

Fireplaces

By John Scott RIBA and Stephen Bradley RIBA

INTRODUCTION AND DESIGN HISTORY

It should be presumed that any remaining fireplace in Bedford Park will be considered of architectural interest and the Conservation Officers should be consulted in all cases before any work is carried out.

The characteristic fireplace in the principal rooms has a so-called "Adam style" timber surround, with carved moulding under the mantelshelf and applied decorative mouldings top and sides. Typically these would have framed simple decorative iron fireplaces with tiled surrounds, in some cases by William de Morgan.

The mantel and surround would always have been painted.



Ground floor fireplace, with original hearth tiles, cast iron fireplace and tile surround and 'Adam' mantelpiece.

The finely detailed decoration of the standard 'Adam' type fireplaces common to many houses will dissolve in contact with paint stripper, and special care should be taken.

Fireplaces in less important rooms, and indeed in some reception rooms, will have had much simpler detail, and were typically constructed as joinery elements using mouldings consistent with other features. The most common types, which prevailed in almost all Bedford Park houses in one version or another, frame the tiled surround with a simple timber frame with mouldings similar to those used on principle doors, surmounted by a mantelshelf supported on shaped timber brackets. These can be found in all rooms from reception rooms to attic bedrooms, and there is consequently a wide range of size and elaboration. These are the Bedford Park feature which most closely approaches the style of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

A typical first floor room would have had a surround with heavy, simple mouldings, with corbel brackets supporting the mantelshelf as illustrated below. Attic floor rooms tended to have either very simple versions of the above, or small cast iron fireplaces and surrounds. They are often set on chimney breasts at 45 degrees in the corner of the room.

The joinery fire surrounds described above can be readily replicated by a competent joiner. Examples can be found to copy by consultation with the Bedford Park Society or local Architects.

Overmantels were sometimes fitted as part of the original fitting out, and a few survive. These follow the style of the fireplaces, and often include a mirror. They should be considered to be part of the fireplace, not a removeable fitting.

Tiles

The original tiles for the surround were either stylised floral designs (some by William de Morgan) or more often simple abstract designs

in blue on a white background (like Delft ware). Surviving examples of either should be rigorously protected, but matching tiles are not readily available for replacement or repair.

Hearths

Hearths to all fireplaces except the most humble servant rooms were normally tiled with 4"x 4" unglazed quarry tiles of terracotta red colour, laid with very tight joints without grout. Where possible surviving examples should be preserved. A similar effect can be created with modern quarry tiles of similar size and colour (manufactured by Winkelmanns) but the match is not close enough to allow patching.



Original first floor fireplace surround