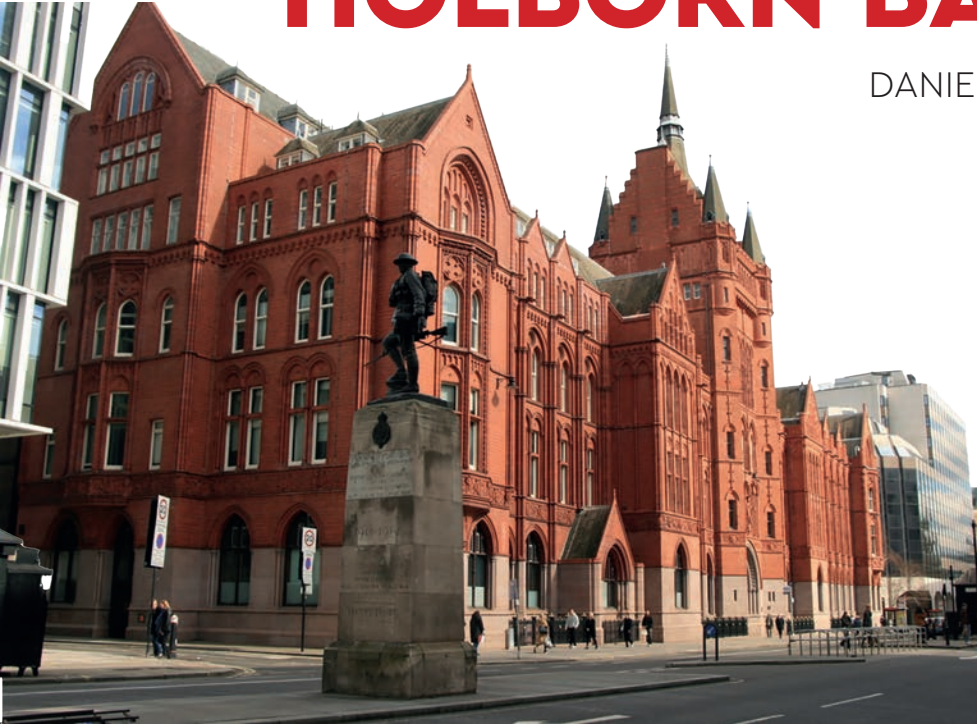


In the Village

HOLBORN BARS

DANIEL DOVAR



There is an imposing red brick building on the east side of Holborn at nos 138-142, past Chancery Lane Station, which has above its arched entrance 'Prudential Assurance' with a plaque lower down on the right recording that this was once the site of Furnival's Inn, demolished in 1897. As well as being known as the Prudential Building, it is also commonly referred to as 'Holborn Bars', which is odd.

Holborn Bars is in fact not really that building, nor as one might imagine a varied selection of drinking establishments, nor even anything to do with barristers, but in fact the label is derived from the two posts that mark the boundary between Holborn and the City of London.

Those posts, grey concrete with menacing dragons atop, holding St George crossed shields, can be found further west, at the junction with Gray's Inn Road. If you fancy a different type of Bar crawl, you could seek out the other City of London boundary markers: Aldersgate Bars, Bishopsgate Bars, Aldgate Bars and Temple Bar.



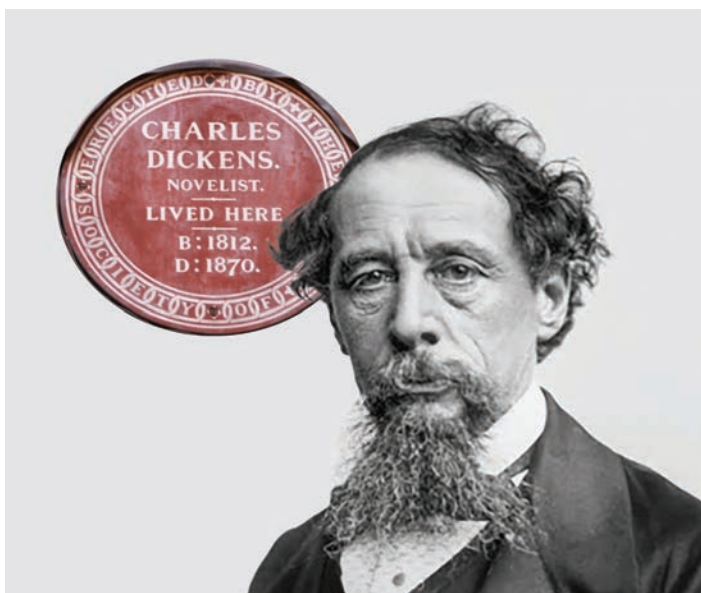
The site where the Prudential Building now stands was, as the plaque recalls, formerly the site of Furnival's Inn, founded in the late 14th century by William de Furnival, who leased the site to the Clerks of Chancery for boarding. The site evolved from boarding into a legal training school for apprentices and those who wanted to be called to the Bar. By the 16th century it had become part of Lincoln's Inn. It was Lincoln Inn's decision a few hundred years later not to renew its lease of the site, which eventually led to its demolition.



Before leaving Furnival's Inn, it is worth noting in passing two of its literary inhabitants. Charles Dickens rented rooms in the Inn in 1834 and wrote *The Pickwick Papers* and *Martin Chuzzlewit* whilst a resident. In the latter he described the Inn in the following terms:

'It is a shady, quiet place, echoing to the footsteps of the stragglers who have business there; and rather monotonous and gloomy on summer evenings. ... there are snug chambers in those Inns where the bachelors live, and, for the desolate fellows they pretend to be, it is quite surprising how well they get on.'

There is a bust and plaque marking his residency in the building.



J.M. Barrie also lived there in 1888, but it is not believed that he dreamed up either Peter Pan or Tinkerbell whilst doing so.



The building that now stands on the site is, to give it its full title, the Prudential Assurance Building. An imposing Victorian building in the Gothic Revival style, it is built out of polished granite, red brick and red terracotta, with some fine ironwork and many carvings dotted around, including Prudentia, cherubs and a pelican. It was designed by Alfred Waterhouse (architect for the Natural History Museum and St Pancras Station Hotel) and was built in phases between 1885 and 1901 after Furnival's Inn had been demolished. At the time, it boasted all the mod cons, from hot running water to a pneumatic tube system for distributing messages around the building from one department to another, and electric lighting. It also housed a library, restaurant, chapel, hall, rooftop promenade and a separate women's entrance (who would leave 15 minutes earlier than the men).



The Natural History Museum

Prudential moved out in 1999 and apparently it was considered as a potential home for the Supreme Court, but rejected on the basis that they may well then be referred to as the 'Men from the Pru!'

The complex now encloses a courtyard, Waterhouse Square, named after the original architect. The library survives with most of its original fittings and some of the original managers' offices have retained their mahogany panelling. The building itself now hosts a number of businesses. ■