



Gads Hill School, Gads Hill Place. Gravesend Road. Higham. Rochester. ME3 7PA

Project ref: 5516

Helical Stair - Heritage Report



P001 – ground floor view thru centre of helical stair

DAC Architects are working with the school to identify and address priority maintenance issues that require attention within the school premises to assist in creating a continued safe environment for the school to operate within. The building is Grade 1 Listed and so intervention to the school fabric will require extensive engagement with the LPA and conservation officer in the majority of cases.

The investigation work to the stair forms part of this wider brief.

Further to the consideration of future operational needs of the school and in response to some of the repair work proposed consideration of how the school will need to adapt and change in response to its environment will be established in the short to medium term.

James Folley from Alan Baxter Associates is the consulting structural engineer working with the school and DAC Architects to support this process.

Heritage

Situated in the village of Higham in Gravesham borough, Gad's Hill Place is a three-storey with basement, double-bay fronted mansion built in 1779 by Thomas Stevens, a former mayor of Rochester.

Currently used as a the upper school building for Gad's Hill School, the mansion occupies a 9.25 acre site along the A226, Gravesend Road. The mansion is a site of national and international historic and cultural significance because Charles Dickens lived at Gad's Hill Place as his main home from 1857 until his death in 1870.

While living at Gad's Hill Place Dickens wrote some of his most important works including Great Expectations, Our Mutual Friend, A Tale of Two Cities and the unfinished Mystery of Edwin Drood.

The building is Grade I Listed.

The helical stair so named due to its sweeping form is of some note and likely formed part of the original house; Dickens daughter may also well have painted the infill panels between alternate balustrade spindles which were removed. It is presumed this work was implemented to imprint a personal style and express the individual taste of the author.

It has been previously established that the stair requires further investigation to ensure its longevity; this therefore is a Listed Building Application for structural investigations to be carried out to enable the further inspection of the helical stair.

The opening up works are to the underside of the plaster stair soffit at the indicated location from ground to first floor level. The area is to be cut out to the full width of the stair to expose stair support connections at the wall interface and to report condition of stairs, stringers and joinery connections of the stair.

The exposed area is to be provided with removable white plaster panel with ply backing to allow investigations to be carried out and concluded.

Subject to the findings a further stage of work of remedial / repair work will be forthcoming.

It is noted that we have met with the conservation officer Allan Cox to discuss the project and that we have discussed the work with Katherine Parkin and Rebecca Harrison of the LPA; noting a number of other listed building applications either approved or pending consideration associated with the school.



*P02 - baluster spindle with hand painted infill [painted stencil by Dickens daughter Kate]
alternate balustrade spindle were removed in their place, Dickens had custom fretwork wooden panels inserted.
These decorative panels were then beautifully hand-painted by his daughter, Katey (Kate Dickens)*



P03 – detail view of original balustrade and protective pine balustrade



P04 – detail view of original handrail and balustrade

Leslie D May [Architect]

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