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Chartered Architects and Historic Building Consultants

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## 33 Betterton Street W2

Short Historic Building Report  
For Katherine Dee

REVISION 1

September 2020



REGENT gifts

31

REGENT GIFTS

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## 1.0 33 Betterton Street WC2 Short Historic Building Report

### 1.1 Introduction

Donald Insall Associates was commissioned by Katherine Dee in August 2020 to assist with an analysis of an application for planning and listed building consent to add a mansard roof to 33 Betterton Street WC2H 9BQ made in July 2020. The investigation has focussed on the effect of the proposals with respect to heritage and has consisted of an examination of the submitted documents. These included Drawings, Design & Access Statement by P-ad and Heritage Statement by Squire Heritage Consulting dated July 2020 and revised versions September 2020, additional online archive research and information checks together with a site visit. A brief outline of the legal status of the building and its history is followed by a commentary on the proposed scheme with respect to heritage planning legislation.

### 1.2 The Building and its Legal Status

33 Betterton Street is a Grade II-listed building located in the Seven Dials Conservation Area in the London Borough of Camden. It is in the setting of a number of listed buildings.

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 is the legislative basis for decision-making on applications that relate to the historic environment. Sections 66 and 72 of the Act impose statutory duties upon local planning authorities which, with regard to listed buildings, require the planning authority to have *'special regard to the desirability of preserving the listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses'* and, in respect of conservation areas, that *'special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area'*.

In considering applications for listed building consent and planning permission, local authorities are also required to consider the policies on the historic environment set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The key message of the NPPF is the concept of 'sustainable development' which for the historic environment means that heritage assets 'should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance'.

The NPPF recognises that, in some cases, the significance of a 'designated heritage asset' such as 33 Betterton Street can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. The NPPF therefore states that any harm or loss to a designated heritage asset 'should require clear and convincing justification' and that any 'less than substantial' harm caused to the significance of a designated heritage asset should be weighed against the 'public benefits' of the proposal.

### 1.3 A Brief Summary History

Early eighteenth century Covent Garden was a fashionable residential area and 33 Betterton Street was originally constructed as an elegant early-eighteenth century townhouse. The building has a standard post Fire of London developer's plan: four storeys over a basement, two rooms deep with a narrow entrance corridor leading to a dogleg staircase and a small 'closet wing' to the rear opening to a courtyard. It would originally have had painted timber sash windows, with small panes and wide glazing bars, recessed from the frontage as required by the London building acts of the time to minimise the spread of fire.

During the late eighteenth century and nineteenth century, as London expanded along the turnpike roads and then railways, Covent Garden became a less desirable place to live. Like many houses of its period, in the area, it appears the ground floor of 33 Betterton Street was converted to a workshop or shop with storage below and tenement accommodation above.

The Seven Dials area remained poor until well into the twentieth century. It was destined for major demolition and slum clearance after WWII until pioneering changes in planning policy in the late 1960s and early 1970s began to promote urban regeneration and repair rather than comprehensive redevelopment. Planning records show that 33 Betterton Street was formally converted into separate flats in the 1980s. Listed Building Consent was obtained for alterations to the roof and third floor in July 1980 to create a self-contained third floor flat (London Borough of Camden LBC 2460).

A detailed history of the area including map regression is included within Squire Heritage Consulting's heritage statement so it is not reproduced here.

### 1.4 Site Inspection

A much restored nineteenth/early twentieth century shopfront remains at ground floor. At higher levels the street façade is faced in dark London stock brick with smooth red-brick rubbed flat arches above the windows. The parapet has been rebuilt. The painted window frames are a medley of nineteenth and twentieth replacement casements and sashes, none of the sash windows with the wide glazing bars typical of the early eighteenth century appears to have survived.

Only the entrance hall and the third floor flat were inspected internally, however it is clear that the fine early eighteenth century staircase survives intact, together with its wainscotting, from ground to third floor, as does much of the internal plan form at higher levels **[Plate 1]**.

The roof structure is an early-eighteenth century double-pitch 'M' form; there are some new timbers and a clay-tiled roof covering including modern rooflights but many of the roof timbers appear early **[Plate 2]**. Hand drawn plans and sections, dating from 1980, confirm that the roof was carefully repaired at this time. They also show that the layout of the third floor flat is as it is today, with a living room and high level sleeping area facing the street, a small bathroom at the top of the stairs and a rear kitchen/dining room **[Plates 3, 4]**.



**Plate 1** *Early Eighteenth Century Stair (Insalls)*



**Plate 2** *Early Rafter (Insalls)*

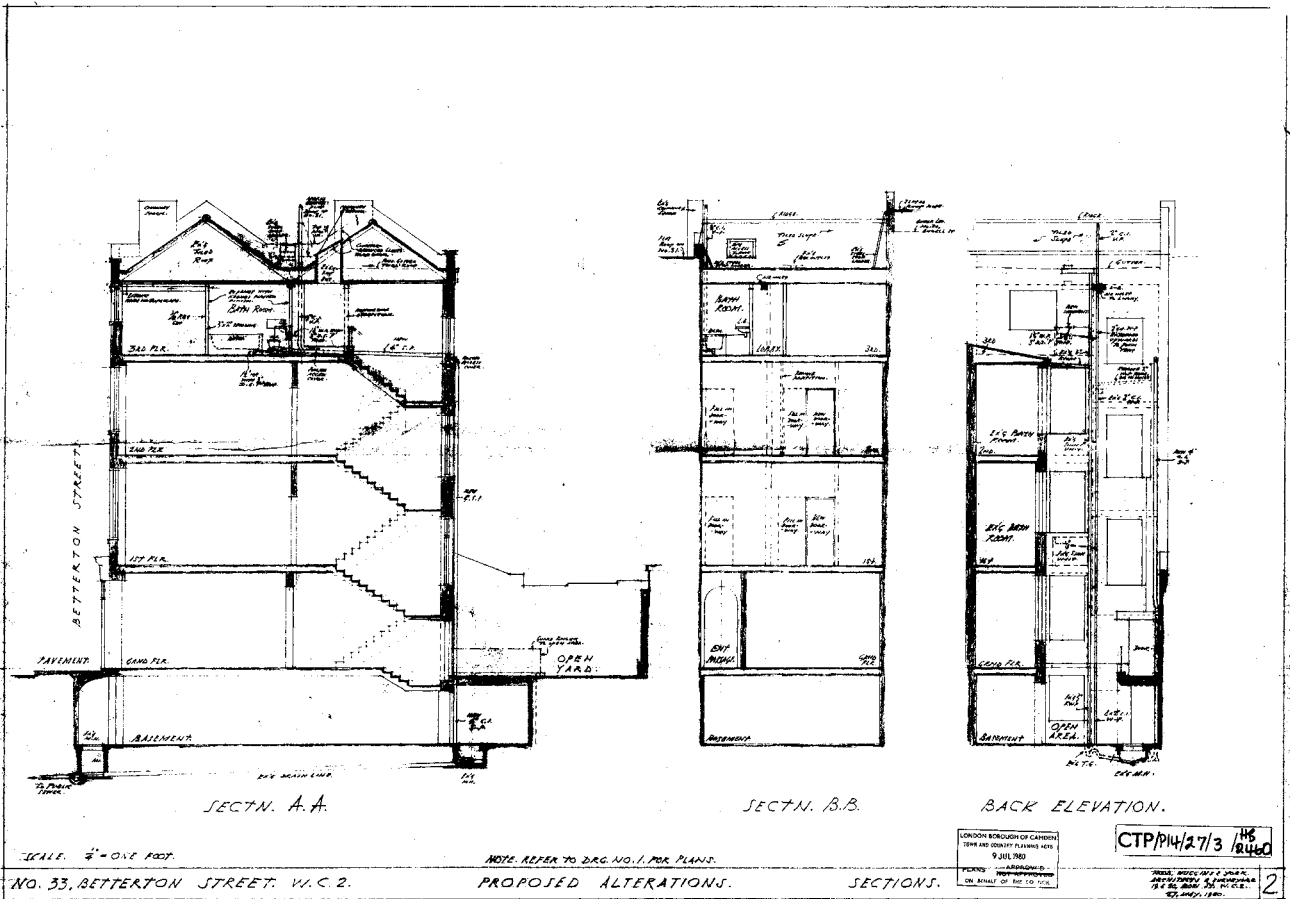
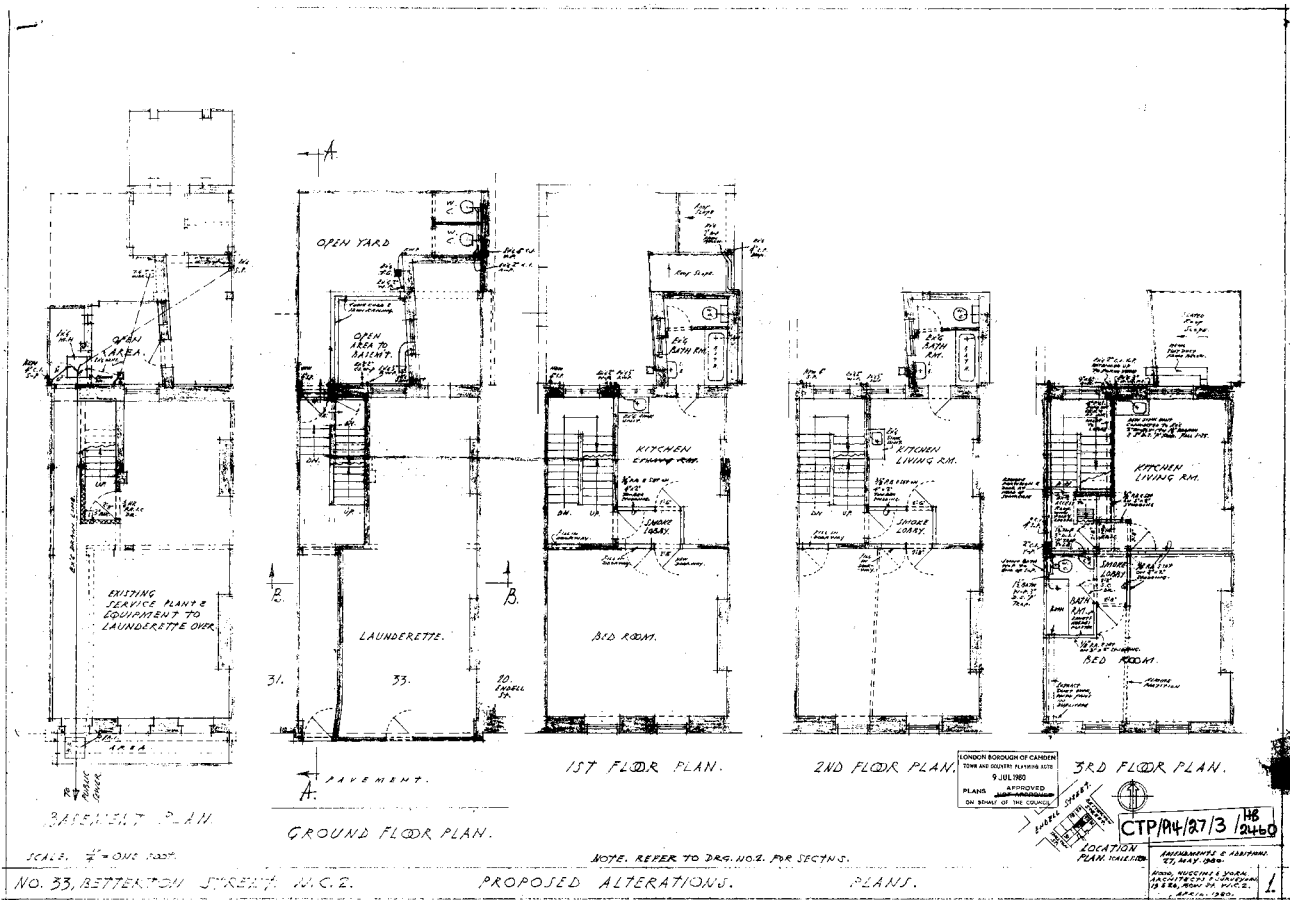


Plate 3 1980 section (consent HB2460 LB Camden Planning).



Plates 4 Floor plans (consent HB2460 LB Camden Planning)





**Plate 5** *Living Room (Insalls)*

The living room is lined with modern tongue-and-groove panelling to the ceiling and walls, exposed trusses, wooden shutters to the street and a nineteenth century style chimney piece [Plate 5].

### **1.5 Significance of the building and its Townscape Setting**

The submitted heritage statement contains a thorough analysis of the townscape, the character and appearance of the conservation area and setting of neighbouring buildings as required by planning legislation. However, pages 28-29 contain a misunderstanding of the nature of the current roof and thus the overall significance of the listed building. Like set back windows, the 'M' form roof was introduced under various seventeenth and eighteenth century building acts post Fire of London in order to prevent the spread of fire. Roof timbers were short to ensure that roofs were concealed behind brick parapet walls. Later terraced housing had the 'V' shaped or 'butterfly' roof with a central valley gutter that drained towards the rear of the building but the 'M' form is typical of an early eighteenth century terrace house.

The roof at 33 Betterton Street is compared with the roofs at neighbouring 51-55 Shelton Street; the latter a labelled a 'better example of a W shaped roof'. This is incorrect: 51-55 Shelton Street is a good example of a later 'butterfly' roof, whilst 33 Betterton Street is an equally good example of an earlier 'M' form of roof construction.

While the roof at no 33 has clearly been repaired and the parapet to the street has been rebuilt, the roof has not been lowered, the attic would not have been higher originally and there is not 'a basic incongruity brought about by the evidence of an altered roof' as claimed in the heritage report. A more accurate statement of significance would thus be as follows:

*33 Betterton Street is a good example of an early Georgian central London townhouse, albeit now converted to separate apartments, and with a later shopfront. Its surviving plan form and features, such as the finely-carved grand staircase and original double-pitched M roof form and structure, are all of high architectural and historical significance. Its street façade, although altered to its detriment, overall makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Severn Dials Conservation area and to the setting of neighbouring listed buildings.*

## **1.6 Commentary on the Proposals with respect to National Planning Policy**

The proposals are described in the Drawings and Design & Access Statement. In summary, they aim to convert the third floor flat into a two bedroom duplex by adding a mansard roof above the current kitchen/ diner and an additional storey to the rear closet wing. The pitched form of what is currently is the living room would be retained internally but it would be used as a bedroom with the high level sleeping area removed. A living room/kitchen would be located in the new fourth floor mansard. The current kitchen/diner would be converted to a bedroom. The mansard would be finished externally in slate with two small dormer sash windows facing the street and another similar dormer and larger window with a Juliet balcony to the rear.

No demolition plans have been provided and thus it is difficult to ascertain the exact extent of proposed fabric removal. However, it appears from the proposed plan and sections that this would involve the complete demolition of the roof structure. This, in heritage planning terms, would cause harm to the significance and special architectural and historical interest of the listed building.

The key question, therefore, is thus to ascertain the extent of the harm caused by the loss of the roof.

The complete loss of the original roof form and structure would not preserve the listed building as required by the 1990 Act. It is also likely to be considered as causing 'substantial' harm to the significance of the listed building by the local authority under paragraph 195 of the National Planning Policy Framework. If so, the application for planning and listed building consent could be refused on these grounds.

It is possible that, if early timbers were retained and reused, and the original roof form internally was preserved at the street front of the building, an argument could be made that the proposals would cause 'less than substantial' harm to the significance of the building. This would then require the proposals to be assessed against paragraph 196 of the NPPF and the harm to be 'weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, its optimum viable use'. The local authority are unlikely to accept this argument, however. Indeed, even if they were, the additional bedroom and Juliet balcony would be difficult to consider as 'public benefits' and would not appear to outweigh the harm caused to the significance of the listed building by the loss of its roof.

## **1.7 Conclusion**

A misunderstanding of the nature of the historic roof form of 33 Betterton Street has led to an error in assessing the overall architectural and historical significance of the Grade II listed building. In consequence, while it assesses the effects of the proposals on the character and appearance of the conservation area and the setting of neighbouring listed buildings, the heritage report that accompanied the application fails to take account of the harm to the significance of the building caused by the partial or complete loss of the original 'M' form roof.

## Appendix - List Description

CAMDEN

TQ3081SW BETTERTON STREET 798-1/105/92 (South side)  
15/01/73 No.33

GV II

Terraced house with later shopfront. Early C18, refaced early C19. Yellow stock brick. 4 storeys and basement. 2 windows. C20 shopfront. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floors with gauged reddened brick arches to recessed casement windows. Rebuilt parapet. INTERIOR: has good early C18 staircase to top of house with closed, moulded string, square newels and twisted balusters. Moulded dado and some original doorcases. Hall with arched opening, some panelling and boxed out cornice. Included for interior.

Listing NGR: TQ3025181187



