

2 Bloomsbury Place London WC1A

Heritage Assessment

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1 **Scope**

- 1.1 This conservation assessment has been produced to accompany a planning and listed building pre-application submission for Number 2 Bloomsbury Place, London WC1.
- 1.2 It has been prepared by Anthony Walker, a chartered architect with a post-graduate Diploma in Building Conservation who has been a visiting professor at Kingston University and who lectures on building conservation on courses at Cambridge and Leicester Universities.
- 1.3 It is based on a visual inspection of the building, reference to the National Planning Policy Framework 2018, the Camden Local Plan, the Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal, and other similar relevant information.

2 **Background**

- 2.1 Location.
 - 2.1.1 The property is situated on the northern side of Bloomsbury Place between Bloomsbury Square and Southampton Row.
 - 2.1.2 It is in the Bloomsbury Conservation Area, sub-section 6, Bloomsbury Square, Russell Square and Tavistock Square.
 - 2.2.3 It forms part of a short terrace, numbers 1-5 Bloomsbury Place, all of which are listed Grade II.
- 2.2 Outline of the historic background
 - 2.2.1 Southampton House, was built on the north side of Bloomsbury Square in about 1657 for Thomas Wriothesley, 4th Earl of Southampton. He died without an heir so the Estate passed to Rachel, wife of William Russell, the second son of the Duke of Bedford, and in 1700 his son inherited the title and Estate of the Dukes of Bedford. Bedford House was a low brick building with two short wings; this layout is shown on William Morgan's map of 1682 with terraces of houses running to the east and west on either side of the main frontage and on the line of the present Great Russell Street.
 - 2.2.2 The 1746 plan shows the main house facing on to the Square with a small open area on each side, and also a development on each side.
APPENDIX A 1746
 - 2.2.3 In 1800 the Duke of Bedford was granted permission in two Acts of Parliament to develop his Estate. In the same year James Burton, who had been working with the adjacent Foundling Estate, started the demolition of Bedford House.
APPENDIX B 1800
 - 2.2.4 This development enabled Burton to form two roads leading due north to a new open space which was named as Russell Square, thereby creating a substantial amount of value in new development for the Bedford Estate.
 - 2.2.5 It is recognised that the two terraces along the north side of Bloomsbury Square and on either side of Bedford Place were designed by James Burton and date from about 1800. It is probable that Burton set out the general design of the main layout, but was not involved in the execution, not least because he was not in London during this period.

2.2.7 By 1824 the two empty blocks at either end of the two 'Burton' terraces are indicated on a map of that date as having been developed and each has a step outwards from the frontage with the adjoining terrace.

APPENDIX C 1824

2.2.8 According to the listing description the terrace was re-fronted in the middle of the nineteenth century, while the Estate record book lists extensive works to numbers 1,2 and 3 among others in 1866 when a detailed specification was drawn up on a building-by-building basis including re-fronting the terrace.

APPENDIX D 1866

2.2.9 The description of the 1866 works which is held in the Bedford Estate archive makes it clear that there was a complete rebuilding scheme for the top storey of number 2. *Take down the chimney shafts of the house and rebuild all the shafts the same height as at 5 Bloomsbury Place..... take down the front rear and two party walls tell they are sound and 14 inches in thicknessconstruct a new roof of framed lattice beams .. and templates as follows..lattice bearing beams 2ft deep framed with iron T beams 6"by5" and 1/2" thick....'*

2.2.10 Detailed descriptions are given of external modillion cornices and copings with throating on both sides. Party Walls were to be repaired and pointed with the top courses rebuilt. The flat roof was to be re-laid in 7lb lead on 14" boards in 'half board' lengths.

2.2.11 Internally partitions are to be increased in height up to roof level, a new deal rooflight is to be introduced and a staircase extended to roof level with a timber balustrade and handrail. Rainwater pipes are to be extended and the cesspit filled and privies are to be removed from the site.

2.2.12 Finishes such as ceilings and wall plaster to be renewed as necessary in lath and plaster on the upper floors and throughout the house. Moulded architraves to windows were to be provided and a head frieze to heads of openings. Where walls and/or ceilings had been papered they are specified to be repapered and all new and existing works inside and outside to be redecorated with three coats of oil paint.

2.2.14 It is clear that there were substantial changes made to the interior of the building which are still manifest today.

2.2.15 Interestingly the specification prohibits the use of any old materials which with the description of the party walls needing to be rebuilt until they are found to be sound suggests that the buildings were in a very poor condition.

2.2.16 The main staircase and entrance hall are of a generous width.

2.2.17 Number 2 has a front light well with two vaults on the road side extending under the pavement. On the garden side there is also a narrow light well which follows the profile of the canted bay in the centre of the façade. There are two vaults on the western side of the site with direct access from the basement of number 2. Beside these is a subterranean corridor leading from the lightwell directly northwards and at the end of which at a right-angle to the corridor is a vault set out with stone slabs on four sides for cool storage.

APPENDIX E 1872

2.2.17 The uses of the building at present include flats in the basement and the two top floors. The rest of the building is used for office accommodation. As part of the restoration of the building it is proposed to carry out a use swop with 37-41 Gower Street exchanging the residential use in number 2 in the

basement and two upper floors for similar accommodation to be provided basement and ground level in 37-41 Gower Street.

3 Significance

3.1 The terrace, comprising numbers 1-5 Bloomsbury Place, was listed grade II in 1969.

3.2 In the listing description it is noted that:
Nos.1-5 (Consecutive) and attached railings II Includes: No.65 SOUTHAMPTON ROW. 5 terraced houses. Late C17, refronted 1857-62 possibly by Searle & Trehearne. Stucco with rusticated ground floor with band above. 4 storeys and basements. 3 windows each. Each house treated as a bay with paired rusticated pilasters rising through ground, 1st and 2nd floors and extending as panelled pilasters through 3rd floor. Entrances with consoles, pulvinated friezes, cornices; square-headed fanlights and panelled doors. Recessed sash windows; 1st floor with consoles, bracketed cornice and cast-iron window-box guards; 2nd and 3rd floor with architraves. 3rd floor with pulvinated frieze and cornice. Bracketed cornice at 3rd floor. Cornice and blocking course. INTERIORS: No 3, some panelling and turned balusters to stairs.

3.3 There have been no modifications to the description. It may be considered curious that it was not noted as having group value in the light of the re-fronting described in the listing, and that contained in the Conservation Area Appraisal which makes specific reference to the similarity in the refacing of the two wings on either side of Burton's new terraces in Bedford Place. It is noticeable that while the front facades have retained a uniform appearance, the back facades are less coherent. Number 2 has a canted bay at the back which appears to be an original feature, and other buildings in the terrace have back closet wings of varying sizes and heights.

3.4 The terrace is clearly of significance on account of its relationship with the development of the area and its role in the changes in the Bedford Estate. Although not included for Group Value, it is of significance as part of the overall composition of Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury Square and Bloomsbury Place and as such its exterior is a contributing element in the character of the area and its development to a master plan by Burton.

4 Relevant national and local legislation

4.1 National Planning Policy Framework 2019

4.1.1 ***The National Planning Policy Framework (The Framework)*** Section 16 deals with conserving and enhancing the built environment.

4.1.2 In paragraph 196 the development is described which will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset. In those circumstances this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposals, including securing its optimum viable use.

4.2 Camden Local Plan

4.2.1 **CS14 Promoting high quality places and conserving our heritage**

The Council will ensure that Camden's places and buildings are attractive, safe and easy to use by:

a) requiring development of the highest standard of design that respects local context and character;

b) preserving and enhancing Camden's rich and diverse heritage assets and their settings, including conservation areas, listed buildings, archaeological remains, scheduled ancient monuments and historic parks and gardens.

DP25 Conserving Camden's Heritage Conservation areas

In order to maintain the character of Camden's conservation areas, the Council will:

- a) take into account the conservation area statements, appraisals and management plans when assessing applications within conservation areas;*
- b) only permit development within conservation areas if it preserves and enhances the character and appearance of the area;*
- c) prevent the total or substantial demolition of an unlisted building which makes a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a conservation area where this harms the character or appearance of that conservation area, unless exceptional circumstances are shown that outweigh the case for retention;*
- d) not permit development outside a conservation area that causes harm to the character and appearance of that conservation area; and*
- e) preserve trees and garden spaces which contribute to the character of a conservation area and which provide a setting for Camden's architectural heritage.*

Listed buildings

To preserve or enhance the borough's listed buildings, the Council will:

- e) prevent the total or substantial demolition of a listed building unless exceptional circumstances are shown that outweigh the case for retention;*
- g) only grant consent for a change of use or alterations and extensions to a listed building where it considers this would not cause harm to the special interest of the building; and*
- h) not permit development that it considers would cause harm to the setting of a listed building.*

4.2.2 Camden Planning Guidance 1 Design.

Section 3 deals with Heritage and the key messages state:

Camden has a rich architectural heritage and we have a responsibility to preserve, and where possible, enhance these areas and buildings.

- We will only permit development within conservation areas that preserves and enhances the character and appearance of the area*
- Our conservation area statements, appraisals and management plans contain more information on all the conservation areas*
- Most works to alter a listed building are likely to require listed building consent*
- Historic buildings can and should address sustainability*

4.3 Bloomsbury Conservation Area

Bloomsbury Square lies in sub area 6 of the Conservation Area. The following extracts are relevant to the current proposals:

'..... there is general consistency in building heights: four storeys to the north and west sides, and three storeys to the south and along Southampton Place. The buildings are predominantly constructed from yellow brick with stucco decoration, although there are some fronts which are entirely stucco-faced. Window openings are vertically-proportioned, diminishing in size above large first-floor openings, with recessed sliding sashes subdivided with slender glazing bars. The majority of properties have iron boundary railings around basement areas.

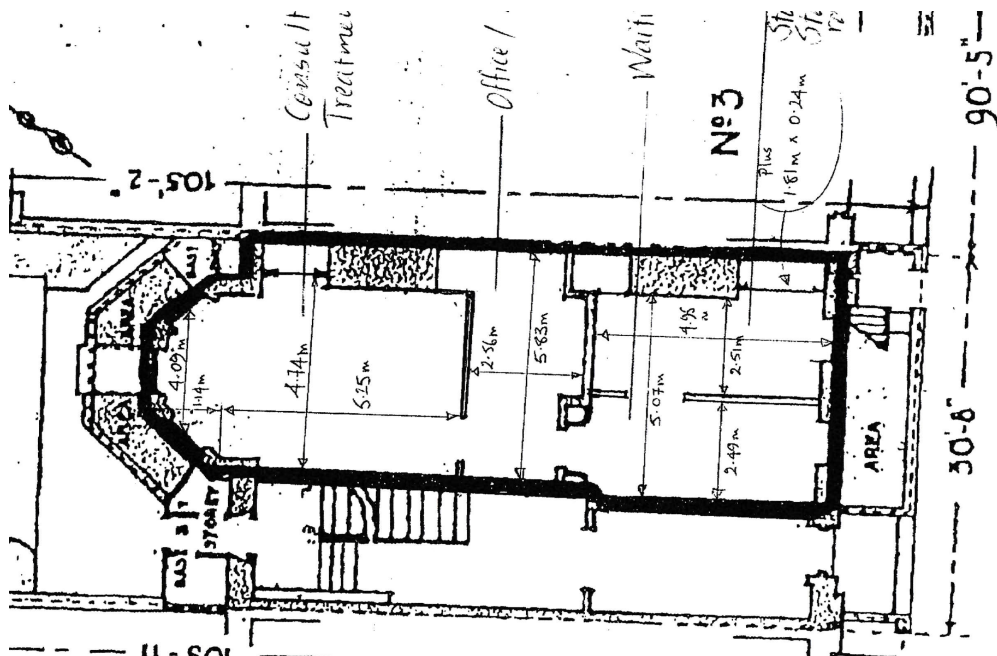
5.84 The square is a unifying element and, owing to its comparatively small size and relatively narrow peripheral streets, has a strong relationship to the buildings facing it.'

5.85 Looking north, Nos 18-22 (consec) and Nos 23-27 (consec) Bloomsbury Square are two terraces of grade II listed brick townhouses by James Burton, dating from 1800 -1805, which frame the vista along Bedford Place. Flanking these are Nos 1-5 Bloomsbury Place and Nos 74-77 Great Russell Street, two stucco-faced terraces of the same height; of 17th century origin they were re-fronted in the mid 19th century and have a more decorative, classically-influenced elevational treatment.

5 Proposals

5.1 The proposals are set out in more detail in the architects' DAS. The building is in use as offices with the exception of the top floors and the basement which provides a self-contained flat converted in 2004. As part of the overall proposals this will be changed to offices which has a substantial conservation benefit in allowing the separation required to the lower flights of the staircase to be removed.

5.2 Within the main body of the house the dominant layout on each floor consists of a large room at the front with a main staircase along the western party wall, and a smaller main room across the back of the building. At each level the wall separating these rooms has a doorway connecting them and there are chimney breasts in each of the main rooms on the eastern party wall indicating that this was probably the source of any heating for each level. There are various thinner partitions subdividing the larger rooms on the upper floors, many of these are later additions such as the conversion of the ground floor for a medical examinations.



Ground floor 2004 conversion

5.3 The proposals, taking note of the existing doorways linking the rooms, seek to create good quality office space with positive links between the rooms on each floor. It is considered that these will create interesting spaces which also provide efficient office space. On the ground floor and the second floor it is proposed to provide movable

screens which can be opened up to unite rooms. These will be of a contemporary design.

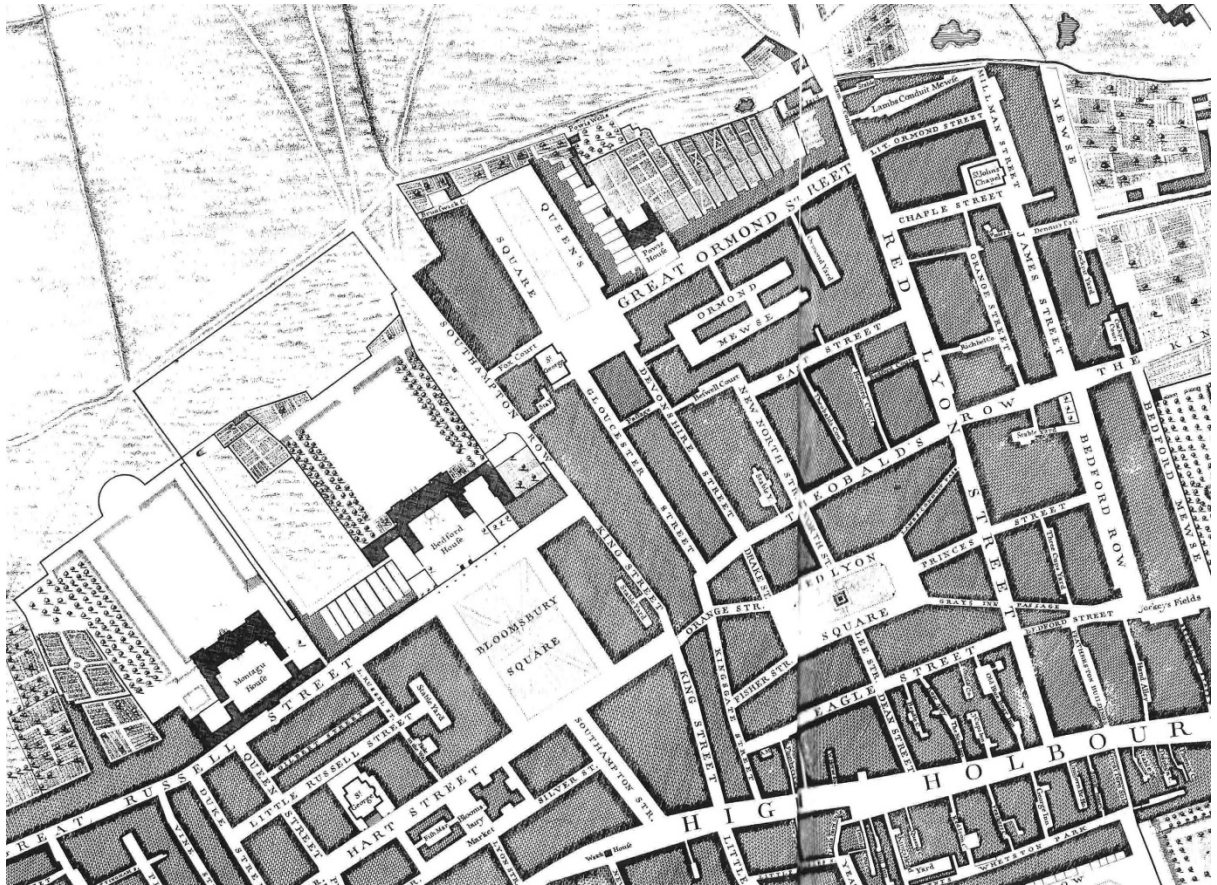
- 5.4 At the back of the buildings, along the north side of Great Russell Street and Bloomsbury Place, are a number of varying back closet wings ranging from the single-storey plus basement full length extension to number 4, to the taller but with a shallower projection, back closet wings of 18-22 and 23-27 Bloomsbury Place.
- 5.5 At ground floor level at the back of number 2 there is a closet wing with a lavatory and small room beyond and it is proposed to extend this to provide useable space, taking guidance for the plan profile from the outer wall of the corridor at basement level. This will enhance the viability of building and will be of a similar scale to the wing behind number 4 Bloomsbury Place which was first built in the early part of the twentieth century.
- 5.6 At roof level there is a terrace area with access by a small staircase which will be re-planned to give safer access within a glazed enclosure of a similar scale to the rooflight on the other side of the roof.
- 5.7 Cornices and other decorative plaster work will be restored where existing as will be timber joinery.

6 Summary

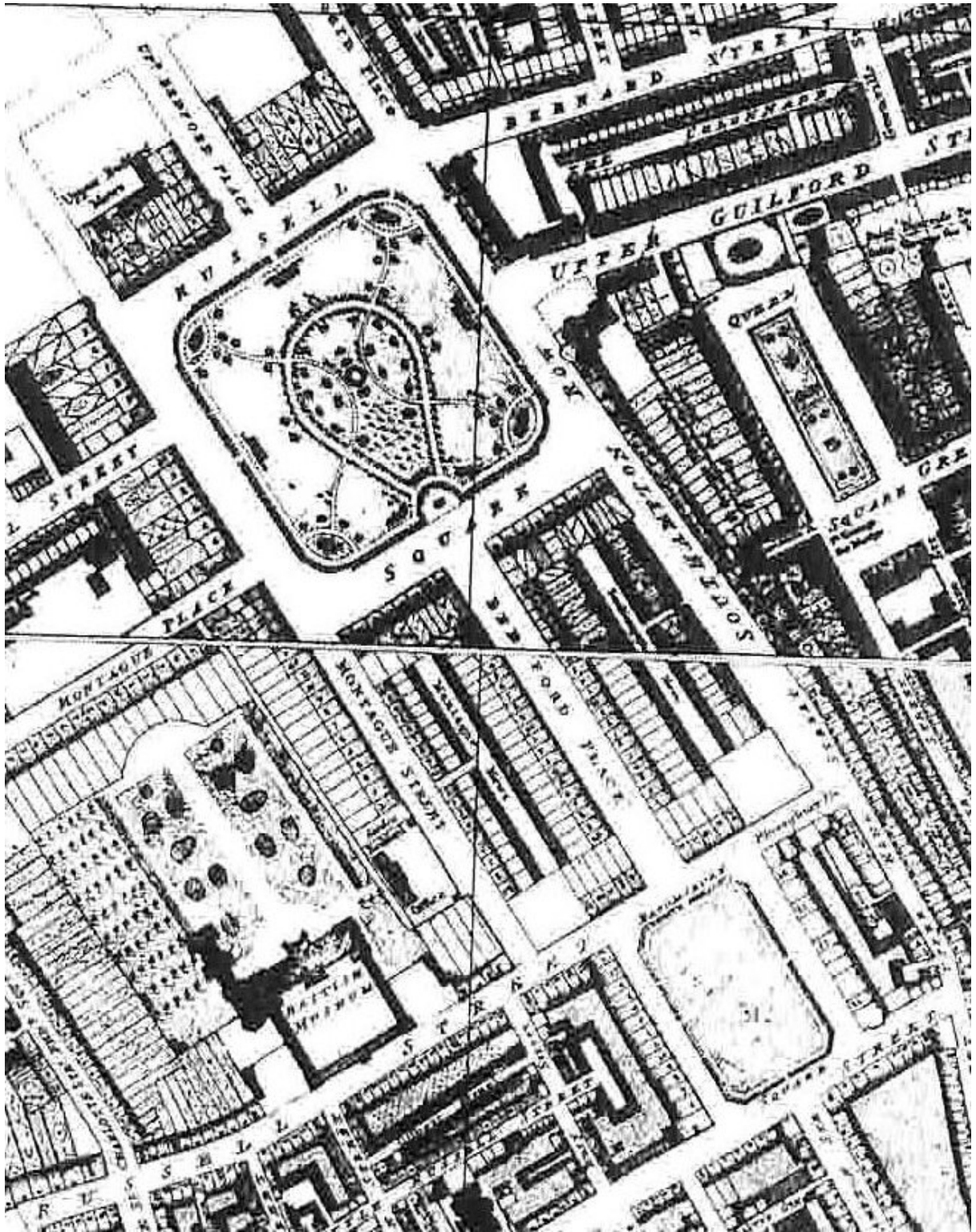
- 6.1 The proposals will restore the historic building, maintaining the basic room layout while enhancing the service installations.
- 6.2 The front of the building will remain unchanged, thus retaining the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.
- 6.3 The back of the building will remain unchanged, apart from the extension of the existing back closet wing at ground level to provide better access to the garden and additional space at a scale appropriate to the surroundings. It is not considered that the extension would cause harm to the special interest of the building which is substantially embodied in the front elevation and its re-fronting in 1866.
- 6.4 Decorative plasterwork and joinery will be restored as necessary.

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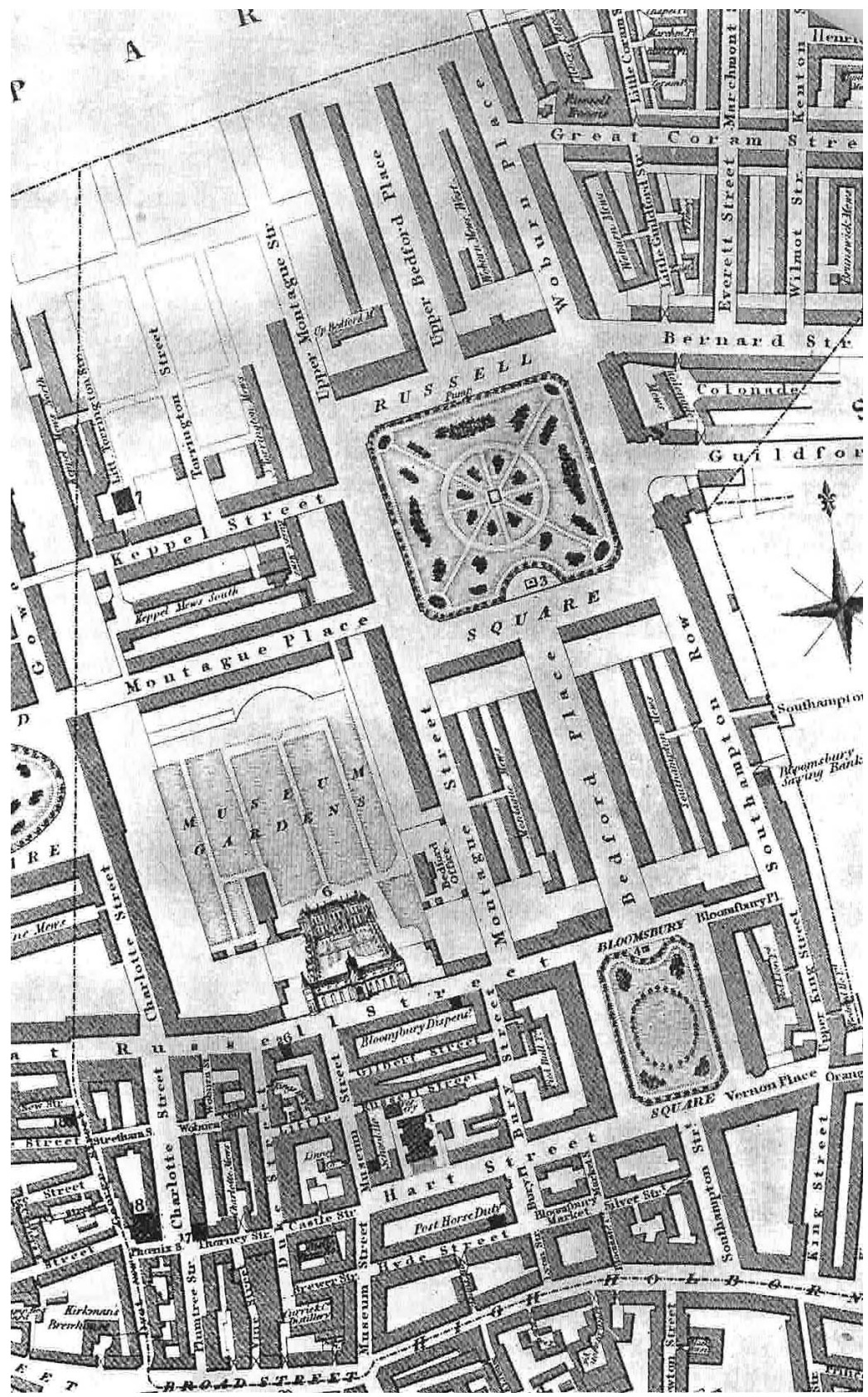
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A
1746 Rocque Map



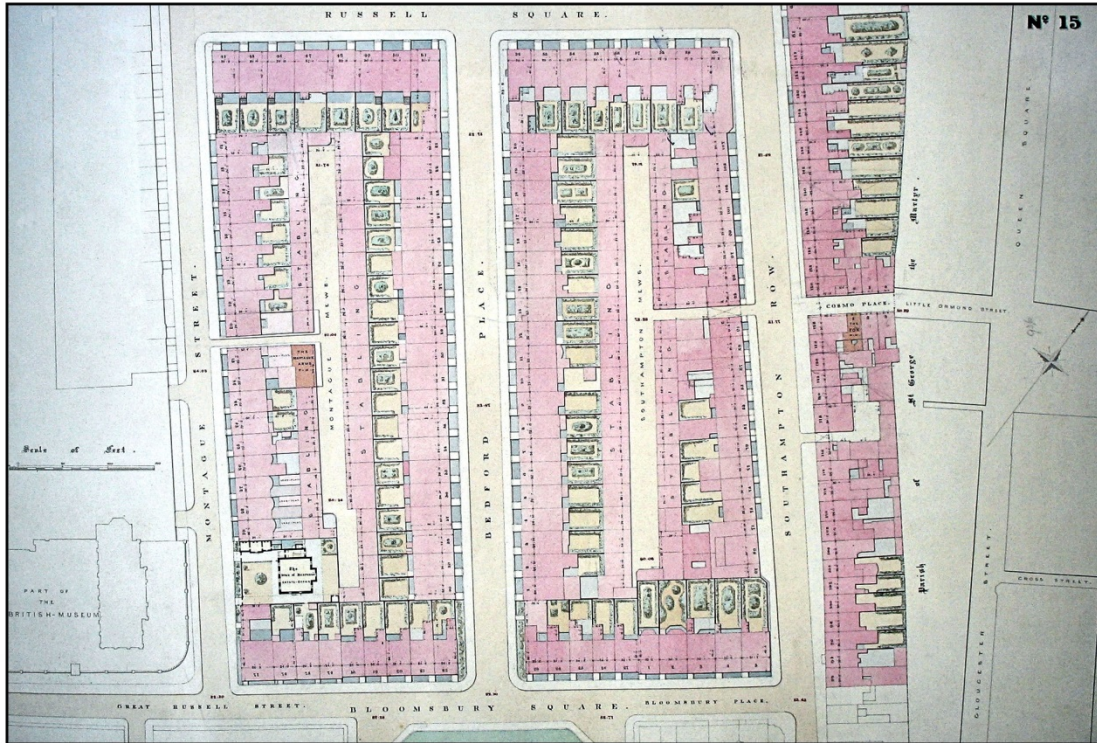
APPENDIX B
1800



APPENDIX C
Estate map 1824



APPENDIX D
Estate Map 1866



APPENDIX E
1872 OS

