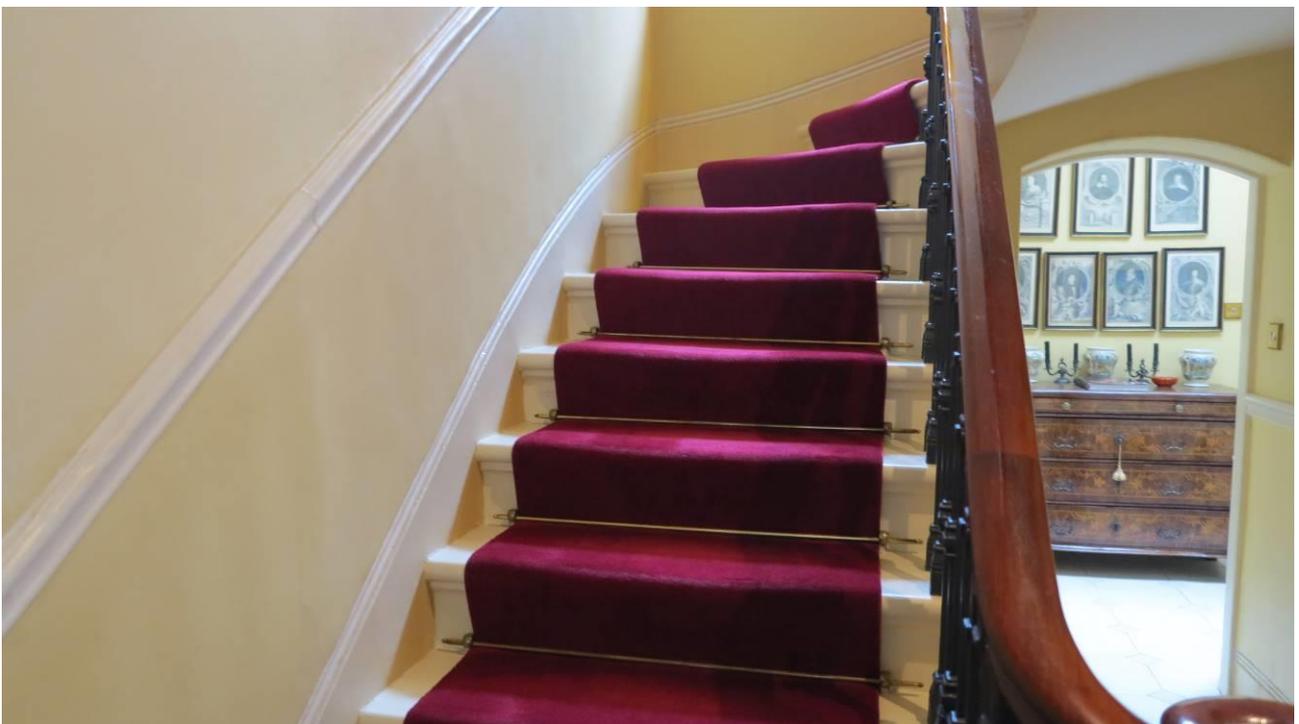


Plate 20. The main staircase, flight from ground floor to first floor



Plate 21. The main staircase, flight from ground floor to first floor showing detail of balusters

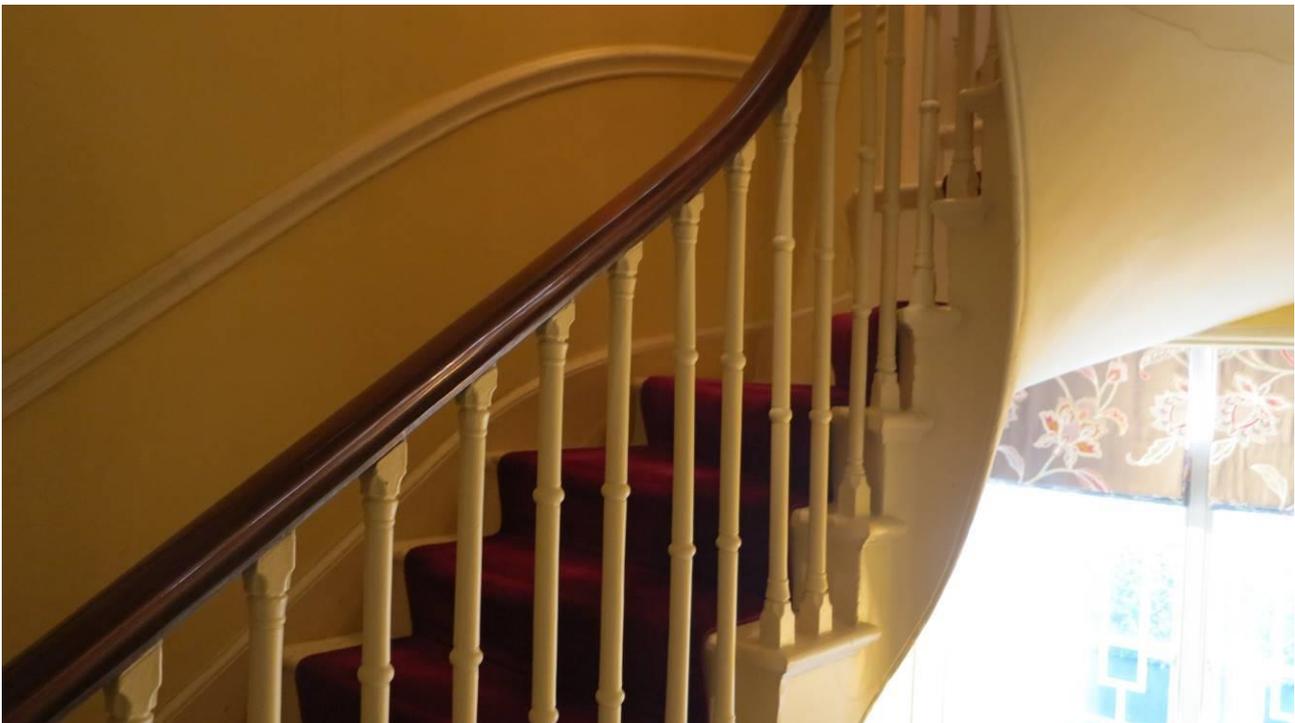


Plate 22. The main staircase, flight from first floor to second floor showing detail of balusters



Plate 23. The principal first-floor room facing Wilton Street

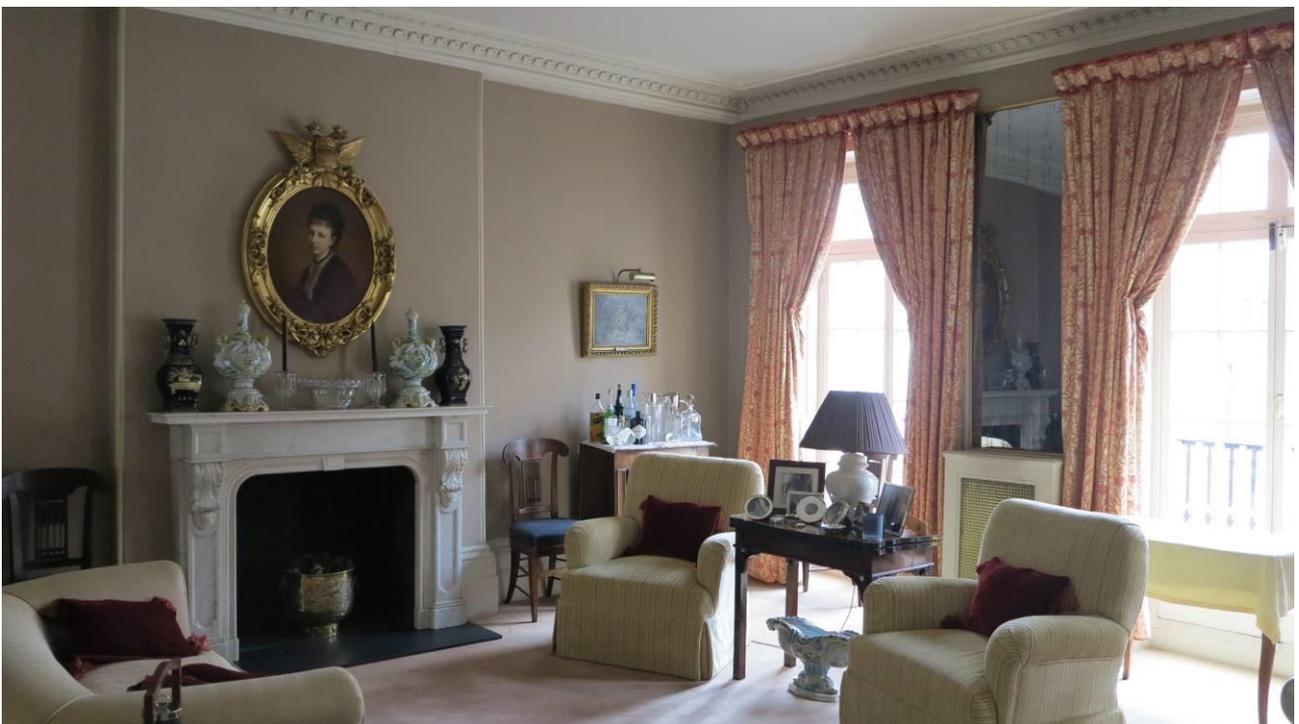


Plate 24. The principal first-floor room facing Wilton Street



Plate 25. Looking from the principal first-floor room facing Wilton Street towards the rear room

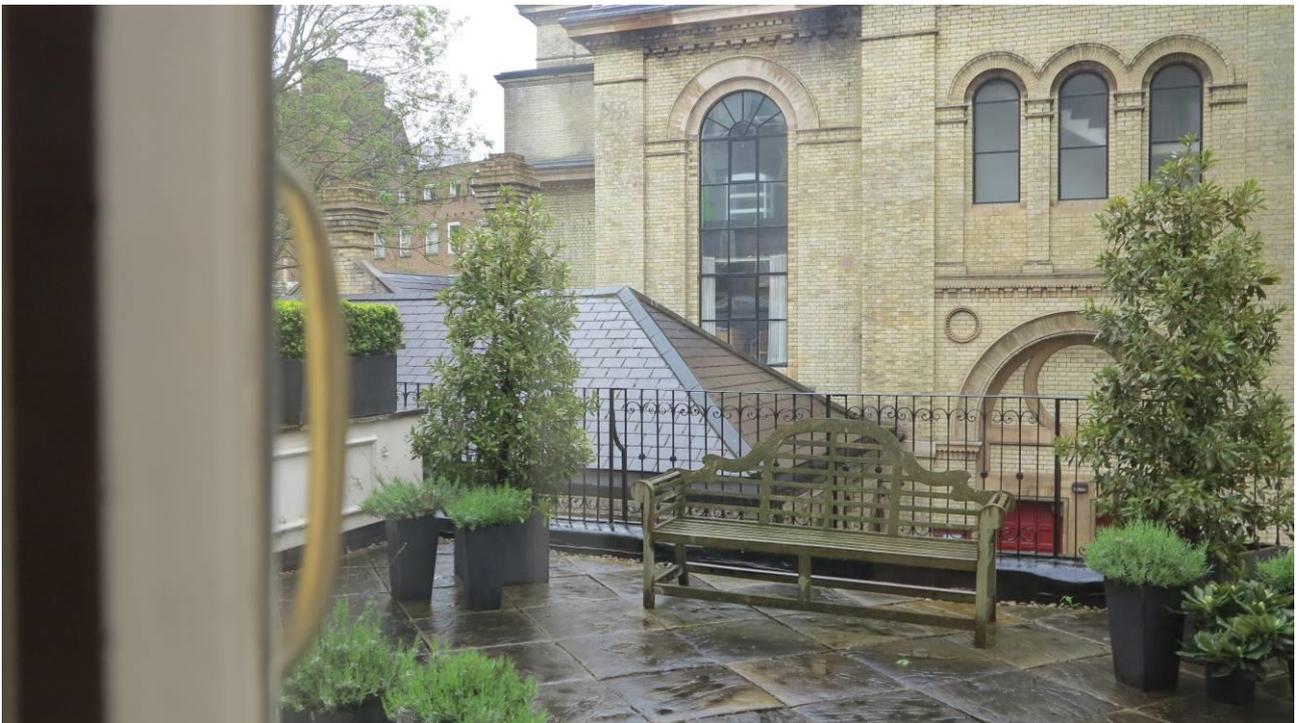


Plate 26. The roof garden/amenity space on the flat-roofed extension is accessed through the French window lighting the rear room in the main part of the house



Plate 27. The existing kitchen



Plate 28. The existing kitchen



Plate 29. The existing kitchen



Plate 30. The existing dining room



Plate 31. The existing dining room

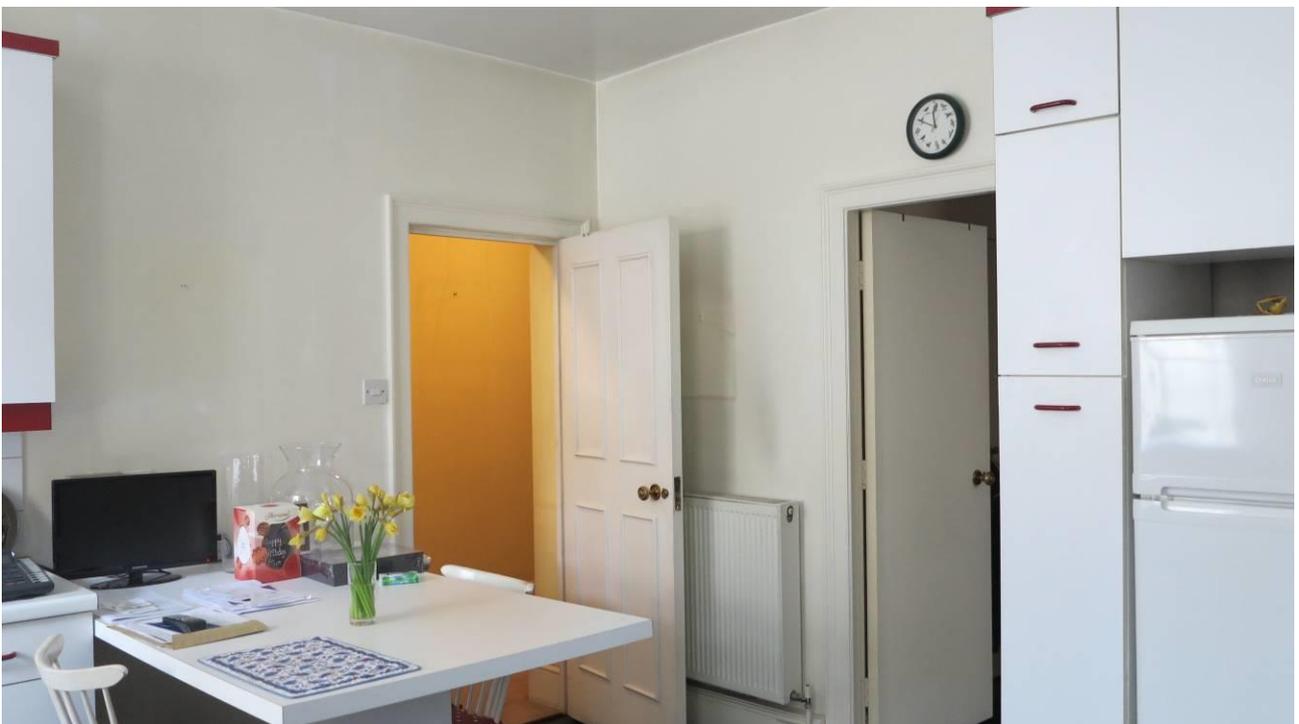


Plate 32. Lower ground floor kitchen



Plate 33. Lower ground floor kitchen



Plate 34. Lower ground floor kitchen



Plate 35. Maid's bedroom



Plate 36. Bathroom adjoining maid's bedroom



Plate 37. Looking from corridor towards living room



Plate 38. Reproduction 'period' fireplace in living room



Plate 39. The 'horns' to the sash windows in the projecting bays to the living room and guest bedroom demonstrate that the bays date to the later 20th century



Plate 40. Looking from the guest bedroom towards the corridor



Plate 41. Bathroom adjoining the guest bedroom

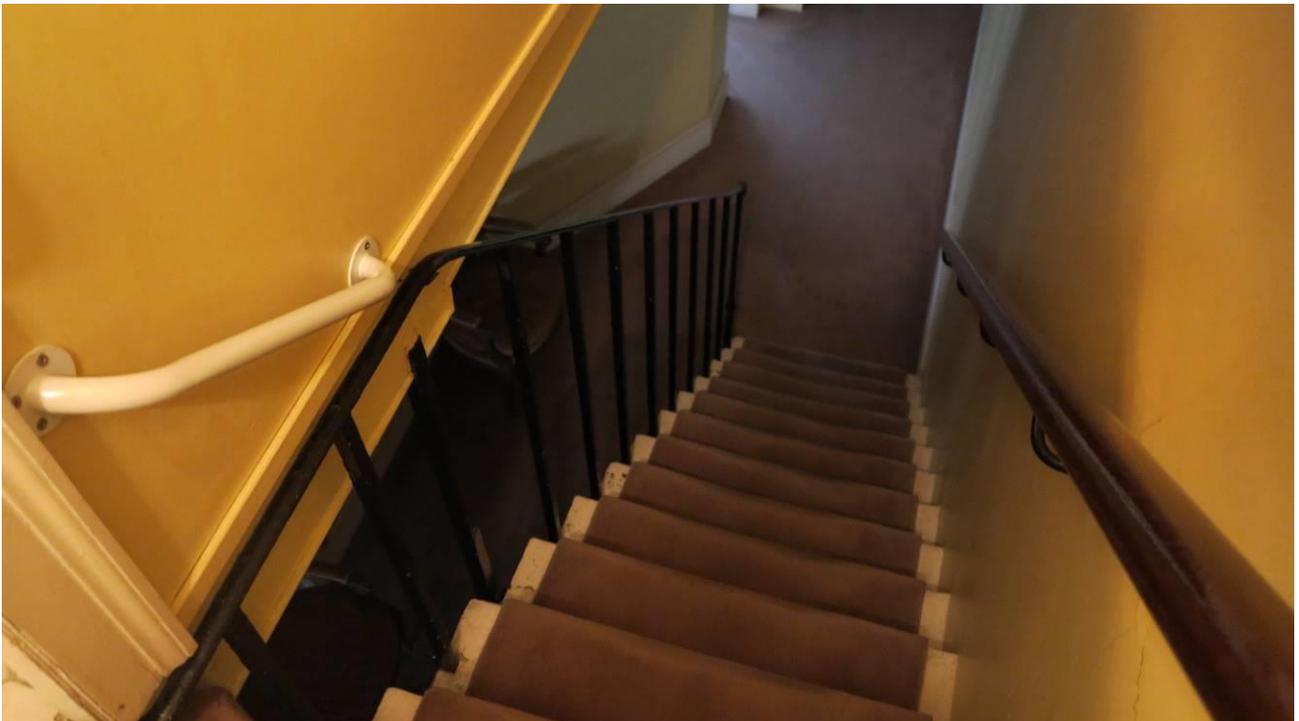


Plate 42. The staircase between the lower ground floor and ground floor



Plate 43. The staircase between the lower ground floor and ground floor

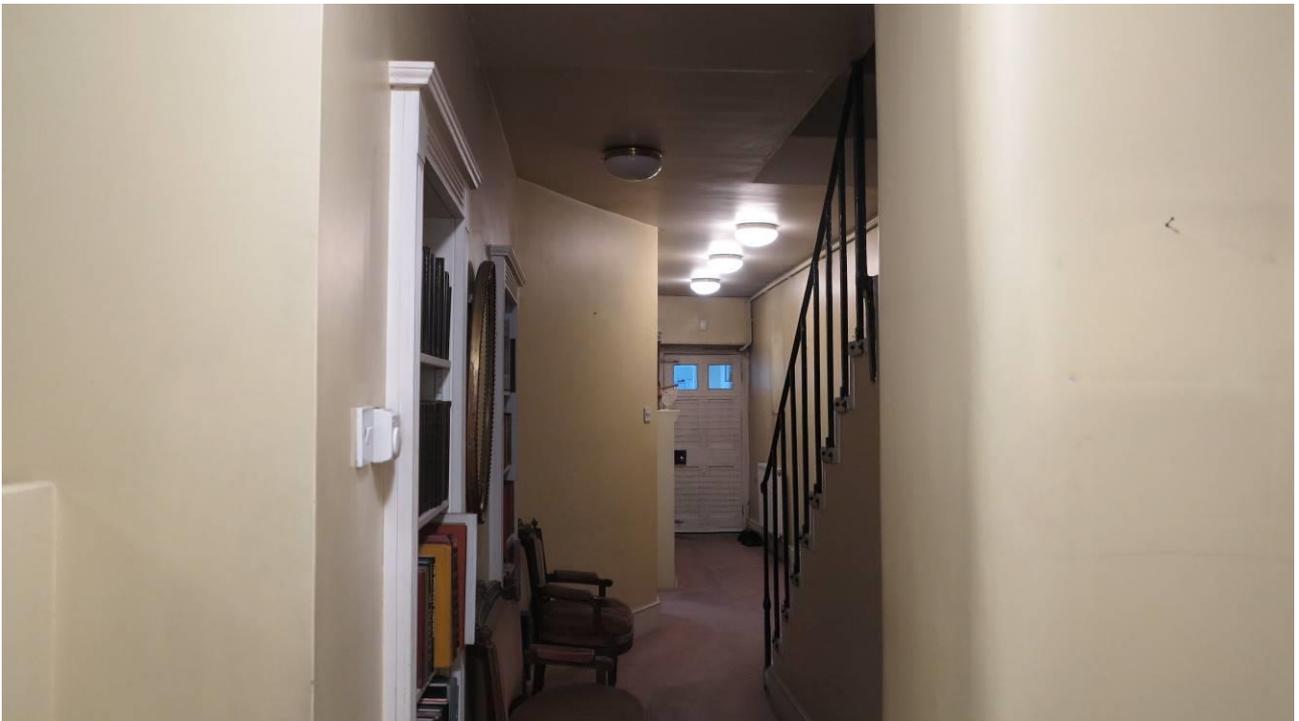


Plate 44. The staircase between the lower ground floor and ground floor



Plate 45. The staircase between the lower ground floor and ground floor



Plate 46. The underside of the staircase is visible in an understairs cupboard



Plate 47. The area to Nos.16 & 17 seen from street level



Plate 48. The existing under steps vestibule at No.16 seen from street level



Plate 49. The existing slightly extended vestibule at No.17



Plate 50. Rear yard area seen through lower ground floor living room



Plate 51. Steps up to rear yard area