

45-51 Monmouth Street and 29-31 Mercer Street

Official list entry

Heritage Category: **Listed Building**

Grade: **II**

List Entry Number: **1434006**

Date first listed: **08-Nov-2016**

List Entry Name: **45-51 Monmouth Street and 29-31 Mercer Street**

Statutory Address 1: **45-51 Monmouth Street and 29-31 Mercer Street, Comyn Ching Triangle, Seven Dials, London, WC2H 9DG**

This List entry helps identify the building designated at this address for its special architectural or historic interest.

Unless the List entry states otherwise, it includes both the structure itself and any object or structure fixed to it (whether inside or outside) as well as any object or structure within the curtilage of the building.

For these purposes, to be included within the curtilage of the building, the object or structure must have formed part of the land since before 1st July 1948.

[Understanding list entries](https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/understanding-list-entries/) (<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/understanding-list-entries/>)

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Location

Statutory Address: **45-51 Monmouth Street and 29-31 Mercer Street, Comyn Ching Triangle, Seven Dials, London, WC2H 9DG**

The building or site itself may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County: **Greater London Authority**

District: **Camden (London Borough)**

Parish: **Non Civil Parish**

National Grid Reference: **TQ3007481064**

Summary

Commercial offices above ground floor retail unit (Sassoons hair salon in 2016) and entrance to Ching Court, 1985-7 by the Terry Farrell Partnership as part of the regeneration of Comyn Ching Triangle.

Reasons for Designation

45-51 Monmouth Street/29-31 Mercer Street, 1985-7 by the Terry Farrell Partnership, is listed at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

- * Architect: a significant, formative scheme by a leading British architect and exponent of postmodernism;
- * Architectural interest: the corner stones of a spatially powerful, mixed-use regenerative scheme, marked by bold form and detail, based on an intellectual understanding of historic precedent, interpreted in a witty postmodern idiom;
- * Contextual placemaking: a masterly exercise in placemaking, eliding the old and new, that recognised the scale and patina of the original (and then recently listed) buildings and spaces in the creation of Ching Court;
- * Degree of survival: little altered, retaining external profiles, detail, fixtures and fittings and internal public spaces;
- * Historic interest: an early and exemplary project in urban contextualism, reflecting the emerging philosophy of conservation and regeneration.

History

SITE HISTORY Comyn Ching Triangle in its present form is the result of a regeneration project, executed in three phases from 1978-91 by the Terry Farrell Partnership. The project integrated the restoration of existing C17, C18 and C19 listed buildings and shop fronts with the design and erection of new buildings and the creation of a new public space, in a mixed use development. It occupies one of the triangular blocks that radiate from the Seven Dials, laid out in 1692 by Sir Thomas Neale, and is bounded by Monmouth Street to the W, Mercer Street to the NE and Shelton Street to the SE, and at its core is Ching Court, and a public thoroughfare through it, created in 1983-5.

The regeneration of Comyn Ching Triangle was central to Farrell's work in the Covent Garden area, following Clifton Nurseries (1980-1). It is a significant example of his approach to urban contextualisation from the 1980s, in its pragmatic elision of a new urban plan and structures with the existing scale, fabric and patina of the essentially C17, C18 and C19 streetscape.

Farrell created a new landscaped, public space in the centre of the site, an area which had previously been gradually built over, obscuring the original building line. New entrances from Monmouth Street and Shelton Street provided access to this courtyard, and a diagonal public route across it, while a series of added entrances at ground floor level within the courtyard provided access to the upper floors of the existing buildings and gave prominence to the rear elevations which had been previously hidden by extensions and years of accumulated buildings. At the corners of the site new buildings replaced redundant commercial premises, while the intervening street frontages of existing commercial premises, most of them listed buildings of C17 and C18 origin, were renovated. Integral to the project was the reinstatement and refurbishment of the premises and showroom of the longstanding occupants, Comyn Ching ironmongers, at 17-19 Shelton Street.

The historic streetscape is made up of traditional three and four storey buildings, now mostly with added attics or mansards and with basements. Most are conventionally constructed in red, plum and stock brick, some with red brick or engineering brick dressings, some stucco rendered or painted, and have slate and tile roofs.

The scale, forms and palette of materials and colours used in the new buildings at the corners of the site complement and provide both a unifying identity and new vitality to the scheme. They are clad in traditional materials interpreted in a forward-thinking way, while windows and bold Mannerist entrances are coloured turquoise blue and deep red. Throughout, the scheme is unified by Farrell's interpretation of the Comyn Ching logo – paired inverted 'Cs' which are a signature of the metalwork. At the core of the site, Ching Court is a discrete and tranquil paved court, which creates a seamless connection with the buildings. Sloping from N to S, it is reached by semicircular steps descending from the N entrance and shallow stepped paving rising from the

Shelton Street entrance. The corner rotundas, prominent rear entrances, modelled rear windows, masonry parapet walls, kerbs and a built-in seat to the rear of Mercer Street, place the buildings within the landscape. Varied forms of steel balconies, window guards, and later planters also designed by Farrell, and bearing the CC logo, provide context within the idiom of the site.

RECEPTION On completion the scheme was admired and well received, notably in a critique in the Architects' Journal (6 March 1985), which praised its architectural assurance and ingenuity. 'Where old fabric has been kept it is revered and treated seriously, but in the final result we are not so much aware of the old and the new co-existing side by side as of one single lively identity embodied in the still recognisable historic streets'. (AJ 6 March 1985, 58). The project won a Civic Trust Award in 1987 and on 26 March 1999 the Seven Dials Renaissance Project was awarded an Environmental Design Award by the London Borough of Camden.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT Designs for the enabling stage were prepared from 1978 and executed on site from 1981 to 1983. Following the granting of listed building consent, the corner buildings at Seven Dials were demolished and the C17 panelled interiors and stairs from 51 Monmouth Street were removed and stored, to be reinstated in 55 Monmouth Street.

Phase 1 (on site June 1983, completed May 1985), entailed the restoration, conversion or part-reconstruction of 15 listed C17-C19 houses and shopfronts; and the creation of Ching Court and new entrances within it to the upper floors of Shelton Street and Monmouth Street buildings. It encompassed 53-63 Monmouth Street, laid out as a mix of offices on three storeys above retail on the ground floor and basement levels; 11-19 Shelton Street, arranged as a mix of flats on three storeys above retail at ground floor and basement levels; and 21-27 Mercer Street, arranged as four houses, for private sale.

Phase 2 (on site 1985, completed c1987) comprised a new building on the corner of Seven Dials, at 45-51 Monmouth Street and 29-31 Mercer Street, which provided four storeys of offices above ground and basement level retail premises. A new building on the corner site at 19 Mercer Street and 21 Shelton Street provided flats on six storeys and a basement.

Phase 3 (on site c1989, completed c1991), addressed the southern apex of the site, 65-75 Monmouth Street and 1-9 Shelton Street. The restoration, conversion or part-reconstruction of four listed buildings (65-71 Monmouth Street) and four unlisted C17-C19 houses and shopfronts on Shelton Street, integrated with a new building at the southern corner of the triangle, provided retail accommodation on the ground floor and basement, three storeys of offices above, with a residential top floor.

ARCHITECT Sir Terry Farrell (b.1938) is a pre-eminent British architect and urban designer, of international

standing. He has been a leading force in establishing postmodernism as an architectural presence in this country. After graduating from the University of Newcastle School of Architecture, Farrell took a Masters in Architecture and City Planning at the University of Pennsylvania, where tutors included Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, whose work would later have a bearing on the postmodernist movement in Britain.

While working briefly for the LCC in 1961-2, Farrell was responsible for the Blackwall Tunnel Ventilation Towers (constructed 1961-4, each listed at Grade II, NHLE 1246736 and 1246738). After 15 years in partnership with Nicholas Grimshaw, which included the Herman Miller Factory, Bath (1976, listed Grade II, NHLE 1415261), Farrell set up practice independently. At that time he was also involved in Charles Jencks' Thematic House, London (1979-84), an early and important essay in postmodernism. Notable projects in Britain, the majority in London, include Clifton Nurseries, Covent Garden, (1980-1), TV am studios, Camden Lock, 1982, now altered; Comyn Ching, Seven Dials (completed 1985); Landmark House, City of London (1985-7), Charing Cross Station (Embankment Place), Westminster (1990); Alban Gate, 125 London Wall (1990-2); MI6 headquarters, Vauxhall (1993); also the Edinburgh International Conference Centre (1995). More recent projects range from the Home Office, London (completed 2005); the Great North Museum, Newcastle (completed 2009) to Bicester Eco Town, Oxon (ongoing). He established an office in Hong Kong in 1991, leading to a prolific practice in Asia, noted for Beijing South Station (completed 2008).

Farrell continues to be an important voice, contributing through published works to current architectural opinion. The Farrell Review of Architecture and the Built Environment (2014) followed a commission from the Department of Culture Media and Sport.

Details

Commercial offices above ground floor retail unit (Sassoons hair salon in 2016) and entrance to Ching Court, 1985-7 by the Terry Farrell Partnership as part of the regeneration of Comyn Ching Triangle.

MATERIALS: conventionally constructed with a steel frame or of reinforced concrete, the elevations are predominantly clad in grey brown brick with flush yellow stock brick and reconstituted stone bands, and narrow banding on or wrapping round the apex and outer bays. It has a flush, glazed brick plinths, and cills. Windows are coloured dark blue grey and dark red; entrances and passages in dark red. The scale, forms and palette of materials and colours used in the new buildings complement and provide both a unifying identity and new vitality to the scheme.

PLAN: the block forms the N apex of the triangular block, first laid out in 1692 by Thomas Neal and is laid out roughly symmetrically with four floors of commercial offices above a ground floor retail unit. On Monmouth

Street is a monumental entrance and passage leading to Ching Court and within it, entrance to the commercial offices.

EXTERIOR: the apex is formed of a three-storey canted square section into which a glazed rotunda is slotted at third floor level, rising to five storeys, and set forward from two set-back, diminishing attic storeys on the return elevations. The glazed drum is faceted with a pronounced oversized cornice and to each side are small semi-circular balconies with pierced balustrades.

Ground floor shop door and window units are of timber, with fixed horizontal lights; those at the apex are in deep stepped brick openings, and full-height openings are above a quadrant moulded cill. On both the Monmouth Street and Mercer Street elevations the shop window is divided by an off-centre brick drum with a dark red, plain band at the head. First and second floor windows are slightly recessed, with pairs of deep red three-light casements or fixed lights. The fourth and fifth floors, with a four-bay centrepiece and set back side bays, have pairs of similar two-light casements or fixed lights; the centrepiece has flush banding at cornice height and upper floor, attic, windows are in recessed moulded panels.

The main entrance to the office floors, at 45 Monmouth Street, is within the monumental public access to Ching Court. A square opening with flush, stock brick dressings is divided by a central moulded drum pier on a masonry base, with the opening to No.45 set back to the left in a moulded doorcase (with a renewed door). A pair of steel gates in a geometric design with the opposing Comyn Ching C on each, close the opening, with a similar dividing panel between. The passage is lined in timber panelling with robust simply formed oriental inspired mouldings, the pier, panelling and doorcases all painted deep red. At the rear, the entrance passage leads into an open drum with a concentric panelled ceiling, supported on masonry piers, each with a moulded banded base and a simplified capital formed of three incised bands. The rear wall is glazed, lighting the lobby. The rotunda forms the base of the corner feature at the N apex of the Court and is reached from it by a flight of masonry steps. Railings here as elsewhere have slender geometric panels flanking pairs of opposing Comyn Ching Cs. The drum rises through four storeys, with a giant order at first and second floors and attic storey above a moulded cornice. The principal floors have faceted tripartite glazed door and window units, with overlights and margin panels, and geometric window guards matching the railings below. The attic storey has slender pilasters, with simple plain window units and window guards between.

INTERIOR: the ground floor office foyer at 45 Monmouth Street has shallow moulded cornices and ceiling mouldings.

Pursuant to s.1 (5A) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 ('the Act') it is declared that beyond the aforementioned ground floor foyer, office floors are not of special architectural or historic

interest and plant and services are also excluded from listing.

Sources

Books and journals

The Master Architect Series: Terry Farrell: selected and current works, (1994)

Cherry, B, Pevsner, N, The Buildings of England: London 4, North, (1998 revised 2001), 318

Davies, Emma (ed), Collage and Context Terry Farrell The Partnership's Complete Works 1981-1991, (2013)

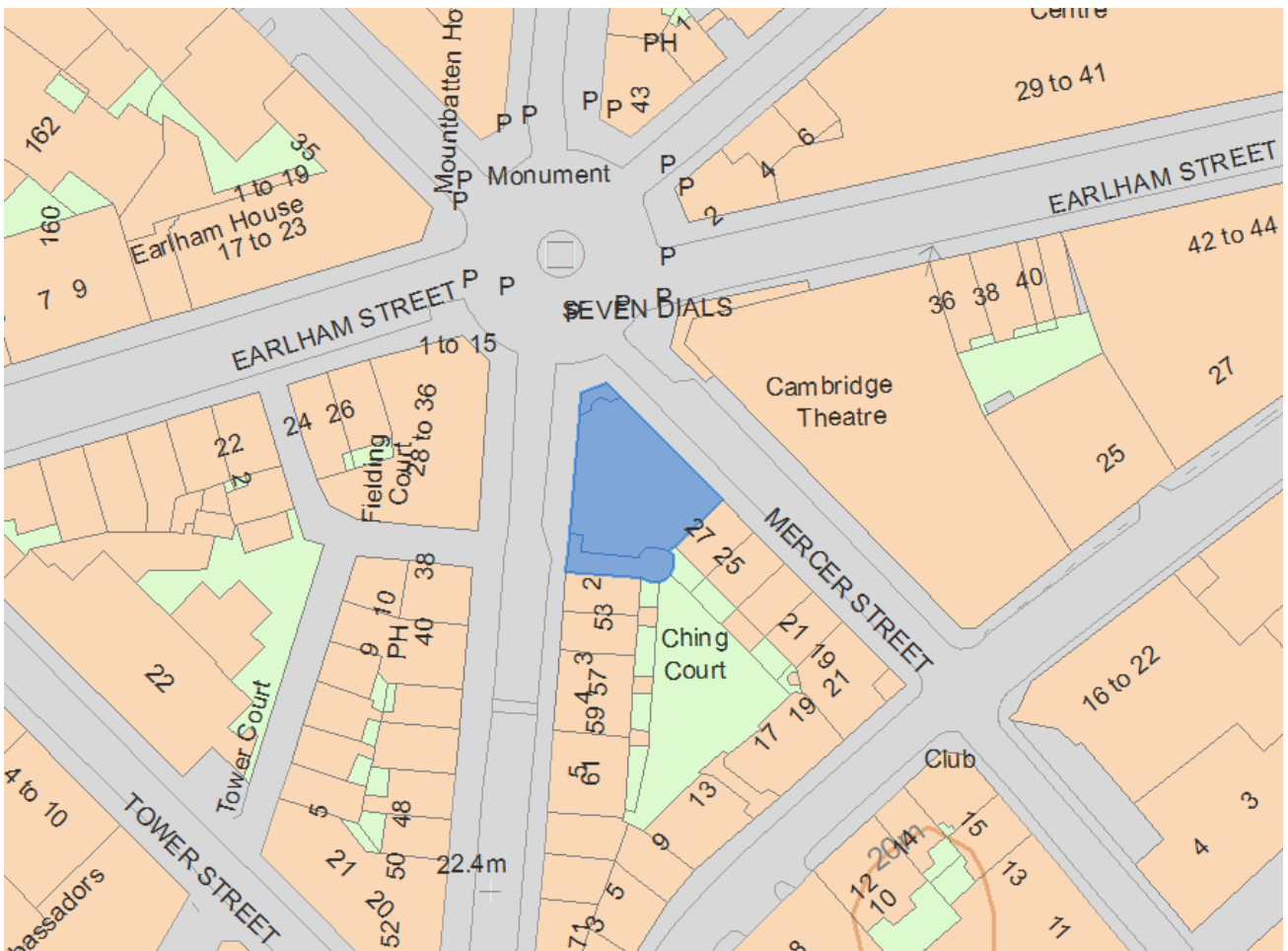
'Post-modern: continuity in the work of Farrells 1981-2011' in Architecture Today , , Vol. 222, (Oct 2011), 2-23

'Historic Precedent: the rehabilitation of the 18th century buildings in the Comyn Ching triangle at Seven Dials in Covent Garden' in Architects' Journal , , Vol. 181 no.10 , (6 March 1985), 47-58

'Facsimile facades in Comyn Ching?' in Architects' Journal , , Vol. 173 no.14, (8 April 1981), 629

Legal

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.



Map

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