

NO. 34 CHEYNE ROW

KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA

*Report on a Proposal to Change
the Existing Door Surround*

by

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Reports and Papers 12

1999



ENGLISH HERITAGE

Nature of Request

A public inquiry is pending with regard to a proposal to remove the existing door surround from the main façade at No. 34 Cheyne Row, SW3. The owner wishes to replace what appears to be an early to mid-nineteenth-century neo-classical feature with a replica shell-hood, of a type more typical of the eighteenth century, and of similar design to that at neighbouring No. 32. The owner's application was originally approved by the planning services committee of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, against the advice of its own staff and that of English Heritage. The application for listed building consent was subsequently referred to English Heritage for direction. The case went to the London Advisory Committee at its meeting on 29 January 1999. The committee endorsed the recommendation that consent be refused.

Further information is required to support the English Heritage case at the public inquiry. The Historical Analysis & Research Team has been asked, in particular, whether it is possible to assign an accurate date to the existing door surround? Secondly, is there any evidence to show that a shell-hood indeed existed at this house in the early eighteenth century? And finally, what evidence is there to suggest that the door surround at each of the houses in Cheyne Row originally featured a shell-hood.

Origin of Request:	<i>Anna Marie Pagano</i>
Date of Request:	<i>16 August 1999</i>
Site Visit and Notes:	<i>17 August 1999</i>
Date of Report:	<i>23 August 1999</i>
File Number:	Kensington & Chelsea 255

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The Context

The well-known, highly attractive, and always fashionable terrace of houses on the east side of Cheyne Row in Chelsea was built on land leased from William, Lord Cheyne, lord of the manor, in the early part of the eighteenth century (figs. 1 and 2). There is a date plaque or tablet surviving on No. 16, inscribed '*This is Cheyne Row 1708*'. Indeed, there is nothing in the design or layout of the houses to suggest that their building was prolonged over any great period. Among the notable residents in the nineteenth century were the essayist and historian, Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881), and the potter and tile-manufacturer, William de Morgan (1839–1917), a close friend and supplier to William Morris. Not surprisingly, as a comparatively rare and important group of Queen Anne (1702–14) houses, the whole of Cheyne Row is listed as grade II*.

There are now ten houses in the row, numbered 16 to 34 from south to north. However, although No. 34 seemingly represents one end of the original development, this was not in fact the case. As completed by its doubtless speculative builder — who remains anonymous — Cheyne Row comprised a total of eleven properties. Until the 1880s, the true northern end of the terrace was marked by one further house situated beyond No. 34 (fig. 3). Known as 'Orange House', it was demolished to make way for the Roman Catholic church of the Most Holy Redeemer and St Thomas More, completed in 1895 by Edward Goldie (1856–1921). Several decades later, in the 1920s and 1930s, the two southernmost houses, No. 16 and No. 18, also came under threat of demolition. The proposal arose in connection with a plan to build a new road linking the Cheyne Row with Oakley Street, though fortunately this potential disaster was averted.

In so far as generalization is possible, Cheyne Row has much in common with the essential character of London terrace houses of the period from the very late seventeenth century through to about 1720. Similar to the near-contemporary if somewhat grander pattern found at Queen Anne's Gate (1704) in Westminster, the Cheyne Row houses were raised as three-storey constructions set over basements; all of them with the same internal plan (fig. 2). The façades are of brownish stock brick, with red brick dressings to the jambs of the windows, and expensive rubbers to the heads, and with two horizontal red brick bands marking the first- and second-floor levels. The somewhat curious rhythm to the elevations, with one narrow bay to the left, followed by three full window bays, and with the doorway set in all cases to the right, is again found at Queen Anne's Gate. The positioning of the sashes close to the outer wall is typical of the years before 1720, even if here they are almost certainly all replacements. The initial unity of the terrace would have been further bound by an overhanging eaves cornice of wood, in the form of a modillion frieze. This had largely disappeared before the end of the nineteenth century (fig. 3), though its form — if not its original fabric — appears to survive at Nos. 16 and 18 (fig. 4). It is also imitated at No. 26, and it has been rebuilt at No. 34 (fig. 5).

Since their original construction, the houses have undergone a wide range of alterations and modifications of varying scale. The result is a rich palimpsest, encapsulating many changes in fashion and taste over almost three hundred years. For the most part, such changes have been subtle, though there are other which are more obvious. In one case, No. 28, for reasons which are unclear, there has been almost a complete rebuilding. But this is exceptional. Elsewhere, the most common change is the introduction of attic stories with dormers. These had appeared before the 1880s, together with the parapets of varying height at Nos. 28, 30 and 32 (figs. 3 and 4). By the same date, there were iron balconies at Nos. 16 and 20, a more elaborate balcony at No. 28, and a stone portico with balcony at No. 22. Other marked changes include the replacement sashes, mentioned above, the opening (or reopening) of narrow blind lights, and the application of stucco to the lower storey in several cases.

No. 34

In many ways, the elevation at No. 34 retains its early eighteenth-century character better than most other houses in the terrace (fig. 5). This is in no small part due to the handsome eaves cornice, and to the way its brick detailing continues to reflect the original conception. And yet there have been significant changes to the fabric over the course of its history.

By far the most prominent of these was with little doubt the removal of the adjoining property, No. 36, in the late 1880s, thus leaving the house as the northern end of the terrace. The difference in the appearance of the quoin brickwork relates to this phase. Another notable change is the work done, probably at various periods, to the sashes. Although all of them still stand close to the outer wall face, the sash boxes, glazing bars, and the windows themselves are of different ages. In the two main bays of the lower storey, for example, the upper sashes are fitted with 'horns', a feature which did not gain common currency until the second half of the nineteenth century. The sashes in the middle storey, on the other hand, do not have such horns. Again, it is clear that in the nineteenth century (fig. 3) none of the lights in the narrow left-hand bay were open. By 1970, the two upper lights had been glazed, and subsequently the lower window, too, has been opened.

But it is the upper storey where the historic fabric has probably been most altered. This becomes clearer when we learn that bombs fell on No. 34 Cheyne Row on the 17 April 1941, starting an extensive fire which apparently caused much damage. From a superficial examination of the brickwork (fig. 5), there is a strong suggestion that the entire upper level has been extensively rebuilt, presumably as a result of this bomb damage. The cornice is also likely to represent a rebuild, though it is clearly based on the original form. Whether the damage caused by the bombs spread to No. 32 is unclear, though the brickwork in the upper two storeys there is not of the character of the early eighteenth-century fabric.

The Door Surrounds

Although not universal, doorways in early eighteenth-century London houses of this type were very often sheltered by canopies or hoods supported on lavishly carved brackets. In some cases, such as the celebrated group at Queen Anne's Gate, or those known (though for the most part sadly lost) from Albury Street in Deptford (c. 1706–17), the canopies were flat and of rectangular plan. Elsewhere, most notably at Nos. 1 and 2 Laurence Pountney Hill (1703) in the City, or at No. 11 Kensington Square (1701–02), they were constructed in an elaborate shell-hood form. It must be said, there seems little reason to doubt that all of the Cheyne Row houses originally featured projecting door-hoods, though not perhaps as elaborate as some of the examples noted here.

That shell-hoods resting on ornate brackets were not unknown is indicated by the survival of one example at No. 32 (fig. 6). Moreover, from two prints — one executed in 1887 (fig. 4) and one in the early 1890s (fig. 3) — it is clear that the now lost house, No. 36, also featured a shell-hood canopy. Indeed, this example looks to have been particularly elaborate, projecting well forward of the door surround. Two other houses, Nos. 18 (fig. 7) and 30 (fig. 8), have carved brackets supporting smaller hoods, though in both cases the hoods themselves may not be the originals.

It was probably during the nineteenth century that a number of the houses in the row had their door surrounds modified, perhaps in conjunction with other changes such as window detailing. The most common pattern, almost certainly introduced before 1850, was to add pilasters to the outer door jambs, with a small projecting hood of greater or lesser neo-classical authenticity. There are good examples at Nos. 16 and 20 (fig. 9), and another at Carlyle's house, No. 24 (fig. 10).

The Date of the Door Surround at No. 32

Even though there is a distinct possibility that an earlier door-hood existed at No. 34, and that it might well have been of shell-hood form, the extant surround is by no means undervalued, nor should its qualities be underestimated (fig. 11). It has been suggested that the context for this elegant feature is to be sought in the trend among late eighteenth-century architects to experiment with a form of 'stripped down' Classical. As was usual, as the fashion gained greater currency, it began to make its way into smaller domestic structures, with modifications to doorways one way of introducing up to date features for a comparatively small cost. The earliest representation of the No. 34 surround *in situ* comes from a print by Walter Burgess, dating from 1891 (fig. 3), though the sketch from which this is taken was probably made in the 1880s.

The surround at No. 34 Cheyne Row is of stucco, and does indeed seem to betray a filtering down of a standard body of Greek revival architectural work by the 1820s. Below the entablature, this is emphasized by the absence of entasis in the shallow pilasters, contrasting incidentally with the form seen at No. 24 (fig. 10). Above the moulded capitals, the entablature itself combines the standard frieze and architrave, though the diminutive cornice is typical of the style. The 'hawk's-beak' undercut moulding is especially diagnostic of work in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century. And in this context, we might note the precedents that were published and made available to a wider readership in the new edition of *The Antiquities of Athens*, by James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, appearing in four volumes between 1825 and 1830. The proportions of the entablature at No. 34 may be compared to those recorded by Stuart and Revett at the Choragic Monument of Thrasyllos (fig. 12), with the hawk's-beak moulding particularly close to that observed on the Athens structure (fig. 13).

We must accept, perhaps, that the door-surround at No. 34 Cheyne Row is work representing a builder's architecture, rather than that of a professional architect, but in its attention to detail and scholarly precedent it demonstrates a clear grasp of contemporary fashion.

Summary and Conclusions

No. 34 Cheyne Row is a house of considerable architectural and historic significance. Though it retains many of its underlying Queen Anne period characteristics, its complexion has been consistently modified. It thus encapsulates a variety of change — some of taste and fashion, some of necessity — introduced by its succession of owners over almost three centuries. The existing door surround is an integral element in that story.

In so far as it is possible to address the questions made in this specific request:

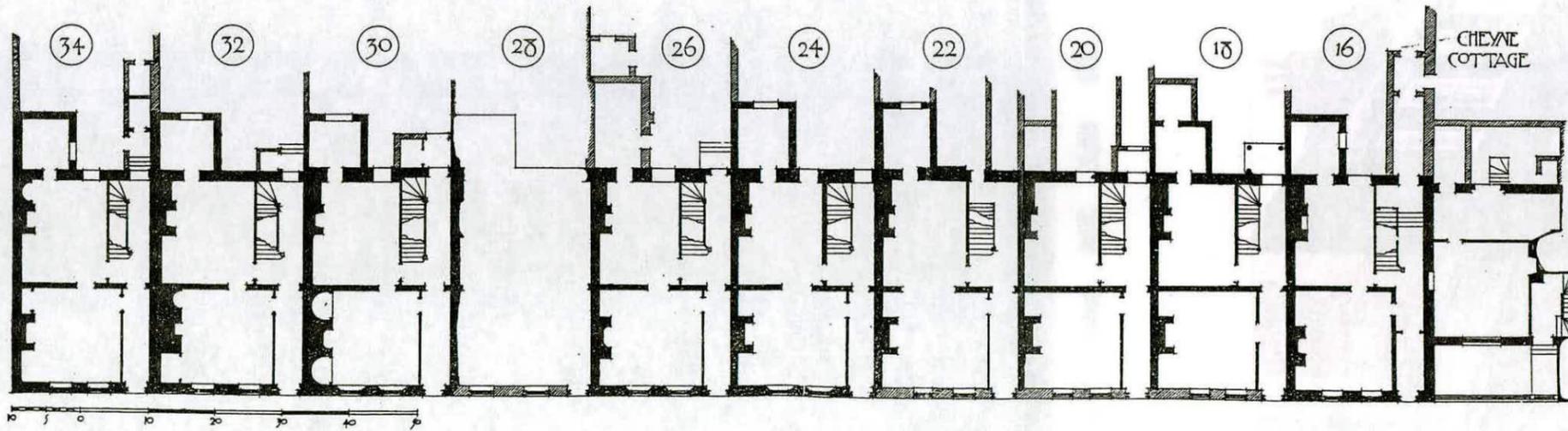
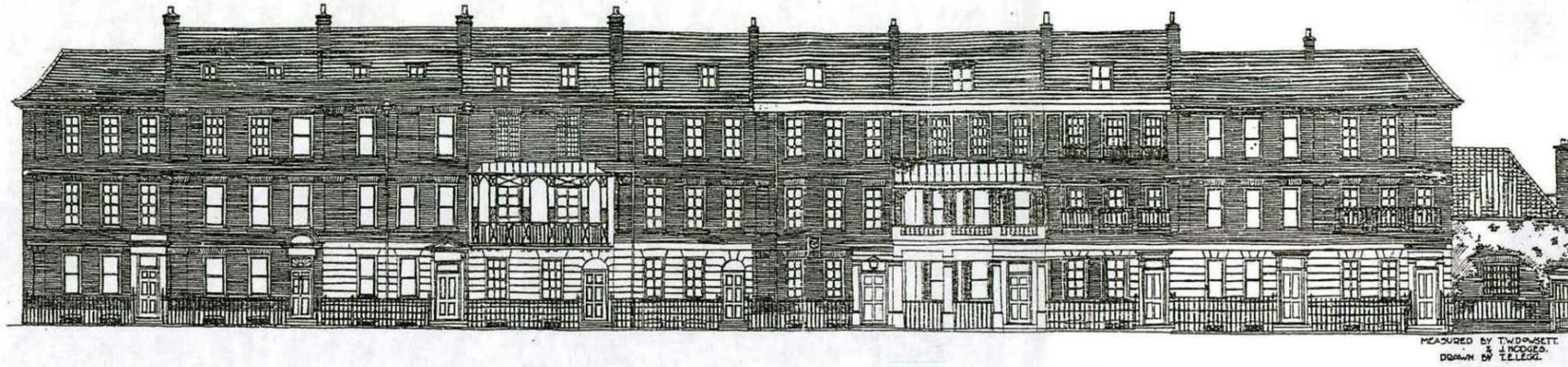
Although it is impossible to provide an absolute date for the existing door-surround, there is a strong body of opinion to suggest it is a work which pre-dates 1850, and that this can be narrowed down to the period 1820–40. The earliest confirmation of its existence comes in the form of a print of 1891.

There is no proof positive that an earlier shell-hood existed at No. 34, though the continued existence of one at neighbouring No. 32, and the recorded existence of another at the now lost No. 36 does suggest it as the most likely possibility.

The authors of the appropriate *Survey of London* volume (1913) thought that all the houses in Cheyne Row may have had shell-hoods 'at one time'. Once again, although this is virtually impossible to confirm, given what we know of such terraces and their history elsewhere in London, it could well have been the case.

Sources and References

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- Historical Analysis & Research Team (English Heritage), and its Predecessors, *Savile Row Casework Files*, L. B. Kensington and Chelsea, No. 163 and No. 165.
- David Stabb, Paper on 34 Cheyne Row to English Heritage London Advisory Committee, 29 January 1999.
- Collections at the Local Studies Department, Chelsea Public Library, Chelsea Old Town Hall, Kings Road.
- Mr Peter Powesland, 115 Lansdowne Way, London, SW8 2PB Pers. Comm. (19 August 1999)



CHEYNE COTTAGE AND NOS. 16 TO 34, CHEYNE ROW

Fig. 2 Elevation and plan of Cheyne Row, taken from the Survey of London (1913).



Fig. 1 A general view of Cheyne Row, SW 3, seen from the north-west. No. 34 is the house in the foreground. To the left is the Roman Catholic Church of the Most Holy Redeemer and St Thomas More (1895), which replaced a further house ('Orange House') at the original end of the terrace.

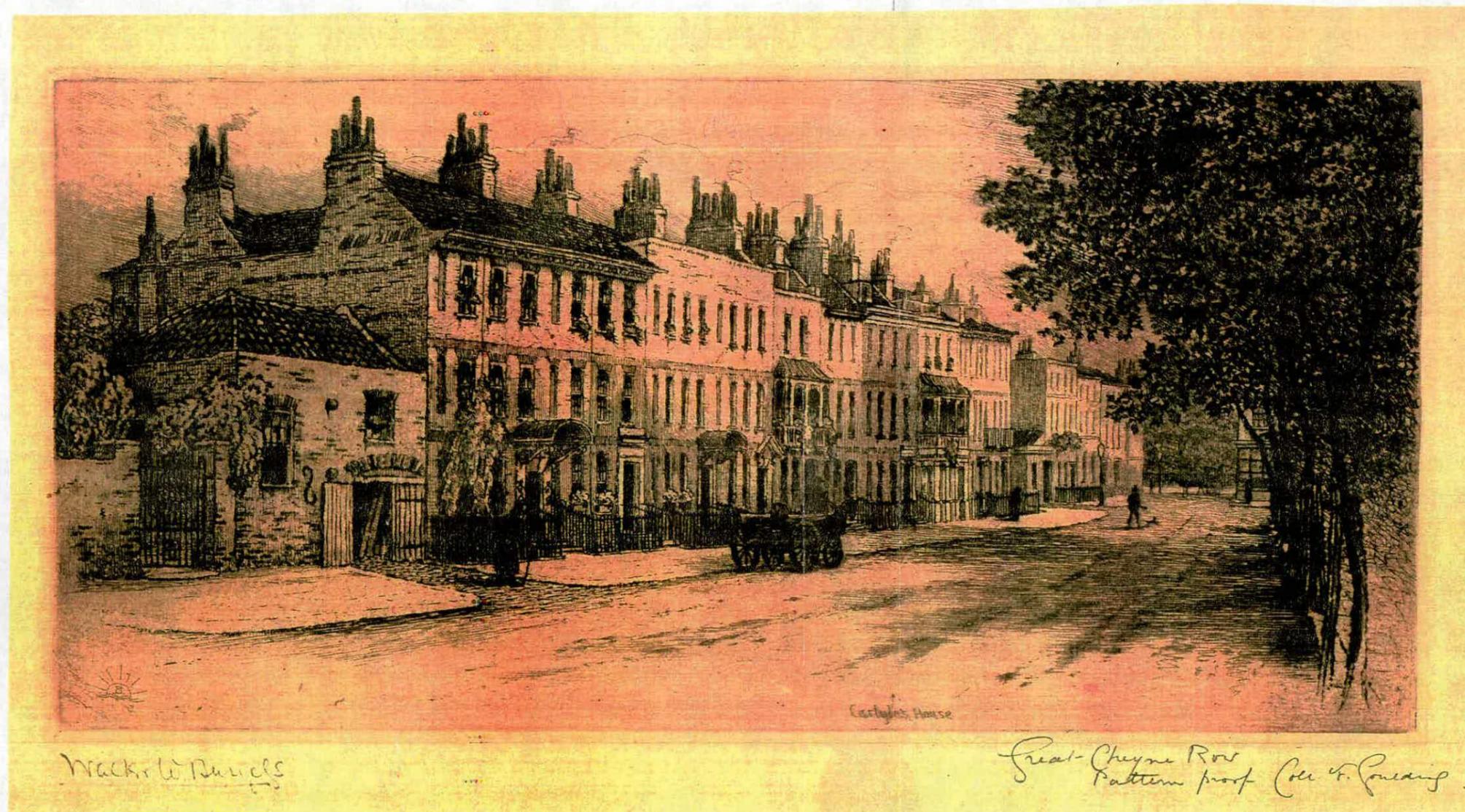


Fig. 3 Cheyne Row seen from the north-west, engraved by Walter Burgess, published in 1891. The drawing was prepared before the destruction of 'Orange House' at the end of the terrace.



Fig. 4 Cheyne Row from the south, drawn and etched by R. Bryden, 1887.



Fig. 5 No. 34 Cheyne Row, front elevation.



Fig. 6 Shell-hood porch at No. 32 Cheyne Row.



Fig. 7 Door-hood with scroll brackets at No. 18 Cheyne Row.



Fig. 8 Door-hood with scroll brackets at No. 30 Cheyne Row.



Fig. 9 Door-surround of stripped down neo-classical inspiration at No. 20 Cheyne Row.



Fig. 10 Door-surround of stripped down neo-classical inspiration at No. 24 Cheyne Row.



Fig. 11 The door-surround at No. 34 Cheyne Row.

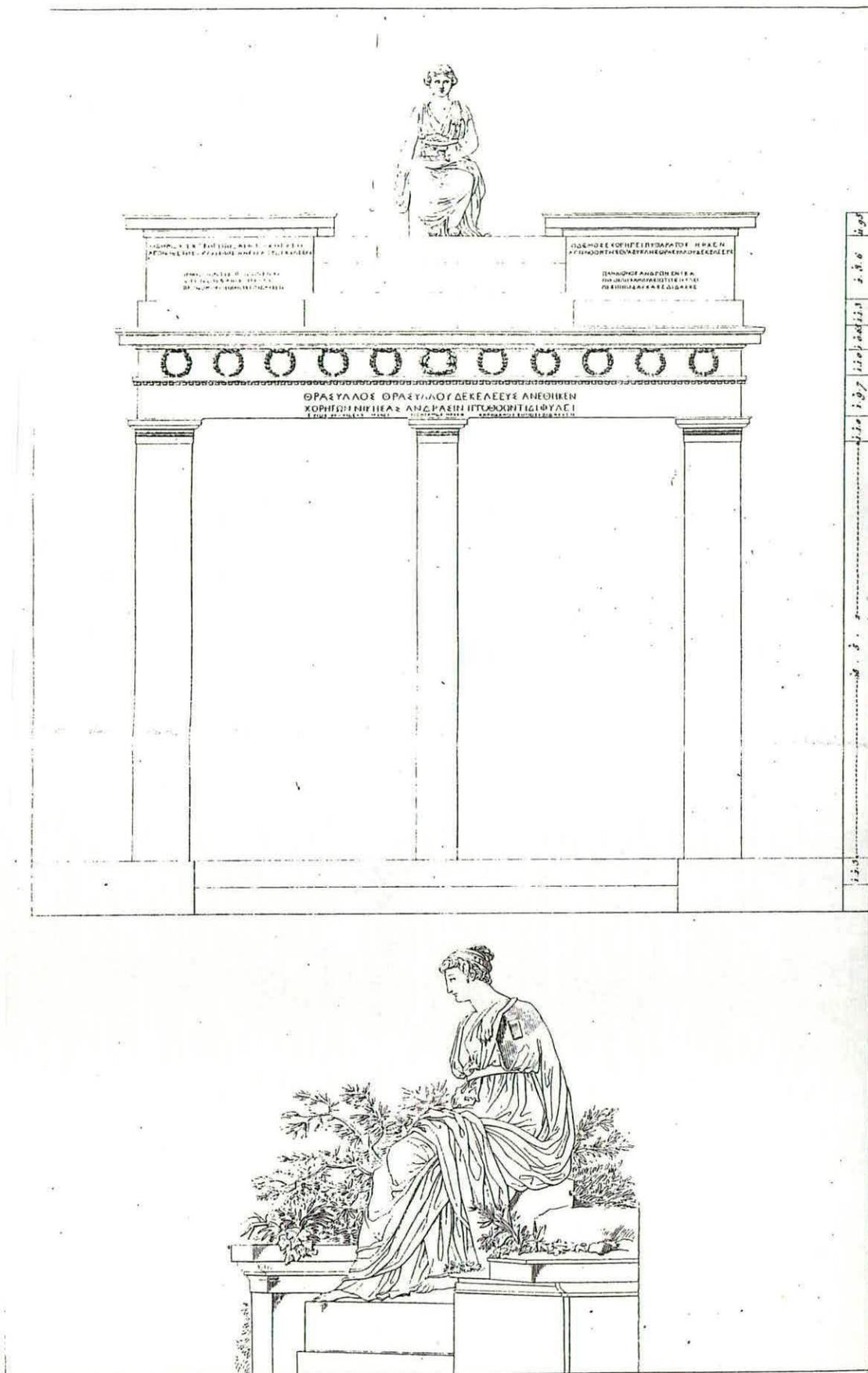


Fig. 12 Elevation of the Choragic Monument of Thrasyllos, Athens, taken from Stuart and Revett, ii (1825).

