

Heritage Statement
13-15 John's Mews,
London, WC1N 2PA



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1.0 Introduction

This Statement was originally commissioned by Marek Wojciechowski Architects on behalf of clients in April 2017 to accompany an application for planning permission and listed building consent. The report was prepared and has now been revised by Neil Burton FSA IHBC, a director of The Architectural History Practice Ltd. Numbers 13-15 John's Mews are a pair of former stable buildings in the mews serving the houses on the western side of John Street. They are not listed but stand within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

2.0 Background and Development History

John Street and Doughty Street, its northern continuation, were both originally laid out on the Doughty estate. The southern part of John Street adjoining what is now Theobalds Road, which was previously known as the King's Road, was laid out and built up with houses as far north as Little James Street in the 1750s by the carpenter John Blagrove, who apparently gave his name to the street. Horwood's 1799 map of London (fig.1) shows the land north of Little James street as open ground. In fact much of the ground had already been let on building leases by Henry Doughty and from about 1807 onwards Doughty Street and the northern part of John Street were built-up with substantial terraced houses, with mews behind. The 1819 edition of Horwood's map appears shows the street almost fully built up. The coach houses in John's Mews were presumably built at the same time as the houses fronting the main street.

Applications were made in 1854 to lay a new drain from both 13 and 15 John's Mews, and the sketch plans submitted with the applications (figs.3 and 4) show that both buildings had broadly similar plans, with stalls for horses and a water closet at the rear. By the 1920s the stable fittings had been removed, both buildings had been enlarged at the rear (fig.5) and it appears from the joint drainage application that they were already in common ownership.

In 1970 an application was made by Mr F Sansom, the then owner, to adapt the buildings for garage use. The drawings submitted with the drainage application (not reproduced here because of very poor fiche quality) show that it was proposed to insert a new steel beam across almost the whole width of the front of both properties, allowing the existing two large ground floor openings to be increased in width and lowered in height. It was also proposed to reduce the number of the first floor window openings from four to three, with the right hand opening being bricked-up. To conceal these extensive alterations the entire front was to be covered with cement render.

It is not clear what was actually done in 1970 because the front of the buildings now differs from the plans 'as proposed'. The original wide door opening to number 15 has been replaced by a doorway with flanking windows and there are still four window openings at first floor level. However, what were originally two separate brick-fronted stable buildings do now have a uniform rendered front.

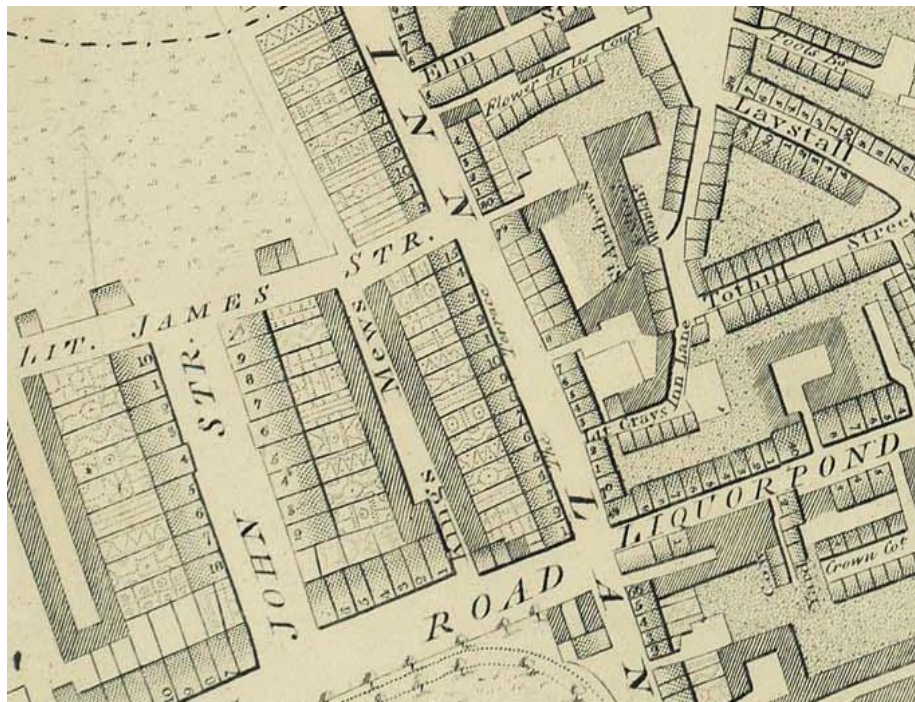


Fig.1 A detail from Richard Horwood's 1799 map of London



Fig.2 The fronts of 13-15 John's mews as existing (April 2017)

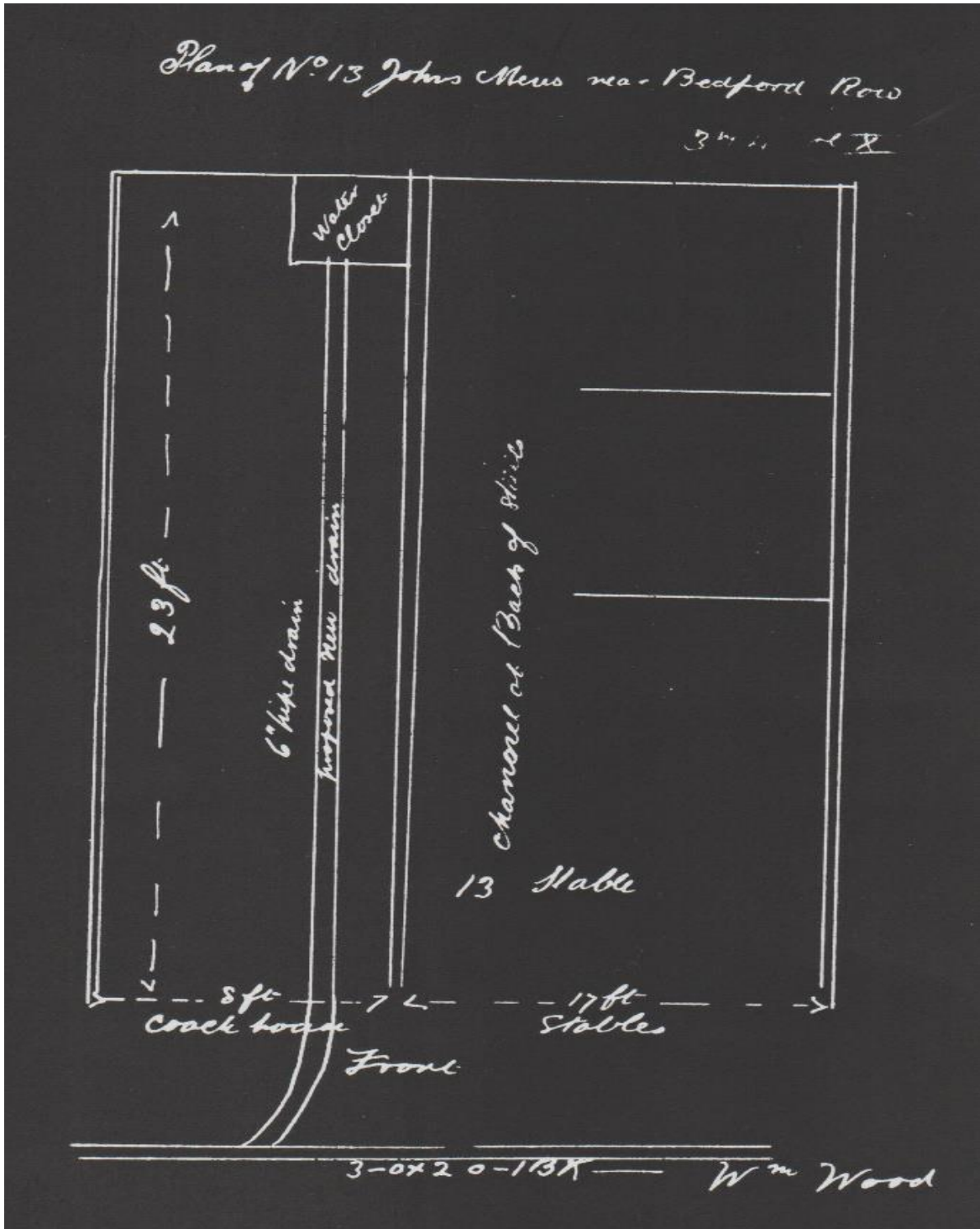


Fig.2: the ground plan of 13 Johns Mews in 1854 (Camden drainage records)

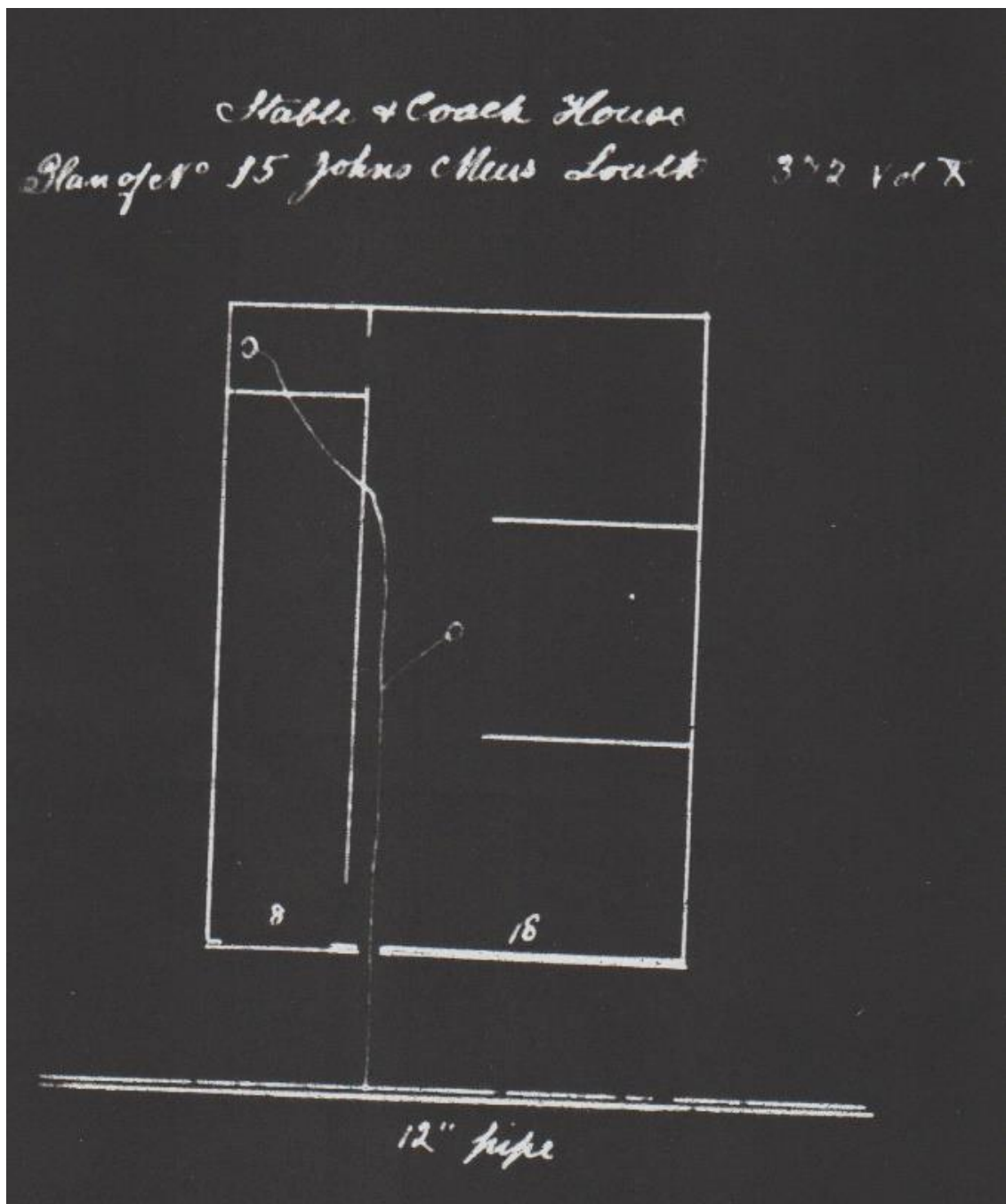


Fig. 3: The ground plan of 15 Johns Mews in 1854 (Camden drainage records)

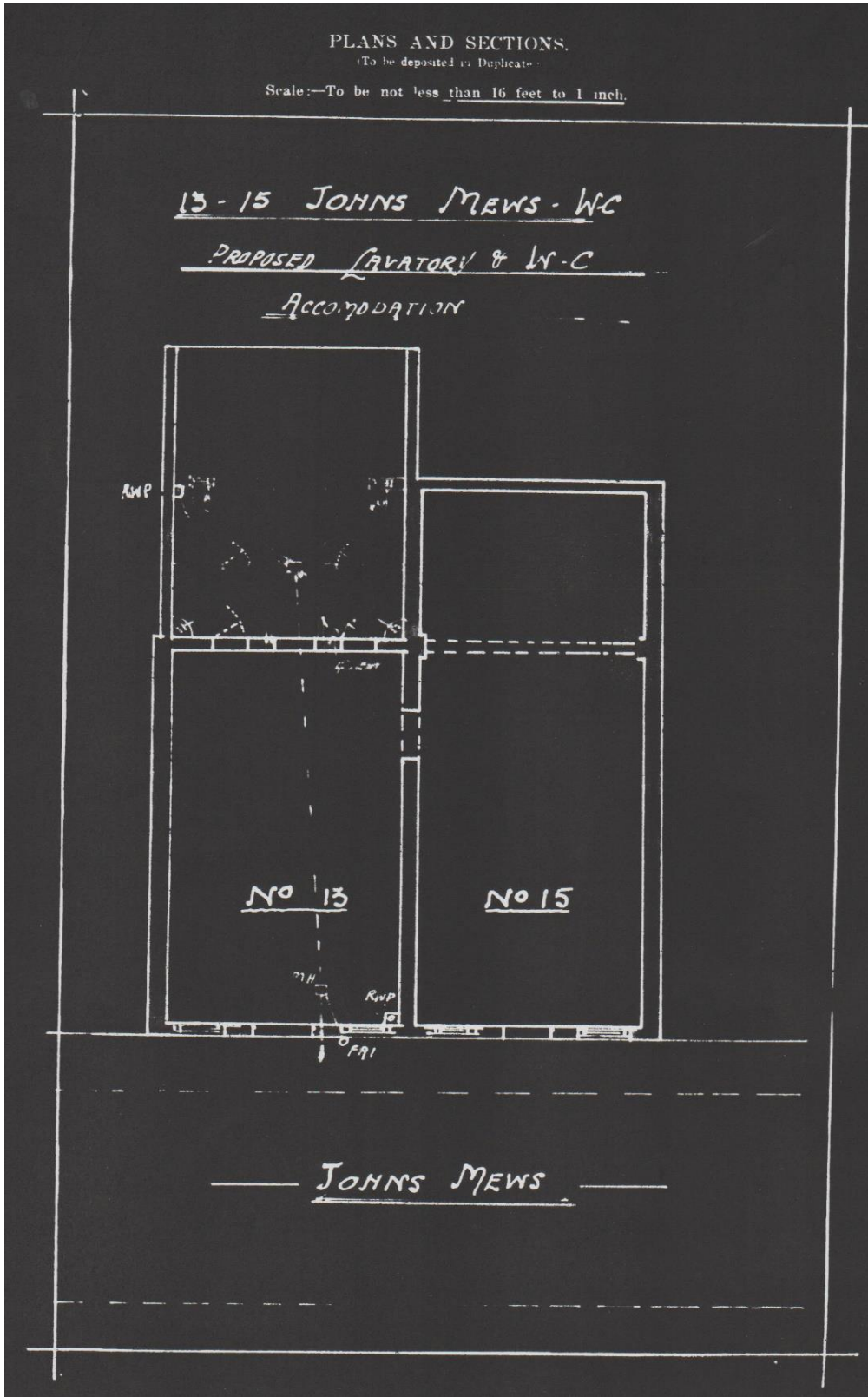


Fig.4: A plan of 13-15 Johns Mews in 1921, apparently at first floor level (Camden drainage records).

3.0 Assessment of Significance

The assessment of the significance of historic buildings and their settings is not an exact science; it is based on detailed knowledge of the building type, a comparison with what exists elsewhere, and the extent to which it may be distinctive or have special meaning for different groups of people.

Statutory designations provide some guide to the importance of historic buildings. The properties at 13-15 Johns Mews are not listed but they stand within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. According to the Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy, both buildings make a positive contribution to the area, but the townscape maps do not show the buildings as making a positive contribution.

Any contribution which the buildings make to the conservation area is because of the scale of their fronts, which conform to what was doubtless the original parapet line for the whole mews. The front probably also contains some original fabric, although there has been very considerable alteration with the insertion of steel beams and successive changes to the openings, which has been covered-up by the modern cement render finish.

Using the values set out in Historic England's 2008 *Conservation Principles* and the levels of assessment established by James Semple Kerr, the buildings have little evidential value, some historical value because of the scale of the fronts, little aesthetic and no communal value. The immediate setting of the buildings is the other former stable buildings on the east side of the mews (the west side is occupied by the grounds of a modern school). Both the adjoining properties have retained fronts of the original height, although both have modern roof additions.

4.0 The Proposed Works and their Impact on the Built Heritage

The current proposals are set out in the drawings, statements and illustrations prepared by M W Architects. In sum, they comprise the partial reconstruction of the building behind the existing fronts to provide four new residential units: two one-bed flats on the ground floor, one two bedroom flat on the first floors and another two-bed flat in a new mansard roof storey..

4.1 External Works

On the front elevation to John's Mews, the existing two-storey rendered elevations of both properties will be retained but there will be some alterations to the openings. The ground floor will have two large part-glazed openings, that to number 15 incorporating the communal front door. On the upper floor the existing four segment-headed openings will be retained, but the two inner openings will be lengthened. The new slate-covered mansard roof will have two dormer windows to each property. On the rear elevation, the original back wall which survives at first floor level will be retained and at ground floor level the rear projection across the back of both properties will be covered by a sedum room, with a lightwell between the projection and the rear boundary wall.

The front elevation has already been considerably altered, though the alterations are concealed by the present rendered finish. The proposed wide ground floor openings are appropriate for properties which began as stables and later became motor garages. The first floor window openings may be original, but the lengthening proposed for the two inner openings is also typical of former stable buildings, which often have first floor loading bays. The proposed new mansard roof will follow the height and profile of the new mansard roofs on the adjoining properties and the central party wall will be raised above the roof line in the typical London manner required by the local Building Acts.

4.2 Internal Works

At ground and first floor levels, the original brick outer walls will be fully retained and the spine wall dividing the two properties will also be retained but will be pierced by additional modern openings. The rest of the interior will be reconfigured.

4.3 NPPF Advice

The National Planning Policy Framework (Section 16) advises local planning authorities on decision-making in relation to the historic environment. They are advised to take account of 'the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation' (para.192). A key principle enshrined in the NPPF is the conservation of heritage assets and the presumption against harm to an

asset's significance (paras 193 & 194) and significance must be taken into account in assessing the impact of a proposal. Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities are instructed to refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or total loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss. Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use (Section 196). In this case, since the building is unlisted, the principal consideration is the impact on the character of the conservation area.

Conclusion

Numbers 13-15 John's Mews are not listed buildings and are not on the Camden Local List but they have been identified in the Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal as making a positive contribution to the conservation area. That contribution consists in the general appearance of the two-storey fronts which, although much altered and covered in modern render, recall the original stable and coach houses buildings which once lined the east side of the mews.

The alterations now proposed for the buildings will preserve the fronts of both properties. The new mansard roof will rise behind the coped parapet of the front and will read as a simple modern addition, clearly distinct from the earlier front, as in the adjoining properties. The works will have no adverse affect on the appearance of the buildings and the character of the conservation area will be preserved. The works will encourage the continued beneficial use of a heritage asset which is a clear public benefit.



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