

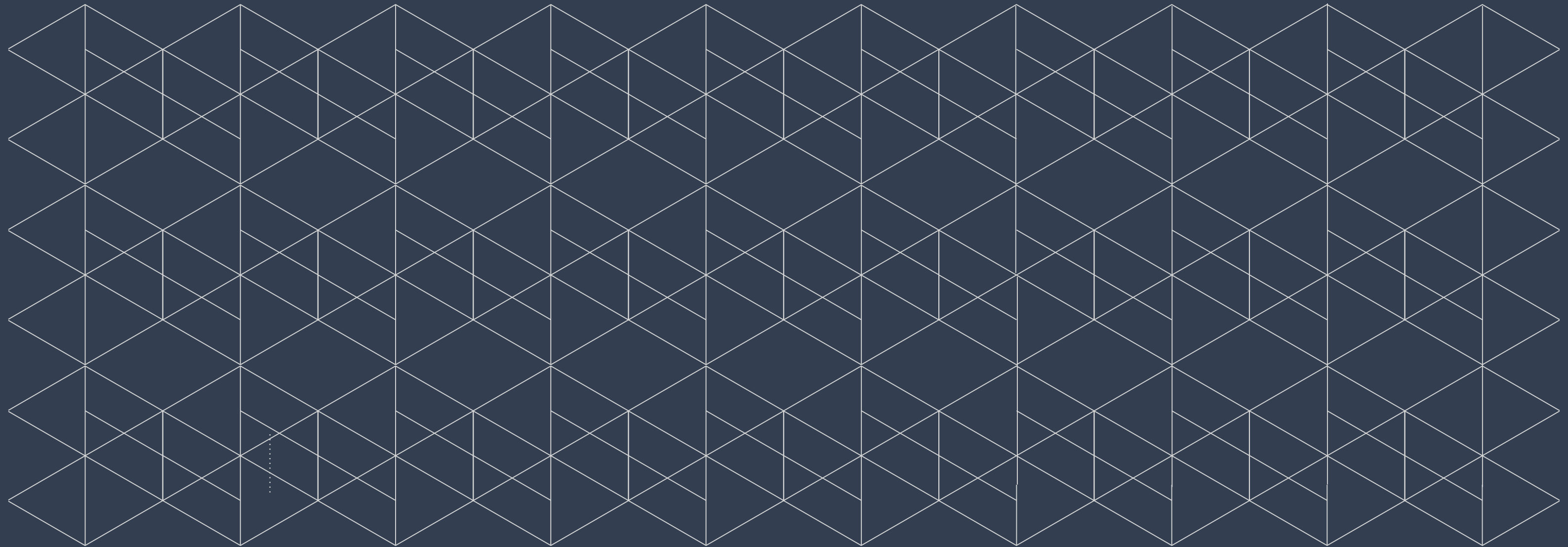
23 Mercer Street, London, WC2H 9QR

Heritage Appraisal



The
Heritage
Practice

July 2024



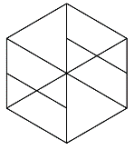
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No.23 Mercer Street, London WC2H 9QR
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1 Introduction

1.1 The following Heritage Appraisal has been prepared in support of applications for planning permission and listed building consent at no.23 Mercer Street, London WC2H 9QR.

1.2 The building is Grade II listed and is situated in the Seven Dials Conservation Area.

1.3 The proposals are for internal and external works to the building. These include the replacement of the modern staircase, reconfiguration of its plan form and the installation of a new kitchen and bathrooms. The existing modern glazed infill to the rear at lower ground floor level will be replaced with a new glazed infill structure and an open lightwell area.

1.4 In line with paragraphs 200 and 201 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2023, the purpose of this appraisal is to define the significance of the listed building and the features which form part of its special architectural and historic interest, as well as its contribution to the character and appearance of the surrounding Seven Dials Conservation Area. This assessment has been made in line with the heritage values set out in Historic England's 'Conservation Principles' (2008).

1.5 This appraisal has been produced using desk based and online research, combined with a visual inspection of the site and wider area. It should be read in conjunction with the drawings and supporting information prepared by Echlin.

1.6 The document will describe the proposed works to the listed building and their impact. They will then be assessed in relation to the relevant statutory, national, regional and local heritage policy framework.

1.7 This Heritage Appraisal has been prepared by Hannah Walker (BA (Hons) Oxon MSc IHBC) who has extensive experience in dealing with proposals that affect the historic environment. She has 24 years of experience, of which 15 years was in local authorities, including 10 years as a Principal Conservation & Design Officer at the London Borough of Camden. She also has a wide range of experience in the private sector, preparing heritage statements and appraising the significance of historic buildings. She has trained as a historian, has a specialist qualification in historic building conservation and is a full member of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC).

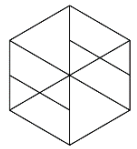


Figure 1: An aerial view of the triangular Ching Court site, bounded by Monmouth, Mercer and Shelton Streets. The site is marked with a red dot.



Figure 2: The rear entrances to the perimeter buildings added as part of the redevelopment, the landscaped courtyard setting and the rear parts of the postmodern corner blocks.

2 Site and surroundings

2.1 Mercer Street is located in the heart of Covent Garden and forms part of the series of streets which radiate from Seven Dials.

2.2 No.23 Mercer Street is a former warehouse, built in 1894 by Killby & Gayford for Messrs. Pankhurst & Co. It now forms part of Ching Court, a comprehensive re-development by the Terry Farrell Partnership of the triangular site bounded by Mercer Street, Monmouth Street and Shelton Street between 1978 and 1991. This mixed use development was an early and exemplary project in urban renewal, placing the conservation of historic buildings at its core.

2.3 The perimeter buildings of Ching Court date from the late 17th, 18th and 19th centuries and were renovated and remodelled as part of the project. These stand at the back of pavement and rise in height to between three and four storeys. Some of the buildings were originally townhouses, with later added ground floor shops. These are generally of red, plum or yellow stock brickwork, some with mansard roofs and others with their roofscape concealed behind a parapet. A small number of buildings are faced in painted stucco. Whilst many of the original domestic properties were historically converted to commercial uses during the 18th and 19th century, no.23 is one of a few properties originally constructed as a warehouse.

2.4 At each of the corners of the triangular site are newbuild elements, up to five storeys in height and providing focal points within the closely packed townscape. The scale, form and palette of materials used on their facades respond to the character of the surrounding historic buildings, but with a post-modern architectural influence, particularly to the building on the corner of Monmouth Street and Mercer Street with its circular glazed tower and banded brickwork.

2.5 A open courtyard space to the rear of the retained perimeter buildings was created as part of the scheme, replacing buildings and structures which had accumulated over time and accessed via new entrances beneath the buildings on Shelton Street and Monmouth Street. The courtyard is enlivened by the post-modern corner rotundas, prominent rear entrances into the buildings and the integrated masonry walls, kerbs and built in seating.

2.6 A fuller description of the building and its significance is contained at section 5 of this Appraisal.

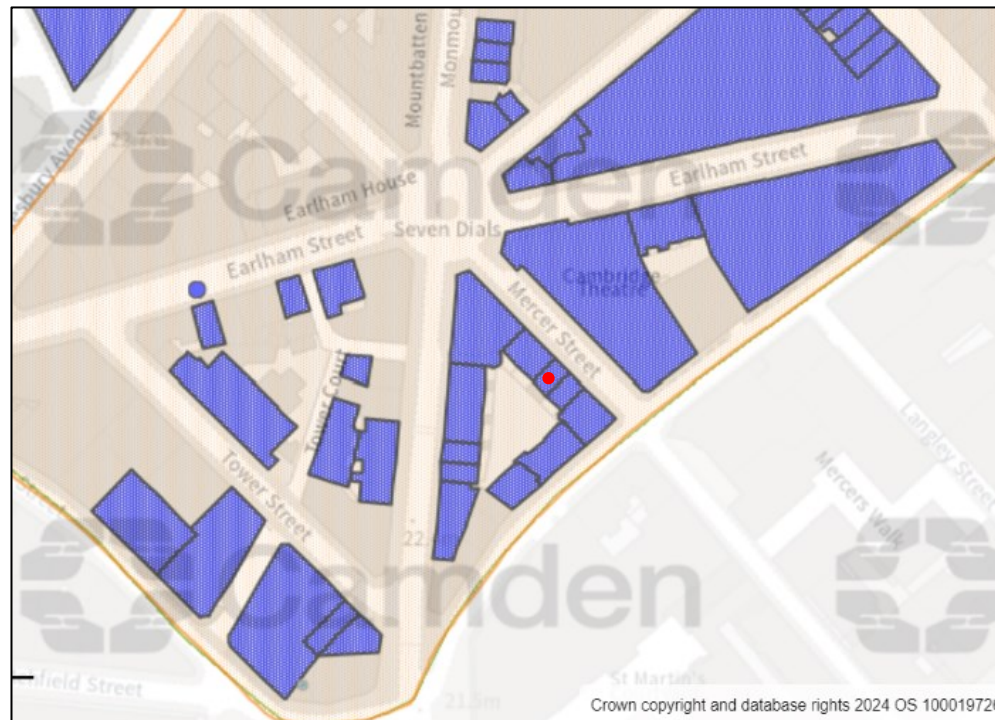


Figure 3: Map showing designated and non-designated heritage assets in the area surrounding the application site. Grade II listed buildings are marked in blue and the Seven Dials Conservation Area is shaded in buff. The application site is marked with a red dot.

Heritage Assets

Statutorily listed buildings

2.7 No.23 Mercer Street was Grade II listed on 15 January 1973. The listing was last updated on 16 March 2017 and now reflects the significance of the site as part of the Comyn Ching triangle redevelopment. The listing description is now very lengthy and is reproduced in full at Appendix B of this Appraisal. The Summary and Reasons for Designation are cited below.

Summary

Warehouse, now a house, late C19, restored and in part remodelled 1983-5 by the Terry Farrell Partnership as part of the regeneration of Comyn Ching Triangle. To the rear are the parapet wall and railings forming the boundary wall to 23 Mercer Street and the built-in seat enclosing Ching Court.

Reasons for Designation

23 Mercer Street, a warehouse, now a house, late C19, restored and in part remodelled 1983-5 by the Terry Farrell Partnership as part of the regeneration of Comyn Ching Triangle, and including the built-in seat, parapet wall and railings to the rear, 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: an C19 warehouse, retained as part 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;

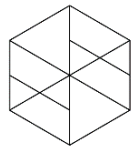
* Contextual placemaking: a masterly exercise in placemaking, eliding the old and new, that recognised the scale and patina of the original buildings and spaces in the creation of Ching Court;

* Degree of survival: very little altered, retaining Farrell's restored facades, their detail, fixtures and fittings;

* Historic interest: an early and exemplary project in urban contextualism, reflecting the emerging philosophy of conservation and regeneration.

2.8 The area immediately surrounding the application site contains a wealth of listed buildings, with most of the properties within the Comyn Ching development being statutorily listed. The Cambridge Theatre sits on the opposite side of Mercer Street to the application site.

- Cambridge Theatre – Grade II
- Nos.19 & 21 Mercer Street – Grade II
- Nos. 25 & 27 Mercer Street – Grade II
- Nos. 45-51 Monmouth Street & nos.29-31 Mercer Street – Grade II
- Nos.11-19 Shelton Street – Grade II
- Nos.53-71 Monmouth Street – Grade II



The Seven Dials Conservation Area

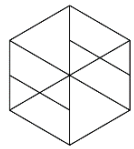
2.9 The application site is located in the Seven Dials Conservation Area which was first designated in 1971, with extensions in 1974, 1991 and 1998. The western section of the designation, where the application site is located, focuses upon the Seven Dials junction and the roads which radiate out from it, forming distinctive triangular plots of land. The conservation area is divided into three separate character areas, with Mercer Street located in Sub Area 1 – Seven Dials.

2.10 The Seven Dials Conservation Area Statement was adopted in 1998. The character of the area is summarised on page 11:

The special character of the Conservation Area is found in the range and mix of building types and uses and the street layout. The character is not dominated by one particular period or style of building but rather it is their combination that is of special interest. Most buildings appear to spring from the footway without physical front boundaries or basement areas. In this tightly contained streetscape, changes of road width, building form and land-use give dramatic character variation, narrow alleys and hidden yards provide unforeseen interest and the few open spaces provide relief and a chance to pause and take stock of one's surroundings. Apart from Seven Dials there are no formal open spaces but some significant informal spaces occur in the form of yards and street junctions.

2.11 Specifically in relation to the Ching Court development, the Statement notes at page 12 that:

The 'triangle' which is bounded by Mercer Street, Shelton Street and Monmouth Street is a good example of the changing character and vitality of Covent Garden. The 1980s development placed Terry Farrell designed corner buildings adjacent to restored Grade II listed 17th century buildings and created a mix of residential, retail and office use. The Shelton Street frontage has a particularly good restoration of 19th century shopfronts. A public courtyard was created at the centre of the triangle, an important urban space for the area. The scheme demonstrates how modern design can successfully integrate with the historic environment. The yard has a restrained, semi-formal air with crisp Yorkstone paving, wall top benches and ornamental trees in iron grilles. This contrasts strongly with Neal's Yard.



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3 Relevant planning history

1985

Planning permission (8500902) and Listed Building Consent (8570170) were granted on 7 August 1985 for 'Works of refurbishment and alteration to 23 Mercer St WC2. (As shown on drawings numbered CC/SK1 957A 958 P1 P2 P3 and P4 and Description of Works).'

1995

Listed Building Consent (9570148) was granted on 22 September 1995 for 'Internal alterations at third floor level together with the erection of a small air conditioning unit on the roof as shown on drawing number 1237/01B as revised by letter dated 19 July 1995.'

2010

Listed Building Consent (2009/5833/L) was granted on 17 February 2010 for 'Replacement of existing single glazed windows and doors to match existing and installation of secondary glazed screen units to elevation of single dwelling house (Class C3).'

Planning permission (2010/0574/P) and Listed Building Consent (2010/0401/L) were granted on 13 April 2010 for 'Reinstating of existing Pulley at 3rd floor level and retractable platform at 1st, 2nd and 3rd floor levels (C3).'



Figure 4: Roque's map of 1746.



Figure 5: Horwood's map of 1799.

4 Historic development of the site and area

4.1 The area around Seven Dials was owned historically by The Hospital of St Giles, a leper hospital founded in 1117. The land passed to Henry VIII in 1537 and remained undeveloped until the end of the 17th century when the layout out of Covent Garden as a formal square by the Earl of Bedford, to the designs of Inigo Jones, prompted development in the surrounding area.

4.2 The distinctive road layout of Seven Dials was devised by Thomas Neal, a speculator and Master of the Mint, from 1693 onwards. A small circus, with a Doric column at its centre, was laid out with a pattern of radiating streets. These created triangular blocks which were developed with domestic terraces, first occupied by merchants, gentlemen and higher-class tradesmen. These residential properties were interspersed with commercial development which emerged during the 18th and 19th centuries, particularly the brewing industry, which built large warehouses, as well as a plethora of other trades, including straw hat manufacturers, butchers, watch repairers, wig makers and booksellers.

4.3 Roque's map of 1746 shows the area as fully built over, with Mercer Street originally known as Little White Lion Street. Horwood's map of 1799 depicts it in more detail, with a perimeter of terraced houses and open space in the centre of the triangular blocks.

4.4 The reputation of Seven Dials began to slide during the 19th century as many of the houses were subdivided into lodgings, including The Kip, a famous lodging house where residents slept leaning on a rope. Over time the area became notorious for its crime and violence, with the Seven Dials junction a popular spot for congregation and loitering.

4.5 The presence of Covent Garden wholesale fruit and vegetable market had a huge impact upon the character of the area, with most of its buildings in uses ancillary to the market, including warehouse and office space. The market closed in 1973-74, relocating to Nine Elms, and after initial plans for its comprehensive redevelopment and the creation of an inner ring road were abandoned, the emphasis was upon urban regeneration and the preservation of the area's physical fabric.

4.6 The adoption of the Covent Garden Action Area Plan in 1978, which sought to safeguard and increase the area's residential population, precipitated residential development in the area. This included the Comyn Ching triangle site, bounded by Mercer Street, Monmouth Street and Skelton Street. This took its name from Comyn Ching ironmongers, established in c.1723, who occupied much of this urban block by the 1970s. Photographs from the time however show that many of the perimeter buildings were in a dilapidated condition and in need of significant repair and refurbishment.

4.7 The site was redeveloped holistically by the Terry Farrell Partnership, with a mixed-use scheme which retained and integrated the 17th, 18th and 19th century listed buildings and their shopfronts, alongside new buildings to define the corners of the triangular site. The upper floors of the perimeter buildings were refurbished and remodelled as residential properties, with retail uses at ground floor. Within the centre of the site, the accumulated structures and buildings were replaced with a new landscaped open space. Preparatory work was undertaken from 1978, with the remainder of the project delivered in three phases between 1983 and 1991.



Figures 6 & 7: A 1913 view of Mercer Street, known as Little White Lion Street at this time (left) and a 1974 image of the dilapidated condition of nos.21 and 23 Mercer Street prior to the redevelopment of the triangle site.



Figures 9-11 left to right: The 1871, 1894 and 1952 Ordnance Survey maps.

Development of the site

4.8 The 1874 Ordnance Survey map shows a densely packed urban block with its interior almost fully covered over with buildings. No.23 Mercer Street is shown as merged with no.25 at this point, as well as with buildings in the centre of the block and those at nos.13-19 Shelton Street – presumably all of these buildings were in use by Comyn Ching at this point. By 1894 their premises had spread into buildings facing Monmouth Street. By 1952 a substantial chunk of the triangular site was shown as a single premises.

4.9 The internal and external restoration and remodelling of no.23 Mercer Street formed part of Phase 1 of the Comyn Ching redevelopment, beginning in June 1983 and completed in May 1985. Along with nos.21, 25 and 27, the building was converted and refurbished as a house, for private sale.

4.10 Planning permission and listed building consent were granted in 1985 for works to the front and rear facades of the building. This included increasing the size of the glazing in the shopfront door and the alteration of a 1st floor window on the rear façade to form a door, alongside a new open steel balcony. The glazed roof over the rear lightwell also dates from this period.

4.11 Since then, planning permission and listed building consent were granted in 2010 for the reinstatement of a cast iron winch to the front façade of the building. This has been undertaken to an authentic design



Figures 12 & 13: The front (left) and rear (right) facades of no.23 Mercer Street.

5 Significance of the site

5.1 The National Planning Policy Framework Annex 2 defines significance as “*The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset’s physical presence, but also from its setting.*”

5.2 A heritage asset is defined as “*A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. Heritage asset includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing).*” In this case the heritage assets are the statutorily listed no.23 Mercer Street and the Seven Dials Conservation Area.

5.3 Historic England’s document ‘Conservation Principles – Policies and Guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment’ (2008) identifies a series of values that can be attributed to a heritage asset and which help to appraise and define its significance. Paragraph 3.3 of the document outlines that:

“In order to identify the significance of a place, it is necessary first to understand its fabric, and how and why it has changed over time; and then to consider:

- *who values the place, and why they do so*
- *how those values relate to its fabric*
- *their relative importance*
- *whether associated objects contribute to them*
- *the contribution made by the setting and context of the place*
- *how the place compares with others sharing similar values.*”

5.4 In assessing the significance of no.23 Mercer Street it is therefore necessary to examine its origins, history, form, architectural design, layout, materials and relationship with surrounding buildings. In making this assessment, consideration has been given to its intrinsic architectural merit, completeness, the extent of any alterations and their impact, the contribution of the buildings to the character of the area and the degree to which the buildings illustrate aspects of local or national history.

5.5 The building was constructed in 1894 as a purpose-built warehouse. It is four storeys in height, with a ground floor shopfront. The façade is of yellow stock brickwork with subtle red brick embellishment. This includes coursing above the 1st floor windows and to the gable, dogtooth moulding beneath the 2nd floor window and to the arched heads at 3rd floor level.

5.6 The commercial character of the building is reflected in its fenestration, with loading doors at each floor, flanked by windows. Beneath the doors are small, hinged timber loading platforms on cast iron brackets which can be raised or lowered. An authentic cast iron winch was reinstated to the front façade of the building at 2nd floor level in 2010, reinforcing and enhancing the warehouse character of the building. The windows and doors are of painted timber and were replaced on a like for like basis, also in 2010.



Figures 14-17 (clockwise from top left): The lightwell area at lower ground floor level, the modern staircase and exposed brickwork wall, modern partitions to the bedrooms at 2nd floor level and the exposed roof trusses to the 3rd floor.

5.7 At ground floor level there is a retail style frontage in painted timber. This has a simple fascia and plain supporting columns. Within this are centrally positioned panelled double doors, flanked by solid, part glazed panels. These are set beneath a transom and deep glazed fanlights.

5.8 The front façade of the building forms an integral element in the high quality and distinctive townscape within Seven Dials. Its height and narrow façade reflect the area's fine historic grain and the original 17th century plots, with its position at the back of pavement contributing to the strong sense of enclosure and intimate atmosphere along Mercer Street.

5.9 The rear elevation of the building faces into the courtyard area within the centre of the triangular block of Ching Court. This has the same gabled form as the front elevation but with a simpler façade of plain, yellow London stock brickwork. The façade is arranged into three bays of windows which diminish noticeably in height as they rise up the building. The openings generally have subdivided painted timber sashes set beneath curved brick arches, with a taller, arched opening in the centre of the composition at 3rd floor level. The central window at 1st floor level was altered in the mid 1980s to create a door and associated steel balcony. The window units themselves are like for like painted timber replacements dating from 2010.

5.10 The lower ground floor level façade is concealed behind the stone wall and integrated seating within the courtyard. Here the rear lightwell was covered over with a glazed roof as part of the conversion works of the mid 1980s and this space now forms part of the lower ground floor accommodation. This element is not widely appreciable in views across the courtyard.

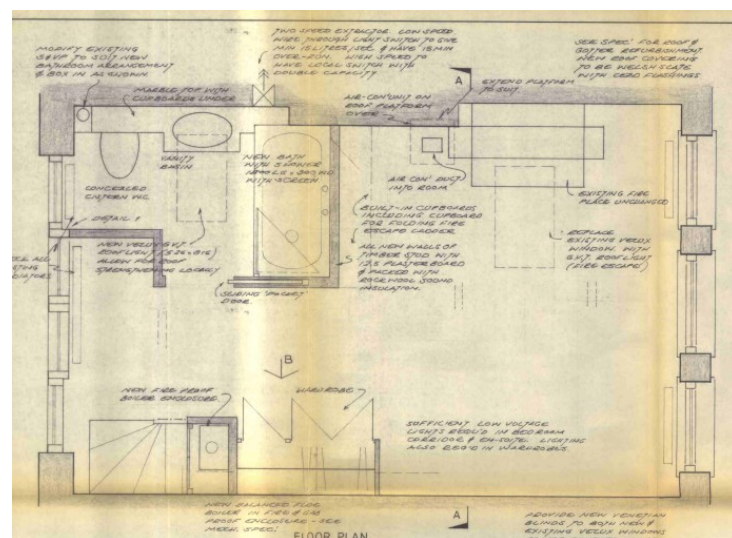
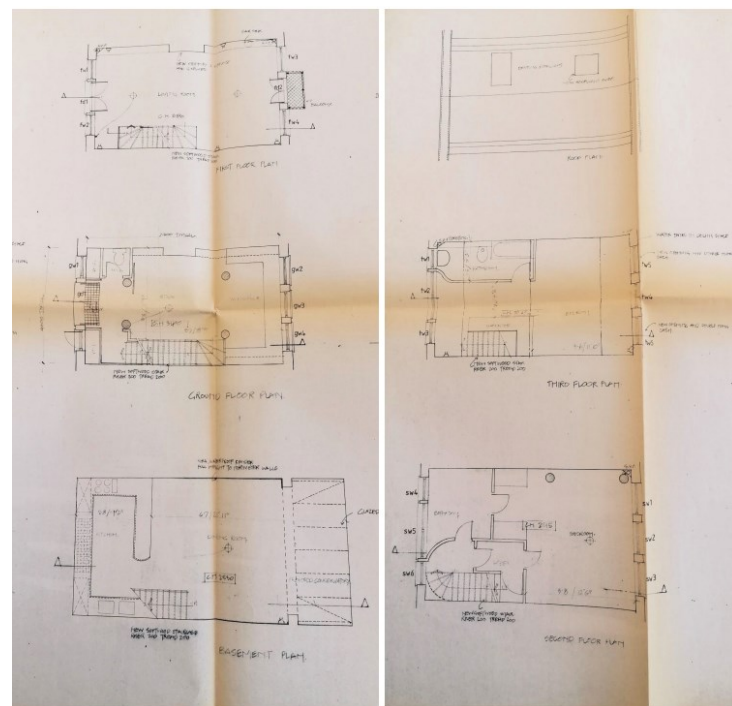
5.11 The rear façade of the building sits comfortably within its immediate context, complementing the brickwork facades, sash windows and curved window heads of the earlier flanking buildings.

Interior

5.12 The listing description notes that the building was originally a warehouse, "*occupying a single bay plot*". It is understood that the interior originally consisted of one open space with a small functional staircase to the front of the plan. The building was converted to residential use and significantly remodelled by the Terry Farrell Partnership in 1983-85 as a five storey house. A domestic interior was created as part of the conversion. Whilst the building's former open spatial character was retained at some floor levels, partitioning for bedrooms, bathrooms and a ground floor lobby area were introduced. A kitchen was installed to the lower ground floor area.

5.13 Limited opening up works have demonstrated that the partitions and plastered ceiling and wall finishes within the building are modern and all date from the mid 1980s conversion works. Areas of fitted joinery and shelving, as well the brickwork chimneybreasts and the floor joists are also modern fabric.

5.14 In many areas the original brickwork walls of the building remain exposed, albeit painted white. At ground and 1st floor level there are exposed beams across the centre of the plan, supported on timber brackets bearing off the party walls. These timber members have been painted white which detracts to a degree from their original character and legibility within the space. At 3rd floor level there are three exposed timber trusses supporting the roof. Steels have been installed against both of the party walls and the trusses bear onto these. This confirms that significant works or rebuilding have taken place to the roof. The 1985 drawings (Figure 18) show the three roof trusses dotted and spaced evenly across the depth of the building. By 1995 (Figure 20), a drawing of the 3rd floor shows the central truss moved closer towards the rear of the building, suggesting that this is a modern alteration undertaken as part of the conversion works.



Figures 18 & 19: Plans from 1985 show the approved layout of no.23 Mercer Street including the staircase, which his clearly annotated as “new softwood stair” (left) and limited opening up works to the soffit of the staircase confirm that this is constructed of modern timber with a modern metal mesh and gypsum plaster finish (right).

Figure 20: A plan of the 3rd floor approved as part of Listed Building Consent 9570148 in September 1995.

5.15 The lower ground floor has the most modernised appearance, with little exposed brickwork and only the horizontal section of a timber beam visible to the ceiling.

5.16 At lower ground floor level the space within the rear lightwell was internalised into the building in the mid 1980s. This has a modern glazed roof above it with timber beams.

Values and significance

5.17 As referenced above, Historic England’s ‘Conservation Principles’ identifies four values that can be attributed to a heritage asset. These have been examined in turn below.

Evidential Value

This value is derived from the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity (para 35) and is generally closely associated with archaeological sites and remains, with age being a strong indicator of evidential value.

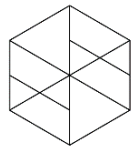
The warehouse use of the building provides some limited evidential value regarding commerce and business during the 19th century and the cheek by jowl nature of residential and non-residential uses in central London during this period.

Historical value

Paragraph 39 of the Conservation Principles document outlines that “*Historical value derives from the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present. It tends to be illustrative or associative.*”

The building dates from 1894 and is consequently of some modest age value. It forms part of the historic local scene in Seven Dials and has been a feature of the townscape for around 130 years. Whilst not dating to the earliest phase of residential development in the 17th century, when Seven Dials was first laid out, it reflects the increasing commercialisation of the area during the 19th century. This period saw purpose built commercial buildings emerge as well as the conversion of the former houses to retail, commercial and warehouse uses.

The building appears to have been occupied as part of the large premises of the Comyn Ching ironmongery company, who have a longstanding historic connection to the area. It forms part of the Ching Court redevelopment of the triangular site bounded by Mercer, Monmouth and Shelton Streets, which is now 30 years old and of interest as an early and exemplary scheme of conservation led regeneration.



Aesthetic value

Aesthetic value is defined as “...*the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place.*”

The front façade of the building has a strong commercial character which reflects its original warehouse use, in particular the centrally positioned doors and loading platforms. This was enhanced by the reinstatement of the cast iron loading winch in 2010. The ground floor frontage is also an attractive, traditional element in its architectural composition, contributing to the group value of good quality ground floor frontages along Mercer Street and to the wider Ching Court development. Although constructed as a functional building, its gabled frontage and red brick embellishment add architectural interest and quality.

As one would expect the rear façade is plainer and simpler than the front, although it reflects its gabled profile. The arrangement of the façade has a strong rhythmic pattern with three bays of aligned windows and an attractive arched window to the 3rd floor. The modification to the central 1st floor window is in keeping with other balconies to the rear of the Ching Court development and has been undertaken sympathetically.

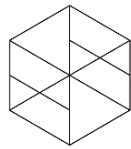
The architectural interest of the site is now two pronged, including both its late 19th century commercial character and its place in the influential 1980s Comyn Ching redevelopment of the wider triangle site by the Terry Farrell Partnership. Although the building was statutorily listed prior to the redevelopment, the listing description is clear that its significance now includes its role in this “*spatially powerful, mixed -use regenerative scheme*” which is based on an understanding of historic precedent but “*interpreted in a witty postmodern idiom.*” The scheme is also of interest as part of the output of a leading British architect and exponent of postmodernism.

Internally the building was completely remodelled and refurbished when it was converted to residential use in the mid 1980s. The partitions, plastered finishes and fittings all appear to date from this period and were overlaid onto the pre-existing brickwork shell. The area of exposed brickwork, timber beams and brackets and exposed roof trusses are all of interest, although their painted finish detracts from their original character and legibility.

Communal value

This value is derived from the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience of memory. In this case, any communal value would be ‘social’, defined at paragraph 56 as “...*places that people perceive as a source of identity, distinctiveness, social interaction and coherence.*”

The building has communal value in so far as it has been part of the local scene for around 130 years and has thus featured in the day to day lives of those who live, work and pass through the area. Any communal value from the site is local in its focus and the building does not have any particular regional or national symbolism or value.



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Summary

5.18 In this case the key significance of the listed building derives from its historic and architectural contribution to the development of this part of Covent Garden, representing a slightly later phase in the evolution of the Seven Dials area. The front façade is of modest architectural interest and retains a strong sense of its original commercial character. The rear is much plainer, but still of some interest for its repetitious pattern of windows and attractive façade treatment at 3rd floor level, set beneath a prominent gable. The building has significant group value and townscape interest with the other buildings along Mercer Street and within the wider Ching Court development, both originally and as part of the holistic redevelopment of the triangle site during the mid 1980s. The building makes a clear, positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Seven Dials Conservation Area.

5.19 The character, fabric and finishes within the interior of the building are a product of its conversion to residential use in the mid 1980s. A modest number of original internal features have survived, including the brickwork walls to the 'shell' of the building, and timber beams and roof trusses.



Figure 21: The steel positioned on the party wall with no.25 Mercer Street, with the roof trusses bearing onto it.

6.8 New kitchen cabinetry will be introduced at ground floor level, alongside new bathroom fittings and finishes. New built in cabinetry and joinery will be installed as required at all floor levels. This will have no harmful impact upon the listed building which is essentially a modernised space within a retained brickwork shell.

New partitions

6.9 Partitions will be installed at all floor levels in order to create a new layout of spaces. This includes a utility and WC room to the lower ground floor, a lobby and WC to the ground floor as well as bedrooms and bathrooms over the upper floors. The current partitions are all modern and date from the mid 1980s. Thus, these reflect the residential conversion of the building at this time, rather than having any intrinsic relationship to the original warehouse use and commercial character of the listed building. Within this context the reconfiguration of the space to suit different domestic requirements is considered acceptable 'in principle.' The proposed new partitions are arranged logically so that they do not intersect with features such as windows and will also leave the timber beam and bracket arrangement visible at ground and 1st floor level, and the roof trusses exposed to the 3rd floor. Consideration has also been given to maintaining a clear line of sight from the front to the back of the property as part of the new arrangement of partitions, referencing the formally open plan space of the warehouse.

Lower Ground Floor excavation

6.10 The floor to ceiling height here is particularly low and it is proposed to excavate the floor by 400mm in order to improve the scale and proportions of the space. The floor slab is modern, and its excavation will result in no loss of historic fabric. When excavated, the floor to ceiling height at lower ground floor level will remain less than that of the ground and 1st floors, maintaining the sense of original hierarchy within the building.

Roof trusses and timber beams

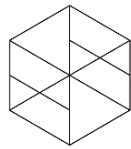
6.11 It appears that the roof was reconstructed as part of the conversion works due to the position of the modern steelwork in relation to the timber trusses. The 1985 conversion drawings show the timber trusses evenly space. It is proposed to relocate the central truss and reinstate the original layout of the fabric.

6.12 The original timber beams and their supporting brackets will be retained as features and will remain appreciable within the renovated and reconfigured space. They will have their modern white painted finish removed, reinstating their original appearance, and the metal fixing plates will be painted black. This will highlight these features and enhance the original commercial character of the interior of the building. The missing timber struts will be reinstated at ground and 1st floor levels.

6.13 At ground and lower ground floor level the ceiling joists will be exposed and painted white. This will reinforce the original commercial character of the building where structural elements were often left exposed. These works will not result in the loss of any historic fabric as the ceiling finishes are modern and date from the 1980s conversion.

Servicing

6.14 There is an existing service void in the front corner of the building, and this will be utilised for vertical circulation through the building. New bathrooms and WC provision will be in a similar position to existing at ground, 2nd and 3rd floor levels and will utilise existing servicing and service runs where possible. It should be noted that the floor joists have been replaced as part of the conversion work in the 1980s.



Assessment of the proposals against the relevant policy framework

Statutory duties – The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

6.15 The main issues for consideration in relation to this application are the effect of the proposals on no.23 Mercer Street as a listed building and the impact of external changes to the building on the character and appearance of the Seven Dials Conservation Area.

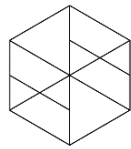
6.16 The interior of the building was converted from commercial use in the mid 1980s and the partitions and domestic fittings and finishes date from that period. The removal of these features will cause no harm to the special interest of the listed building. Partitions will be installed to provide a new domestic layout, maintaining living space over the lower floors, bedrooms to the 2nd floor and a large master bedroom/bathroom suite to the 3rd floor. The original spatial quality of the building as a warehouse was partially lost in the 1980s conversion and the principle of a new domestic layout will thus have a neutral impact upon the special interest of the listed building. In this case, the replacement of the modern staircase and features such as the modern brickwork chimneybreasts, as well as an improved layout at 2nd floor level will be more sympathetic to the original spatial quality of the building.

6.17 Elements of the original fabric of the building remain appreciable, including the brickwork walls, timber beams and timber roof trusses. These features will be retained, with the paint removed from the timbers and their fixing plates painted black, improving their legibility within the building. Missing timber struts will be reinstated at ground and 1st floor level and the central roof truss will be returned to its assumed original position. Overall, the proposals will preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the listed building in line with the s.16 duty.

6.18 External works to the listed building are limited. Within the rear lightwell the 1980s glazed roof will be removed and the lightwell partially re-opened. A new glazed infill will be added, with a crisp, contemporary appearance. The proposals will be tucked discreetly at the base of the building in an area of lower significance and where views, even from the rear courtyard, are extremely limited. In addition, later accretions such as the modern lighting and boiler flue will be removed from the front façade of the building. Consequently, the proposals are considered to preserve the character and appearance of the Seven Dials Conservation Area in line with the s.72 statutory duty.

National Planning Policy Framework 2023

6.19 This Heritage Appraisal has provided a thorough analysis of the significance of the listed building and the relative contribution of the various parts to its special architectural and historic interest. The proposals will conserve its significance by retaining, enhancing and reinstating elements which reflect its commercial history. The works which affect modern fabric, including partitions, the main staircase, bathroom/kitchen fittings and built in cupboards and joinery will not affect significance. Consequently, the proposals are considered to comply with the requirements of the NPPF.



6.20 It is not considered that the proposals result in any 'less than substantial harm' to either the listed building or the surrounding conservation area and thus paragraph 208 of the NPPF is not engaged. However, if any harm is identified then it is considered to be convincingly outweighed by the public (heritage) benefits which flow from the proposals. These include:

- Replacement of the leaky basement lightwell infill with a new, lightweight infill of better design quality.
- Removal of modern accretions from the front façade of the building including lighting and the boiler flue.
- Removal of the staircase and modern chimney/fireplace at ground and 1st floor levels, allowing the full span of the timber ceiling beam to be legible within the space.
- Removal of the white paint from the timber beams and the painting of the fixing plates black to highlight these features and enhance the commercial character of the building.
- Reinstatement of the central roof truss in its correct historic position.
- Reinstatement of the timber struts to the beams at ground and 1st floor levels.
- Replacement of the standard 1980s staircase with a new helical stair which accentuates the vertical connection through the building.
- Removal of the cluttered domestic layout of the 1980s conversion and its replacement with a better considered arrangement of partitions and spaces which take account of sightlines through the building, light penetration and its original spatial quality.

The London Plan 2021

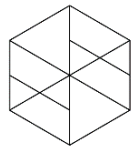
6.21 The proposals are considered to comply with the adopted London Plan (2021). The thrust of Policy HC1 - Heritage conservation and growth is that heritage assets should be conserved through proposals which are sympathetic to their significance and that enhancement opportunities should be identified early on in the design process. The proposals will focus upon modern fabric and partitioning which was introduced as part of the 1980s conversion works and which is of no intrinsic interest. A new domestic layout and series of spaces will be formed however these will preserve key elements of the original character of the listed building. The external works to the building are limited to the reconfiguration of the rear lightwell where the works will be of a high design quality and barely visible, even from the rear courtyard area. Overall, the affected heritage assets (the listed building and the surrounding Seven Dials Conservation Area) will be conserved.

The London Borough of Camden Local Plan 2017

6.22 The proposed works are considered to comply with the relevant sections of the London Borough of Camden's Local Plan 2017.

6.23 The principle of retaining the building and converting it to a residence as part of a mixed-use, conservation led regeneration scheme for the wider site in the 1980s is now part of its special interest, as are the post-modern new build elements and the creation of the open courtyard to the rear. The fabric from the conversion works however is basic and functional and does not contribute to significance. The proposals will maintain the ongoing residential use of the building, with a new layout and configuration of space which will have no harmful impact upon the intrinsic, evolved character of the building. Overall, the proposed internal works to the listed building will cause no harm to its special architectural or historic interest. The features which reflect its original commercial use will be retained and enhanced.

6.24 The external works to the building have been sensitively designed and will be located in an area of low significance and limited public visibility. Consequently, the character and appearance of the Seven Dials Conservation Area will be preserved.



Seven Dials Conservation Area Statement 1998

6.25 The proposals comply with the relevant sections of the guidance. Policy SD2 is clear that both traditional and contemporary materials may be appropriate for works within the conservation area. The removal of the glazed roof and the partial reinstatement of an open lightwell will be in keeping with the established pattern of development on the site, whereby the rear lightwell has been glazed over nearly 30 years ago. The incorporation of an open section will however be an enhancement.

7 Conclusion

7.1 This application seeks planning permission and listed building consent for internal works to the listed building and the replacement of the modern glazed infill to the rear lightwell.

7.2 The interior of the building was fundamentally altered as a result of the Terry Farrell works of the mid 1980s when it was converted from commercial to residential use. This had an inevitable impact upon its original character, with the subdivision of spaces, the insertion of a modern staircase and the integration of domestic facilities such as a kitchen and multiple bathrooms. The current proposals affect this overlaid domestic plan form and fabric and will not affect the intrinsic surviving commercial character of the listed building.

7.3 The external proposals are very limited in their scale and impact and will preserve the positive contribution which the building makes to the character and appearance of the Seven Dials Conservation Area.

7.4 The proposed works satisfy the s.16 and s.72 tests within the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. They accord with the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework 2023 and the policies of the London Borough of Camden Local Plan 2017.

Listed Buildings

Listed buildings are designated heritage assets and this section should be read in conjunction with the section above headed 'designated heritage assets'. To preserve or enhance the borough's listed buildings, the Council will:

- j. resist proposals for a change of use or alterations and extensions to a listed building where this would cause harm to the special architectural and historic interest of the building; and*
- k. resist development that would cause harm to significance of a listed building through an effect on its setting.*

Seven Dials Conservation Area Statement 1998

A6 This Statement has a number of area specific policies which are relevant to these proposals.

DESIGN

SD2 The Conservation Area has a long history of development which is demonstrated in the variety of styles which are juxtaposed within it. The last twenty years has seen the development of a successful combination of refurbishment and modern design, reflecting the dynamic changing character of the area, located in a unique historic context. Appropriate design for the Conservation Area can reflect both the historic and the modern context and both traditional and contemporary materials may be appropriate.

SD8 The choice of materials in new work will be most important and will be the subject of control by the Council.

REAR EXTENSIONS

SD27 The infilling of yards and rear spaces between buildings will generally be unacceptable.

SD28 What is permissible will depend on the original historic pattern of extensions within the terrace or group of buildings. Rear extensions will not be acceptable where they would spoil a uniform rear elevation of an unspoilt terrace or group of buildings.

Appendix B – Statutory listing description for 23 Mercer Street

Summary

Warehouse, now a house, late C19, restored and in part remodelled 1983-5 by the Terry Farrell Partnership as part of the regeneration of Comyn Ching Triangle. To the rear are the parapet wall and railings forming the boundary wall to 23 Mercer Street and the built-in seat enclosing Ching Court.

Reasons for Designation

23 Mercer Street, a warehouse, now a house, late C19, restored and in part remodelled 1983-5 by the Terry Farrell Partnership as part of the regeneration of Comyn Ching Triangle, and including the built-in seat, parapet wall and railings to the rear, 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: an C19 warehouse, retained as part 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 buildings and spaces in the creation of Ching Court;

* Degree of survival: very little altered, retaining Farrell's restored facades, their detail, fixtures and fittings;

* 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.

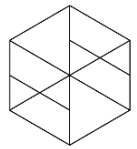
PROJECT DEVELOPMENT Designs for the enabling stage were prepared from 1978 and executed on site from 1981 to 1983. Following the granting of listed building consent, the corner buildings at Seven Dials were demolished and the C17 panelled interiors and stairs from 51 Monmouth Street were removed and 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, National Heritage List for England 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); M16 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

A former warehouse, now a house, late C19, restored and in part remodelled 1983-5 by the Terry Farrell Partnership as part of the regeneration of Comyn Ching Triangle. To the rear is the parapet wall and railings forming the boundary between the properties and Ching Court and the built-in seat overlooking Ching Court.

MATERIALS: it is built of yellow stock brick with red brick dressings, above a timber ground floor facade. The rear of the house has steel window guards and balustrades. To the rear are masonry parapet walls, stone paving, steel railings and a timber seat.

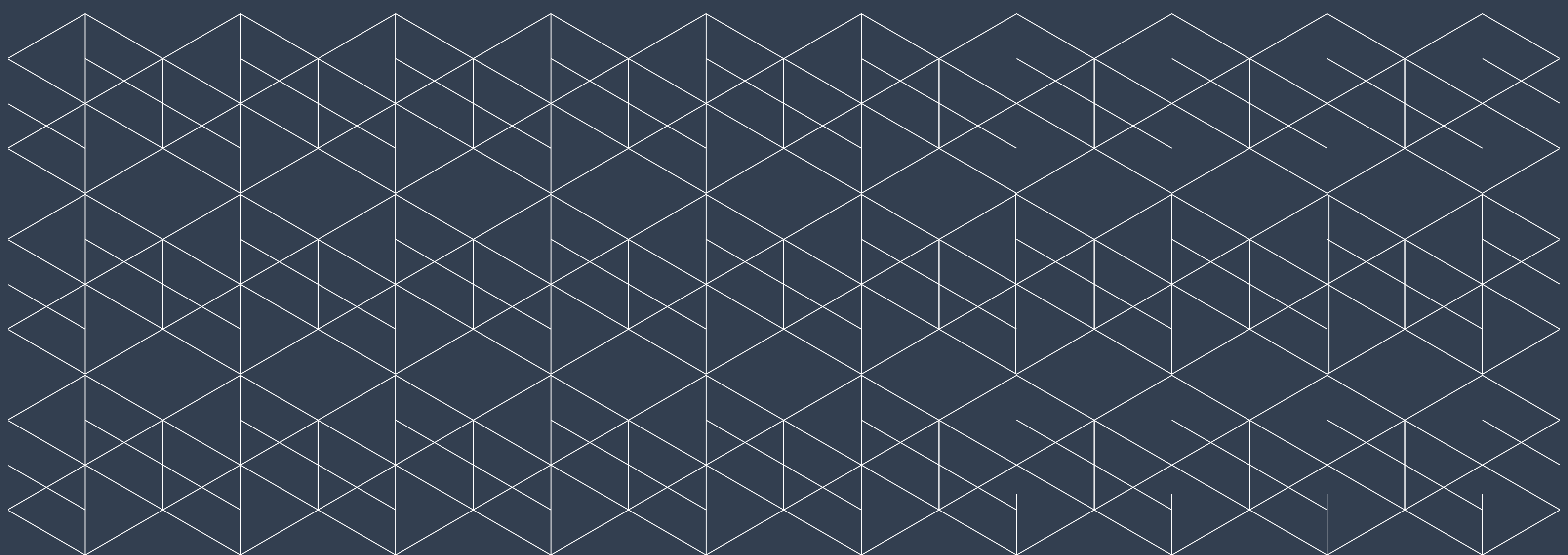
The scale, forms and palette of materials and colours used in the new work complement and provide both a unifying identity and new vitality to the scheme, where traditional materials are interpreted in a forward-thinking way.

PLAN: formerly a warehouse occupying a single bay plot, remodelled by Farrell as a four-storey and basement three-bay house.

EXTERIOR: the industrial character of the former warehouse is retained in the scale and arrangement of the openings, fixtures and fittings. The facade is symmetrically arranged and gabled to the road. The ground floor is in timber with a central pair of panelled doors, flanked by tall fixed glazed lights above a panelled dado and all beneath overlights of small fixed panes. There is a number plate above each side light. The first floor has full-height glazed loading doors flanked by windows with plain glazed lights, and beneath a slightly moulded storey band. The original tall upper floor appears to be subdivided, but with a similar arrangement of glazed loading doors and flanking windows, the upper series beneath arched heads. In front of each door is a hinged loading platform and there is a gantry attached to the upper floor. There is a brick corbel table beneath the lower set of flanking windows.

REAR: the rear is in three symmetrical bays with predominantly six-over-six pane segmental arched sashes to the lower floors, diminishing in size in the upper floors. A full-height door with small-paned leaves opens onto a steel balcony enriched with Farrell's reversed CC insignia for Ching Court. The area is enclosed by a tubular steel rail on a moulded masonry parapet wall into which a Rococo timber seat is built, in a paved area, overlooking and serving the public area of Ching Court. The rails have panels with Farrell's reversed CC insignia, for Ching Court, and his added planters are set on the wall. The seat is flanked by a pair of cherry trees, accentuating the oriental character of aspects of the Court.

INTERIOR: not seen.



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