

Heritage Statement (Addendum)

42 Southwood Lane, London N6 5EB

Analysis of Upper Stair



March 2023

1.0 Introduction

This analysis of the upper part of the stair in 42 Southwood Lane, Highgate in the London Borough of Haringey was commissioned in March 2023 by Retrouvius Architects to amplify a Heritage Statement on the building. Both reports were prepared by Neil Burton BA FSA IHBC, a director of The Architectural History Practice Ltd.

42 Southwood Lane, Highgate (National Grid Reference TQ 28398 87616) is part of a continuous terrace of houses which was probably built in the early 1830s. The terrace was listed grade II in May 1974. The whole of Southwood Lane also lies within the Highgate Conservation area in the Borough of Haringey.

2.0 Brief Development History and Description

(A fuller account can be found in the Heritage Statement by AHP)

On 23 April 1835 the *Morning Herald* newspaper carried an advertisement for the sale of, 'A very eligible estate, held for 70 years from 1834, consisting of thirteen brick built and very neatly finished private residences with gardens, numbers 1-13 in Southwood Terrace, Southwood Lane Highgate, commanding most delightful views, and about half an acre of garden ground walled on two sides, let to highly respectable tenants...'

These thirteen houses correspond to the present numbers 24-48 Southwood Lane and it seems clear that they were built as a single terrace at some time between 1813 (when the Haringey Enclosure Award map shows an empty site) and 1834. Since apparently the leases of all the houses date from 1834 they were probably built in 1n that year or shortly before. The whole terrace was originally known as Southwood Terrace and the present number 42 Southwood Lane was originally number 10 Southwood Terrace. The present street numbering was adopted in the mid-1880s.

42 Southwood Lane consists of three storeys above a basement and has a version of the standard London terrace house plan, with a front and back room on each floor linked by the stair. The most common terrace house planform has the staircase at the rear of the house but here the staircase is placed at the front of the house immediately inside the front door. Unusually, the two rooms on the second floor at the top of the house are tall and well-proportioned and fitted out with moulded plaster cornices more elaborate than anything now surviving on the lower floors.

The stair is made of timber with plain cut treads, stick balusters and a moulded handrail. It rises from the basement to the second floor in a series of straight flights with winders at top and bottom of each flight and serves a passage-landing on all floors. At first floor level the handrail has been cut and pieced to allow the insertion of a fluted timber post which supported a modern cupboard inserted into the stair-well. This cupboard also constricted the width of the very steep stair from first to second floor which has a closed string and no handrail until the second floor landing.

3.0 Analysis of the First to Second Floor Stair

The present stair from first to second floor is oddly narrow (figs. 1 & 2). It is set hard against the party wall with number 40 Southwood Lane and a principal joist against the party wall has been cut short to allow the stair a few inches of greater width (fig.3). On the second floor landing there is a small lobby enclosing the doors to the front and rear rooms. The lobby has a moulded plaster cornice like those in the rooms and is clearly an early feature, possibly original. On the north side of the lobby is a door-opening with a plaster moulded surround on the stair-well side (fig.4). The door is now blocked and reduced in width by the insertion of a modern timber upright, but would once have opened directly onto the open well of the stair. Alongside is a doorway with a modern timber surround which opens onto the landing. Clearly there has been some alteration.

More substantial evidence of alteration can be seen in a cupboard opening off the stair at its mid-point. The ceiling of the cupboard is formed by the boards of the second floor landing, and these are supported on modern joists which have been treated or tanalised – a process only invented in the 1930s (fig.6). The inner or east side of the cupboard is formed by horizontal edge-to-edge boarding which has been painted a cream colour and was once clearly exposed to view (fig.5).

From inside the cupboard it is possible to see the rear of the stair itself, which is at least partly made up with mismatched pieces of modern timber (fig.7). Other treads and risers may have been shortened when the stair was narrowed. The boards of the second floor landing certainly show signs of alteration, with irregular joints and signs of piecing-in.

From all this evidence it seems reasonable to conclude that the stair in its present form is fairly modern and certainly not original. The modern timber joists and the horizontal boarding surviving in the cupboard half way up the stair suggest that there was previously a much wider stair-well, the width of two flights of stairs. The blocked doorway with its plaster surround on the second floor landing shows that the landing once extended over the present stair well to allow access to the door.

The original form of the stair itself is not wholly clear but it was certainly wider than the present stair and probably rose in two flights, either with winders or with a landing across the first floor window. Such an arrangement may seem clumsy but is not uncommon.

It may seem odd to have such a generous stair to the upper floor, which in most Georgian houses was usually occupied by servants, but in this case the upper floor rooms are tall and have handsome moulded plaster cornices, which suggests a high-status use which would have demanded a dignified approach.

Comparison with other houses in the terrace has not proved helpful. Most of the houses are only two storeys in front, most now with mansard roofs which are probably not original features.. Number 38, which is one of the three central houses along with numbers 40 and 42 has a completely different arrangement of the top flight of the stair, which rises away from the front of the house and originally opened into the south-facing rear room.

The possible date of alterations to the upper part of the stair in number 42 is not clear. According to the present owner of the house, various alterations were made by her grandfather in the 1960s or 1970s. Listed Building Consent was granted in 1976 to replace and enlarge three windows in the front of the house and some internal alterations may have been made at the same time, but this is by no means certain.

Summary Conclusion

The present stair from first to second floor is not original but is probably a twentieth century alteration. There are several clear indications that it replaced, or was adapted from, an earlier stair of different form in a wider stairwell, of which elements survive.



Fig.1: The first floor landing showing the lower part of the upper stair



Fig.2: The stair at second floor level



Fig.3: view of the stairwell showing a truncated joist against the party wall resting on a small padstone, and above it the base of the moulded surround to the doorway which now faces onto the stairwell



Fig.4: The second floor landing, showing the blocked and truncated former door opening in the lobby to the two main rooms.



Fig.5: The interior of the cupboard on the stair under what is now the second floor landing, showing the vertical horizontal boarding of what was probably the original stairwell.



Fig.6: The underside of the second floor landing from the cupboard on the stair, showing the modern joists and also some modern Fletton brickwork in the front wall of the house



Fig.7: The upper winders of the upper stair, made of odd pieces of modern timber with some plywood.



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