

Appeal against the granting of a Certificate of Immunity 16a/18 West Central Street

I have been contacted by the Save Museum Street Coalition regarding the granting of a Certificate of Immunity from listed at 16a and 18 West Central Street. I conducted an in-depth study into Working Horse Stables as part of the Conservation Studies (Historic Buildings) MA course at the University of York. The resultant research was entitled 'Heavy Going: a study of the history, building typology, and conservation of Working Horse Stables' and is available online here: [https://www.academia.edu/44935929/Heavy_Going_a_study_of_the_history_building_typology_and_conservation_of_Working_Horse_Stable] and is supplementary to this brief consideration of 16a and 18 West Central Street.

I have not made a site visit 16a and 18 West Central Street and am reliant on floor plans, photographs, and the 'details' section of Historic England's Advice Report dated 17th February 2023.

The guidance in Infrastructure: Transport a Listing Selection Guide by Historic England 2017 is included in the Advice Report from February 2023 and details that assessment for listing should take into account '*architectural interest and the survival of features like stalls and sloped ramps*' of which 16a and 18 West Central Street contains both. The HE Advice Report finds the former stables to be a '*rare example of small-scale urban stables for a commercial company*' and that a number of other features survive as part of the building. However relatively modern alterations were found to have had a '*detrimental impact on the readability of the original building as a carriage house and stables as well as the overall level of survival*'.

Surviving Features

Numbers 16a and 18 were originally built in 1864 but remodelled in 1900, the apparent loss of architectural features from the design by Fitzroy Doll when plans were scaled back is considered to '*diminish the quality of the original composition*'. However, in terms of stable design 1900 is relatively late, the emergence of the motorcar unpredicted at that time so investments were still being made in carriage horses. The Giraud manual of 1891 and the earlier dates of other listed multistorey stable blocks, infers that by the late 19th century stable building and fittings were a fine art. The external features of numbers 16a and 18 do display this, flanking the carriage way on the south elevation are bollards to protect the entrance from carriage wheels, internally is a grooved concrete floor for the ease of drainage and grip of shod horse hooves, and the rainwater goods are recessed into the façade so that the regularly passing horses did not catch themselves on protruding ironwork. Internally the horse ramp is entered opposite the carriageway for the ease of the blinkered horse, it is constructed with a concrete surface, timber treads have apparently been removed. The ramp does however retain glazed bricks and rounded surfaces including bullnose bricks on covered openings. At first floor level there remains the back of a set of stalls with sockets into which stall rails would have been attached. The positioning of these stalls is likely original highlighting the turning circle of a horse at the top of the ramp, the scale of this space and high positioning of the windows is illustrative of the original function of the building. The stalls were manufactured by the St Pancras Ironworks who were the '*original inventors, patentees and manufacturers of improved stable fittings*' and supplied royalty. The stalls are decorative with rounded edges and newel posts topped with balls, many working horses were partitioned by hanging bales, demonstrating that Marshall & Elvy's stables may have been modest in size but were not in terms of fit out expense and architectural finish. The first floor is supported by substantial I-beams presumed to be steel manufactured by

Dorman, Long and Company. The development and use of metal beams with concrete infill is well covered by Historic England research into fireproof design, and its use is common amongst multi-storey stable buildings include Stapleton’s Repository and The Mint Stable horse ramp. Concrete flooring stopped dust from upper level feed stores falling into eyes, and the fumes from urine rising on warm days to spoil feed or infiltrate stablekeeper’s accommodation. Such accommodation was likely included given the risk of fire and theft at the site despite the curtailment of it’s size the mere inclusion of stablekeeper’s accommodation is characteristic of Working Horse Stable. As stated in the HE Advice Report the wall-crane and hand winch is a rarity, despite the replaced taking in door the opening adjacent to the wall-crane is illustrative of its former use.

Rarity

R e c e s s e d rainwater goods	Common feature although regularly overlooking in listing descriptions noted on 29a&b Newcastle Street, Stafford
Carriageway	Common feature noted specially in the NHLE entry for Stapelton’s Repository and the Former LGOC Pitfield Street Depot
Horse ramp	A rare feature and from the 12 listed examples in London considered a benchmark of multistorey working horse stabling. In the assessment for listing of the unsuccessful Turnmills Building the advice report stated some level of alteration can be excepted but that ‘there must be surviving fabric of its stabling use for it to have special interest’, the horse ramp had been removed. Those with ramps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stanley Sidings, stables to East of bonded warehouse Stables Market, Camden • Horse Hospital, Stables Market, Camden • 136 Kingsland Road (South) • Stapleton’s Repository • Whitbread's Stables, Islington • Mint Wing of St Mary's Hospital • 22-24 Hertford Road • London Canal Museum (unlisted)
Stalls	Stalls are a rare survivor in urban Working Horse Stables, often bales were used to separate horses with elaborate/stylised stall rails reserved for private house stables or in the case of London, large brewery complexes. Those with stalls: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former LGOC Pitfield Street Depot • Whitbread's Stables, Islington • Young’s Brewery Complex, Wandsworth High Street
Beam and concrete construction	This seems to have emerged post iron frame buildings as steel fabrication overtook wrought iron for its apparent fireproof design. Concrete mixes are detailed in Giraud’s 1891 publication in Chapter 3 ‘Construction’.

Stablekeeper's accommodation	Once common this provision was purely for insurance and ease of labour reasons, it demonstrated the importance and investment of the horse over its human colleagues. The Shoreditch Observer on December 7th 1895 noted a stablekeeper's cottage at the Former LGOC Pitfield Street Depot but this is now lost, the London Canal Museum originally built as an icehouse and expanded in 1904-6 to include 1st floor stabling with stablekeeper's accommodation on the 2nd. The later is now a museum and the accommodation presumably converted, therefore this is the best preserved example of a stablekeeper's flat found in association with Working Horse Stables.
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Summary

The HE Advice Report for February 2023 correctly identifies 16a and 18 West Central Street as '*a rare example of small-scale urban stables for a commercial company*'. Many of the Listed and notable examples of Working Horse Stables in London are brewery stables or associated with transport companies. Small scale examples tend to be mews buildings and private house stables, no other small business stables have been identified in London. 13 Northington Street are a comparable Listed example, although also brewery stables, they are two storey and date from 1903 the elevational appearance being passingly similar to numbers 16a and 18 in terms of the rhythm of openings along the street elevation.

Multiple signifiers of the buildings previous use and horse related architecture remain internally and externally. Given sympathetic treatment much of the alterations could be reversed and the surviving features highlighted. The scale of the first floor ceiling height is still legible, as are the high openings and taking in doorway. Multiple fixtures and fittings remain including a wall-crane, horse ramp, and stalls a combination of which is not seen in any other listed examples. This is a high survival rate contextually and a good examples within an ever depleting record comparable levels of internal fittings are found in brewery stables used well into the 21st century. No other intact stablekeeper's accommodation has been identified as part of other sites, despite some modern fittings this retains a high level of historic fabric and is illustrative of its historic purpose. Indeed there are '*a number of listed multi-storey stables in London*' however given that in 1902 there were some 3.5 million horses working in Britain (Thompson 1970 Victorian England; the horse-drawn society) one may expect to see more than 12 Listed examples.

The architectural interest of the building lies in its sole purpose to house and care for the horse, the aesthetic merit and intent of such utilitarian architecture has been missed in the HE Advice Report. This is however included in the Appraisal for the Bloomsbury Conservation Area which details the '*utilitarian mid-19th century buildings of group value*'. Numbers 16a and 18 also hold group value with the '*19th century buildings in this urban block, much of which was shaped in association with the layout out of New Oxford Street*'.

Although modest in size, the provision of these stables holds historic interest, Marshall and Elvy chose to maintain their own carriage horses for deliveries rather than subcontract the work. The investment in St Pancras stalls in 1900 demonstrates horsepowered delivery was still an asset for the company. The site had an enduring use for wine storage, the HE Advice Report contrasts the building with the Listed former Stapleton's Horse and Carriage Repository '*which remains more readily legible in terms of its original function and layout*'.

The horse repository shares some features with 16a and 18 in the use of concrete and survival of horse ramps, however a repository was not predominantly a stable building but a show room and auction hall. The repository's legibility warranted Listing, but it is not comparable to 16a and 18 as it is an entirely different building type.

Number 16a and 18 West Central Street hold architectural and historic interest for the reasons set out above, as well as group value with adjacent Listed building and in the context of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. Multiple fixtures and fittings survive, and it is an interesting and unique example of a small scale stables owned and operated by a commercial company. This combination of fabric survival, scale, and group value make it a rarity indeed, and one of special interest.