

7-15 Fleet Street, London



Buildings Analysis



Oxford Archaeology

April 2003

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**Nos 7 – 15 Fleet Street
Fleet Street, London**

Historic Building Analysis of Staircase

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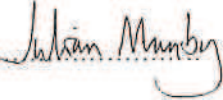
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Illustrated by Rosemary Wheeler, Ben Jeffs

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NOS 7 – 15 FLEET STREET LONDON

HISTORIC BUILDING ANALYSIS OF STAIRCASE

SUMMARY

Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out archaeological analysis and record of the second staircase at Nos 7 – 15 Fleet Street, London. The analysis was carried out in order to assess the condition of the staircase, and if any of its elements could be saved and incorporated into the rebuild of a new staircase. The first examination was on 8th October 2001, at Fleet Street, with the staircase in-situ. The second examination was on 3rd October 2002, at Wallis Joinery, Maidstone, with the staircase dismantled. This report details the findings of both visits in the form of a brief condition survey, undertaken with an archaeological perspective. It was decided that due to the condition of the staircase, it would be best to reconstruct it using new materials for the majority, but to incorporate the original spindles and banister rails, to preserve some sense of the original.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by BBF Fielding, to carry out an historic building analysis of the second staircase of Nos 7-15 Fleet Street, London (NGR: TQ 3105 8105). (Figs 1 and 2)

1.1.2 The purpose of the work was to record the original structure of the staircase, prior to repair works being carried out on the building. Late 20th-century office details were being removed, and the original 19th-century interiors being renovated, with the staircase being restored. This will entail the replacement of a large part of the original timbers, to rebuild the staircase in its original form. Therefore it was felt necessary to record the staircase so that it could be reconstructed.

1.2 Methodology

1.2.1 The investigation was undertaken during two site visits. The first visit was on 8th October 2001, on site, to see the staircase in-situ. The last visit was on 3rd October 2002 to Wallis Joinery, Maidstone, to see the staircase dismantled. The recording was primarily of a photographic nature using 35 mm film (black and white prints and colour slides). Additional descriptive and analytical notes were also made. A section was drawn at 1:20 scale, of the entire staircase, and details were drawn at 1:10. Field notes and sketches were also made.

1.2.2 A site archive including the photographs, negatives, site notes, the current document and other documentary material will be deposited with the Museum of London, or other agreed body.

2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 The site

- 2.1.1 Nos 7-15 Fleet Street was one of the units of a terrace block, built in the 19th century. During the second half of the 20th century, the unit was converted into offices. Mezzanine floors and partition walls were added, making smaller offices, with false floors and ceilings, thereby disguising the original height and size of the rooms.

3 THE SECOND STAIRCASE

3.1 Location

- 3.1.1 The second staircase rises from the ground floor through to the second floor of the building. The staircase appears to have been inserted into a rectangular stairwell. This stairwell was bounded by a masonry wall of a ground floor room, but was successively defined by stud walls that do not appear to have been load-bearing.

3.2 Structure

- 3.2.1 The staircase is entirely of wood and consists of treads, risers, turned newels and spindles, carved banisters, supports and laminated strings. The timber used appears to be Baltic pine.
- 3.2.2 The treads measure 225 x 30mm x 1140mm; the fillets measure 35 x 15mm; the risers measure 145 x 30mm; the supports measure 2060 x 80 x 140 mm; an example of the straight strings measures 1900 x 260 x 37.5mm.
- 3.2.3 The construction of the staircase employed grooved treads that were secured together with fillets. The treads were fixed to the risers by screws running through the treads up into the underside of the risers.
- 3.2.4 The upper sides of all the stair elements were painted, and left unpainted on the undersides.
- 3.2.5 Plaster mouldings were applied to the joining between the treads and the wall and also between the banister and the wall. The plaster appears to be constructed of a course under-layer and a smoother top layer, which was painted.

4 CONDITION SUMMARY

4.1 Overall Comments

- 4.1.1 The second staircase (staircase 2) within 7 – 15 Fleet Street is in a significantly deteriorated condition, and was thought not be repairable without complete dismantling.
- 4.1.2 Many of the members appeared to be very worn and damaged. Wet and dry rot had also manifested itself in a majority of the timber.

4.2 **Survival of the Stair Elements**

- 4.2.1 Individual components were significantly intact. Some 90% of spindles were complete and in situ. The handrail was almost entirely undamaged and some 70 % of treads and risers appeared sound.
- 4.2.2 These figures are, however indicative of the in-situ condition of the components and it was unlikely that these figures would remain at this level after the dismantling.
- 4.2.3 Many of the flat board components displayed splits, which although they presented no problems within the structure, would render the components unusable after the staircase was dismantled.
- 4.2.4 It was observed during the Maidstone visit, that since the dismantling, some laminated elements had indeed split, while others had not survived without getting damaged during the process.
- 4.2.5 In addition, it was clear to see the extent of wet and dry rot in many of the members, after dismantling; that was not visible while they were in-situ.

4.3 **Joints**

- 4.3.1 The greatest degree of deterioration was to be found in the joints of the structural timbers beneath the skin of the staircase, where they attached to the stud walls, rather than the load bearing masonry wall to the Fleet Street side.
- 4.3.2 The cantilevering had failed, leaving many of the individual steps hanging without support from the adjacent studwork. The exact extent of actual physical movement of the joints could not be assessed without further opening up and some element of dismantling.
- 4.3.3 However it was clear from the current slope of the stairs and lack of rigidity, that most of the steps affixed to the studwork had failed.
- 4.3.4 This failure seems to be partly due to a poor design and partly due to modern alterations to surrounding structures rather than fabric deterioration.
- 4.3.5 The joints fixing the steps to the stud did not appear to have been sufficiently braced, to provide support for the weight of the staircase. Neither had the design transferred sufficient load down the line of the steps and around the corners to the ground floor or to load bearing masonry.

5 **CONCLUSIONS**

- 5.1.1 Due to the inherent design flaw in the stairs, and the significant proportion of the stairs that needed to be lifted, it would have been inappropriate to attempt repairs in-situ.
- 5.1.2 The general synopsis made by Wallis Joinery, was that all the treads and risers would have to be replaced, amongst other elements. (Wallis)

- 5.1.3 Furthermore, to try and integrate the old materials with the new would have led to problems of shrinkage, etc. It was decided that this would have been less than satisfactory, on structural and possibly aesthetic grounds.
- 5.1.4 Therefore, it was decided that the original spindles, newels and banisters, which appeared to represent the most sound elements of the staircase, would be re-used in the new construction. This was perceived as preserving some of the appearance and history of the original staircase.
- 5.1.5 Aside from the obvious scope of the works, some further engineering solution must be sought to provide greater anchorage for the steps currently hung on the stud walls.

APPENDIX 1 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

OAU, 2002 *7-15 Fleet Street, London*. Watching Brief Report

D WILKINSON ED, 1992, *OAU FIELDWORK MANUAL*

WALLIS 2002 *Report on the Staircase at 7-15 Fleet Street*.

Oxford Archaeology

April 2003

Post Medieval period - This building was built during the Nineteenth century, on a tenement plot of medieval date. The current office fittings date to late Twentieth century.

7) **NATURAL** (state if not observed; please DO NOT LEAVE BLANK) Not observed during this analysis - see FTTWB site report.

Type:

Height above Ordnance Datum:

8) LOCATION OF ARCHIVES

a) Please indicate those categories still in your possession:

<u>Notes</u>	<u>Plans</u>	<u>PHotos</u>	<u>NGatives</u>
<u>SLides</u>	<u>CORrespondence</u>	<u>Mscripts (unpub reports, etc)</u>	
Bulk finds	Small finds	Soil samples	
Other (please specify)			

b) The archive has been prepared and stored in accordance with MGC standards and has been deposited in the following location:

c) Has a security copy of the archive been made?: YES will be arranged

d) Have you arranged for RCHME microfilming?: NO

9) BIBLIOGRAPHY

OAU, 2002 *7-15 Fleet Street, London. Watching Brief Report*

D WILKINSON ED, 1992, *OAU FIELDWORK MANUAL*

WALLIS 2002 *Report on the Staircase at 7-15 Fleet Street.*

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NAME (Block capitals):

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Figure 2: Site location

7-15 Fleet Street,
London
FTTBS

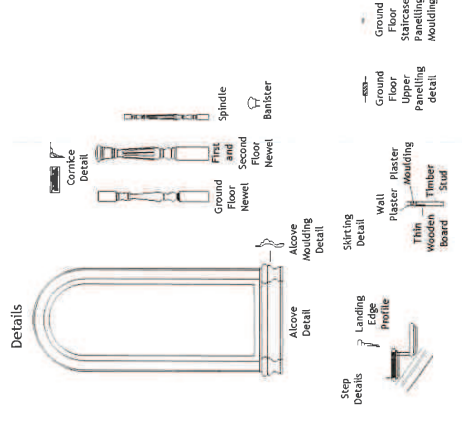
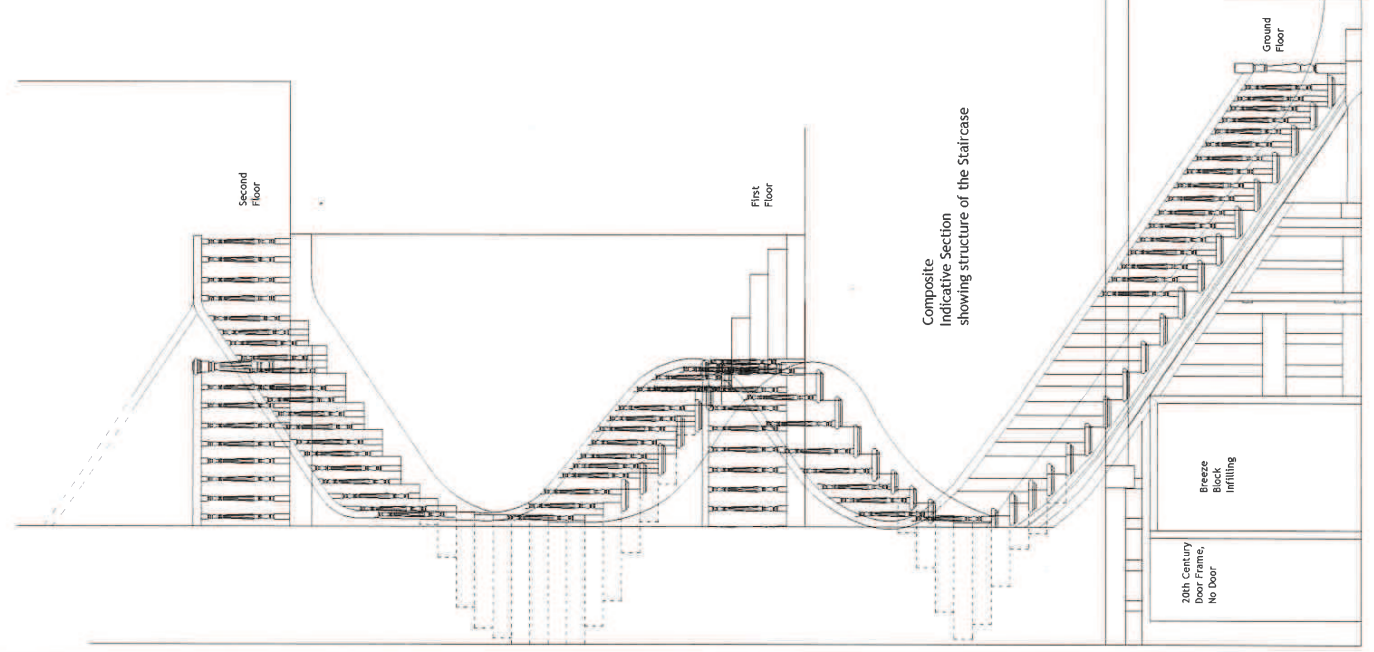
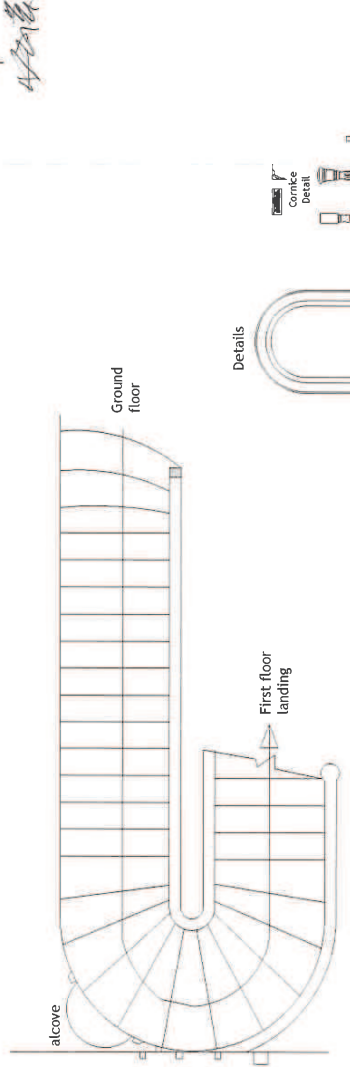
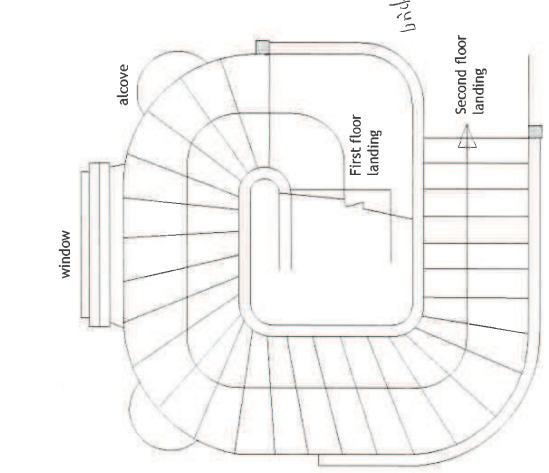
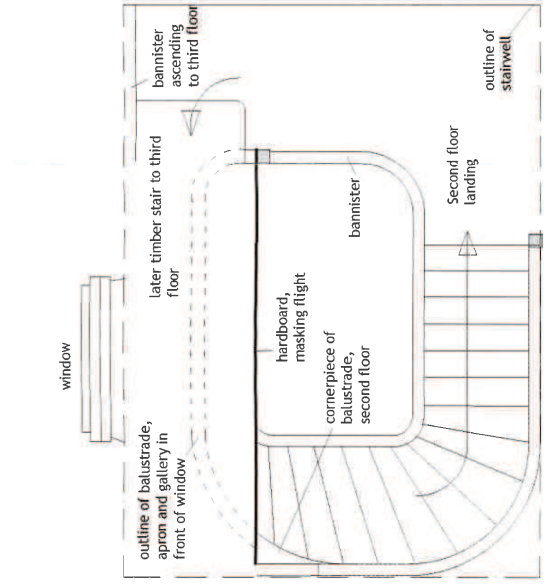
Key
— Stair details
— Hidden details
— Conjectural details
— Direction of ascending stairs

Title
The second staircase,
composite section,
plans and details.

Scale at
A3
1:50

Drawing
No.
Figure 2

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1 Ground floor, first flight



2 First flight up to first alcove



3 First alcove, on first turn



4 Second flight leading to First floor



5 Third flight, leading to fourth



6 Fifth flight leading up to Second floor



7 Corner of fifth flight



8 Sixth flight to Second floor



9 Second floor



10 Second floor



11 Second floor

Figure 3: Views of the staircase in-situ



12 Stairs in-situ, looking down from Second floor



13 Moulding and underside of treaders



14 Underside of treaders



15 Curved string element, splitting after dismantling



16 Straight string



17 Curved string

Figure 4: Elements of the staircase, before and after dismantling



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