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artel31.co.uk · 01249 445656 · 5 Union Road SN15 1HW



Schedule of works undertaken at
53 St Mary Street
Chippenham

Introduction

Artel31 have been appointed to look at various internal works altering the grade 2* listed fabric of 53 St Mary Street. Chippenham. The listing is as follows with interior description in bold:

> *House. Early C18. Flemish-bond red brick, ashlar dressings, hipped stone slate roof with red brick stacks to returns, similar roof to central dormer. Double-depth plan. EXTERIOR: 2 storeys with attic and basement; symmetrical 5-window range. A coved eaves cornice conceals the gutter. 9/6-pane sash windows, some with old glass, have ogee-moulded architraves and bracketed sills, those to the ground floor with cornice, those to the 1st floor dying into the eaves cornice. The 1st floor central window has a moulded archivolt with a mask to the keystone, moulded imposts and radiating glazing bars to top sash. Steps up to the tall pedimented doorcase which has scrolled brackets, a moulded architrave and a 3-pane overlight to a raised-and-fielded 6-panel door. A plaque below the pediment reads "Jn Zealy surgeon". The ashlar plinth is rough to the lower courses. To rear, land falls away toward the river; symmetrical 5-window range with mezzanine staircase window; 3 and 5-light mullioned windows to basement and ground floor; timber 5-light mullioned dormers.* ***INTERIOR: not inspected but known to include original staircase and some panelled rooms. A fine early C18 town house exhibiting an early use (for this region) of brick.***

Works undertaken:

1. Floor boards (some historic) have been lifted on the first floor and then the historic floor structure has been packed to remove some of the sagging that has occurred over the years. All historic fabric is retained and there is not considered to be any harm to the asset through the rehabilitation of the sagging floor to allow the continuing usage of the space.

A small section of floor has been replaced due to degradation, the new piece needs still to be aged in to allow a blending with the historic floor which has been altered a large number of times through the years with significant numbers of infill portions patched into the wider planks or replacing portions of the more historic floor. The replacement piece is un-treated pine to match the existing floor and has been retained in the exact form of the original, to ensure a clear legibility of the historic placing of the original wall (see image 3)



Image 1: the floorboards as re-laid

2. A circa 1000x2700 section of internal stud partition has been removed, the owners believed it not to be original because of the configuration of the windows to the front elevation, a position potentially supported by the floorboards which ran under the wall as removed. However, it was apparently, at east in parts, plaster and lathe which would have made it pre 1940's no evidence of the walls construction remains and as such it is very hard to definitively ascertain its age or importance.



Image 2: previous sole plate location on floor

3. A lateral non load bearing wall has been added to form a front corridor, ‘allowing a better appreciation of the central window’ from the communal areas and re-balancing the façade on plan. The owners point out a clear infill portion of flooring which does suggest a wall ran parallel to this wall at some point historically



Image 3: Light toned infill timber replacing a piece that was rotten but clearly shows the likely location of a wall prior its removal historically.

As part of this work the owners have re-completed the cornicing to ensure both rooms have complete cornicing and the dado rail is complete. This has been done to match the original cornice and dado both in appearance and materiality.

4. Radiator pipes have been moved to allow the re-hanging of a radiator previously hung on the lateral wall now removed. As shown in the image 3 above.
The original holes are shown in image 2. No structure was removed to facilitate this move with the pipes being run in the void formed by the packing of the floor.

5. Various elements are in the process of being re-decorated, sympathetic historic colours and paints from V&A and F&B have been chosen and appear appropriate for the asset’s age and stature.

The final image on the next page shows the corridor as created to the front elevation.



Image 4: the corridor as createdbuilt.

Conclusion

We are not able to comment on the acceptability of the changes as undertaken by the owners of 53 st mary street, however the concept that the form is more original for the property is looked at more fully below.

The main portion of this building appears to have been constructed in the early 1800's when plans were still arranged symmetrically (the picturesque movement had not yet discarded the idea of formality on plan) but the idea of enfilade had been rejected and instead rooms were arranged around a central circulation core. To the first floor the dining and drawings rooms were mostly isolated in grander houses by another space to minimise the noise from the dining room disturbing the occupants of the drawing room. The central corridor was often brought right from the back to the front of the house to allow light and so all occupants could see people arriving at the front of the house without disturbing the occupants of the rooms to either side.

This is further supported through the unique nature of the front central window which matches neither room and the indication of a historic wall sole plate in the floorboards. In our professional opinion on the weight of probabilities the original floor plan was more likely similar to the one now proposed by the present owners and this change benefits the house to that end, the work has been done in a sympathetic manner to the importance of the asset with fully matching traditional mouldings and paint colours. Ideally services would have been housed in the new wall rather than brought out through the floorboards, and potentially moving the pipes to the wall and plugging the holes (both new and historic) would benefit the historic floorboards.