THE SEVEN DIALS TRUST
Street History Plaques

Sponsor a Street History Plaque and Illuminate the Area’s History
Each plaque has the sponsor’s name on the top right corner, in the same size as the body text.
The plaques for Short’s Gardens and Earlham Street are available to sponsor.

There are five A3 size street history plaques, one for the Dials and one each for Earlham Street, Mercer Street, Monmouth Street and Short’s Gardens, the core streets radiating off the Dials. In addition to the text and images on each plaque, the Trust’s QR code leads to our website with its wealth of information on the fascinating history of this much-loved quarter of London: http://www.sevendials.com/history. Sponsors will be credited on the Trust’s website.

Sponsors have been secured for The Dials (Shaftesbury Plc); Mercer Street (The Mercers’ Company); and Monmouth Street (an anonymous donor). These plaques can be seen below. The Dials plaque is in colour as we have colour illustrations and the others are photo etched, black on silver, with historic monochrome images. The text is taken from research by Dr J.M. Robinson for the Seven Dials Renaissance Study and by Steve Denford for our People’s Plaques (see separate brochure).

SPONSORSHIP COSTS
The cost of sponsorship is a minimum of £1,500 for companies or £1,200 for individuals with Gift Aid. Donations made with a signed consent for the Trust to claim Gift Aid (individuals) garner The Trust an additional 25% from HMRC.

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Each plaque has the ‘Golden Hind’, symbol of the Parish of St Giles, within a circle representing the Dials also seen on all street furniture. A project developed by the Trust in association with Camden Council.
AWARDS
The Trust has won a number of awards over the years including the London Forum of Amenity & Civic Societies Media Award for ‘People’s and Street History Plaques & Neighbourhood Street Name Plates’ with the citation: ‘An absolutely brilliant and wider ranging scheme…’
Seven Dials was one of the many creations of Thomas Neale MP (1641–1699) — "The Great Projector". Neale was one of the most influential figures of late Stuart England: an MP for 30 years serving on 62 parliamentary committees; Master of the Mint and the Transfer Office and Groom Porter under three kings; gambler, entrepreneur; and husband to two of London's richest widows. William III granted him the freehold of the land, then known as Marshland or Cock and Fye Fields, in return for favours. Neale raised over £100 for the Crown via England's first lottery.

Plans for a building license were submitted to the Surveyor-General Sir Christopher Wren in 1662 and showed six streets, at least 316 houses and an estate church. Neale thought of adding a street and finding an estate church. The unique star-shaped layout maximized income as rents were charged by footage. From the outset, Neale planned for Seven Dials to be a mix of residential, retail and crafts, very different from the fashionable, purely residential London squares of his day.

Today Seven Dials stands as the only quarter of London remaining from late Stuart England — its layout remains unaltered and many of the original houses remain, mostly re-faced in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. To the south, the massive buildings of the Woolyard Brewery remain, unique in London’s West End.

Short's Gardens from the Dial to Neal Street (formerly Queen Street)

On the other side of what is now Short's Gardens is the site of the gardens of William Short, gardener of Gowy's Inn who, in 1799, purchased fields known as Newland between Dury Lane and the Marshalsea. The Short family were prominent property owners of St Giles and their wealth was unlike that of Thomas Neale's Seven Dials development.

Today, only part of the street remains. The Dials retain the original seventeenth-century domestic architectural scale and character, while Nos 1, 2, 4 and 6 still occupy the original building plots. Nos 5–11 were the site of a long-standing lodging house, known as The Key, where until the end of the nineteenth century, residents slept in bed above the ground on a rope which was untied at dawn. The building was ruled to be a police station. It remained a lodging house until the 1920s. Poverty was rife in Seven Dials and for the end of Short’s Gardens, crossing Endell Street was the site of the notorious St Giles Workhouse. It was esteemed in 1723. It housed up to 1000 paupers. The establishment continued into the early twentieth century. In 1915, the buildings were converted to a Militia hospital staffed entirely by women doctors and medical staff.

The south side of the street is largely taken up by Thomas Neale’s shopping centre, the final on Neale being optional in the variable spelling of the time. This encompassed the stables of the nearby Woolyard Brewery, leased in 1888. Within Thomas Neale’s in Canners Alley, a reconstruction of a passage was shown on Rocque’s map of 1741, later known as Neale’s Passage, until obliterated by warehouses in the 1870s. It was here in 1990 that the northernmost evidence of Seven Dials (Ludwicise) was found, remaining dating from the mid-eighteenth century, including traces of wattle-and-daub houses and evidence of roof-working.

Neale’s Yard

Originally King’s Head Court, Neale’s Yard had received its present name by 1745. The Seven Dials Pigstye Night School opened in the Yard in 1847 attracting 60 destitute boys on its first evening. Until the 1970s, Neale’s Yard was connected with the activities of Covent Garden Fruit and Vegetable Market and included premises for wheelwrights and packing-case manufacturers. Alternative entrepreneur Nicholas Saunders (1938–98) bought No. 2, former banana store, in 1970 and went on to establish the Yard as a centre for specialist enterprises including a wholefood warehouse, coffee shop, bakery, dairy, therapy rooms and apothecary. In the 1980s, Monty Python’s Michael Palin and Terry Gilliam had studios and film editing suite here, bearing a provocative hanging sign, ‘Neale’s Yard Abattoir’.

To find out more about Seven Dials and the work of The Seven Dials Trust please visit: www.sevendials.com
Earlham Street

Seven Dials was one of the many creations of Thomas Neale MP (1641-1699) — “The Great Proctor”. Neale was one of the most influential figures of late Stuart England: an MP for 30 years serving on 62 parliamentary committees; Master of the Mint and the Transfer Office and Grocer Porter under three kings; gauger, entrepreneur and husband to two of England’s richest widows. William III granted him the freehold of the land, then known as Marsland or Cock and Lyre Fields, in return for favours. Neale raised over £1m for the Crown via England’s first lottery.

Plots for a building licence were submitted to the Surveyor-General Sir Christopher Wren in 1692 and showed six streets, at least 316 houses and an estate church. Neale elected by adding a street and failing to build the church. The star-shaped layout maximised income, as rents were charged by frontage. From the outset, Neale planned for Seven Dials to be a mix of residential, retail and crafts, very different from the fashionable, purely residential London squares of his day.

Today Seven Dials stands as the only quarter of London remaining from late Stuart England — its layout is unique and many of the original houses remain, mostly re-faced in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Earlham Street from The Dials to Shaftesbury Avenue (formerly Little Earl Street)

The western section of Earlham Street was for many years largely given over to food shops and those serving domestic needs. In the 1800s there were two butchers, three grocers, a pastrycook, a dray and an ironmonger. Purveyors Butcher (founded in 1820) and F.W. Collins & Sons, ironmonger (founded in 1808) both continued trading into the new millennium. No. 14 still bears the Collins’ advertising sign which proudly balds the first Fred’s invention of “elastic glue”. There were also two public houses. In the 1800s there were numerous pubs in Seven Dials, of which only four remain. Earlham Street also housed a thriving street market until the early twentieth century. Markets began in Seven Dials in the early nineteenth century and were officially documented in Dickson’s Sketches by 1816. As many as 199 London stone merchants, served a densely populated low-income area. Their gradual disappearance followed the decline of the population, which reached its nadir in the early 1970s.

In a row-vaned alley, Monmouth Court, which runs between present day Shaftesbury Avenue and Earlham Street, thein Catnach (1792-1841) plied his trade. Catnach was Seven Dials’ most famous and successful seller of paperhangers, trunks, almanacs, brushes and balls. He paid a former printer an idea for what would become the world-famous design. The tyre, illustrated with a woodcut, was sold in the streets, usually for a penny, by “patters”. More recently, historian and museum of Earlham Street is the current frontman of Pink Floyd, Nicky Barrett, who lived in a flat on the site of No. 2 (1866-7).

From The Dials to Noel Street (formerly Great Earl Street)

The building on The Dials with the attractive green-hed facade was until 1915 The Bunch of Grapes public house. From 1927-28 it housed the Case of Harmony club owned by actress Eva Lanchester (famous as the bride of Frankenstein). It was a popular meeting place for London intellectuals including H.G. Wells, Aldous Huxley and Evelyn Waugh. The neighbouring Cambridge Theatre was built in 1939. Designed by Wimperis and Simpson, it is a rare complete and early example of a London theatre adopting the modern, expressionist-style pioneered in Germany during the 1920s, a reaction to the design excesses of the music hall and contemporary cinema. It has an Art Deco interior by Serge Chermayeff.

The Woodyard Brewery

By the nineteenth century Seven Dials had taken on a predominantly commercial and industrial character. The brewery industry became established here in 1790. The Woodyard Brewery eventually sold the whole area between Long Acre and St John’s Gardens with large, handsome brick buildings linked by high-level cast iron bridges, built between 1796 and the 1800s. It had three wells of its own, bored 322 feet deep into the chalk. By the late nineteenth century, the brewery employed 450 people, and produced 300,000 barrels of beer a year. Nos. 29-43 Earlham Street were rebuilt in 1890-95 as premises for 216 houses arranged on two levels around a stone paved inner yard. Something of this can still be seen in the Thomas Neale’s development completed in 1992. Next door, what was the brewery’s waresmen and hop warehouse is now occupied by the Donmar Theatre. The theatre moved out in 1905 and its premises were largely converted to warehouses serving Seven Dials Market.

The Liep Trial (Character, composition, behaviour and reputation)

James Ward

48 cases, 1905, 40 years in gaol for fornication, theft of cheese, and for the wild and licentious life at the head of a merry gang. 8½ feet high, wide

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