

Heritage Statement

**13-15 John's Mews,
London, WC1N 2PA**



May 2024

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1.0 Introduction

This Statement was commissioned by Studio Three Architects on behalf of clients in March 2024 to accompany an application for planning permission and conservation area consent. The report was prepared by Neil Burton FSA IHBC, a director of The Architectural History Practice Ltd. Numbers 13-15 John's Mews(National Grid Reference TQ 30793 82058) are a pair of former stable buildings in the mews serving the houses on the western side of John Street. They are not listed but stand within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

2.0 Background and Development History

John Street and Doughty Street, its northern continuation, were both originally laid out on the Doughty estate. The southern part of John Street adjoining what is now Theobalds Road, previously known as the King's Road, was laid out and built up with houses as far north as Little James Street in the 1750s by the carpenter John Blagrove, who apparently gave his name to the street. Horwood's 1799 map of London (fig.1) shows the land north of Little James street as open ground. In fact much of the ground had already been let on building leases by Henry Doughty and from about 1807 onwards Doughty Street and the northern part of John Street were built-up with substantial terraced houses. The 1819 edition of Horwood's map (fig.2) shows the street almost fully built up but with only two buildings at the south end of the upper part of John's Mews. The mews was presumably built-up in the 1820s.

Applications were made in 1854 to lay a new drain from both 13 and 15 John's Mews, and the sketch plans submitted with the applications (figs.3 and 4) show that both buildings had broadly similar plans, with stalls for horses and a water closet at the rear. By the 1920s the stable fittings had been removed, both buildings had been enlarged at the rear (fig.5) and it appears from the joint drainage application that they were already in common ownership.

In 1970 an application was made by Mr F Sansom, the then owner, to adapt the buildings for garage use. The drawings submitted with the drainage application (not reproduced here because of very poor fiche quality) show that it was proposed to insert a new steel beam across almost the whole width of the front of both properties, allowing the existing two large ground floor openings to be increased in width and lowered in height. It was also proposed to reduce the number of the first floor window openings from four to three, with the right hand opening being bricked-up. To conceal these extensive alterations the entire front was to be covered with cement render.

It is not clear what was actually done in 1970 because the front of the buildings now differs from the plans 'as proposed'. The original wide door opening to number 15 has been replaced by a doorway with flanking windows and there are still four window openings at first floor level. However, what were originally two separate brick-fronted stable buildings do now have a uniform rendered front.

In recent years planning permission has been granted on several occasions for the conversion of the two buildings to residential use. Permission was granted in May 2014 for conversion into two dwellings (ref. 2013/4967/P). Permission was granted again in February 2022 for conversion into four self-contained flats (ref. 2021/0020/P). Both consents included alterations to the front elevations and the addition of mansard roofs.

In March 2024, prior approval was deemed as granted, which enabled the conversion of the building to two residential dwellings under permitted development rights, which has been implemented.

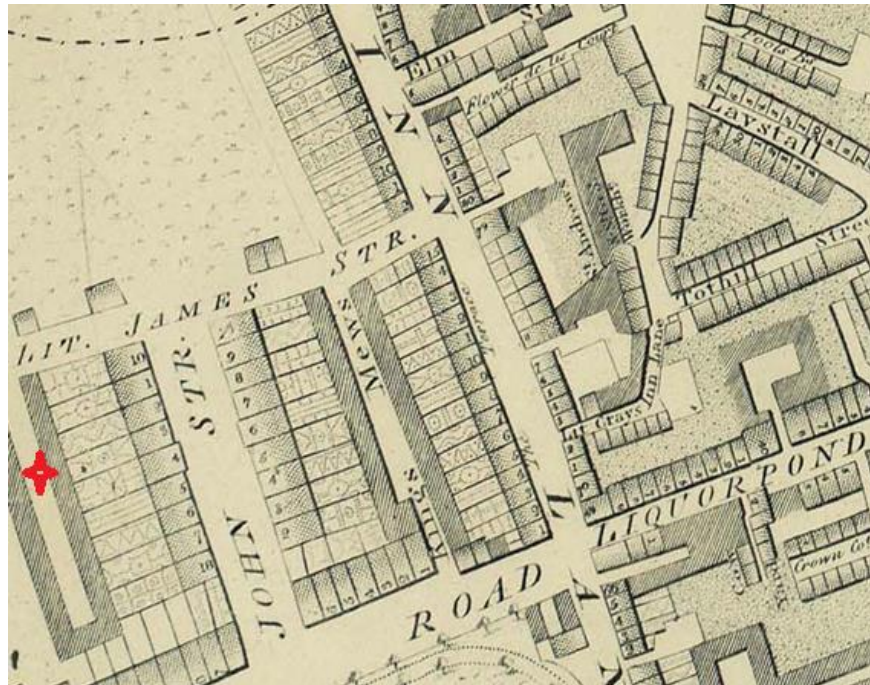


Figure.1: A detail from Richard Horwood's 1799 map of London with the southern part of John's Mews in the lower left-hand corner.



Figure.2 A detail from the 1819 edition of Horwood's map of London showing the northern part of John's Mews only partly built-up.

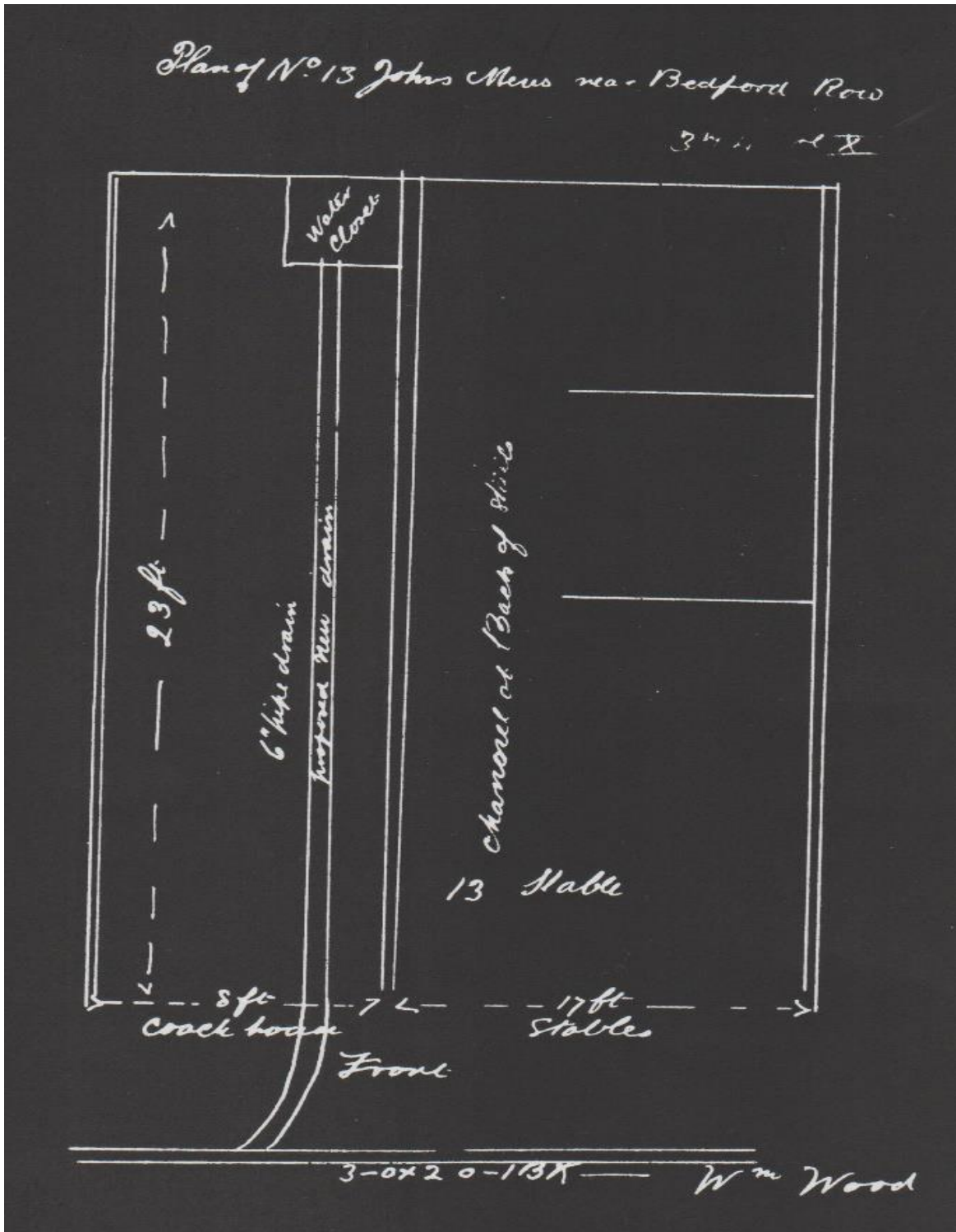


Fig.3: the ground plan of 13 Johns Mews in 1854 (Camden drainage plans)

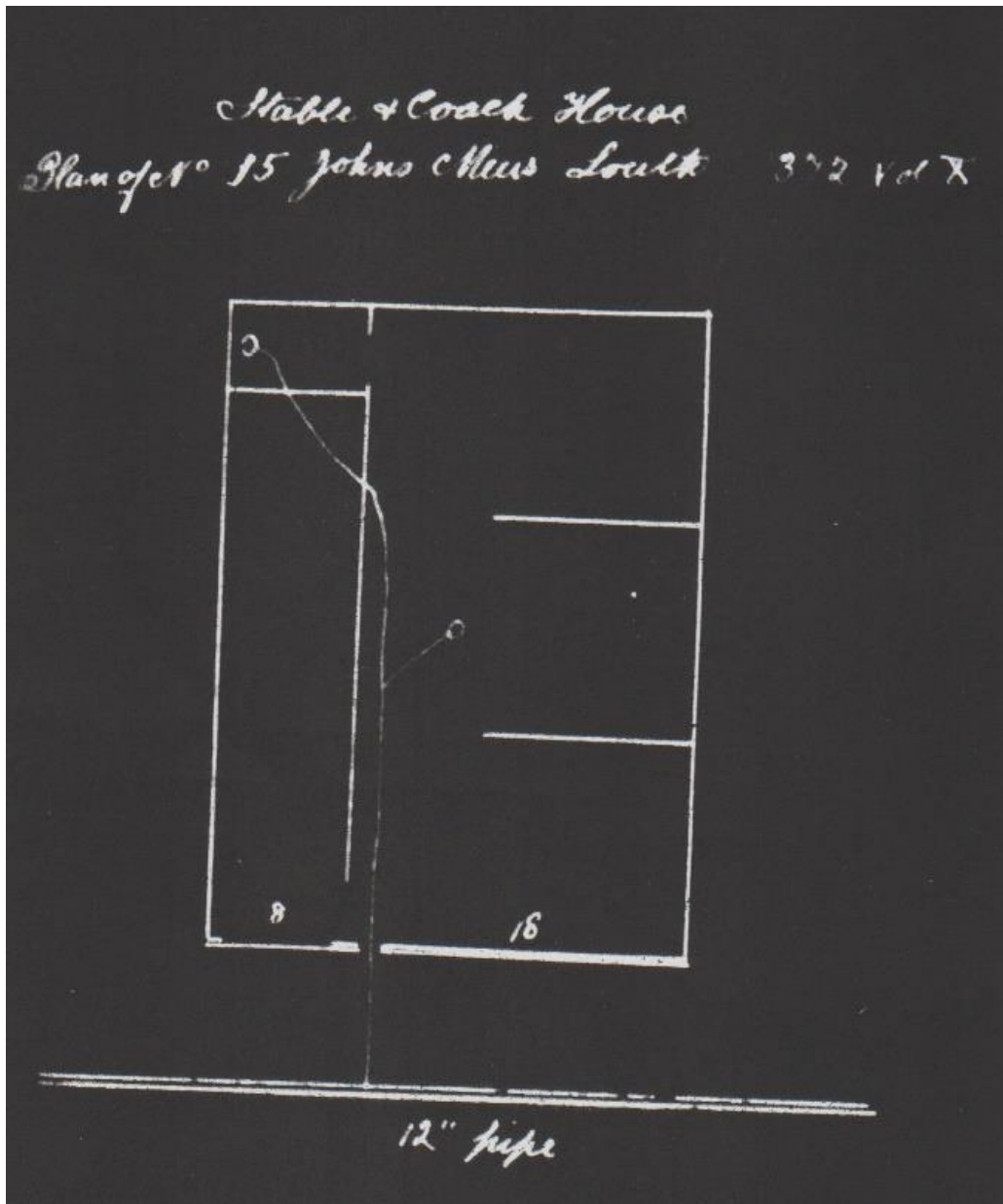


Fig. 4: The ground plan of 15 Johns Mews in 1854 (Camden drainage plans)

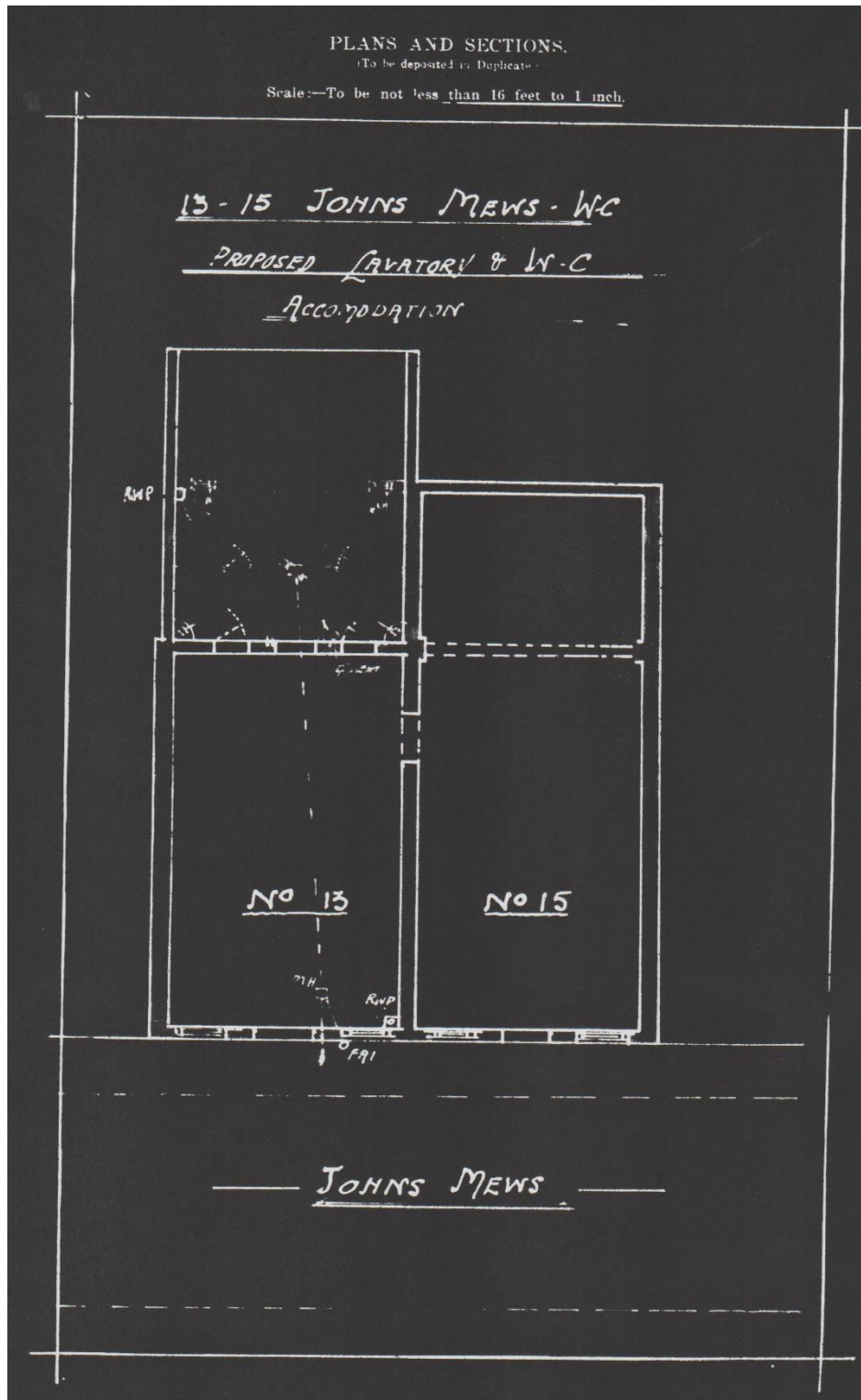


Figure.5: A plan of 13-15 Johns Mews in 1921, apparently at first floor level.



Figure 6: The fronts of numbers 11-15 John's Mews in 1975 (London Picture Library)



Figure 7: The fronts of numbers 11-15 John's Mews today

3.0 Assessment of Significance

The assessment of the significance of historic buildings and their settings is not an exact science. It is based on detailed knowledge of the building type, a comparison with what exists elsewhere, and the extent to which it may be distinctive or have special meaning for different groups of people.

Statutory designations provide some guide to the importance of historic buildings. The properties at 13-15 Johns Mews are not listed but they stand within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. According to the Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy, both buildings make a positive contribution to the area, but the townscape maps do not show the buildings as making a positive contribution.

Any contribution which the buildings make to the conservation area is because of the scale of their fronts, which conform to what was doubtless the original parapet line for the whole mews. The fronts probably also contain some original fabric, although there has been very considerable alteration with the insertion of steel beams and successive changes to the openings, which has been covered-up by the modern cement render finish.

In 2008 English Heritage published *Conservation Principles*, which identified four principal heritage values which might be taken into account when assessing significance and which can be used to amplify the assessments in the statutory lists. These values are *Evidential*, deriving from the potential of a place to yield (mainly archaeological) evidence about past human activity; *Historical*, deriving from the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present; *Aesthetic*, deriving from the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place; *Communal*, deriving from the meaning of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience and memory.

In 2012 the Department of Communities and Local Government issued the National Policy Planning Framework (slightly revised and updated several times since) which suggests that for planning purposes, the significance of historic buildings should be assessed under the headings of *archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic*.

Heritage Significance is essentially a hierarchical concept, using descending levels of value. The levels of significance are:

- *Exceptional* - important at national to international levels
- *Considerable* - important at regional level or sometimes higher
- *Some* - usually of local value only but possibly of regional significance for group or other value
- *Little* - of limited heritage or other value
- *Neutral* - features which neither enhance nor detract from the value of the site
- *Negative/intrusive* - features which detract from the value of the site

Evidential Value /Archaeological Significance On the evidence of maps, the northern part of John's Mews was laid out on a greenfield site in about 1807 and built up in the 1820s. It is unlikely that the buildings have any archaeological significance in the sense of below-ground archaeology which would be disturbed by building works. The original interiors of the buildings have been completely lost through later alterations and overall they are of ***Little Archaeological Significance or Evidential Value***

Historical Value/Historic Significance These two terraced mews cottages, originally with stables and coach house on the ground floor, were probably built in the 1820s as adjuncts to the large houses in Doughty Street. They later passed into commercial use. The buildings have ***Some Historical Significance as part of a mews linked to the development of Doughty Street.***

Aesthetic Value/Architectural and Artistic Significance The mews cottages are very simple functional structures. The interior fittings and much of the original interior fabric has been lost. The fronts have been considerably altered, with new openings, and the original brickwork has been covered with cement render, probably to conceal the scars of alteration. The buildings have ***Little Architectural Significance.***

Communal Value and Setting The mews cottages have always been in private occupation or small business use. They are of ***Little Communal Value in themselves*** but form part of a group of similar buildings lining the eastern side of John's Mews which makes a positive contribution to the area as a whole.

4.0 The Proposed Works and their Impact on the Built Heritage

The current proposals are set out in the drawings, statements and illustrations prepared by Studio Three Architects. In sum, they comprise the reconstruction of the buildings behind the existing fronts to provide two new residential units. The works will also include new mansard roofs to a raised profile to match the adjoining properties.

External Works

On the front elevation to John's Mews, the existing two storey rendered elevations of both properties will be retained but there will be some alterations to the openings. The ground floors will have large full-height windows alongside the front doors. On the upper floor the segment-headed openings in number 15 will be re-positioned. One of the first floor windows to each property will have a dropped cill to become glazed doors with Juliette balcony-type railings.

The new slate-covered mansard roofs will have two dormer windows to each property, aligned with the windows below. On the rear elevation, the original back walls which survive at first floor level will be retained and at ground floor level the rear projection across the back of both properties will be partially covered by a flat sedum roof, with a top-lit space between the projection and the rear boundary wall.

Internal Works

At ground and first floor level, the original brick spine wall dividing the two properties will be retained, and openings made in it since it was built will be infilled, returning it to its original state. The wall will be extended up to roof level to divide the properties. The rest of the interior will be reconfigured as part of the residential conversion.

Conclusion

Numbers 13-15 John's Mews are not listed buildings and are not on the Camden Local List but they have been identified in the Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal as making a positive contribution to the conservation area. That contribution consists in the general appearance of the two-storey fronts which, although much altered and covered in modern render, recall by their scale the original stable and coach house buildings which once lined the east side of the mews.

The alterations now proposed for the buildings will preserve the fronts of both properties. The new mansard roof will rise behind the coped parapet of the front and will read as a simple modern addition, clearly distinct from the earlier front, as in the adjoining properties. The works will cause no harm to the appearance of the buildings and the character of the conservation area will be preserved or enhanced by bringing semi-derelict buildings back into beneficial use.



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