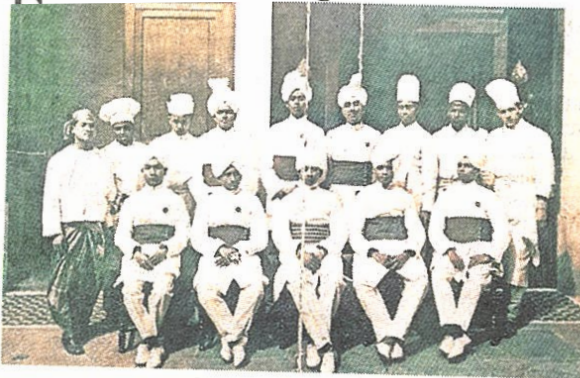


Business



Britain's oldest curry house fights eviction

The owner of Veeraswamy has called the Crown Estate "disingenuous" as he gears up for a legal battle with the King's property company, which is trying to kick out Britain's oldest Indian restaurant from its Regent Street home of the past 99 years (Tom Howard writes).

Veeraswamy has been based in Victory House since 1926. The Michelin-starred venue is one of the oldest occupants on Regent Street, along with the likes of Hamleys and the Café Royal, and is

popular with royals, celebrities, politicians and business people. Princess Anne, David Cameron and King Abdullah of Jordan have all eaten there.

The Crown Estate wants to take back the building to renovate the offices on the upper floors, which have been empty since the end of 2023 after a flood in the basement. Veeraswamy was able to continue trading because it has a different power supply.

As part of its 12-month renovation plans, the Crown Estate wants to knock down the wall that separates the



entrance to Veeraswamy and that to the offices to create a larger reception area for its tenants.

Without any access, there is no restaurant. Ranjit Mathrani, the co-owner of MW Eat, which runs Veeraswamy and a handful of other Indian restaurants in London, said he had suggested "numerous

alternatives", to no avail. He is open to sharing an entrance with the office tenants or giving back the first floor of the restaurant and keeping just the basement and mezzanine floors.

"My dealings with the [Crown Estate] have been characterised by an uncompromising refusal to consider any

change to their design plan," Mathrani, 82, said in court filings submitted last week.

Veeraswamy pays the estate about £205,000 in rent each year, but Mathrani has said he would be prepared to match whatever the office tenants are charged once the works are complete.

He had been open to leaving Victory House; the Crown Estate said it "offered to help find premises elsewhere". Mathrani, in his submission to the court, said "this assertion is disingenuous" and told The Times: "They've made no real attempt to find alternative sites."

As it stands,

Ranjit Mathrani and his co-owner, Namita Panjabi; Veeraswamy first opened in Victory House in London's West End in 1926

Veeraswamy's lease expires at the end of this month. However, MW Eat is taking its landlord to court and can continue trading until that hearing, which is likely to be held next spring or early next summer. Because it is a protected tenancy, which gives long-term tenants enhanced rights, if the court finds in favour of Veeraswamy it would effectively allow the restaurant to extend its lease for 14 years.

Mathrani and his lawyers think they have an "above 50 per cent chance" of winning. If they fail, his hope is that the court will grant a two-year lease, which would give him time to find a new venue.

A spokesman for the Crown Estate repeated its previous statement: "We need to carry out a comprehensive refurbishment of Victory House ... We thank Veeraswamy and its customers for their contributions to the West End."