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18 Lady Lane, Waterford City.

Plasterwork report.



Summary

No. 18 Lady Lane is a notable mid-eighteenth-century townhouse in Waterford City, dating to around 1750. It is a five-bay, three-storey over basement Georgian building of balanced proportions, distinguished externally by a cut-limestone Doric doorcase approached by stone steps and by its windows having classical detailed architraves on moulded windowsills and the ground floor architraves being of the lugged type with a central keystone. Internally, the house retains the finest surviving Rococo-style decorative plasterwork in both the city and county of Waterford, with three principal rooms containing elaborate mid-eighteenth-century ceilings. The panelled staircase hall also survives as a significant interior feature.

For much of the twentieth century, the property was occupied as a men's hostel operated by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and in 1975 a utilitarian extension was added to the rear. The hostel use continued until 2012, after which the building fell into decline. In 2015, a fire severely damaged the roof structure and led to localised collapse of some of the ornamental plaster ceilings. Emergency stabilisation works were subsequently undertaken in 2016 to safeguard the most vulnerable features.

Recognising its architectural and historic importance, Waterford City and County Council acquired the property with the intention of securing its future. Under the current heritage-led regeneration programme, funding has been allocated for its repair and adaptive reuse. The building is to be restored and conserved as part of a cultural project, with proposals for its reuse as a visitor attraction known as *Tír na nÓg*, celebrating the heritage of children and youth while preserving the integrity of its historic fabric.



Drawing room ceiling 1926.

G.01 Parlour

A single-bay room fronts the street and is entered directly from the entrance hall. Historically, such rooms were often referred to as ‘street parlours’ and, due to their proximity to the entrance, commonly served either as waiting rooms for visitors or as business rooms where the householder could receive clients without admitting them to the principal accommodation. The plan form has been altered by the insertion of a large steel shuttered opening into the rear room, although the space remains substantially intact complete with a chunky plain run cornice.



Chimney breast cornice.



Cornice corner detail.

G.02 Entrance Hall

The room is arranged in three bays, with a centrally positioned entrance door in the north wall and a corresponding centrally positioned door in the south wall leading through to the staircase hall. Additional doors in the east and west walls provide access to the former ‘street parlour’ and the secondary staircase. The space was, until recently, subdivided to form two office/reception units flanking the entrance; these partitions have now been largely removed, apart from a retained section housing fuseboards and associated services.

The interior retains a finely moulded cornice of mid-eighteenth-century date, executed in three distinct sections. The lower section comprises a narrow-moulded band enriched with flattened leaf ornament, above which the central portion is formed as a plain cove. The upper section incorporates waterleaf mouldings to the lower edge and an egg-and-dart moulding above.

The ceiling is flat and of lath-and-plaster construction, enclosed within a simple moulded frame with lobed corners. At the centre is a large acanthus centrepiece, encircled by two concentric moulded bands. Between these bands runs a lace-like frieze of interlocking C-scrolls forming oval and diamond-shaped compartments with intermediary rosettes.

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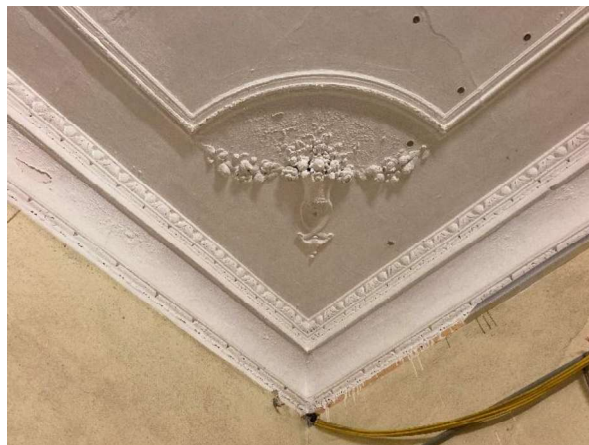
Surrounding the centrepiece are garlands and radiating pendants of delicate foliage and flowers, while additional floral garlands and baskets of flowers extend to link the lobed corners of the ceiling.



View of ceiling showing restraint works.



Cornice detail.



Flower basket enrichment.

G.03

Storage room, no significant decorative detail.



G.04 Drawing Room

A large reception room extends into a deep bow at the rear of the house and was probably designed as the Drawing Room when the property was first constructed. It is entered from the staircase hall and, via a modern opening, from the adjoining street parlour (Room G.01). The walls are finished in plain plaster, painted, and are notable for their elaborate ornamental panelling. This panelling is executed in plaster, applied directly to the wall surfaces, and arranged in a series of raised and fielded panels with round-arched heads. Over the doorway to the staircase hall and to the chimneybreast, the panels are rectangular, flat rather than raised, and framed by an ornamental lugged surround enriched with waterleaf mouldings and rosettes. The chimneybreast panel is further embellished with a plaster garland of flowers.

The cornice is conceived as a full entablature, comprising an enriched architrave, frieze, and cornice. The architrave is decorated with waterleaf ornament, while the frieze is filled with scrolling acanthus rinceau, floral garlands, and alternating motifs of baskets, ewers, and urns. The cornice, executed in the Corinthian manner, incorporates tiered bands of waterleaf ornament, dentils, and egg-and-dart moulding beneath a row of acanthus-backed modillions alternating with carved flower heads; its upper section is more plainly moulded.

The ceiling is of particular significance: an important example of mid-eighteenth-century Rococo decorative plasterwork. The design is arranged in an arabesque pattern formed by concentric bands of hand-modelled ornament. The outer band consists of interlocking acanthus leaves, S-scrolls and acanthus-tufted C-scrolls terminating in cornucopias and vases or baskets of flowers; certain scrolls adjacent to the window are enriched with rocaille (rock-like encrustations). The central band comprises garlands of fruit and flowers borne aloft by birds in flight. Within the bow, the outer band incorporates two S-shaped panels

filled with diaper work, seamlessly extending the composition into the curved end of the room.



Bow end of room.



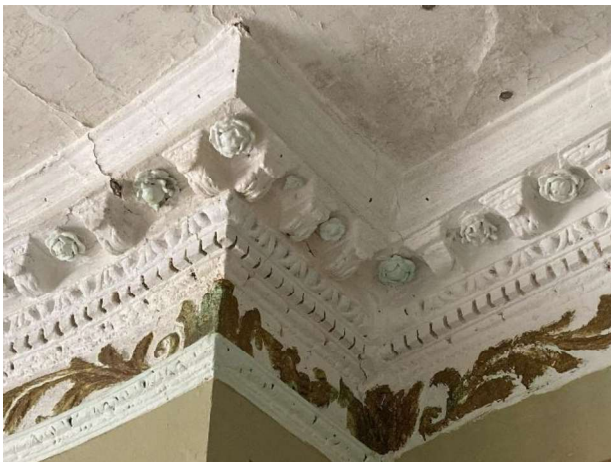
View of wall panelling.



Panel over door.



Chimneybreast panel.



Cornice corner detail.



View of rococo ceiling detail.

G.05 Staircase Hall & 1.09 Stairwell

A centrally positioned stair hall located to the rear of the house, lit by a large round-arched half-landing window. Above the window there is an oculus from which there are traces of garlands dropping down to two blocked niches, one of which appears to have a bust in-situ. The space contains the principal staircase of the house, rising as far as the first-floor landing. This arrangement is characteristic of more substantial town houses, in which a separate staircase would have provided access to the service quarters in the basement and the family rooms on the second floor, while the principal staircase was reserved for visitors to the ground- and first-floor reception rooms.

At ground-floor level, the cornice is executed in the Ionic style with bands of dentils and waterleaf ornament. The first-floor cornice is more elaborate, arranged in three parts with a lower band of waterleaf, a plain cove, and an upper section enriched with alternating bands of waterleaf and egg-and-dart moulding. The walls are articulated by a dado rail aligned with the staircase; the surfaces below finished in smooth plaster and the panels above expressed as a series of raised and fielded panels.



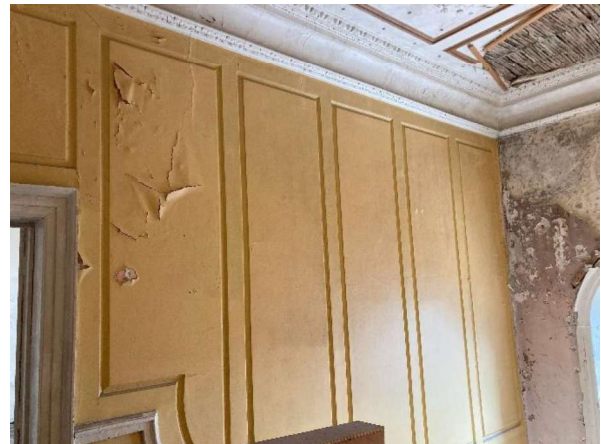
Arched window & filled niches.



Ground floor cornice detail.



1st floor cornice detail.



Wall panel detail.

The ceiling is flat and compartmented, divided into panels of varying shapes and sizes in a manner comparable to Room G.06. The central circular panel contains an acanthus-leaf centrepiece. Flanking panels are largely plain, with the addition of sprigs of flowers applied in a somewhat irregular and ungainly manner. At the corners of the ceiling, plasterwork floral baskets provide further enrichment.



Overall view of ceiling.



View of flower details.

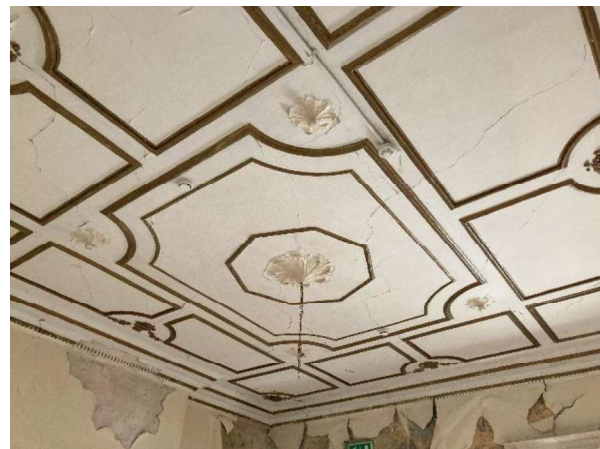
G.06 Dining Room

A large two-bay room entered directly from the main staircase. The room survives in a largely unaltered state, the principal alteration being the replacement of the original chimneypiece with a nineteenth-century stone example.

The room is defined by a mid-eighteenth-century Ionic-style dentil cornice incorporating a cavetto-shaped cove and an upper moulding enriched with waterleaf ornament. The ceiling is flat and compartmented, divided into thirteen panels of varied shapes and sizes. The central panel contains a large centrepiece formed of stylised acanthus leaves, with smaller rosettes placed at the corners of this panel. Further enrichment is provided by plaster decoration comprising flower baskets and garlands positioned at the cardinal points, and garlanded shells set into the ceiling corners.



Dentil cornice detail.



Ceiling compartments.



Flower Basket detail.



Shell detail.

1.01& 1.02 Bedroom

Originally a two-bay room entered from the corridor leading from the principal staircase, now subdivided into two smaller rooms (outer and inner) together with a lobby. The space is interpreted as having served originally as a bedroom.

The decorative treatment is restrained, consisting of a mid-eighteenth century plainly moulded box cornice and a flat ceiling with plain plastered and painted finishes. Despite subdivision, the underlying proportions and surviving finishes allow the original character of the space to be discerned.



Modern partition breaking through cornice.

1.03 & 1.04 Bedroom

Originally a two-bay room entered from the corridor leading from the principal staircase, the space has since been subdivided into two smaller rooms, one of which now forms a bathroom. The room is interpreted as having originally served as a bedroom.

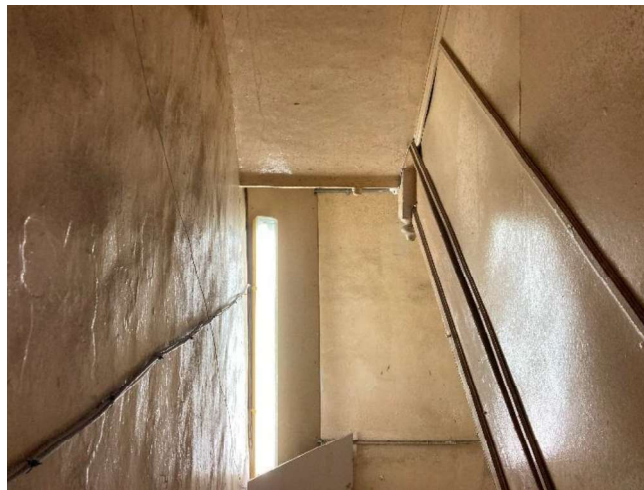
Surviving decorative elements are modest, comprising a mid-eighteenth century plainly moulded box cornice and a flat ceiling with plain plastered and painted finishes. Although subdivision has altered the plan, the surviving features provide evidence of the room's original form and function.



Modern partition built to provide bathroom space.

1.05 Stairwell

No significant decorative details.



1.06 Dressing Room

A one-bay room entered from Room 1.10. The room is interpreted as having functioned as a dressing room. It was remodelled as a bathroom at some recent stage and any decorative plaster elements do not remain.



Original dressing room to Master Bedroom.

1.07 Landing

It would appear that there has been some intervention in this area as the south wall between it and the stairwell is of a modern skim coat finish. Also, this wall is missing its small waterleaf pattern cornice which is present on the other three walls.



Landing ceiling with waterleaf detail to cornice.

1.08 Drawing Room

A large room extending into a deep bow at the rear of the house, interpreted as having served as the Piano Nobile when the house was first constructed. There is evidence from photographs taken in 1926 of a very refined and delicately crafted rococo ceiling complete with cornice and frieze. Unfortunately, even at this early date, the frieze is only evident as an imprint as are the wall panels which appear similar to the panels which are still in-situ in Room G.04 directly beneath.

Surviving decorative elements include a cornice with egg-and-dart mouldings, incorporating plain modillions alternating with rosettes. The original ceiling has been replaced with modern plasterboard, now in poor condition. The space has since been subdivided by a modern partition wall.



Bow end of room.



Left of chimneybreast corner detail.



Chimneybreast & cornice detail.



Surviving cornice detail.



Original rococo ceiling detail.



Original ceiling & cornice.

1.10 Master Bedroom

A large two-bay room entered from the principal staircase, with a secondary modern doorway providing access to the secondary staircase. The room is thought to have served as a principal bedroom, with direct communication to a small dressing room or closet adjoining the secondary staircase at the front of the house.

The proportions of the space, together with its location within the plan, indicate its status as a principal chamber. Original joinery survives in the form of moulded architraves and panelled doors, though the secondary doorway is a later insertion. The chimneypiece, though altered, remains the architectural focus of the room, its position emphasising the intended domestic comfort of the chamber.

The ceiling is plain in comparison to the more elaborate reception rooms, reflecting the room's semi-private function, but retains a well-formed cornice with classical mouldings of mid-eighteenth-century character. Window openings to the rear elevation provide balanced light to the interior, further reinforcing its designation as a chamber of status.



Plain ceiling & cornice.



Chimneybreast cornice detail.

2.01 & 2.02

This large four-bay room, with a broad opening on the south side providing access to the central lobby. Subsequent subdivision has introduced a corridor and WC, obscuring the original spatial arrangement; the proportions suggest the room may originally have functioned as a gallery or an enlarged lobby space. The interior sustained partial fire damage in 2015. A plainly moulded cornice of mid-eighteenth-century date remains in situ.



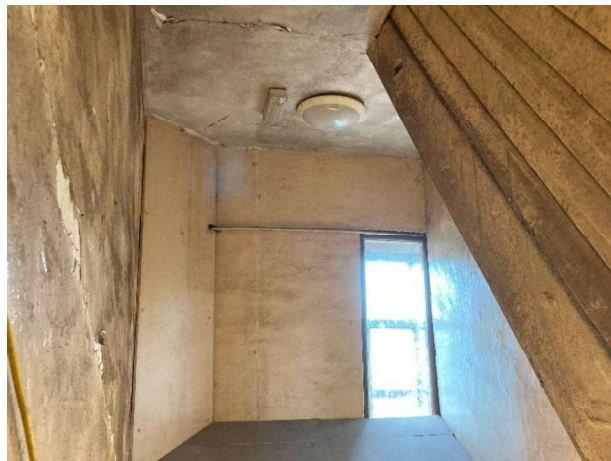
View of 2.01 looking towards landing.



Cornice running through from 2.01-2.02.

2.03

No significant decorative details.



2.04

One bay room possibly originally used for storage, now a bathroom. No decorative details remain.



2.05

This landing area has been altered in the past possibly to allow access to the three rooms to the rear of the 2nd floor instead of having to go through Room 2.08. There aren't any decorative elements surviving.



Looking east into 2.08.



Looking west into 2.06.

2.06

A large two-bay, bow-ended room extends from the central landing and lobby area. Its ceiling features a deep, plain cove surrounding a flat central field, finished in plain plaster and paint. Within the bow, the ceiling is flat.



Bow end of room.



Coved detail, possible modern replacement.

2.07

A small, single-bay room accessed from the central landing and lobby area. There isn't any surviving decorative plasterwork.



2.08

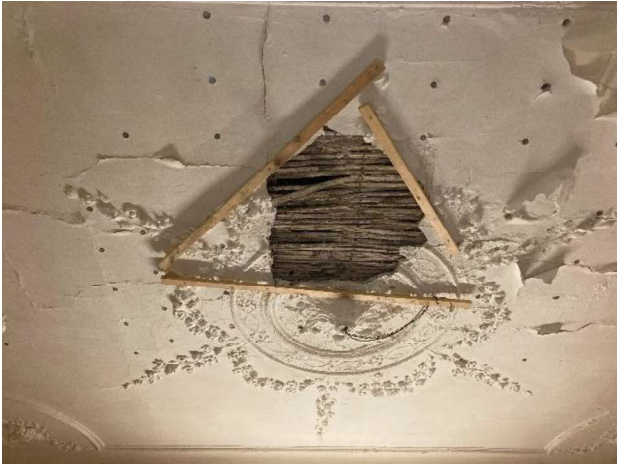
This large two-bay room is approached from the secondary staircase. The northwest corner has been reconfigured through the removal of the original wall and the construction of a new partition, incorporating part of the former landing area. In the west wall, a modern door opening provides access to the central landing and lobby space.



Coved detail similar to Room 2.06 but with extra run mould detail around the compartment.

Emergency Stabilisation Works 2016

Stabilisation works were carried out in 2016 in Rooms G.02, G.04, G.05, 1.02 & 1.09. The purpose of the works was to install temporary restraints to various areas of ceilings causing concern using stainless steel screws & washers and timber battens screwed into joists.



Room G.02



Room G.04



Room G.05



Room 1.02



Room 1.09

Recommendations

Currently the priority must be the prevention of any further deterioration of the fabric of the building and in relation to this report, specifically the integrity of the remaining decorative plasterwork. While it is noted that stabilisation works were carried out in 2016, since then there has been further failure of ceiling plaster in Room G.04 which has the most intricate enrichments in the house. As a result, it is imperative that the surviving plasterwork be stabilised in a more permanent fashion to preserve the architectural and decorative heritage within No.18 Lady Lane.

Once these stabilisation works have been carried out, consolidation works can proceed. With a best-case scenario of minimal percussive works, during proposed floor strengthening and stabilisation works there will inevitably be some dislodgement of loose or damaged enrichments and/or areas of failed plaster. Any detached salvageable plasterwork should be retained for restoration/reinstatement.

Following these works, re-plastering should commence using traditional lime mortars as originally used. Where areas of ceiling have failed previously, the remaining timber laths should be checked for rot or insect infestation and if found to be sound then a decision can be made whether to leave them in-situ or replace with new. Any replacement ceiling or frieze enrichment should be carried out freehand to match the original.

The removal of the many layers of paint from the decorative plasterwork is something to be considered also. In room G.04 the ground floor drawing room, the ceiling and the frieze in particular, are heavily overpainted and the decorative detail is a shadow of the original intricate design. Sample areas of paint removal would be of great benefit to uncover the quality of the underlying enrichments and also to ascertain the cost/benefit of the proposed restoration works.

Methodologies

Ceiling restraint / stabilisation works.

The locations of the joists above the ceiling to be restrained are determined and marked with lines. Centres are marked at 300mm spacing and 30mm holes are countersunk into the ceiling plaster being careful not to drill too deeply. A 70mm stainless steel screw (usually sufficient length but dependant on the depth of the ceiling plaster) inserted through a stainless steel 25mm OD washer is bedded into the countersinking and carefully screwed into the joist above taking care not to break the plaster. The countersinking is backfilled with a 50/50 mix of lime putty and gypsum.

Once all washer & screw fixings are in place, 50mm X 25mm timber battens are placed perpendicular to the ceiling joists 600mm apart and fixed with screws. It is important to note at this point that the battens are only put in place to support the ceiling, not to push it back into place. The purpose of the battens is to prevent a localised collapse of ceiling plaster even if the key has failed or been compromised during works.

Consolidation works.

The purpose of this stage of the works is to make good areas of loose or friable plaster and the salvage of any reusable material. The rough loose plaster around the edges of collapsed areas of ceiling or cornice benefit in particular from these works as it not only cleans the area of detritus and loose debris, but it also reintroduces structure and strength to the damaged area prior to re-plastering.

Any loose material should be carefully removed from damaged areas and any cast or freehand enrichments or decorative detail salvaged, recorded, numbered and stored safely for potential reinstatement. The cleaned down edges are then brushed with a diluted mix of water-soluble sealer such as 'Polybond', and a 50/50 mix of lime putty and gypsum is applied to the rough edge bonding the existing laths and the plaster together. In some areas it may be necessary to pack larger gaps with strips of hessian scrim dipped in a wetter mix of lime putty and gypsum before the 50/50 mix is applied. The finish of this bonding application of plaster should be left quite rough with, if possible, an overcut to provide a good key for the new replacement plaster coats.

Replastering should be carried out using traditional lime mortars and methods to match the existing as far as is practicable. A pricking up coat about 10mm thick is applied directly onto the laths making sure a good key / curl has formed above. This is allowed to start setting before a float coat 5-8mm thick is applied over it. Once the float coat has set enough a finish coat is applied and left to set.

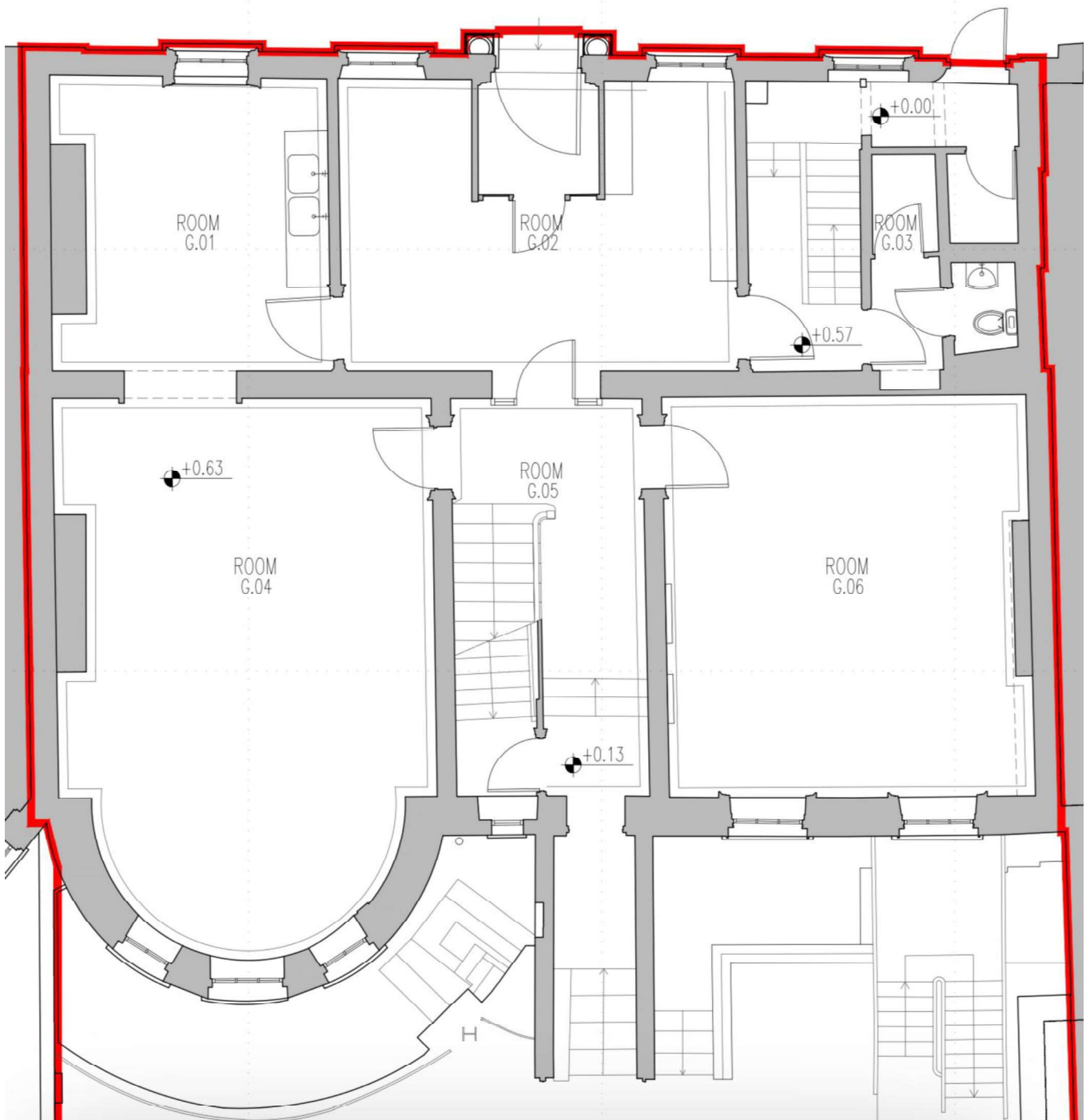
Paint removal.

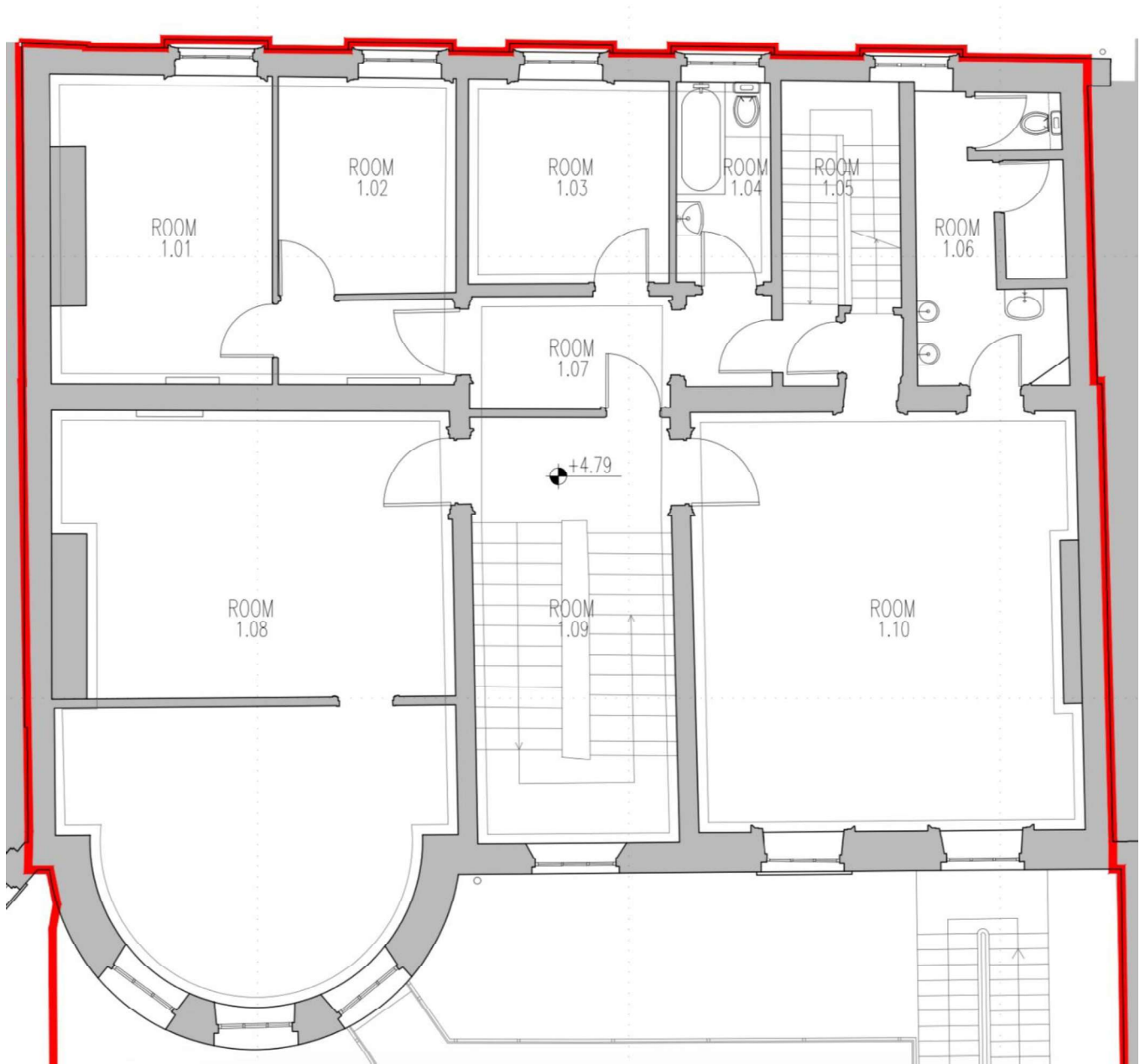
Paint removal works require careful consideration and decisions should be based on the results of paint removal samples. It is sometimes the case that plasterwork is covered in a casein-based distemper which is nigh on impossible to remove without causing unnecessary damage to the substrate using products currently available. In this scenario it is best to leave the paint layers be until hopefully a suitable product becomes available in the future. There may also be cost implications due to the type of paints present. It takes a lot more time and effort to remove layers of oil-based paint than it does to remove distempers. Carrying out samples will indicate the levels of overpainting, the types of paint present, the condition and quality of the underlying plasterwork and also allow for firmer pricing. It should be noted that no amount of sampling will estimate the cost of repairs post paint removal as the unseen is unknown.

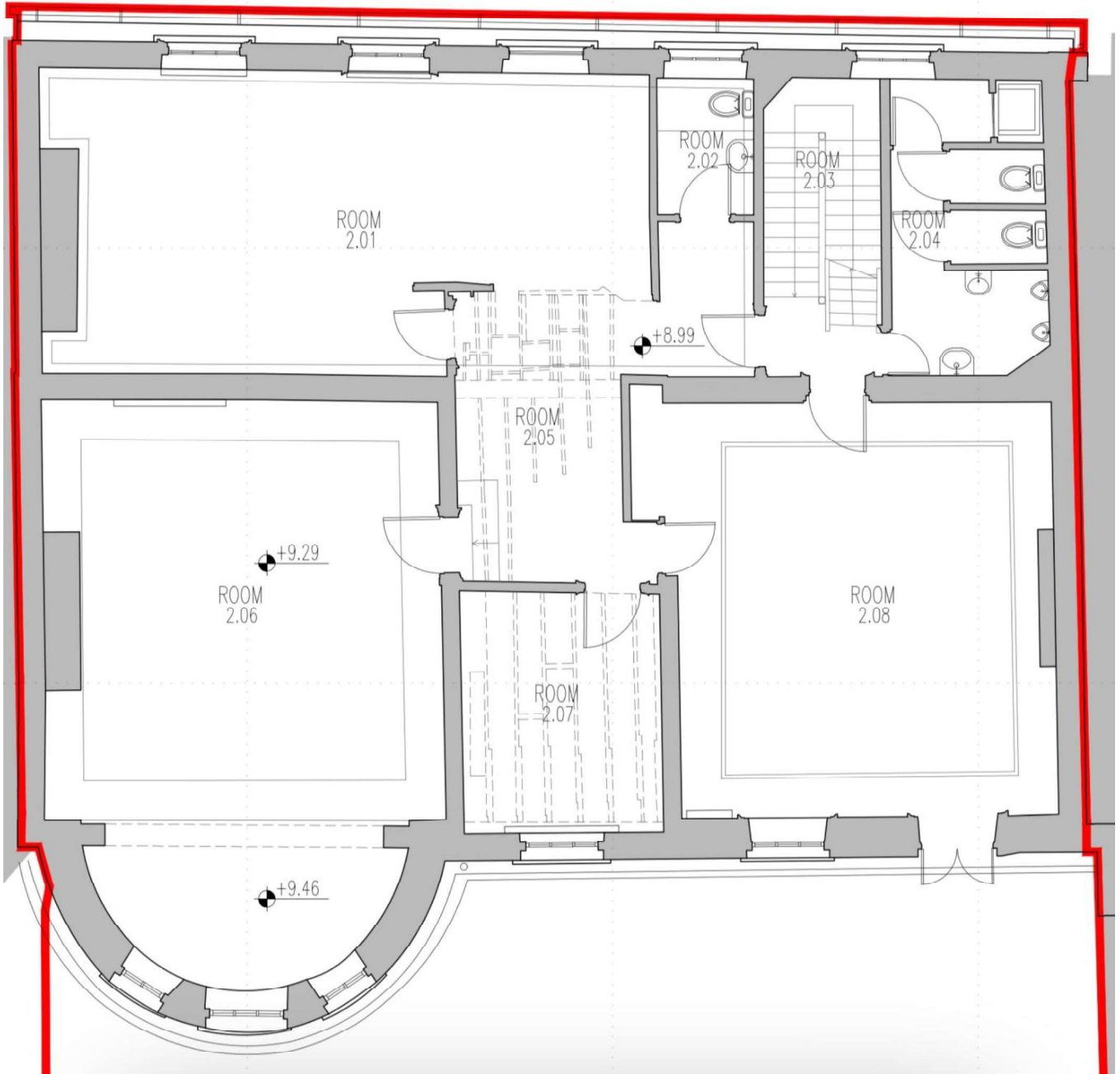
The most important thing to say about paint removal from porous surfaces is that **ONLY** solvent based paint removers should be used. These are available as conservation grade for professional use. Alkali based poultice style paint strippers, and their ilk should **NEVER** be used on plasterwork. If plaster gets wet after being stripped with alkali pastes it literally disintegrates into powder, unsalvageable and lost forever.

Solvent based paint removers should be used in well-ventilated conditions and where this is not possible appropriate face masks should be worn. Gloves and eye protection are normal standards. Starting with a small area of approximately 10cm², paint stripper is applied with a brush. As the product starts to work the paint layers will expand and separate. These layers are scraped off and the process repeated until the plaster is exposed. Any loose debris is brushed off and the area can be washed down with white spirit.

Floor plan drawings by Heneghan Peng Architects.







Sean Henderson & Andrew Smith