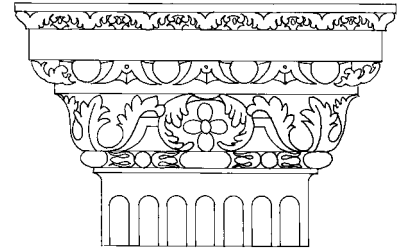
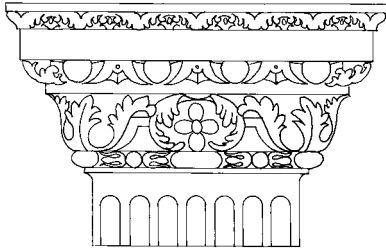


**THE RESTORATION OF JOHN MEARD JUNIOR'S HOUSE  
FIRST BUILT C. 1681 AS PART OF THE PITT ESTATE  
DEMOLISHED & REBUILT ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE 1681 HOUSE BY JOHN MEARD  
JUNIOR C. 1732**



*Detail of the pilasters in the Hall at 68 Dean Street carved by John Meard Junior c. 1732, kindly drawn by Paul Draper.*



The basement in 1995 before restoration – note middle pic showing position of lead water tank. The closet room (right distance) had been bricked up.



The rear attic 'hidden rooms' – note the 4' high door in the middle pic on the left, skirting and partition both made from window shutters with the latter having a 4' high door still with the original lock.



Ground floor before restoration – note missing panelling between the front and middle rooms, now replaced with openable panelling – one panel facing the front room and 4 panels facing the middle room.



Third floor ceiling removed, front door before stripping 50+ paint layers & ground floor shutters revealed having been nailed in & obscured throughout the house as throughout Meard Street.



Removing the lathe & plaster to reveal the hidden rooms in the rear attic. Right numbered for removal & restoration.



Front vault servants' cesspit revealed & hibernating frogs from within – 1997 Museum of London Archaeological Research Unit.





The front cesspit being restored by John Turnbull in 2009.



Brian Whiter & son tuck pointing (Brian's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the 6<sup>th</sup> generation); repairing the lathe & plaster in the 'hidden rooms'; Michael & Anne Malleson delivering their shutter bars and hand forged door furniture.



Peter Maynard master joiner (who worked here for two years) following in John Meard Junior's footsteps...



Dave Wise plasterer working on the rear attic 'hidden room'; replacing the missing Portland stone front plinths and door step.

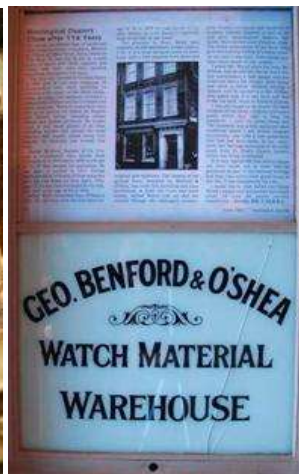




Re-triangulating the attics; rear lead-work flashing; Dean doing electrics after LEB took away the main St. Martin's Electrical Company main board for their museum and ELEC cut my supply. They did not *'Want a dead client before they invoiced me'*!



Objects found in the cesspits, plasterer's giant ale bottle and marmalade jar helping to date the installation of Victorian plumbing.

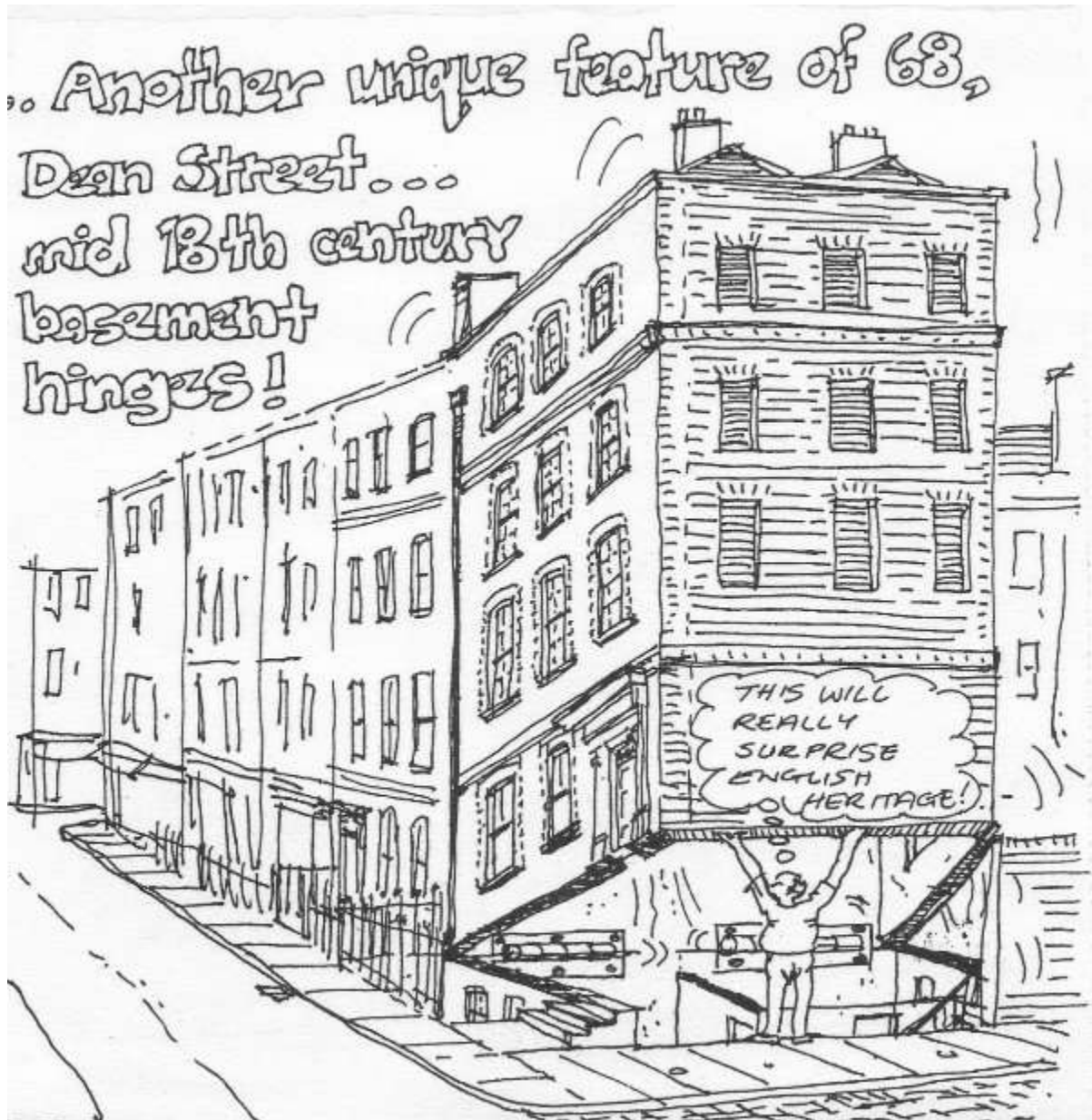


Benford O'Shea (1869-1983) Alf & Nancy Woods, Mike McCoy on the left still repairs clocks and Madame Fava tailoress who worked here in the 1920's & apparently only had three clients.



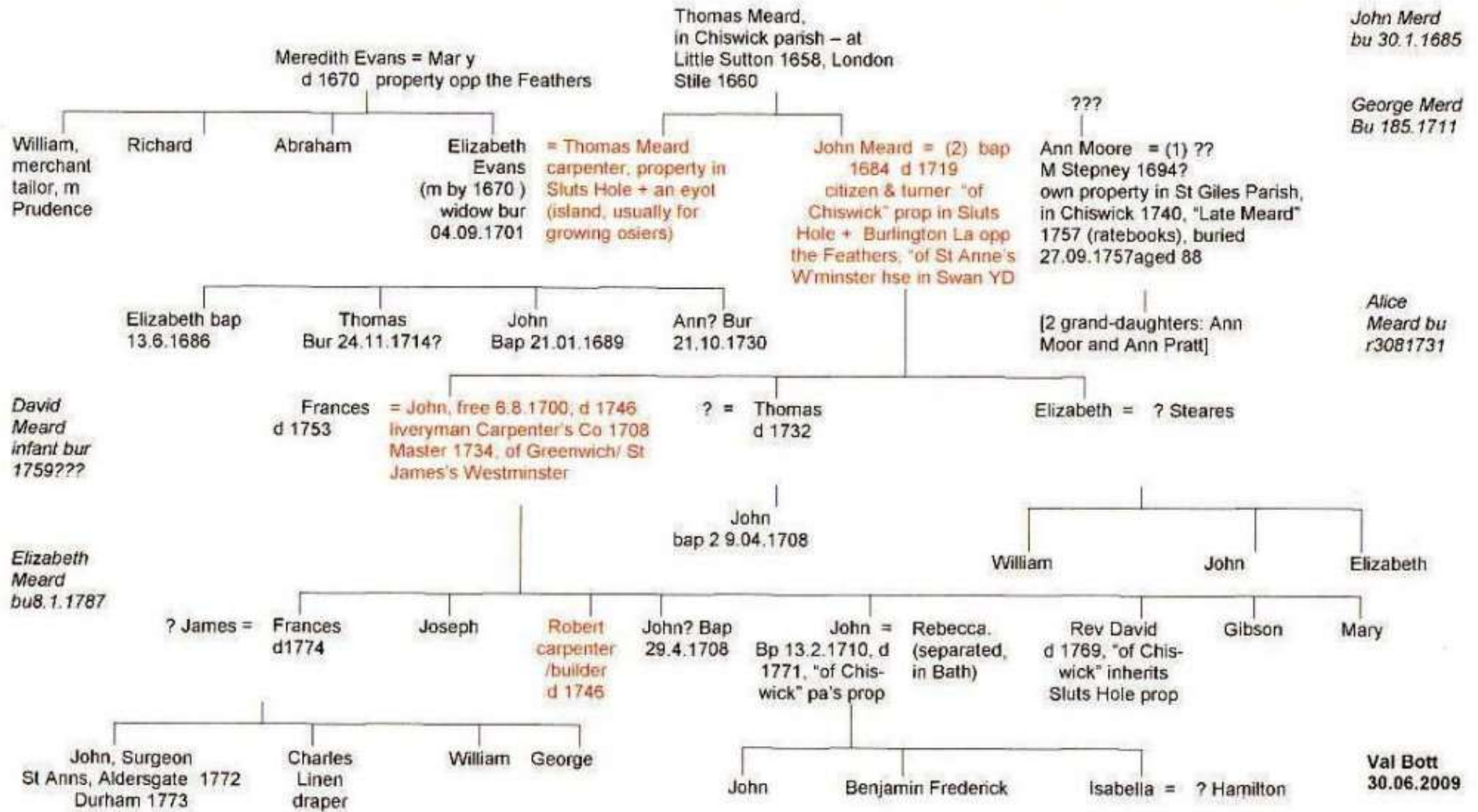


Resident blackbirds and below Peter Heath's cartoon.



## MEARD FAMILY TREE

The Meards are prominent **carpenters and builders** in late C17 and early C18 Soho. However, John I (d 1719) and John III (d 1771) and some of the others still describe themselves as "of Chiswick" in their wills. The family tree below has been assembled from wills and some LMA references to property holdings.



The Meard Family Tree – courtesy Val Bott.



## 68 Dean Street - Soho | Period Details & Restoration Events

**JOHN MEARD JUNIOR:** little is known about Meard in spite of the great extent of his work. He was apprenticed to his father, a member of the Turners' Company in August 1700. He inherited St. Anne's Court off Dean Street and about 20 other houses, and died around 1743. He was Master of the Carpenters' Company in 1735. He built many of the houses that remain today in Soho and his workshop was in Bouchier Street running between Dean and Wardour Streets.

**EXTERNAL:** The Front Door is original but upside down, the lantern is new – originally the door had no glass above, the letter box and knocker are probably early 19c and the massive internal hinges original. The doorcase & pilasters are original Portland stone with egg & dart. Front Elevation: late 18c tuck pointing onto original stocks + gauged brickwork with segmental arches around windows; was originally penny struck pointing. Windows late 18c.; Front Railings - replica c 1820; Side Elevation: blank with 9 blank window arches tuck pointed; Rear Elevations: flush pointed, late 18c windows and surrounds; unusual right angle return of red brick arches, as viewable from the rear.

**BASEMENT:** The front right basement houses the original servants cesspit/soakaway originally linked to a small early 18c sewer for liquids only. This also took water from the street and from the front area, and was converted into a coal cellar c.1862 when 'modern' drainage was installed. The right hand vault was always a coal cellar. The rear vault houses the cesspit for 'upstairs' where the effluents came down from the backyard privy via two walls set at right angles to the left hand corner. Beneath the floors there are the remains of the 1681 house sewers, plus another large sewer probably part of Richard Frith's illegal system. The front kitchen has an early 19c sink originally with lead water tank above (the house would have had water maybe for 3 hours a week), early 19c grate and the original spice cupboard. The middle and closet rooms were probably for servants and food etc storage. The front fire surround is new and the shelf above a copy of Batty Langley's original's from c.1740 at No. 9 Meard Street. Note the massive LH hinges on the door the front area.

**GROUND FLOOR:** Hall has unusual pilasters – Meard's only design error as you can see from the top mouldings. On the left is Benford O'Shea's watch warehouse door (1896-1983) and the front room was converted into a formal dining room circa 1820 with unusual tromp l'oeuil double doors designed for a serving table between, and this part of the room was taken from the middle room. The floors show the oak dowels originally set in the middle of the floorboards. Elements of the original servant's bell mechanism remain. All the shutters have closing bars, originally two on most. The fireplace is c.1820 and designed to throw outwards as opposed to upwards with the earlier ones and the chandelier hangs from the original point set in the first floor. The middle room has the original servants' bell pull and bolection fireplace and very narrow door to the closet wing. The rear yard has the original privy and the gauged red bricks to the windows unusually turn at right angles.

**FIRST FLOOR:** the 'piano nobile' has the only fully carved cornice and double fielded panelling (as with the front ground floor). The shutters are held by small bars since Meard enlarged the windows here to make the room grander and hence also the peculiar mini panels to left and right. Both the main fire surrounds are replacement old ones and in the front room smaller than the original. The large double doors are mid Victorian additions and damaged original panelling, unlike the earlier alterations on the ground floor. Both staircase doors have signage – the British Board of Boxing Control and an earlier sign for drop forging etc.

**SECOND FLOOR:** is almost entirely unchanged with the 1732 layout, the only addition being the wall dividing the front room installed by the Spagnoli family c. 1960 and their letter box is still there, as is the 1732 wig cupboard.

**THIRD FLOOR & ATTICS:** the panelling disappears. Both attic staircases are new, as are the attic dormer windows. In 1996 during the course of restoration both ceilings were removed in order to re-triangulate the roofs, which were moving. Above the rear room floorboard were revealed indicating an unknown room above, in the rear attic. In the front attic the original internal water gutter was revealed which still takes the rainwater from both main roofs. I had been refused permission by English Heritage to convert the attics into rooms on the grounds that '*there is no evidence that servants used the attics in early 18c. London town houses.*' The existing c. 1880 fire exit ladder to the roof via the rear attic can be seen on the top landing, but the rear attic had been partitioned off so the room inside it was not visible.

When we found these floorboards we made a hole in this attic partition and through it could see a tiny plastered room covered in dust with a door only 4 foot high leading to the rest of the attic. An urgent fax to my Case Officer at EH elicited call accusing me of having a '*retarded sense of humour... and we are not giving you permission for a room up there.*' However a second call 10 minutes later persuaded Mr. Edgar that I was serious, and it was agreed that the partition wall could be removed, and that he and Westminster colleagues would visit in two hours. By this time the wall had been removed, and an extremely large plastic spider with luminous eyes carefully placed in the middle of the floor together with a small plastic skeleton hanging from a joist, all carefully sited so that Mr. Edgar would encounter same when he reached the top of the fire exit ladder and stepped into this tiny room. Everything went according to plan and resulted in my Case Officer exiting down the ladder screaming. The two plasterers who were doing the stripping out work were then instructed to demolish these two rooms, as I did not have permission for rooms in the attics. Sadly our local joke shop has since closed. The partition in the rear attic is made up of old bits of panelling, and both rooms have window shutters as skirtings, for some inexplicable reason. An EH survey indicated that these rooms were from 1732 & my neighbours Glen & Phillipa Suarez subsequently found an entire servants quarters in one of their attics.

**SURVEYS & REPORTS:** EH – '*Paint Survey*'; EH '*Attic Structural Survey*'; MOLAS: '*Archaeological Survey of early 18c Waste Management System*'; UCL Archaeological Unit: ditto. Dan Cruickshank Review of Archaeological Reports.

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Freshly  
baked

Terracotta  
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Wednesday 13 July 2016

# Homes & Property

NEW HOMES: BAKER STREET **P8** CLEVER COMMUTES **P10** BREXIT' BENEFITS **P15** SPOTLIGHT ON CLAPHAM **P36**

## What was under the floorboards in Soho?

The World of Interiors: Page 26





Glorious mellow brickwork: the meticulously tuck-pointed facade of the house restored by David Bieda, seen with his 1973 Lancia



Handsome settings: what is now the dining room once held a watchmaker's sales counter. Now it displays prints by the Chivico, Brique and Dali



Surviving features: lucky for Bieda, the hallway retained both its original floorboards and wall painting

## Soho's Georgian house of secrets

**Leana Pooley** tells how her friend David Bieda restored his derelict 18th-century townhouse – and unearthing a servants' cesspit was just one of the surprises

here. The major finds have been two crypts and two rooms hidden in the attic. Many Londoners will have noticed this lovely building. The brick facade of Number 68 and 67, two townhouses built in 1732, seems gloriously mellow against the bustle of their Soho street. But it is full that invites your attention.

The work of specialist craftsmen: the main bathroom, far right, and the stairwell, right, are both lined with flat paneling



Atmospheric: the office, now filled with natural light, is in the former basement kitchen, built in 1732

**T**HE urgent voice on the phone adds: "Come over, quickly. I've just found another 'crypt'!" It was my friend, David Bieda, I locked up my office in Covent Garden and hurried to Soho, where Bieda was waiting impatiently outside the early Georgian house he'd recently bought in Dean Street.

We went through the hall and down the stairs into the basement kitchen. "Here, take this torch. It's got a couple." He led the way into the designated area in front of the house, opening a rickety door to reveal a dark, dark space under the pavement. (Tucked against the door panel and above the torch downwards.) David, squeaked beside me, started digging into the brown, crumbly ground – dry earthy stuff from the 18th century, right? Well, that was not 32 years ago. Now the secrets of 68 Dean Street have been laid

attractive greenery rampages up from the basement, and a tree, now 35 years old, produced 80 apples last year. It seems extraordinary that when Bieda bought number 68 in 1993 the house had been on the market for eight years. Miraculously, the original wooden paneling and slatwork were intact, as was the delicate carved cornice. For Bieda there followed three years without a bath, having to use the outdoor privy in the yard, and huddling over coal fires in the winters. He gained an interesting insight into Georgian life.

Grants from English Heritage and Westminster City Council helped fund restoration. Bieda learned that his house was built by John Meard Junior, who in 1723 inherited 20 properties, as well as its Anne's Court in Soho. Master of the Worshipful Company of Carpenters in 1735, Meard also worked with the Christopher Wren at St Paul's and other great London churches. Number 68 was Meard's own

home. The first crypt was discovered during the restoration work. "Archaeologists from University College London were two concerned about its structural integrity to dig it out, so I did it myself after a precautionary test run. Among the found objects were hundreds of coins, this secret bottle. When empty they were thrown into the crypt, which effectively doubled as a rubbish chute."

**WCC** architectural historian Dan Cruickshank told Bieda there would have been a separate servants' crypt. "When I cleared out the left-hand vault under Dean Street I noticed a missing section of Victorian paving, and dug a hole that revealed an odd brick construction. The Museum of London Archaeology Service unearthed the servants' cesspits and a tiny vaulted sewer, the latter only for liquids." The conversion of this vault into a coal cellar and the installation of the Victorian drainage system were dated by the footstones of a monumental jar inscribed with the date of 1862.

When Bieda was persuaded by architectural historian, John Martin Robinson, to rescue Number 68, he was largely living in a house in Seven Dials. He made a reasonable living inspecting jobs but hated the house was a loose mess, given its dereliction. Bieda had spent

many years doing conservation work – he is chairman of the Seven Dials Trust and a founding trustee of the Covent Garden Area Trust – so he was experienced enough to lead his own project, hiring 85 subcontractors, all specialist craftsmen, to help. With 18 rooms in all, the project took two decades.

**N**O GEORGIAN house was complete without the odd joke: think a champagne bottle drilled with a hole. The custom continues with a remote-controlled rat on the sideboard and a rubber spider to greet you upstairs.

**I**F the information about booking a group tour of 68 Dean Street, W1, email [26@intariy8.com](mailto:26@intariy8.com)



The full version of this article appears in the August issue of 'The World of Interiors', out now

### Excerpts from the *World of Interiors* August 2016 | Some other publications about 68 Dean Street:

*Horological Journal*: 'Benford O'Shea' (1983); *The Telegraph*: 'Benford O'Shea Closes' (1983); *English Heritage*: 'A Record Survey of Hidden Rooms' (1994); *Sunday Times*: 'The Face of It' (1994); *University College London*: 'Archaeological Investigation of Late 17c-18c Water & Waste Management' (1996); *WCC*: 'Repairs to Listed Buildings' (1997); *English Heritage Architectural Paint Research Unit*: 'A Paint Survey 1732-' (1998); *Museum of London Archaeological Service*: 'An Archaeological Watching Brief' (1998); *Dan Cruickshank*: 'Commentary on Archaeological Reports'; *David Bieda in the The Georgian*: 'Soho Masochism' (2003); *Evening Standard*: 'A Bid for Stardom' (2004); *Christies*: 'The Age of Oak' (2004); *World of Interiors* (2016); *Evening Standard*: 'What was Under the Floorboards' (2016).