

36-38 Gordon Square Heritage Statement Prepared for University College London May 2019



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Executive Summary

Nos. 36-38 Gordon Square are three linked townhouses at the end of a terrace within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area in the London Borough of Camden. They were built between 1825 and 1831 by the renowned architect-builder, Thomas Cubitt, as part of the residential development of the Bedford Estate. For their connection with Cubitt, external intactness, and the high quality of design and construction, they were listed at Grade II in 1969 along with the rest of the terrace they form part of (Nos.36-46 Gordon Square).

The properties have largely retained their external appearance and many internal historic features including staircases and decorative plasterwork, although the physical linking of the three buildings at all levels has reduced the coherence of the original plan form. Overall, any elements of original fabric can be judged as of high significance due to the building's high architectural quality and connection with Thomas Cubitt. Alterations relating to the physical linking of the buildings are judged as of neutral significance at best, and in many cases, these interventions detract from the building's significance.

The client, University College London, wishes to reconfigure and refurbish Nos.36-38 Gordon Square as part of a development project to accommodate a 'learning hub' for postgraduates and academics within the terrace. The scheme involves the reinstatement of the buildings' historic plan forms throughout most of the building, largely achieved through the demolition of later partition walls but also including some amendments and alterations, as well as a general refurbishment of the properties involving the retention of historic features.

There will be some limited removal of highly significant fabric, including a section of party wall at basement level to form a larger event space than is currently available to the end users. Mitigating steps will also be taken such as the retention of nibs and a downstand to indicate the original location of the wall to retain an appreciation of the plan form of the original houses.

The proposals will enhance the significance of the building through the reinstatement of the buildings' original plan forms which will in turn better reveal many historic features. This will be achieved largely through the removal of modern partition walls which form corridors between the properties and cut across historic plasterwork, therefore removing elements that detract from the building and better revealing highly significant spaces in the process. The front door of No.37 will also be reinstated, bringing an important heritage benefit in reconstituting the buildings' historic character as three separate dwellings. Together with the proposed refurbishment of the buildings, the inclusion of a thoughtfully designed teaching and meeting space will enhance the viability of the university occupation of these buildings, contributing to their continuing presence with Bloomsbury generally and Gordon Square specifically.

Overall, the proposals will have a **positive impact** on the listed building and conform to local and national policy. We therefore recommend that the works are approved.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The brief

This Heritage Statement has been prepared by Alan Baxter Ltd for University College London (UCL) to assess the heritage impact of proposals for the reconfiguration and refurbishment of Nos. 36-38 Gordon Square ('the Site'), a row of three internally-linked late Georgian townhouses.

This report provides an assessment of the significance of the building in order to identify elements that are sensitive to change, and others that are less sensitive. This will help to inform the development of the proposals, which are assessed towards the end of the report.

1.2 Methodology and structure of the report

The information in this report is based on a site visit conducted on 8 November 2018 and both desktop and archival research.

This report is divided into 6 sections: the preceding executive summary; this introduction (1.0); Understanding 36-38 Gordon Square (2.0), which outlines the history of the Site; an Assessment of Significance (3.0); a Heritage Impact Assessment (4.0); and a list of supporting information (5.0) which including a list of sources, the National Heritage List entry, a map of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and Greater London Historic Environment Record (GLHER) search results for the site.

It is the nature of existing buildings that details of their construction and development may be hidden or may not be apparent from a visual inspection. The conclusions and any advice contained in this report — particularly relating to the dating and nature of the fabric — are based on our research, and on observations and interpretations of what was visible at the time of our site visits. Further research, investigations or opening up works may reveal new information which may require such conclusions and advice to be revised.

1.3 The Site

Nos.36-38 Gordon Square are the three end properties of a larger terrace of houses which form the east side of Gordon Square in Bloomsbury, within the London Borough of Camden. Built in c.1825, the Site was originally three separate residential properties, but have been occupied by various institutional or commercial bodies since the early twentieth century and are now linked at all levels. Each house is three bays wide, rising through four storeys, with an additional lower ground floor and attic spaces. In addition, each house has a single bay projection which rises from lower ground to ground floor at the rear and access to separate walled gardens.

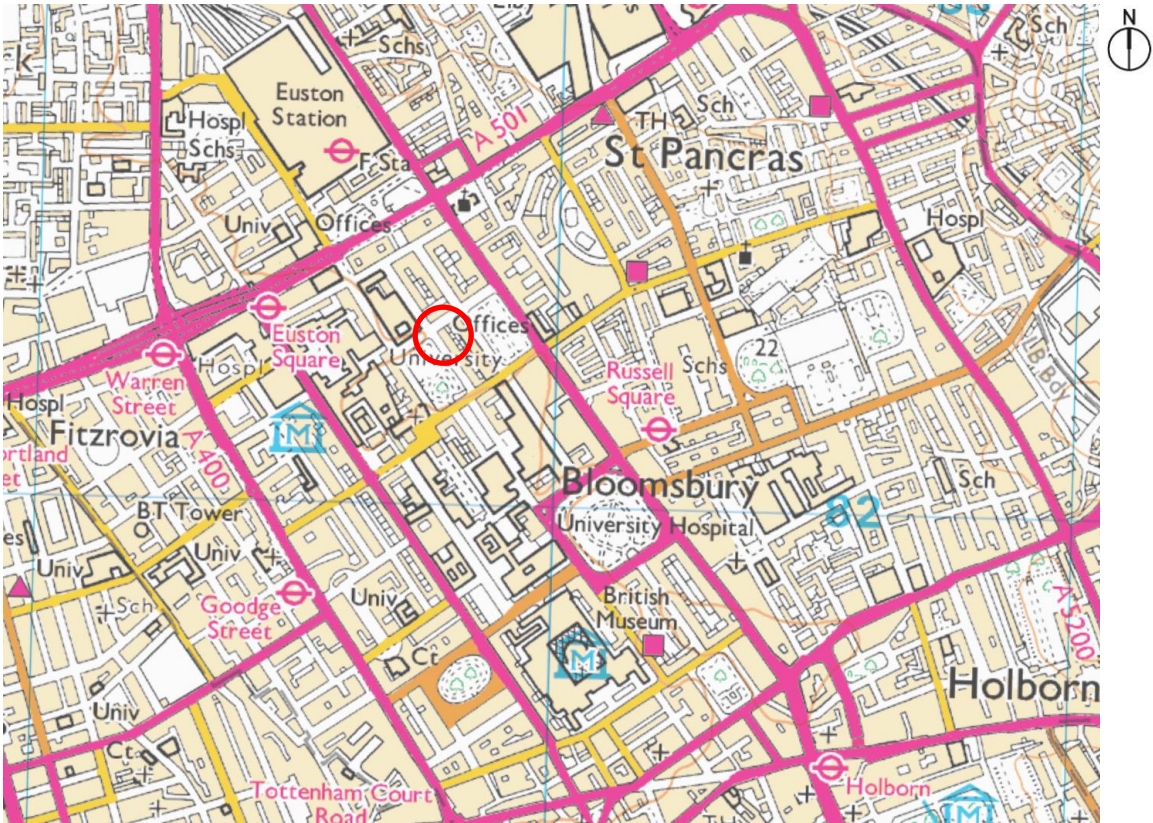


Fig 1 Location Map (Crown Copyright 1:25000)

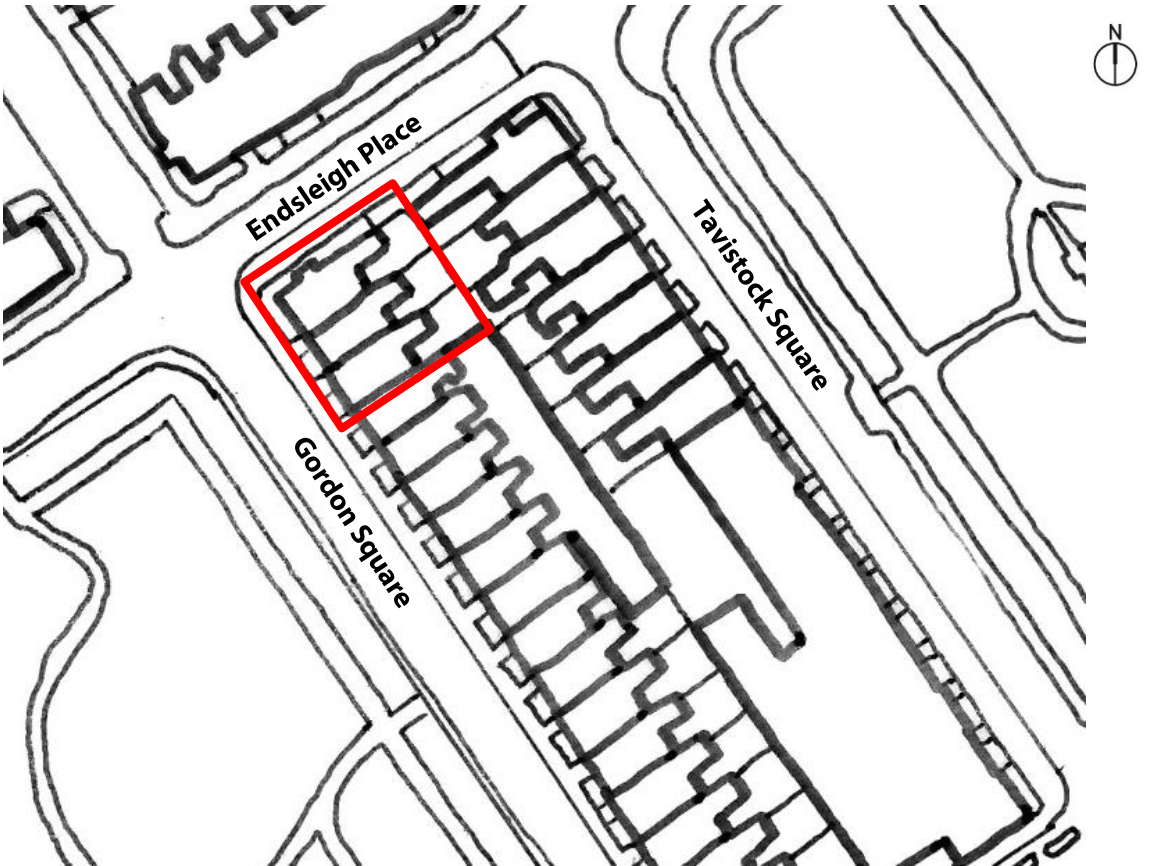


Fig 2 Site plan

1.4 Designations

1.4.1 Listed buildings

Nos.36-38 Gordon Square were listed at Grade II in 1969, as part of a wider listing of numbers 36 to 46. The terraces sit within sub-area 2 of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area, designated in 1968 and subsequently expanded a number of times. The sub-area covers Gordon Square, Woburn Square and Byng Place, and is densely packed with nationally listed buildings and structures, as well as other non-listed buildings which positively contribute to the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. The listed and positive buildings around Gordon Square are:

- Grade I:
 - Church of Christ the King
- Grade II*:
 - Numbers 29-45 Tavistock Square, including Connaught Hall (numbers 36-45)
- Grade II:
 - Numbers 14-15 Gordon Square
 - Number 16-25 Gordon Square
 - Number 26 Gordon Square
 - Numbers 47 to 53 Gordon Square and screen wall linking number 53 Gordon Square and Number 45 Tavistock Square
 - Numbers 55-59 Gordon Square
 - Lamp post on corner of Gordon Square and Gordon Street
 - The Cloisters (nos. 1-5), Gordon Square
 - Passfield Hall (nos. 1-7), Endsleigh Place
- Positive building within the Conservation Area (Non-designated heritage assets)
 - Institute of Archaeology and Classical Studies (nos. 30-35) Gordon Square
 - The Warburg Institute, Woburn Place

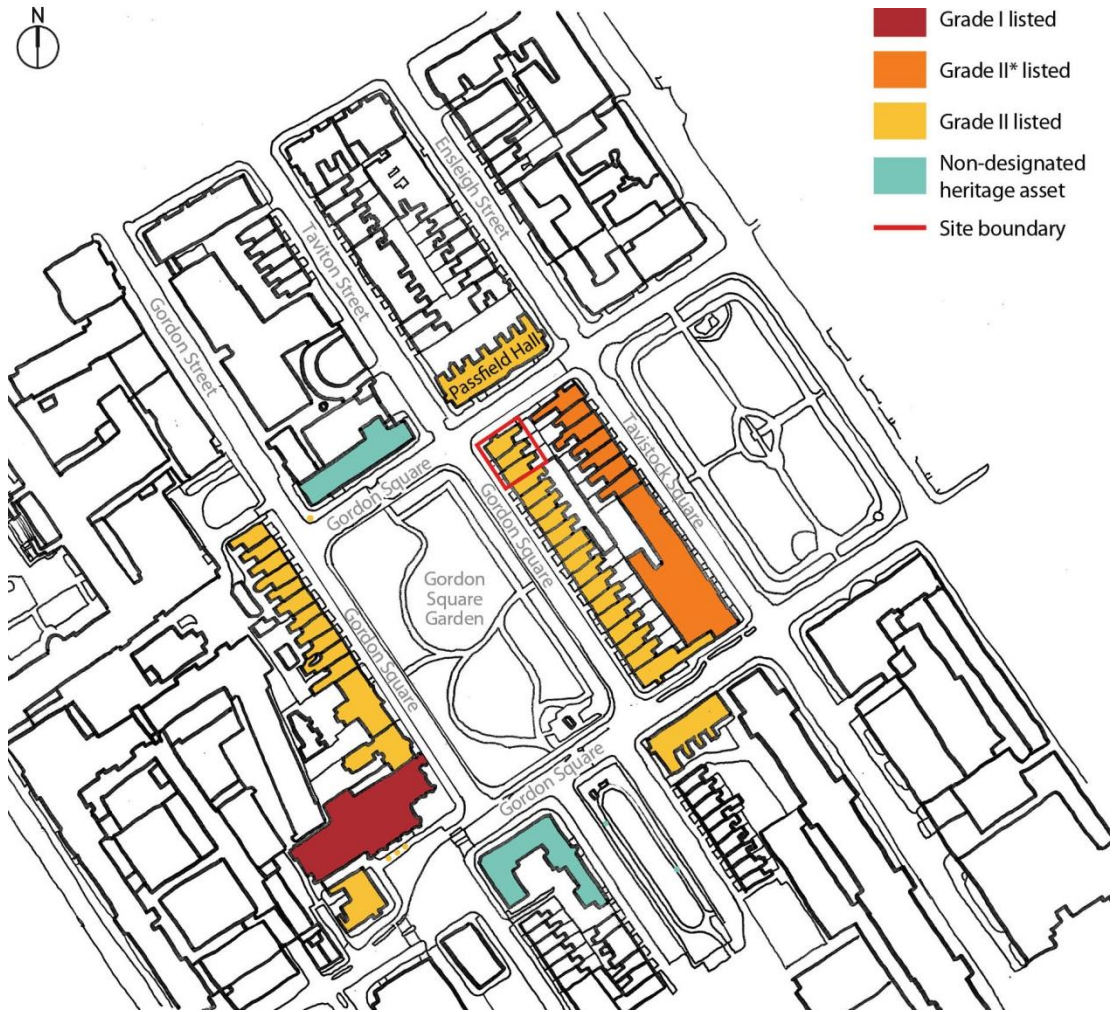


Fig 4 Map of designated and non-designated heritage assets in the vicinity of 36-38 Gordon Square (based on National Heritage List for England website)

2.0 Understanding 36-38 Gordon Square

2.1 The development of Gordon Square

Before the eighteenth century, the area now known as Bloomsbury was part of the historic Tottenham Manor, with the land now occupied by Gordon Square identified as the manor's Oatfield (Thames: *Bloomsbury Past*, 1993). In the decades prior to their formal development, the open fields north of Great Russell Street were known in particular for the fruit grown in small plots there, but its proximity to the growing city also made it a popular site for sports and recreation from the mid-seventeenth century onwards.

By the eighteenth century, most of present-day Bloomsbury was owned by the Dukedom of Bedford, and it was the widow of the 4th Duke, Gertrude Leveson-Gower, who began the formal development of the area in the late 18th century. This period of the area's development, almost wholly at the hands of large-scale architect-developers backed by wealthy aristocratic landowners, was described by Donald Olsen as the 'systematic transformation of the pastures of north Bloomsbury into a restricted upper-middle class suburb' (Olsen, *Town Planning in London*, 2nd edn, 1984). Growth took the form of formally planned groups of Classical terraces, some grouped around squares and crescents, and was largely carried out at the hands of two architects – James Burton and Thomas Cubitt.

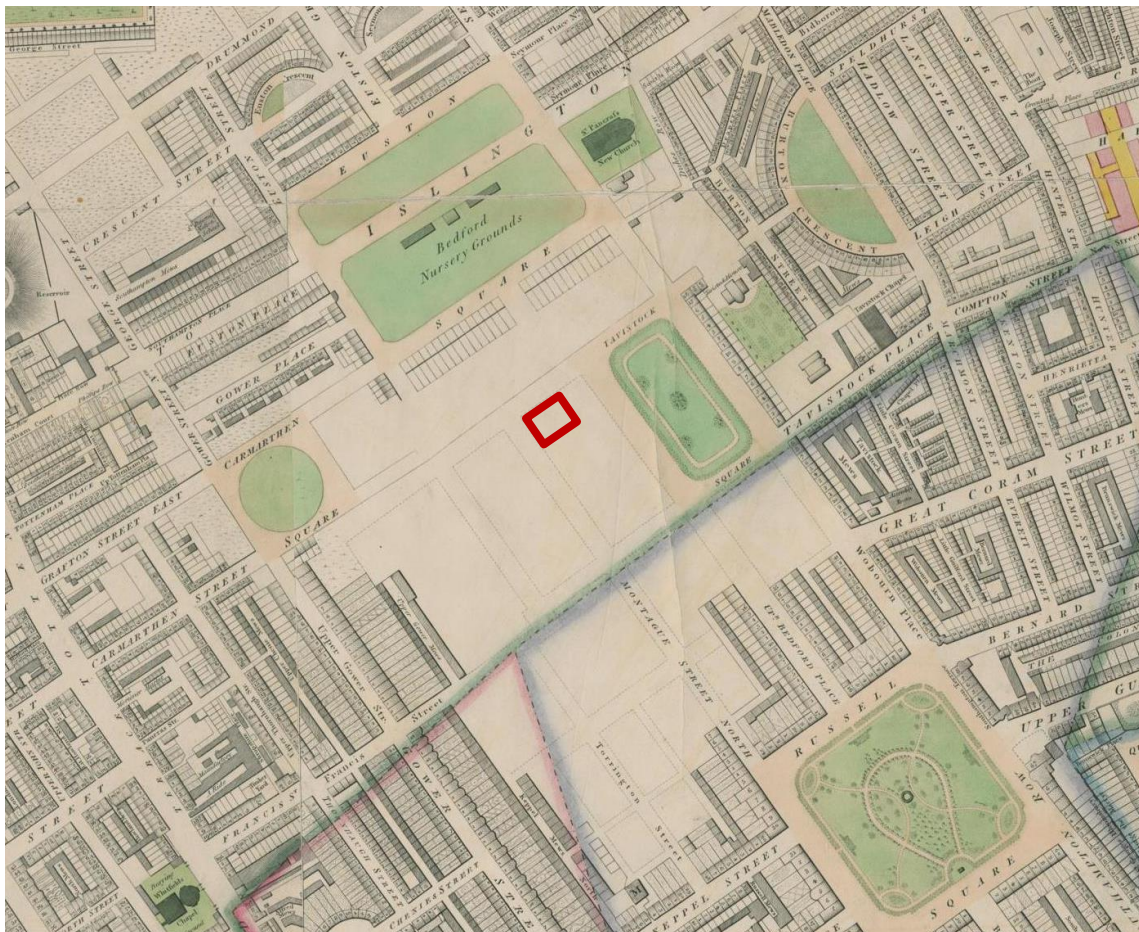


Fig 5 Horwood's Map of London 1793, revised by Faden 1819 (Site highlighted) (British Library)

Burton's involvement in the north Bloomsbury area began in 1800, when the Duke of Bedford called upon him to pull down Bedford House and construct Russell Square in its place, until 1817. By 1802 he had constructed almost 600 houses on the Bedford estate (Thames: *Bloomsbury Past*, 1993). Thomas Cubitt's involvement in Bloomsbury came rather late in the area's development, with most of the Bedford Estate having been laid out, if not fully built by the time he began work there in 1820. Between the mid-1820s and 1850s, Cubitt developed the major part of the remaining area of north Bloomsbury between Russell Square and New Road (now Euston Road).

The development of the north part of Bloomsbury within which the Site sits came late in the estate's expansion as its swampy nature made it a difficult and unattractive location for building. This slow development was exacerbated by the building slump in the 1830s. After Cubitt's initial phase of building, the area's growth experienced a hiatus and remained only part-developed well into the 1850s, with Gordon Square's western side finally being completed 1860.



Fig 6 B R Davies map of 1843 showing a half-finished Gordon Square (Site highlighted) (British Library)

The area was initially one inhabited by the upper-middle classes, with Nos.36 and 37 Gordon Square being inhabited by 'merchants' in the 1840s (Kelly's London Post Office Street Directory, 1841). At the same time, North Bloomsbury was quickly becoming a popular location for institutions, partly catalysed by the construction of London University's (now University College London) Main Building on Gower Street in the late 1820s. However, Gordon Square seems to have remained primarily residential into the early twentieth century, for example being home to several members of the influential group of middle-class intellectuals known as the Bloomsbury Group in the 1910s and 1920s.

The mid-20th century did eventually see the gradual encroachment of commercial businesses and institutions, particularly the University of London, into buildings around Gordon Square. In 1954-5, the University's modernist Institute of Archaeology replaced the bomb-damaged Nos.31-34 on the north side of the Square (Manchester Guardian, 29 April 1958, 'Classical and Workmanlike'), and sits perpendicular to Nos.36-38 Gordon Square. This building is itself now identified as a positive contributor to the Bloomsbury Conservation Area (Appraisal, 2011).

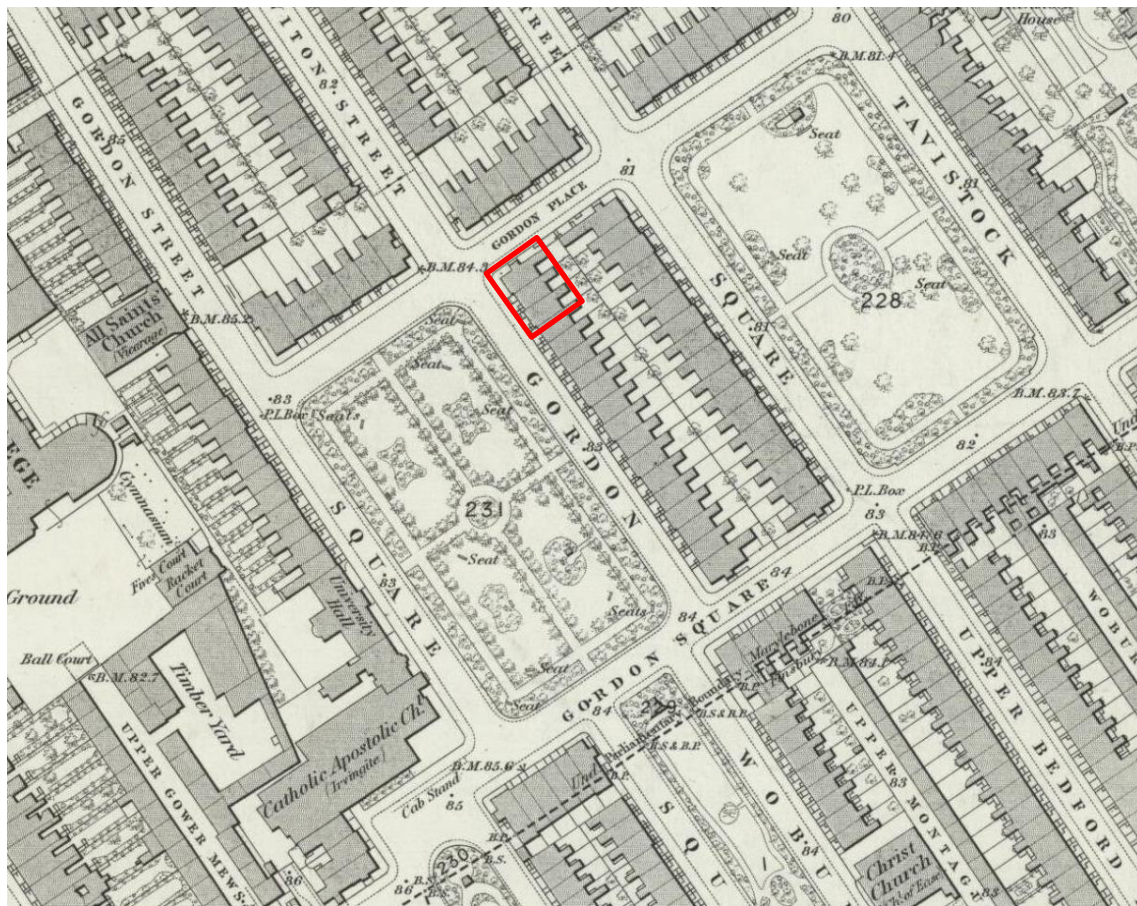


Fig 7 OS 25 Inch surveyed 1870 published 1876, showing completed Gordon Square (site highlighted) (National Library of Scotland)

2.2 History of 36-38 Gordon Square

2.2.1 Nineteenth-century residential development

The terrace containing Nos.36-38 Gordon Square was constructed sometime in the period 1825-31 by Thomas Cubitt, concurrently with his completion of Tavistock Square, Woburn Place and the roads leading off of and between them (Cubitt Lease Book, 1820s-40s: LMA). Cubitt's terraces in north Bloomsbury, all constructed in during a short time period, bear many stylistic similarities. Nos.36-46 Gordon Square is typical of the type, being a four-storey red brick terrace with wider projecting end bays and stucco detailing in the form of pilasters rising from a rusticated ground floor to a large modal entablature at second-floor ceiling height, and a further simple cornice above the third-floor windows. The first floor is identified as the *piano nobile* by way of large French windows leading onto cast-iron balustraded balconies.

Few historic drawings of the buildings survive, and none relating to their original construction have been located. The terrace of which they form a part is curiously absent from the Cubitt Lease Books, which list the dimensions of plots and initial leases of the properties built by Thomas Cubitt on the Bedford Estate (Cubitt Lease Book, 1820s-40s: LMA). The buildings first appear in the Post Office Street Directories in 1841, which suggests it took several years for occupiers to be found. This was most likely due to the stagnation in the speculative building market in the 1830s.

Despite a lack of original drawings, it seems that much of the early fabric of the buildings survives, with their external appearance remaining largely unchanged except for the blocking of the front door of No.37 at some point in the mid-twentieth century (see Figures 9 and 10). The only later external addition to appear on plan is a single-storey brick extension to the eastwards two-storey projection of No.38, added in the late-nineteenth century. This was originally used as an outside WC with access from the garden (Drainage Plan, 1936: Camden Archive).

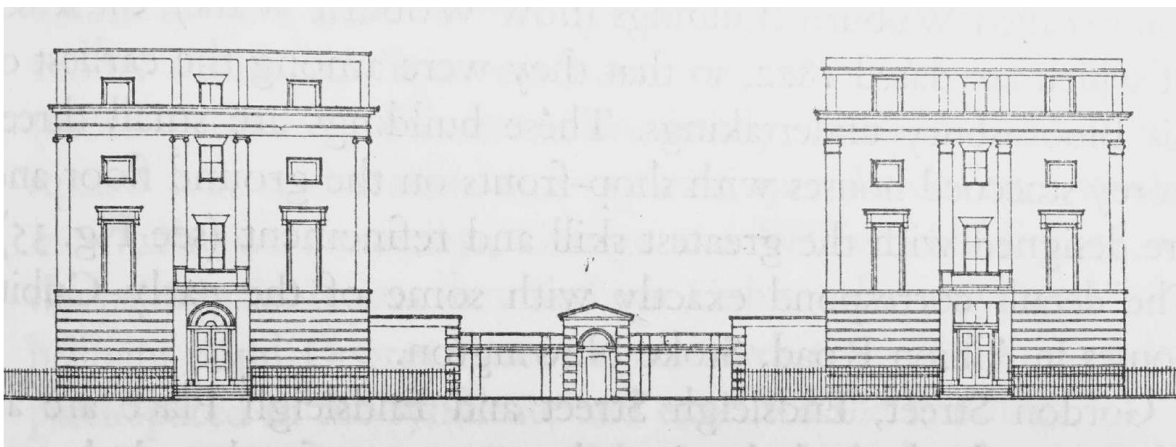


Fig 8 End elevations of Tavistock and Gordon Square as built, undated (Survey of London)



Fig 9 Nos.36-38 Gordon Square in 1937 (London Metropolitan Archive)



Fig 10 Nos.36-38 Gordon Square in 2019



Fig 11 Stairwell of No.36 looking onto first floor landing

Interiors

Internally, the original plan form is legible in places, although partition walls have been inserted when the buildings were converted to office use. Original staircases remain in all three properties, with identical decorative iron balustrades and hardwood handrails (see Figures 12a and 12b). The principle rooms on the ground, first and second floors carry ceiling plasterwork typical of the 1820s, particularly acanthus-leaf design cornices, although in general this is heavily painted over. French windows with timber-panelled surrounds survive on the ground, first, second and third floors, also characteristic of the early 19th century (see Figure 17), as do historic wooden sash and casement windows throughout the properties, although most of these are later nineteenth- or early twentieth-century replacements. Many rooms retain original joinery including picture and dado rails and door cases.

It is unclear whether the small mezzanine-level rooms now containing toilets between the second and third floors of each property existed on the original building plan, although they appear to be a shared feature throughout the terrace. If not original, they seem to have been created early on in the buildings' existence and certainly by 1896 (Drainage plan, 1896: Camden Archive).

Evidence of the building's continued residential use can be found in the entrance hall of No.36, which contains a good quality late nineteenth-century tiled floor, a typical late-Victorian domestic feature (see Figure 12b). Additionally, the stairwell of No.38 carries a high dado rail with chevron wallpaper beneath, also typical of late-Victorian domestic interiors (see Figure 15).

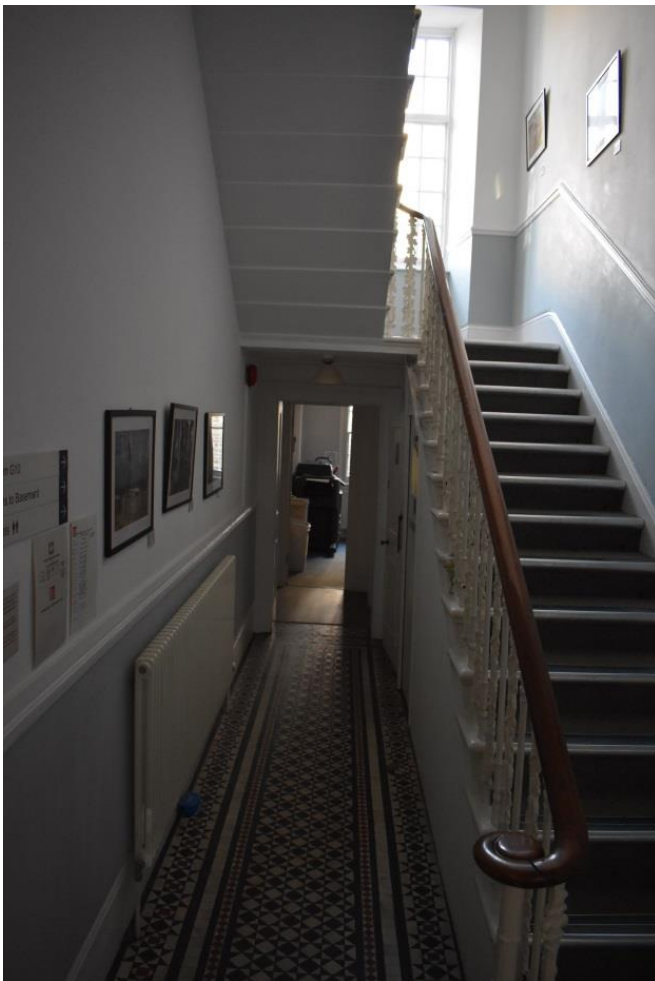


Fig 12 Entrance Hall of No.36 Gordon Square



Fig 13 Inner doorway of No.38 Gordon Square, a combination of original (upper) and 20th-century (lower) joinery



Fig 14 Original door surround and plasterwork above entrance to first floor front room of No.38

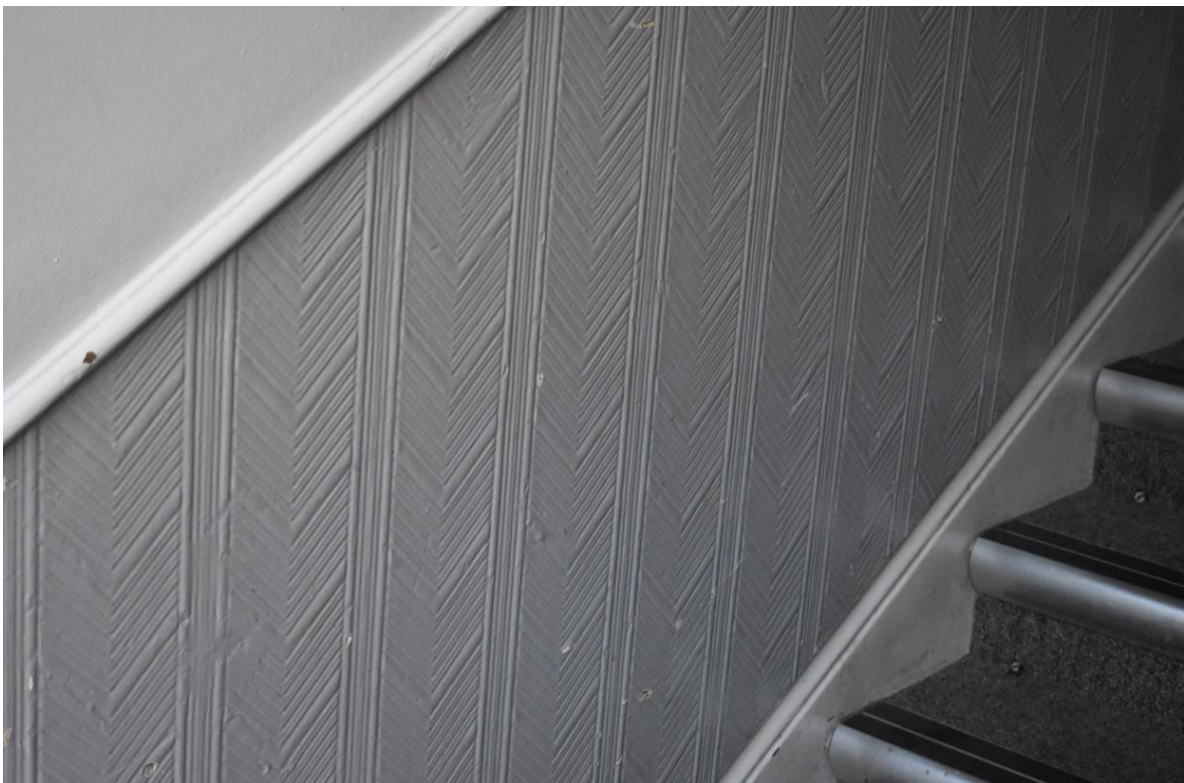


Fig 15 Late Victorian wallpaper and dado rail on staircase of No. 38 Gordon Square

2.2.2 Twentieth-century institutionalisation

Nos.36-38 remained residential properties for white-collar professionals into the early 20th century. A drainage plan from September 1936 gives the situation of No.37 as a 'Private house with own offices' under the ownership of Acworth and Montagu Architects, indicating a transitional period for the buildings (Drainage plan, 1936). The buildings' increasing commercial use led to some modest internal works including opening up new links between rooms. For example, in 1936 a large opening was made between the principal first floor rooms in No.37 (see drainage plan), which has subsequently been infilled.

By 1951, all three properties were in institutional or commercial office use, with No.36 housing the National Veterinary Medical Association and Harold Cherry, architect; No.37 occupied by Laurence King, architect, and No.38 occupied by three Christian organisations: the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the Christian Pacifist Forestry and Lands Ltd, and the Methodist Peace Fellowship (Street Directory 1951). Between 1955 and 1957 No.38 was occupied by the renowned architectural practice, Messrs HP Adams & C Holden, who may have taken up residency there due to its proximity to the University of London, their main employer at the time (Street Directory 1955). Drainage plans of the three properties created in 1936 and 1954 indicate that their internal layouts had only experienced minor changes from their initial construction in spite of their increasingly commercial usage, such as the insertion of lavatories and a creation of openings between front and back rooms.



Fig 16 Two later partition walls, the right-hand one replacing an original partition, on the first floor on No.37

2.2.3 Linking of the properties

In October 1954, Nos.36 and 37 were occupied by the University of London's Association of Universities of the British Commonwealth, giving a likely date for the initial institutional, if not physical, linking of the two buildings. It seems likely that the buildings became fully interlinked in the late 1950s or early 1960s, after Adams and Holden had vacated No.38.

Since the properties came under single ownership, the major interventions have been associated with linking of the properties at all levels. This entailed the insertion of doorways through original party walls and the construction of partition stud walls to create corridors providing lateral access through the three properties. Some original internal walls were demolished and rebuilt to accommodate wider doorways or clerestory windows to light the through-corridor. A number of the principle rooms have also been subdivided with partition walls, their plaster cornices having been cut through but retained within both rooms (see Figures 16 and 17).

A further major change to have occurred since the building's linkage is the blocking up of the front door of No.37, the position of which is now occupied by a window lighting an office which sits within the former entrance hall of the house (see Figure 18). The plasterwork ceiling of this entrance hall partially survives within the office occupying the space.



Fig 17 First floor front room of No.38, showing later partition wall cutting through original cornice



Fig 18 Room G02 in No.37, occupying the former location of the entrance hall, with the window in the location of the original door visible beyond

3.0 Assessment of Significance

3.1 Assessing Significance

Assessing significance is the means by which the cultural importance of a place and its component parts is identified and compared. The identification of elements of high and lower significance, based on a thorough understanding of a site, enables owners and designers to develop proposals that safeguard, respect and where possible enhance the character and cultural values of the site.

Statutory designation is the legal mechanism by which significant historic places are identified in order to protect them. The designations applying to Nos.36-38 Gordon Square are listed in Section 1.4. However, it is necessary to go beyond these in order to arrive at a more detailed and broader understanding of significance. This is achieved here using the terminology and criteria from the *NPPF* (2019).

Annex 2 of the *NPPF* defines significance as:

The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. The interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting.

3.2 Heritage interests

Historic England's *Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance* (2008) includes a methodology for assessing significance by considering 'heritage values'. In this instance *NPPF* terms are used because their adoption simplifies the preparation and assessment of planning and listed building consent applications, but the equivalent heritage values are given in brackets for reference. This assessment uses three main types of interest as defined below.

Architectural and Artistic Interest ['aesthetic value']: These are the interests in the design and general aesthetics of a place. They can arise from conscious design or fortuitously from the way the heritage asset has evolved.

Historic Interest ['historical value']: An interest in past lives and events (including prehistoric). Heritage assets can illustrate or be associated with them. Heritage assets with historic interest not only provide a material record of our nation's history, but can also provide an emotional meaning for communities derived from their collective experience of a place and can symbolise wider values such as faith and cultural identity ['communal value'].

Annex 2 of the *NPPF* defines **archaeological interest ['evidential value']** in the following way:

There will be archaeological interest in a heritage asset if it holds, or potentially may hold, evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation at some point.

Archaeological interest will not be assessed in the following discussion of the significance, although the Greater London Historic Environment Record (GLHER) has been consulted and a map is included in the Supporting Information (Section 5.0) for completeness.

3.3 Assessing the significance of 36-38 Gordon Square

The following section offers an assessment of the significance of the Nos.36-38 Gordon Square. Its contribution to the character and appearance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area is also assessed.

For this assessment, four levels of significance have been identified:

High significance: major contribution to special interest

Moderate significance: contributes to special interest

Low significance: has some minor contribution to special interest

Neutral: makes no contribution to special interest, but does not detract

Detracts: is a negative feature that obscures or harms significance

These levels, in addition to the different heritage interests outlined in Section 3.2, are referenced throughout the following sections as well as on the accompanying significance plans.

3.4 Statement of Significance of 36-38 Gordon Square

3.4.1 Exterior

Nos.36-38 Gordon Square forms part of a series of late-Georgian terraced houses designed by one of the leading architect-builders of the period, Thomas Cubitt. As a photo comparison of the properties in 1937 and the present day indicate, the building has retained its external appearance, save for the blocking in of the door of No.37. The imposing exterior is a key element of the building's special historic and architectural interest and is therefore **highly significant**.

3.4.2 Basement

Of all the floors in the building, the basement has been most thoroughly refurbished in recent years, with very few historic elements remaining. Whilst not overtly detracting from the building's special interest, the spaces at this level are of no historic or architectural interest and are judged to make a **neutral** contribution to the building's significance. The primary interest at basement level is in the retained plan form, particularly the party walls which define the building's historic character as three separate dwellings. However, the surviving original plan form and fabric at this level is considered of less importance than on the upper levels given the historic secondary nature of the basement floor and degree of later remodelling, and is considered of **moderate significance**. The external basement areas are of some **minor significance** as they provide historic context of this level as a service space.

3.4.3 Ground Floor

Many historic elements survive on the ground floor of each house. Much of the original plan form survives, although in places the wall fabric is of a later phase. Where original fabric survives this is of **high significance**. Surviving original features include room cornices and window boxes. These are of moderate historic and artistic interest, as well-preserved examples of late Georgian craftsmanship which was common in many contemporary London townhouses, and are therefore of **high significance**. The entrance hall of No.36 contains an attractive Victorian tiled floor, which is of **moderate significance** as a good example of a late-nineteenth century domestic interior finish.

The single storey elements that project into the gardens of each property have been extensively remodelled and bear very little historic interest beyond their planform. These therefore have a **neutral** contribution to the building's significance.

3.4.4 First and Second Floors

Elements of original fabric that mark out the historic plan form are **highly significant**, while later fabric that retains the original plan is of **moderate significance** as it contributes to the special interest relating to the retained plan. Later partitions that disrupt the original plan form **detract** from the building's significance, as do the gloomy corridors that the partitions have created.

As on the ground floor, the rooms at first and second-floor levels contain a good number of surviving historic elements, most notably the ceiling cornices which mark out the former plan form of each residence but are cut through by the alter partitions. These are of **high significance** as good examples of late-Georgian craftsmanship.

The WCs at mezzanine level between the second and third floors have modern interiors of no heritage interest but the partition walls are of **minor significance** as the spaces have existed since at least the late nineteenth century.

3.4.5 Third Floor

The third floor of each residence is of lower architectural quality than the lower floors, reflecting its historic status as a private space not intended for entertaining visitors. However, the survival of the original internal walls allows the historic plan form to be read in each property, in spite of later partitioning. Therefore, retained original fabric is **highly significant**, while the spaces themselves are of **low significance** given their lower quality compared to the lower floors. The kitchenette on the third floor of No.37 **detracts** from the significance of the building, being of low architectural quality and causing the second to third floor staircase to be a gloomy, unwelcoming space. Similarly, the later partitions which cut through the rear rooms of the houses **detract** from the building's significance, due to their low quality and impact upon the plan form.

3.4.6 Fourth Floor

The historic interest of the fourth floor lies in the ability to read the social history of the spaces as the servants' quarters through the retention of plan forms within Nos.36 and 37. The walls that mark out this form are **highly significant**. The extent retained historic features at this level is limited to the surviving blocked fireplaces in some of the rooms, making the spaces of **minor significance**. The same cannot be said for No.38, where the floor plan has been opened up and made into one large room, bearing no visible historic interest or character. It is therefore of **neutral significance**.

3.4.7 Staircases

Each house retains its original cast iron and hardwood balustrade, which are of considerable historic and artistic interest and are therefore **highly significant**. The stairwells at ground and first floor level retain much of their historic character, with good quality ceiling plasterwork typical of the date of construction, and large windows flooding the wells with light. These spaces are of **moderate significance**. As one moves to the upper floors, however, the quality of the stairwells declines due to later interventions which have stripped many of the historic elements from the spaces. Little other than the form of the original stairs remains from the second floor up and these spaces are of **neutral significance**, with the exception of the second to third floor staircases in Nos.36 and 38, which have been less altered and are of **minor significance**. At basement level, the staircases in Nos.37 and 38 are later concrete replacements of **neutral significance**, while No.36 retains its original staircase in an altered state and as such is of **moderate significance**.

3.5 Contribution to Bloomsbury Conservation Area

According to the Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal, the predominant building type in Bloomsbury is the three- to four-storey terraced townhouse that is classical in style, with regular fenestration and larger windows on the first floor, denoting the piano nobile (the floor with the most important rooms). These houses also usually feature cast iron railings across their frontages, separating the pavement from the front light well. As such, 36-38 Gordon Square is highly representative of the historic character of Bloomsbury Conservation Area and therefore makes a **positive contribution** to its significance.

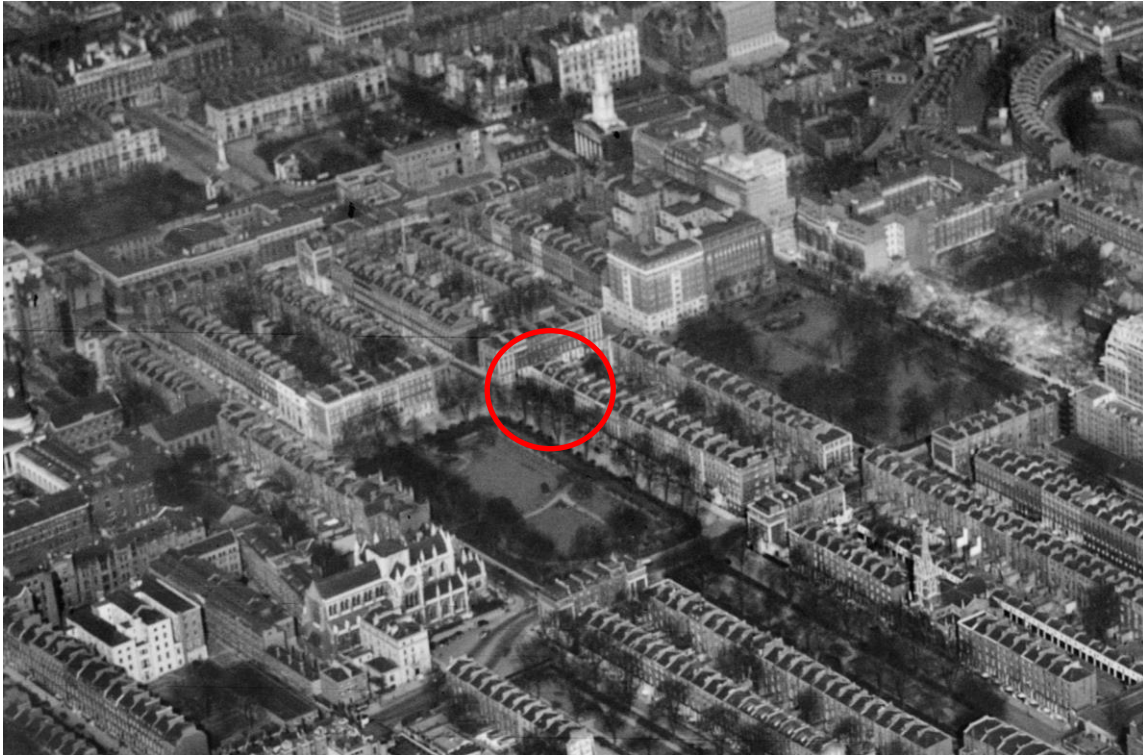


Fig 19 Aerial view of Bloomsbury in 1939, showing its formal layout. Nos. 36-38 Gordon Square are circled (Britain from Above EPW060555)

Lower Ground Floor Significance Plan

