

NO. 12 BEDFORD ROW
LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

Report on Internal Fabric Related to LBC Application

by

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Nature of Request

Extensive internal works are currently being carried out on the early eighteenth-century property at No. 12 Bedford Row, WC1, with the intention of bringing the house back into full domestic use. Appropriate procedures were apparently followed by the owner, or his agent, during the initial application for Listed Building Consent. Various repairs, modifications, and some alterations were approved. Subsequently, it appears a change in the contracting surveyor has led to a request for additional works, outside the scope of the initial LBC application.

London Region North and East Team has asked the Historical Analysis & Research Team for its opinion on the relative architectural and historic value of the internal fabric of the house. In particular, an assessment is needed of those structural interventions made to the building during an early period in its history, to enable informed decisions to be made with regard to the extant fabric.

This brief report is based on a single site visit, at an interim stage in the works, together with limited background research.

The Historical Context

The broad, tree-lined, and essentially elegant Bedford Row is said to be one of the best places in London where one might go to gain a good impression of early eighteenth-century street architecture. True, the terraces on either side were to see various phases of rebuilding running through the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Bomb damage was also to take its toll, and there have since been the inevitable pressures brought on by the onslaught of modern development. Yet for all this it is a street which remains essentially Georgian, described by Ralph in 1734 as 'one of the noblest ... that London has to boast of'. It is, too, a street which reflects a particularly interesting phase in the development of the modern capital.

Until the 1680s, this area to the north and west of the City remained largely open country (fig. 1). For a time, urban growth was limited to a ribbon of properties along High Holborn, itself following the line of the Roman road westward from Londinium's Newgate. Hereabouts was the late-medieval Gray's Inn, by now a college of lawyers, with its attractive walks enhanced under the direction of Francis Bacon (d. 1626) standing on the very edge of the open landscape. All of this was to change dramatically in the last two decades of the seventeenth century as speculative developers began to seize the commercial opportunities offered by new building. Foremost among those entrepreneurs involved in the process was that 'exquisite mob master', the notorious and no less exceptional Dr Nicholas Barbon (d. 1698). Indeed, it was Barbon's developments of the 1680s at Red Lion Square and Queen Square (alas where no original buildings survive) which first broke into the virgin ground north of High Holborn (fig. 2).

To the east of Red Lion Square there was an area of land owned by the corporation of Bedford, a gift which had been made to the town in the sixteenth century by its benefactor, Sir William Harpur. As early as 1668, William Thompson (of the parish of St Andrew's, Holborn) envisaged building on this plot when he took out a lease from the Bedford Charity (or Harpur) estate for forty-one years (expiring in 1709). In the event, nothing was done until the mid-1680s, the time when Barbon had begun his development over the former Red Lion Fields. It appears that Barbon persuaded Thompson, as well as the charity trustees, to transfer the lease to him. Whether intimidation played any part in the transfer we cannot say, though Barbon is known to have employed such ruthless methods elsewhere. In any case, Barbon also managed to gain an extension on the original lease for a further fifty-one years (1709-60). He was to pay £99 per annum for the remainder of the initial term, and £149 per annum thereafter.

Evidence survives to show that houses were being built, on what is now the west side of Bedford Row, in the early 1690s. About half of the properties were perhaps complete as

early as 1693, though construction may have continued through to about 1700 (fig. 3). The development was described by Edward Hatton in his *A New View of London* (1708) as 'a row of very spacious buildings, pleasantly situated between Grays Inn Walks east and Red Lyon Square, but fronting the Walks'. In the background, however, all had not been well. The Harpur Trust had found difficulty in obtaining payment from Barbon from the first, and he appears to have dropped out of things by 1694 when the Trust was dealing with the assignees of William Thompson.

For some twenty-five years, these houses on the west side of Bedford Row had an open view across to the walks of Gray's Inn, just as described by Hatton. The intervening plot of land, at one time known as Gravel Pit Field, later Allebone Field, and by now Jockey Field, and which contained about three acres (1.2ha), had earlier been the property of William Brownlow. In 1674, on his marriage to Margaret, daughter of Lord Chandos, Brownlow settled the plot (among other properties) on his new wife for her life, and then on any children of their marriage. There may well have been an intention to develop the land at this early date, since through the grant Margaret was in turn given authority to issue leases of up to sixty years. That building was delayed may — as has been suggested — have been due to the opposition of the lawyers at Gray's Inn; they are known to have fought a minor 'battle' with Barbon's builders in 1684 in an effort to prevent the construction of Red Lion Square.

Meanwhile, William Brownlow had died soon after his marriage in 1674, and Margaret was to take for her second husband Sir Thomas Skipworth, Bt. Eventually, on 24 May 1716, Dame Margaret Skipworth, as she then was, entered into an agreement with George Devall, a plumber, and Robert Burford, a carpenter, both of the parish of St Andrew's Holborn, whereby the tradesmen were leased Jockey Field 'For improvement of the said premises by building'. Thereafter, over the next few years, Dame Margaret, Devall and Burford jointly granted leases on a number of individual properties on the new east side of Bedford Row, with ground rents calculated at five shillings per foot frontage.

Devall and Burford had undertaken to erect one 'good uniform and substantial Brick house' with subsidiary buildings on each plot. At the west end, to the front, thirty-five feet (10.6m) were to be left for the street; and at the east end, to the back, twenty-five feet (7.6m) were to be allowed for a common way. Leases to the tenants were to be made 'when and so soone as the second floore above the Ground of every or any Messuage or Tenement to be Built on the said Ground shall be laid'. Evidence survives to show that many of the houses were at this stage during 1717 and 1718.

According to Phillips (1964, 290), Nos. 4, 8, 9, 10, 12 and 15 were built by Burford and Devall. No. 16 was built to the order of Richard [or Robert] Fenwick, gentleman of Lincoln's Inn Fields. No. 17 was built by George Osmond, plumber of St Andrew's, to the order of Robert Ferris, gentleman, and the building lease mentions that No. 18 was built by Edward Cordwell, carpenter, to the order of Gilbert Steele, gentleman, in 1720.

Not all of the houses, certainly, were built by Burford and Devall themselves. Instead, they entered into sub-leases with other smaller entrepreneurs or builders. The complete list (Nos. 1 to 16) of those involved, compiled from lease evidence, is suggested as follows:

No. 1	Matthew Allan
No. 2	Matthew Allan
No. 3	Matthew Allan
No. 4	Matthew Allan
No. 5	Matthew Allan
No. 6	Matthew Allan
No. 7	John Mist
No. 8	George Devall

No. 9	William Seabrook, bricklayer
No. 10	Robert Burford
No. 11	Robert Burford
No. 12	Robert Burford
No. 13	Robert Burford
No. 14	Robert Burford
No. 15	Robert Burford
No. 16	Robert Burford

Robert Burford took the lead at Bedford Row, with George Devall taking the greater share in the development at Great James Street a few years later, another part of Dame Margaret's property. Burford is a figure of some interest. Although he is not known to have engaged in extensive speculative building apart from Bedford Row, he apparently made enough money to buy a small rural property in Finchley. It has been revealed that he designed and built the Geffrye Almshouses in Shoreditch, now the Geffrye Museum. And from his will of 1727/8 we know that he owned 'books of architecture'.

Thus we have the context for the construction of No. 12 Bedford Row, and we can be reasonably sure that its builder was Robert Burford. The building lease was dated 9 August 1717, and was said to be for the 'Demise of a piece of ground by Bedford Row to be held from Lady Day 1717 for a term of 59 years at the yearly rent of £6 5s. 0d. The names and dates of its occupiers through the eighteenth century as given by the surviving rate books is as follows:

1729	Sir John Hartopp
1731-39	John Shaftoe
1750-52	William Wynne
1752-53	Margaret Wynne
1753-67	Dorothy Wynne
1771-80	Mary Morry (or Merry)
1782-95	John Willmot
1796-1808	Dr Lathom
1809-18	Dr Haworth
1819-20	John Ellis

By the 1840s, the house had apparently become the offices of the Entomological Society, which had been founded in 1833.

General Description of the Row

As completed about 1717-19, the east side of Bedford Row contained twenty-four houses numbered 1 to 24 from south to north (figs. 3 and 4). On average the plots measured about 195 feet (59.4m) long by about twenty-five feet (7.6m) wide. No. 11, the most conspicuous of the properties in the entire row, was thirty-five feet (10.6m) wide. The houses are of four storeys, with basements, mostly of three front bays. They are built of brown stock bricks, with gauged red brick dressings to the jambs and straight heads of the windows, and there is a single band of red brick between the ground and first floors. Six of the houses, Nos. 8 to 13 are listed as grade II*. No. 11 is especially notable for its fine sequence of early eighteenth-century wall paintings by John Vanderbank (1694-1739).

No. 12: Exterior Description

The façade of No. 12 follows the common pattern (fig. 5). Here the doorway is to the left (north) of the elevation, pairing with that to the right (south) of its neighbour, No. 13. The

door is protected by a fine rectangular hood (fig. 6), featuring panelled soffits and supported on carved brackets. The fanlight appears to be original.

Some refacing of the brickwork in the upper storeys has been undertaken, probably as a result of enemy action during World War II (Nos. 10, 18 to 22 consecutively were destroyed). There is fine nineteenth-century tuck pointing surviving to the principal floors below. Late eighteenth-century sash boxes can be seen on the lower floors, though to the main front elevation the sashes are probably of early and late nineteenth-century date, and to the rear they are of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century date (fig. 7).

The Interiors and their Joinery

The external sobriety of the house conceals fine surviving interiors. The house has a conventional early eighteenth-century two-room deep plan form, with closet addition, and with the staircase located to the rear of the entrance hall. However, this arrangement changes somewhat on the upper floors with the staircase occupying a central position on the flank wall. Later alterations to the ground floor arrangement, including the introduction of a buffet alcove to the principal front chamber, give the current appearance of a late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century plan form.

Original, fine quality, raised and fielded, deal panelling survives in the ground-floor hall, and in the principal front and rear chambers (figs. 8, 9 and 10). There is an unembellished Doric box cornice to hall and rear chamber. On the first floor, the rooms are now lined with plaster, although clearly the intention was originally for panelling — recently confirmed by the exposure of raised and fielded panelling on the main spine wall of the house (fig. 11). Panelling, of an intermediate quality, also survives on the second floor and partly on the top floor. It is set in plain framework and embellished with ovolo moulding (fig. 12). Unusually, it appears that the intention was to line-out all rooms of the property with timber panelling.

A fine and very substantial original framed floor structure survives at each level, little altered (fig. 14). Heavy timber-framing has been used to construct the braced framing of the internal partitioning (fig. 15). The floor coverings have been removed, apparently recently, though there are indications they were of hardwood construction.

With the exception of the loss of the flight to the basement (fig. 16), the staircases remain largely unaltered. That from the ground to the first floor (fig. 17) is gracefully arranged with groups of three twisted balusters to the tread. There is a corresponding dado (fig. 18) with Corinthian pilaster strips at the head, foot, and turn of the flights, extending to full height.

Later Modifications

Reflecting changing fashions and tastes, the building appears to have been upgraded several times over the course of its history. One of these phases of work may have taken place about 1780, though not perhaps (as one might expect) in connection with the expiry of the original lease, the date of which was presumably 1777; Mary Morry (or Merry) occupied the house from 1771 to 1780, after which there may have been a two year gap before it became the home of John Willmot. A second phase of works took place about 1820, with another in the late nineteenth century, and upgrading has again taken place in the twentieth century. These alterations are summarized in the synopsis section below.

The principal modifications were concerned with the planning of the ground-floor chambers. Here, the original entrance to the front room was directly from the hall through a doorway, now moved eastward (left as standing in the hall) and sealed shut (fig. 8 and 9).

This is confirmed by the arrangement of the extant framing of the panelling in the hall, where the head and framing of the former opening survive (fig. 8). No trace of the original doorway survives within this room as the panelling was reordered with the introduction of the buffet alcove about 1780, now fronted by a columned screen with a 'broken' Corinthian order of nineteenth-century date (fig. 13). Further alterations were made to this room with the removal of the former box cornice and its replacement with the extant, if somewhat thin, swag and palmette frieze about 1780.

The rear closet was improved by the introduction of a quarter-circle panelled screen, which awkwardly projects into the rear chamber.

Synopsis

1717–18	Construction
c. 1780	Introduction of the buffet alcove; reordering of panelling; removal of box cornice and installation of swag and palmette frieze; blocking of doorway to hall in principal front ground-floor chamber; improvements made to rear chamber and closet by the introduction of a quarter-circle panelled screen; probable date for installation of sash windows, replacing former casements; blocking of doorway giving direct access to principal first-floor chamber from staircase; reordering of panelling to principal staircase.
c. 1820	Installation of 'arched' openings through to staircase at ground and first floor and closet at rear; probable upgrading/installation of columned screen to buffet alcove; removal of panelling from first-floor rooms and introduction of plastered wall coverings and fibrous plaster detailing; installation of muniment room to lower ground floor.
Nineteenth Century	Replacement of sashes; probable date for new doorway to hall from principal front chamber and doorway to divided front, first-floor chamber direct from staircase; construction of crude arch through to rear, ground floor chamber; upgrading of sash windows and shutters; division of upper chambers.
Twentieth Century	Installation of mains services; repair and upgrading after damage caused by enemy action.

Current Issues

It appears that Listed Building Consent has already been granted for two aspects of the proposed restoration which give some cause for concern. The doorway from the hall through to the principal ground-floor room (figs. 8 and 9) is to be removed and the panelling 'restored' to an aesthetically pleasing and uniform arrangement. Similarly, the doorway giving access to the principal first-floor chamber, probably blocked about 1780, and recently unpicked (fig. 19) is also to be 'restored' as a complete panelled section. Both of these proposals are to be lamented, since the fabric as it stood early in 1999 reflects significant historic changes to the property. Greater time for fabric analysis at an early stage might have allowed for a better informed programme of conservation.

The focus of an additional LBC application is the installation of a complex underfloor heating system. The applicant wishes to employ a piped-water based system, fed by a sizable

'manifold' located on each floor. On the upper and third floors, the manifolds can apparently be concealed behind panelling, or in cupboards, with the need for alterations. On the lower floors this is not possible, and there is a proposal to block-in, or to move hitherto untouched historic fabric. This is not readily acceptable in a house of this quality and significance.

Significance

The importance of these interiors lies in the relative scarcity of early eighteenth-century domestic architecture of this scale and quality in central London, and in the fact that there have been relatively few internal alterations. Of the surviving Georgian (1713–1830) houses in the capital, most date from the late eighteenth century. It would appear that the houses in Bedford Row, unlike those in Mayfair, may have fallen early from fashion. Parts of Holborn were certainly later occupied by notorious slums. Such areas would not have been subject to extensive programmes of alteration by fashion conscious residents. No. 12 Bedford Row is part of an important group of little altered early eighteenth-century houses, of a type once common and architecturally fashionable, built to more or less standardized designs in this part of London. The Bedford Row houses can perhaps only be equalled by those in the nearby Great James Street, Bloomsbury, and Dean Street in Soho.

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Historical Analysis & Research Team (English Heritage), and its Predecessors, *Savile Row Casework Files*, L. B. Camden, No. 23 (material by Mr Frank Kelsall).

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◦ English Heritage 23 Savile Row, London, W1X 1AB

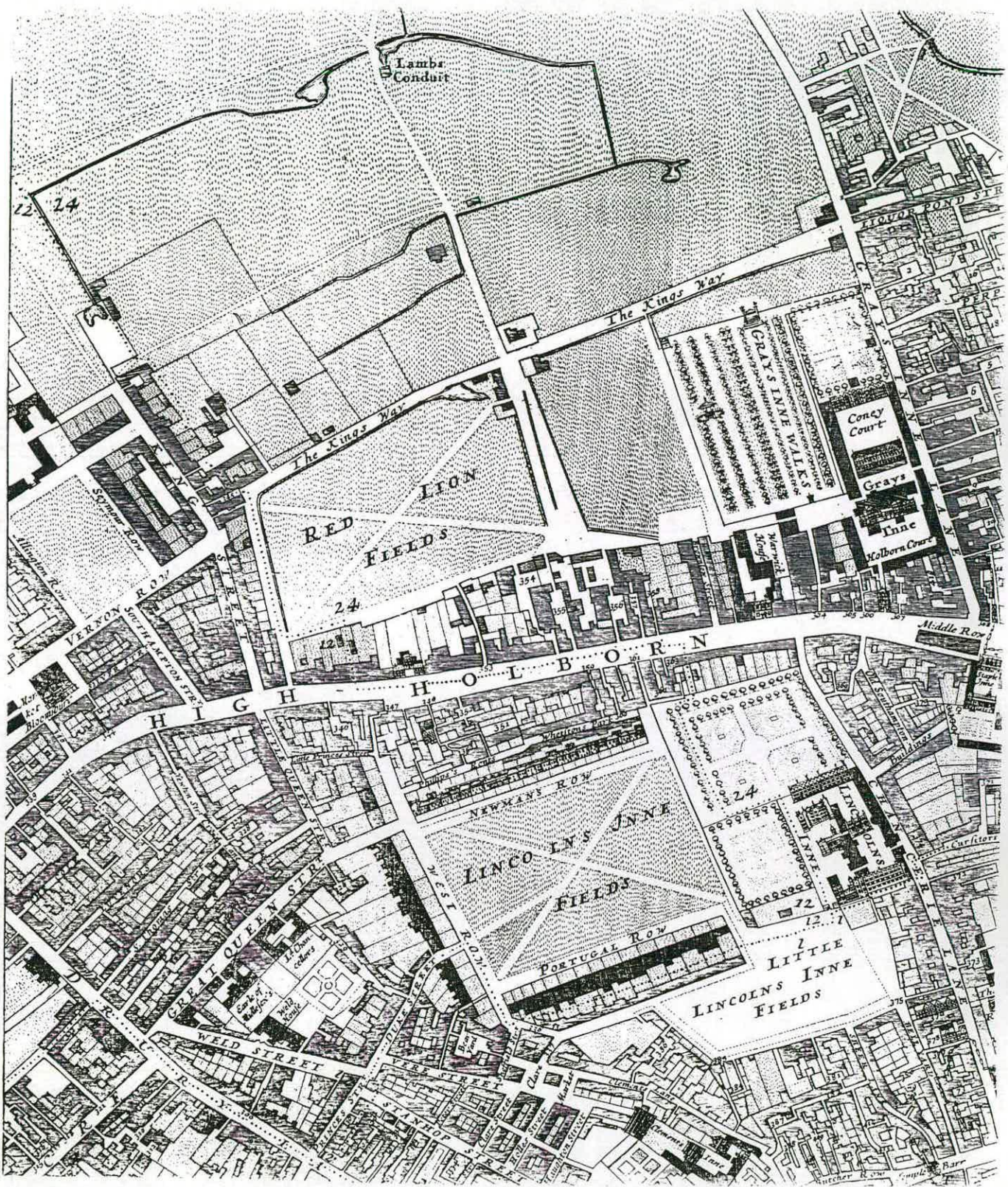


Fig. 1 Detail from William Morgan's map of London (1681-82) showing the area to the north-west of the City. At the time, the land to the north of High Holborn was still largely open country.

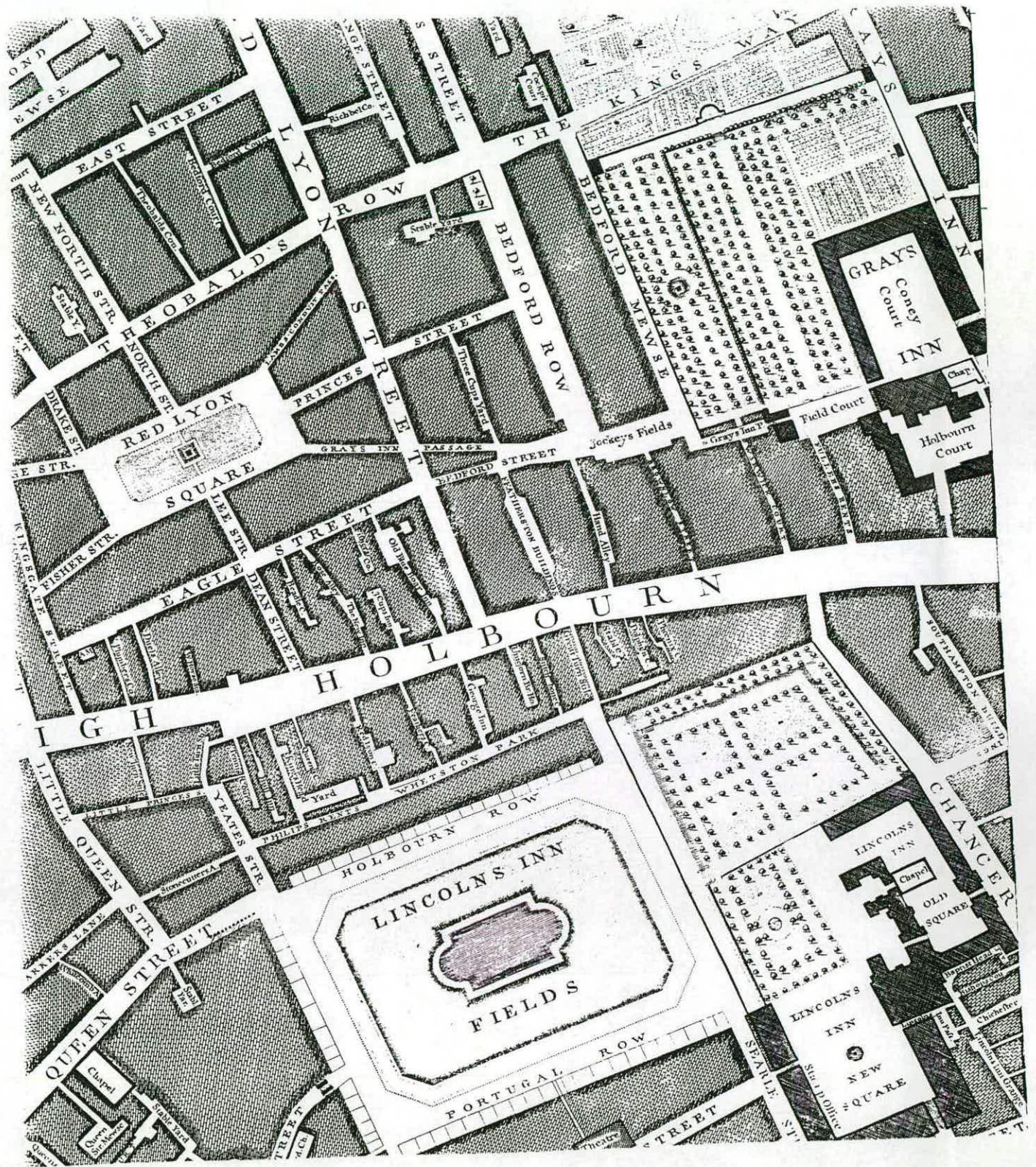


Fig. 2 Detail from John Rocque's mid-eighteenth-century map of London, published in 1746, showing the area to the north of High Holbourn. 'Red Lyon Square' had been developed by Dr Nicholas Barbon from the 1680s. The broad Bedford Square, to the east, was developed in two stages: the west side from about 1690 to 1700, and the east side in about 1717-19.

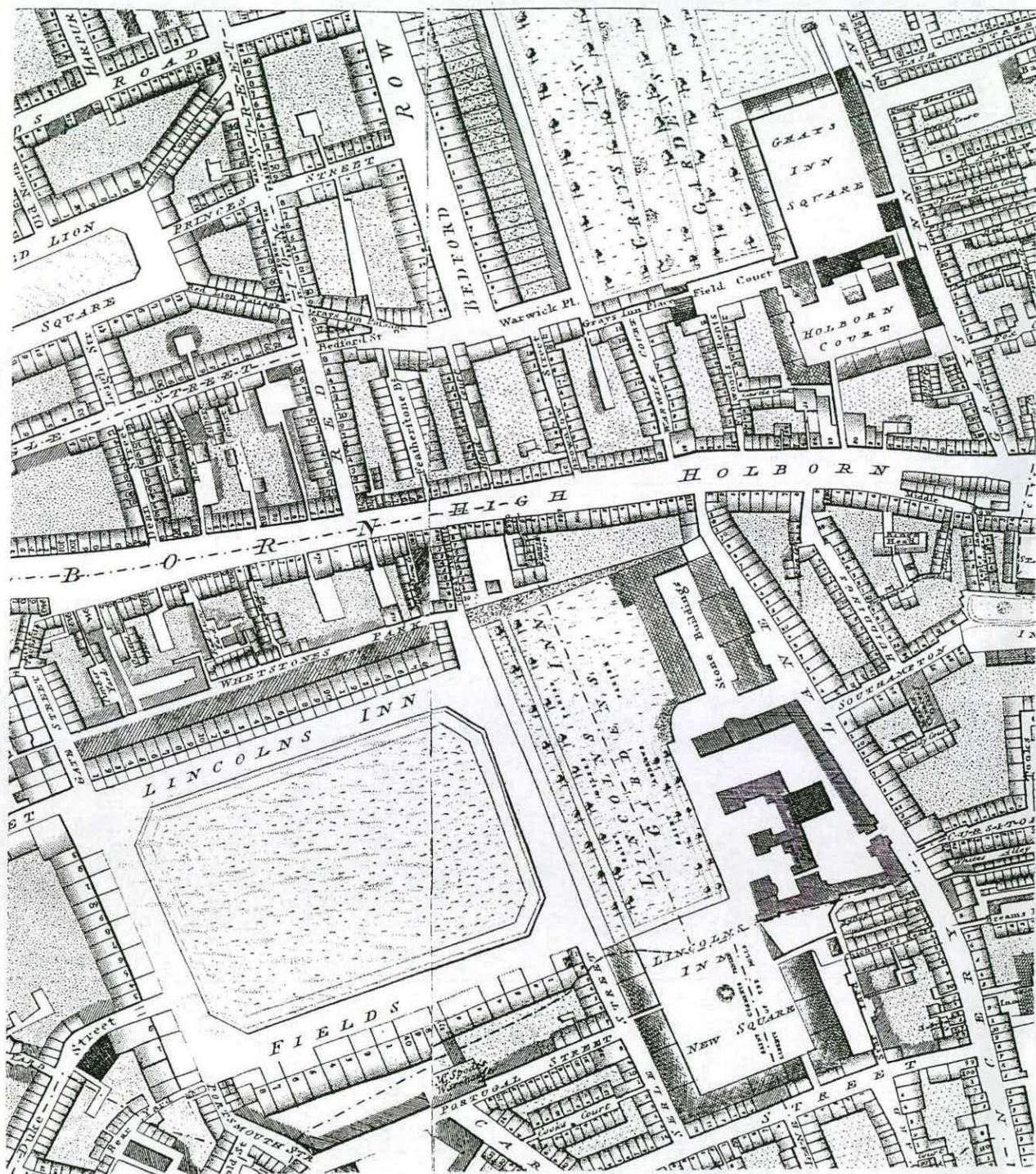


Fig. 3 Detail from Richard Horwood's 1792-99 map of London, showing the developed Bedford Row. Twenty-four houses appear on the east side, and there were nineteen in two blocks on the west side.

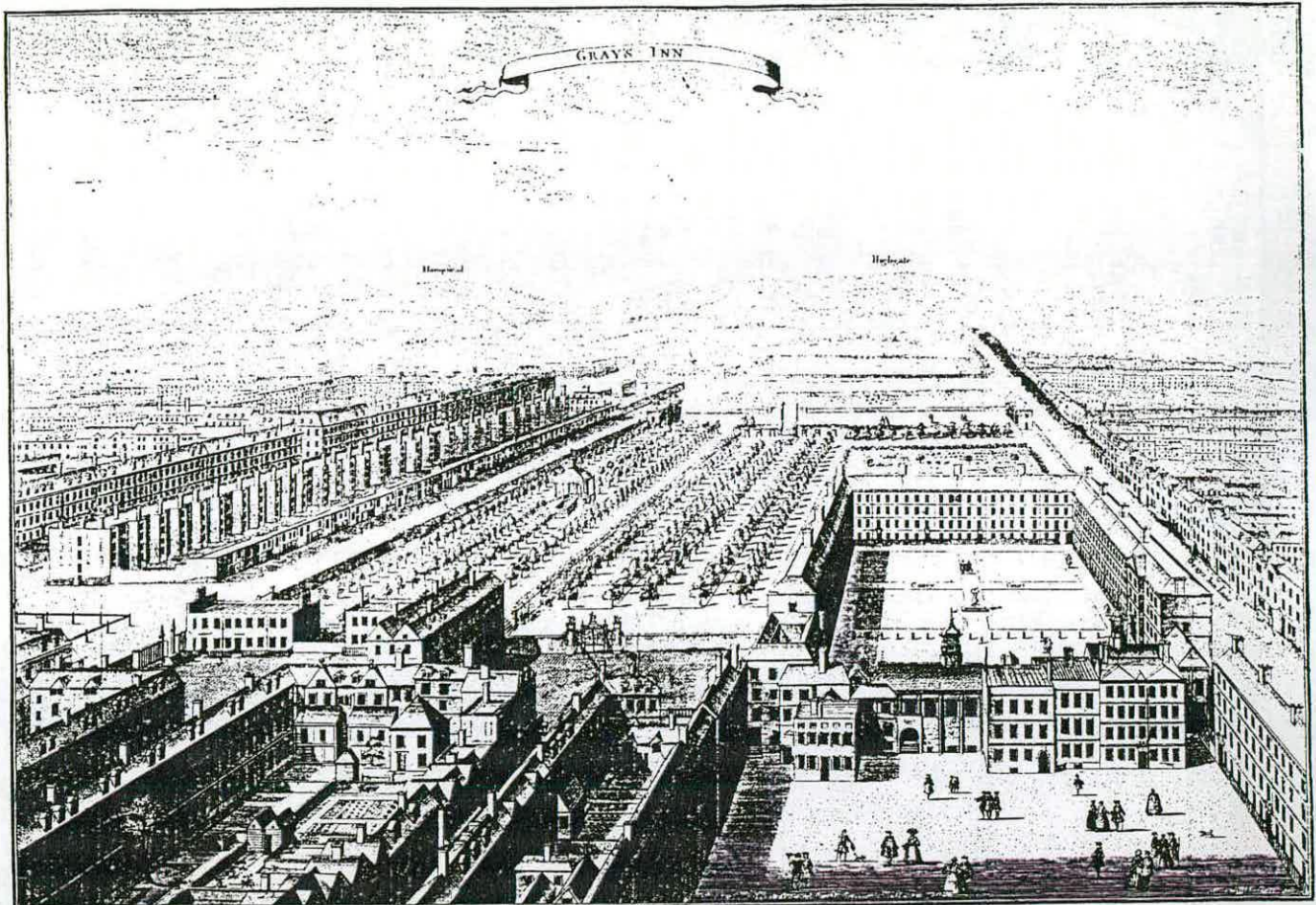


Fig. 4 A prospect of Gray's Inn, with Bedord Row to the left, engraved by Sutton Nicholls for Bowles' *London Described* (1731).



Fig. 5 The front elevation of No. 12 Bedford Row.



Fig. 6 The door to No. 12 Bedford Row, with fine carved brackets supporting the hood.



Fig. 7 Detail of the back elevation of the house. The red brick dressing to the jambs and heads of the windows are original, though the sashes are later replacements.



Fig. 8 Detail of the south (right) side of the hallway, with its raised and fielded deal panelling. The head and framing of the original doorway survives, and the existing doorway is a later feature.



Fig. 9 Detail of the later doorway from the hall into the principal ground-floor chamber seen from the chamber side. The panelling around it was reordered at the time of its introduction.



Fig. 10 The arch from the front ground-floor chamber through to the rear room.



Fig. 11 Recently exposed panelling along the spine wall on the first floor of the house.



Fig. 12 The plainer pannelling in the upper part of the house.



Fig. 13 The buffet alcove may have been introduced to the rear of the principal ground-floor room about 1780, and the screen with its columns about forty years later.



Fig. 14 A view of one of the rooms on the top floor showing the substantial timbers of the floor framing.



Fig. 15 Heavy timbers were employed to construct the braced framing of the internal partitioning throughout the house.



Fig. 16 Shadow along a wallface within the basement marks the removal of a staircase, apparently without record drawings or analysis.



Fig. 17 Detail of the lower section of the staircase from the ground to the first floor. The attractive balusters are arranged three to a tread, a common early eighteenth-century pattern, also seen at No. 11 Bedford Row.



Fig. 18 The dado panelling at the half landing to the principal staircase.

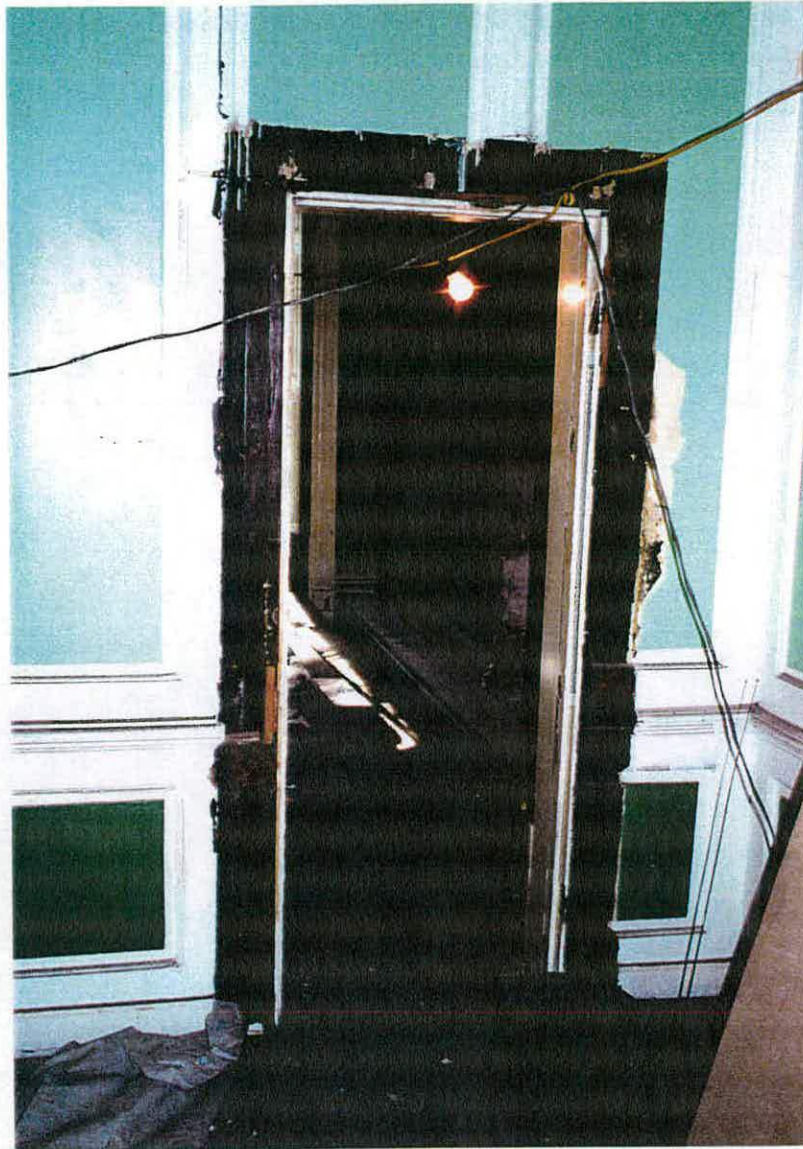


Fig. 19 Recent unpicking has revealed a blocked doorway into the main front chamber on the first floor.