

## **Site and Building history of Kipling House, Villiers Street Westminster**

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This report details the history of 41-47 Villiers Street, a building which was built as a warehouse in the 1790s and converted to residential and office space in 1880.

Villiers Street was developed in the 1670s on the site of York House, one of the great waterside houses of the Strand, with its front and gardens facing the river and its rear towards the Strand. (Villiers Street was apparently built on the line of the entrance from the Strand to York House).

The report, which is based upon a rates-book search as well as the Survey of London and other standard references, outlines the history of York House and the development of the estate (Section 2), and then details the development and changes on this particular site (Section 3).

A summary of the history is given in Section 4, and a full list of site tenants follows in Section 5.

### **2. YORK HOUSE AND THE BUCKINGHAM ESTATE**

The first reference to York House -- then Norwich Place, the town-house of the Bishop of Norwich -- dates to 1237. The house remained with the Bishops until the Dissolution in 1536, when it was granted to the Duke of Suffolk; 20 years later, it was given to the Archbishop of York, from which it took its name for the remainder of its life as a private mansion.

At this date, the estate included a total of 50 houses, 10 cottages, 4 stables and 7 gardens; it was not used long by the Archbishop, however, and from 1558 to the 1620s was given to successive lord keepers of the Great Seal. (This association led to the intriguing situation whereby Francis Bacon was born at the house in 1561 -- when his father was lord keeper -- and lived here in his own right when he held the post in 1617-20.)

York House and its grounds were given to the Duke of Buckingham in 1624. He apparently repaired the old house and in 1626 added the existing watergate (Figure 1), but was murdered in 1628. The swings of fortune during the Civil War meant that his widow, their son and her second husband lost the house when it was sequestered, but it was retrieved in the 1650s when the son (the 2nd Duke) married the new owner's daughter. It was then given back to him in his own right at the Restoration in 1660.

The second Duke of Buckingham mortgaged the house heavily to help pay his considerable debts, and in the early 1670s developed the estate to raise more money. As is often noted, the streets and lanes of the new development contained the Duke's name and title: George, Villiers, Duke, Of and Buckingham. (Villiers and Buckingham Streets still exist; Duke Street is now part of John Adam Street, George Street became York Buildings, and Of Alley is now York Place.)

The best houses were undoubtedly in Buckingham and George Streets: the east side houses in Villiers Street were often used in conjunction with the larger Buckingham Street houses, while the appeal of the west side was eroded almost immediately by the building of the York Buildings Waterworks in 1675 and the opening of a market on the site of Hungerford House in 1682.

### **3. 41-47 VILLIERS STREET**

For the first century of its life, the site at 41-47 Villiers Street formed part of 14 Buckingham Street - a large private house occupying a south-facing site fronting the river (Figures 2 and 3). Although always well-occupied, the history of this house was not straight-forward: the site was first leased in 1674 when the foundations were said to have already been in place, but it was apparently not occupied until 1680 and burnt down four years later (in a fire which started in the York Buildings Waterworks).

The house was rebuilt on the same site in 1687-88 -- perhaps re-using the earlier foundations -- and was occupied by the diarist, Samuel Pepys. He remained until 1701, and for the next 30 years the house attracted aristocratic tenants. In 1732, however, it was taken over by the Salt Office to collect the tax on that substance, a use which remained here for over 50 years.

The Salt Office moved out of the house in 1788, and the building was demolished shortly afterwards -- a change which perhaps reflected an initial 99-year lease of the 1670s. In 1792, it was replaced by two new buildings (Figure 4): 14 Buckingham Street, which was let out in chambers, and 19 Villiers Street, a warehouse owned by Minier, Minier & Fair, a firm of seedsmen with a shop at 63, the Strand.

Minier and its successor firms appear to have improved the building in the 1820s and 1830s, and remained here until 1880 (a tenancy which again suggests the running-down or expiry of a 90- or 99-year lease). During this occupancy, however, the changes around the building were drastic: Hungerford Market was rebuilt in 1830-33; Hungerford Bridge was added in 1836-45; in 1853-64 the market and bridge were removed to develop Charing Cross Station and its railway bridge, obliterating the west side of Villiers Street; and -- most importantly -- the river was embanked and the warehouse landlocked in 1864-70.

This latter change undoubtedly decided the fate of the Minier warehouse, as the loss of access to barges would have made the facility of little use to the company. In 1880, the upper floors of the building were converted to a rooming house with up to 50 rooms, while the ground floor was turned over to shops and the whole of the building was renamed "Embankment Chambers".

Although the mix of uses in the building has varied over the past century, it remains largely unchanged aside from some modernisation in the 1920s and after World War II. The nature of the uses are discussed in Section 4, but some are of particular interest: **the longest-established is the wine bar, opened in the 1890s by Angus Gordon**, while others -- including a brothel of the 1920s -- have since been replaced by offices.

#### 4. HISTORICAL SUMMARY

The site is that of York House, and Villiers Street is believed to lie on the line of the main entrance to the house from the Strand. Until 1790, the site formed part of a large house in Buckingham Street which had been built in the late 1670s, burnt down in 1684, and was rebuilt in 1687-88. The site was redeveloped in 1791-92 for chambers in Buckingham Street and a seed warehouse at what became 41-47 Villiers Street.

It is not known if foundations or vaults from York House (now comprising **Gordons wine bar**) were used for the first house of the 1670s, nor if vaults were re-used in the 1680s for the house occupied by Samuel Pepys, nor if the vaults which now exist were again re-used again in the 1790s. Given the nature of the various rebuildings, however, it seems likely that the existing vaults date to the late 17th century.

The warehouse was occupied in 1792 by Minier, Minier & Fair, a firm of seedsmen; its successor firms remained here until 1880, when the building was redeveloped as a rooming house and shops. Rudyard Kipling famously stayed here from 1889 to 1891, and the building's longest tenant, the wine bar, was first established here in the 1890s.

In the early 20th century, the residential population of the building levelled out at 17 or 18 but the clientele deteriorated: one Alfred Frederick Joyce was convicted and fined in 1923 for keeping a brothel at this address. (Disorderly houses were more common, however, at other addresses in the street and, particularly, in Craven Street.)

Offices were developed in about 1925; the present street numbers were assigned in 1926; and in 1950 the building was presumably upgraded when it was renamed "Kipling House".

## 5. SITE TENANTS

### York House (to 1674)

by 1237-1536	Bishops of Norwich (Norwich Place).
1536-1556	Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk (Suffolk Place).
1556-1558	Archbishop of York (York House).
1558-1579	Nicholas Bacon, lord keeper of the Great Seal;
1579-1587	Francis Bacon born at house, 1561(probably) Sir Thomas Bromley, lord keeper.
c.1587-1594	Robert Devereaux, Earl of Essex.
1594-1596	Sir John Puckering, lord keeper.
1596-1617	Sir Thomas Egertan, lord keeper.
1617-1620	Sir Francis Bacon, lord keeper.
1622-1640s	Duke of Buckingham (to 1628) and family.
1640s-1660	Thomas, Lord Fairfax, and son-in-law, 2nd Duke of Buckingham.
1660-1674	George Villiers, 2nd Duke of Buckingham.

### With 14 Buckingham Street

1674	Site leased to Six Thomas Estcourt.
1680-1684	Charles Sackville, 6th Earl of Dorset.
1684-1688	Burnt down and rebuilt.
1688-1701	Samuel Pepys.
1701-1714	Robert Harley (Earl of Essex, 1711).
1714-1716	Arthur Herbert, Earl of Torrington.
1717-1732	George Henry Lee, 2nd Karl of Lichfield;
1732-1788	Edward Harrison, postmaster general. Salt Office.

### As 19 (now 41-47) Villiers Street

1792-1880	Minier, Minier & Co., seedsmen.
1880-1950	Embankment Chambers. Up to 50 tenants including: Rudyard Kipling, <b>Angus Gordon, wine merchant, (1890 – bar now longest serving tenant)</b> 17 to 18 private residents
1923	Brothel prosecution!
1925	offices introduced
1923	Renumbered as 41-47 Villiers Street.
1950	Renamed Kipling House.