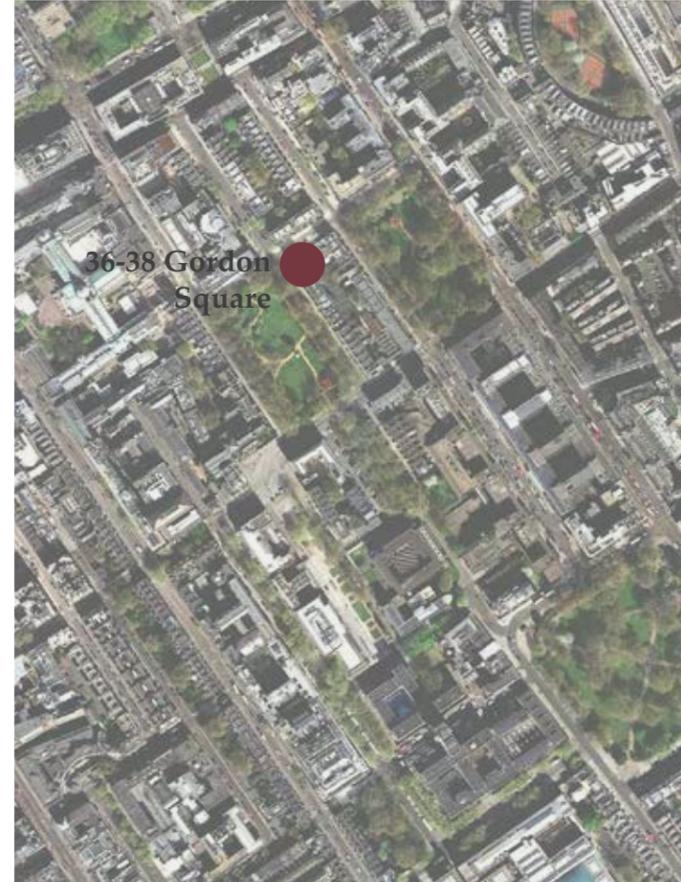


36-38 Gordon Square

A heritage transformation project





Heritage transformation

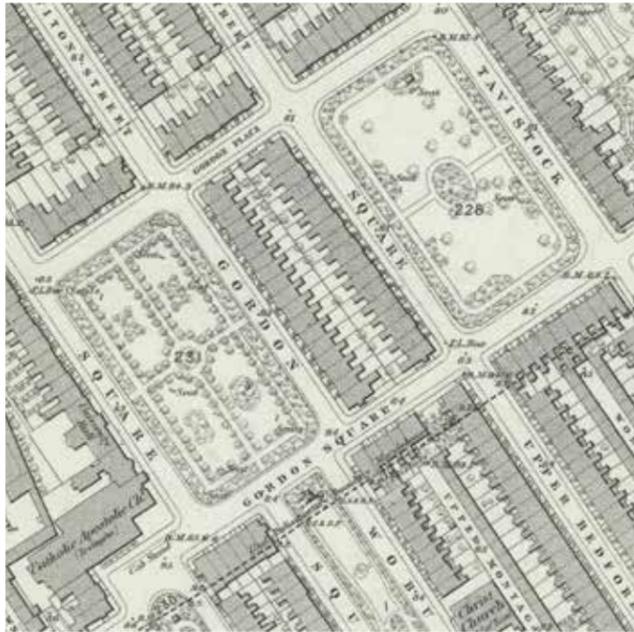
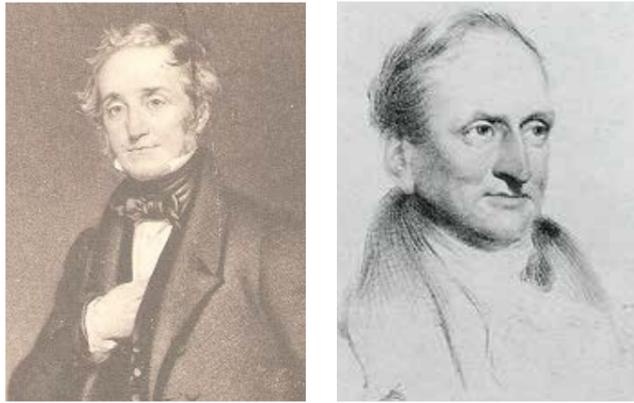
A project to refurbish 3 listed Georgian townhouses has provided an opportunity to rediscover important aspects of heritage fabric whilst transforming historic residential accommodation into a stimulating academic environment for research and teaching.

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.

The properties have largely retained their external appearance and many internal historic features including staircases and decorative plasterwork, although the previous internal planning amendments have reduced the coherence of the original plan form. Overall, many elements of the original fabric are judged to be of high significance due to the building's architectural quality and connection with Thomas Cubitt.



Bloomsbury character



Development of Gordon Square

Previously part of the historic Tottenham Manor, 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.

Burton's involvement in the north Bloomsbury area began in 1800 and 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).

Although by the 1840's North Bloomsbury was quickly becoming a popular location for institutions, partly catalysed by the construction of the University's Main Building on Gower Street in the late 1820s, Gordon Square seems to have remained primarily residential until the mid-20th century which saw the gradual encroachment of commercial businesses and institutions, particularly the University of London, into buildings around Gordon Square.

The terrace containing Nos.36-38 Gordon Square was constructed sometime in the period 1825-31

by Thomas Cubitt. Cubitt's terraces in north Bloomsbury, all constructed in 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.

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.

Historic photograph of Nos.36-38 Gordon Square, built in the period 1825-31 by Thomas Cubitt



Bloomsbury's rich architectural heritage includes landmark listed buildings such as Denys Lasdun's Institute of Education built in 1970 (right above), and Senate House (right below), designed by Charles Holden for University of London, constructed between 1932 and 1937





All three properties have original staircases with decorative iron balustrades and hardwood handrails



Building enhancements

The refurbishment enhances the significance of the building through the reinstatement of the buildings' original plan forms which in turn better reveal many historic features.

Together with the proposed refurbishment, the inclusion of a carefully designed teaching and meeting space enhances the viability of the university's occupation of these buildings, contributing to their continuing value within Gordon Square and UCL's Bloomsbury campus.



Design strategy

The high-level design strategy which informs the proposals has been developed around three principles:

Integrity of space: the removal of piecemeal alterations and reinstatement of the original spatial organisation of rooms and restoration of the fabric.

Circulation: redefine the lateral circulation routes and improve orientation, optimising opportunities for openness, natural light and views out. Reinstatement of the missing front door and the quality of the original stairs.

Section & Storey Heights: develop a pattern of occupation across the floors sympathetic to the relative importance of the original scale and height of the floors.

- L4** Fourth floor - Accommodates academic and post graduate research space and retains the existing floor pattern with minimal changes.
- L3** Third floor - Accommodates academic and post graduate research space, and a kitchen/ social space with new bespoke kitchen joinery.
- L2** Second floor - Accommodates academic and post graduate research space.
- L1** First floor - Accommodates academic and post graduate research space, a meeting room, and a kitchen / social space with new bespoke kitchen joinery.
- G** Ground floor - Accommodates a reception room, academic and post graduate research space, two large and one small meeting room, social space and WC facilities.
- LG** Lower ground floor - Accommodates the seminar/ event space, two break out spaces, one of which contains new bespoke kitchen joinery, a large meeting room, a media room and WC facilities.



Reinstating the quality of the existing spaces

The buildings have a number of features that have been retained and refurbished. These include the principal staircases, cornices and other plasterwork. The utilitarian alterations over time have had a critical impact on the integrity and quality of the properties. The spatial integrity has been compromised and the sense of original rooms has been lost. Orientation, wayfinding and legibility is poor due to the confusing network of cross circulation routes. The later cross corridors are gloomy with poor natural light.

The University's development of 36-38 Gordon Square into a 'Creative Hub' has used this refurbishment to rationalise the spaces, using surviving historic fabric to inform the internal reorganisation. Internal demolition work

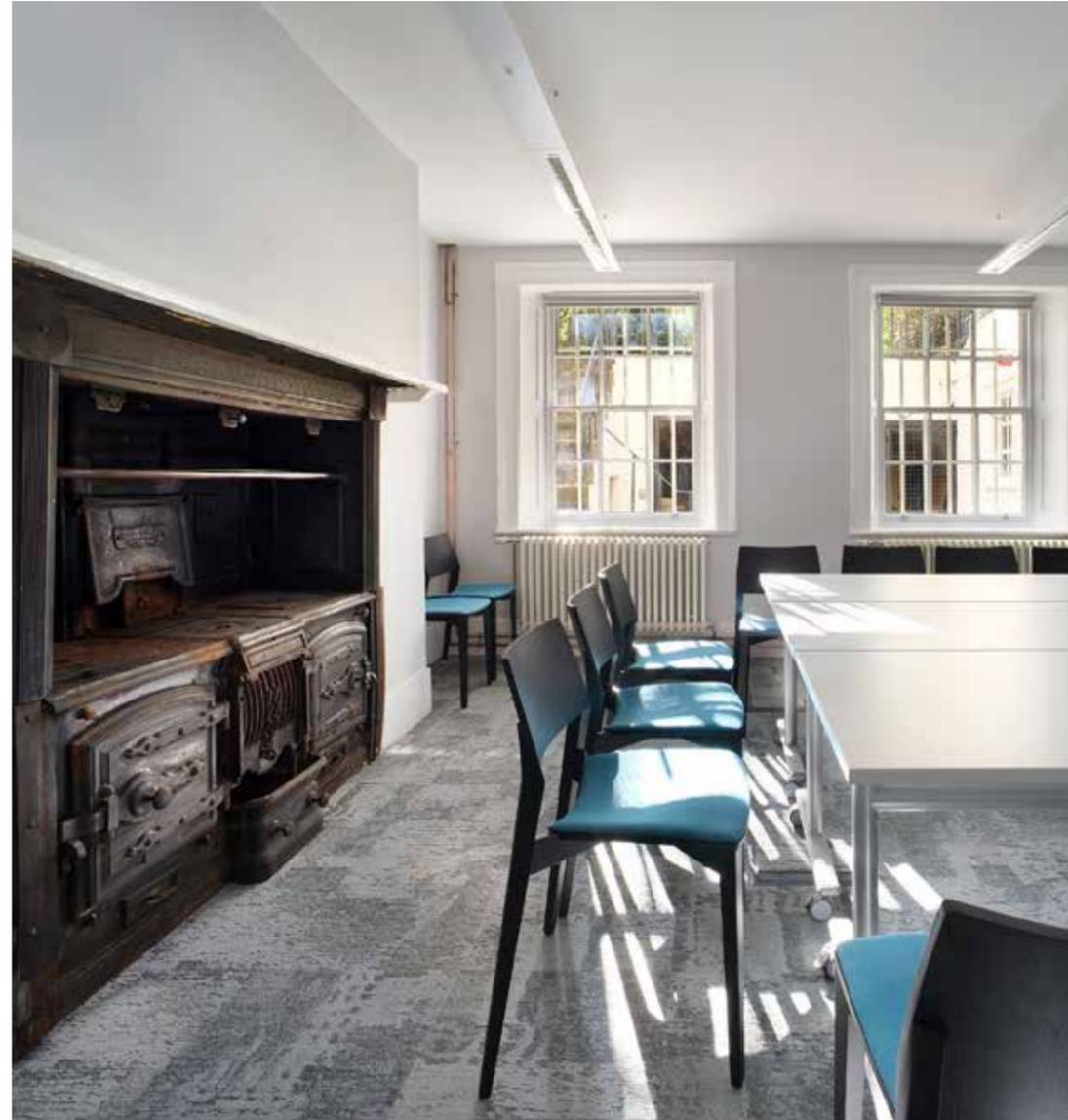
is largely confined to mid twentieth-century insertions which disrupt the historic plan form and rationalising and concealing services runs to introduce more discrete servicing.

Externally, the primary alteration will be the reinstatement of No.37's front door, the space of which is currently occupied by a window into a small office in the space of the house's former entrance lobby. Other external alterations include the removal of security bars from the windows at lower ground and ground floors, landscaping the gardens to the rear (east) of the terrace, and a general refurbishment of the facades.

Some of the elements where internal rectification and

restoration works has been undertaken include the principle rooms on the ground, first and second floors which carry ceiling plasterwork typical of the 1820s, particularly acanthus-leaf design cornices, original joinery including picture and dado rails and door cases, a late nineteenth-century tiled floor, a typical late Victorian domestic feature, the original staircases with identical decorative iron balustrades and hardwood handrails to all three properties.





Collaborative delivery

Working collaboratively, the project team developed and finalised the project’s design, programme and budget with the main fit out works starting on site on 17th February 2020. With the Covid 19 pandemic spreading throughout the world, the UK was put into lockdown on 16th March 2020.

The project team closed the Gordon Square site on 27th March 2020. This allowed Overbury to rewrite the Construction Phase Health and Safety plan, and issue it to the UCL Estates team for approval. Safe working methods were also developed with each trade subcontractor, incorporating Covid 19 social distancing measures to allow safe operations on site.

The site re-opened 14th April 2020. Prior to the Covid shut down, the project peaked at 33 personnel on site. The site was re-opened with social distancing measures in place with an initial 5 operatives installing new signage and implementing safe working practices.

The site day commenced at 08.30hrs, following the Construction Leadership Council and Sadiq Khan’s request for Tubes and Buses to be left free for healthcare workers 06.00–08.00hrs. Operatives

were greeted on site with “How are you feeling today?”, before having their forehead temperature taken and recorded. Additional site facilities were created in the garden to aid social distancing measures. These proved to be a welcome provision during the summer months.

Following the installation of the flooring (approximately 4 weeks) Overbury were able to increase the number of personnel to full capacity (30 personnel) as areas of work became available whilst allowing for social distancing.

The Grade II listing was a blanket order over any original building materials and features. Key features such as 1820’s cornices and discoverables like tiled flooring, fire places and a cast iron stove were protected, repaired and reintroduced using traditional construction methods in keeping with Historic England’s requirements.

Particular care of the building’s ornate cornices was taken. After most of the original service risers were stripped out and the new ones formed, new cornices had to be patched in or formed to match the existing.



Timeline

- 21st August 2019
Start of PCSA Period
- 30th September 2019
Enabling works commence on site
- 13th December 2019
Contract sum agreed subject to value engineering
- 28th January 2020
Overbury’s appointed 2nd stage and instructed to mobilise trades with Contract Sum to be finalised
- 17th February 2020
Main fit out works commence on site
- 25th February 2020
Contract sum finalised with value engineering
- Pre Covid Site Numbers
peak at 33 operatives
- 16th March 2020
Covid 19 - 4 week lock down
- 27th March 2020
Gordon Square site closed
- Site Set Up
Health and safety Plan and RAMs revised incorporating CLC & Government social distancing measures
- 14th April 2020
Site reopens - limited supplies available
- Flooring Installation
helps increase site capacity opening up working areas
- Post Covid Site Numbers
peak at 30 operatives
- 12th June 2020
testing & commissioning
- 4th July 2020
2m rule relaxed to 1m+
- 15th October 2020
Practical Completion

Client: **UCL Estates**
Project Manager: **Arcadis**
Architect: **Nicholas Hare Architects**
Contractor: **Overbury**
Cost Consultant: **Gardiner & Theobald**
Building Services Engineering: **Fowler Martin**
Structural Engineering: **Conisbee**
Planning Consultant: **Deloitte**
Fire Consultant: **The Fire Surgery**
Heritage Consultant: **Alan Baxter**

UCL 36-38 GORDON SQUARE

