An introduction to:
60 Carey Street
London residence of the Law Society president
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60 CAREY STREET was built in 1731-2 as a business and townhouse for Richard Foley, an MP and bencher of Lincoln’s Inn.

At the time Palladianism and the architecture of William Kent were influential, although the house would probably have been designed and built by a master builder.

The house is early Georgian, of three storeys and built of red brick. There are three vertical bays of paired windows with external shutters on the ground floor. The base of the middle bay is occupied by the recessed Doric porch of the front door which dominates the elevation. The fanlight and door-frame date from circa 1800.
A photograph from 1910 shows a smaller doorway with a much later lintel in place of the window to the east of the main door. This would have led directly upstairs to the living accommodation. At that time, there was a partitioned lobby behind contemporary swing doors, leading into the offices on the ground floor. These were separated from the staircase by an internal door. It seems unlikely that this asymmetry in the elevation was original, and there is some evidence that these two parts of the house may have been constructed separately, as the internal north-south wall is unusually thick.

In 1929, the house was acquired by the Law Society for £20,000; they obtained a licence in mortmain because their charter limited the value of the property which the Society could hold. Sir Philip Martineau, the first president to occupy the house in 1932, remembered playing there as a child when his grandfather, also a solicitor, was a tenant of the first and second floors (1824-55). His grandfather, another Philip Martineau, had been chairman of the Building Committee in 1832, when the Law Society’s hall was first opened.

The small, walled garden was destroyed when Lander, Bedells and Crompton designed a courtroom and committee room for the Solicitors’ Disciplinary Tribunal as a single storey extension to the north, with an entrance from Star Yard. The supervising architect was R. D. Jinks, but he may have been working to a design by Charles Bedells, surveyor to the Society, who was president of the Surveyors’ Institute from 1929-30. The committee room has now been converted to provide cloakroom facilities. The interior of the courtroom, now used for receptions, is a delightful example of modern neo-
classicism. The room is almost square and has two arched recesses at either end with circular windows at the top of the eastern wall. The cornice is supported by four slender Corinthian columns, and is surmounted by a dome. It also enjoys a circular lantern edge with a key-patterned frieze.

When the foundations were dug, the builders discovered a 12 m (40 ft) tunnel, 2 m (6 ft) high and one metre (3 ft) wide, probably cut in the early nineteenth century when the house was occupied by a wine merchant. The tunnel, which had niches for candles and small pulley wheels, perhaps for a bell pull, runs from a vault under the garden with two turns towards Star Yard. It is possible that it once connected to other passageways, but the tunnel is now blocked. Jinks restored and adapted the house to provide a waiting room for tribunal witnesses, a conference room, basement strong rooms, staff offices and rooms for the president’s use. The builders were Higgs and Hill, who concurrently worked on Baker Street Station and on a miniature Tudor mansion for the Daily Mirror’s cartoon characters, Pip, Squeak and Wilfrid.

The building has since been adapted to improve the domestic quarters on the first and second floors. The ground floor office has been adapted into a modern kitchen, used to serve lunches and dinners, whilst the basement rooms have also been updated. Originally, the basement would have been the servant’s hall, scullery and kitchen with coal delivered to cellars below the pavement. Traces of a bricked up Georgian kitchen hearth with a Victorian fireplace inserted were discovered at the east end when a wall was replastered in 1994.
The interior is an excellent example of an early Georgian business and dwelling house. The ground floor waiting room to the east of the spacious hall is remarkable for its veined, grey marble chimney-piece with a frieze of floral swags surrounding a finely modelled mask on a cartouche. The staircase to the first floor at the south-east is highly decorated with rococo festoons of papier mâché set in earlier borders of moulded plaster; on the uppermost frieze there are two identical crests from the arms of Baron Foley. Papier mâché architectural ornaments were an English invention made by Jackson & Son in London during the period; they were cheaper than the plaster equivalent and were later employed by Robert Adam.

The open string stairs have elaborately scrolled tread ends. The ‘Spanish’ mahogany balusters, handrails and doors are all finely carved. The double-action brass door handles and elongated hinges are also noteworthy. The underside of the second flight of stairs is decorated with a series of painted panels portraying grotesque masks with patterns of shells and scrolls, similar to a larger panel on the south wall which depicts the laurel-wreathed head of Homer. It is possible that the panels containing papier mâché work once bordered similar paintings. Grotesque painting is a Renaissance art. It became a characteristic of the rococo, but lost its Roman motifs until revived by Adam after 1750. The ceiling is painted to represent an oval dome supported on four arches, with the blue and white of a cloudy sky appearing between them around an urn, each joined to the other three urns with festoons of leaves.
The first floor rooms are entirely panelled in unpainted pine, probably Baltic fir, with raised and fielded panels. The panelling may have been painted originally, but this would obscure the microscopic delicacy of the carving. The sitting room was once a bedroom, and there is a privy door to the left of the fireplace. The dining room, which seats twelve, runs the full depth of the house and was probably the original sitting room. Both chimney-pieces are marble, carved with floral decoration and the heads of mythical beasts in high relief. The president’s bedroom suite, formerly the dining room and pantry, is also on the first floor. The second (top) floor, where the servants would have slept, is now living accommodation with its own staircase descending to the basement on the west side.
References


POWLESLAND, Peter. MSS correspondence, 1994.