

3.0 ASSESSMENT

3.1 SITE LOCATION AND ASSESSMENT

2 Waterhouse Square lies close to the southern boundary of the London Borough of Camden, within a site which is bounded by High Holborn to the south, Leather Lane to the east, Beauchamp Street to the north and Brooke Street to the West. As can be seen in figure 2 it is clear that not only is this block now a hugely complex mix of building stages, dating from between 1885 and 2011, but 2 only makes up part of the overall site.

As a result of the various periods of extension and alteration that the building has undergone, in particular a programme of works dating to the late 1980s and early 1990s, and a recent refurbishment programme, the interiors of the site at 2 Waterhouse Square, the subject of this application, present predominantly as modern office spaces, which currently stand empty. Within these office spaces the flooring is largely of grey aluminium sheeting in need of a suitable overlay, the walls are of plasterboard, and modern suspended ceilings dominate throughout.

It should be noted however, that while the application site largely consists of interiors within a late 1980s block, it also includes some spaces that date to earlier, late nineteenth century phases of construction on the site. These include the block to the southeast of the site fronting onto Leather Lane which was part of the former Leather Lane/Ridler's Hotel phase of 1895-1901; the small block to the southwest of the site, within the remains of the Waterhouse works of 1885-8; and the square block which faces Waterhouse Square, known as the 'Wood's Hotel Block', and constructed between 1895 and 1896. A small number of features remain within these parts of the building which contribute to the special interest of the listed building.

The original design and layout of the late nineteenth century parts of the building can be seen, for example, in the arched forms within the former Ridler's Hotel block, and which are illustrated in figures 4 and 5. Despite the original glazed brickwork having been concealed by plasterboard over in recent years, these structures attest to the reconstruction of this part of the site in the late nineteenth century.

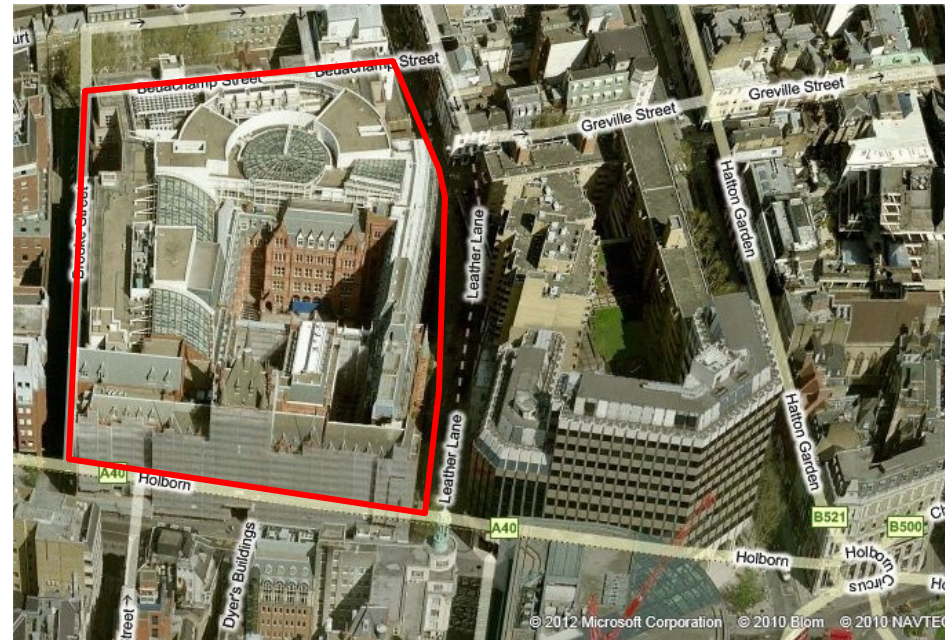


Figure 2: The site of the former Prudential Assurance Building is indicated by the red line.



Figure 3: A view of the interior of the former 'Wood's Hotel Block, constructed 1895-6, but which now presents as formalised modern office accommodation, devoid of any obvious historic features.



Figure 4: A view of the interiors of the former 'Ridler's Hotel' Block, in the south-east section of 2 Waterhouse Square, as they appeared in use by the Prudential in 1968. Glazed brick arches dominate here.



Figure 5: A view of the same space today, illustrating the extent to which historic features have now been concealed by plasterboard, raised floors and suspended ceilings.

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Another important interior feature remains in a second floor room in the southwest corner of the site, identified as being the Director's Rest room. This room retains, it would appear, the oak panelling which was initially located in the Board room of the first Prudential Assurance building on this site, constructed from 1878. Photographs of this panelling in its original location is shown in figure 6, while figure 7 shows the current appearance of the former Director's Rest Room. This room is the only part of 2 Waterhouse Square to have survived with at least some of its internal features exposed, following recent redevelopment between 1988 and 2011.

Another important element of the history of the site at 2 Waterhouse Square is the legibility of those sections of the building which date to the late nineteenth century, and whose elements retained, without being concealed from view. In the south eastern quarter of the site, the glazed bricks of a late nineteenth century lightwell have been retained, with figure 9 illustrating the join between the original Waterhouse building and the addition made by EPR Architects in the late 1980s. Figure 8, meanwhile, reveals the sympathetic treatment of these original Victorian features and brickwork within the interior of the building. Such elements attest to the special interest of the building in these parts of the site.



Figure 6: Internal views of panelled, directorial rooms within the former Prudential Offices. The 'linenfold' panelling found in these rooms matches that which Waterhouse designed for the original building's Boardroom in the late 1870s, and which can now be found in the former Director's Rest Room (figure 7).



Figure 8: An example of some of the late-Victorian glazed brick that remains exposed within 2 Waterhouse Square.



Figure 7: The former Director's Rest Room as it appears today. The appearance of its linenfold panelling and simple, stone Neo-Gothic fireplace has been harmed to an extent by the introduction of later office features, such as suspended ceilings.



Figure 9: A view of the glazed brick, formerly open, lightwell, within 2 Waterhouse Square. The elaborate, stained glass Gothic windows to the left of this image relate to one of the staircases, to which no works are proposed.

3.2 ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORIC APPRAISAL

The former Prudential Assurance building, speaks of 'The Pru' having a long history on the High Holborn site. retains a history upon this site since the mid nineteenth century. It is a site which, however, has a much longer history related to the dominance of the legal profession in this area of London.

The former Prudential Assurance building's location and ground plan records the layout of older inns of court that long pre-date the Prudential Assurance building. This area had come to be known as 'Holborn' by the mid eighteenth century and was the location for 'Furnival's Inn', a boarding facility which had provided for law students since its opening in 1383. A long term lease arrangement had been agreed with Lincoln's Inn, yet when this ran out in 1817 and was not renewed, Furnival's Inn was threatened with demolition.

These changes facilitated the arrival of the Prudential Assurance company with plans for a suitably grand headquarters. The area had experienced a period of growth and expansion with the opening of the Holborn Viaduct in 1869 which allowed access across to the City from the law courts and inns. The Middle Row, which was located opposite Gray's Inn Road, was demolished in 1869 as the decision was made by the Prudence Assurance company to move up from their offices at Ludgate Hill. The site on the corner of High Holborn and Brooke Street was therefore taken on 17 February 1876 and further buildings to the east were also acquired in order to provide a large enough site for the desired headquarters.

This imposing structure that was finally built as the Pru's first offices on the site was designed in 1876 by Alfred Waterhouse in a sturdy Neo-Gothic style, dominated by deep red terracotta finishes. It was, ultimately, to become the standard for all Prudence Assurance buildings. While there is no evidence of the company's directors seeking to adopt a 'house style' for their offices, Waterhouse's original design for the Holborn offices was so well-liked by the Prudential's directors that it went on to be used in a number of their other offices, including at Nottingham, Bristol and Liverpool. Waterhouse's Holborn offices were opened in May 1879, and were described by *Building News* as:

'a building which presents some commendable features, and which may challenge, without exaggeration or pretention many costlier buildings in the same thoroughfare of brick and stone!'

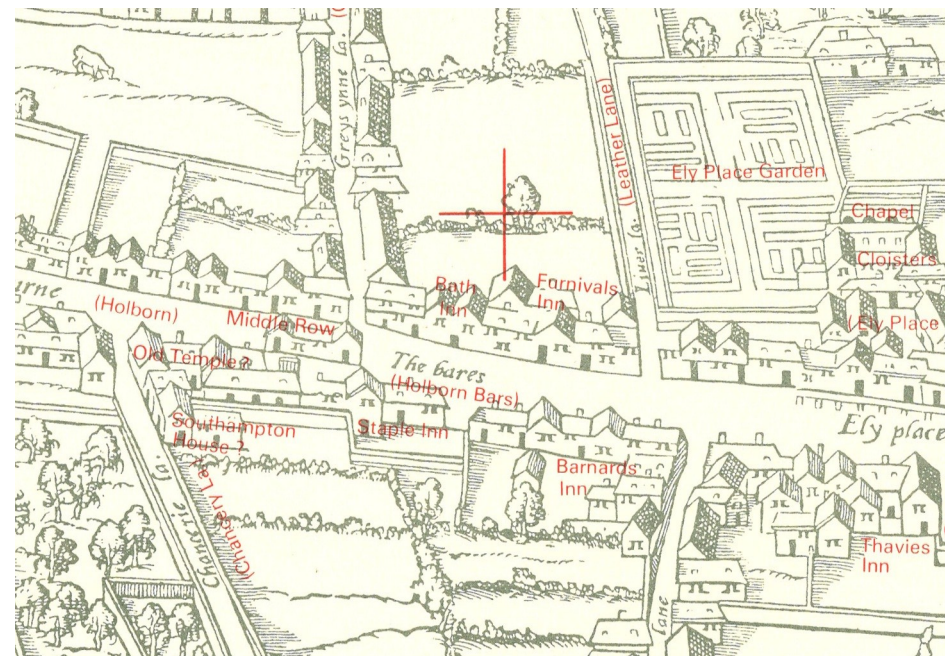


Figure 10: An annotated extract from Braun and Hogenberg's Map of 1572, with Furnivals Inn appearing as one of many 'Inns', providing legal chambers, in the area.

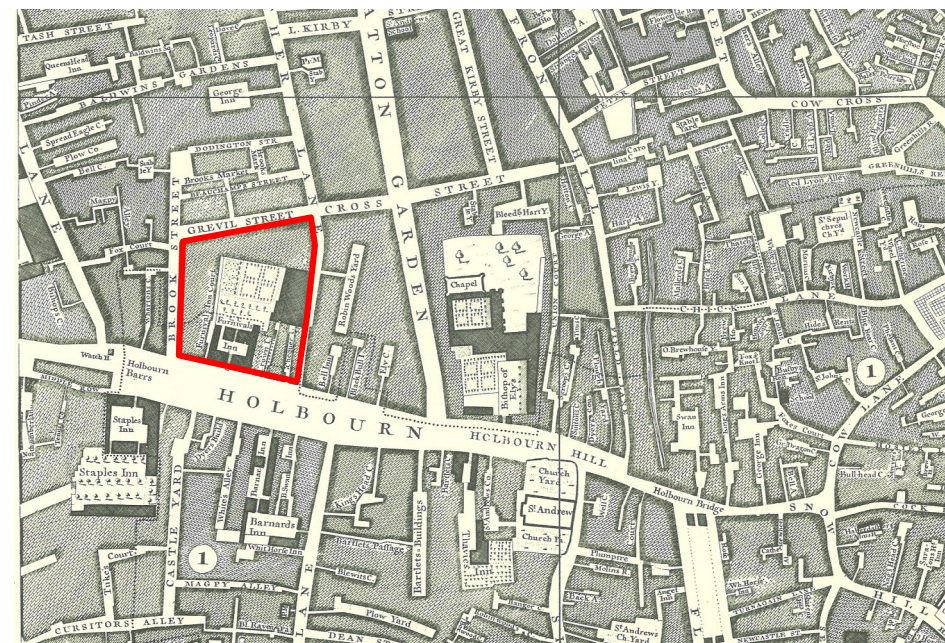


Figure 11: The Holborn area as illustrated in John Rocque's map of London from 1745; Furnival's Inn, the future location of the Prudential Assurance offices, is indicated in red.

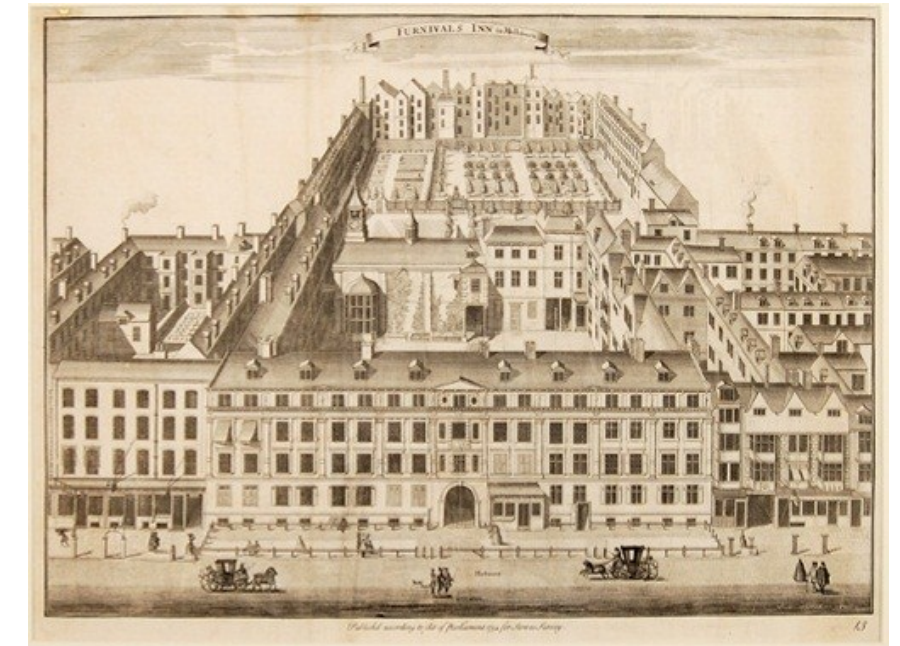


Figure 12: Furnivals Inn as it appeared in 1754, showing, in comparison with figure 10, the extent to which it had extended north from Holborn by this point.



Figure 13: The imposing facade of Furnival's Inn in the early nineteenth century. This porticoed block was ultimately to be preplaced by the Prudential Building's ornate main front.